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Developing intercultural competence in translator training: Evidence from Didactic Subtitling in French as a foreign language

M.ª Azahara Veroz-González

Universidad de Córdoba (Spain)

Abstract

Didactic Audiovisual Translation (DAT) has emerged as an innovative methodology in foreign language education by integrating audiovisual translation tasks into the learning process and promoting active learner participation. Beyond language development, DAT has also been identified as a valuable tool for fostering intercultural communicative competence (ICC). This study focuses on French as a Foreign Language (FFL), which remains comparatively underexplored as a working language in DAT research (Sanz-Moreno, 2023) and examines students' perceptions of their ICC development after completing a sequence of didactic subtitling tasks in a Translation and Interpreting Degree programme at the University of Córdoba. A quasi-experimental pretest–intervention–postest design was implemented following Bisquerra (2004). Twenty-four students participated in the intervention, which consisted of six didactic subtitling tasks implemented within the TRADILEX pedagogical framework (Talaván & Lertola, 2022). Students' perceptions of the procedural, cognitive, and affective dimensions of ICC were measured using the Intercultural Resources Scale (IRS) (González Plasencia, 2020), and the data were analysed using the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test. The results revealed statistically significant improvements of ICC ($p < .05$), with significant improvements observed in the cognitive and affective dimensions, while no statistically significant change was found in the procedural dimension. These findings suggest that didactic subtitling can positively contribute to the development of students' ICC in FFL contexts and highlight its pedagogical potential for translator and interpreter training.

Keywords

Didactic audiovisual translation, didactic subtitling, intercultural communicative competence, French as a foreign language, student perceptions

CONTACT

M.ª Azahara Veroz-González, z92vegom@uco.es, Universidad de Córdoba, Plaza del Cardenal Salazar s/n, 14071, Córdoba, Spain

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1. Introduction

Intercultural communicative competence (ICC) has become a key objective in contemporary foreign language education, particularly in increasingly globalised and multilingual societies (Byram, 2020; Council of Europe, 2018; Deardorff, 2006, 2015).

Its relevance is particularly evident in Translation and Interpreting programmes, where students must not only develop linguistic proficiency but also learn to mediate between cultures, interpret sociocultural meanings, and communicate appropriately in diverse intercultural contexts.

Within this educational framework, DAT has emerged as an innovative pedagogical approach that actively engages learners in multimodal language learning processes. By involving students in audiovisual mediation tasks, DAT has been shown to promote language development, learner motivation, and intercultural awareness (Borghetti & Lertola, 2014; Couto-Cantero et al., 2022; Guillot & Pavesi, 2019; Talaván, 2009; Talaván & Rodríguez-Arancón, 2018).

Among its different modalities, didactic subtitling appears particularly suitable for fostering intercultural reflection, since, unlike dubbing or voice-over, it preserves the original soundtrack rather than replacing it, requiring learners to produce a condensed written translation that is displayed alongside the source dialogue and thus makes their own decisions about culturally embedded content visible and comparable, whereas such decisions remain largely hidden once the source audio is substituted. Subtitling is not, however, unconditionally more effective for intercultural purposes, as some scholars have argued that dubbing can in fact better convey cultural conflict or difference precisely because it allows fuller linguistic substitution (Avello & Fernández-Costales, 2020); the explicit and comparable nature of the translation decisions involved in subtitling, nonetheless, makes it especially appropriate for a study concerned with learners' own perceptions of their intercultural development.

Despite the growing body of research on DAT, further empirical evidence is needed regarding students' perceptions of its contribution to the development of ICC, particularly in FFL and within translator and interpreter training. Although didactic subtitling has been widely investigated with English and Spanish as foreign or target languages, French remains comparatively underrepresented as a working language in DAT studies (Sanz-Moreno, 2023), despite its prominent place in many Translation and Interpreting programmes across Europe. The present study therefore helps address this gap while exploring the extent to which findings from English- and Spanish-medium DAT can be extended to other foreign languages. The transferability of the present results to other underexplored languages remains a matter for future research.

Against this background, the study investigates students' perceptions of their ICC development after completing a sequence of didactic subtitling tasks implemented within the TRADILEX pedagogical framework (Talaván et al., 2023; Talaván & Lertola, 2022). Specifically, it examines students' perceived changes in the procedural, cognitive, and affective dimensions of ICC following the intervention.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Didactic Audiovisual Translation (DAT)

In recent years, audiovisual translation (AVT) has gained increasing attention in foreign language education and is emerging as a pedagogical resource that combines multimodal input with active learner participation. Early uses of audiovisual materials in language classrooms primarily focused on exposing students to authentic communicative situations through video viewing, often accompanied by subtitles (Herrero & Vanderschelden, 2019; Vanderplank, 1988). However,

these approaches largely positioned learners as passive recipients of audiovisual content and did not fully exploit the pedagogical potential of translation-based audiovisual tasks.

Advances in digital technologies and language pedagogy have facilitated the emergence of DAT, a methodological approach that integrates audiovisual translation tasks into language learning activities (Díaz Cintas, 1997; Hadzilacos et al., 2004; Talaván, 2006). Rather than using audiovisual materials solely as input, DAT encourages students to actively engage with audiovisual texts through translation-based tasks, such as subtitling, dubbing, voice-over, and audio description.

Several international initiatives have contributed to the consolidation of DAT as a pedagogical methodology in language education, although they differ markedly in scope and focus. LeViS centred exclusively on subtitling as a language-learning resource (Romero et al., 2011; Sokoli, 2006). ClipFlair later broadened this scope by combining subtitling with revoicing/dubbing within a single online platform developed by a multi-university consortium (Baños & Sokoli, 2015; Incalcaterra McLoughlin & Lertola, 2015; Navarrete, 2013; Zabalbeascoa et al., 2012). Babelium differs from both in kind rather than degree: rather than having learners translate or caption pre-existing audiovisual material, it centres on learners' own oral production in response to stimulus videos (e.g., dubbing a role, reading aloud, free speech), with feedback provided by native speakers (Pereira Varela, 2014). More recently, the TRADILEX project (Talaván & Lertola, 2022; Fernández-Costales et al., 2023) has extended this line of research by validating DAT empirically across five AVT modalities (subtitling, dubbing, voice-over, audio description, and SDH) using pre-/post-test designs, providing the most comprehensive empirical evidence to date for the effectiveness of DAT in foreign language education.

Within DAT, several audiovisual translation modalities have been explored, including dubbing (Avello & Fernández-Costales, 2020; Couto-Cantero et al., 2024), voice-over (Talaván & Rodríguez-Arancón, 2018), audio description (Ogea Pozo & Ruiz Espejel, 2024; Vermeulen & Escobar-Álvarez, 2021), and subtitling (Borghetti, 2011b; Danan, 2004). Among these modalities, didactic subtitling has received particular attention because of its strong pedagogical potential and relative technical accessibility in classroom settings.

Subtitling tasks require learners to process spoken discourse, interpret meaning, and produce concise written translations under temporal and spatial constraints. This process encourages learners to engage deeply with linguistic structures, pragmatic meanings, and sociocultural references embedded in audiovisual texts.

Empirical evidence linking didactic subtitling specifically to intercultural development remains scarce and methodologically diverse. Borghetti and Lertola (2014) conducted a qualitative case study with fourteen A2/B1-level learners of Italian, showing that subtitling tasks fostered cultural and intercultural awareness even when teacher mediation was limited, although teacher-led discussion remained the strongest driver of learning. A comparable didactic proposal was reported by Beseghi (2018), in which the subtitling of multilingual films within university translation courses raised learners' awareness of cultural references and language variation. Within the TRADILEX framework itself, Rodríguez-Arancón (2023) found that combining several AVT modalities, rather than subtitling alone, increased learners' motivation and supported the development of intercultural competence in an online context, while Sanz-Moreno (2023) reported comparable motivational gains through audio description rather than subtitling in a French as a foreign language classroom. Guillot and Pavesi (2019), for their part, provide conceptual rather than empirical grounding, situating subtitling and dubbing as forms of intercultural mediation within the broader field of audiovisual translation studies. These pedagogical benefits are particularly relevant in translator and interpreter training programmes, where students must develop the ability to interpret and mediate culturally embedded meanings across languages.

2.2. Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)

ICC has become a central concept in contemporary foreign language education, reflecting the increasing importance of intercultural interaction in globalised societies (Byram, 2020; Deardorff, 2006). However, defining ICC remains challenging because of the diversity of theoretical perspectives on culture and intercultural communication in academic literature (Goldstein, 1957; Jandt, 2004; Katan, 2018; Rachman, 2021).

In general terms, intercultural competence refers to the ability to interact effectively and appropriately with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. According to the definition proposed by the Centro Virtual Cervantes (2025), it involves language learners' capacity to perform satisfactorily in intercultural communication situations commonly encountered in multicultural societies.

Historically, language and culture were often treated as separate components in foreign language teaching. However, since the 1980s, increasing attention has been devoted to the cultural dimension of language learning. Kramsch (2002) and Gómez-Parra (2018b) have addressed this shift at a conceptual level, arguing that communicative competence cannot be reconceptualised simply by adding cultural content, but rather requires intercultural education to be embedded within the design of language curricula itself. Building on this conceptual shift, Gómez-Parra (2018a) examined the integration of audiovisual translation within CLIL classrooms, while Larrea-Espinar and Raigón-Rodríguez (2019a, 2019b) analysed sitcoms and EFL textbooks, respectively, illustrating how the cultural dimension of language learning can be operationalised in practice.

A major contribution to this reconceptualisation was provided by Byram, whose model of ICC expands traditional communicative competence frameworks by incorporating the ability to mediate between cultures and critically reflect on cultural values (Byram et al., 2002; Byram & Fleming, 2001). In this model, intercultural competence is conceptualised as a dynamic combination of knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness, enabling individuals to engage meaningfully in intercultural communication.

Byram (1997) defines intercultural competence as the ability to acquire new knowledge about cultural practices and to apply knowledge, attitudes, and skills during real-time communication and interaction. From this perspective, intercultural competence is not limited to the acquisition of cultural facts but involves continuous processes of interpretation, adaptation, and negotiation of meaning in intercultural encounters. While ICC has been extensively examined in foreign language education, cultural competence has in fact been part of translator competence models since the late 1980s, when scholars such as Lowe (1987) and Nord (1988) first included a cultural component among the sub-competences required of translators. What has changed more recently is the explicit framing of this competence in intercultural communicative terms, drawing on Byram's (1997) model, rather than treating culture as a separate body of declarative knowledge.

In translator education, ICC is closely linked to a translator's ability to mediate between cultures and interpret culturally embedded meanings in the translation process. From this perspective, ICC can be considered a key component of translator competence, particularly in audiovisual translation contexts, where cultural references must often be adapted for different audiences.

Consequently, translation and language education research has increasingly incorporated intercultural dimensions into theoretical and pedagogical models. From early formulations of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995) to more recent frameworks addressing intercultural learning (Balboni, 2015; Spitzberg & Changnon, 2022), research has emphasised the need to develop learners' ability to navigate culturally diverse communicative contexts.

In this context, González Plasencia (2020) identified three fundamental characteristics of ICC:

- mobilisation of cognitive, affective, and procedural resources;
- communicative success measured in terms of appropriateness and effectiveness;
- the contextual nature of intercultural interaction.

These principles align with the educational objectives promoted by the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR), which highlights the importance of intercultural awareness and plurilingual competence in language learning (Council of Europe, 2018).

Despite the broad consensus on the importance of ICC in language education, its assessment remains a complex methodological challenge. Borghetti (2017) and Zotzmann (2014) have questioned the feasibility of measuring a competence that is inherently dynamic, relational, and context-dependent. Quantitative instruments may risk reducing intercultural learning to static and measurable variables, potentially overlooking the experiential and reflective nature of intercultural development. Nevertheless, various tools have been developed to assess aspects of ICC in educational contexts. Among these, González Plasencia's (2020) IRS represents an attempt to operationalise ICC through the integration of cognitive, affective, and procedural dimensions.

The IRS consists of 97 Likert-type items and was validated using a large international sample of university students. Unlike other instruments, such as the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ), the Intercultural Adjustment Potential Scale (ICAPS), or the Cultural Intelligence Scale (CQS), the IRS was specifically designed for language-learning contexts and closely aligns with the intercultural education principles promoted by the CEFR. By integrating cognitive knowledge, intercultural attitudes, and practical communicative skills, the IRS provides a multidimensional framework for examining learners' perceptions of their intercultural development. For this reason, it was selected as the primary instrument for analysing students' perceptions of ICC in the present study.

DAT offers a particularly suitable pedagogical environment for developing ICC. By engaging learners in translation tasks that require the interpretation of culturally embedded meanings, DAT encourages them to reflect on linguistic, pragmatic, and sociocultural differences between languages. In subtitling activities, learners must identify culturally specific references, negotiate meanings across languages, and select translation strategies that are appropriate for different audiences. This process promotes not only linguistic awareness but also intercultural reflection, as students actively engage in interpreting and mediating cultural meanings.

From this perspective, didactic subtitling can be understood as a form of pedagogical intercultural mediation that allows learners to develop the procedural, cognitive, and affective dimensions of ICC while performing translation tasks. Consequently, examining students' perceptions of their intercultural development after participating in subtitling activities provides valuable insights into the pedagogical potential of DAT in foreign language education.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants

The sample used in this study was incidental, as the participants were drawn from two courses within the Translation and Interpreting Degree at the University of Córdoba, where FFL is taught at the B2.1 level according to the CEFR. Incidental selection responds to ethical criteria, as it was decided not to intervene in or alter the natural composition of the groups to ensure that no educational discrimination occurred among students regarding the opportunity to benefit from the proposed pedagogical intervention. The modules involved in this research were languages BIII (French) and CIII (French) at the B2.1 level. Of the 67 enrolled students, only 24 completed

both the initial and final questionnaires; therefore, the analysis was based on this sample. Although most students completed the pedagogical intervention, a significant number did not complete the IRS. This was likely because the IRS was not part of the official course assessment, whereas the production tasks within the lesson plans (LP) were. Participation in the study was voluntary, and all responses were anonymised to ensure the confidentiality of the participants.

3.2. Materials: lesson plans

Before publication on the TRADILEX platform, the set of LPs was piloted to assess their effectiveness in terms of language gain (Veroz-González, 2024). The DAT mode was mixed, that is, intralingual, creative intralingual, and interlingual subtitling, following the classification proposed by Talaván and Lertola (2022), as detailed later in the LPs design. This variety was intended to enhance linguistic competence and intercultural awareness, as well as expose students to different types of translation challenges and strategies, thereby aligning with the pedagogical aims of the intervention. Each LP lasted for 60 minutes and was structured into four phases:

- Warm-up (5–10 min): Introduction to the topic through activities that anticipate thematic, lexical, and grammatical elements relevant to the main subtitling task.
- Video viewing (5 min): Presentation of the audiovisual fragment to subtitle (2 min), aiming to encourage critical analysis and direct students' attention to key elements.
- Didactic subtitling task (30 min): Subtitling one minute of the video in the specified linguistic combination (intralingual, direct interlingual, inverse, or creative).
- Post-DAT task (15 min): A written production activity reinforcing the thematic, lexical, and grammatical content covered in the unit.

The lesson plans used in the intervention were as follows:

LP	TYPE OF SUBTITLING[1]	OBJECTIVES
LP 1	Intralingual (L2-L2): Filling blanks in pre-existing subtitles with keywords.	Introduction to subtitling. Reflect on perceptions of France and French people. Write a summary of a meeting.
LP 2	Intralingual (L2-L2): First half of the video with keywords and gaps; second half without subtitles, suggested timestamps provided.	Discuss immigration and social commitment. Explore the job market. Use discourse connectors accurately.
LP 3	Intralingual (L2-L2): Same format as Unit 2.	Discuss the media. Express opinions on rumours. Analyse causes and consequences.
LP 4	Creative Intralingual (L2-L2): Creative reinterpretation of subtitles without technical assistance.	Describe travel experiences. Submit a formal complaint.
LP 5	Standard Interlingual (L2-L1): Creation of subtitles in L1 for a video in L2.	Tell a story in the past tense. Identify the simple past tense, its conjugation, and uses. Correct use of temporal propositions.
LP 6	Reverse Interlingual (L1-L2): Creation of subtitles in L2 for a video in L1.	Promote creativity. Practice vocabulary and grammar related to health.

Table 1. Lesson Plan Design

[1] Following the TRADILEX framework's language-neutral notation (Talaván & Lertola, 2022), L1 refers to the students' first/source language and L2 to the target foreign language under instruction (French, in this case).

3.3. Instrument: Intercultural Resources Scale

As previously mentioned, this study followed a quasi-experimental design based on a pretest-intervention-postest design (Bisquerra, 2004). One of the most common methodologies in intercultural competence research is the use of self-perception questionnaires (Ang & Van Dyne, 2015; Chen & Starosta, 2000; Cohen et al., 2005; Matsumoto et al., 2001, 2003; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2000; Vilá Baños, 2005). These instruments facilitate the analysis of behavioural patterns in educational contexts (Sercu, 2004).

Although some scholars have indicated that questionnaires might offer only a partial view of the phenomenon under study (Deardorff, 2015; Young, 2015), previous research has shown that participants can reflect on their intercultural interactions and provide valuable information (Riggio & Riggio, 2021). These instruments align with an ethical quantitative approach based on the premise that individuals possess a repertoire of psychological resources applicable in different cultural contexts (Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013).

After reviewing various ICC measurement models (González Plasencia, 2020; Matsumoto et al., 2001; Matsumoto & Hwang, 2013; Van Der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; Van Der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2001; Van Dyne et al., 2015), the IRS (González-Plasencia, 2020) was selected because of its ability to evaluate the procedural, cognitive, and affective dimensions of ICC. This choice is based on the fact that the cognitive dimension assesses knowledge and understanding of diverse cultural norms, values, and practices; the procedural dimension analyses practical skills necessary for effective interactions in real cultural contexts; and the affective dimension explores attitudes, motivations, and emotions that facilitate empathetic, open, and respectful intercultural communication, as highlighted by Vilà Baños (2005), Borghetti (2011a), Deardorff (2006), Spitzberg and Changnon (2022), and Wiseman et al. (1989).

Other internationally recognised instruments, such as the MPQ, the ICAPS, and the CQS were carefully reviewed but ultimately not selected. These tools predominantly focus on stable personality traits or general adaptability in intercultural settings and do not offer a sufficiently integrated approach to the linguistic, communicative, and educational dimensions. Moreover, they tend to overlook identity construction and critical reflection, two aspects that are essential for developing ICC in foreign language education. In contrast, the IRS was designed from an educational perspective and specifically tailored for language learners in formal academic contexts, making it a more pedagogically relevant choice for the aims of this study (González Plasencia, 2020).

Consequently, this instrument consists of 97 Likert-type items rated on a 5-point scale and distributed across three dimensions:

- Procedural dimension (46 items, scale ranging from 1 = almost never to 5 = almost always).
- Cognitive dimension (22 items, scale ranging from 1 = not at all to 5 = a lot).
- Affective dimension (29 items, scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

The data collected through the IRS questionnaire were analysed using JASP software, applying the non-parametric Wilcoxon test (due to sample size) to assess the statistical significance of changes between the pretest and post-test. Furthermore, the internal consistency of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The analysis yielded a high level of internal reliability, with a Cronbach's α of 0.853 (95% CI: 0.825–0.887), confirming the robustness of the IRS as a reliable tool for measuring ICC in its three dimensions within this educational context. These findings are in line with the psychometric properties reported by González Plasencia (2020), whose validation study established the reliability of the scale

through a principal component analysis and reported Cronbach's α values above 0.70 for all nine components identified.

Finally, it is worth noting that the IRS was originally validated with students of Spanish as a foreign language in multicultural academic contexts across Europe and North Africa (Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Egypt). This reinforces its relevance to our sample, which consisted of Spanish university students learning FFL. Despite the change in the target language, the instrument remains pedagogically and conceptually appropriate, given the similar linguistic and cultural learning contexts.

3.4. Data analysis

Data collected through the IRS questionnaire were analysed using JASP statistical software. Given the relatively small sample size (n = 24) and the paired nature of the data, the non-parametric Wilcoxon signed-rank test was applied to compare pretest and post-test scores. In addition, descriptive statistics were calculated for each dimension of ICC (procedural, cognitive, and affective). The internal consistency of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

4. Results

The results section presents the statistical comparison between the pretest and post-test scores obtained using the IRS. The analysis focuses on the three dimensions of ICC (procedural, cognitive, and affective) as well as the overall score.

The analysis considered the following dimensions of ICC: procedural, cognitive, affective, and total. This approach allowed us to address the primary objective, which was to analyse students' ICC acquisition following the pedagogical intervention, and the secondary objectives, focusing on the analysis of each of the aforementioned dimensions.

The Wilcoxon test indicated statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-test scores in the cognitive, affective, and total ICC scores, but not in the procedural dimension, as illustrated in Table 2. These findings suggest that students perceived improvements in most areas of their ICC following the intervention, with the exception of the procedural dimension.

ICC dimension	W	Z	p	r
Procedural	111.5	-0.806	.429	.168
Cognitive	50.50	-2.843	.005	.580
Affective	46.50	-2.597	.010	.530
TOTAL	59.5	-2.388	.018	.498

Table 2. Wilcoxon signed-rank test results comparing pre- and post-test scores across ICC dimensions

We thoroughly analysed the results by dimension, drawing on the descriptive data outlined in Table 3.

	N	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Pre_procedural	24	160.667	16.159	3.298	0.101
Post_procedural	24	162.083	12.258	2.502	0.076
Pre_cognitive	24	82.500	11.485	2.344	0.139
Post_cognitive	24	88.500	12.677	2.588	0.143
Pre_affective	24	92.917	6.652	1.358	0.072
Post_affective	24	97.750	10.208	2.084	0.104
PRE_TOTAL	24	336.083	26.816	5.474	0.080
POST_TOTAL	24	348.333	27.127	5.537	0.078

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for pre- and post-test scores across ICC dimensions

As shown in Figure 1, students' mean score for the procedural dimension showed a slight increase from M = 160.67 at pre-test to M = 162.08 at post-test. However, this difference was not statistically significant (p = .429), indicating that students' perceived procedural ICC did not change significantly following the didactic subtitling intervention.

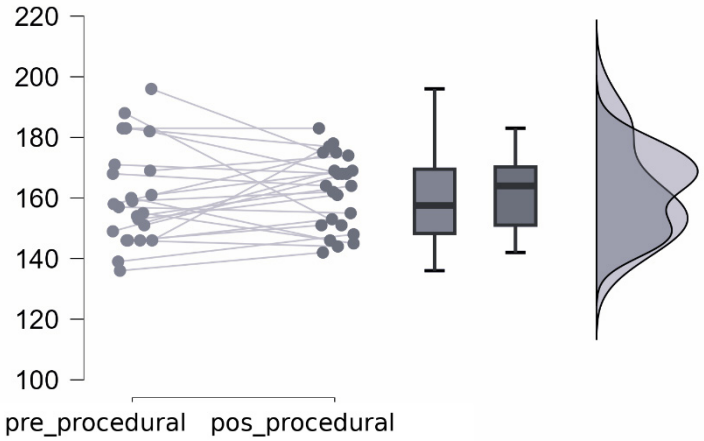

Figure 1. Analysis of the procedural dimension

Regarding the cognitive dimension, which evaluated students' perceptions of their cultural knowledge, a significant improvement was observed (p = .005). The post-test score (M = 88.500) was higher than the pretest score (M = 82.500), supporting the hypothesis that there was an improvement in students' perceptions of ICC acquisition, as illustrated in Figure 2.

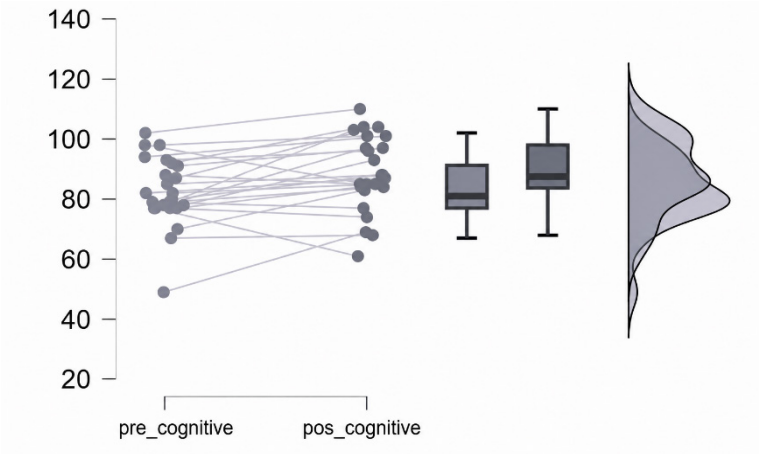

Figure 2. Analysis of the cognitive dimension

Concerning the affective dimension, which reflects students' feelings regarding their interactions with other cultures and their interest in learning about them, the post-test score (M = 97.75) was higher than the pre-test score (M = 92.92), and the difference was statistically significant (p = .010), as illustrated in Figure 3. In this case, the effect was moderate and slightly lower than that observed for the cognitive dimension (Figure 2). It is important to note that the participants were students from the Translation and Interpreting Degree, who naturally tended to have a positive attitude towards engaging with people from other cultures and typically enjoyed intercultural interactions.

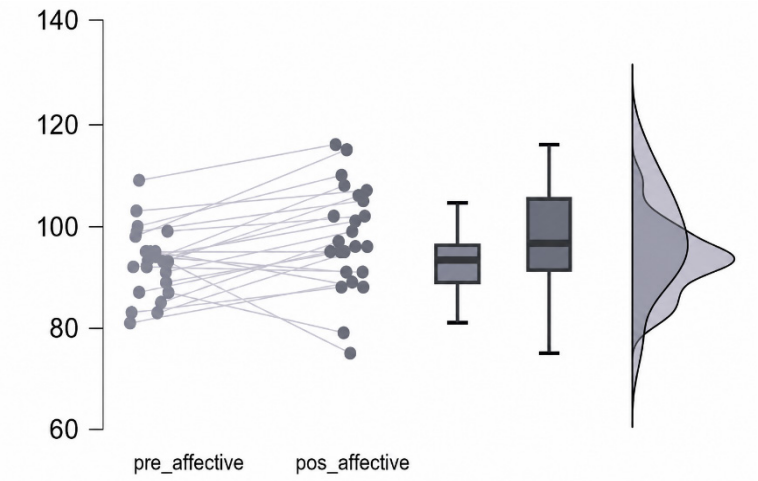

Figure 3. Analysis of the affective dimension

Regarding the total IRS score, the post-test mean (M = 348.33) was higher than the pre-test mean (M = 336.08), and the difference was statistically significant (p = .018; Table 2), as illustrated in Figure 4. These findings indicate a modest but significant overall improvement in students' perceived ICC following the didactic subtitling intervention.

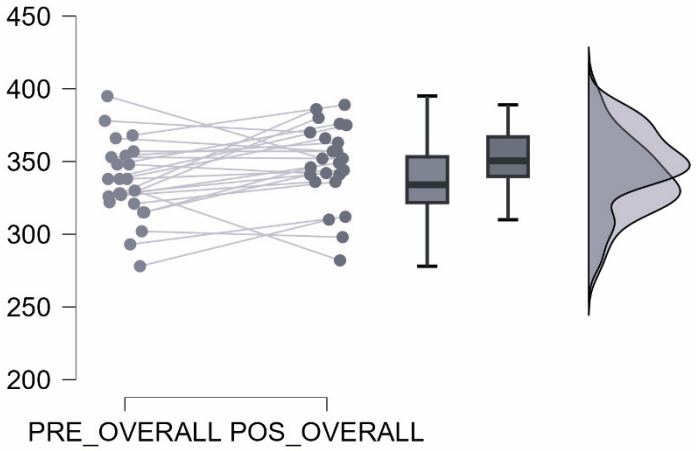

Figure 4. Analysis of the total perception

Finally, we can conclude from the descriptive analysis (Table 3) that the cognitive and affective dimensions showed moderate but statistically significant increases, while the procedural dimension showed only a marginal, non-significant increase. This pattern suggests that the didactic subtitling intervention was more effective in fostering knowledge-based and attitudinal aspects of ICC than in developing behavioural and interactional resources, which may require more sustained or explicit practice to produce measurable change.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study analysed students' perception of ICC after participating in an intervention based on a sequence of didactic subtitling tasks within the context of learning FFL in a Translation and Interpreting degree programme.

The results indicate that, from the students' perspective, the didactic intervention based on the TRADILEX model had a positive and statistically significant impact on the cognitive and affective dimensions of ICC, though not on the procedural dimension, supporting previous research suggesting that DAT can contribute not only to linguistic development but also to

the enhancement of intercultural awareness and intercultural learning processes in foreign language education (Borghetti & Lertola, 2014; Guillot & Pavesi, 2019; Talaván & Lertola, 2022). These results are consistent with previous studies on didactic subtitling, which have shown that translation-based audiovisual tasks require learners to interpret culturally embedded meanings and make communicative decisions that go beyond linguistic transfer (Beseghi, 2018; Borghetti, 2011; Lertola & Mariotti, 2017). By analysing and reformulating audiovisual discourse, learners are exposed to pragmatic and sociocultural nuances that encourage reflection on intercultural communication strategies – cognitive engagement that may help explain the gains observed in the cognitive dimension of the IRS. This experiential, practice-oriented nature of DAT tasks, which privileges engagement with audiovisual texts over explicit instruction about cultural content, similarly aligns with research showing that subtitling can foster cultural awareness through exposure to authentic communicative situations involving humour, sociolinguistic variation, and culturally specific references (Borghetti & Lertola, 2014; Guillot & Pavesi, 2019). At the same time, these tasks appear to foster positive attitudes toward other cultures by exposing learners to authentic audiovisual narratives and encouraging empathy with diverse perspectives (Borghetti, 2011; Guillot & Pavesi, 2019). By engaging students with cultural viewpoints embedded in audiovisual discourse, these tasks may contribute to the affective gains observed — namely, the development of intercultural sensitivity and openness.

Despite these positive results, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the study involved a relatively small sample of participants (N = 24), which limits the generalisability of the findings. Second, the study relied on self-perception data collected using the IRS. Although this instrument provides valuable insights into students' perceived development of ICC, self-reported measures may be influenced by subjective biases or individual perceptions and do not necessarily reflect actual ICC performance. Future studies could therefore combine perception-based instruments with performance-based assessments, such as the analysis of subtitling outputs, classroom observations, reflective journals, or ICC mediation tasks.

A further avenue for future research concerns the lack of significant change in the procedural dimension: since this dimension involves behavioural and interactional resources that typically require sustained practice to develop, longer interventions or tasks that more explicitly target real-time intercultural interaction may be needed to produce measurable gains in this area.

Another limitation concerns the duration of the pedagogical intervention. Although statistically significant improvements were observed across the three ICC dimensions, the long-term sustainability of these changes remains uncertain. Further longitudinal studies are necessary to determine whether the intercultural gains observed in this study persist over longer learning periods.

In addition, the more moderate improvement observed in the cognitive dimension, with an effect size comparable to that of the affective dimension ($r = .580$ and $r = .530$, respectively), suggests that didactic subtitling may be particularly effective in developing intercultural interaction skills. Although significant gains were also observed in the cognitive dimension, the acquisition of cultural knowledge may benefit from complementing subtitling tasks with more explicit intercultural learning activities, such as debates, critical text analysis, or case studies focusing on intercultural communication.

Another limitation is the pre-experimental design of the study, which did not include a control group. This methodological decision was motivated by ethical considerations, as all students enrolled in the course were entitled to benefit equally from the pedagogical intervention. Excluding a portion of the class from participating in an innovative research-based activity could create unequal learning opportunities in the same educational context. Although the absence of a control group limits the possibility of establishing direct causal relationships between

the intervention and observed outcomes, the design remains appropriate for exploratory classroom-based research. Future studies could address this limitation by implementing quasi-experimental designs with delayed intervention groups or adopting longitudinal research approaches.

Despite these limitations, the pedagogical implications of this study are noteworthy. The positive outcomes observed across all ICC dimensions suggest that didactic subtitling can contribute not only to language development but also to the enhancement of intercultural awareness and intercultural learning processes in foreign language education. By requiring learners to interpret and reformulate culturally embedded meanings, subtitling tasks create opportunities to reflect on linguistic variations, cultural perspectives, and communicative strategies across languages.

In conclusion, this study provides further evidence that didactic subtitling represents an effective pedagogical strategy for fostering ICC in the context of FFL within Translation and Interpreting programmes. Significant improvements were observed in students' perceived cognitive and affective capacity for intercultural communication, though not in the procedural dimension. These mixed findings across ICC dimensions nonetheless support the integration of didactic subtitling as an innovative methodological tool that promotes both linguistic development and critical intercultural reflection, while pointing to the need for complementary pedagogical strategies to target behavioural and interactional competences specifically. More broadly, these findings highlight the importance of further exploring the pedagogical potential of didactic subtitling in foreign language education, particularly when integrated into broader instructional frameworks that address the intercultural and global dimensions of contemporary language learning.

AI disclosure statement

Generative artificial intelligence was used exclusively for linguistic editing and grammar correction. The author reviewed and takes full responsibility for the final content of the manuscript.

Ethical considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. The research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the UNED (approval code: 2-FLOG 2021; approval date: 2 March 2021).

Author contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: conceptualisation, methodology, data collection, formal analysis, and writing (original draft and review & editing).

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no conflicting interests.

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Data availability statement

The data supporting the findings of this study are available in Helvia, the institutional repository of the Universidad de Córdoba (http://hdl.handle.net/10396/36753).

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