

Training in subtitling for the d/Deaf and the hard-of-hearing

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1. Introduction

As Kelly (2005:8) reminds us, “translator training is a phenomenon which begins in the mid twentieth century. Until then translators were essentially either language specialists or bilinguals, self-taught in translation, or with some form of apprenticeship or mentoring alongside more experienced colleagues”. As far as audiovisual translation (AVT) is concerned, it might be more exact to say that training, within the educational system, only began in the very late twentieth century and that specific emphasis on subtitling for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing (SDH) only arose in the early years of this twenty-first century.¹

Very much in line with what Gambier (2003:184) says for the training of screen translators in general, training in SDH should aim at developing all the competences that are considered in the training of screen translators who, by turn, have to master the full range of competences required by any type of translator. Taking this into account, one might say that the further we go down the line, the greater specialisation is required and emphasis will need to be placed on those aspects that make this particular type of AVT different from every other. In a nutshell, what makes SDH ‘different’ is the fact that its privileged addressees,

1. Díaz Cintas (2001b:3) offers a list of institutions throughout Europe where, at the time, modules in AVT were being given both at an undergraduate and a postgraduate level. However, he does not mention the teaching of SDH. In fact, not much was known about formal SDH training at university level until very recently. There is one case where such training is mentioned: James et al. (1996) account for the teaching of SDH at Lampeter University in Wales in a partnership with Channel 4 Wales.

the Deaf,² have no or limited access to sound and, in some cases, to the subtitles themselves for their poor reading skills.

This said, if subtitlers working on SDH want to produce a truly useful accessibility service they need to have a profound knowledge of the profile and the needs of their specific addressees and audiences (the d/Deaf and the hard-of-hearing); a good knowledge of filmic composition, particularly in respect to the place and meaning of sound (in all its forms) in the compositional whole; a clear understanding of redundancy, relevance, adequacy, cohesion and coherence, so as to guarantee truly meaningful reading material; and the ability to draw both upon sense and sensibility when difficult choices need to be made.

If we are to get trainees in SDH to gain awareness, acquire knowledge and develop skills and competences within the classroom context,³ this will be best achieved through carefully laid-out syllabuses and well devised exercises that will allow for a great many practical activities, both inside and outside the classroom environment. This can be best attained by setting up a learning environment that stands upon an “open structure”, as proposed by Gentzler (2003: 13), where “theory, descriptive research, practice, and training productively interact with each other”. The creation of such circumstances at the Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (IPL), in Portugal, has allowed for a better understanding of what the training of SDH specialists encompasses, making it clear that proficiency only comes with time and practice and no initial education/training is enough to make a fully fledged SDH professional. Such initial training should thus be addressed as a privileged moment, even if restricted in duration, to raise awareness and develop skills and competences that will be put to use throughout actual usage. This, in itself, will be ‘the’ real training, extending throughout life, particularly because

2. The term ‘Deaf’, with a capital ‘D’, is used to make reference to people who belong to the Deaf community and who use sign language as their mother language in opposition to small ‘d’ deaf which refers to people who have acquired deafness but use the oral language and relate to the hearing society as their own. Hard-of-hearing people will also be included in the hearing society; they will have some degree of residual hearing and will relate to sound as hearing people do, even if they may perceive sound to a lesser extent.

3. There seems to be no consensus as to what is taken to be the difference between translator ‘education’ and translator ‘training’. For the purpose of this paper, I take people studying SDH at an undergraduate level to be ‘students’ and people working towards a professional profile to be ‘trainees’. Such trainees might be taking part in an internship/training course in a company; training as part of their access to a position within a company; or taking a practical training course at an educational institution (university, college, school). Most of the strategies proposed are specifically directed towards a classroom environment, but might be equally valid for professional training within other contexts.

no translation commission is the same as the previous one, a fact that is equally valid when we are dealing with AVT in general, and with SDH in particular.

2. Getting to know the agents involved in SDH

It is often advocated that translators work into their mother language in the belief that, in so doing, they will be producing texts that are relevant and adequate to their envisaged addressees who, in general, belong to the same linguistic community as the translators themselves. This means that by being in touch with the social and linguistic environment of the target language they will be in possession of the norms of actual language usage and will be better equipped when producing texts in that particular language. By being part of a linguistic community and by using its language regularly to do things, these translators should be able to find better translational solutions to fulfil the needs and expectations of those who depend on their work in order to gain access to a text that is otherwise inaccessible for a number of different reasons. In short, in these circumstances, the closer the translators are to the reality of their addressees, the more efficient their work is likely to be, for they will be producing work for receivers in a context that is well known to them.

In fact, as far as SDH is concerned, we are dealing with 3 different groups of people: the Deaf, the deaf and the hard-of-hearing (see Note 2). If we are to take this belief *au pied de lettre*, and if we take into account that, in practice, it is the Deaf audience that SDH seems to be primarily directed to, SDH subtitlers should belong to the social system of their addressees, thus working into a shared language. This happens to be almost impossible since many addressees of SDH are Deaf viewers who may belong to the Deaf community, thus having a form of sign language as their mother tongue. This ideal situation of sharing common ground is perhaps what happens in the case of sign language interpreters who are quite often bi-lingual and bi-cultural, mediating between the hearing and the Deaf communities. This, however, is not usually the case for subtitlers working on SDH, who may be producing subtitles in what is their native language and the native language of the speakers in the programme, but are not in the mother tongue of the Deaf readers to whom they are directed because Deaf viewers, who use sign language as their natural language, will read subtitles in what is their second language. Additional effort will be demanded of such viewers for they will be cut off from many of the acoustic cues, such as speech onset, voice quality, tone and rhythm, which conduct hearers in their reading of subtitles.

It is clear from the start that translators working on SDH are in the unusual situation of producing texts for people who may differ from themselves in their

physiological, social and communicative make-up, thus subverting many of the pre-conceived notions that preside over the work of translators in general.

This circumstance is one of the most important aspects that sets SDH apart from all other forms of translation and should be taken into account by those devising training programmes for future SDH professionals. Trainees must be made perfectly aware of this circumstance at a very early stage, so that they may put some effort into knowing their addressees' profile and understanding the needs of their particular audiences.

One way of getting to know the d/Deaf addressees' profiles is often by reading the vast bibliography that is available on deafness and related issues, which range from the physiology of hearing and the physical, psychological and social implications of deafness to the educational and linguistic conditions that d/Deaf people are subjected to.

Getting to know real audiences' profiles, however, cannot be fully achieved through reading alone. Audiences are people, rather than concepts, who can only be known through direct contact and interaction. Trainees working on SDH should be encouraged to interact with d/Deaf people so as to get inside knowledge of their characteristics and special needs. Bringing d/Deaf guests into the classroom to speak about themselves is a feasible even if unnatural way to go about making deafness better known to SDH trainees. It seems better, however, to take the trainees to interact with the Deaf community by inviting them to local Deaf associations and/or clubs, where they might get the 'feel' of that particular group. Gaining entrance into such a group can prove to be a valuable learning opportunity and finding ways to interact with the people will highlight the important issue of communication differences. This sort of interaction brings about a number of problems which can only be overcome at a personal level. Trainees may feel the need to learn sign language or to get involved with the group, so that reasons for interaction may come into being. And the best way to find 'reasons for interaction' is to develop common projects between trainees and the d/Deaf. Small projects such as helping out in the organisation of an event, or the subtitling of institutional material may be sufficient to get trainees and d/Deaf people involved in productive interaction, thus revealing themselves to each other in what should then lead to mutual understanding. By doing so, subtitlers will be able to achieve their final aim which is to produce a text that is relevant to its users, doing justice to Chesterman's words (Chesterman and Wagner 2002:43) in that "the reader's situational context and cognitive experience, are factors that impinge upon the choices of the speaker/writer/translator, unless you know something about these expectations, etc., you cannot formulate your message in an optimally relevant way".

This sort of interaction has proved to be of great importance in the training of SDH within the undergraduate translation degree at the IPL. Trainees have been offered the opportunity to take part in projects, which have involved them, the Deaf and blind communities and other entities in the production of real products.⁴ All projects have been fully evaluated and reported by all the agents involved and have proved that such exercises are of great value in the training of future professionals for the multiple learning opportunities that cover all the components of each particular translation *skopos*.

Having to make things work within an extended team is always a challenge that requires organisation, negotiation and self-control. Quite often translators are said to be solitary workers who lack interpersonal skills and their task is frequently addressed as being restricted to the transfer of a given message into another language, as an object-centred task. It is clear that AVT in general calls for a lot of multi-tasking and if trainees are given the opportunity, at an early stage, to try out the adventure of working with others towards a common goal, they will benefit as professionals for they will be better equipped to contradict the above mentioned tendency to fly solo, learning about the others involved in the process and making themselves and their work known to those very same partners.

As Mayoral puts it in response to Pym's questions on translator training (Pym et al. 2003:5): "students must be trained for teamwork, sharing translation tasks not only with other translators but also with professionals in other fields, (actors, producers, multimedia technicians, editors, etc.)". In the case of SDH, this dialogue is particularly important because quality standards may be substantially improved if all of the agents involved in the process have a better understanding of the pressures each of them are subjected to. This can only lead to a better understanding of all that is involved in the process and to the development of respect for each other's activity.

4. In 2003–2004 a group of 10 students worked on the subtitling project *Mulheres Apaixonadas* (Neves 2005), providing SDH for 50 episodes of a Brazilian *telenovela* to be shown by SIC, a Portuguese national commercial television broadcaster; in 2004–2005, 6 students worked on subtitling live the Draw for the European Deaf Football Championship that took place in Leiria in 2007; in 2005–2006, 40 students worked on a big project, *Fátima Acessível*, which aimed at providing audio description for the blind and subtitling for the Deaf in two pilgrimages to the Fátima Shrine, Leiria; in 2006–2007, 24 students subtitled 60 clips on accessibility projects within the Digital Inclusion Programme, promoted by the *Agência para a Sociedade do Conhecimento*, a Portuguese governmental agency (subtitled video available at www.acesso.unic.pt/conferencia_id/programa.htm).

3. The study of the process and the study of the product

Although the approach outlined above places special emphasis on the 'process' of subtitling, this does not mean that less attention be devoted to the study of the 'product', which might best be seen as a number of possible 'products'.

In the first place I take the 'product' to be actual subtitles, i.e. the 'end product'. It is essential to have newcomers analyse common practices within different contexts so that they become aware of the norms in use. Such norms will necessarily differ according to the media (cinema, television, DVD, DVB), the type (pre-recorded or live; interlingual or intralingual), and the genre (programme type or film genre), among others. Such an analysis, which is descriptive in nature and requires guidance at first and critical maturity on behalf of those who conduct it, will offer trainees conceptual tools which will be useful when they are to work on their own subtitles.

It is clear from the start that subtitles are not the only product worth being studied and that, like all the other 'product(s)' found within the AVT context, they are multifarious, and complex in their making. They are always multi-medial and have a number of layers that come together in the construction of meaning, thus opening up to equally multiple analyses. These analyses can be oriented towards each of the different parts or towards the effect of the sum of various parts or of the whole. In this respect, I shall analyse other 'product(s)' which play an important part in the making of what here was taken to be the 'final product'.

One 'product' that needs to be analysed at length, when studying AVT in general and SDH in particular, is the original text. Given the highly stimulating context in which modern society lives, most people are now reasonably literate as far as audiovisual material is concerned. Even though most viewers take a passive role when watching television, for instance, they have acquired the basic skills needed to make sense of most of what they are offered in mainstream contexts. They have come to understand most of the cinematic codes used in particular genres and to automatically adjust their viewing attitude in terms of their expectations towards each specific case. Much of this knowledge is acquired through long-term exposure to particular audiovisual texts and people tend to be more articulate when exposed to the genres, subjects and styles that they best relate to.

Further to this almost natural competence which most people share, audiovisual translators also need to have a deep understanding of the making of their text and each and all of its components in order to carry out their task successfully. They need to be able to decipher the motivated meanings of the different elements and the way they come together in the construction of yet other meanings. Learning how to read audiovisual text for a reason other than personal pleasure may mean having to scrutinise the compositional whole from different viewpoints so

as to become fully aware of the effect that each code individually and in co-existence with the other codes may produce.

The acquisition of this selective and oriented competence calls for systematic exercises that may bring to the fore each of the aspects to be taken into account, e.g. image (lighting, camera movement, montage), character make-up, sound (noise, music), and speech. In the case of SDH, and because such subtitles are all about conveying visually the messages that cannot be perceived through hearing by d/Deaf viewers, special emphasis needs to be given to the analysis of sound. In addition to all the skills that subtitlers in general need to master, those working on SDH need to be highly sensitive to sound and learn to understand its role(s) in the audiovisual text so as to decide which of such elements need to be conveyed when subtitling.

To sum up, the study of different 'product(s)' is an important element in the whole SDH learning/training process. Trainees should address it from a number of viewpoints and see it as a finished product (when analysing somebody else's or their own finished work) or as a product in constant construction (when looking at any process of producing subtitles).

4. Understanding the meaning of sound within the audiovisual text

Chaume (2002: 3) was most certainly not thinking about SDH when he wrote:

the training of translators in this sector and the discovery of translation strategies and rhetorical mechanisms unique to the construction of audiovisual texts is only possible from an analysis of audiovisual texts that looks at their peculiarity: Meaning constructed from the conjunction of images and words.

Had he been thinking about the specificities of this particular kind of AVT, the last sentence would most probably have read: "Meaning constructed from the conjunction of images and *sound*". In my view, SDH is all about sound, or to be more specific, SDH is all about making sound visible. And sound, in audiovisual texts, is a complex structure encompassing sound effects, music and speech, each of which opens up to a number of different issues.

The task of making sound visible is difficult and can only be successfully achieved if subtitlers are 'sound literate' and have mastered basic techniques in the decoding and interpretation of acoustic signs and in the recoding of such signs into visual (verbal and/or iconic) codes. This means that, in this respect, trainees in SDH will benefit from intensive training in a number of specific tasks: hearing and listening to sound; interpreting sound; understanding its narrative value; determining its relevance; and conveying it visually.

People in general have a tendency to discount sound and to take the sense of hearing for granted. Our society is constantly submerged in sound and noise, and listening is an art that needs to be cultivated. Chion (1994) lays out the perception of sound in a graded scale stretching from simple hearing, which is said to be a purely mechanical/physiological mechanism; to listening, which implies effort and direction; to identifying, which calls upon previous contact with the sound; to understanding, which implies the attribution of meaning to the sounds heard. Each form implies the previous ones and understanding being the last one is also the most complex form of all. Learning to listen is in itself a difficult task and trainees need to be taught to carry out what Rodríguez (2001: 200–201) calls *escucha analítica* [analytical listening], i.e. the ability to listen with pre-established aims in mind, so as to collect particular information from the sound elements to be heard. According to this author (ibid.: 201), the ability to carry out analytical listening and to make the most of the information obtained, greatly depends on what is known about the acoustic forms. This knowledge can be developed through exercises aimed at making trainees aware of the absence or presence of sound and listen to it so as to identify its source, the direction it is coming from, its interaction with the image, its narrative value, and its cultural and emotional charge. The more trainees are exposed to situations of analytical listening and the more they drill transcoding and re-verbalisation techniques, the easier it will become for them to produce effective SDH.

Traditional SDH has been mostly concerned with transcribing speech (in many cases as closely to the original as possible), identifying speakers through colour coding or subtitle displacement, and offering objective information about sound effects, such as a phone that rings or screeching tyres. Here and there attempts have been made at offering information about music and/or paralinguistic cues, even if at a much smaller scale. In my opinion, the reason why SDH has kept to what I consider to be a poor account of its full potential might be found in the fact that most subtitlers have not been made aware of the complexity and narrative importance of sound in audiovisual texts, might have not been taught to hear and listen, or might have not been able to develop efficient re-verbalisation techniques. Once translators become aware of the way sounds convey emotional, narrative and metatextual information it will be easier for them to identify the function of each sound effect and to make choices on the best way to transmit such effects. They will be able to decipher the sounds that are most relevant in each particular passage; to decide when and if there is a need to identify the source or direction of particular sounds which might lack visual clues, and to be sensitive to nuances which might establish tempo or mood. In short, they will have acquired techniques that will allow them to filter sound through the eyes of the deaf ear.

This means that subtitlers working on SDH will be doing what Chesterman (Chesterman and Wagner 2002: 10) proposes for all translators:

what the translator has to do in order to communicate successfully is to arrive at the intended interpretation of the original, and then determine in what respects the translation should “interpretively resemble” the original in order to be consistent with the principle of relevance for the target audience with its particular cognitive environment.

What he posits for translators in general might be brought down to three main concepts in the case of SDH: relevance, redundancy, and adequacy. Subtitlers need to ask themselves which sound elements are most relevant for the construction of meaning in the original text. They should question whether particular acoustic signs could have been conveyed through visual codes as well, thus merely accessing core messages, or whether they have distinct narrative value. Finally, they will be required to find ways to convey the relevant acoustic messages through visual codes accessible to d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers.

When deciding upon adequacy, it is easy to give up even before trying to find an optimal solution, for it is clear that the intended audience is made up of different profiles and what may be adequate for one viewer may well be quite inadequate for another. As Shulman and Decker (1979: 560) put it: “because each program is captioned at a single level, it is necessarily directed to the “average” viewer’s reading ability. Superior readers may be frustrated by the simplicity of the captions and poor readers by their difficulty”.

5. Teaching/Learning approach

With the above in mind, it is my belief that we can train subtitlers within the educational system both at undergraduate level and through specific postgraduate training programmes. I see a number of important advantages in providing special training within the university context. In practice, it means that people are given the time and the conditions to think about their work, to acquire basic skills in a reflexive manner and to test and try innovative solutions, thus creating strategies and routines that will prove useful when facing the stressful circumstances of professional subtitling. In addition, within the educational system, their learning experience will be shared with others in the same circumstances and when carefully conducted, trainees will be given the opportunity to acquire competences and to develop those social and interpersonal skills that “translators often lack” (Gentzler 2003: 23).

When discussing the course in screen translation offered at Lampeter University, James et al. (1996: 181) list the technical and linguistic skills to be developed in future subtitlers. The former centre on timecodes, synchronisation, positioning, colour and breaks between subtitles. The later, in the realm of linguistic competence, are listed as portrayal, language quality, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Díaz Cintas (2001b: 3), on the other hand, numbers the aspects that ought to be taken into account when teaching a module on subtitling (in general) as being “theory and practice, professional and linguistic dimensions, equipment needs and internet resources among others”. I completely agree with the authors in that mastering such skills is crucial to all subtitlers, including obviously subtitlers working on SDH. However, I feel that in both cases only a small part of what students really need to learn is actually stated.

As far as SDH is concerned, I consider that by the end of their training, people should have learnt a great deal about (1) themselves as intermediaries; (2) their clients as service providers; (3) their addressees as special audiences with specific needs; (4) their source text as a multimodal, multilayered construct; (5) the role and narrative value of sound in all its forms – speech (verbal and non-verbal components), sound effects and music –; (6) the means available or considered most adequate for visually conveying the relevant acoustic information; (7) the most adequate way to convey such information in view of the genre, media and intended audience; (8) the linguistic skills required for translation and/or adaptation; (9) the technical means involved (e.g. subtitling equipment); (10) coping with difficulty and stress; and (11) working within a team. This may seem like a whole lot to be learned in what is usually a very short period of time. Tveit (2004: 41) writes that:

learning to subtitle takes time. Some claim that it takes at least 3-4 years to become a fully-fledged subtitler. [...] I know that it is possible to develop the necessary skills to produce professional subtitlers in a considerably shorter period of time. But extensive practice is required in order for the subtitler to develop in terms of speed and consistency.

Even though I fully agree with this quote, experience has shown that in six months of intensive work one can develop the fundamental competences which characterise the best of professionals in the field. I believe that in making trainees agents of their own training they will come to know *why* things are done in a particular way so that, when performing an action, “[the subtitler] will (potentially) be able to explain *why* he acts as he does although he could have acted otherwise” (Vermeer 2000 [1989]: 223).

This can be achieved through a mixed approach that takes trainees through a variety of learning experiences, covering activities such as attending lectures and conferences, drilling particular skills (reduction and expansion), analysing materials (in a descriptive approach), and carrying out full projects that might be limited to the school context or have real practical application.

In what I have said, I share Kiraly's (2000) social constructivist learner centred approach to translator training and believe that learning takes place best when learners feel that they are in control of their own learning process. Further to this, and given the nature and social implications of this particular type of translation, SDH lends itself to the development of activities that can be simultaneously staged as a training exercise and as a service to a group of people. Why work on a clip for purely academic purposes when students can work on something that might serve for that same purpose but also be of real use to some local group such as a Deaf association or a school for special education? Through the development of various practical action research projects with SDH trainees I have learned that, when well planned, such activities can have great generative power. They can prove beneficial to all the partners involved (Neves 2005), helping trainees to fully understand their *skopos*, helping the community to be better understood, giving the translators a visibility that they seldom get, and gaining greater appreciation and understanding on behalf of all those they work for.

6. Suggestions for exercises and activities

Looking back on the way I have oriented my trainees in their learning of SDH, I find that they have been conducted through a number of learning experiences that fall into four main categories: (1) the reading of relevant materials, (2) the analysis of actual practices, (3) the acquisition of certain skills and the drilling of particular processes through specific exercises and (4) the development of complete projects. Even though the project comes last in this list it has often been the catalyst of all the other activities for it has proved to make all the other activities meaningful and therefore less boring or difficult.

6.1 Reading relevant materials

It may be true that there are not many academic publications on SDH available, but it is relatively easy to find material on related topics which are also fundamental

reading for subtitlers.⁵ These may range from works on hearing and deafness or on the Deaf, to books on the audiovisual text(s), to material on AVT in general.

In contrast to the lack of specialised publications on SDH, there is a substantial number of in-house style books and guidelines. They are used within professional contexts and may be difficult to get, for they are often kept confidential for commercial reasons. When made available, such guidelines are valuable tools for trainees for they usually come closest to 'codes of good practice' and can provide some standardisation criteria.

This lack of written materials on SDH is soon to be a situation of the past. The growing interest in the study of SDH has led to its introduction as a topic for research at postgraduate level in many Universities throughout the world, and a number of people are now writing about their findings (Bowers 1998; De Groot 2001; Pérez 2003; Neves 2005; Kalanzi 2005; Jiménez Hurtado 2007; Díaz Cintas et al. 2007).

As a result of the many papers presented at recent conferences, some of which were primarily dedicated to accessibility as is the case of *Media for All* (Barcelona, June 2005 and Leiria, November 2007), various publications are now in the pipeline, bringing together a significant number of interesting articles which will soon be made available to all those studying the issue.

Getting students to read widely and to discuss their findings and conclusions with each other is a useful means to get them thinking about specific issues and if such discussions are brought about within problem solving situations, they will become all the more fruitful for they will be directed towards real interests and will prove useful for particular purposes.

6.2 Analysing actual practices

As mentioned before, reading about the way things are done may and should be complemented by the analysis of actual subtitled programmes. Important learning opportunities are found in describing and analysing common practice. By seeing how things are normally done and by trying to understand why particular solutions are used, newcomers can learn many of the tricks of the trade for much of our learning is done through imitation. In order to be encompassing, this sort

5. De Linde and Kay's (1999) monograph is, to date, one of the best known academic references on SDH. Other works, such as Baker et al. (1994), are also valuable reading material for subtitlers-to-be, but difficult to come by because they have not been distributed within commercial circuits.

of exercise needs to be carried out through the analysis of a vast and varied sampling of subtitled material.

The analysis may be restricted to specific aspects of one particular piece, or it may be done by contrasting various examples which take different approaches to similar issues. The study may also be done by comparing actual practice with what is set forward in the guidelines. Another approach might be one where particular issues raised by actual practice may be addressed in the light of relevant theoretical premises. This is often more fruitful in situations where trainees have already acquired sufficient knowledge to allow them to process problems in a theoretical manner. Whichever the approach taken, the product may be addressed as a whole or special focus may be placed on particular aspects, directing trainees' attention to details such as character identification, depiction of sound, interpretation of music, or linguistic matters such as translation or adaptation strategies.

Regardless of the focus taken, the analysis of actual subtitled programmes proves most useful in developing critical maturity in trainees and should be done in such a way as to stimulate tolerance and a constructive attitude towards others, which will be of great use when, in the professional context, subtitlers are asked to proofread or simulate other subtitlers' work.

Learning how to analyse and evaluate other people's work will also be useful when revising one's own work. Gaining distance from our own production is often difficult and if trainees are given the tools to carry out objective analyses, it will become easier for them to look at their own work with professional detachment. The ability to analyse other people's work can also be further encouraged by having trainees revising and commenting on their colleagues' work, constructively contributing towards a better job by offering suggestions and alternative solutions. This exercise will also promote trust and cooperation, valuable tools when carrying out teamwork, a situation that is much valued in the professional world where SDH demands responsible and cooperative teamwork.

6.3 Developing specific skills and drilling particular processes

Besides having to develop all those competences that are implied in other AVT contexts, SDH subtitlers also require particular skills that might be less necessary to other AVT translators. Students need to acquire all those previously mentioned skills, such as reading audiovisual texts, understanding sound, and developing techniques like rephrasing or reducing text. The acquisition of some of these techniques may require actual 'work-outs' and drilling and it may prove useful to create exercises which specifically drill certain routines.

Let us consider ‘understanding sound’, one of the most important aspects in the production of SDH. Exercises to raise awareness towards the importance of sound may include watching clips without sound, or listening to excerpts without watching the images. The first exercise will help trainees become aware of what it may mean to be deaf, the second may help them understand that sound in audiovisual texts has a life of its own.

Listening to the soundtrack without watching the images may also bring to the fore sounds which go unheard when integrated with the image. This is particularly the case with natural or synchronous sound where there is a direct correlation between cause (image) / effect (sound) and not much attention is given to the sound because the cause seems to be more relevant. Listening without image is also a good exercise to develop the ability to pick up paralinguistic features. Getting students to decipher how people may be feeling when saying things, without relating to non-verbal information that might be made available through facial expression or kinesic features, is useful when those very same features are only made present through speech alone and therefore needs to be relayed to the d/Deaf, who cannot hear nuances such as the tempo, rhythm or pitch of speech, for instance.

Other exercises may be conducted to help trainees become aware of motivated sound effects: all those effects that were introduced in post-production to produce a pre-determined impact on the listener. Very seldom do viewers realise how much sound is tampered with in order to produce particular effects. By stimulating selective listening, subtitlers will become better equipped to interpret sound and to determine how relevant certain sounds are to the narrative’s economy.

Still within the realm of learning how to ‘listen’, trainees will benefit from some ‘musical education’. Music plays such an important role in audiovisual texts that it justifies all the attention it can get. Listening to musical scores, with and without image; talking to musicians about their works; and learning about the artistic, historical and social implications of certain musical constructs helps develop musical literacy which will prove extremely useful when producing SDH. By learning the narrative value of music as a linking device, a punctuation device, and a means for extra-diegetic referencing, or by understanding the contribution of musical scores in the establishment of mood and atmosphere, trainees will be made aware of which musical elements deserve to be subtitled.

Developing sound awareness is a complex process which deserves a study in its own right. There is much to be learned on the importance of sound in the audiovisual construct and the more effort is put into making sound more transparent to subtitlers the better equipped they will be to create solutions that make sound visible to those who cannot hear it naturally.

Another exercise that has proved to be highly productive in the context of training in SDH is the creation of open debates about filmic composition in general

and about sound in particular. By talking about their personal sensations when viewing/listening to certain pieces, students develop interpretation and verbalisation techniques. In order to speak about things one has to understand them and to take a stand towards them. It also requires having the lexis to speak about them. Such competence is further stimulated when the conversation is conducted by or shared with specialists who can set forward problems, offer solutions, or explain the makings of certain details. Sessions with sound artists, for instance, or with directors have proved to be most enriching for future subtitlers. Setting up such sessions might not always be easy, but by getting involved in events such as local film festivals, trainees may acquire the feel and the jargon of the trade and gain insights that only come through contact with the world of film making itself.

Another area that needs to be highly stimulated is that of writing. Writing good subtitles requires advanced writing skills that can only be acquired through regular practice. Simple exercises such as proofreading for the correction of typos or punctuation, or for sentence splitting; more complex situations such as text reduction through omission (most necessary in intralingual SDH) or through rephrasing (more adequate in interlingual SDH);⁶ or exercises involving changing the text's register are most important since they help subtitlers become versatile and able to respond automatically when particular patterns are encountered.

Much more needs to be learned about rephrasing techniques in SDH. Special care in sentence formulation, such as pushing difficult words to the end of the phrase, or in substituting complex or imbedded phrases into distinct short direct sentences may increment reading speed and may make reading far more agreeable, particularly to poorer readers. A painstaking and long process is needed to make trainees competent at making changes that leave sentences looking natural, while guaranteeing the three types of equivalence proposed by Brondeel (1994: 28) – informative, semantic and communicative. Getting students to question their rephrasing strategies in the light of the questions “has all the information been transferred to the TL?”, “has the meaning been transferred correctly?” and “does the subtitle also transfer the communicative dynamics as reflected in the prosody of the SL utterance?” (ibid.) helps them to naturally seek ideal solutions when writing their subtitles.

6. SDH is often thought to be exclusively intralingual. This belief should however be revisited. Open interlingual subtitles – used in subtitling countries such as Portugal, the Netherlands or Belgium, for instance – are quite insufficient for d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing audiences because they only carry the translation of speech and miss out on important information such as relevant sound effects, music and the identification of speakers. Interlingual SDH opens up a number of issues that deserve further analyses.

As far as linguistic issues are concerned, trainees will benefit from any exercise that might stimulate their ability to paraphrase, to rewrite using reduction and expansion techniques, to find synonyms, and to achieve clear writing. They must be reminded that their subtitles may be used by their d/Deaf viewers for educational purposes, for even if unknowingly, every time they read subtitles they will be improving their reading skills, and if they feel successful in the endeavour they will be stimulated to continue trying and will thus be gaining proficiency in an area which is extremely important to them.

Specific language exercises may be drawn up to help trainees gain a greater awareness of their task when providing SDH as well as master skills that might be purely mechanical or that may need dexterity or quick reflexes. This is the case when training for live subtitling.

Another area deserving special training regards the use of subtitling software. Learning the mechanics of operating subtitling equipment or software means long hours of trial and error. Cueing subtitles correctly may also mean doing and doing again. Changing colours, fonts, subtitle position, dividing or merging subtitles, adjusting reading and subtitle exposure time, naming and organizing files are all techniques that need to be acquired while using the equipment. Modern subtitling suites are becoming extremely powerful and versatile, and using them to their full potential requires time and training.

Even though prices have been coming down in recent years and special reduced price licences can be obtained for academic purposes, it is often the case that universities do not have professional equipment for trainees to work on. Working on subtitling equipment is fundamental for only then do new subtitlers become fully aware of the reason why certain strategies need to be followed. It is true that the equipment that students use in their training may be different from the one that they find in the professional context. This is not a major problem because what is important is to understand the mechanics of operating any subtitling equipment. Learning particular shortcuts or finding the right keys to do the job is an easy task once subtitlers know what each function is meant for. The excuse that universities cannot afford to buy professional equipment or that it is not relevant to buy equipment that rapidly becomes obsolete is not acceptable.

6.4 Working on (real) projects

I totally agree with Díaz Cintas (2003b:201) in that “[s]tudents must be able to work in groups and under pressure, with very stringent deadlines; and they must have an insight into the inner workings of the professional world, not only

view it from inside the academic cocoon”, and this can be best achieved through project work.

Developing projects is a stimulating educational strategy that requires a great deal of organisational competence on the part of the promoter but which brings about great advantages to all those involved. Projects that bring together trainees, teachers/researchers, professionals, providers and recipients in view of a common goal strengthen ties and stimulate social and organisational dynamics. The need to work as a team where tasks and responsibilities are shared and where achievement depends on each of its elements makes people take their part seriously and stimulates them to do all they can to make things happen.

As previously mentioned, project work in the field of SDH is a unique opportunity for subtitlers to interact with the d/Deaf and to test solutions and receive feedback to stimulate action. It also allows trainees to get a taste of the makings of professional subtitling while still enjoying the comfort of working among peers and under the supervision of their teachers and mentors. When the aim is real and has social implications, as is usually the case with SDH projects, emotional involvement becomes a stimulant and a justification for carrying out less enjoyable tasks, which become light when given a purpose.

It needs to be clarified that project work in itself may not be enough to educate/train future SDH professionals, but when combined with other strategies it is a most powerful tool that offers more than may be imagined.

7. Final remarks

I would like to believe that I have made a case for the training of SDH at university level. In fact, a closer look at translation courses throughout Europe shows that SDH has now been included in AVT programmes, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (see Appendix). This number will certainly grow in the years to come for accessibility issues are gaining greater academic interest and recognition among Translation Studies scholars. Bringing these subjects into the classroom in a structured syllabus will contribute towards the development of new competences and new professional opportunities and will also stimulate social responsibility towards people with disabilities.

To conclude, a note might yet be added about the teachers or trainers. Who might they be? Here again, there is no unique answer. Given the diversity of activities proposed above, it might make more sense to talk of a number of different teachers. Even though there will be a convener in charge of the SDH module or course, anybody from an academic or researcher, to a professional, a technician, a

specialist, a d/Deaf viewer or the trainees themselves will be sharing the responsibility of teaching/training in what should always be looked upon as a dialogic process. If the teaching and learning process is seen as an interactive, circular activity, all those involved will be constantly exchanging roles by teaching and learning in the process. The main teacher will at best take the role of the facilitator, organiser and mediator, staging each learning opportunity to make the most of each experience. If the programme is conducted under the maxim of 'sense and sensibility', the study/training in SDH will be an overall exciting and enriching experience. Future professionals will be perfectly aware of the importance of their work and will do all they can to provide the best of services to people whom they have learnt to understand and respect.

Appendix

Some institutions in which SDH is formally taught are:

Undergraduate level:

Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (PT)

www.ipleiria.pt

Roehampton University, London (UK)

www.roehampton.ac.uk/programmedetails/modules.asp?path=ug|translation|index.xml

University of Wales, Lampeter (UK)

www.lamp.ac.uk/media/courses/subtitling.htm

MA level:

Hoger Instituut voor Vertalers en Tolken, Antwerp (BE)

www.hivt.be/emci/doelstellingen.htm

Instituto Politécnico de Leiria (PT)

www.ipleiria.pt

Leeds University (UK)

www.smlc.leeds.ac.uk/cts/cts_content/ma_programmes/masts.asp

Roehampton University, London (UK)

www.roehampton.ac.uk/pg/avt

Surrey University (UK)

www.surrey.ac.uk/lcts/cts/pgprog/mainmonsubauddescription.htm

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (ES)

www.fti.uab.es/audiovisual

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (online course) (ES)

www.fti.uab.es/onptav

Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (ES)

www.ulpgc.es/index.php?pagina=estudios_postgrado&ver=detalle&codigo=64

Universidad de Vigo (ES)

https://bubela.uvigo.es/bubela/publico/publico.php?function=ver_edicion_descripcion&tab=LC&id_edicion=85

University of Wales, Lampeter (UK)

www.lamp.ac.uk/screenstudies

PhD level:

Universidade de Coimbra (PT) – taught modules:

www.fl.uc.pt

Various Universities throughout Europe have PhD students working within tutorial frameworks, which make it difficult to offer a complete list of such institutions.

Other:

Experto universitario en Subtitulación para Sordos y Audiodescripción para Ciegos:

www.ugr.es/~dpto_ti/tablon_files/EXPERTO/Experto_subtitulacion_audiodescripcion.htm