Project-based approach in subtitler training: a case study of subtitling pre-WWII films for the Polish National Film Archive

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CTER 2016, Kraków

Project-based translator training

Project-based translator training

- Empowerment of students in their learning process
  - Constructing their own knowledge
  - Assuming responsibility of their own learning through collaborative work
- Authentic assignments
  - 'the collaborative undertaking of complete translation projects for real clients' (Kiraly 2005)
- Departure from
  - 'Who takes the next sentence' approach to more learner-centred, task-based training
  - Transmissionist view of competence acquisition
- 'Providing students with opportunities to work authentically on the real-world translation market' (Kiraly 2005: 1109)

Don Kiraly (2000, 2005)

Kiraly – a subtitling project (2005)

- University (a subtitling tutor) was contacted by a small German film production company
- Translation into English
- The subtitling tutor taught them ‘the mechanics of Subtitle Workshop’ in two 90-minute sessions
- Divided the film into chunks to be translated in pairs by 14 students
- Prepare the subtitles, peer-review, full group review
- Completion time: 16 weeks

Kiraly (2005)

- *'The project developed a life of its own. It became the group's* raison d'etre*; the need for the teacher-centred transmission of knowledge and sticking to a lesson plan evaporated against the backdrop of our real-world responsitibilities: acquiring, creating and applying the knowledge needed to complete our project in a timely and competent manner'*
- *'As a sole native speaker informant in the class, I moved from group to group and provided assistance resolving difficulties involving vocabulary choice, idiomatic usage, stylistic infelicities and the like, and I also provided my constructive criticism as a translator and fellow novice subtitler'*

Subtitling pre-WWII films as the final project in a subtitling course at ILS

Subtitling course

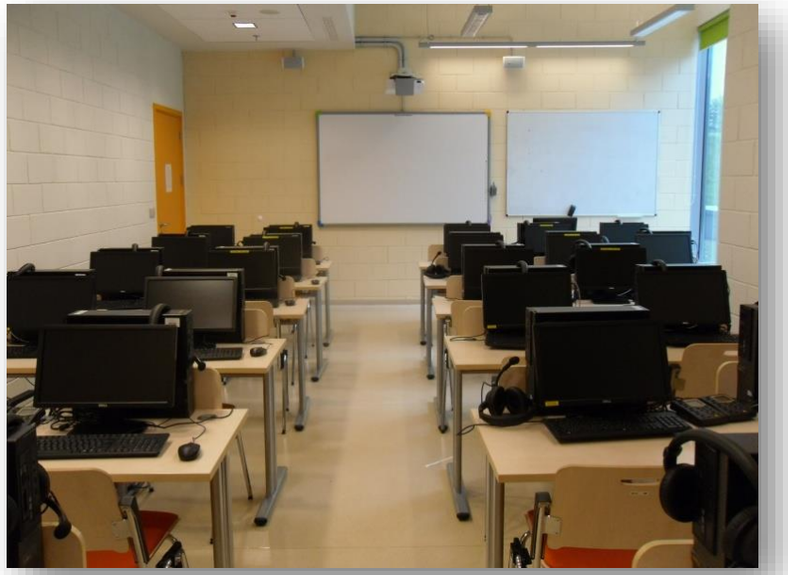
- 30 hour (15 meetings) face-to-face elective course
- 1st year of the MA programme
- VLE: Moodle platform
- 20 students in the class
- Languages
  - English – B or C
  - Polish – mother tongue

Subtitling infrastructure at ILS

- Professional subtitling software EZTitles

EZTitles®

  - Full licences in the university labs
  - Demo versions at home (up to 25 subtitles)



- Computer lab in the class
- Computer lab for students to work out of the class on home and final assignments

Polish National Film Archive

- PL: Filmoteka Narodowa
- State cultural institution that aims to protect of the national heritage in cinematography and dissemination of film culture
- NITROFILM PROJECT – digitisation and restoration of pre-war feature films (43 films)

http://www.nitrofilm.pl/strona/lang:en/index.html

„Znów taki straszny lęk mię ogarnia!!... Potworna zmora zatapia w me serce swe krzywe szpony!!... Haraldzie, ratuj mię... ratuj!!"
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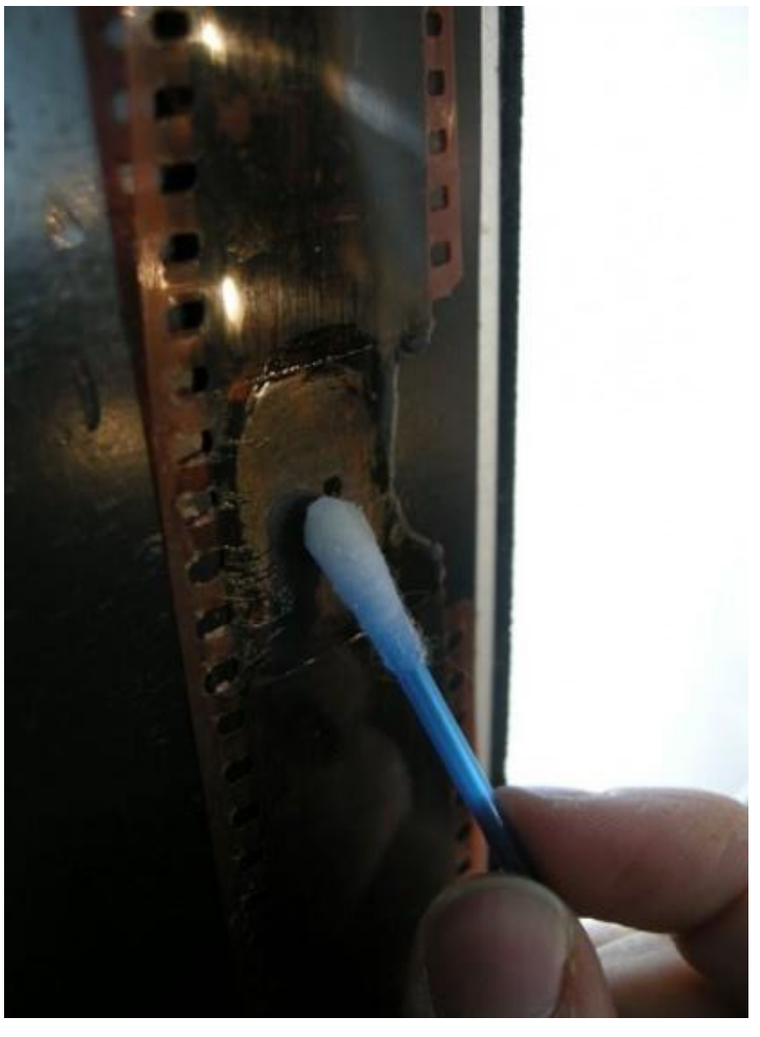

NITROFILM
Konserwacja i digitalizacja przedwojennych filmów fabularnych
w Filmotece Narodowej w Warszawie

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PO

Films subtitled in the project

- *ABC miłości* (1935)
- *Ada, to nie wypada* (1936)
- *Dwie Joasie* (1935)
- *Dziewczyna szuka miłości* (1937)
- *Przez łzy do szczęścia* (1939)
- *U kresu drogi* (1939)
- *Ludzie Wisły* (1938)

Course work & the final project

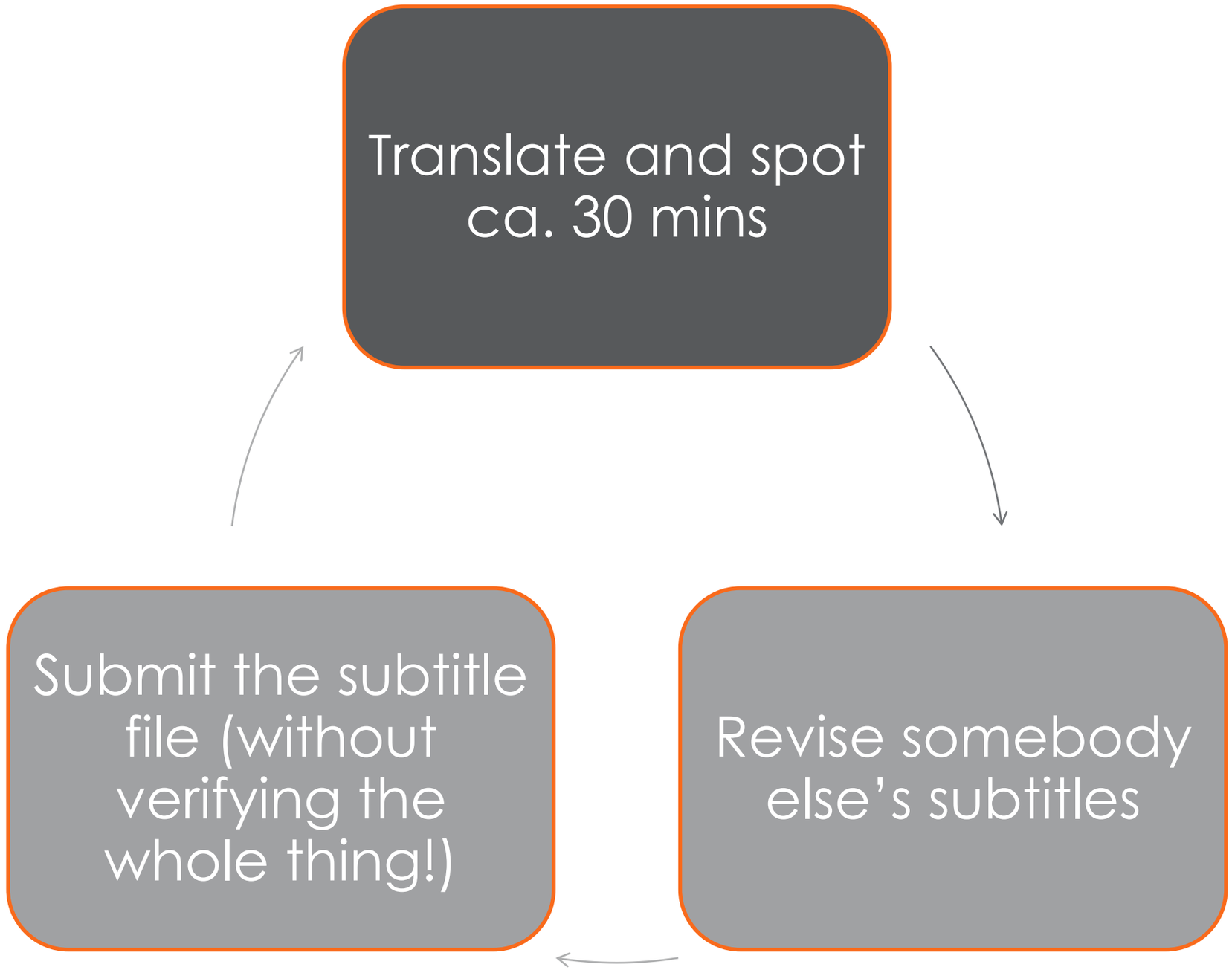
- Introduction to subtitling
- Parallel work on the final project and the regular course
- Time frame
  - November – students get the films and original scripts
  - mid-January – deadline for delivering subtitle files
- Group work
  - Moodle quiz functionality
  - 3 people per group (up to 30 mins per person)
  - Peer review within groups

Subtitling course syllabus	Project-based syllabus
1. Introduction to subtitling 2. Spotting – Method 1 3. Spotting and shot changes 4. Spotting – Method 2 5. Subtitling forms of address 6. Working with a template 7. Subtitling cultural references 8. Subtitling strong language 9. Subtitling with non-professional software 10. Subtitling for children 11. Subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (intralingual) 12. Subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (interlingual) 13. Subtitling into English 14. **Final test** 15. Results & discussion	1. Introduction to subtitling 2. Spotting – Method 1 3. Spotting and shot changes 4. Spotting – Method 2 5. Subtitling forms of address 6. Working with a template 7. Subtitling cultural references 8. Subtitling strong language 9. Subtitling into English 10. **Final assignments – discussion** 11.Subtitling with non-professional software 12. **Final assignments – discussion** 13. Subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (intralingual) **Deadline for final assignments** 14. Subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (interlingual) 15. Results & discussion

In-class work on the project (failure?)

- Some students did not manage to watch their films before coming to class
- Some students did not start translating, so they couldn't talk about difficulties
- Moodle discussion forum – not used at all

Division of work within each group of 3 students (done by students themselves)



Deadline – and then what?

- Subtitle files marked by the tutor
  - Less than 2 weeks for 7 films
  - Revise the files for them or just indicate problems?
  - Comments inserted with requests for revision
- Deadline for grading at the university – subtitle files not ready to be sent to the National Film Archive
- Students volunteered to revise the files after the course ended

Student feedback on final assignment

Real-life task

- *Very, very good idea. Especially the fact that* ***we knew that our translations will be used later****.*
- *In my opinion it was quite difficult and demanding, yet* ***I like the idea of creating something that has real use and will be helpful to someone****.*
- *I liked it, it was challenging. I'm glad I could take part in a larger project, out of university and to gain experience in real subtitling. I really appreciate that you planned the final assignment in such an interesting way, though of course it required a lot of work.*
- *loved the final assignment!*

Translation problems

- *It was very interesting, yet very demanding, but I found translating **the songs** quite amusing.*
- *It was difficult, as the people were using **outdated words and collocations** that are not meaningful anymore.*
- *Dated forms of address*
- Technical issues related to film quality

Time

- *It was a very very **time-consuming**, yet very interesting challenge :)*
- *Pretty hard and very **time-consuming**.*
- *It was great fun, but at the same time very difficult. **It took me ages to translate my part**. It was very demanding, but all in all, I enjoyed it.*

Work management

- *It was difficult to work on the assignment when ILS was closed for Christmas, so **we didn't manage to plan the work optimally**.*
- *Also, coordination for such a large project necessitates the people to be able to truly **rely on one another**.*
- *It was a very interesting experience. But I think we **didn't have enough time to complete it**. You had to hunt to be able to find a computer in the lab to be able to do this.*

Technical issues

- *Translating it was a very satisfying job, but at the same time really tiresome. I couldn't stay at ILS after the classes, so I had to prepare it at home on a* ***demo version*** *of EZTitles with maximum 25 subs per file.*

- *It was a stressful, but generally great experience. The only thing I didn't like about it was that I had to do it on my* ***demo version*** *of the programme and then merge all files into one using the university computer.*

Group work

- *The minus of the assignment was* ***the necessity to work in a group and taking responsibility for other people's work, which was quite problematic****.*
- *It taught me more than all the home assignments combined. It was hard and really time-consuming but, at the same time, interesting and satisfying. However,* ***I really don't like working in groups because there's not always a chance to choose someone you trust to work with and ILS forces students to work in groups constantly****.*

Other issues

- *Ok, though* ***doing stuff useful for someone for free feels stupid***
- *It was a great idea. But* ***I wish the final project was a part of the classes. I mean that it would be helpful if you, lecturer, was present while our facing problems when subtitling****.*
- *Really time-consuming and quite stressful at times (when programme does not work or some unexpected things occur.) At the end it was rewarding to see the effects, but* ***I would suggest that people should do shorter translations as final assignment (up to 10-15min****.)*

Problems from the tutor's perspective

- How much of the work should be done in class and how much as individual/group work?
- Spending the whole course/semester doing one project – limiting
- Unrepresentative of the market situation
- 'The market requires that the final product be of impeccable quality' (Kiraly 2005: 1109) – what if it isn't?

Conclusions

- ‘The ways of accomplishing these goals vary greatly from group to group, from project to project and from student to student’
  (Kiraly 2005: 1109)
- Students are used to trainer-centred didactic environment and transmissionist approach
- How to train transferrable skills?
  - Group work
  - Spotting
  - Research
- Payment for work?
- Time-consuming for the tutor

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