

## II. BOOK REVIEWS

**Yves Gambier / Annamaria Caimi / Cristina Mariotti** (eds.): *Subtitles and Language Learning. Principles, strategies and practical experiences*. Peter Lang: Bern 2015, 351 S.

The topic of learning foreign languages while watching or creating subtitles experiences a fast-growing interest among researchers. The reviewed book contributes to this field from the acquisitional and didactic perspective. It is a peer reviewed anthology which comprises 14 articles edited by Yves Gambier, Annamaria Caimi and Cristina Mariotti. The two latter were also the organizers of the international conference 'Subtitles and Language Learning', held in Pavia in September 2012, where the need for such a book arose.

The publication encompasses articles devoted to theoretical overviews of milestone and up-to-date research projects and their findings as well as learning while watching subtitled audiovisuals, and learning by doing, i.e. subtitling or dubbing. Although the book is not formally divided into sections, in her 'Introduction' **Annamaria Caimi** groups the essays into four subsections, which I am going to follow. Due to the fact that the anthology includes 14 articles, only the most important information and comments will be given.

The first two articles give comprehensive historical overviews of studies on subtitles and second language learning (in this review the term 'second language learning' includes also foreign language learning). **Robert Vanderplank** presents the key research studies from the last 30 years of research in this field outlining the current state of knowledge and research gaps. He lays out possible future research paths and pleads for further research projects which would be truly longitudinal and would be focusing on self-instructed 'learner-viewers' (p. 34) at a different age.

The second article by **Martine Danan** not only provides a historical overview of research findings, but also depicts her personal history and development as a researcher which coincides with the evolution of research on audiovisual translation and language learning. The author suggests that researchers should engage in more longitudinal and qualitative studies, as well as investigate the function of subtitles in mono- and multilingual societies including their potential to promote multilingualism.

The next four articles are contributions from recent projects on subtitles and language learning funded by the European Commission. **Yves Gambier** describes the project *Subtitles and Language Learning* (SLL, 2009-2012), in which 10 European research institutions took part along with teachers and learners from formal and non-formal settings. The aim was to investigate the potential of watching subtitled television or cinema for learning or

improving a foreign language. The author discusses the theoretical framework of this project, its objectives, characteristics, variables and methodology.

In her article **Cristina Mariotti** continues the description of the above-mentioned large-scale and longitudinal project, providing an insight into the implementation of the project and the results of the pre- and post-experience questionnaires. They show the opinions of the involved teachers, as well as students in formal and informal learning contexts, about their teaching/learning experiences with provided subtitled materials. The feedback and opinions were positive in all involved groups, highlighting the benefits of subtitles for foreign language learning. The teachers group also voiced the need for guidance and creation of ready materials and activities.

In the following article **Patrick Zabalbeascoa, Sara González-Casillas and Rebeca Pascual-Herce** report on the experiences of two of them as EFL secondary-school teachers in Barcelona who took part in the SLL project. They used audiovisuals in the target language (English) and interlingual subtitles in students' L1, i.e. Spanish or Catalan. The authors of this paper focus on the integration of the SLL project into the school curriculum, used materials and implemented activities. They highlight the students' increased motivation and share their positive comments. Because this paper is only a contribution from teachers' perspective, no proper research results are presented.

The last article in this section by **Stavroula Sokoli** deals with another EU funded project called *ClipFlair*. The author presents the open source and free platform under the same name (<http://clipflair.net>), which allows interacting with videos by adding text (subtitles) or voice-recordings to them. The platform is addressed to foreign language learners and teachers and additionally gives them the opportunity to create communities by using forums, groups and blogs, where they can work, upload their materials, share and comment on them. This detailed description is accompanied by screen shots, examples of activities and in brief the results of a survey from the first pilot study.

The third section is devoted to some state-of-the-art quantitative or mixed methods research projects. **Noa Talaván** and **José Javier Ávila-Cabrera** investigated the combination of dubbing and subtitling as didactic activities. Twenty students in the experimental group worked online in smaller groups on four video clips and answered pre- and post-tests, as well as pre- and post-questionnaires. Additionally, they took part in a videoconference to share their feedback and were observed by four teachers. The yielded data compared to the data gathered from the control group, proved that these didactic tools are efficient. Furthermore, they may be said 'to be optimal for integrated skills and language development, whatever the primary focus of the activity might be' (p. 165).

In their article **Tendai Charles** and **Danijela Trenkic** question the previous research methodology used to investigate the influence of bi-modal input on listening skills, arguing that the research projects lacked test construct validity. The authors' objective was to improve the methodology in their study on L2 speech segmentation. They relied on a shadowing task and conducted two experiments. Their results show that international students at UK universities miss approximately 30% of what they hear. However, the exposure to bi-modal input improves listening skills, although the results did not reach statistical significance. Nevertheless, the results from the control group with videos without subtitles and the group who watched audiovisuals with subtitles but no sound,

suggest that the methodology has been rightly chosen and the improvement does not come from the presence of subtitles only, but the simultaneous listening to the sound and subtitle reading.

In the next paper **Anna Marzà** and **Gloria Torralba** focused on incidental language learning of children through subtitled cartoons in a dubbing country. Their results indicate that most children aged 9-12 sometimes watch subtitled audiovisuals with their families, especially those in immigrant families. Moreover, they liked watching cartoons in this form during the experiment, were not distracted from watching and listening, as well as accepted the proposed parameters of subtitles (7 sec. rule).

In the last article in this section **Paulina Burczyńska** presents the results of a pilot study conducted in a Polish language school. Her aim was to research whether students' grammar, spelling and vocabulary acquisition can be improved through creating reversed subtitles. Although both the experimental and the control group (which followed the standard curriculum) improved their skills after eight weeks, the results of the written production assignment at the end of the experiment were considerably higher than in the control group.

The last section encompasses papers devoted to classroom-based-studies and experiences. **Jennifer Lertola** focuses mainly on the overview of research findings about subtitles and subtitling in foreign language teaching. She also presents her own model of subtitling task assessment and gives examples of tasks for each level of proficiency according to the CEFRL.

The description of a course held in scientific English for Italian dentistry students, during which subtitles/additional texts were created, is the topic of the article by **Deirdre Kantz**. The aim of the course was to improve students' scientific English and their language awareness using project work. Apart from the description the author pleads for 'a definition that replaces the term *subtitling* as an overarching catch-all term with other terms such as *overlay* or *visual/verbal overlay*' (p. 287). He argues that the term 'subtitling' is often overused and inadequate for simple activities in which some text is added to the video, which is not the proper representation of what is being said, but represents what is being showed.

Language awareness is the main focus of the article by **Lucilla Lopriore** and **Maria Angela Ceruti**. The authors present a comprehensive overview of research literature and only their own research findings, in a nutshell. Their semi-experimental study involved both quantitative and qualitative methods and was carried out with 19 students, who watched travel documentaries and created their own subtitles. The results show that subtitling is a tool for increasing students' autonomy and developing their language awareness not only in the L2 but also in their L1.

The last article in this book discusses the didactic potential of subtitles for learning idiomatic expressions while watching cartoons. **John Sanderson** claims that cartoons are the most suitable medium to teach idiomatic expressions because of the de-idiomatisation through humoristic visual representations of the 'head of the idiom' for comical purposes and the semantic duality stemming from the context. This visualisation and humoristic effect contributes to the better understanding of the presented expressions and their memorisation. Additionally, equivalents in interlingual subtitles root the idiom into stu-

dents' linguistic competence. Senderson analyses three American cartoons and possible equivalents in students L1 (Spanish) and proposes a two-step approach: watching the segment with intralingual subtitles and then watching a freeze-frame with interlingual subtitles. However, because of the inexistence of the equivalents of some idiomatic expressions in students' mother tongue, the author allows manipulation of the visual sphere using a software, in order to adjust the visual element to the equivalent in L1, which is highly controversial. He argues that with the proven effectiveness in L2 teaching but adduces no research results.

To conclude, the anthology *Subtitles and Language Learning* is a valuable contribution to the field of applied linguistics and audiovisual translation research. It provides the reader with a comprehensive overview of milestone findings and current research projects. It is highly recommended for both researchers and teachers who would like to introduce subtitling activities or use subtitled audiovisuals in their foreign language classes.

*Kamila Chmielewska*

k.chmielewska@amu.edu.pl

Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

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