Audiovisual Translation and Incidental Vocabulary Acquisition in Colloquial Arabic

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Abstract

Over the past few years, a renewed interest in employing translation in language pedagogy appears to be gaining momentum over the more commonly-celebrated communicative approach. The present paper describes a pilot study on the effectiveness of audiovisual translation in vocabulary acquisition. A group of (13) learners of Arabic in a large public university in the US took part in an 8-week project where they carried out the interlingual subtitling of a full-length Egyptian film into the English language. Data was collected by means of a pre- and a post-project survey to measure the progress made by learners at the end of the project with regard to incidental acquisition of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions. The study participants were also surveyed to determine their perception of the relevance of translation in their language studies. The findings corroborate the argument in favor of the incorporation of translation activities in L2 classes.

Key words: translanguaging; translation; subtitling; Arabic; audiovisual material; listening skills

Introduction

While translation has historically been an integral part of second language pedagogy, the shift to the communicative approach in the early seventies was the catalyst for a gradual but steady disinterest by language practitioners in employing translation-based techniques. The focus has instead shifted to communication-based techniques that develop the learners' ability to use the L2 in "real-world" situations, i.e., on teaching the language in a monolingual context that seldom takes into account the learners' L1. Consequently, translation has come to be perceived as a professional skill that does not necessarily need to be practiced by individuals who may not be pursuing a career in the field of translation (Cook 2010). However, a recent shift in applied linguistics is bringing the concepts of translanguaging (Douglas Fir Group, 2016) and Own Language (Hall and Cook 2012) to the forefront of the discussion. These concepts challenge the monolingual approach that for decades has dominated the field of second language pedagogy.

Conceptually, translanguaging transcends the traditional boundaries between languages as it redefines language, not as a static object, but rather as a dynamic and fluid process whereby multilinguals use all linguistic resources at their disposal as an integrated communication system (Conteh 2018). Translanguaging practices can be seen virtually

everywhere, from the New Chinglish of Chinese speakers that reappropriate and assign new meanings to ordinary English utterances (Li 2016), to modern Tagalog speakers that switch often between their native language, English, and Spanish. While these practices are not a novelty, the term translanguaging itself was coined only in the nineties by Cen Williams to describe the pedagogical practice of switching between English and Welsh as observed in Welsh revitalization programs (Baker 2011). It is striking that the same field where the term translanguaging was conceived is the very one that now struggles to acknowledge it as a viable pedagogical practice. Not surprisingly, much of the research on translanguaging has engaged with its definition and manifestations in spontaneous speech, with only a few studies engaging with its pedagogical practices and implications (Mertin 2018; Duarte 2020).

The notion that second language learning is a dynamic and fluid process that inherently involves the learners' L1 is also reflected in a 2012 survey conducted by Hall and Cook that investigates the role of learners' own languages, as well as the attitudes of teaching practitioners towards how L1 is used in the language classroom. The results clearly indicate a widespread use of learners' L1 in classrooms around the world, which speaks to the presence of a contemporary trend that is reviving the support for L1 use (Hall and Cook 2012)——a form

of translanguaging that has been overlooked for far too long. Furthermore, translanguaging resonates with the interdependence hypothesis (Cummins 2008), which argues that literacy-related skills in L1 and L2 are interdependent, whereby L1 proficiency impacts and is transferred to L2, thus supporting the so-called common underlying proficiency (CUP). The CUP theory may explain the frustration experienced by adult beginner L2 learners as they struggle with their inability to express complex thoughts in their L2 and feel compelled to use utterances from their L1, thus challenging the impermeability of boundaries between languages.

Translanguaging and translation are inherently interrelated phenomena that naturally occur in second language classrooms. The arguments against using translation and, by extension, translanguaging in second language pedagogy stems from the fact that it limits the learners' exposure to the L2 as they find themselves functioning half of the time in their L1, thus slowing down their progress. Another rather widespread argument against translation has to do with its artificiality, which is prompted by the fact that practitioners tend to administer preselected texts that target certain language structures deemed problematic (Källkvist 2008). Along with its perceived artificiality comes an inevitable sense of dullness that can easily demotivate learners. On the other hand, proponents of the use of translation in L2 classrooms base their argument on the effectiveness of using contrastive analysis to raise the

learners' awareness of the relationship between their own language and the new language. Pavlenko and Lantolf (2000) argue that L2 does not exist in a vacuum and that the learners' success ultimately is contingent upon their ability to make connections between their first and second languages. In that sense, translation becomes a bridge that connects the known to the unknown and facilitates the acquisition and internalization of L2 vocabulary and grammar structures. Translation exercises deepen the learners' understanding of how the target language works, and in what way it resembles or differs from their own; this qualifies translation to be an integral part of any language class.

Similarly, Mitchell and Myles (2004) argue that translating from one's native language is a natural process, and has undisputed evidence in the linguistic features of learners' speech which bear traces from their native language. In his 2010 monograph on translation in language teaching, Cook argues that using a monolingual teaching method in a beginning class, for example, corresponds to a teacher-centered approach where all of the power is in the hands of the instructor. The use of translation at that level is particularly necessary to allow students to ask questions, express their thoughts, not only to save precious class time, but also to verify and monitor the correct understanding by the students (Cook 2010).

While the communicative approach has gained a lot of ground over the past few decades at the expense of translation-based techniques, the latter and the former are not mutually exclusive. The findings of a large-scale survey that was conducted in six EU countries in 2013 indicate that the use of translation in language classes lives on as a legitimate teaching and learning technique (Pym et. al. 2013). The mere need by language learners to check the meaning of a word in a bilingual dictionary is proof of the fact that translation is virtually used in all language classrooms (Cook 2010).

According to Cook (2010), the use of translation is essential, for example, to introduce vocabulary particularly in reference to abstract concepts that, otherwise, can be quite vague and difficult to grasp. Cook also attributes the ineptness of language learners to master L2 vocabulary to a lack of exposure to translation activities and to the lack of explicit discussion of similarities and differences between L1 and L2, which can often promote a false sense of equivalency. By establishing comparisons and relationships with their own language, learners are drawn to improve their understanding of and their ability to correctly use certain language forms.

If there is a solid case for translation to be actively and purposefully employed by instructors in language classrooms, as it appears, the roots of its disuse merit further investigation. One of the explanations put forth by Cook considers what he

calls the 'vilification' of translation in language classrooms to be a direct result of a broad political movement that took place in the twentieth century favoring nationalism and monolingualism as a way for political and cultural expansion. These global and political circumstances that led to the disuse of translation are no longer valid in today's globalized world, where plurilingualism, translanguaging, and therefore translation, should be at the forefront of language education (Cook 2010). In today's multicultural and multilingual societies, translation should be at the core of the communication process, not limited exclusively to interpreters and translators.

- **Audiovisual Materials in the L2 Classroom**

The applications of translation are extensive as they go well beyond the use of bilingual dictionaries and can vary by level and lesson goal. In this regard, a prominent type of translation activity in language pedagogy that is being actively promoted by governments as a means of promoting second language skills and plurilingual and pluricultural competences (PPC) is the subtitling of audiovisual materials (Baños et al. 2021; Lertola 2019a; Incalcaterra-McLoughlin et al. 2011; Gottlieb 2004). An increasing number of studies on the various subtitling modes and their impact on language learning bears

that out, including EU funded projects.[1] The argument for the incorporation of audiovisual translation in the classroom stems from the fact that an audiovisual input is primarily a multimodal text, in which information is conveyed through four verbal/non-verbal and visual/auditory channels (images; sound effects; signs; and dialogues). According to Sokoli (2018), this multitude of channels reinforces the meaning of the 'text' by creating textual redundancy (also Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola 2014), which requires learners to interpret the text in its totality as 'a complex communication act' (Sokoli 2018, p.80).

The language of films and TV series, in particular, has been proved to mimic natural, spontaneous conversation, as indicated by several studies that identified a high degree of emotional involvement and discourse interactivity in telematic language. One of these studies was conducted by Quaglio

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[1] In 2011, the European Commission published a study on the use of subtitling audiovisual materials in foreign language education (European Commission 2011). In 2017, the European Commission launched a call for proposals for the development of subtitling software, which resulted in the development of the Compass Subtitling Project. More recently, the CEFR Companion Volume (Council of Europe 2018) has emphasized the role of audiovisual materials as a vital reception activity. The government endorsement of research activities and applications centered around subtitling in the EU speaks to the relevance of subtitling in language pedagogy.

(2009) who carried out an analysis of the language of the sitcom "Friends" and identified certain patterns, such as the frequent use of the first and second persons, the imperative form, and the use of empathic words, that are typical of spontaneous conversation. Furthermore, the lack of hesitation and dysfluency that are typically associated with spontaneous, real-life conversation greatly enhances the comprehensibility of the linguistic input as it ensures that the language is linear and more articulated (Pavesi 2012). The exposure to dialogue input not only helps learners familiarize themselves with conversational strategies, but also with regional and social varieties in the L2 (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2008).

It should be noted here that non-narrative TV programs (i.e., talk shows, game shows, etc.) are less likely to engage viewers emotionally as stories do. Research in the field of psychology indicates that stories, intended as a connected set of events, are more persuasive and engaging than raw facts and figures (Green & Brock 2000), and a story that evokes happy emotions (i.e., a romantic comedy) can be even more powerful. Furthermore, translating full-length films has the potential of providing a relevant input to learners by ensuring longer exposure to the input and, as a result, greater learning benefits. In her 2012 monograph on subtitling and foreign language teaching, Ghia considers 'the amount of time learners are exposed to audiovisual input […] of paramount importance to the acquisition process' (Ghia 2012, p.20).

In order to assess the effectiveness of the translation of audiovisual materials in the acquisition of L2 vocabulary, the present paper reviews existing literature on the use of interlingual (from L2 to L1) subtitling before moving on to describe a study focusing on interlingual subtitling from colloquial Arabic to English. Thirteen study participants worked on the translation of a full-length Egyptian film over a period of eight weeks as part of their coursework. A pre- and a post-project survey were administered to measure the effectiveness of the project activities on incidental vocabulary acquisition, as well as to understand the learners' perception of the importance of translation in their language studies. The relevance of this paper is to be seen within a broader body of similar efforts that aim to legitimize the use of translation activities as an integral part of language teaching.

- **Literature Review**

The effectiveness of subtitling in second language pedagogy has been the object of several empirical, data-driven studies focusing on subtitling from L2 to L1, including a limited number of studies conducted on reversed subtitling from L1 to L2, of which Lertola (2019a) gives a detailed overview. Williams and Throne (2000) conducted one of the first such studies, which had students add English subtitles to ten Welsh video excerpts taken from TV programs of various genres. The length of the selected excerpts was between four and five

minutes. The authors used a questionnaire to collect feedback that was generally positive and demonstrated that the exercise not only expanded the working vocabulary of the participants, but also showed significant improvement in their listening skills.

Similar results were reached by Talaván (2010, 2011) with an experimental group who produced interlingual subtitles between English and Spanish, while a control group simply treated the video excerpt as a regular listening comprehension exercise with the support of closed captioning. The excerpt was two minutes long and the genre was unspecified (Talaván 2010, 2011). Talaván asked participants of both groups to produce a writing sample in their native language in order to guarantee a more objective assessment of their comprehension. The results demonstrated that learners who engaged in interlingual subtitling showed a significant improvement in oral comprehension.

A study by Lertola (2012) focused on the role of subtitling in the incidental acquisition of vocabulary between Italian and English. The experimental group who performed the interlingual subtitling activity reported a higher rate of vocabulary acquisition and retention as measured by an immediate posttest and a delayed posttest. Talaván and Rodríguez-Arancón (2014) investigated the role of interlingual subtitling in enhancing the listening comprehension skills of a

group of advanced EFL students who carried out the subtitling of three short video excerpts. The results indicated remarkable improvement in students' listening comprehension skills, along with their writing skills in L1 (Talaván and Rodríguez-Arancón 2014). More recently, another study by Lertola (2019b), which was conducted on 25 English native speakers who were enrolled in a beginner-level Italian course, concluded that interlingual subtitling facilitates the productive recall of new word meanings (Lertola 2019b).

A number of other studies have looked into the effectiveness of interlingual subtitling in developing pragmatic awareness (Incalcaterra McLoughlin 2009; Lopriore and Ceruti 2015; Incalcaterra McLoughlin and Lertola 2016), intercultural competence (Borghetti and Lertola 2014), and acquisition of idiomatic expressions (Bravo 2008). In 2016, Talaván, Ibáñez, and Bárcena headed a study by a group of researchers looking at the efficiency of collaborative reversed subtitling from Spanish into English on the development of learners' writing skills. Here again, the test group reported a substantial improvement in the writing skills of the participants particularly with respect to the discursive aspects of the writing process such as cohesion, organizational structure, etc. The study used two video excerpts two minutes long each, which the authors defined as 'self-contained' (p. 44). As can be seen here, the results of these studies speak to the relevance of interlingual subtitling as a valuable didactic tool that enhances

learners' acquisition of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions, pragmatic awareness, intercultural competence, and L2 writing skills in the case of reversed subtitling.

Two important conclusions can be drawn from this brief synthesis of previous empirical studies: first, the lack of studies focusing on full-length films or TV series. The length of exposure to an authentic audiovisual material is of great importance: it offers a more grounded context for the learners and it triggers several cognitive processes that pave the path from input to linguistic output in L2 (Ghia 2012). One of these processes is *noticing*, which refers to the identification on the learners' side of linguistic patterns that occur in the input. The general consensus is that the longer the learners' exposure to a certain vocabulary item or grammatical construct is, the more successful noticing is (Ellis 2003). Secondly, the vast majority of these studies have been confined to either English or Spanish. To our knowledge, no similar empirical studies exist with regard to less commonly taught languages (LCTLs).

This paper aims to contribute to the debate on the effectiveness of interlingual subtitling in vocabulary acquisition by providing data from a less commonly taught language. Furthermore, the abundance of studies conducted on short video excerpts poses the question of whether a long-term exposure to audiovisual material would enhance the learners'

noticing process and, therefore, have a positive impact on their vocabulary acquisition.

- **Method**

Thirteen Arabic language learners joined this study to fulfill a mandatory component of their Egyptian colloquial Arabic course counting for 10% of their total course grade. All participants are native speakers of English who had completed a minimum of two years of intensive Arabic language instruction prior to launching the project. Nine out of thirteen participants had completed four academic semesters; two participants had completed six or more semesters, and only one participant had completed five semesters of language instruction. A total of four participants had taken part in some form of a study abroad program in an Arab country ranging from a summer program (two participants) to one academic semester (two participants)[2].

Prior to launching the project, participants completed a background survey to assess their familiarity with translation

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[2] All project participants took an informal placement test prior to the beginning of the project, which placed all participants between the intermediate-mid and the advanced-low levels on the ACTFL scale. According to ACTFL guidelines, learners at the intermediate-mid and intermediate-high levels function most of the time at the advanced level; thus, the participants of this study are collectively considered advanced learners.

in the language classroom. Their answers indicated that none of them had participated in a translation course prior to this project, and that only one participant had worked with translation as an integral part of their language study; furthermore, only one participant had some experience in professional translation. While the findings of the survey indicate very little to no experience in professional translation or in working with translation as an integral part of their coursework, all participants responded positively when asked whether they think translation can help them achieve their language goals. The gap between the students' perception of the benefits of translation on one hand, and the reality of their classroom instruction on the other hand is quite relevant, as we will discuss in detail in the results section.

When asked to self-assess their level of oral comprehension in colloquial Arabic, five out of 13 participants assessed their level as 'unsatisfactory'. Seven participants assessed their level as 'satisfactory', and only one participant assessed their level as 'good'. Particularly interesting was the profile that emerged in relation to the degree to which participants were exposed to audiovisual materials in colloquial Arabic prior to this project: less than half of the participants (N=6) stated that they only watched a couple of films in colloquial Arabic, while two participants only watched short clips on social media on an occasional basis, and seven of them only watched short clips and music video clips. Furthermore,

all participants reported that they rely on English subtitles to watch audiovisual content in Arabic. When asked to assess their comprehension of un-subtitled content in Arabic on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest), over half of the respondents assessed their comprehension at level 2, while five of them chose level 3, and none of them assessed their comprehension at any of the two higher levels (4 or 5). Additional information was collected on the participants' ability to use a subtitling software, which showed that none of them had any familiarity with such software, and that only two of them had partaken in a subtitling activity; however, it is unclear if that was in Arabic or in a different language.

In summary, although the language proficiency of the project participants was estimated to be at the advanced level, most of them reported a lack of confidence when taking on audiovisual materials in Arabic, and infrequent, intermittent exposure to said materials; finally, all of them relied on English subtitles when engaging with audiovisual materials.

1.   Selection of Material

The selected film for the project is a 1995 romantic comedy from Egypt with a total duration of 147 minutes. The selection was made based on the lexical, syntactic, and discursive features of the language, which align with those of the ACTFL advanced-level guidelines for listening, thus making the input comprehensible (Krashen 1985) and pedagogically viable for

advanced learners of the language. More specifically, the language of the film includes mostly non-technical, high-frequency vocabulary, while the sentences are of medium length with a few embedded sentences and compound connectors.

2. Procedures

The project took place over a period of eight weeks. Participants worked individually and in pairs on global comprehension, in-class discussions, extraction and editing of the transcript, establishing time-codes, and carrying out the translation, before inserting the subtitles in the multimedia file that was provided. Participants were given detailed guidelines with specific deadlines for each task. The guidelines contained various listening and translation strategies, as well as tips on how to use the subtitling software Aegisub.

During the first week, the multimedia file was made available for participants who were asked to watch the film at home and prepare to discuss it in class and share their own reflections on it. The following week, a list of the core vocabulary was introduced in class and a few in-class exercises were carried out in order to verify the global comprehension of the story and establish a clear timeline of the plot. Participants were then randomly divided into teams of two, and each team was assigned a 20-30 min clip of the film. Teams were then asked to closely watch the clip that was assigned to

them and create a 4-minute video on the Flipgrid platform, where they gave a summary of their clip. The purpose of this exercise was to consolidate the information that was discussed in class as well as to offer the various teams the opportunity to hear from other teams a summary of their respective clips so that they can better contextualize their understanding of their own clip to ensure continuity.

In week three, a Google Doc file was created for each team; this is where participants were asked to carry out the translation and share any questions and comments for the instructor or for their team partner. Participants were also given a list of tips to overcome any gaps in their understanding of the dialogue because of inaudible speech or an increased speech rate. These tips included relying on visual clues to make educated guesses, slowing the speech rate on their media player, identifying three possibilities for each gap and looking them up in the dictionary and, finally, meeting with a tutor.

Each team devised their own strategy to carry out the translation of their clip. The instructor monitored the progress made by each team on a weekly basis and provided feedback in the appropriate section of the Google Doc. The feedback varied from giving clues in English to writing out a specific line in Arabic; however, on no occasion was a direct translation offered. The feedback process required multiple rounds of

revisions for each team to guide them through the extraction and translation process.

In weeks 4, 5, and 6, three translation workshops were organized in a language laboratory. During these workshops, students worked on separate devices and had access to the multimedia file and to the Google doc where they carried out the transcription and translation. The purpose of the workshops was to zoom in on the more challenging parts of the dialogue and to guide students through the transcription process by providing immediate feedback. Prior to each workshop, students were asked to identify three to five lines that they are struggling to understand, which the instructor would play at a lower speech rate or for which he would make contextual references and associations to help clarify. Due to time constraints, the instructor occasionally had to resort to repeating the line themselves in a different intonation to emphasize and draw attention to a problematic grammatical structure, which the students would work on unpacking and understanding under the instructor's guidance. This process often involved writing the line on the board and giving examples of how the structure/word in question can be used in another context. It was observed that most teams worked together on the translation of their assigned clip during the workshop, while others split the clip equally, and finally one team divided the workload in a way so that one partner would

be responsible for creating the Arabic transcript, while the other partner would translate the transcript into English.

Upon completion of the translation activity in week 8 and the successful insertion of the subtitles via the Aegisub software, participants were asked to complete a post-project survey. The survey contained a total of 18 questions structured in three distinct sections: the first one is language-specific and aimed to measure the linguistic progress made by students; the second part is software-related and aimed to assess the usefulness of learning how to utilize a subtitling software as perceived by participants; and the last section addressed the participants' perception of the impact of the project on their confidence in taking on authentic listening materials in colloquial Arabic.

More specifically, the first section of the survey aimed to 1) assess the effectiveness of the project in the acquisition of new vocabulary items and idiomatic expressions; 2) collect a somewhat representative sample of said items/expressions; 3) measure the participants' ability to use these items/expressions meaningfully; 3) assess any improvement that would have taken place in regard to the participants' understanding of the sentence structure in colloquial Arabic; and 4) assess the participants perception of the effectiveness of comparing Arabic and English structures during the

translation process in increasing their understanding of said structures.

The second section aimed to assess 1) the usefulness of learning how to utilize a subtitling software; and 2) the likelihood of the participants continuing to use the same software on their own for personal or professional purposes. The third and final section aimed to 1) understand the impact the project had on the participants' confidence in taking on authentic listening materials in colloquial Arabic; 2) assess the impact of the project in enhancing the participants' intercultural awareness; and finally, 3) understand the participants' perception of the impact of the project on the improvement of their overall oral comprehension skills and on its usefulness in helping them achieve their language learning goals.

Descriptive statistics including frequencies were analyzed using Google Forms. Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used to conduct cross-tabulation and Pearson Chi-square tests for independence to determine significant relationships between categorical variables in question, with significance levels set at 0.05.

3. Results

Upon completion of the project, participants were asked to complete all three parts of the post-project questionnaire, while being assured that their responses would in no way

inform their project grade. In the following paragraphs, we present a summary of these results for each of the three different sections separately.

4.1. Language Skills

When asked about the number of vocabulary items that they were able to acquire as a result of the project, five out of seven participants stated that they learned 10 or fewer new words, and four participants stated that they learned twenty or fewer words, and finally four participants stated that they learned over twenty new words (Figure 1).

In your opinion, how beneficial was the subtitling project in helping you acquire new vocabulary?
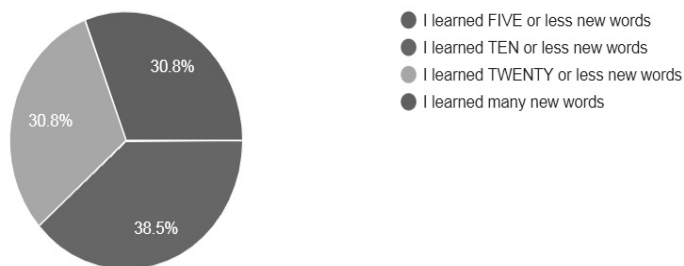
13 responses

Figure 1. Participant responses on the benefit of the project in helping them acquire new vocabulary.

Participants were asked to produce a few examples of the vocabulary items that they acquired. Each participant produced an average of five or more words, half of which were

nouns, and the other half was equally distributed between adjectives and verbs. When asked to assess their ability to use these words spontaneously in their speech, two out of 13 participants stated that they were very confident, five participants stated that they were sufficiently confident, and six participants stated that they lacked confidence in using these items spontaneously, but that they were confident in their ability to recognize them in speech.

On the other hand, when asked to evaluate the usefulness of the project in acquiring new idiomatic expressions, only one participant stated that they have learned several expressions, 10 participants stated that they learned a couple of expressions, and two participants did not learn any expressions. Here too, participants were asked to list one or more of the idiomatic expressions that they learned: three out of 13 participants did not write any examples, and the remaining 10 produced an average of one idiomatic expression per participant.

Furthermore, seven participants thought that the project was helpful in understanding how sentence structure works in Egyptian colloquial Arabic, while five of them thought it was moderately helpful, and only one participant thought it wasn't helpful. All participants, however, agreed that the opportunity to compare sentence structures and vocabulary items in colloquial Arabic and English helped

improve their understanding of such structures or vocabulary items (Figure 2).

When translating the lines of your clip, did having the opportunity to compare sentence structures/vocabulary in Colloquial Arabic and English help improve your understanding of said structures/vocabulary in Colloquial Arabic?
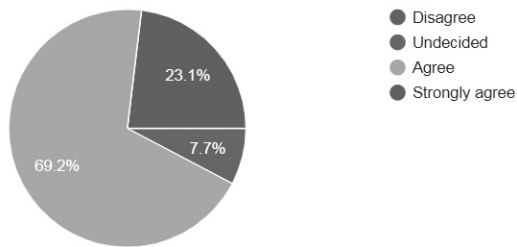
13 responses

Figure 2. Participant responses on the helpfulness of having the opportunity to compare sentence structures/vocabulary in Colloquial Arabic and English in improving understanding of said structures/vocabulary in Colloquial Arabic.

4.2. Transferrable skills

The second section of the questionnaire aimed to determine the usefulness of working on transferable skills such as the act of subtitling and the use of a subtitling software. Nine out of 13 participants thought that learning how to use a subtitling software was a useful skill, and the remaining four participants thought that it was not a particularly useful skill. Four participants stated that they were either unlikely or very unlikely to use a subtitling software on their own for personal or professional purposes, while six participants stated that they

were either very likely or likely to do so. The remaining two participants were uncertain.

4.3 Non-measurable components

In the third section of the questionnaire, participants were asked to evaluate the impact that the project had on their confidence in taking on authentic listening materials in colloquial Arabic. All participants stated that they feel more confident in their listening skills, and 10 of them stated that they are likely to make watching audiovisual materials in Egyptian colloquial Arabic an integral part of their language study routine (Figure 3).

How likely are you to make watching audiovisual materials in ECA an integral part of your language study routine?
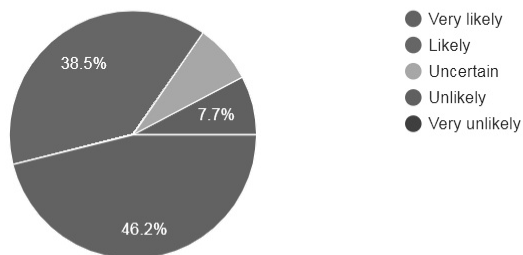
13 responses

- ● Very likely
- ● Likely
- ● Uncertain
- ● Unlikely
- ● Very unlikely

38.5%

7.7%

46.2%

Figure 3. Participant responses on their likelihood of making audiovisual materials in ECA an integral part of their language study routine.

In terms of meaningful exposure to elements of Egyptian culture, the overwhelming majority of the participants (N=12) felt that they have a better understanding

of some aspects of Egyptian culture, while only one participant was undecided. Finally, 12 out of 13 participants perceived this activity as being useful for their language learning goals.

Furthermore, cross-tabulation and chi-square tests of independence were performed to examine the relation between a number of variables. The first two variables that we looked at were the progress made by participants in terms of number of acquired vocabulary items and prior experience working with translation as an integral part of language study. As can be seen in Table 2, there is no significant relationship between the number of acquired vocabulary items and experience working with translation as an integral part of language study. Similarly, no correlation was observed between the number of acquired vocabulary items and work modality, regardless of whether each participant worked on the translation or only on the transcription of the dialogue.

Table 1. Number of acquired vocabulary items by prior experience with translation

Number of acquired vocabulary items	Experience working with translation as integral part of language study		Total
	No	Yes	
TEN or fewer	4	1	5
TWENTY or fewer	4	0	4
Many new words	3	1	4
Total	11	2	13

While no significant correlation was observed between vocabulary acquisition and participants' prior experience in working with translation, the same does not hold true for idiomatic expressions. When we examined the relation between progress with the number of acquired idiomatic expressions and prior experience working with translation as an integral part of language study, as can be seen in Table 2, we observed a significant relationship between these two variables.

Table 2. Number of acquired idiomatic expressions by
prior experience with translation

Number of acquired idiomatic expressions	Experience working with translation as an integral part of language study		Total
	No	Yes	
I did not learn any new idiomatic expressions	2	0	2
I learned a couple of idiomatic expressions	9	1	10
I learned several new idiomatic expressions	0	1	1
Total	11	2	13

Similarly, a significant correlation was observed between the number of acquired idiomatic expressions and work modality, whereby participants who worked on the transcript and the translation seemed to have acquired more idiomatic expressions than the one participant who worked solely on the Arabic transcript.

Table 3. Number of acquired idiomatic expressions by modality of project partner work

Work modality			
Number of acquired idiomatic expressions	We both worked on the Arabic transcript AND the translation	I translated into English and my partner worked on the Arabic transcript	Total
I did not learn any new idiomatic expressions	1	1	2
I learned a couple of idiomatic expressions	10	0	10
I learned several new idiomatic expressions	1	0	1
Total	12	1	13

Discussion

The present paper describes an interlingual subtitling project between colloquial Arabic and English that was carried out

with a group of (13) language learners at the advanced level. The purpose of the study was to assess the effectiveness of translating audiovisual materials, and of translation in general, in the incidental acquisition of vocabulary with regard to less commonly taught languages.

The findings of this research demonstrate that the project participants were able to expand their repertoire of vocabulary by an average of 15 new words per participant. Over half of the participants (N=7) indicated their ability to use these words actively (productive recall), while the remainder indicated their ability to understand these words in speech (receptive recall). The list of words that was produced by each participant is largely in line with the noticing hypothesis put forward by Schmidt (2001), according to which the more exposure learners have to a certain vocabulary item, the more successful noticing is (also Ellis 2003). In fact, the list produced by the participants contains high-frequency words that were frequently repeated throughout the film.

Similarly, the results on the syntax/sentence structure components also demonstrate a deeper understanding by the participants of how sentence structure works in colloquial Arabic as stated by the overwhelming majority of the participants (12 out of 13). With regard to the participants' acquisition of new idiomatic expressions, the results were modest in terms of both the number of expressions acquired

(10 participants acquired only a couple of new expressions) and the examples that participants produced.

The results reported on the language component of the questionnaire are generally in line with previous empirical studies with regard to the acquisition of new vocabulary and understanding of syntactic structures, with the exception of the acquisition of idiomatic expressions. The results of the pre-project questionnaire, however, demonstrated a lower listening proficiency perceived by all participants. The development of listening proficiency, particularly in diglossic languages such as Arabic, can be quite problematic, which indicates a much-needed emphasis on listening particularly in informal settings where the colloquial variety of the language is used.

The progress made by the project participants was evaluated on three combined variables that together indicate the extent of such progress: the number of acquired vocabulary items, the number of acquired idiomatic expressions, and improvement in confidence. In processing the data, we looked closer for any significant association between these combined progress variables and the following three independent variables: the participants' exposure to audiovisual materials, working with translation as an integral part of their language study, and work modality. A strong correlation was observed between the progress made by participants and their regular exposure to translation activities, which leads us to hypothesize

that learners who are more engaged in L2 translation activities are more receptive to processing and internalizing new input. Similarly, participants who have worked in the past on translation as an integral part of their study have made more progress in the learning outcomes of the project. Finally, the one participant who reported working solely on the closed captioning part of the project made the least progress.

Furthermore, the results demonstrate that language learners perceive translation to be an effective way for them to reach their language goals, as indicated by all of the study participants. This particular result is relevant as, by rule of exclusion, it implies that the hesitancy of teaching practitioners and administrators to employ translation activities as an integral part of language instruction could be at the root of its disuse in language classrooms. With regard to the non-language components of the questionnaire, the results demonstrate an increase in the participants' confidence in taking on authentic listening materials in colloquial Arabic as well as their interest in learning the skill of subtitling and that of using a subtitling software (9 participants).

The main limitation of this study was the lack of numerical data to support and accurately measure the progress made by participants in terms of vocabulary acquisition. While other studies have used pre- and posttests to assess the participants' mastery of the vocabulary items and their ability

to use them correctly, the extended length of the audiovisual material for this study has rendered it impossible to create a meaningful pool of vocabulary that participants can be tested on. Similarly, the small number of participants and the fact that participation in the project was mandatory made it difficult to split the participants in order to form a control group.

As more empirical studies on interlingual subtitling continue to support the argument for its effectiveness in learning vocabulary, there is a strong need for more studies that investigate its effectiveness in learning syntax. This recommendation, made by Ghia in 2012 regarding the lack of syntax-related studies still stands true. Additionally, there is a need for investigative studies that engage with less commonly taught languages with the specific challenges that they bring to language instruction. Finally, a valuable addition to the present body of studies would be an investigation into the effectiveness of interlingual subtitling as opposed to intralingual subtitling in learning L2 vocabulary.

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