

Sociocultural and Pragmatic Perspectives in Countries that Use Dubbing for Multimedia Translation. Implications for Foreign Language Teaching¹

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ABSTRACT: Sociocultural and pragmatic perspectives have semiotic implications that differ greatly between different countries. These have important cultural implications in the way multimedia cultural products are produced and received. The learning of foreign language, specifically English, has become widely accepted as an unconditional norm. The current global context has created a need for successful and efficient teaching and learning. Consequently, this has made the research in the field of second language acquisition significantly active in the past decades.

The use of subtitled audio – visual material in foreign language classroom is considered an innovative strategy for foreign language instruction. It is an effective teaching tool since it enhances second language learning both from linguistic and sociocultural perspective. The full potential of the use of subtitles in classroom practice is still to be explored. However, the recent findings in regard are more than encouraging.

This paper aims to provide a set of evidence on the multifaceted implications the subtitled audio – visual materials have for second language learning. It analyses this process from theoretical aspect taking into account all the elements involved in second language learning through watching subtitled films and TV series, while denoting possible directions for its implementation in foreign language classroom. The proposal is based on the indicators which show a certain connection between the use of subtitles for films and TV series as a general system for multimedia translation and the level of proficiency in English language specifically.

The research in this field is still limited, so there is a large number of lines of investigation to carry out which could allow learners who are exposed to foreign language only in classroom to benefit from as greatly as possible.

KEYWORDS: subtitled multimedia, multimedia cultural products, sociocultural perspective, pragmatic perspective, classroom foreign language teaching

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1. Introduction

Based on a thorough analysis of various factors that influence the successful and efficient teaching / learning of a second language (SLA), this paper intends to shed some light on the possible reasons why in some European countries the level of proficiency is significantly different than in others and suggestions to overcome those differences in modern second language classroom.

English language as a foreign language, has become a lingua franca, which makes it the most learnt foreign language in the world. Moreover, as the mobility in Europe and globally, has become higher than ever in all possible aspects - migration, work, study, tourism, etc. - the expectations in English language knowledge follow through. However, there are remarkable differences among European countries in how the teaching and learning process is addressed. In fact, the proficiency level may vary significantly, which means there must be some other explanation beside the variation in the instruction methodology.

There are numerous generalizations about why foreign languages are better acquired in some countries or cultures, whereas in others learners seem to struggle more. As obvious as these assumptions might appear, they should be analysed from a perspective which allows considering as many factors involved as possible and obtain conclusions which could be adequately applied in practice.

Firstly, the issue should be addressed from the perspective of researchers in second language acquisition (SLA). This field has been dynamic in its recent history, especially after the turning point in the 1980s and the appearance of Krashen's theory. Some researchers consider that the second language acquisition field was weakened by theory proliferation, while others find it necessary to "make sense of the varied phenomena of L2 (second language) learning, the agency of language learner, and the context and communities of practice in which they operate" (Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2019). Despite the important advances in the past three decades, Krashen's Monitor Theory is comprised of observations about language acquisition that continue to be valid today, which is the reason his theory is comprised in the analysis, as well as a number of recent theories also relevant to this matter.

The SLA is a complex process and its analysis has led to numerous theories regarding the mechanisms behind it from the perspective of different scientific fields. The use of subtitles for multimedia cultural products as a main method for its translation seems to be one of the important factors in the learning process. Consequently, watching subtitled media can be understood as a meaningful learning process, something which might also be extracted from the analysis and comparison to the existing relevant theories in the SLA field.

It is important to highlight the fact that the language learning process does not exclusively occur in the classroom and that it depends on various internal and external

factors regarding the learner. Regardless of the reasons why one decides to learn a foreign language, being exposed to that language outside the classroom is without any doubt a beneficial factor in the learning process. Countries that apply the system of subtitling for foreign films and TV programmes provide a cultural context in which the exposure to foreign language is significantly higher than in those which use the system of dubbing. To this date, a significant number of studies suggest that second language acquisition may be facilitated by watching subtitled films and TV series. Numerous studies have shown the benefits subtitled movies and television have for the second language learning process and its relation to second language proficiency. My goal is to do an analysis of the key aspects of the second language learning process in a way that reader can infer that subtitled films and series could be a great ally of second language teaching in classroom and learning outside classroom.

“It is now commonplace to say that audio - visual material, with its rich context, is a powerful instructional tool known to have a motivational, attentional, and affective impact on viewers, which in turn facilitates auditory processing (Baltova, 1994: 510-1). In addition, film, television, video, and now digitized images usually expose students to larger amounts of authentic oral language input, which in the long run should improve listening comprehension in face-to-face interaction with native speakers” (Herron et. al., 1995 cited in Danan, 2004, p.68).

The abbreviation L2 refers to English language. However, some of the studies used to support the main argument in this paper, are carried out on participants whose second language is other than English. Thus, the term might be applied to any second language without causing error in understanding the central idea. The term L2 learners mostly refers to primary and secondary school students. Nevertheless, the other age groups are not excluded as they are often accounted for in studies from various fields used to back the argument. Lastly, the didactic proposal is thought within the global scope. Still, when references are made to the teaching and learning standards comprised in the official documents within the educational system and practice, as well as the system of subtitles used in media, the scope is limited to Europe.

2. Introduction to sociocultural and pragmatic perspectives

The theories, findings and factors included in this analysis are backed by strong research in the respective fields and carefully picked according to their relevance and recentness on the global scientific scene. In order to better understand the acquisition of a foreign language, an overview of the SLA theories is required. The considered theories relevant to this purpose include Krashen's Monitor Theory (acquisition as a learning process in an unaware manner – picking up a language; acquisition and early learning of second language occurs by a natural order; the importance of affective variables - motivation, self – confidence and anxiety – involved in successful learning process), Connectionist Approach (engaging in an activity in which the exposure to constant associative patterns is given),

Usage based Approach (frequent exposure allows for gradually frequent repetition of certain pairs, as well as the variety of pairs which may be encountered during the exposure period) and Interaction Theory (“the amount of attention which the learner is paying to matters of form may influence the extent to which second language input and interaction actually produce second language intake” (Mitchell & Myles, 2003, p.184)). The closer look into them gives us clear clues on how important patterns of learning are triggered by watching subtitled films and programmes, which in some cases has significant implications on second language instruction.

Additionally, the sociocultural perspectives are inevitable in the understanding of the process of L2 acquisition. As Elinor Ochs states (Ochs, 1988, p.14, cited in Mitchell & Myles 2003, p.235): “Given that meanings and functions are to a large extent socioculturally organised, linguistic knowledge is embedded in sociocultural knowledge. On the other hand, understandings of the social organization of everyday life, cultural ideologies, moral values, beliefs, and structures of knowledge and interpretation are to a large extent acquired through the medium of language . . .”. There is a wide range of cultural references reflected in films or series, the information the viewer obtains through the aesthetics, architecture, habits, food, the way people relate to each other, art, music, etc. is rich in its contents, yet easily perceived and even memorized without intentional doing.

Beside the theory in the SLA field, it is essential to understand certain cognitive operations behind the learning process through watching audio-visual material. There are two central theories:

- Paivio’s Dual Coding Theory (A multimedia that combine visual and verbal input on the same topic, allow for a stronger retention of the input regarding that topic. Therefore, the use of audio – visual input triggers the dual coding processing and significantly enhances the language learning. The translation provided in audio – visual materials establishes links between the two verbal systems first, and generates more paths for recuperation which allows viewers to benefit from visual traces as well as from two distinct sets of verbal traces (Paivio, 1986, chapter 11; Danan, 1992, p.504, 522 cited in Danan, 2004, p.72).)
- Mayer’s Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (The learner is a “sense – maker” who engages in the process of selection, organization and integration of new information to the existing knowledge. The ultimate goal of this approach is to guide learners through the process of making sense of the instructional materials (Mayer, 2001). In other words, teachers provide information leading learners to create associations between verbal and non – verbal representations.

The processing of subtitled media allows for the development of learner strategies, such as “guessing and inferencing, clarification (through questions), and verification of meaning” (Rubin, 1995, p.15, 16 cited in Danan 2004, p.74). A good learner can be defined as an “active processor” of information, whereas learning is a process of “successive approximation”. The ability to use the written text strategically in addition to positive learning

environment can clearly apply to subtitling. Furthermore, these factors may be the key to the high degree of incidental learning provided in environment with frequent and motivated viewers of subtitled programs, even if they use adequate strategies in a subconscious manner.

Learning process as a whole is influenced by various factors, of which the most relevant ones for SLA in the context of viewing subtitled media, called learner variables, are:

- Attitude (obtaining linguistic self – confidence creates learner's belief that they can perform competently and reach learning goals)
- Motivation (integrative and instrumental; the recent construct of L2 Motivational Self System)
- Exposure (its positive impact on motivation leading to “side effects” in the shape of words “picked up” without any intentional memorizing or active learning)

All three factors play a remarkable role in the learning process while cross – feeding each other, however, they are not equally provided in second language classroom. Watching subtitled media in out of school context is shown to be one of the dominant factors of exposure, putting L2 learners in the countries that use this system in an advantage over those that do not.

Exposure - the multifaceted variable of multimedia cultural products

English language, as a central second language learnt across the globe, is present in most of the contents viewed on television, cinemas, internet and other audio-visual material, since the Hollywood films gained dominance in the global commercial film industry. The two main factors in the globalization of American films which have helped Hollywood to become the most influential film industry are on one hand, the fact that English became a language used worldwide in a short period of time and, on the other hand, the use of internet which connects the viewers from all over the world, so they can share the experience of watching a film. Additionally, authors De Zoysa & Newman (2002, p.89) claim that “American film became part of the socialization process from early childhood for people all over the world, its stars and idioms, basic assumptions and subtext familiar to all”.

Furthermore, the language used in film industry is perfectly suitable for learners due to its characteristics as described by the experts in the field Pavesi, Chaume), such as:

- lexical and discourse patterns present in language used in screen dialogues provide good quality input for L2 acquisition
- references used in dialogues are clear and related to elements already known to viewers

- prefabricated sequences, recurrent patterns, key words and repetitions as well as predictability, enhance the comprehension and, consequently, acquisition

A study of primary school children in Iceland, who were not previously trained for the words and phrases tested in the study, showed they learnt them just by watching subtitled television (Lefever, 2010 cited in Lindgren & Muñoz, 2013, p.108). The authors continue stating that children have been exposed to subtitled television throughout their whole childhood / life, which means that by the time they start learning English as L2 in schools, they are already familiar with English phonemes, the prosody and some vocabulary (Lindgren & Muñoz, 2013, p.108).

The Internet is in undeniable rise and its presence will soon be a general fact in most European countries. Therefore, its influence on L2, which in most cases is English, will have even greater impact than what has been observed in the latest studies. The attention to out-of-school exposure to L2 and its potential has not been considerably taken into consideration by the policy makers nor pedagogues. However, we can observe its great potential not only as an external factor in the L2 learning process, but also as a complementary tool to the L2 classroom activities regardless of methodology or teaching preferences of each instructor.

Definition of language proficiency is an important element for this research, since it goes beyond the linguistic knowledge. No language is comprehended fully outside the context in which it has been developing in a consistent manner. Traditional approaches to understanding and consequently teaching a language were limited to linguistic aspects of it. However, there has been a change in the paradigm of what constitutes a language. The linguistic competence, which includes the knowledge of linguistic elements of a language, is one of the three competences - linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic - comprised in overall language knowledge. As such they are included in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Learning a language implies first understanding a cultural mindset which subsequently leads to associating names with the concepts behind those names reflected in the language. In other words, it is impossible to understand a language without understanding its culture, thus, the learning occurs when some basic cultural knowledge has been grasped previously or is being acquired simultaneously. The ideal L2 learning, if we could define such, takes place in the context of full immersion of learners in the foreign language culture which grants them the opportunity to create parallel relations between words and ideas as they progress in their learning process. Nevertheless, for most L2 learners this kind of immersion is impossible, so their learning most probably occurs in L1 (mother tongue) environment in which they are provided with opportunities to have contact with L2 to the extent depending on personal and general circumstances of the context. Learners whose general context is defined, among others, by the use of subtitles for foreign films and programmes, consequently have more opportunities for contact with L2, or what has been defined as the exposure.

L2 classroom might use help of some additional tools in order to fully meet the requirements set by the official curriculum and the learning goals determined by each educational system and based on the guidelines of the CEFR, since both sociocultural and pragmatic competence are mostly learnt through either full language immersion or constant quality exposure.

There are some interesting indicators suggesting a relation between English language proficiency and the use of subtitles as a main method for multi – media translation. The 2019 Global proficiency report shows that most of the countries ranking high use subtitles for foreign films and multi – media translation. “Non experimentally, it has also been pointed out that so called subtitling countries fare better than dubbing countries in foreign language acquisition and learning (Gottlieb 2004). Such an advantage can be clearly related to massive exposure to subtitled L2 dialogues, since films and TV fiction represent the foreign programmes that are most commonly imported and made media accessible to non native audiences.” Pavesi (2012). Despite the fact that a variable called cognate linguistic distance is at play, suggesting that learners whose mother tongue is closer to L2 are more likely to benefit from subtitled multimedia, there are countries with longer linguistic distance ranking high. Authors Lindgren & Muñoz (2012, p.122) stress the possibility that “extensive exposure to L2 could compensate for cognate linguistic distance and parents’ opportunities to use the L2 professionally”. To sum up, the two figures might suggest that the countries using subtitles in multimedia translation create extensive exposure to L2, thus learners in these countries “fare better” in foreign language acquisition and learning. To date, there are no experiments and clear findings based on these variables, therefore it may be of interest for future research.

3. Instructional implications for multimedia cultural products

The implications most of the findings in all the fields of research included in the present analysis (SLA, learning through multimedia cultural products and SLA through subtitled multimedia) are important for L2 classroom. Therefore, instructors should take them into account and introduce important changes in the established practice. In countries that use dubbing as a main system for media translation, teachers might explore new options and introduce considerable changes, such as the combination and the adaptation of subtitled films and series as an additional teaching / learning tool and flipped classroom.

Potential benefits of subtitled films and series as an additional teaching / learning tool:

- There has been a shift in habits of young generations in which the prevalence of watching videos over reading took place
- Extensive watching can be an alternative source of rich and authentic input

- Provides an extra (out of school) exposure

Authors Webb & Rodgers (2009^a cited in Pujadas & Muñoz, 2019, p.1) suggested “extensive viewing as an alternative source of rich authentic input” drawing attention to films and TV programmes as a likely means for vocabulary acquisition because of its lexical richness, frequent repetition and contact with less common words in addition to visual backing. The authors consider this material to provide an “authentic input” difficult for L2 learners to be processed. However, the captions added to the audio-visual text help learners to comprehend it. When adolescent students were asked about the attitude towards watching films or series in L2 classroom they reported that it was more “natural, enjoyable and motivating than other classroom activities” (Pujadas & Muñoz, 2019, p.2).

Countries that use full – cast dubbing for multimedia cultural products do not provide their L2 learners with the extra or out – of – school exposure, so the actual contact with foreign language is limited to school classes. Thus, it might be less beneficial for both students and instructors to fit such activity into already busy classroom schedule. It would only signify redesigning the curriculum options within the same time frame. Nevertheless, if the exposure is widened to the out – of – school frame as part of the classroom learning, it might be advantageous for the whole learning process and those involved.

A research conducted to see the relation between flipped classroom and the positive effects it has on learning of English as L2, carried out by Chen Hsieh, Wu & Marek (2017) showed the benefits on motivation and idiomatic acquisition through online written and oral interaction. In addition, Lee & Wallace (2018) explored the benefits of flipped classroom for L2 English students and found that their final grades were affected positively as well as their level of engagement and enjoyment in the lessons approached in this manner. In addition, this approach goes in line with the communicative approach widely accepted among instructors as the principal teaching method in L2 classroom. This means the lectures are personalized and student – centred, the former implying that students get to learn at their own pace, whereas the latter refers to all the previously mentioned activities which put students in the centre of the lecture, and they become active participants (Basal, 2015). In addition, students not only enjoy this kind of approach, but find it helpful to organize their learning according to their personal learning strategies and styles.

The advantages of flipped classroom

- An effective way of gaining extra time and using the time provided in classroom for discussion and deeper learning
- The activities included in the learning process include analysis of the key concepts, clarification of complex concepts or those not commonly understood by students, etc.
- New generations are more technology oriented

- Lectures are personalized and student centred

It should be highlighted that the term flipped classroom is used in cases when students watch a pre – recorded video subsequently commented and used in classroom. Watching subtitled films or series would not entirely match this formula, however it would indirectly imply the use of video materials previously watched at home in order to utilize them in class for discussion and development of language learning activities. The fact that no established formula is required for it to be carried out, the positive side effect is that it gives instructors free hands to work on their particular model. Instructors have to be creative and fully engaged in their work to attract students' attention. Creating contents closely related to subjects which are of students' interest is a helping tool in the process which increases motivation on different levels.

Applying adequate teaching methodology, instructors and students might benefit from the fact that students watch subtitled series they would usually watch in their free time regardless of the classroom content, if teachers manage to relate topics and matters from the series to their regular curriculum. In other words, learners keep watching films and series in their free time, enjoy that activity, after which they attend their language lessons and find activities related to their favourite series. Teachers might encourage students to use subtitles instead of dubbed version of the show. Commonly used expressions, vocabulary, characters, non – linguistic features characteristic for the context in which the narrative is situated, can then all be used for the purpose of standard classroom teaching, so students would find references to which they can strongly relate to. Consequently, the motivation would be enhanced which, as seen in the studies discussed in the paper, would be an additional benefit for the learning process.

4. Conclusion

Learning is a multidimensional process which starts at the very beginning of a person's life. Language, as we know it, is specific to humans, who create their identity by means of all the elements which comprise a language. Its learning is conditioned by the context in which it unfolds and, at the same time, the acquired knowledge is closely related to that context. Beside their own identity, people create ideas about identities of others and the way they are all interconnected. In other words, people need language to understand the reality, themselves and the general state of affairs.

When a second language is introduced, the learning builds upon a set of varied and numerous knowledge already acquired throughout life, a fact which makes its learning faster and arguably easier. As we have discussed in this paper, there is a large number of theories on how a second language is learnt, and regardless of the perspective from which the explanation is constructed, they all agree on one thing: the context and the quality of input will mostly determent the outcome.

Second language classroom is not sufficient as a provider of that necessary input. Thus, it is essential to assure learners with other input opportunities. In countries where subtitles are used as a main method of translation for foreign films and TV series, the availability of extra foreign language input is not limited to L2 classroom, therefore the learning is enhanced by viewing this type of media. In fact, it is irrelevant whether viewers are paying explicit attention to any possible learning process that is taking place at that moment. Hence, it is occurring in one way or another. Besides, the provided input seems to be greatly in favour of the acquisition happening. In other words, the language used in films and series - fictional language – follows patterns of repetition and association between words and expressions which considerably coincide with those suggested in the SLA theories discussed in this paper. In certain ways, we could say that the fictional language is designed as if it was meant to fit the learning patterns.

Moreover, the sociocultural and pragmatic aspects of language are significantly addressed in films and series as supplementary key components of language knowledge. If students do not have any other contact with L2 available except for the L2 classroom, this type of exposure is not only additional to their learning, but it could be vital. Its main characteristic beside being complete as a form of input and perfectly adapted to the needs of foreign language learner, it is also constant and frequent. Based on all the positive factors included in the viewing of subtitled films and series, the conclusion which includes benefits such input has for the overall learning is, thus, inevitable.

Students are appointed a number of second language classroom sessions for an academic year as a context provided for their L2 learning. In most cases, this time might be sufficient to obtain goals defined by the curriculum, but insufficient for learners to reach appropriate communicative competence which would serve them in the real – life interaction. Depending on the context, that is, a country in which L2 learning occurs, many students are provided with extra out – of – school opportunities for contact with foreign language, which is consequently reflected in their proficiency level. In addition, it has been shown that extracurricular “unintentional” activities involving foreign language have benefits for L2 acquisition. What is meant under unintentional is any exposure to L2 which is not included in L2 instruction. What is more, it has been indicated that all key competences of language proficiency are fostered in this type of activity, since the input includes not only linguistic but also extra – linguistic elements of the original dialogue. Additionally, studies have confirmed that learners enjoy watching subtitled films and series both in classroom and at home, which helps with motivation – one of the key variants to any successful learning.

Going one step further in the methodologies currently being applied in L2 classroom, researchers are obtaining significant findings related to the benefits of relatively recent approaches such as flipped classroom and the use of pre – recorded teaching videos as a support material for classroom instruction. Besides, the new technology has changed the way new generations live, think and learn. Thus, the adaptation of traditional instruction to these new ways of perceiving the reality is vital for it to be effective. In this line, L2

classroom could certainly use the scientifically confirmed beneficial aspects of new instruction models and adapt it to its characteristics. In addition, the countries that use dubbing system for foreign films and television programmes do not provide such desired extra exposure to L2. Thus, the professionals and experts in L2 teaching might see these new tools as one great ally for effective teaching practice. The materials can include captions or subtitles irrespectively, as they eventually lead to independent and life-long language acquisition.

Despite all the positive implications of introducing subtitled films and series as an activity included in flipped classroom, there are some clear drawbacks that should be considered. Teachers would have to develop a mechanism necessary to gain control over students' outside classroom activity. All the materials are available in dubbed version, so students can easily watch them in the way which is more convenient for them. However, these challenges are still part of the same traditional challenge instructors have always been facing, the one of finding the best way to engage students in the learning process by creating appealing and motivating activities. One way to help teachers control the viewing of subtitled films and series is to design materials to be worked on in class including specific references from the material which would help them determine whether students have complied or not.

Furthermore, many instructors might be unresponsive to switching to a new model of classroom, since it supposes additional knowledge in the use of ICT tools and extra preparation for the implementation of such tools in classroom. A significant number of instructors have a long professional experience in teaching and their expertise in the subject is on high level, but their knowledge of new technologies and teaching trends might be limited and, therefore, the consequences of adopting this model might cause decline in quality of language instruction. At the same time, the requirements established by most European lawmakers include these competences and call for innovation in L2 classroom.

For all these reasons, applying subtitled media into L2 instruction specifically in contexts which do not provide such out – of – school input might contribute to effective teaching and learning. Both flipped classroom and the use of subtitled media in L2 classroom have shown highly positive effects in that process. The combination of these two methods might allow for revitalizing of classroom instruction which must adapt to new circumstances created by information and technology advances and their presence in everyday life of students and young learners. At the same time, this may deliver unexpected results based on motivation and re-engagement of those students who have traditionally found it difficult to focus in classroom environment. The model provides students with materials they likely use outside classroom, so consequently they get engaged by participating in the activities they can easily relate to. Furthermore, it boosts their motivation and at the same time lowers their anxiety commonly present in L2 classroom. Once the students' attention is captured, the subsequent chain of reaction unfolds: the motivation leads to better perceptiveness and higher engagement, and lastly, the shaping of learning strategies takes place. These are the key learner variables involved and their shifting to a

positive course of the learning process is challenging both for teachers and learners. For that reason, it is essential to get them in the same line which ultimately allows for successful and gratifying learning.

There are countless elements and conditions which shape the process of efficient and successful learning of a foreign language and it is possible to go into more depth in the analysis. However, I believe to have presented strong evidence which demonstrate that watching of subtitled films and series is not insignificant in the process of L2 acquisition and that its inclusion into L2 classroom might be highly beneficial for teachers, students and the overall path to language proficiency.

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