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Exploring the Combination of Subtitling and Revoicing Tasks: A Proposal for Maximising Learning Opportunities in the Italian Language Classroom

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Exploring the Combination of Subtitling and Revoicing Tasks: A Proposal for Maximising Learning Opportunities in the Italian Language Classroom.

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Abstract

Research has proven that audiovisual translation as an instructional tool is certainly beneficial to the enhancement of language skills, mainly listening, reading and writing. The relationship between the pragmatics of audiovisual (AV) material and the way they are learned, is still a topic that requires more investigation. In this study, clips from an Italian TV series are exploited as context-rich scaffolding on which students can build up vocabulary and develop an awareness of L2 pragmatics. This article presents an innovative didactic methodology that capitalised on the linguistic richness of audiovisual texts and sees in subtitling and revoicing tasks a great didactic potential that provides students with numerous opportunities for learning vocabulary and L2 pragmatic. In the course proposed, exposure to AV input is integrated with subtitling and revoicing tasks as well as with multimodal analysis of the video clips in order to maximise learning opportunities in the FL classroom.

Keywords: Audiovisual Translation, Subtitling, Interlanguage Pragmatics, Italian as a Foreign Language.

1 Introduction

Several studies show how Audiovisual Translation (AVT) can be exploited in multiple ways in the FL classroom for different purposes. Subtitles can be used to foster vocabulary recognition and retention (Baltova, 1999; Caimi, 2006; Incalcaterra McLoughlin & Lertola, 2011; Vanderplank, 1998). Audio description can make students reflect on the language and learn new vocabulary (Steyvers, 2014-2015) and it promotes phraseological and lexical competences (Ibañez Moreno & Vermeulen, 2008). Dubbing has proven to be an effective didactic tool inasmuch as it provides students with an opportunity to speak and improve their intonation, pronunciation and general fluency (Burston, 2005; Chiu, 2012; Danan, 2010). Activities that involve the use of an AVT mode feature a strong motivational factor, since students perform practical tasks imitating the work of professionals in a comfortable learning situation. Referring to subtitling as an active task in the FL classroom, Noa Tavalán (2012) points out the “specific, tangible, visible and immediate results for the learner”. She also stresses the importance of this didactic tool since it is very comprehensive, combining the benefits of various pedagogical resources. In fact, one of the main reasons that supports the use of AVT mode in the FL classroom is the presence of authentic video material; many studies on the use of subtitles, audio description and dubbing in the FL classroom show that at the end of the experiments, students reported that they were happy to work with video material and felt motivated (Chiu, 2012; Danan, 2010, Steyvers, 2015).

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Audiovisual translation and L2 pragmatic awareness

As defined by Crystal (1997), “pragmatics is the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication”. According to Kasper & Rose (2001) pragmatics is “is not only concerned with performing speech acts but it also requires learners to engage in different types of discourse and participate in speech events of varying lengths and varieties.” (p.2). Foreign language learners often have little access to target-language input outside the classroom and even less opportunity for productive L2 use. AVT offers accurate and contextualized pragmatic input as well as natural conversational models representing a use of language which is as close as possible to the real use of language that occurs in a spontaneous conversation among native speakers. Although movies and TV series adapt spontaneous conversation to cinematographic needs, from an academic perspective the language they employ is nonetheless an acceptable emulation of spontaneous speech. In a study on the teaching of pragmatics of Italian L2, Nuzzo (2016) compares textbooks, TV series and spontaneous dialogue as sources of pragmatic input. She reaches the conclusion that, although it cannot be said that TV material faithfully reflects real language use (though analogies seem to prevail over differences), it is still possible to say that, with respect to manuals, TV series offer a wider range of contexts, communicative situations and social variables. Furthermore, knowledge of Italian grammar and vocabulary does not guarantee the opportunity to effectively participate in a communicative exchange. It is necessary to be able to correctly interpret the meaning with the context of enunciation and students often need to be guided in noticing relevant input that can be subsequently registered under attention or detected under awareness; this step is necessary to distil intake from input and make it available for further processing. By working on the source text, listening repeatedly to the audio track, translating the script and subtitle, students are encouraged to reflect on the language, to note unfamiliar and unusual expressions and are guided by the instructor to acknowledge speech acts and pragmatic phenomena as they occur among native speakers of Italian. Unlike traditional role play tasks, this approach based on AVT is advantageous inasmuch as students are given the opportunity to watch examples of conversation as they occur among native speakers and then to reproduce them through active tasks such as re-voicing videos, role playing, re interpreting scenes, dubbing, and so on. Besides stimulating learners’ motivation, using authentic audiovisual input in the classroom has numerous advantages; since this type of material is not tailor-made for L2 learners, the language is presented in real-life situations with characters speaking at normal conversational speed and with a variety of accents and sociolects. As a matter of fact, audiovisual input is often rich in idioms, proverbs and other fixed formulae which are used by different individuals interacting in different contexts (formal, neutral, informal registers). In consideration of this, besides enhancing learners’ linguistic and sociolinguistic competence, subtitling also represents an opportunity for them to develop pragmatic skills; in fact, while translating, learners can practice discourse competence (organise the sequence of sentences in a coherent manner) and functional competence (functional use of written language) as well as their ability to use patterns of social interaction (Lertola, 2013)

2.2 Subtitling and revoicing

To date subtitles and dubbing have been used as distinct and often mutually exclusive teaching tools; to the best of my knowledge there is only one study that seeks to shed light on another possible didactic implementation of productive AVT tasks in the FL classroom. In a recent study, Talaván (2015) offers a first insight into the combination of dubbing and reverse subtitling. Her experiment involved 40 EFL (English as a foreign language) students from formal and informal instructional contexts, who worked collaboratively online in the dubbing and subsequent reverse subtitling of four video clips taken from the Spanish movie *Todo es mentira*. The aim of the experiment was to assess the effects of a didactic task based on the combination of dubbing and subtitling, on students' oral and written skills as well as general translation competence. The participants were divided into two groups, the dependent variable being the AVT tasks, and were administered a pre-test and a questionnaire aimed at gathering information on their written and oral production skills. The experimental group carried out the dubbing and reverse subtitling of the four selected clips within a total of 8 weeks (2 weeks per each video), and after completing the final questionnaire and post-test, they took part in a video conference where they exchanged impressions and provided feedback on the project. From the analysis of data, it emerged that the greatest advance took place in the cases where oral production and general translation skills were assessed, whereas written production improved to a lesser extent. Based on information from the final questionnaire, Talaván suggests that the reason behind such an unexpected result probably lies in the motivational factor that characterizes the dubbing activity, which students seemed to appreciate more than subtitling as a didactic task. Not only does this study acknowledge the efficacy of this new didactic methodology on integrated skills and language development, but also it points to the versatility of this resource in relation to the focus of the activity. What caught my attention was the fact that, besides perceiving an improvement in the targeted competences – translation, oral and written production – 90% of participants also affirmed that the AVT tasks helped them develop their sociolinguistic and cultural skills. While there are studies that show how AVT can promote intercultural knowledge (Incalcaterra, 2009; Borghetti and Lertola, 2014), the number of studies that deal with the improvement of pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence is more limited, especially when AVT is intended as an active task to be performed by learners and not in terms of simple exposure. It seems, therefore, that research on AVT and foreign language learning lacks more in-depth investigation on the enhancement of students' non-linguistic competences such as pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence.

3 Aims and objectives

Based on the research outlined above, this non-experimental study intends to be an investigation of the effects of the combination of AVT tasks with regard to the component of communicative competence that concerns pragmatic and sociolinguistic awareness. Two main objectives were identified as follows:

- Tap into the potential of the combination of subtitling and revoicing tasks as language learning tools that can provide students with opportunities to develop L2 pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence.
- Investigate whether this course can help students acquire multiword expressions.

Acquisition and correct use of lexemes or multiword expressions has been linked to a better L2 fluency, in particular for what concerns communicative competence and oral proficiency (Boers, 2006). However, Boers observes that while “noticing may be a prerequisite for learning, it does not necessarily guarantee the acquisition of every single element that gets noticed” (ibid. 257) since it is impossible for the brain to store and make available for productive use every noticed chunk. This can happen on the condition that students are provided with “activities with greater mnemonic potential” (ibid. 257). The methodology proposed in this small-scale project identifies in subtitling and revoicing activities potential tools for enhancing students’ “noticing” skills and communicative competence by acquiring multiword chunks. On the one hand, subtitling these linguistic items they can relate them to their own language and culture; this task makes students ponder over the L2 and it is more likely that new vocabulary expressions, phrases etc. will stay with them. To further enhance noticing and help student become independent analysts of L2 dialogue, the subtitling task is integrated with multimodal analysis, in order to encourage students to consider and value all the components that contribute to convey meaning in an audiovisual product they subtitle. On the other hand, revoicing activities offer students the opportunity to watch examples of conversation as they occur among native speakers and then to reproduce them, practicing both linguistic and paralinguistic skills.

4 Data collection

A mixed-method approach was applied to collect both qualitative and quantitative data through classroom observation, post-test and a final questionnaire. This study is carried out with a non-experimental design where a single group of participants is exposed to the experimental treatment and a single measurement (a post-test) is taken afterwards. An end-of-course questionnaire was also administered to gather data on students’ perception of their improvement of L2 communicative skills and opinions on the course. A post-test was administered at the end of the course observe students’ productive recall of multiword expressions and their ability to re-utilize them. The post-test consisted of one exercise in which students had to translate four expressions that appeared in the episodes they had worked on during the course.

5 Course design

5.1 Course participants

The study was carried out in a class of 19 students of Italian in their fourth and final year of Bachelor Degree at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG); according to the common European Framework of Reference for Languages, their level of Italian corresponds to a B2 (upper intermediate). 15 students are English native speakers, 3 are native speakers of French, one is a native speaker of Slovakian and one is a native speaker of German. The majority of them have been on Erasmus in Italy for a period of 9 months during their third year.

5.2 Outline

The course consists of a total of 12 hours over two semesters (one hour a week for a total of 6 hours per semester) and it is part of the module “Italian Language” which consists of intensive language work with practice in translation from Italian into English, textual analysis and essay writing on topics of contemporary interest in Italian social, political and cultural life, as well as

aural and written comprehension. Lessons take place once every two weeks and each last approximately one hour. However, extra hours were made available to those students who wanted to carry out the assignments in the language lab (mainly the subtitling task, as the software had been previously installed in these laboratories) under the supervision of the instructor. The course follows a progressive approach that sets off in the first semester with subtitling activities and moves towards tasks that increasingly require the use of oral proficiency such as audio description and finally dubbing in the second semester. Such an approach is designed to give students the opportunity to become acquainted with the video material in use, build up vocabulary and expand or reinforce their knowledge of Italian vocabulary, including informal and colloquial expressions, idioms and slang terms of which the TV series offers plenty of examples. In the case of the subtitling activities the aim is to give students the time to familiarise themselves with the software and the translation strategies involved in the process of subtitling. Subtitling tasks constitute the basis on which students can build up vocabulary, foster their listening, reading and writing skills as well as noticing L2 structures while translating. Furthermore, such a progressive approach aims at spreading the cognitive load over a longer period of time in order to facilitate the learning process and give time to students to get acquainted with the type of tasks and the software.

5.3 Material

In one of her studies, Bruti (2016) observes how video clips from TV series can be easily used in the foreign language classroom to help students develop awareness of pragmatic features of conversation and show them the dynamics of face-to-face interaction. Quaglio (2009) and Forchini (2012), carried out a corpus-based analysis of fictional dialogue of TV series and discovered that they share very similar uses and patterning with spontaneous conversation. The material consists of short videos, selected according to the amount of realistic dialogue, richness of colloquial expressions, accents and idioms present in the scenes. Humour, speed of speech and number of characters were also among the criteria used to select the material. Another important reason behind the choice of the TV series *Zio Gianni*, is the fact that each episode is self-contained; this enables the instructor to choose which episode to show and work with, without having to follow a long storyline. *Zio Gianni*, is an Italian sitcom produced by the Pills in collaboration with RAI and released in Italy in 2014. The protagonist is Gianni Coletti, a 50 years old man who, after finding himself divorced and unemployed, is forced to seek accommodation with students in order to save money. He ends up sharing an apartment with three students in their early twenties. Confronted with the college students' life and struggling to get his job and family back, Gianni is determined to get back on track with the help his three young roommates. The subtitling tasks are carried out through VisualSubSync (VSS), a free subtitling software available online. Accessibility was a determinant factor for the choice of the software, which is freeware, user-friendly, intuitive and easy to install; furthermore, its website provides good tutorials on how to use the software (e.g. how to make a transcript or how to synchronise the subtitles).

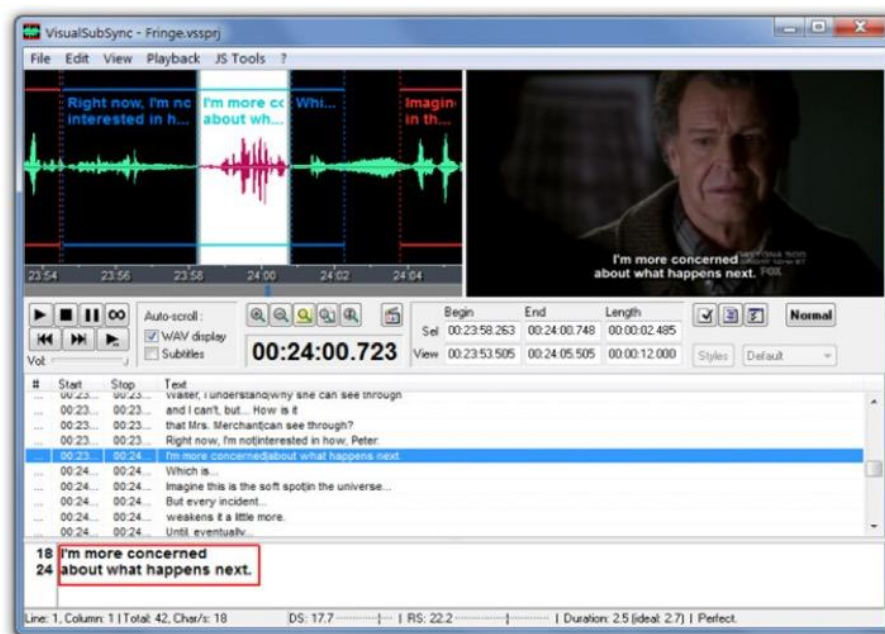


Image 1: VisualSubSync

6 Methodology

The methodology proposed in this study intends to contribute to designing an innovative approach to foreign language teaching which capitalised on the linguistic richness of audiovisual input by tapping into the potential of combined subtitling and revoicing practices in the foreign language classroom. In order to develop students' noticing skills, a language awareness approach was adopted in the present study; this approach is centred on developing learners' awareness of how the target language is used for communication by its native speakers, and its "main objective is to help learners notice for themselves how language is typically used" (Tomlinson, 1994). In one of her studies, Josélia Neves (2004) explores how language awareness can be promoted through training in subtitling, in particular through the following phases:

1. Media text analysis. It allows for the improvement of receptive skills, among which, extracting information, inferring opinion and attitude, deducing meaning from context, recognising functions and discourse patterns and markers.
2. Script analysis. A variety of Discourse Completion Tasks (DCT) can be derived from incomplete or incorrect scripts; transcription of film dialogue is also an excellent listening comprehension task. Finally, dialogue analysis is pivotal for drawing and understanding a character's profile.
3. Translation/editing. At this stage productive skills are also involved as writing calls for accuracy and the constraints in terms time and space typical of subtitling, make the production a written text a painstaking process.
4. Spotting/cueing. This final stage allows for a systematic review of the work done by the student and, however time-consuming, it is important to break the student into the habit of checking his/her work as a natural part of the whole subtitling activity.

In view of this, subtitling and revoicing tasks are bolstered by multimodal analysis that incorporates both media text and dialogue transcript analysis. The methodology applied in proposed course proposed looks to Neves' four stages of language awareness development and it unfolds as follows:

- Preparation/motivation
- Multimodal analysis of the audiovisual text
- Production of AVT tasks(subtitling/revoicing)
- Correction of the tasks and class discussion

Two subtitling tasks and two revoicing tasks were carried out by students as assignments throughout the course, and most of them used the extra lab hours (two or three per week depending on lab availability) to do the assignment under the supervision of the instructor. Initially, the audiovisual text analysis was guided by the instructor who intentionally focused on certain translation issues and pragmatic phenomena. During the 12 lessons, multimodal analysis was used to encourage students to focus on certain passages of the videos and their scripts that were fundamental to achieve a thorough comprehension of what is happening in the scene and how meaning was conveyed through different channels. Particular relevance was given to the language component of the multimodal text, which students had to analyse carefully under different aspects. In his *Discourse Strategies* (1982), Gumperz suggests that it is important to use an approach that leads students to independently analyse discourse and question the purpose and intention of the speaker and his/her interlocutor. Thus, in their analyses students answered questions concerning the intentions of the speakers, the purpose(s) a given utterance may have, the kind of social relationship that exists between the interlocutors, the way the interlocutor interprets the speaker's utterance and so on.

7 Opportunities for pragmatic learning

7.1 The interlingual subtitling tasks

During the first lesson students were presented the outline of the course and the main objectives were explained as well as the type of the activities they would undertake. Due to the short amount of time available for the course, the introduction was concise and thorough at the same time; the notions subtitling and revoicing were explained by means of definitions and examples contained in a Prezi presentation¹. During the second lesson students carried out their first subtitling task which consisted in translating and subtitling into English a 7-minute episode of the TV series "Zio Gianni". They were shown the video initially without subtitles and subsequently with Italian subtitles created by the instructor using VSS (unfortunately RAI does not avail of an official subtitled version of this series). This preliminary viewing was followed by a discussion on their understanding of the episode, in particular of accents and dialects, as well as paralinguistic cues. After the discussion, the instructor handed out a copy of the transcription of the episode dialogue and allowed some time to examine it; afterwards, students were asked to indicate any unfamiliar vocabulary or expressions. They were then divided into small groups of 3 or 4 people each and

¹ This file was made available on Blackboard and consists of a collection of lecture notes to which students can refer to when performing the AVT tasks. All of the material used in class, including videos, scripts, PowerPoint presentations, timecode files, useful links etc. was made available to students on Blackboard Learn.

they had one week to translate the script into English. Since the purpose of this brief course is not to form professional translators, students are not expected to perform perfect synchronisations neither in subtitling nor in re-voicing tasks. On the third lesson each group presented their translation reporting any problems or difficulties they encountered and subtitled the video. The following paragraphs show brief excerpts that report students' activity of subtitling and multimodal analysis in order to show how this methodology can provide opportunities for sociolinguistic and pragmatic learning.

7.1.1 Excerpt 1

This excerpt is taken from the first video that students subtitled during the course as their first assignment. Gianni does not succeed in renting an apartment, mainly because of the fact that he is considered old for sharing an apartment. In fact, in the scene here described, an Asian guy tells Gianni repeatedly that he is old and it is up to the Asian girl to translate this into Italian. While the guy shouts in another language, she calmly addresses Gianni with the following statement:

“Dice che sei troppo avanti con l'età”

[He says you are too advanced in age.]

The girl decides to use a euphemism to save face and avoid coming across as rude; in so doing, she complies with the principle of politeness as “conflict avoidance” and its rule of “making the other person feel good, be friendly”. More precisely, it is a negative politeness strategy (Brown & Levison, 1987) where the speaker takes advantage of the role of translator to soften the tone of an exclamation that would have almost certainly hurt the listener if understood in the source language. It is interesting to note that most students translated “troppo avanti con l'età” as “too old”; the Italian expression “essere avanti con l'età” is a euphemism, a courteous way to say that somebody is old, “vecchio” and the girl uses this expression in order not to offend Gianni. Few students appropriately interpreted the dialogue in its context and chose to translate “troppo avanti con l'età” as “too advanced in age” or “too mature” rather than “too old” which could be perceived as blunt; one student even used “way too old” which is definitely too strong for the context. Appropriate translations are “too advanced in age” or “too mature” rather than the blunt “too old” or even “way too old”, which are the ones that the majority of students used. The multimodal analysis interestingly revealed that certain features in this scene helped students understanding the context and thus providing an appropriate translation; in fact, some of them who subtitled this line correctly reported that the girl's movements and facial expressions in the video indicated that she was apologising and trying to be polite. Students reported that her gestures, the tone of her voice, her hesitation and pause (after “che”) in translating the guy's statement revealed that she was feeling awkward in that situation, therefore a very polite answer would be the best translation.

7.1.2 Excerpt 2

This second excerpt is taken from the second episode subtitled by the students which was their second assignment (episode 5 of *Zio Gianni*). In the line here observed, they were faced with the task of conveying politeness and a formal register into their subtitles. In so doing, they were asked to focus on the illocutionary act behind this statement, which is a request to the manager to move Gianni's interview to the following day. The scene opens with the following line:

Gianni: “Guardi glielo chiedo, mi risponda con franchezza. Se fosse possibile spostarlo a domani.”

[Gianni: “Look, I thought I would ask, please answer frankly. Would it be possible to move it to tomorrow?”]

Interestingly, in their subtitles, most students decided not to omit the first part of the sentence where Gianni dithers before asking the question; although aware that subtitling poses limits to the amount of speech that can be translated, most students considered important to convey Gianni’s feelings of hesitation in their translations. In fact, they reported that while analysing the video they felt that Gianni’s hesitations and the complexity of statement were important in as much as they reveal that he would not want to make that request but he was somehow forced to. The following are examples of some of their subtitles:

- I don't want to bother you now, but... is there any possibility to postpone it?
- Look I'll ask, answer me frankly. What if you could move it to tomorrow?
- What I'm asking is... answer me frankly. Is it possible to change it to tomorrow?

Gianni formally addresses his interlocutor using the Italian polite form “lei”; this person deixis is essential in determining the tone of the conversation and the relationship between the speaker and his interlocutor. Although this is the opening scene of the episode and thus the audience does not know who Gianni is talking to, by analysing this request, students understood that Gianni is paying respect to his interlocutor so they were able to choose a translation that is appropriate to formal tone of this enunciation. After both subtitling assignments were submitted, one lesson was dedicated to viewing the video with the subtitles created by students who were asked to compare their versions.

7.2 Revoicing tasks

Revoicing tasks are intended to provide students with abundant practice of their L2 speaking skills and possibly encourage students to reproduce communicative structures they might have learned from watching and subtitling the videos. A first revoicing activity was carried out as a sort of warm up exercise, in order to introduce students to this practice. The groups that carried out the translation of the script had to choose a passage to read aloud to the instructor, dividing the roles of each character among themselves and paying attention to their pronunciation and intonation. The first proper re-voicing task was carried out in the first semester; a brief muted clip (1:51-minute long) taken from the 6th episode of *Zio Gianni*, was shown to students and they were asked to write the script and record its enactment. The muted clip starts at 1:20 and students watched the part before as an introduction to the topic of that episode. Subsequently, they were given a list of hints that summed up what each character was talking about as well as a file with the order of appearance of the characters. Both the list with hints and the other file were divided into three time slots (e.g. 00:00–0:29; 0:30–1:09; 1:10– 1:51). This scene was chosen since it suited the collaborative intent of the task which gave students the opportunity to interact in the L2; the four protagonists are reunited in the kitchen and are discussing Gianni’s need for a new car after he sold his old one. Another reason why this scene is suitable for the task is that, although all four characters appear at the same time, they do not talk over or interrupt each other. Two groups of four students each were formed and each student decided which character to interpret. The purpose of this task was to stimulate creativity in the L2 and observe whether they

correctly interpret the scene by choosing terms, idioms and expressions which are socially and pragmatically appropriate to the given context. All students engaged in the research and use of informal/slang terms to best render the language of the three students and their sarcasm, however, they tended to be cautious in including swearwords or foul language in discourse. An example of this can be seen in Fulvio's response to Gianni's nostalgic story of his car; the hint given about the scene specifically states that Fulvio only uses one word to dismiss Gianni's story as boring, and that word in the original script is "sticazzi" (an expression which is similar to English "wtf"). However, both groups opted for less vulgar terms, namely, "palloso" (boring) and "chissene" (who cares) which nonetheless are very colloquial.

The second revoicing task consisted in acting out a scene from the dialogue transcript. Firstly, students were given the dialogue transcript of the whole episode 5 of *Zio Gianni* which they were asked to subtitle as the last assignment of the first semester. Secondly the instructor selected two excerpts which are two self-contained scenes not related to each other and where only two characters appear; students were divided into pairs and they were given general information on the topic of the episode before they started to read the excerpts and enact them. The purpose of this task was to test students' ability to understand and interpret a given context and perform the scene accordingly; as well as to understand the content of the dialogue and practice pronunciation, students were required to interpret characters' feelings, actions and reactions and convey them with an adequate intonation and perhaps even gestures. The fact that students had previously worked with episodes from the same TV series is believed to be an advantage, since they know the characters and they may be able to predict their behaviour in a given circumstance. During the course they had the opportunity to study the characters and form an opinion on each of them. This is, indeed, one of the advantages of using a TV series like this, where characters are to some extent stereotyped and tend to behave in a predictable way in different contexts. For example, as in the first episode Fulvio does not worry about offending Gianni by telling him that he is 70 years old, he is now talking to Alessandro, a 7-year-old child, as if he was an adult, advising him of flirting with all the girls in his primary school. Similarly, Chiara is a very naive and cheerful girl, who offered to look after Gianni's son without having the least idea of how to babysit. The following scene witnesses Gianni trying to move a job interview which is scheduled for the same day he has to mind his son Alessandro. Chiara offers to look after the child while Gianni goes to interview.

Gianni: "Guardi glielo chiedo, mi risponda con franchezza. Se fosse possibile spostarlo a domani. Allora che volete? ecco infatti fra due ore ci vediamo. Sì sì sì, no no no non c'è problema per carità! grazie, anzi, per questa opportunità. arrivederci, grazie. E ti pareva. ti pareva?"

Chiara: "Ti pareva cosa? Guarda che oggi è il turno tuo di fare i piatti eh."

Gianni: "Ma no che c'entrano i piatti, è che oggi devo stare con Alessandro, mio figlio, che è tornato dalla settimana bianca, mi hanno messo un colloquio di lavoro fondamentale e non so come fare."

This excerpt contains colloquial expressions such as "ti pareva" (of course) and "che c'entrano" (what do they have to do with it) as well as the fixed expression "settimana bianca" which is a typical Italian expression to indicate a ski trip, or more generally a winter-sport

holiday break. Furthermore, it was interesting to observe how students interpret the context appropriately and pick up how characters' feelings make their intonation change; some students realised that when Gianni was talking on the phone at the beginning and that the call upset him. However, most students did not pick up on Chiara's willingness to look after Alessandro and they used an annoyed tone for her lines. The same episode contained wide range of colloquialisms and slang terms like in the following line where Fulvio tries to advise Alessandro on how not to become a "sfigato" (loser) like his father:

Fulvio: "Bravissimo! Vedi, tuo padre è uno sfigato perché quando tua madre l'ha lasciato non aveva nessun altro da cui andare. Te che sei bello giovane, ben vestito, fresco, puro, devi capire che te ne devi tenere almeno 3 o 4 di riserva. Tu devi... rimorchiare un botto! Me stai a capì? Tu domani vai a scuola con il tuo zainetto, la mela fresca, la merendina, l'astuccio, e ci provi con tutte! La bidella, la maestra, quelle magre, basse, grasse, tutte, a tappeto! È la legge dei grandi numeri, Ale."

Students were allowed a few minutes to read it and note unfamiliar vocabulary. As expected, they asked questions about dialecticisms (typical of Rome and neighbouring areas) such as "daje" (come on), "me stai a capì?" (Do you hear me?), "ce devo provà" (I must hit on them), "pischelle" (girls) as they were not familiar with their meaning and use. Most of them remembered the expression "un botto" from a previous lesson as one of the colloquialisms they had translated and subtitled. The Italian expression "a tappeto" also caused confusion to some students who translated the word "tappeto" with its literal meaning "carpet". During the class discussion some students reported that their translation of "carpet" did not seem to make any sense within the context of the enunciation, which induced them to think that they were facing a fixed-expression.

In conclusion, classroom observation and discussion revealed that the enactment of both scenes proved to be a successful exercise in various ways; it represented an opportunity for student to reflect on the language and to notice new vocabulary, especially colloquialisms and multiword expressions. They also practiced their pronunciation and intonation as well as some paralinguistic elements of speech such as gestures, pauses, loudness, pitch and rate of speech; last but not least they had the chance to practice pragmatic skills by using politeness formulas, speech acts (such as request and complaint), sarcasm and so on.

8 Observations

Class observation revealed that the visual and auditory components of the audiovisual text seemed to play an important role in as much as the input is contextualised at different levels; in fact, audiovisual translation seem to offer an advantage over literary translation as the various pragmatic phenomena appear to be easier to notice for students who experience them contextualized at an acoustic, spatial and kinetic level. These observations are reinforced by the examination of students' multimodal analyses of the videos, in which they analysed body language, gestures, movements, hesitations, pauses and interruptions etc. as parameters on which to base their translation choice. As far as revoicing was concerned, the instructor observed that they generally tend to speak fast as they identified a good oral performance with a spontaneously rapid and fluent conversation. However, this caused several pronunciation mistakes as students were focusing on speed rather than on conveying a clear and understandable message. On the other hand, interlingual subtitling seemed to prove more efficient than intralingual subtitling, perhaps because of the presence of students' L1. By translating into their native language,

students can compare the pragmatic phenomena encountered in the L2 to their own language and culture. It is interesting to note in the subtitled videos a general tendency to be cautious in including swearwords or foul language in discourse. An example of this can be seen in Fulvio's response to Gianni's nostalgic story of his car; the hint given about the scene specifically states that Fulvio only uses one word to dismiss Gianni's story as boring, and that word in the original script is "sticazzi". However, both groups opt for less vulgar terms, namely, "palloso" and "chissene" which nonetheless are very colloquial, but they play down the importance of the impoliteness that marks Fulvio's speech. This observation is in line with previous studies that showed how impoliteness is more marked in the L1 and in particular with a study conducted by Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola (2016) in which the authors found that when translating from their L1 into their L2, students tend to provide a weaker version of impoliteness with respect to the original text.

8.1 Post-test results

A vocabulary post-test was administered at the end of the course, 2 weeks after the end of the treatment. The objective of the post-test was to ascertain whether incidental learning of certain multiword expressions had occurred during the treatment. Incidental vocabulary learning through subtitling has been investigated by Lertola (2013), though in terms of acquisition of single words rather than chunks. In the present study, it was hypothesized that learners would benefit from a mix of exposure and practice with authentic AV input (subtitling and revoicing as well multimodal analysis), and use it as a context-rich scaffolding which could help them retaining certain L2 lexical chunks. Four expressions (3 multiword chunks and 1 colloquialism) were selected from the excerpts used during the course and students were tested on their knowledge through a vocabulary test. The first part of the test required students to provide the L1 translation for each of the four expressions (bilingual productive recall). After they completed this part, they were given a different sheet with the four expressions listed in random order and they were required to put them in the correct sentences provided below (L2 monolingual productive recall). Out of the 9 students who sat the post-test, 7 provided a correct L1 translation and the same 7 students completed all four sentences with the correct expression. Albeit preliminary, these results seem to indicate that students not only recalled the meaning of the language items on which they were tested but also, they were able to identify the appropriate context for each of them.

8.2 Questionnaires results

Only of the 19 students taking part in the exploratory study completed the end-of-module questionnaire. From their answers it emerged that continuity was a major issue throughout the course. All students reported that they would have been happier if lessons had taken place every week rather than every two weeks; they explained that this way they were not able to properly focus on the assignments which were confused with other assignments of the same module. However, one of the students commented that she enjoyed learning new phrases and colloquial expressions and because she was thinking of how to translate them, and revising them again before subtitling, the new expressions stayed with her. Finally, two students commented on the importance of learning language instances which are typical of everyday spoken Italian and of entering an Italian person's mind-set and humour. One of them mentioned the usefulness of working with this kind of TV series as she felt she could learn new vocabulary and the context in

which to use it. The following table shows some of the results from the questionnaires completed at the end of the first semester in relation to their perception of self-improvement in learning and using new vocabulary:

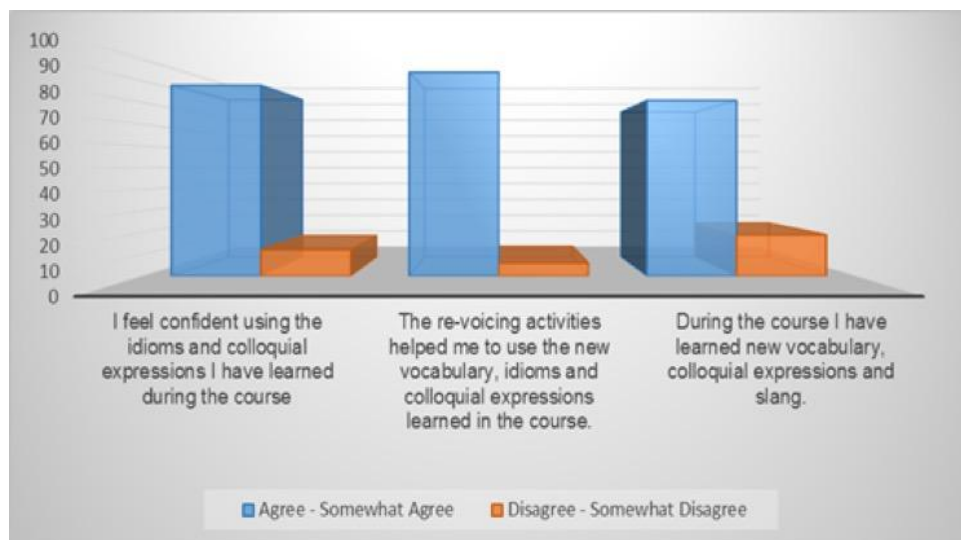


Image 2: Questionnaires results

From their answers it emerges that most students think they have learned new vocabulary during the course and that revoicing tasks were an opportunity to practice such vocabulary. Moreover, they seem to think that they will confidently be able to use the new vocabulary acquired during the course. In order to obtain further insights on this matter, in the final questionnaire one question asked students whether they felt the course had helped them improving their communicative competence and if so how. The following table shows the answer provided by those students who completed the open-ended question²:

Table 1: Answers to the open-ended question

Do you think this course has helped you improve your Italian? If so, how? Please leave a comment below.
Being engaged in some subtitling/re-voicing exercises helped me to improve my language skills. It allowed me to listen to the same expressions several times, and synonyms, etc. in an enjoyable manner. Watching a same episode several times until it was well understood was very useful (the visual context helped a lot).
It has improved my use of Italian expressions.
It definitely has. After watching the clips that we were given I decided to start watching more Italian movies. Therefore I think it has helped my communicative skills.
Yes I think this course has helped me improve my communicative skills in Italian. I've learnt lots of new colloquial expressions and idioms and I feel a lot more comfortable using them in day to day situations.
Yes, because I have listened to and understood much more Italian vocabulary.
Yes it has. The dubbing helped me to be aware of my pronunciation so that when I'm speaking I'm paying attention to the way the words sound.

² The open-ended question was not marked as “required” in the questionnaire, therefore not all students provided an answer to it.

9 Conclusion

Combining subtitling with other AVT modes is a novel idea with promising benefits for FL students. The combination of different AVT tasks within the proposed didactic methodology seems to be effective in as much as it guides students to acknowledge certain pragmatic phenomena; the fact that subtitles must match exactly what is said and displayed in the video leads students to question the meaning of certain utterances, in particular the purpose of the speaker and the social relationship with his/her interlocutor. Revoicing activities represented an opportunity to put into practice what has been previously observed in the interaction between the characters, improving their general fluency by practicing intonation, pronunciation and other paralinguistic features of communication. Field notes and class observations during students' performing of the assignments (in particular during the extra lab hours) concern the tendency of this particular sample of students to favour a more traditional learning style over an experimental one. This attitude made it difficult for them to move away from the approach to language learning they are accustomed to, and to appreciate the novelty of AVT modes as didactic tools, especially subtitling. Their translations of the script showed a solid knowledge of certain Italian vocabulary and colloquialisms and good abilities at paraphrasing and rendering them in English (both in the translation and in the discussion in class). This non-experimental study presented as a didactic experience has several limitations and extreme caution must be exercised in interpreting and generalizing the results obtained. However, it seems to reveal an untapped potential in the combination of subtitling and revoicing as an aid to language learning that offers abundant possibilities to practice and develop different areas of language competence, such as pragmatic competence as described in this article. Further developments are called for to replicate this study with an experimental design using a bigger sample of participants and adopting control and experimental groups. This would allow to demonstrate the efficacy of a course based on AVT as opposed to other methodologies used to promote pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence in the foreign language classroom.

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Appendix - Post-test

Part 1.

Please provide the English translation for the following expressions

- Avere presente _____
- A occhio e croce _____
- Mi raccomando _____
- Piantarla _____

Part 2.

Please put the following expression into the correct sentence

- Mi raccomando
- A occhio e croce
- Piantarla
- Avere presente

1. Sto cercando di studiare _____ di fare rumore per favore.
2. Mi spiace ma stasera non ci sono. Non so se _____ Giulia, mia cugina. Stasera festeggiamo il suo compleanno con tutta la famiglia.

3. Non ne sono sicura ma _____ credo che ci vorranno più di 2 ore per aggiustare il computer.
4. _____, assicurati che prima di uscire Marco abbia finito tutti i compiti per domani.

Biographical Note

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