

The Use of Audiovisual Translation Software in Second Language Teaching

Juan José Martínez Sierra

Universitat de València

juan.j.martinez@uv.es

Abstract

Increasingly, we can build new bridges between related fields of education. This makes it possible to use techniques that were originally designed for one specific area of teaching, in others. An example of this can be, on the one hand, the teaching of audiovisual translation and, secondly, the teaching of foreign languages. We can find instances of this possibility in recent and noteworthy works in which, for example, the application of subtitles to learn a foreign language is explored. Thus, along the same lines, the main objective of this article is the search for other possible avenues of connection between the two areas mentioned above, taking advantage of new technologies and of the tools with which they provide us. Our starting point will be audiovisual translation teaching and the use of software programs such as Windows Movie Maker and Subtitle Workshop, to later transfer them to the second language (in this case, English) classroom. In the first of these contexts, both software programs allow for, among many other possibilities and respectively, dubbing and subtitling simulations in class. On this occasion, our intention is to show the potential of the aforementioned software in the English language class, but not for interlinguistic purposes, as in the case of dubbing and subtitling into another language, but for intralinguistic ones, as in the case of postsynchronisation and of subtitling into the same language.

Keywords: audiovisual translation teaching, second language teaching, software

Introduction

Audiovisual translation (AVT) training is progressively becoming more widespread, mainly due to its greater presence in high education institutions. Such increasing interest of universities in this particular field can be considered a reflection of the tremendous impact that audiovisual translated products have in our everyday lives.

However, as authors such as Díaz-Cintas expressed, “AVT is an area in which there seems to have been a chronic lack of expertise amongst trainers to teach it” (2008, p. 5). Thus, AVT trainers seem to be in need of new ideas, so every contribution in this respect should be welcome. Besides, AVT “shares an umbilical relationship with technology,” so “future professionals should be exposed to the latest software generations” (Díaz-Cintas, 2008, p. 4-6). Hence, our job as AVT trainers is – at least – twofold: we need to (1) assimilate and keep up with new developments in AVT training and (2) be able to assimilate new technology and implement it in the classroom. Besides, some of the activities used in the translation classroom can also be adapted and adopted in the training of another crucial aspect for prospective translators: the command of the source language from which they will translate in the future.

Thus, in this article, first we review briefly the current state of affairs regarding AVT training. Then, we present a way in which trainers can make use of and integrate dubbing and subtitling software programs in their translation classes. More concretely, we explain the way Windows Movie Maker and Subtitle Workshop can be used in the classroom to carry out dubbing and subtitling simulations, respectively, so that the trainees can go beyond the translation stage, get an overall view by completing the dubbing and subtitling processes, and actually see how their translated scripts materialise on the screen.

On the other hand, in the second part of this paper we turn our attention to the additional use of the abovementioned software to practise and learn a foreign language, an aspect that we deem crucial to every soon-to-be translator.

Brief Review of the Current State of Affairs Regarding AVT Training

As Díaz-Cintas (2008, p. 1) stated regarding AVT, “the Cinderella mantle that has surrounded this area of knowledge seems to have (partially) evaporated.” Translation training has been dealt with in numerous works, both theoretically and practically. However, that is not the case with AVT training, to which relatively few works have been devoted. Not comprehensively: Carroll (1998), Agost and Chaume (2001), Santamaria (2003), Sponholz (2003), Bartrina and Espasa (2005), Zabalbeascoa, Santamaria, and Chaume (2005), Díaz-Cintas, Mas-López, and Orero (2006), and Díaz-Cintas (2008).

Windows Movie Maker and Subtitle Workshop

Let us introduce briefly the two software programs that can be used for the training of both several AVT modes and certain source language

skills. According to the Windows Movie Maker website, Windows Movie Maker is a “free video creating/editing software application.” It was initially designed for Windows Me, XP, and Vista, although it also works with more recent versions such as Windows 7 and 8. It includes different features; for example, “effects, transitions, titles/credits, audio track, timeline narration, and *Auto Movie*.” Besides, it allows for effects and transitions creation and modification. More importantly for our purposes, it is also “a basic audio track editing program,” thanks to which it is possible to “apply basic effects to audio tracks such as fade in or fade out” and to export the audio tracks “in the form of a sound file instead of a video file” (2013, p. online).

Regarding Subtitle Workshop, the Software Informer website explained that it is a software program “intended to edit video subtitles.” In addition, it can also be used to “translate subtitles between a pair of languages and correct their timing.” It has a highly intuitive interface, which makes it possible for a beginner to use the program without much trouble, even though the available functions are numerous. The basic editing mode allows the user to “have access to previewing the video while you add subtitles and adjust their timing.” Moreover, thanks to the translator mode, “you can start from an original subtitle and translate it line by line.” It is also possible to adjust subtitle timing, either by time or frame. Another positive aspect is that it can “calculate the duration of subtitles automatically,” a very useful feature “when you already have a subtitle file but it is intended for another version of the video” (2013, p. online).

Both applications can be used in the classroom to carry out dubbing and subtitling simulations, respectively. With them, trainees can:

- go beyond the translation stage
- achieve an overall view by completing the dubbing and subtitling processes
- see how their translated scripts materialise on the screen

Additionally, these software programs have some noteworthy advantages:

- they are free
- they are easy to obtain and to use (no specific training required)
- they allow for simulations (didactic potential)

Audiovisual Translation Training

Let us consider first two possible ways to implement these two software programs in audiovisual translation teaching.¹

¹ A computer lab is required for this type of activities.

Windows Movie Maker

It is at the undergraduate level, although not restrictively, where the use of this kind of software can prove most applicable. One way to carry out a dubbing or voice over activity using Windows Movie Maker could be the one that is proposed below:

1. The students are provided with the source text (that is, clip plus script) of a given audiovisual product (a fragment of an episode from a television series or a documentary, for example; the difficulty of this fragment will depend on the current level and stage of the group).
2. Individually, either in the classroom or at home and within the time allowed, the students translate the fragment into the target language, paying attention to the different restrictions and adhering to the translation brief's instructions that the teacher has given them.
3. The different translations are put in common, and corrections are agreed and explained when needed.
4. The students team up in groups of two to four members. Greater groups may not be functional. The translated text is also divided into as many pieces as groups there are. Windows Movie Maker can also be used for this purpose. By way of guidance, a fragment of five minutes should be appropriate for a four-member group.
5. Each group is assigned one of those pieces. Depending on how deep the course has reached regarding dialogue writing, the students will adapt the translation of the allocated piece so that it meets, to a bigger or lesser extent, the different lip-sync requirements.
6. Then, each group decides who is going to be who, and even if one of the members is going to play more than one role or is going to have to fake or modulate a voice (for example, in the case that a male is going to play a female, or vice versa). In other words, they do their own castings, a step that implies negotiation and team work.
7. The teacher sets a deadline, since it is usually more convenient that the recording phase be performed outside the classroom, so that each group's activity does not interfere with that of the rest. The students will then have the opportunity to become dubbing actors and actresses (they can even designate a dubbing director) and dub their fragment. This way, they have the chance to go beyond the translation stage, and the dubbing process is completed (leaving aside the highly technical mixing stage).

8. Once all the groups have submitted their dubbed piece of audiovisual material, Windows Movie Maker can be used to put them all back together. Hence, a dubbed copy of the whole film or episode is generated. A session can be dedicated to watch the dubbed copy, so that the students can enjoy the final result of their work.

This process is summarised in Figure 1.

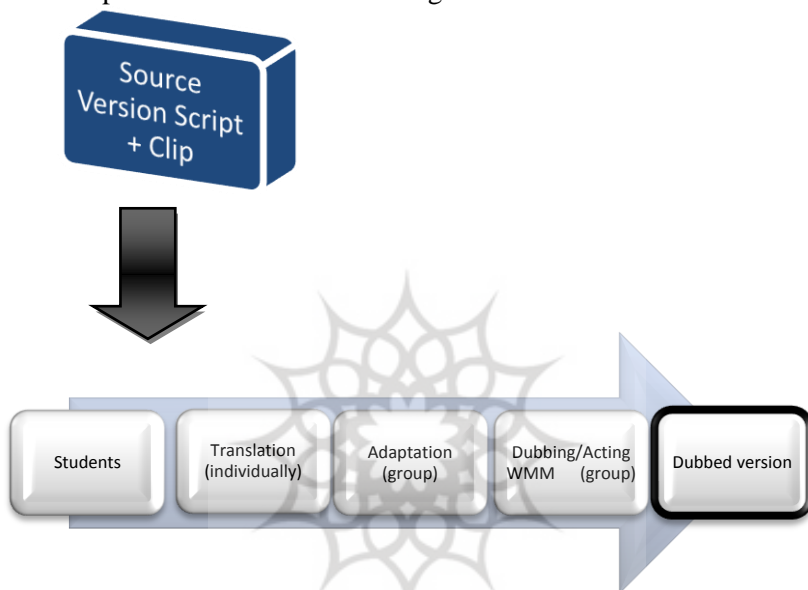


Figure 1. Windows Movie Maker in the audiovisual translation class

Subtitle Workshop

Another typical activity that can be performed in the audiovisual translation classroom involves the creation of subtitles for a given audiovisual product. Subtitle Workshop is a software program commonly used for this purpose, and one possible way (obviously, not the only one) to take advantage of it could be the one that follows:

1. The students are provided with the source text (that is, clip plus script) of a given audiovisual product (a fragment of an episode from a television series or a documentary, for example; the difficulty of this fragment will depend on the current level and stage of the group).
2. Individually, either in the classroom or at home and within the time allowed, the students translate the fragment into the target language, paying attention to the different restrictions and

- adhering to the translation brief's instructions that the teacher has given them.
3. The different translations are put in common, and corrections are agreed and explained when needed.
 4. Again individually, the students will then start creating interlinguistic subtitles from their translation, using Subtitle Workshop. The underlying idea of working from the translated text is that this way the students necessarily account for the synthesis process intrinsic to subtitles generation.
 5. Once the activity is finished, the teacher can opt between individual or group correction.

This process is summarised in Figure 2.

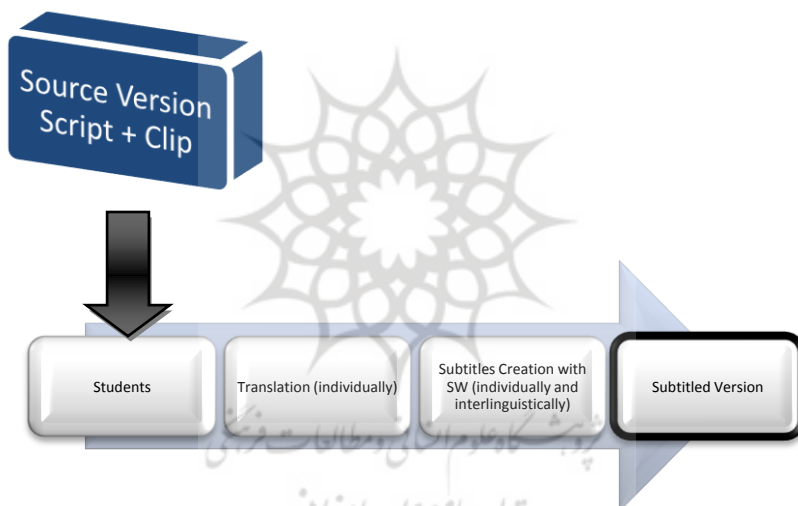


Figure 2. Subtitle Workshop in the audiovisual translation class

Second Language Training

Dubbing can be defined as an AVT mode that “consists of replacing the original track of a film’s (or any audiovisual text) source language dialogues with another track on which *translated* dialogues have been recorded in the *target language*” (Chaume, 2012, p. 1, emphasis added). On the other hand, from the technical point of view, *postsynchronisation* also involves the recording of dialogue and sound effects in synchronisation with the images once the film has been shot, but in this case there is no translation process; that is, the dialogues are recorded in the original language, and not in any target one. The main reason for this is that, while dubbing aims at hiding from view the foreign origin of the

film, the purpose of postsynchronisation is basically to incorporate the sound to an already recorded scene, to improve its quality.

As suggested earlier, mastering a foreign (source) language is crucial for a translator, so it seems evident that translators' training must include second language instruction. Just as we proposed the use of Windows Movie Maker and of Subtitle Workshop to carry out translation activities in the classroom, we now put forward the use of those two programs to practise and learn a foreign language. As we will see, some steps will be repeated, although some others will include significant changes.

Windows Movie Maker

Dubbing involves translating from a source language into a target one. When that translation stage is absent, then we can talk of postsynchronisation. In real practice, the technical similarities between both processes are numerous. Thus, it is possible to take advantage of that in the second language classroom, once again resorting to Windows Movie Maker. The development of the activity could be as follows:

1. The students are provided with the English – source – text (that is, clip plus script) of a given audiovisual product (a fragment of an episode from a television series or a documentary, for example; the language difficulty of this fragment will depend on the current level and stage of the group). It is also advisable to give them a written copy, also in English, of a tutorial on how to use the software program.
2. The students team up in groups of two to four members. Greater groups may not be functional. The text is also divided into as many pieces as groups there are. Windows Movie Maker can also be used for this purpose. By way of guidance, a fragment of five minutes should be appropriate for a four-member group.
3. Each group is assigned one of those pieces.
4. Then, each group decides who is going to be who, and even if one of the members is going to play more than one role or is going to have to fake or modulate a voice (for example, in the case that a male is going to play a female, or vice versa). In other words, they do their own castings, a step that implies negotiation and team work.
5. The teacher sets a deadline, since it is usually more convenient that the recording phase be performed outside the classroom, so that each group's activity does not interfere with that of the rest. The students will then have the opportunity to become actors and actresses and postsynchronise (that is, into the same source language) their fragment.

6. Once all groups have submitted their re-recorded piece of audiovisual material, Windows Movie Maker can be used to put them all back together. Hence, a postsynchronised copy of the whole film or episode is generated. A session can be dedicated to watch that copy, so that the students can enjoy the final result of their work.

This process is summarised in Figure 3.

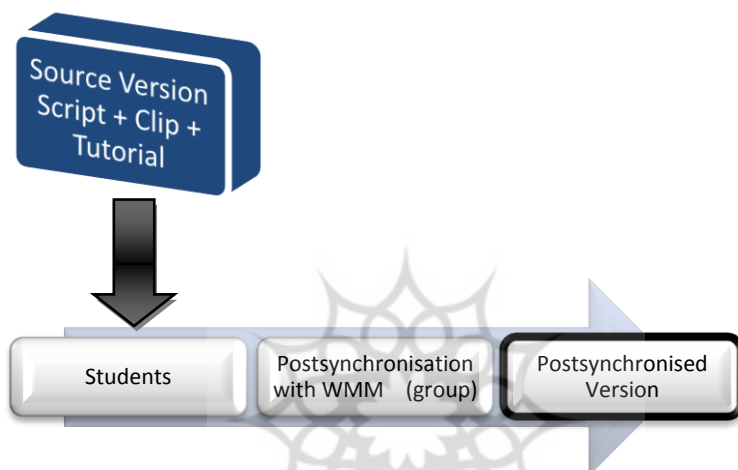


Figure 3. Windows Movie Maker in the second language class.

Subtitle Workshop

This program can also be implemented in the second language classroom, once again ignoring the translation stage, just as we suggest next:

1. The students are provided with the English – source – text (that is, clip plus script) of a given audiovisual product (a fragment of an episode from a television series or a documentary, for example; the difficulty of this fragment will depend on the current language level and stage of the group). It is also advisable to give them a written copy, also in English, of a tutorial about how to use the software program.
2. Individually, the students will then start creating intralinguistic subtitles from the script, using Subtitle Workshop.
3. Once the allotted time is over and the activity is finished, the teacher can opt between individual or group correction.

This process is summarised in Figure 4.

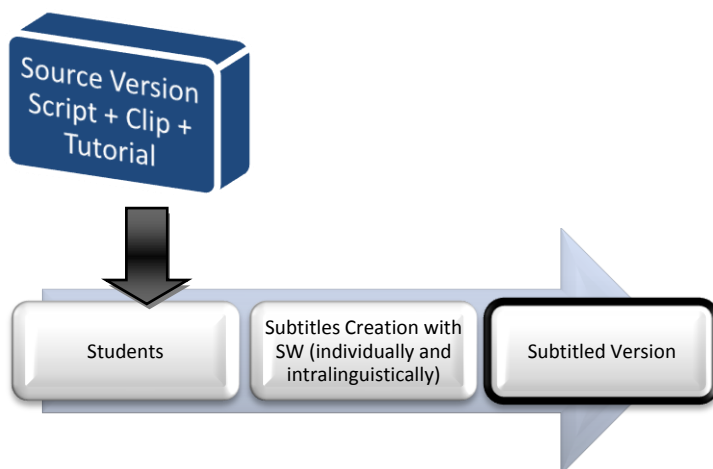


Figure 4. Subtitle Workshop in the second language class.

Final Comments

As we have seen, the two software programs referred to in this article, that is, Windows Movie Maker and Subtitle Workshop, have great didactic potential in the two areas of teaching at stake.

We have already mentioned some of the benefits of using these programs in audiovisual translation training. Let us now consider in more detail the most positive aspects of their application in the second language classroom, turning to my own experience in that particular field. At the Universitat de València I teach a course titled *English Language II*, a compulsory first-year (second semester) subject that is part of the module English Language and Linguistics and the sub-module English Language in the English Studies degree programme. In general terms, the final grade of this subject is calculated as follows:

- ✓ 20% listening
- ✓ 30% speaking
- ✓ 30% use of English (grammar)
- ✓ 20% portfolio

As we can see, 50% of the final grade is based on the two oral skills, listening (receptive, passive) and speaking (productive, active), which are precisely the two skills that students can go through using Windows Movie Maker to carry out the activity explained above (see 5.1). They practise 1) listening, as they need to listen to the original voices not just to understand the meaning of what they say, but also to become familiar both with the intonations and the accents; and 2) speaking, as they have to speak and record their voices, trying to make their speech be as close

to the original one as possible. The fact that they also practise reading when they peruse the tutorial is also an advantage, together with the grammar that they review indirectly.

On the other hand, I also teach a course titled *English Language I*, also a compulsory first-year (first semester) subject that is part of the module English Language and Linguistics and the sub-module English Language in the English Studies degree programme. In general terms, the final grade of this subject is calculated as follows:

- ✓ 20% reading
- ✓ 30% writing
- ✓ 30% use of English (grammar)
- ✓ 20% portfolio

On this occasion, 50% of the final grade is based on reading (receptive, passive) and writing (productive, active), that is, the two skills that use the written channel of communication. Subtitle Workshop can be an appropriate tool to practise those two skills. Thanks to an activity such as the one explained in 5.2, students can train 1) reading, since they have to read both the original script and the tutorial and 2) writing, since they have to rewrite the whole text in the form of subtitles, which requires great doses of comprehension and summarising. The grammar that they review indirectly is an additional benefit.

The different activities proposed here have already been implemented in real practice, and all of them have proved their excellence due to different aspects such as the fact 1) that they allow for audiovisual translation simulations and second language training, depending on the setting, and 2) that students (an average number of 40 per group) find them not only useful and relevant, but also amusing, responding positively to them.

To conclude, as we have seen, it is possible to build didactic bridges between different but related fields of study. On the one hand, prospective (audiovisual) translators can take advantage of the possibilities offered by the two software programs referred to here. The latter facilitate the practice of translation and of language skills, taking into account that translation future professionals need to be trained both in translation issues and in the command of the (as a minimum) two languages with which they will work. On the other hand, second language students can also benefit from the use of this type of software since, as it has been shown, it allows for language training, covering all language skills.

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