Colloquium Area "Contemporary Research in Mass-Media Translation and Interpretation"

OBSTACLES IN SHORT VIDEO TRANSLATION: A MULTIDIMENSIONAL APPROACH



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Received: January 4th, 2026 | Reviewed: January 5th, 2026 | Accepted: January 7th, 2026
UDC 81`25 | https://doi.org/10.62413/cqm.2026.34

Abstract

This study investigates the linguistic, cultural, and technical challenges faced by MA students when translating short video clips in EFL and translation courses. Data were collected via a questionnaire exploring students' perceptions of difficulties, confidence levels, and strategies employed during audiovisual translation tasks. Findings reveal that unfamiliar terminology and culture-specific references constitute the main obstacles, while speaker delivery and technical factors also affect performance. To address these challenges, students utilized a range of cognitive, metacognitive, and technological strategies, including note-taking, shadowing, repeated viewing, vocabulary preparation, and contextual inference. The results highlight the pedagogical potential of short video clips for developing translation competence and emphasize the importance of structured guidance, strategy instruction, and exposure to authentic audiovisual materials to optimize learning outcomes.

Keywords: *audiovisual translation, short video clips, interpreting, EFL, linguistic challenges, cultural competence, technical difficulties, translation pedagogy, note-taking strategies, MA students*

Introduction

Video-based instruction is widely acknowledged as an effective teaching and learning approach, and its educational impact has been extensively explored by researchers. Kay (2012) stated that video materials can substantially improve students' learning outcomes. In a similar vein, subsequent studies have confirmed the facilitating role of videos in the learning process (Ljubojevic *et alii*, 2014; Hsin & Cigas, 2013). Our study aims to explore the pedagogical value of short video clips in the development of MA students' translation skills. Its objectives are to analyze the linguistic, cultural, and technical difficulties encountered by students when translating short video content; to evaluate the effects of video-based audiovisual translation (AVT) tasks on comprehension, vocabulary acquisition, and interpreta-

tive abilities; and to propose recommendations for improving translation instruction through the use of video materials. Our research is going to answer the following questions: *How do short video clips contribute to developing students' translation and interpretation skills? What linguistic, cultural, and technical difficulties do MA students encounter when interpreting short videos?*

Literature Review

The concept of translation derives from the Latin term *translatio*, itself rooted in *transferre*, which in English means "to transfer." This verb consists of two components: *trans*, meaning "across," and *ferre*, meaning "to carry" or "to bring." Consequently, *transferre* may be understood as the act of "carrying across" meaning. Translation is generally viewed as a communicative activity that enables the transmission of meaning between languages; however, it entails far more than the mere transfer of content. It encompasses both written and oral forms of linguistic mediation, although spoken translation is more commonly referred to as interpreting. Furthermore, the term *translation* may denote the academic field of study, the final translated text, or the process of producing that text—often described as translating (Hatim & Munday, 2004, p. 3).

Whether regarded as a process or a product, translation plays a vital role in facilitating communication between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. It functions as a mediating link in contexts where differences in verbal and non-verbal behavior, expectations, background knowledge, and perspectives hinder effective interaction between sender and receiver. The metaphor of translation as a bridge between languages has generated extensive debate. As Firth (1997) observes, "Translators know they cross over but do not know by what sort of bridge. They often re-cross by a different bridge to check up again. Sometimes they fall over the parapet into limbo" (p. 27). Given that translation requires careful selection of vocabulary, expressions, and grammatical structures, it is the translator's responsibility to make informed and accurate choices in order to avoid such metaphorical missteps during the transfer of meaning.

Much of the preparatory and decision-making work involved in this act of "crossing" remains hidden from the readers of translated texts. The translator alone bears responsibility for these decisions, which is why translation is frequently characterized as a solitary activity. Ultimately, only the final product is visible, while the numerous interpretative routes explored during the process become irrelevant. Hatim and Mason (1990) emphasize this ongoing decision-making trajectory from the source language to the target language, noting that readers encounter only the outcome, not the dilemmas or alternatives faced by the translator along the way (p. 3). Naturally, not all decisions lead to perfect results, and the act of bridging two languages is rarely without flaws. Misinterpretations—or figurative "falls into limbo"—are inevitable, resulting in a wide range of humorous or problematic translation errors. Accordingly, this paper aims to explore some of the major challenges involved in identifying effective strategies for navigating between two languages.

Nord's functionalist perspective conceptualizes translation as a "purposeful activity" (1997). From this viewpoint, one of the central objectives of translation is to sustain a coherent relationship between the components of the source text and those of the target text during the metaphorical process of "crossing the bridge." This objective involves striving for an equivalent effect (Newmark, 1998, p. 48), that is, producing an impact on the target audience that is identical or as close as possible to that intended for the original readership. Nida (1994) refers to this principle as dynamic equivalence. The notion of equivalence has long been one of the most debated and contested concepts in translation theory. It has generated extensive scholarly discussion and has been approached, evaluated, and interpreted from a variety of theoretical perspectives, reflecting both its complexity and its central role in translation studies. For this reason, a concise overview of the main dimensions of equivalence in translation is necessary.

In *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Nida (1994) rejects traditional classifications such as "literal" (word-for-word), "free" (sense-for-sense), or "faithful" translation, proposing instead two core types of equivalence: formal and dynamic. Formal equivalence concentrates on the message itself, emphasizing both form and content (p. 159), and prioritizes close adherence to the structure of the source text. Accuracy and fidelity to the original are therefore the primary concerns of this approach. Dynamic equivalence, by contrast, seeks to ensure that "the relationship between receptor and message [is] substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message" (p. 159). This receptor-focused approach prioritizes intelligibility and naturalness, allowing for adjustments in grammar, lexis, and cultural references in order to achieve effective communication. Catford's (2000) approach to translation equivalence adopts a more strictly linguistic orientation, drawing on the theories of Firth and Halliday. He introduced the concept of translation shifts, which he defines as "departures from formal correspondence in the process of moving from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL)" (p. 141).

Building on the discussion of translation equivalence, Koller (1995) proposes a framework identifying five types of equivalence:

1. *Denotative equivalence*, which concerns the extra-linguistic content of a text, including context, subject matter, time, place, sender, and receiver, as well as affective elements such as humor, irony, and emotion;
2. *Connotative equivalence*, related to lexical choices, including terminology, near-synonyms, dialectal variations, and register;
3. *Text-normative equivalence*, which focuses on text types or genres;
4. *Pragmatic equivalence*, emphasizing the fluency, naturalness, and comprehensibility of the translation;
5. *Formal equivalence*, which takes into account the form and aesthetic qualities of the source text.

Translation Teaching through Video Clips

Over the past twenty years, research into the pedagogical applications of audiovisual translation (AVT) has steadily expanded. Scholars have primarily ex-

amined the educational advantages of both standard and reverse interlingual subtitling, investigating its effects on listening comprehension (Talaván, 2010), writing skills, vocabulary acquisition (Lertola, 2012), integrated language skills, intercultural competence (Borghetti, 2011; Borghetti & Lertola, 2014), and pragmatic awareness. Studies on intralingual subtitling have also indicated potential benefits for developing writing skills, although research in this area remains comparatively limited (Talaván *et alii*, 2016). In the domain of revoicing tasks, research has largely focused on dubbing. Initial proposals for integrating dubbing into language teaching emerged in the 1990s (Zohrevandi, 1994; Kumai, 1996), but empirical investigations into both intralingual and interlingual dubbing are relatively recent. Evidence suggests that intralingual dubbing positively affects speaking skills, while studies—though fewer—indicate that interlingual dubbing can enhance both speaking and writing abilities (Danan, 2010; Sánchez-Requena, 2016; Talaván & Costal, 2017; Sánchez-Requena, 2020). More recently, interest has grown in audio description (AD) tasks, which have been shown to support vocabulary development as well as oral, written, and integrated language skills (Ibáñez Moreno & Vermeulen, 2013, 2014; Talaván & Lertola, 2016; Calduch & Talaván, 2018; Navarrete, 2020).

Overall, the literature on captioning and revoicing tasks highlights an increasing recognition of the value of AVT activities in language learning, particularly for university-level EFL students. Many advocates of using video in language teaching have focused on facilitating students' comprehension of video content or using video as a model for language input. The underlying assumption is that teachers should transform students' typically passive viewing habits into active learning opportunities. Because video presents complete communicative contexts, it is regarded as a valuable resource for intensive language study. More recent trends emphasize using video to promote both oral and written communication skills among learners (Stempleski & Arcario, 1992).

Harmer (2001) highlighted that video is an exceptionally effective resource for language learning, as it enables learners to both hear and see the language in use. Videos offer visual cues, including gestures and facial expressions, which allow learners to go beyond the spoken words and infer meaning, thereby enhancing comprehension. Canning (2000) defines video as "the selection and sequence of messages in an audio-visual context." By engaging with video content, students can connect images to language, which supports vocabulary acquisition, understanding of cultural subtleties, improved pronunciation, and self-monitoring of language use. Video serves as a communication medium that presents authentic language and speech patterns in their natural pace and context. Additionally, Chung and Huang (1998) observe that as more comprehensive video materials become available, teachers increasingly aim to make learning experiences more active and engaging, closely reflecting real-world communicative situations.

Research Methodology

The study involved 15 MA students from the Faculty of Letters, all of whom were at the C1 level of English proficiency. Participants represented a variety of academic and cultural backgrounds, offering diverse perspectives on the chal-

lenges of translation. Their prior experience in translation and language learning was taken into account to ensure a representative sample for assessing the effectiveness of short video clips in audiovisual translation (AVT) tasks. The research was conducted within the context of EFL and translation courses at the Faculty of Letters, Alecu Russo Balti State University. These courses included *Translation Studies, Mass Media Texts in Translation, Consecutive Translation, English C1, and Applied Translation*. These courses provided an appropriate environment for examining students' engagement with video-based translation tasks, as they integrate theoretical instruction with practical translation exercises. The primary materials used in this study were short video clips sourced from the *Speech Repository*, an online platform offering authentic speeches in multiple languages along with pedagogical support materials. The platform has educational applications, providing real-life speech recordings accompanied by specially designed teaching resources to facilitate practice and enhance students' interpretation skills.

The repository provides a curated collection of selected speeches or relevant excerpts in multiple languages (for this study, English was used) as delivered by European institutions. These recordings are collected by professional interpreters and organized in a searchable online database. The repository encompasses speeches from various domains, including: *Public conferences held on Commission premises*; *Press briefings; Parliamentary debates; Interviews; Speeches created specifically for training by EU interpreters and university instructors.*

Data for this study were gathered using a structured questionnaire, which was administered to the participating MA students after they completed several translation and interpretation tasks involving short video clips from the Speech Repository. The main aim of the questionnaire was to obtain detailed information about the challenges students faced while interpreting speeches presented in audiovisual format.

The analysis of the questionnaire responses indicates that interpreting short video clips poses a range of complex challenges for MA students. The analysis revealed that linguistic challenges, particularly unfamiliar terminology, constituted the most significant barrier for all participants, followed closely by difficulties related to cultural references and idiomatic expressions. Technical issues, such as unclear speech or overlapping speakers, were reported less frequently but remained noteworthy. The speaker's delivery—including speed, accent, and clarity—moderately affected most students, although a smaller portion experienced either extreme difficulty or no effect, reflecting variability in auditory processing and adaptability.

In terms of confidence, the majority of participants reported feeling slightly less assured when interpreting spontaneous, unscripted speech compared to structured or scripted texts, highlighting the cognitive demands of real-time comprehension and note-taking. To address these challenges, students employed a range of cognitive, metacognitive, and technological strategies, including note-taking with key words and chronological visualization, repeated viewing or listening, shadowing, vocabulary preparation, contextual inference, and the use of headphones or script-access software.

Overall, these findings underscore the multifaceted nature of audiovisual translation tasks, revealing the complex interaction of linguistic, cultural, technical, and cognitive factors. They emphasize the importance of structured training that integrates strategy development, exposure to authentic speech, and technological support to enhance students' translation performance.

Conclusions

This study highlights the intricate nature of interpreting and translating short video clips within MA-level EFL and translation courses. The findings indicate that students encounter multifaceted challenges spanning linguistic, cultural, and technical dimensions. Linguistic difficulties, particularly unfamiliar terminology, emerged as the most significant barrier, underscoring the need for targeted vocabulary preparation and contextual comprehension. Cultural and idiomatic elements also posed considerable challenges, emphasizing the necessity of developing intercultural competence alongside linguistic proficiency. Although reported less frequently, technical issues—such as audio clarity, overlapping speakers, and variations in speech delivery—remain relevant for realistic interpreting scenarios. The research further shows that students' confidence is affected by the spontaneous, unscripted nature of video speeches, suggesting that interpreting real-life discourse places greater cognitive demands than working with scripted texts.

To cope with these challenges, students employed a combination of cognitive, metacognitive, and technological strategies, including note-taking, shadowing, repeated viewing, vocabulary research, and contextual inference. These strategies reflect learners' adaptability and highlight the importance of an integrated approach to audiovisual translation tasks, combining linguistic knowledge, cultural awareness, and technical proficiency.

Overall, the study confirms that short video clips are a valuable pedagogical tool for enhancing translation and interpretation skills. Effective implementation, however, requires careful selection of materials, structured guidance in note-taking and comprehension strategies, exposure to diverse accents and speech patterns, and reinforcement of cultural literacy. Future research could build on these findings by examining the longitudinal effects of repeated video-based translation practice and investigating how varying levels of technical complexity and cultural specificity influence learner performance.

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