Teaching Intercultural Communication Through Film

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PhD investigated the construal, cross-cultural relay and comprehension of implicit film dialogue meaning by filmmakers, subtitlers and audiences, respectively (Desilla, 2009/2012/2014)

Teach modules on Audiovisual Translation theory and practice in HE
- incorporating a strong film studies component (cf. Remael, 2004)

Taught the Intercultural Communication (IC) module for 2013-2014.
- Using film as a pedagogical tool
Intercultural Communication (IC)

- A UG compulsory Semester 2 module
- Year 2 (FHEQ Level 5) students across Language offerings of degree programmes
- Length: 11 weeks
- Contact hours: 3h per week
  - 2-hour lecture
  - 1-hour language specific tutorials
- Assessment
  - 1,500 research proposal
  - 2-hour exam
Intended Learning Outcomes

- To analyse instances of **intercultural communication (IC)** in a variety of contexts and media by applying IC terminology and relevant theoretical insights.
- To identify reasons for intercultural communicative breakdowns, e.g. stereotypes, racism etc.
- To improve intercultural communication skills by effectively using verbal and non-verbal means of expression.
- To be equipped to deal with **culture-shock**.
- To be equipped to deal with **conflict and mediate between the TCs and the SCs in the global workplace**.
- To understand how IC principles affect **marketing and advertising across cultures**.
- To apply research methods in the field of IC.
Challenges

- 2014 cohort: 34 students enrolled on this module, including Erasmus students, from different degree programmes:
  - BA French and Translation
  - BA Spanish and Translation
  - BA German and Translation
  - BA French and Spanish
  - BA English for Intercultural Communication with Spanish/French/German
  - BSc Business Management and French/German/Spanish

- IC brings together insights from various fields: anthropology, linguistics, psychology, sociology, business, marketing etc.

- The research proposal assessment: basic training in research methods was necessary.
Films have been used in the IC module:

- as a common ‘language’ that could bridge the different academic and cultural backgrounds of the students
- as an excellent source of empirical observational data
- as a tool for concretising complex theoretical concepts and illustrating IC phenomena:
  - *Vicky Christina Barcelona* (Woody Allen, 2008)
    - Week 4: Politeness and FTAs, code-switching
  - *The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel* (John Madden, 2011)
    - Week 7: Stereotypes, racism, culture-shock, intercultural adjustment
  - *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003)
    - Week 11: IC in the global workplace
Sample exercise

- Intercultural communicative competence in the global workplace
  - Watch the clip from *Lost in Translation* (Sofia Coppola, 2003) available on [BoB: LIN2004: Week 11b IC in the Global Workplace Playlist](#)
  - How would you describe Bob’s interaction with the photographer? Please take into account both verbal and nonverbal communication.
  - How does Bob feel at the moment? How can you tell?
  - In your opinion, is Bob a competent intercultural communicator? Justify your answer.
  - How would you behave if you were in Bob’s shoes?
“Films are perfect vehicles for (...) engaging students with critical questions about the relationship between information and power, through the critical analysis of sociopolitical issues and intercultural relationships”

(Chan and Herrero, 2010: 10)

The chosen films brilliantly served the majority of the ILOs as they were instances of IC in action:

- students developed intercultural communicative competence ‘experiencing’ and analysing concrete portrayals of the aforementioned IC phenomena
Students were given the opportunity to develop an additional set of transferrable skills:

- **Multiliteracies** (The New London Group, 1996): understanding and critically approaching multimodal texts
  - Analysing films both at a micro- and a macro- level
  - Appreciating the power of nonverbal communication (images, sounds, gestures etc.)

- **Empathy**
  - “effective intercultural communicators have the ability to empathise with the worldviews and situations of people who have a different linguistic and cultural background” (Jackson, 2014: 320)
Impact on student performance?

Assessment 1 (Research Proposal) - Choice of Observational Data:

- Students were given the freedom to choose among different sources of observational data

- Out of the 33 students who submitted:
  - 22 selected film(s),
  - 10 selected other multimodal texts (e.g. TV shows, documentaries, advertisements)
  - 1 selected a novel
Impact on student performance?

Assessment 1 (Research Proposal) Marks:

- Over 80%
- Over 70%
- Over 60%
- Over 50%
- Fail
References


- Desilla, L. (in press) ‘Reading between the lines, seeing beyond the images: An empirical study on the comprehension of implicit film dialogue meaning across cultures’. Manuscript accepted for publication in *The Translator* (Expected publication date: November 2014).


References


Questions?