

Putting the Reader in the Picture: Intralingual Subtitles for foreign language-learners of Portuguese

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Abstract

Audiovisual Translation (AVT), in the form of subtitles, can be regarded as a mediator of cross-cultural communication and an aid in foreign-language learning. This paper focuses on intralingual subtitles and the language competences observed with a sample of foreign learners of Portuguese (of mixed linguistic backgrounds) where audiovisual materials with and without intralingual subtitles were used. The study indicated that the presence of subtitles provided more comprehensible language input, for both the reading and listening skills, facilitated effective self-study and was regarded as a motivating tool to use.

Key words: intralingual subtitles; foreign-language learning.

Introduction

Screen translation is generally taken to mean subtitling and/or dubbing but there are other forms of language transfer currently used by the audiovisual industry such as: narration, free-commentary, voice-over and captioning or intralingual/teletext subtitling.

Throughout this article the terms captions, teletext and intralingual subtitles all refer to closed captions – the textual discourse normally created for hearing-impaired viewers.

The Study

The aim of this study was to test the usefulness of the option of same-language subtitled viewing material for foreign-language learning whilst accommodating learners with different interlanguages (from different interlingual backgrounds), different learning styles (also stemming from the traditional mode of translation in their country of origin) and different needs (subjects' profiles are discussed in subsection 'The Sample').

It also aimed at making learners aware that they can adapt this audiovisual learning resource to their own particular needs and styles. We hoped to show that a within-subjects examination might demonstrate how each condition treatment has an effect on students'

performance in different vocabulary tests and overall comprehension (*cf.* concept of 'effect')

Another objective was to try to assess which types of programmes especially need subtitles for comprehension purposes. Owing to space constraints, the questionnaires, tests and task sheets could not be included here.

Given the students' different interlingual backgrounds, a brief questionnaire on their television-viewing habits and preferences was administered at the start of the study to assess their reactions to subtitled television programmes. At the end of the study a similar questionnaire was again administered to test for possible significant changes regarding attitude and to test for students' perception of knowledge gained via the viewed material, with or without subtitles. These perceptions were gathered by means of students' self-report technique whereby they expressed their reactions, comments and opinions. Examples of such student comments and reactions can be found in subsection 'Results'.

The viewing material consisted of a variety of genre, presentation, content, style and pace. The same programme type, but different passages, was shown once with subtitles and once without. Tests were administered during or after each viewing session to test for word recognition, word meaning and general comprehension of programme content. Subjects were asked to consider the degree of their dependence on the written text (when available), by means of a direct question at the end of some task-sheets.

Thus, the effects of using Portuguese subtitles or no subtitles with Portuguese language soundtrack on students' listening/reading comprehension were tested. The present study differs from previous research on intralingual subtitling in that the same informants are tested on both conditions – subtitled and non-subtitled materials. It also addresses a different target language – Portuguese.

Our own position in this study was one of observer and at the same time part of the experimental protocol. We handled the few minutes of the viewing sessions and post-viewing questions/tests.

Research Questions

1. Do students react more or less favourably to subtitled television programmes depending on their country of origin and foreign language policy in that country?
2. Do Portuguese-language DVD soundtrack materials with or without Portuguese-language subtitles affect students' listening/reading comprehension?

The Sample

The sample consisted of a *convenience* or *opportunity* sample insofar as participants possessed certain key characteristics convenient for the purpose of the investigation, apart from the relative ease of accessibility (Dornyei, 2003). The criteria to be met were: diversity of language backgrounds, some knowledge of the L2/FL and availability during the month of August (pure beginners were not considered, as well as those of Portuguese descent or having immediate family members fluent in Portuguese).

The participants were a group of 42 students enrolled at the University of the Algarve for the Summer Course in Portuguese as a Foreign Language (*Português Língua Estrangeira*). After an initial placement test consisting of written, grammatical exercises and an oral interview, implemented by the department's language teachers, the students were divided into four levels of competence: beginner, elementary, intermediate and advanced.

¹ Andrew Chesterman (1993: 13) defines 'effect' in the empirical study of translation effects, as "a change of mental state (emotional, cognitive, etc.) in the reader". This he designates as a proximate effect, not directly observable. Some secondary effects are defined as the subsequent actions and are observable; can also be called behavioural effects. "Other effects are less easily observed (effects due to an increase of knowledge, an aesthetic experience, etc.)".

The group of beginners (10) was not considered appropriate for our study since there is evidence, in other documented research, that a minimum level of foreign-language proficiency is necessary for this resource to be of significant benefit (*cf.* Danan, 2004; Neuman & Koskinen, 1992; Lambert & Holobow, 1984). The remaining thirty-two students distributed over the three levels: elementary (12), intermediate (11) and advanced (9) constituted our groups of informants. In the advanced group, a participant from Canada, of Portuguese descent and an almost native-speaker, was also not considered. The subjects' ages ranged between 20 and 66, although the average age was 23 (23 participants: 71.8 % between the ages of 20 and 28; 4 in the 30's – 12.5 % and 4 between the ages of 50 and 66, also 12.5 %). The most frequent mother tongue was Italian (13 – 40.6 %) followed by Spanish (8 – 25 %). Other mother tongues were French, German, Dutch, Flemish, English, Bulgarian and Japanese. Most of the subjects were university students, mostly in Language or Communication courses and those not studying already held a university degree. A few had Portuguese language as a subject in their degree, but not necessarily as a major. There were 23 female subjects (72 %) and 9 male subjects (28 %).

Setting

The research setting was established at the University of the Algarve as it provided a group of informants with mixed language backgrounds, thus providing an environment in which our first research question could be addressed. Also, the geographical setting allowed the researcher to personally implement the tasks and tests/questionnaires, as she teaches at this institution and obtained permission to carry out the study. An added advantage to this personal intervention was the possibility presented to collect additional data from daily observations during the tasks as well as students' verbal feedback on the activities, in an informal manner.

Materials

In order to expose students to a variety of genres and pace in authentic language, a compilation of Portuguese-language viewing material was made, consisting of: subtitled and non-subtitled excerpts of a musical programme, a dramatic feature film, cartoons, a cartooned news bulletin, a documentary and a soap opera. They presented a high audio/video correlation in which the pictorial images corresponded fairly closely to the content of the soundtrack and the captions. Exceptions were the informative programme (documentary – "*Consigo*") on the Lisbon underground and the elderly population in the city, and the political cartoons – "*Contra-Infomação*" – in news format (here the pictorial information was reduced but soundtrack and subtitles, when in that mode, were in synchrony).

Portuguese public television services are operated by RTP (*Rádio Televisão Portuguesa*, which has two domestic channels, *RTP1* and *RTP2* and external services – *RTP África* and *RTP Internacional*) and the commercially independent channels SIC and TVI. Captioned/teletext subtitled programmes became available in the public channels in 1999 and on the two private channels in 2003. The number of available subtitled teletext programmes was, at the time of this study, as follows: a total average of 5 daily programmes in both public channels and 4 in the two private channels. In Portugal, teletext subtitles are identifiable by the symbol and accessed on teletext pages 887 and 888 (as per figures 1 and 2).

The first and foremost criterion for choosing the viewing materials was that they should be from contemporary authentic sources. By 'authentic' we mean produced in Portuguese for a native-speaking audience of Portuguese and not designed for learners of Portuguese as a foreign language. The value of authentic text to language learners as opposed to materials manipulated for pedagogical purposes has long been recognized (eg. Porter and Roberts, 1981).



Figura 1 – Teletext symbol only.



Figure 2 – Teletext subtitles on screen.

Another criteria to be met was that the subject matter of the segments should be relevant and of interest to the average student in the groups, bearing in mind the average age group but also the *sui generis* context in which these courses are held. By this we mean that students enrolling in these summer language courses, based on previous knowledge and experience, are interested in learning the foreign language but also extremely motivated in "taking in" as much cultural information as possible.

After selecting the segments to be viewed we asked the three language teachers to view them and evaluate them on comprehensibility of the language and overall appropriateness. Apart from two segments that had slight background noise interference, the others were considered appropriate. The corpus consisted of six diverse genres, each genre containing a segment with captions and a segment without captions. These different genres depicted different speech act situations. Each segment was between 4 – 6 minutes in length and altogether were the following:

- "*The Symphonic Concert by Madredeus*" recorded live at Stadsschouwburg Brugge (musical concert). The creative use of language in this segment contained lyric speech, with added elements of repetition, rhyme and rhythm.
- "*Floresta Mágica*" (animated feature film). This is a light comedy with layer of voice characterizations of animals and plants. Simple register. Although this is not a Portuguese production, the film had been dubbed for cinema and DVD, with a Portuguese native-speaking audience in mind.
- "*Adeus, Pai*" – dramatic feature film with monologic and dialogic situations, with focus on register and emotional tone.
- "*Contra-Informação*" - political cartoons in news bulletin format. Emphasis is on situational humour, tone of voice and irony. The caricature puppet figures in this production target the field of political or public current affairs (both national and international), as well as important sports events and well-known personalities. It follows the same format as the news bulletins on all the channels. Serious matters are handled in a comic, satirical manner. National news programmes or regional news were not chosen, as they are not subtitled; they imply a quasi-live process of subtitling.
- "*Consigo*" – documentary feature with monologue speech, emphasis on narrative details, reported sociological facts and events in the city of Lisbon.
- "*Morangos com Açúcar*" – contemporary popular soap opera with dialogic situations, focusing on teenage interpersonal relationships. Light, fast-paced register, loaded with cultural references.

The subtitles for both feature films were standard translation subtitles found in foreign films ("*Adeus, Pa!*" is a Portuguese production but "*Floresta Mágica*", as mentioned earlier, is Spanish; both offered the option of Portuguese subtitles for Portuguese soundtrack). The subtitles for the other programmes, although identical in format, were teletext subtitles, created purposefully for hearing-impaired viewers. It is worth mentioning that not all teletext programmes in Portugal offer the supplementary features of references to sounds, noises, etc.; some merely resemble conventional interlingual subtitles.

Methodology

The first task was an initial questionnaire to find out students' television viewing habits, in terms of subtitled or dubbed material. The questionnaire contained simple wording items and closed-ended questions, except for one item where informants were asked to elaborate a little further should they normally travel to places or study in places where Portuguese is spoken. Apart from this item, respondents did not have to produce any free writing but just choose one of the alternative answers supplied. As students had different levels of foreign-language proficiency (Portuguese), this seemed the most appropriate question type. The questionnaire was shown to the three language teachers for their feedback on coherence, explicitness and accessible language for all levels of proficiency. The terms 'subtitling', 'teletext', 'dubbing', L1 and L2 were duly explained before completion of the first questionnaire. Additionally, the initial and final questionnaires and task-sheets for three segments were tested and validated with a small group of foreign students (learning Portuguese) at a Lisbon university, in July.

The aim of the study was explained to students, as viewing sessions were to take place during their class time. However, their participation in the questionnaires and post-viewing tasks would be totally voluntary. We asked if there were any objections to participating in this activity and no objections were raised in the three groups of students.

To ensure maximum confidence regarding participant identification we established that an identification code be created on the basis of: group level – Advanced, Intermediary or Elementary –, and individual nationality. Thus, a 5-character code would serve to indicate: the student's level, by using the first letter – A, I or E –, followed by 3 characters, letters or digits, of personal choice and a last letter indicating the nationality². For example, one of the students created the code A123i, indicating that he/she was in the Advanced level, was informant '123' and was of Italian nationality. Considering the language of instruction was Portuguese, the nationality codes appear as: *a-alemão* (German), *e-espanhol* (Spanish), *h-holandês* (Dutch). We also checked for possible repetitions of codes amongst the participants. In the case of only subject in a particular nationality, the anonymity was reduced but throughout the study names were never associated to nationalities or codes. Thus, the promise of confidentiality was ensured and to avoid further questions on demographic data such as age, gender, educational status, academic major and occupation, the course coordinator allowed the researcher access to the file with the participants' course enrolment documentation.

At the beginning of each viewing session the subjects were briefly told about the content of the material and corresponding awareness raising and orientating tasks were handed out before viewing took place. These were content comprehension questions designed to test the level of the students' comprehension of the language of each segment and to provide quantitative data to compare the captioned and uncaptioned versions of the materials. Considering the diverse native-languages of the students the comprehension checks had to be written in the target language, thus wording of the questions was as close to the lexicon of the original segments as possible. Students were asked to read through the questions. The researcher clarified any existing doubts.

² An adaptation from Dornyei, 2003: 94.

Homogeneity (as far as possible, given that segments were different) between both viewing conditions was important as we hoped to assess possible changes in opinion regarding attitude towards subtitled material and, to analyse the difference in performance under the two separate conditions, whilst communication settings remained identical, other than the presence or absence of captions/teletext subtitles.

All viewing sessions were held in the classrooms at the University of the Algarve, using a standard DVD player and a TV set.

A total number of twelve testing segments, two questionnaires and two vocabulary recall/retention tests were held between August 2 and August 22. The initial questionnaire was held on the August 2 and the final questionnaire on August 22.

The first "Vocabulary Recall and Retention" test was administered after the first three genre types had been viewed, halfway through the course. The second "Vocabulary Recall and Retention" test was set after viewing the six text types, at the end of the course. Drawing on Garza (1991) the questions were given in advance of the task viewing, as this was not a memory test but an evaluation of content comprehension. All the subsequent segments and task sheet completion proceeded in the same manner. The data generated from these task sheets were then tabulated and organized into tables for easy comparison.

The scoring system was constructed with one point awarded for each correct answer in the task sheet. Task-sheets generally had 10 items in the form of multiple-choice answers to questions or incomplete statements that required students to provide the missing information. Exceptions were the musical segments, which contained 15 items each and to the first Vocabulary Recall and Retention test, also with 15 items.

Results

a. Students' perceptions on subtitled material

The first collected set of data and results were the students' opinions regarding the use of teletext subtitles. Amongst the total of 32 students, at the start of the course, there were 10 subjects who regarded teletext subtitles as distracting or disturbing. The remaining 22 considered it a useful resource. It is useful to reiterate the language policies in the European context of the countries from which the participants originate: the favoured mode in Holland and in some parts of Belgium is subtitling. In France, Germany, Spain and Italy, the preferred alternative is dubbing. Bulgaria seems to dub most of its programmes. Japan prefers subtitling and in America, the Federal Communications Commission issued regulations requiring most programmes to have captions by the start of 2006³. Finally, Venezuela is a country of dubbing preferences.

The reading of subtitles, whether the viewer is used to it or not, appears to be an automatic activity resulting from the priority of visual over verbal input (d'Ydewalle, Praet, Verfaillie & Van Rensbergen: 1991). When viewers who are not used to subtitles complain of the experience it is because processing subtitles requires more cognitive resources (Danan, 1992: 499).

Examples of some of the comments written in the first questionnaire, accounting for their negative views on subtitles are given below.

- "Distraem, porque se estou lendo as legendas não vejo o filme!" (Issal)
[They are distracting because if I am reading the subtitles I cannot watch the film.]
- "Se lemos as legendas não podemos ver bem o filme, nem ouvir a fala dos personagens." (I777I).

³ For complete FCC rules regarding Spanish, English and emergency captioning, visit http://www.cpcweb.com/Captioning/govt_regulations.htm

[If we read the subtitles we cannot watch the film properly, nor hear the characters' speeches].

The 10 subjects who viewed subtitles in a negative light were 8 from Italy and 2 from Spain, countries with a dubbing tradition. At the end of the 12 viewing segments the results indicated that only one Italian subject remained with an unaltered opinion.

Regarding the subjects' opinions that reading subtitles distracts from hearing or from the visual image, eye-movement research on Dutch-speaking viewers suggests that viewers are able to switch from the image to the subtitle without any effort.

Also, reading the subtitles does not distract the viewers from hearing the soundtrack, as it is an automatically elicited behaviour (d'Ydewalle et al.: 1991).

Again some remarks (the verbatim original statements are followed by a corrected translation) from the students who changed their opinions and stated the following:

- "São úteis para um estrangeiro que precise de aprender a escrever português" (Eabcl)
[They are useful to a foreigner who needs to learn to write in Portuguese].
- "Sim, acho que as legendas podem ajudar mas prefiro fazer com DVD onde eu posso acabar ou começar quando eu quero" (Eanal).
[Yes, I believe subtitles can be helpful but I prefer to use DVD on my own as I can start and finish when I like].
- "Mudei, porque antes achava que as legendas perturbassem as aulas. Só quando já tinha mais vocabulário comecei a apreciar a utilidade das legendas" (lcecl).
[I changed my mind as before I thought subtitles would disturb the lessons. Only when I had acquired more vocabulary did I start to appreciate the usefulness of subtitles].
- "prefiro leer as legendas que ouvir a tradução por causa da pronuncia" (lclal).
[I prefer to read the subtitles to hearing the translation because of pronunciation].

However, amongst the positive perceptions and answers, there was one French student who said: "ao início achava que as legendas podiam ser muito úteis mas agora já não tenho tanta certeza; fico a saber quanta informação ainda estou a perder". [At first I thought subtitles could be useful but now I am not so sure; I am aware of how much information I still miss when they are not there]. Raising awareness was one of our objectives but perhaps this student's disappointment stems from his awareness of text dependence. Our conviction is that over a lengthier period of time listening comprehension will improve and text dependence will diminish.

As expected, in the musical segments all three groups performed better in the subtitled condition. The total number of students, 32, totalled 344 correct answers out of a possible total of 480. The aural comprehension in these segments was less accessible because of less clear articulation of sounds and rhythm.

The segments of the animated film produced unexpected data. Several students – 12 out of 32 (37.5 %) – scored higher in the non-subtitled mode. After viewing the second segment without subtitles an additional item on the task sheet queried the ease or difficulty of each of the two segments. Examples of participants' responses (here translated) from subjects who got more correct answers in the non-subtitled mode were:

- "Sem legendas podia ver melhor o filme" (AmecE).
[Without subtitles I could watch the film better].
- "Prefiro ver os filmes sem legendas; posso olhar melhor as cenas"(lclal).
[I preferred to watch the film without subtitles; I could look at the scenes better].
- "Eu não olhei de propósito para as legendas, para poder ver melhor as imagens, escutar melhor as personagens e aproveitar o filme" (l777l).
[I deliberately avoided looking at the subtitles, in order to concentrate on the pictures and sound and to enjoy the film].

The last remark was from the student in the Intermediate group who scored zero in both segments. Given that this was a well-known film to most of the students, they were familiar with the content and, especially the Spanish-speaking students and the Italians, did not concentrate on the dialogues too closely. The task-sheet for the captioned mode tested comprehension of idiomatic expressions. Overall there were only 36 % correct answers, a total of 115 out of 320. The score with the non-captioned segment indicated a similar result – 126 correct answers, amounting to 39 %. The biggest deviance occurred in the Intermediate group, with 34 correct answers in the captioned segment and 50 correct answers in the non-captioned one. A plausible explanation is that the Advanced group coped better than the other two groups in deciphering the meaning of idiomatic expressions. The Intermediate group had difficulty with the meaning of the idioms, albeit with subtitles, and performed better in the second task sheet, which just required general understanding of the plot. The Elementary group performed poorly in both modes – 30.8 % of correct answers in the subtitled mode and 32.5 % in the non-subtitled – indicating that the content was too far above their level of comprehension. We are aware that the aimed-for homogeneity between both segments was not achieved in this case, as comprehension language checks differed substantially from the subtitled to the non-subtitled mode.

b. Overall results

The table below indicates the percentages of correct answers for the different programmes. We have placed the subtitled mode and the respective results in descending order. Thus, the news programme had the highest percentage of correct answers – 80 % and the animated film the lowest – 36 %. With the exception of this last programme – the animated film- results for all other text types indicated the beneficial presence of subtitles, which in some cases, led to more than twice the number of correct answers compared to the same text in the non-subtitled mode.

Table 1 – Percentage of correct answers.

Programme / subtitled	%	Programme / no subtitles	%
News	80 %	News	28 %
Feature Film	72 %	Feature film	39 %
Musical	71 %	Musical	27 %
Documentary	64 %	Documentary	44 %
Soap Opera	54 %	Soap Opera	33 %
Animated Film	36 %	Animated Film	39 %

c. Vocabulary recall and retention tests

The first test, implemented after six days of viewing segments, was designed to assess participants' degree of vocabulary recall and retention. It covered items taken from the first three categories: musical segments, animated film and the feature film but only in the subtitled versions. Thus, this was a delayed written vocabulary production post-test.

The results were very similar to those obtained in the second test, which followed the same format but covered the next three texts: news bulletin, the documentary and the soap opera (See tables 12 and 13 on the next page. Test 1 contained 15 items and Test 2 only 10). A note on these type of tests seems appropriate: Linda Jones (2004: 4) explains that although recognition and recall tests are often used to examine students' vocabulary

knowledge, test and measurement studies indicate that they are different forms of testing and demand separate processing strategies. Recognition tests usually involve multiple-choice activities and students select a correct response from a list of alternatives given. Recall tests offer no answers and require students to call upon their memories of the newly acquired vocabulary and produce their own responses. In the case of the two delayed vocabulary tests in this study, there was a mixture of multiple choice items and production items.

Discussion

The accepted fallacy that the language policy in a country meets with the target audience expectations has been somewhat shaken with the results here. It seems acceptable to conclude that within such a small representativeness, generalizations regarding our first research question cannot be made. Thus, not all subjects coming from dubbing countries reacted negatively to the subtitled material. Amongst the French, German, Italian and Spanish, 15 subjects viewed subtitled material favourably from the start of the course, contrary to our expectations and the subjects from subtitling countries all claimed to regard subtitled material favourably, as expected. The task-sheet data indicated participants' positive response to intralingual subtitles but we are aware of the limitations of such a reduced sample.

Also, bearing in mind Chesterman's warning of "the sampling problem" (1993: 16) how typical are these participants in terms of TV viewing? ⁴ They ranged from some to quite a high proficiency in the FL – Portuguese – unlike most viewers from the wider set of the general public of viewers. Their motivation is different to that of the average TV viewer, considering their enrolment in a foreign-language course abroad.

Furthermore, we cannot take for granted that current policies in the different countries of our sample are policies tailored to the requirements of the target population. From comments the students made it was clear that there have been changes in audience's preferences and these have not been borne in mind in the policy-making. For example, it seems, based on informal feedback from the participants, that in France and Germany the younger audience enjoys listening to original foreign products and would prefer to have more available subtitled material.

Films frequently offer both alternatives but TV productions remain mostly dubbed. In Bulgaria a similar situation was related.

Judging from the percentages of correct answers in the subtitled segments, compared to the poorer results in the non-subtitled ones, subtitled material seems to have affected listening/reading comprehension positively. Although some participants stated their preference for ignoring the subtitles in the animated film, their performance in the non-subtitled mode did not improve. Thus, it seems reasonable to hypothesize that with this particular text type, and with some subjects, subtitles produced no effect on their listening/reading comprehension.

The materials without subtitles produced low performances in the task sheets, thereby having no effect on the listening comprehension.

Although we did not carry out formal auditory exercises to assess the listening skill specifically, overall comprehension was evaluated and the listening parameter is a necessary component for such comprehension to occur.

⁴ In discussing investigation on the effects a given translation has on readers, Chesterman raises the problem of typicality or atypicality of readers. Often, the subjects chosen for samples are highly atypical as they belong to professional or social subsets that differ from the wider set of the general public. They have "an in-built focus [...] unlike most naive typical readers" (1993: 16). The same problem can be raised in the selection of any sample of subjects.

The results of this study, although not generalizable, have important implications for captioned TV as a means of providing more comprehensible input.

This can be inferred from the results in the subtitled conditions, despite the level of competence in L2/FL influencing the students' ability to acquire vocabulary through context. Direct teacher intervention with specific instructional strategies sensitive to their level was necessary (Neuman & Koskinen, 1995: 104). Also, as audiovisual material is a medium with an invariant pace, students at times would have benefited more if the opportunity within a session to review the segments had been possible.

The text types that most needed the support of subtitles were the segments on music, the news with the puppet figures and the soap opera. Music posed difficulty because of the manner of word articulation and the other two presented problems of culture and lack of knowledge of plot and characters.

In summary, we can conclude that exposure to subtitled audiovisual materials had a 'proximate effect' on some participants – a change of opinion regarding the benefits of subtitles – and some 'secondary effects' on several subjects. The observable effects were: we noticed that some of the participants jotted down words/phrases during the viewing and sometimes after the viewing and after answering the question sheets. They then consulted dictionaries to look up unknown meanings of words. The less observable ones appeared as an increase in knowledge and their comments on how they had enjoyed the DVD sessions, an aesthetic experience (at least for most of them).

Also worth considering is whether the mixed source languages, ranging from Romance languages to Bulgarian and Japanese can address the issue of language-generalizability (*cf.* Garza: 1991 on Russian). Research on viewing programmes in a foreign language that sounds familiar to the viewer proved that language and vocabulary acquisition were higher than when the flow of sounds is more unfamiliar. D'Ydewalle & Pavakunun (1997) exposed Dutch-Belgian high school children to subtitled television programmes with soundtracks in Afrikaans and German, languages similar to their mother tongue. Those exposed to soundtracks in Chinese and Russian had a poorer performance than the first group.

Conclusions

Our first conclusion is that flexibility should be advocated in the selection of the method in screen translation – dubbing, subtitling, voice-over, etc. – which best fits the audience and their needs. Countries with a dubbing tradition should be sensitive to the changes in the preferences of their viewing audiences.

Secondly, we believe the use of captioned and non-captioned audiovisual material helped learners of Portuguese "acquire more of the cultural script" that native speakers share (Price, 1983: 8). The order or presentation of the video materials for the two condition treatments was generally the same – first captioned followed by non-captioned, although with the segments "*Contra-Informação*" the order was reversed. The first condition, the one that most facilitated comprehension and thus, language learning, could be interpreted to indicate that students would benefit from viewing only segments with captions. As our study only contemplated one instance of a different order of presentation, further research would be needed to find out if viewing a non-captioned segment first, followed by a captioned segment produces different results.

Also, as with any limited study, similar captioning research should be further conducted amongst monolingual foreign students and amongst a larger group of informants. It is also hoped that in the future these findings can be transferred and applied to a distinct current reality in Portugal: the significant number of Eastern-European immigrants living and working in the country, mainly Ukrainians and Russians and having to learn Portuguese as a second language; awareness of the facility of teletext subtitles and their benefits would be a powerful aid to this portion of the population.

During class observation and in subsequent informal interviews it was noted how this pedagogical aid was regarded by learners and the information seems relevant for future studies: learners stated that it provided more comprehensible language input, that it facilitates effective self study and that it is motivating to use.

Furthermore, same-language subtitles can be used for a variety of purposes. In the advanced group, where subjects were more orally competent than subjects in the other levels, the reading word recognition and comprehension skills of the foreign-language could be improved through the availability of the teletext subtitles in the foreign-language. When listening skills are weaker and reading skills more advanced, foreign-language learners can rely on the teletext subtitles to improve their listening skills (as reported in Markham, 1999: 327).

We hope to have had students interacting with the materials, in this pilot study, and to have provided the group of 32 learners an opportunity for them to focus, not only on language but on the learning process itself. Also, that motivation and attitude awareness would lead learners to explore these technological resources as a learning device, to be done inside and outside the classroom and in an autonomous fashion. Given the time constraints in this small-scale study, we did not assist the viewers with more prescriptive guidelines to viewing nor were other related activities explored, as this was meant to be a quasi non-instructional setting. We recall Vanderplank's views on this issue, based on his explanation of cognitive and affective domains:

The autonomous learner needs not only conscious and reflective control over the dynamic stream of speech which closed captions/teletext subtitles help to provide, but also a specifically educational orientation to viewing which may be assisted by active tutoring, task setting and an integration of activities using different media (1994: 119).

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The full detailed study can be found in the dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment for the Diploma in Advanced Studies in the Doctoral Program in Translation and Intercultural Studies at Universitat Rovira I Virgili, Spain.

The television viewing segments were taken from the RTP and the TVI channels. Several attempts were made, via telephone and emails, for obtaining the broadcasters' authorization for using the recorded materials solely for pedagogical purposes. To this date, and a year later, no formal response was received.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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