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Interlingual subtitling for intercultural language education: a case study

Claudia Borghetti^{a*} and Jennifer Lertola^b

^a*Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne, Università di Bologna, via Cartoleria 5, 40124, Bologna, Italy;* ^b*School of Languages, Literatures & Cultures, National University of Ireland, University Road, Galway, Ireland*

Interlingual subtitling has been extensively investigated for language learning and teaching purposes in the last decade. However, there is a lack of research into the creation of subtitles as a means of intercultural learning. This article is a first empirical attempt to verify the potential of subtitling for intercultural language education. It reports on a case study carried out at an Irish University with 14 A2/B1-level students of Italian, who attended a subtitling module as a regular part of their language course. The aim of the study was to investigate whether the creation of subtitles can offer language students opportunities for learning in terms of cultural and intercultural awareness development. A multi-method approach was employed to collect data through initial and final questionnaires, interviews with participants, class audio-recordings, teaching forms and notes, and students' interlingual subtitles. Thematic analysis of the collected data was then conducted. Findings confirm that teachers play a major role in enhancing students' cultural and intercultural awareness development fostering class interaction and discussions; however, they also show that the use of subtitling tasks offer conditions in which students can better develop intercultural skills even when teacher mediation is limited.

L'utilizzo della sottotitolazione interlinguistica a fini glottodidattici è stato ampiamente studiato negli ultimi dieci anni. Si registra però la mancanza di studi dedicati alla creazione dei sottotitoli per l'educazione interculturale. Questo articolo è un primo tentativo di verificare su basi empiriche il potenziale della sottotitolazione nell'ambito dell'educazione linguistica interculturale. L'articolo presenta un *case study* condotto presso un'università irlandese con quattordici studenti di italiano (livello A2/B1) che hanno frequentato il modulo sperimentale come parte integrante del loro corso di lingua. Lo scopo dello studio è quello di verificare se la creazione di sottotitoli può offrire agli studenti opportunità di sviluppo della consapevolezza culturale e interculturale. Lo studio si avvale di vari metodi di raccolta dati: due questionari, interviste, registrazioni audio delle lezioni, schede didattiche, appunti dell'insegnante, i sottotitoli prodotti dagli studenti. L'intero corpus è stato analizzato tematicamente. I risultati dello studio confermano che gli insegnanti ricoprono un ruolo decisivo nel favorire lo sviluppo della consapevolezza culturale e interculturale degli studenti quando stimolano l'interazione tra pari; nondimeno, i risultati mostrano anche che l'utilizzo della sottotitolazione può offrire occasioni di apprendimento interculturale anche quando la mediazione dell'insegnante è limitata.

Keywords: language teaching; intercultural education; intercultural learning; audio-visual translation; subtitling; foreign language education

*Corresponding author. Email: claudia.borghetti@unibo.it

Introduction

The issue of promoting intercultural learning within language education has been widely explored since the 1990s, and several pedagogical approaches and methodologies have been tested so far with the general scope of identifying best practices for promoting students' intercultural competence (IC). Critical reading of texts and movies has been extensively explored, both according to a cultural studies approach (Byram, 1989a; Kramsch, 1993), and, more recently, grounded in poststructuralist theories of identity (Norton, 2011). Ethnographic approaches have been also adopted (Byram & Fleming, 1998; Roberts, Byram, Barro, Shirley, & Brian, 2001), some building on the intercultural learning potential of study abroad experiences (Byram, 1989b; Jurasek, 1995). Moreover, there is a growing number of publications which report on the use of technologies for intercultural language aims, including Internet-based tools (Belz & Thorne, 2006; O'Dowd, 2007). Finally, reviews that comment on best approaches and activities to develop IC are available with respect to both intercultural language education (ILE, Byram & Feng, 2004; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, pp. 83–121) and general education (Barrett, Byram, Lázár, Mompoin-Gaillard, & Philippou, 2013).

Currently, however, there is a lack of research into the creation of subtitles as a means of intercultural learning. At the same time, the subtitling practice itself has been extensively investigated for language learning and teaching purposes in the last decade, in particular with regard to listening, writing, vocabulary and pragmatic awareness (Incalcaterra McLoughlin, 2009; Lertola, 2012; Sokoli, 2006; Talaván, 2011). This article is a first empirical attempt to verify the potential of subtitling for ILE. We present an experimental case study in which interlingual subtitling is employed to foster language students' intercultural learning. We argue that the very practice of subtitling corresponds to certain forms of ILE and, as a consequence, that it can positively affect language students' intercultural learning processes (Borghetti, 2011). In order to better prove this postulate, we report an exploratory case study conducted in the Italian Department of an Irish public university with 14 language students who were asked to subtitle a video clip into English as part of their regular Italian language course. In particular, the study aimed at investigating if and how the active creation of interlingual subtitles can offer students opportunities for learning in terms of cultural and intercultural awareness development.

After introducing 'cultural awareness' and 'intercultural awareness' as conceptualised in this study and discussing some theoretical standpoints and hypotheses, in the second section we describe the teaching case study. Results are presented and discussed in the third section, as well as some concluding remarks focusing on the implications of this study for future research on the use of subtitling in ILE.

Cultural and intercultural awareness

ILE can be defined as language teaching and learning whose main educational goal is the development of students' IC. Following the so-called 'intercultural turn' in language education, ILE is now an articulated field of enquiry whose main theoretical assumptions are still under fruitful debate. It is beyond the scope of this paper to offer an account of ILEs principal areas of research, for example, the social and individual processes which lie beneath intercultural learning (Lantolf, 1999) or the relation between such processes and language development (Borghetti, 2012) and learners' identities (Norton, 2011).

Rather, in what follows we exclusively outline the concepts at the basis of our study, in order to lay out our research design.

It may come as a surprise that the concept of ‘intercultural competence’, which is at the core of ILE, is not employed in this study. However it is labelled or defined, IC generally requires that cognitive, affective and behavioural processes are at work and sustain an individual’s understanding of diversity and interaction within intercultural encounters (Borghetti, 2011). While planning our research, we came to consider the notion of ‘IC’ as a whole far too complex and multifaceted to be useful to our empirical investigation: The study was carried out over a limited period of time (two weeks) – too limited for participants to actually experience comprehensive IC development. Moreover, the setting was a foreign language class, where – compared to contexts of second language teaching – students might not have been challenged enough in their emotional states to fully engage the affective dimension of IC. After all, in most foreign language contexts, students usually do not have urgent emotional needs tied to diversity in the foreign culture and tend to spontaneously adopt an analytical point of view on cultural matters (Block, 2007; Byram, 1989a). Considering these variables, we determined that placing IC in its entirety as our focal point may well have led to a simple lack of empirical evidence concerning true intercultural learning, at least for what concerned IC’s affective and behavioural dimensions. Given this, we decided to focus specifically on ‘awareness’ rather than on IC as a whole.

As widely acknowledged in the literature (e.g., Bennett, 1993; Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2009), awareness within IC is superordinate to cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions (i.e., knowledge, attitudes and skills), since it is a necessary prerequisite for the development of the other components. Awareness is normally referred to either as ‘cultural awareness’ or ‘intercultural awareness’. Diverging from other existing interpretations (e.g., Baker, 2012), we here consider the two designations as mutually complementary concepts since, as is often the case with the conceptualisation of cultural phenomena, one can only become aware of the existence of culture and of its influence on values, attitudes and behaviours (cultural awareness) by experiencing difference and, indirectly, by becoming aware of the fact that cultures influence every aspect of every human life in equivalent, if different, ways (intercultural awareness; Borghetti, 2013). Even if these two concepts are strictly related to each other, we decided to keep them conceptually separate in our study as different categories of analysis. In this way, *cultural awareness* is intended as linked to the target languaculture (Agar, 1994) as it implies developing specific knowledge, attitudes and skills about it. *Intercultural awareness* on the other hand, represents a step up to another educational level, as it involves applying knowledge, attitudes and skills with regard to cultures other than the target languaculture, including – above all – students’ own cultures.

We decided to adopt the notion of ‘languaculture’ as the main criterion to distinguish cultural and intercultural awareness, despite acknowledging that it is rightly put into question in recent literature about multiple or hybrid identities and about the cultural implications of English as a Lingua Franca. The rationale behind this choice was that the expression ‘languaculture’ was part of the lived experiences of our students, since their study of Italian implied to them knowledge of both language and culture, as it was advertised by the Italian Department itself. Fully aware of the possible theoretical shortcomings of our decision, we argue that in order to be effective, ILE must find ways to tune its innovative educational drive into students’ and teachers’ understanding of language and culture in the context of learning and teaching.

Intercultural learning and subtitling

In Borghetti's (2011) study, a number of analogies between interlingual subtitling and ILE principles are put forward within a parallelism between professional subtitlers and second language learners, to affirm that subtitling can be profitably used in the foreign language class for intercultural purposes. Here it is argued that while students are normally external spectators of the source text and tend to decode the text according to their own cultural schemata, when they are invited to assume the role of translators, they examine the video material and the culture it represents through both internal and estranged lenses, reflecting on the meaning the target text assumes in the cultural source context of reception. If encouraged by the teacher, this decoding process can be rooted in interpretive axioms as far as possible in line with those of the source audience, and in this way can then nourish greater intercultural awareness in the crucial phase of encoding for the target audience. Here the student must make translational choices which 'help the target audience to locate the film so firmly in the original contextual conditions that they will not consider interpreting the signs in terms of their own culture', considering that they 'should have viewing conditions, as well as a basis for interpretation, comparable to those of the original audience' (Niemeier, 1991, p. 152).

If translation is a cultural transfer (Katan, 1999), audio-visual translation can be even more effective for intercultural learning purposes (Borghetti, 2011): When making translation choices for subtitling, students have to take all information transmitted through different semiotic systems into account (via sound effects, music, non-verbal communication, camera movements, etc.) and thus reach beyond mere verbal communication. They must also consider the requirement of matching the visual image respecting the time and space restrictions imposed by subtitling. The overall complexity implied in interlingual subtitling also induces inquiry, doubt and modesty, and requires definitive decision-making, thus fostering responsibility (Borghetti, 2011).

This concept of 'responsibility' plays a major role in this study. If we assume that 'beyond languages, translation establishes relationships among people' (Brisset, 2003, p. 101) and build upon Pym's concept of 'multiple divided loyalties' (2010, pp. 172–173), it is important for students to feel responsibility towards the film director and the source text, the source culture and the target audience (Borghetti, 2011). In the specific case of subtitling, respecting the director and the source text not only entails avoiding distortion of textual form and content but also operates in such a way that subtitles do not impede viewing (by monopolising the viewer's attention due to excessive length, altering the rhythm and tone of the dialogues, etc.). The responsibility that students/subtitlers must perceive regarding the source culture is even more delicate because their choices may impact on the audience's perceptions of the target culture and perpetuate (positive or negative) stereotypes, undermining or highlighting cultural specificities (Ramière, 2006). The translator's function thus assumes notable ethical tones, and forces students to reflect on their own role as mediators between cultures. Finally, concerning translators' responsibility towards their audiences, students must not forget that they are offering a linguistic-cultural mediation which constitutes the receiver's only access to the text, and therefore receivers who read their subtitles trust their work. Students must also be very aware that if a reduction of the language of the original script is inevitable (Gottlieb, 2004), this can be risky on an intercultural level since it might alter the intended original meanings.

The study

This paper presents an ‘exploratory’ case study, according to Yin’s well-known categorization (2013), designed ‘to define parameters, refine research questions, test procedures, etc.’, often before initiating another study (Richards, 2011, p. 211). It thus explores through a small-scale project if and how interlingual subtitling could enhance cultural and intercultural awareness development, while testing the research design in view of a larger-scale study.

Teaching case study context and methodology

The case study was conducted with 14 undergraduate students at A2/B1 level, who attended a three-hour intercultural-oriented subtitling module lasting two weeks, as a regular part of their Italian language course. This study took place at the end of Semester II, after these students had already participated in other exclusively language-focused subtitling activities since the beginning of the academic year. They were thus already familiar with subtitling software and practices.

Student ages ranged from 18 to 35 years. Most participants were Irish (12), while 2 were Polish and 1 was German.

One seven-minute clip from the 2008 Italian comedy *Tutta la vita davanti* by Paolo Virzì was selected to be subtitled. This particular clip was selected since it is rich with cultural elements, and presents a number of aspects that students potentially could have noticed on their own, such as the Italian university system and some typical features of contemporary job hunting in Italy.

The subtitling module we lay out below was based on a model of a teaching unit divided into five phases – motivation, global perception, analysis, synthesis and reflection – as described in Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola (2011). At a difference from the other language-oriented subtitling activities the students had done before, this teaching unit also included two teaching forms (Form 1 and 2, see Appendix 1 and 2) expressively created to focus students’ attention on cultural and intercultural issues, and two planned group discussion sessions (Discussion 1 and 2) related to these forms. The unit was thus structured as shown in Table 1.

In the first, motivational phase, the intercultural-oriented subtitling activity was presented and objectives as well as deadlines were set. Students were thus immediately required to consider their multiple responsibilities as subtitlers, as outlined above. The movie title and poster were then introduced in order to foster students’ motivation to learn and, after a brainstorming session, the students carried out some Internet-based research on the movie plot, characters and actors, also sharing some of their comments as a class.

In the second phase of global perception, the whole class watched the video clip in the original language once. Learners were provided with the dialogue transcript (in Italian) in order to ease their comprehension and allow them to better focus on cultural and intercultural issues.

In the analysis phase, after watching the video clip several times individually, students filled in Form 1 working in pairs, in order to better reflect while in interaction. The form was comprised of nine questions concerning the film genre, settings and characters. Its aim was to stimulate group discussion in an intercultural perspective (e.g. by creating comparisons between differences in state university systems, etc.) and to direct students’ attention towards their multiple responsibilities in the subtitling task. For example, the form required students to select their intended audience before starting the activity (i.e. Irish or English speakers in general) and consider the possible implications of this

Table 1. The five-phase intercultural-oriented teaching unit.

Phase	Intercultural-oriented teaching devices	Objectives
1. Motivation		Activity presentation; Introduction of the subtitler's multiple responsibilities; Basic information about the movie.
2. Global perception		Viewing of the video clip with the dialogue transcript.
3. Analysis	Form 1 Discussion 1	Identification of cultural and intercultural elements; Discussion of the subtitler's multiple responsibilities in view of the subtitling task; Discussion about the clip cultural features in an intercultural perspective.
4. Synthesis		Translation of the original text; Synchronisation of the translated text with the video.
5. Reflection	Form 2 Discussion 2	Evaluation of subtitles in view of the subtitler's multiple responsibilities; Discussion on cultural and intercultural issues.

choice. The questions posed in Form 1 served to encourage a subsequent class discussion (Discussion 1) on the linguistic and visual elements of the video in order to better grasp cultural and intercultural elements such as the use of dialect or a student–professor relationship. When needed, the teacher was prepared to highlight any elements which had not been perceived autonomously by the learners. Due to our focus on culturally specific elements, more time was allowed for discussion than in a traditional teaching unit, and students were encouraged to freely exchange opinions in either Italian or English. During the discussion, learners were allowed to independently conduct Internet searches on intercultural elements present in the clip which, perhaps, they had not fully understood. This discussion also worked to deconstruct and analyse the L2 input for the subsequent synthesis phase when learners create their own subtitles.

In the synthesis phase, participants translated and synchronised the spoken dialogue from Italian into English. Participants had to synchronise their translated text with the video using a user-friendly open subtitling software called LvS (*Learning via Subtitling*), specifically designed for language learning. Previous experience with the software allowed students to prepare their subtitles in a short amount of time without facing any technical difficulties and thus focus on condensing the message. Peer-to-peer discussion was fostered during translation and synchronisation.

In the last phase of the teaching unit, reflection, students were asked to work in pairs to fill in Form 2. This form contains a total of seven questions that require learners to reflect on their translation choices in light of the subtitling responsibilities. After they filled in the form in pairs, students talked about their answers with their classmates and the teacher (Discussion 2).

Research questions

As initially stated, this study is a first empirical attempt to investigate the potential of subtitling for ILE, through examining whether subtitling used for intercultural purposes

creates *opportunities* (i.e. possible starting points) for students' cultural and intercultural awareness development, and better identifying and analysing the nature of such opportunities.

We thus posed the following research questions: When subtitling is specifically used for intercultural purposes, (1) What kinds of opportunities for *cultural* awareness development do students have? (2) What kind of opportunities for *intercultural* awareness development do they have? and finally (3) How does students' temporary role as subtitlers affect their opportunities in these developmental processes?

Data collection

We employed a multi-method approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, using a number of tools in order to achieve a measure of method triangulation (Denzin as cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013, p. 196):

- class audio-recordings for a total of three hours (including planned and spontaneous class discussions);
- initial and final questionnaires;
- group and pair responses to the two teaching forms;
- students' interlingual subtitles;
- teacher's field notes; and
- semi-structured video-recorded interviews with individual students and the teacher.

Class audio-recordings and video interviews were studied as written transcriptions (see [Appendix 3](#) for conventions). The initial questionnaire served to gather participants' background information. The final questionnaire and the two teaching forms collected feedback on the module as well as cues to participants' learning. Students' subtitles proved useful in reviewing transcriptions about translation choices students had made after class discussions. Finally, the teacher's notes acted as a form of preliminary data analysis as they reported the teacher's ongoing interpretation of the classroom.

Investigator triangulation was applied since two observers took part in the study design, data collection and analysis. Furthermore, we compared the data collected in this exploratory study with that of the previous language-learning-oriented subtitling module conducted with the same participants.

Data analysis

We conducted a thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006) of all collected data, including the transcriptions of class audio-recordings and interviews. We began ordering the data following two pre-established themes ('Possible opportunities for cultural awareness development' and 'Possible opportunities for intercultural awareness development'), while we identified the other themes ('role of translation', 'interrogative teaching style', 'time constraints', 'group interaction and dynamics', 'professional responsibility as translators') inductively. All themes were explored through code sets of different sizes, which sometimes overlapped (the same code could be present in different code sets).

As researchers, we annotated the data separately on the basis of some shared criteria, which proved fundamental since identifying opportunities for awareness development meant identifying markers of potential learning, which is in fact not particularly straightforward. We used the following as our protocol: (1) for audio-recording and

interview transcriptions, a unit of coding could be either a turn-at-talk or a sequence. Turn-at-talk defined as ‘the discourse made by one speaker uninterruptedly’ (Fasulo & Pontecorvo, 2004, p. 39, our translation), while we considered ‘sequences’ as the ‘stretches of talk that seemed to hang together, a stretch that seemed to constitute a unit in its own right, over and above the turns at talk that composed it’ (Schegloff, 2007, p. xi). The phrase was taken as the unit of coding for questionnaires, forms, notes and students’ subtitles. (2) An opportunity for cultural awareness development takes place any time when students showed their thoughts, understandings, opinions, memories, etc. about the target culture. When students also compared the target culture with other cultures (including their own), such instances were coded as opportunities for intercultural awareness development, whatever the degree of critical thinking students showed, where, for us, as for Giroux, ‘critical thinking’ means ‘to step beyond common sense assumptions and to be able to evaluate them in terms of their genesis, development and purpose’ (1997, p. 26). (3) Sequences about meanings of words or idiomatic expressions cannot be considered opportunities for awareness development per se; they can be annotated as such only if they enlarge the focus of the discussion to include broader cultural topics.

Codes and themes were fine-tuned through three cycles of annotation. In order to engage in the complex interpretative task of identifying and making sense of students’ processes of awareness development, we explored data by adopting a comparative critical approach towards students’ views, focusing on incoherencies and inconsistencies, not giving immediate credit to their manifest (language) behaviours and analysing the construction of their turns-at-talk within broader sequences. We took a critical approach to our own interpretations and explanations of what we were identifying step by step as significant phenomena.

Results and discussion

At the end of the coding process, we designated three typologies of moments where students’ main opportunities for awareness development took place. As shown in Table 2, these were: while or shortly after watching the clip (‘instance group 1’); during the subtitling process (‘instance group 2’); and during or short after class discussions (‘instance group 3’). While the instances grouped in groups 1 and 2 correspond to specific phases of the teaching unit (the second and the fourth respectively), several class discussions (both planned and unplanned) took place during the teaching unit, so that ‘instance group 3’ collects opportunities for awareness development occurring throughout the entire teaching unit.

Table 2. Opportunities of cultural and intercultural awareness development: a quantitative overview.

	Instance group 1 While or short after watching the clip	Instance group 2 During the subtitling process	Instance group 3 During or short after class discussions	Total
Cultural awareness	1 (2.174%)	3 (6.522%)	42 (91.304%)	46 (100%)
Intercultural awareness	0 (0.00%)	12 (32.43%)	25 (67.57%)	37 (100%)

The fact that most opportunities for cultural and intercultural awareness development are concentrated ‘during or short after class discussions’ (‘instance group 3’) is not surprising, since they mostly co-occur with the teaching phases and devices (forms and class discussions) expressly aimed at building awareness. The fact that almost no opportunities are registered in ‘instance group 1’ was similarly expected, as these results confirm overall what is largely stated by ILE literature: cultural and intercultural learning mainly occur through interaction with peers and the teacher (e.g., Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

Opportunities for cultural and intercultural awareness development in ‘instance group 2’ occur during the subtitling process itself. One might well argue that Form 1 and the following class discussions might have directed students’ attention towards cultural and intercultural aspects while subtitling the clip. However, the data analysis helped us realise that it was actually the subtitling process – rather than the class discussions – which better led students to intercultural reflection, interpreted as opportunities for awareness development and thus attributed to ‘instance group 2’.

Intercultural opportunities during the subtitling process

Most sequences that have been identified as belonging to ‘instance group 2’ show how the urgency and difficulty of translating into English played a major role in creating opportunities for awareness development. In these cases, students manifest different degrees of autonomy from the teacher (T) and, even when they actually ask questions (as in Extract 1), they seem to have shifted from thinking in terms of language to reflecting on cultures due to the translation task itself:

Extract 1

[Group discussion (author translation)]

- 1 S7: and: (.) °Jennifer° (.) excuse [me],
- 2 T: [tell me]
- 3 S7: and: (.) (how) (.) in England or here in Ireland? (.) >how would a *sezione del liceo* be called?<

In the reported extract, the student does not ask for a simple translation, she does not frame her question in terms of translation. Instead, she mentions England and Ireland rather than English as a language. The student is thinking in terms of scholastic organisation within different national systems (the Italian and that of the target audience), and consequently her question manifests a certain, albeit basic, level of reflection and intercultural awareness.

Extract 2 shows a similar phenomenon, even if the group reasoning appears here less sophisticated and the opportunity for intercultural awareness development is less straightforward and easy to identify. The sequence is part of a broader group discussion where three students are translating the Latin expression ‘*summa cum laude*’, which is sometimes used in Italian to refer to ‘full marks and honours’:

Extract 2

[Group discussion]

- 1 S1: I’m trying to translate this (.) °*summa cum laude*°.
- 2 S9: I don’t know: °what it means°.
- 3 S4: So, that’s something for: (.) I have heard [of it]
- 4 S9: [yes], I have heard of it
- 5 S4: I think >I have an idea<, it’s like (.) a grade

Students in Extract 2 are inclined to ask the teacher for help; however, before actually doing so, they progressively shift their attention from language (which was S1's main concern) to culture (as the turn-at-talk in 3 shows more clearly). Therefore, from a linguistic problem, the interlingual translation turns into a cultural doubt, since students seem to wonder what 'summa cum laude' actually represents as an 'extralinguistic culture-bound reference' (Pedersen, 2005) within the foreign cultural frame. Students explicitly reported on such cultural learning in the final questionnaire, when asked about what they had learned about Italian culture during the module. For example:

Extract 3

[S5 and S7's answers to the final questionnaire]

Question 7. Did you learn anything new about the Italian culture(s)? If yes, give as many examples you can.

Answer:

S5: That when you graduate 'cum laude' it means with a first class honours. Also, in Italy graduation seems to be a bigger, more formal, occasion.

S7: How people graduate from college cum laude etc., the ceremony.

The opportunities for intercultural awareness development clustered in 'instance group 2' were created by students autonomously. On the contrary, those in 'instance group 3' were strongly fostered by the teacher through teaching forms or questions. Following is a sequence ascribed to 'instance group 3', where the teacher's intervention makes the difference in creating opportunities awareness development:

Extract 4

[Class discussion (author translation)]

- 12 T: BUT it's not like that in Ireland. (.) How IS IT in Ireland? Do you have a final exam?
 13 (0.3)
 14 S2: just: for (.) >the Ph.D.<
 15 T: yes. But this is LESS than a Ph.D.
 16 S2: oh (.) like a Mas[ter]?
 17 T: [eh] Do you have: an exam for the Master?
 18 S1: °No°
 19 S2: a thesis.
 20 T: you've a thesis.
 21 S8: *just a thesis.*
 22 T: you've a thesis.
 23 S3: but in Poland the [sam-]
 24 T: [is it?] Five years?
 25 S4: Five years. Five years. Or three years for graduation (.) °in teaching°
 26 T: Ah, in education?

In this extract, the teacher is trying to induce students to compare different university systems, which makes it possible for a student from Poland to offer an initial contribution for collective intercultural reasoning.

Subtitling or translating for intercultural purposes?

It is not fully clear whether most of the opportunities for autonomous intercultural awareness development clustered in ‘instance group 2’ are due specifically to subtitling or are linked to translation in general. This might represent a shortcoming of the present study, as our focus was on the role that audio-visual translation – thus a translation from/to several different semiotic systems – could have on cultural and intercultural awareness development. On the other hand, we identified a number of instances where subtitling time and space constraints seem to have had a role in fostering students’ processes of awareness development. Extract 5 reports a sequence where a student (in line 9) is pondering her translation in light of the restrictions subtitles impose:

Extract 5

[Student-teacher interaction in the classroom (author translation)]

- 1 S4: °tronista?°
- 2 T: the tronista? (.) Yes: Try to ask your friends (.) what they would understand if you say ‘bachelor’ or: =
- 3 S4: yes because: for the audience (.) of more mature people? (.) would they, would they (.)
Would they not understand?
- 4 T: They would not understand.
- 5 S4: [Yes], the word ‘bachelor’.
- 6 T: Exactly.
- 7 S4: Yes, I can ask.
- 8 T: [You] might say *famous: Italian eh: (.) famous Italian personality.*
- 9 S4: BUT is very long, isn’t it?
- 10 T: Yes! So you need to: *zic!* ((she makes a gesture of scissors cutting with her fingers))

The word in question here is indeed difficult to translate into any variety of English; the ‘tronista’ is a role usually played by attractive young women/men in a popular Italian TV programme, where they have to choose a person to date among a number of suitors. The protagonist sits on a throne (*trono*), which explains why s/he is called ‘tronista’. As also mentioned in lines 2 and 5, the programme has several equivalents in other countries, being an international format; however, any translation of ‘tronista’ does not fully convey the meaning originally attributed to it within the video clip, where it is just mentioned – without any accompanying information – to symbolise popular trash TV. Every group of students raised the issue of the meaning of this word during the subtitling task. In the case reported, however, thanks to subtitling, S4 shows her understanding that paraphrases are not always suitable strategies for subtitles, which constitutes an occasion for her to reflect on languacultures and their partial untranslatability.

From cultural to intercultural opportunities for awareness development

The ratio of opportunities for cultural/intercultural awareness development is varied, as shown in Table 2. We identified just one opportunity for cultural awareness development in correspondence with clip watching (‘instance group 1’), while 3 out of 4 of the opportunities arising during the subtitling task (‘instance group 2’) were annotated as intercultural. At the same time, class discussions seemed to offer numerous opportunities for both cultural and intercultural awareness development, with a slight numerical superiority of the former (‘instance group 3’).

It is well known that ‘films and texts in general can be a key for *self-reflection* and for *openness to explore other places as well as conflicts and tensions related to diversity*’

when class interaction takes place (Barrett et al., 2013, p. 25). Our results confirm this; however, they emphasise the role played by interaction and the teacher in creating opportunities for awareness development; when subtitling/translating is not involved, they are almost exclusively teacher-mediated. Nevertheless, teaching expedients can still be ignored by students, as observed with respect to almost all opportunities annotated as ‘opportunities for cultural awareness development’ and gathered into ‘instance group 3’. In Extract 6, reporting a question posed in Form 1, students seem to identify Italian cultural traits, but do not build on their first sensations of strangeness and surprise to make hypotheses about the implicit aspects which may lie behind such impressions and, thus, this does not open up opportunities for intercultural awareness development. This happens even when students are encouraged to go beyond their external observations to try to capture the original meaning conveyed by the clip:

Extract 6

[S1, S3, and S6’s answer to Form 1]

Question 6. Are there situations, settings, characters, etc. which are unusual in Ireland/your country? If yes, provide some examples and try to explain why.

Answer. Yes, if someone had a degree like the man in the film, we [sic] wouldn’t be walking the [sic] dogs they [sic] would have a job.

Form 1 asked students to reflect on the clip just after watching it and, as illustrated by the explicitness of Question 6, it was mainly meant to introduce intercultural comparisons. In the case reported, the group of students proves to have noticed a cultural (socio-economic) feature which was odd to them (i.e., the fact that a brilliant researcher had a job as dog-sitter to make up for his low wages). However, despite being directly encouraged by the question, they ignore the suggestion to explain why such a trait seemed unusual to them. As a consequence, they miss the opportunity for intercultural awareness development that questions like this would like to open for discussion. Had the students instead posed questions to themselves and to the others such as: ‘What role does the ironic tone play in the scene?’, ‘How odd would this scene appear to an Italian audience?’ or even ‘How true is the representation of young promising researchers being underpaid in Italy?’ etc., perhaps an occasion for intercultural learning would have arisen.

While teaching devices are not always enough to help students move from cultural to critical intercultural observation, subtitling proved to be quite effective in this respect, even when the role of the teacher was limited or absent as in Extract 5.

The translator’s multiple responsibilities

The students, as subtitlers, were asked to take into account the translator’s multiple responsibilities towards the director and the source text, the source culture and the target audience. Students mentioned the target audience several times in the data-sets both autonomously while subtitling and with the help of teacher mediation throughout the entire teaching unit. We report one instance from ‘instance group 2’:

Extract 7

[Question for the teacher (author translation)]

- 1 S3: They say 'La De Santo makes you an ass' (.) is it vulgar?
- 2 T: Yes!
- 3 S3 <How can we convey it for an international audience?> We can't.
- 4 T: We'll probably lose the rhyme. *La De Santo fa il culo tanto*.

The student addresses the issue of audience independently, and she also makes her involvement in the task explicit as if she was a professional translator with multiple responsibilities. Such involvement might have positive effects on students' critical thinking about cultural and intercultural issues, as they spend a considerable amount of time pondering their translation choices and strategies.

During the subtitling task, then, students showed their intention to respect the target audience but did not explicitly mention their responsibility towards the director or the source culture. The fact that students primarily took their audience into consideration while translating was somehow expected, as it was the only responsibility to be constantly mentioned also during the previous language-oriented subtitling activities; however, we noticed that in such regular subtitling tasks, students did not account for the audience unless the teacher told them to. This clearly differentiates this intercultural-focused subtitling teaching unit from other language-oriented subtitling tasks.

The issues of responsibility towards the director and the source culture therefore required teacher mediation either through questions in the Forms or in class discussions as in the following two extracts:

Extract 8

[Class discussion (author translation)]

- 1 T: S11 [calling on one student] (0.2) would Paolo Virzi [the director] be happy? with your: work?
- 2 S11: The director? Ehm: (0.3) difficult, because: the director is probably Italian.
- 3 T: Yes, he is.
- 4 S11: He does not understand Irish:
- 5 T: Ok(h)ay! Irish slang (.) or Irish sense of humour: for example.
- 6 S11: We'd have? to explain to [him].
- 7 T: [yes]

In this example taken from the class discussion about Form 2, the student reflects on his responsibility towards the movie director when prompted by the teacher. He comes to the conclusion that the director would appreciate his subtitles only if he had a good understanding of the Irish languaculture since these subtitles were strictly targeted to an Irish audience.

Regarding responsibility towards the source culture, students do not even seem to realise what responsibility, exactly, they are theoretically charged with. In the data collected, we did not detect any cases in which students felt responsible for the source culture itself. In Form 2, when directly asked about this issue, answers were quite vague, with the exception of the following example:

Extract 9

[S4's answer to Form 2]

Question 4. Do the subtitles respect the specificities of the Italian language and culture?

I think that it's a real challenge when working with subtitles to respect the cultural and linguistic specificities of Italian, as I have mentioned before, there are words and references which may be quite difficult to explain to an international audience which has no knowledge of the Italian language and culture when Marta graduates with the highest distinction – cum laude – it is a phrase I have not heard before, therefore I found it a challenge to apply it to the Irish (and international) context [...]

This extract shows how students tend to think of their responsibility within a viewpoint directed at the audience even when explicitly asked about the subtitler's responsibility towards the Italian languaculture. We somehow expected that, when directly stimulated, students would undertake the role of cultural mediators committed to presenting a truthful image of the target culture with its complexities and beyond static stereotypical images. In light of these results, we now envisage the need for the teacher to insist more on this kind of responsibility, since it is less easily perceivable for the students than their responsibility towards the audience and even towards the director.

Conclusions

The findings above show that the use of subtitling tasks in the foreign language class gives learners opportunities (possible starting points) for autonomous cultural and intercultural awareness development. While findings confirm that the teachers play a major role in fostering the development of cultural and intercultural awareness by providing dedicated teaching devices and enhancing class interactions, they also reveal that the very practice of subtitling itself offers conditions for students to partake in such learning even when teacher mediation is limited. In particular, while assuming the roles of subtitlers and cultural mediators, students seem to move autonomously from opportunities for cultural awareness development to touch on opportunities for intercultural awareness development.

The students' perception of the subtitler's multiple responsibilities towards the director and the source text, the source culture and the target audience also seems to in some way positively affect the processes of cultural and intercultural awareness development. In this respect, however, our findings are conflicting, since students in the study only outwardly demonstrated that they pondered their subtitling choices in order to respect the target audience, while they did not seem guided in any particular way by considerations regarding the source text and culture. This deduction could be more carefully examined in future studies.

These findings can also serve as the basis for future research on the crucial issue of the difference between subtitling and translation tasks in providing opportunities for learning. One controversial result of the present study is indeed the difficulty we found in identifying the actual role played by subtitling compared to translation in general, although time and space constraints seem to have deepened students' reflections on the translatability of cultures and their responsibilities towards the target audience.

In conclusion, it is worth stressing once again that the focus of this study was not in any way to verify to what extent the development of cultural and intercultural awareness occurred; rather, we intended to elicit outward behaviour which might be a marker of awareness development. While it is possible that the outwardly identified opportunities resulted to some extent in actual intercultural learning, students' cultural and intercultural understanding might well go beyond their communicative performances and the consequent opportunities that we have outlined for cultural and intercultural awareness.

Notes on contributors

Dr Claudia Borghetti is Adjunct Lecturer in Language Learning and Teaching at the University of Bologna. She is the project manager of the IEREST Project (Intercultural Education Resources for Erasmus Students and their Teachers), <http://ierest-project.eu/>, co-funded by the European Commission (LLP 2012–2015). She researches on intercultural language learning and teaching, teaching Italian as a foreign/second language, English as a Lingua Franca and ICT in language teaching and learning.

Dr Jennifer Lertola has been teaching Italian since 2006 at the National University of Ireland, Galway. She is a member of the ClipFlair Project (Foreign Language Learning through Interactive Captioning and Revoicing of Clips) <http://clipflair.net/> co-funded by the European Commission (LLP 2011–2014). She investigates the use of audio-visual translation in language learning, in particular the effects of subtitling on vocabulary acquisition.

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Appendix 1. Form 1

Name(s)

Form 1

1. Film genre:
2. How do you know? At least three clues:
3. The same genre as (if possible, not Italian movies).
4. Intended Italian audience:
 - Mostly young people
 - Mostly educated people
 - Mostly Italian people
 - Everyone
 - Other
5. Who is the intended audience of your subtitled version? Do you see any difference in relation to the intended Italian audience?
6. Are there situations, settings, characters, etc. which are unusual in Ireland/your country? If yes, please provide some examples and try to explain why.
7. Do all the characters speak the same language? If not, how could you make the difference clear through subtitles?
8. Which words don't you understand? Do you think some of them may have specific cultural meanings?
9. Are there gestures in the clip? If yes, please give some examples and try to explain their meaning. Are they easily understandable in Ireland/your country?

Appendix 2. Form 2

Name(s)

Form 2

The subtitler's multiple responsibilities

[Please provide as many examples as you can from the translated subtitles in order to support your opinions]

Responsibilities towards the director and the film:

1. Do the subtitles respect the film as regards length, time on the screen, etc.?
2. Do the subtitles respect the film as regards the translation of specific words/sentences?
3. In your opinion, what would the director think of the subtitles produced?

Responsibilities towards Italian culture(s):

4. Do the subtitles respect the specificities of the Italian language and culture?
5. Are the subtitles too anglicised?

Responsibilities towards Irish/Anglophone audience:

6. Are the subtitles easy to read?
7. Is it foreseeable that, by virtue of the subtitler's work, the Irish/Anglophone will audience react to the film in a manner comparable to that of the Italian audience?

Appendix 3. Transcription conventions

TEXT	Speech produced more loudly
° text °	Speech produced at a lower volume
<u>text</u>	Stress on a utterance, word, syllable or sound
>text<	Portions of an utterance delivered at a noticeably quicker pace
<text>	Portions of an utterance delivered at a noticeably slower pace
tex-	Interrupted sound
Te:xt	Sustained enunciation of a sound
te(h)xt	Linguistic aspiration as in laughter
text,	Continuing intonation
text.	Downward intonation
text?	Upward intonation
[text]	Temporal overlap among utterances produced by two or more speakers
((annotation))	Transcript annotation
(.)	A timed pause of less than 0.2 sec.
(0.9)	Number of seconds of silence (when more than 0.2)