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Subtitling of films as a potential tool in learning Greek as a second or as a foreign language

Abstract

Students' motivation and interest for more engagement in learning is desired for each educator. In recent years, with the development of digital technology, "filming" is one of the instruments that can be easily used in various educational contexts and multiple ways.

It is suggested in this report that the use of subtitles as a dynamic tool can be used for educational purposes in teaching Greek as a second or as a foreign language (language development of reading, writing and speaking).

The focus will be the case of the Institute of Classical, Byzantine and modern Greek studies in Tbilisi, in Georgia. There has been an attempt to implement the subtitling tool to support the learning of the Greek language in the Department of Modern Greek studies. The aim was the use of subtitles in the Georgian language through Greek films for a more attractive and engaging teaching experience of the students.

The results of this application in teaching practice of subtitling films, the benefits and the difficulties have been recorded and are presented in this article.

Key words: Learning of the Greek language; teaching practice of subtitling films.

1. INTRODUCTION

Students' motivation and engagement is necessary for learning for every educator. New Technology can contribute towards that creative direction and interactive learning for language (Computer Assisted Language Learning- CALL¹). The use of subtitling and

filming for language acquisition have been researched and used recently because of the benefits that seem to portray towards education (Lonegran1990, Gambier 2003, Danan 2004, Neves 2004).

¹ Has prevailed in the international bibliography, but also for the charm of abridgment and facility, that any

report in Teaching of Language with the help of the Computer to be stated with the Latin acronym CALL.

Nevertheless, subtitles' addition or processing in movies extract is not often applied in education, thus there are few studies. (Williams & Thorne 2000, Sokoli 2006, Kostopoulou-Duka 2011, Lertola 2012, Borghetti & Lertola 2014). Research concerning subtitling is very limited in Greece², so are the citations on using subtitles in teaching Greek as a second or as a foreign language. It has been concluded that here lays the innovation of our proposal, since there hasn't been any educational implementation or application of subtitles.

Therefore, the use of subtitling during the acquisition of Greek as a second or foreign language is strongly suggested in this article. The learning outcomes are language acquisition, improvement of listening, phonologic awareness, reading, writing and speaking acquisition, vocabulary improvement, and cultural skills. The role of interactive learning is emphasized considering the theoretical approaches (Krashen, 1985).

Engaging teaching, active and effective learning, and multiple skills' acquisition are also a goal. These practices that were applied for the target language is not only based on empirical knowledge, but also has a theoretical foundation. The teaching theories that concern

language acquisition as a second or foreign language [Theory of interaction (Swain, 1985), the Socio-cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978), Constructivism (Ruschoff-Ritter, 2001), Situationist learning (Halliday, 1993)] are used into the organizing and planning of a lesson.

Our teaching approach was applied in the Institute of Classical, Byzantine and Modern Greek studies in Tbilisi. The practice of the subtitling tool was applied for the support of language acquisition to the students of the Greek language in the Department of Modern Greek. Hook to that approach has been the insinuation of some students that have learned Greek with subtitles when they were in Greece and also the fact that five Greek movies were subtitled.

2. SUBTITLING³ SOFTWARE

Subtitling Workshop was used for subtitling the movies. It's a free, creative, accessible software that processes subtitles and has minimal configuration from the server side, as it requires relatively little computing and processing power on the side of Server.

² Important Greek researchers that have dealt with the subject of subtitling are: Karamitroglou 2000, Georgakopoulou 2003, 2009, Asimakoulas 2004, Sokoli 2009.

³ Analytic instructions (in Greek) for the program Subtitle Workshop in:
<http://users.sch.gr/cosranev/index.php/e-idees-gia-olalogismika-yliko-how-to/52-subtitle-workshop>.

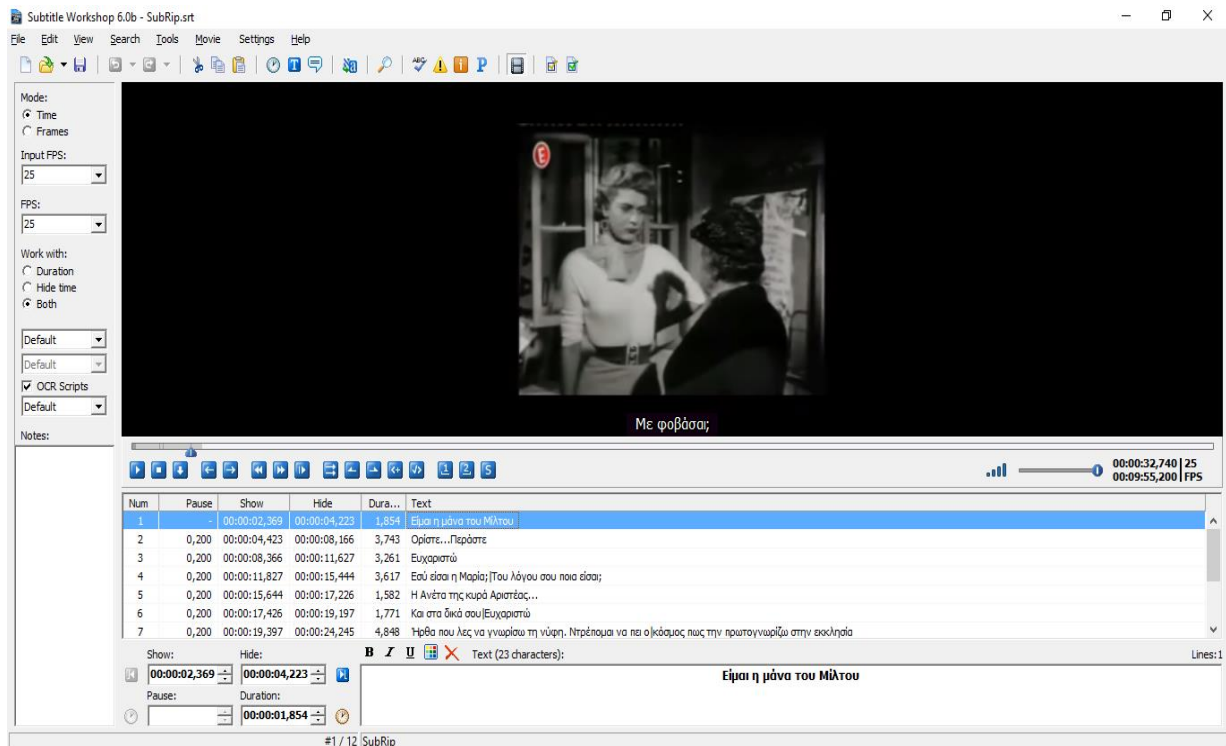


Figure 1: The environment Subtitle Workshop

The Subtitle Workshop platform (Figure 1) is divided into four domains: a) the movie viewing domain (top right), b) subtitle processing domain (bottom left), c) the key domain (in the middle) and (d) the main menu domain (top left).

Subtitle Workshop platform gives us many possibilities. We can:

a) Duplicate all or part of the film that we have chosen. From the Movie menu, we choose Open to open the movie in Subtitle Workshop platform.

b) Create new subtitle (from the File menu choose New Subtitle).

c) Process the subtitles' text in the bottom

left domain.

d) Use the keys play/pause to find the target point of the first heading.

e) Adjust the subtitles' duration with show/hide keys.

f) Add new subtitles by pressing the Insert key in our keyboard.

g) Save our work as soon as some or all with all the subtitles (press File and Save and in the window that appears, select the desired file format).

Subtitle Workshop is not the only software that can be downloaded from Internet. Subtitle Workshop was chosen because of its accessibility. Students got easily familiar with

this tool and its features. Because of the easy application, the platform can strengthen students' independence, less guidance is needed while students are self-conscious of their work pace. Attention is given to the student and to the ways knowledge is structured. Students' expression and personal engagement are encouraged. The Subtitle Workshop is a platform that encourages the discovery model and the exploratory model.

3. THE FILMS

The audiovisual material used in each teaching period was only an extract from the specific Greek movie. It was planned to last one period and thus the chosen extracts lasted five minutes for each teaching period. Documentary films or advertisements' extracts were deliberately not chosen since the reinforcement of students' skills (improvement of oral and acoustic skills, development of listening comprehension and writing) were targeted. Furthermore, it was aimed to reflect on Greek society, Greek music, Greek culture in General (socio-cultural competency).

Great help for us was the fact that the Institute of Classical, Byzantine and Modern Greek studies of Tbilisi had previously subtitled twice notable Greek movies⁴. Five

movies were subtitled in Georgian but were not utilized. In all these cases the subtitling program was handled by an expert and subtitling took place outside the University (Children's Television- Enki- Benki).

From the subtitled movies the film *Stella* was used, which is based on the play by Iakovos Kampanellis "Stella with red gloves" and that played an important role due to its literacy value. It was predicted that students will gain benefits that will allow them to significantly improve their skills in the foreign language but also to get acquainted to the music of Manos Hatzidakis, to get to know places, such as the Acropolis and Piraeus, to refer to Iakovos Kampanellis's literature value and to compare literature and filming. Additionally, the film allows the students' understanding of the different levels of communication (intimate, colloquial, slang etc) but also of idioms.

Modern Greek studies homage titled "The Days of Greek Cinema". There had been subtitled in Georgian language the films: *Politiki kouzina* of Tassos Boulmetis (2003), *Peppermint* of Kostas Kapakas (1999), *One eternity and one day* of Theodoros Angelopoulos (1998). The subtitling was done from the professors of the department of Modern Greek studies Medea Ambulashvili, Medea Metreveli and Ketevan Tsintsatze with the computer scientist support of Media Support. In 2015 in the frames of events that were realised at the Institute of Classic, Byzantine and Modern Greek studies to honor Melina Merkouri (95th anniversary from her birth) were subtitled the films *Stella* of Michalis Kakogiannis (1955) and *Never on Sunday* of Zyl Ntasen (1960). The subtitling was done from the bachelor student Theoni Mpalampani. The assiduity of all work had the professor Medea Ambulashvil and the doctoral student at that time Giorgos Ugulava.

⁴ In 2008 was carried out in Tbilisi from 19-21 December in the Institute of Classic, Byzantine and

Subtitling *Stella* took place in Greek. We used the Intralingual subtitles⁵, because they can help considerably in improving knowledge the language, enriching of vocabulary and in developing listening skills. We avoided the intra – linguistic subtitles⁶, because of the current knowledge of the Georgian language that would not allow a comparison of the two languages (Greek-Georgian). The intra - linguistic subtitles, which already had been done in the past-Georgians subtitles for the film *Stella*, were used only at the end of each teaching time and the professor’s highlights focused on teaching *gender expressions*. The stereotyped expressions and their translation are challenging because of lack of appropriate translation and equivalence in Georgian language. The students were taught these expressions through observation of Georgian subtitles and with the parallel use of the electronic dictionary “Online Dictionary of Idioms”⁷.

4. METHODOLOGY- LESSON PLAN

Lesson: Greek Language. This course, according to the syllabus of the University, is six (6) hours per week. The two teaching hours per week were used for the subtitling of

films. These two hours were not consecutive but took place on different days.

Lesson duration: 55 min.

Student team: Five (5) students of the third year of the Department of Modern Greek studies of the Institute of classical, Byzantine and Modern Greek studies in Tbilisi.

Greek expert level: B2 (good knowledge) and C1 (proficiency)⁸.

Lesson objective: listening skills’ development, communication skills’ reinforcement, writing, subtitling the entire movie, active student participation, individual learning.

Audiovisual material: *Stella* of Michael Cacoyannis (1955), duration 90 min.

Teaching aids: laptops, headphones, projector.

Software: Subtitle Workshop.

Dictionary: Online Dictionary of Idioms (<http://idioms.iliauni.edu.ge>), Greek-Georgian Dictionary (book).

Time: one semester.

Indicative plan of teaching time:

- View clip (Time 5 minutes)⁹. Through the projector was shown the extract from the movie to all students. Our aim was to connect students with factual circumstances of communication (Socio-Cultural Theory).

⁵ Intralingual are the subtitles which are in the same language with the dialogues of film.

⁶ Cross-language are the subtitles which are in other of language from the dialogues of film.

⁷ For more information cf. <http://idioms.iliauni.edu.ge>.

⁸ The Levels of language proficiency are determined according to The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages by the Council of Europe (CEF 2001, level A1- C2).

- Listening comprehension questions and encouraging the students' expression (time 10 min).

- Oral discussion on the content of the extract.

- Identification of the plot

- Comments

- Connections between emotions and characters

- Comparison and reflection of Greek and Georgian society

- articulation of meanings in communicative circumstances (time 10 min).

- Activity: students create their own subtitles for the same extract (time 15 min)¹⁰.

- Presentation of the result- Comparison of the different versions of subtitling- Speculation and selection by students of the final subtitle format that they wanted to be saved (time 10 min)¹¹.

- View of the same extract with Georgian subtitles (time 5 min). Students are encouraged to observe the stereotyped expressions and apply them in Georgian language equivalently. At this stage but also

throughout the lesson they can refer both to the Greek- Georgian dictionary and in the Online Dictionary of Idioms.

- Worksheets with exercises, student's level appropriate. The exercises (lexical or grammatical) relate to a phenomenon that was also noticed during the teaching hour. With the worksheets students have the time for individual practice at home¹² while at the same time the exercises-activities meet students' needs of each student as they were defined by the educator (application of the General principles of Constructivism). Also, writing assignments are given for practicing different uses of the language system (writing text for a purpose, ideas communication, interpersonal relations, etc.) According to the theoretical approach of Situational learning theory.

At the end of the semester, the subtitling of the movie was completed and they were incorporated into the movie, into a single video file¹³. The outcome was viewed at the University campus with the presence of other students.

⁹ Learning with observation.

¹⁰ In this stage the teacher gives instructions and the students are encouraged to work by themselves. The students work individually in laptops. They have the opportunity to stop or repeat the extract of the film (autonomous learning). The use of earphones allows the individual treatment of extract of film and the evasion of confusion.

¹¹ The students work in groups (synergistic learning) and joint decide for the final file of subtitles that will be

stored (culture of critical faculty). For the storage of files we selected the form SubRip.

¹² The exploitation of the worksheets is done in next teaching hour and no in the one that we are involved with the subtitling of the film.

6. EVALUATION

The evaluation of the course took place in two phases, during the semester (upgrading evaluation) and after the completion of the semester and have completed the subtitling of the movie.

For the final evaluation students who attended this lecture were asked to fill out anonymous questionnaires about their experience. Data were collected through descriptive research and despite the limited sample, important feedback for reflection was gathered.

In accordance to the processing of our small sample, it seems that students enjoyed the process of subtitling, although that proved to be time-consuming. Satisfaction was reported along with a feeling of awkwardness towards the result especially during the performance since fellow students who were not in the group of subtitling were there. They stated that the movie with pictures and music created a pleasant atmosphere that helped them capture better in memory the new words and expressions and to improve the ability of listening comprehension. A special chapter of teaching gender expressions was interesting and helped them understand the structure and content. The worksheets that were given for

homework said that they helped them to improve understanding and writing but that they would rather do it at the University.

The diagnostic tests that we have received from our students during the semester contributed to evaluation of their linguistic ability and have been for us important feedback for improving evaluation of the lecture. The tests that were collected from us during the whole semester showed that overall, the students have significantly improved listening comprehension, vocabulary through discussions. Significant improvement was noted in spelling and writing, both through the process of creating subtitles and the accompanying exercises. The greatest improvement occurred in the understanding of the behavior of stereotypical expressions.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The appropriate level of knowledge of the Greek language by the students contributed to the successful completion of the process. The current report's findings are in accordance with the findings that have been made for other languages (French, Kostopoulou- Duka, 2011: p. 158) that the learning of Greek language by using extracts from film is appropriate for learners with at least good knowledge of the language. Such an application is not suggested for the students

¹³ For the incorporation of the file of subtitles in the film was used the software Any Video Converter.

with basic knowledge of the language. If the target group and the linguistic competence's level are going to be altered, the audiovisual material must be adapted to the level of students (Danan, 2004) and the extracts of a movie that are going to be used should not have language difficulties and dialectic characteristics. Subtitling a film requires fluent use of the language and understanding of the oral characteristics.

Also, the size number of the group is essential for the student and project centered approach through the interactive method. This size allows the teacher to be in continuous

contact and communication with students. The instructor's role is essential in all aspects of the process. The facilitator's role in the process of language acquisition contributes to the implementation of the goals.

The six-month experience of implementation of subtitles in the Education Act systematically allowed the conclusion that the subtitles, either Intralingual subtitles or inter -linguistic, significantly improve skills in language acquisition. They can utterly be a pedagogical tool in the hands of the instructor provided they are accompanied by organized learning activities.

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