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in translation collaborative practices and cooperation

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Mapping collaboration and communication practices in the French subtitling industry

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Abstract

This study explores collaboration practices among English-French subtitlers in the audiovisual translation (AVT) industry in France. By adopting a human-centred approach, the study identifies two types of collaboration: formal and informal, and examines subtitlers' communication with colleagues, clients, and external agents in the subtitling production network. The research sheds light on the impact of collaborative practices on the subtitlers' workflows and roles, as well as on the profession's working conditions and its sustainability. The data were collected with seven subtitlers who each participated in two interviews and a direct non-participant observation of their workday. The participants were affiliated to ATAA, the association for audiovisual translators in France, and as such, benefited from opportunities for collaboration provided by this well-established community. This study contributes to a better understanding of collaboration in the French subtitling industry, highlighting its benefits and limitations.

Keywords: AVT, subtitling industry, subtitlers, collaboration, communication.

1. Introduction

Within the audiovisual translation (AVT) industry, French subtitling production networks have received little scholarly attention. Production networks involve a complex system of organisations, individuals, and technologies that collaborate in the creation, distribution, and consumption of subtitled audiovisual content. Understanding social dynamics within AVT production networks is important, because this can have a significant impact on translation processes and product quality (Abdallah 2012). However, little is currently known about how French subtitlers interact with each other and with other agents in the subtitling process. The purpose of this study is to address this gap by investigating the human collaboration patterns of seven English to French subtitlers, who each participated in two interviews. Specifically, the study aims to address the following research

question: How do French subtitlers exchange information, communicate and collaborate among themselves and with other stakeholders in the process?

The conditions and environments in which subtitlers work are often considered to be "veiled in mystery" because nowadays professionals often work independently as freelancers (Kuo 2015: 163). Since previous studies have acknowledged that subtitlers "hardly ever work alone" (Di Giovanni 2016: 6) and that "the conditions in which they are working can influence the outcome of the process" (Silvester 2022: 401), it is necessary to understand which forms of collaboration and communication occur and what influence they might have on subtitling processes. Therefore, by adopting a Translator Studies approach (Chesterman 2009), this study places the human translators at the centre of the research and recognises the importance of understanding the experiences and perspectives of the subtitlers themselves. The study allowed for an identification of various types of collaboration in three main areas of their subtitling production networks: colleagues, clients and other agents. O'Brien (2011: 17) defines collaborative translation as a context in which "two or more agents cooperate in some way to produce a translation" or "two or more translators work together to produce one translated product". Both kinds of collaboration were identified in this study and the findings reveal the interconnection between collaboration, working conditions, and the sustainability of the profession. The findings also include community collaboration with ATAA, the association for French audiovisual translators (*Association des Traducteurs/Adaptateurs de l'Audiovisuel*), as well as collaboration in globalised settings.

The study emphasises the importance of collaboration among stakeholders in subtitling and identifies barriers to effective collaboration, contributing to a better understanding of the French AVT industry and the roles and practices of subtitling professionals. The paper begins with a comprehensive review of the literature on collaborative practices in subtitling and provides background information on the French audiovisual translation industry. The paper then outlines the methodological framework used to explore the subtitlers' practices. The findings report on the subtitlers' profiles, as well as their collaboration and communication in three key areas of their production networks, and within the ATAA community. Finally, this article discusses the challenges of globalisation and its implications for collaboration in the subtitling industry.

2. Collaboration in subtitling

Collaboration between agents has primarily been studied in amateur subtitling environments (e.g., Massidda 2015; Orrego-Carmona and Lee 2017) and has received less attention in professional settings (Zanotti 2020). AVT production networks involve a complex web of interconnected stakeholders, yet our understanding of the various workflow steps, processes, and the agents involved remains limited. As highlighted in a study of French translations of TV series, the multiple stakeholders involved in the translation workflow have an influence on the product, which is thus not always the sole labour of the person officially commissioned for the translation (Loison-Charles 2022: 17).

Romero-Fresco's (2019) study highlights the crucial role of collaboration in the production of accessible films, emphasising the need for translators and filmmakers to work together during the production process, to consider the challenges of translation and accessibility issues and their effect on the final product. In her study of six English subtitlers of French *auteur* cinema, Silvester (2022) identified a high degree of collaboration between subtitlers, but surprisingly also with producers and directors, facilitated by the higher status of subtitlers working for independent French films compared to mainstream subtitling. She identified different power dynamics at play in the processes of translating *auteur* films, where subtitlers were found to lead the collaboration with directors, who, for their part, were available to answer questions and attend in-person simulations (*ibid.*). In contrast, the simulation process for quality control in mainstream subtitling involves subtitlers presenting their work only to clients and simulation operators (Gourgeon 2014). Zanotti's (2020) study on Stanley Kubrick's interventionist approach into the Italian dubbing and subtitling process of *Full metal jacket* (1987) also presents a different picture from the collaboration processes in mainstream subtitling identified in this study, with a notably higher degree of production involvement in the AVT process. Similarly, when sharing his experiences in the French subtitling industry, Eisenschitz (2013) noted that in addition to collaboration with colleagues and agents, subtitling *auteur* films could involve more (sometimes 'forced') collaboration with filmmakers.

In his study of labour division in English-Polish subtitling and voice-over, Aleksandrowicz (2022) mentioned that the new distribution and consumption trends on platforms have shortened deadlines and impacted the translators' division of labour. Despite frequent changes in translators,

the findings showed that their collaboration had a positive effect on consistency throughout translation modes and seasons, thus suggesting that a "lack of communication between translators is detrimental to their work" (Aleksandrowicz 2022: 29).

3. The French subtitling industry

French subtitling has been primarily analysed alongside dubbing, in terms of norms, challenges, and shifts in AVT trends (Cornu 2014), whereas few studies have looked at the processes or the translators from a social perspective. While Eisenschitz's (2013) personal perspective highlights instances of collaboration with various agents involved in the subtitling process in a similar *auteur* film context to Silvester's (2022) study, collaboration in French mainstream subtitling remains underexplored.

Studies on professional and amateur subtitling have mentioned the negative repercussions that the proliferation of fansubbing teams had on professional practices in the French industry (Genty *et al.* 2021: 8), leading to shortened deadlines for subtitling tasks (Loison-Charles 2022: 17). Marignan (2019) describes the negative developments and acceleration of processes in the subtitling industry as an "uberisation" that impacts working conditions, remuneration, and the quality of the subtitles. The increase in French audience demands has also led to the emergence of the US+24 model, where the aim is to broadcast series on TV with subtitles within 24 hours of their original US broadcast, thus shortening deadlines for subtitlers (Bréan 2014; Marignan 2019). Further shifts in subtitling practices include Video On Demand (VOD) platforms releasing all episodes at the same time, resulting in a rise in subtitling volumes and significant changes to the traditional workflows (Aleksandrowicz 2022; Massidda 2022).

Despite the challenges facing subtitlers, the French industry remains one of the most rewarding, as highlighted by Kuo's (2015) worldwide study comparing 39 subtitling markets. Her findings revealed worrying trends, including an increased vulnerability of subtitlers, and a high level of disparity in rates between and within countries (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, the French subtitlers reported the highest average rates, which may be explained through the support of ATAA and the union for French authors and composers (SNAC – *Syndicat National des Auteurs et des Compositeurs*). In contrast to disparate practices observed in other contexts, Kuo (*ibid.*) found that such strong unions and associations resulted in a homogenisation of

working conditions, such as rates, royalties, and credits. Therefore, the involvement of ATAA in the industry is particularly interesting to study because it greatly benefits French AVT professionals, as will be highlighted in section 6.3. on community collaboration.

4. Background

As the French AVT industry involves many stakeholders and processes, ATAA proposes a glossary of terminology in the field (Gourgeon 2014), which helps to define the stakeholders and their collaboration, as well as to clarify the terminology used in this study.

For clarity reasons, the terminology I use here to describe the practitioners is 'subtitlers'. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that in the French context, audiovisual translation is also called 'adaptation' and therefore translators also refer to themselves as 'adapters', 'translator-adapters', or 'author-adapters', according to their claims and preferences (*ibid.*). The varying designations for audiovisual translators stem primarily from their legal recognition under the author status. This status ensures copyright protection for their translations and entitles them to receive royalties for their subtitles (Genty *et al.* 2021: 8), thus making the French industry a unique context (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2020: 58).

To gain insight into with whom and how subtitlers collaborate, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of their clients. As has also been observed in other contexts, clients for mainstream subtitling projects can be divided into two levels: primary and secondary clients. On the primary level, there are production companies that are sometimes major companies; distributors; TV channels (Ferrer Simó 2021); and VOD platforms. Production companies are the creators and producers of the audiovisual content (*ibid.*), also called 'majors' in the case of big studios based in the US (Gourgeon 2014: 25). Distributors purchase the rights to distribute the audiovisual content in France (Ferrer Simó 2021), and also oversee legal aspects. VOD platforms[1] and TV channels can have the same tasks as majors or distributors. Primary clients will generally be the first to decide

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[1] In this study, I use 'Video on Demand (VOD) platforms' to encompass a large spectrum of platforms without distinction, to reflect the hybridity of systems: VOD streaming platforms accessible online (e.g., Netflix, Disney+, etc.), also referred to as OTT (Over-the-Top) systems or Subscription VOD (SVOD); Transactional VOD (TVOD) systems; and TV Channel VOD platforms (e.g., Canal+, M6, TF1, ARTE, etc.).

about the commissioning of subtitling. The secondary level is composed of post-production companies, also called 'laboratories' in the French context, who can either be in charge of commissioning subtitles from freelance subtitlers themselves or be used as technical intermediaries by the primary clients who have already commissioned projects from the subtitlers of their choice. Nowadays, laboratories are not always French companies, but are often multinational Language Service Providers (LSPs) with a French branch, who are typically multilanguage vendors (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2020: 33), hired as "intermediaries in the business chain" (*ibid.*: 55).

In the globalised chain of LSPs, 'templates' are often sent to subtitlers to centralise subtitle creation (*ibid.*: 43), as well as to reduce time and costs (Nikolić 2015: 196). Templates are files that already contain subtitles, usually in English, with their corresponding entry and exit timecodes (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2020: 43). These can be created for content with English as the source language, but can also "be used as a first or pivot translation in the subtitling of an audiovisual programme originally shot in a third language" (*ibid.*). These files will subsequently be used to translate all languages, thus not leaving subtitlers much room for flexibility in adaptation, notably with non-editable pre-established segmentation in the case of locked templates. Thus, any error or misunderstanding in template files will then "most likely be replicated in the other languages too" (*ibid.*). In French cinema, subtitlers also work with 'spotting files' (*repérages*), which can be considered "blank templates" (Nikolić 2015: 193). These files are created by spotters (*repéreurs*) and can be edited by the translators to suit their needs, thus highlighting "two very distinct activities: technical spotting and linguistic translation" (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2020: 43). In this study, the three subtitlers working for cinema noted that they enjoy working on pre-spotted files as they can focus on the creative translation process. In other studies, professionals have reported that these files slow down and complicate the process (Nikolić 2015: 197) or decrease quality (Oziemblewska and Szarkowska 2022: 450). For some, separating these tasks is not the norm and leads to a fragmentation of processes, and more competition on the market "as no specialist knowledge of subtitling is required anymore" (Künzli 2023: 13). In the French industry, an additional file that is usually sent by the client is the 'script', also called 'dialogue list', or 'spotting list', which contains the dialogues in the original language and is sometimes accompanied by comments on elements such as idiomatic expressions, context, etc. (Gourgeon 2014: 33). In 'video' subtitling, which encompasses VOD platforms and TV, as opposed to cinema subtitling, subtitlers tend to

carry out the spotting themselves. Two participants in this research project expressed enjoyment of the technical aspects of this task. In this study, the distinction between cinema and video is also reflected in collaboration, as well as rates and working conditions, with more positive reports in cinema subtitling than in video projects. Recently, a professional subtitler stated that there are between 400 and 500 French subtitlers, but only about 20 of them work exclusively for cinema (Boiron and Syssau 2020: 18). As Genty *et al.* (2021: 8) note, AVT professional practices are far from homogeneous despite being governed by many traditions and conventions.

5. Methodology

The data for this study consist of preliminary and retrospective semi-structured interviews, carried out between March 2021 and January 2022. These interviews focused on the subtitlers' backgrounds, their subtitling projects, practices, habits, and clients. They also investigated the subtitlers' role, as well as their communication and collaboration patterns with other agents within the production networks. The complete dataset for this case study also included a passive observation, which focused more on the subtitling processes, but is beyond the scope of this paper. A thematic analysis was then performed, and the data was coded using the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. I employed a 'theoretical' approach, as I set up preliminary research questions linked to work processes, collaboration, and communication, combined with an 'inductive' approach as some themes were established after data analysis and not beforehand (Braun and Clarke 2006). This allowed for the emergence of themes that were not solely based on predefined aspects, but also on the participants' contributions. The analysis thus reflects the focus on the subtitlers, which permits conclusions to be drawn based on their experiences and perspectives.

Participants were recruited through a variety of methods. An initial email explaining the research project was sent to ATAA through the contact form on their website. Additionally, I used social media platforms, in particular Facebook groups for audiovisual translators, to advertise my study. Further recruitment was conducted by individually emailing subtitlers. Ultimately, the most effective recruitment strategy proved to be a combination of personal email outreach and snowball sampling, facilitated

by the first participant who was enthusiastic about the research and recommended colleagues to participate.

The sampling design for the data collection was based on specific criteria:

1. The subtitlers needed to be based in Paris and produce subtitles for a European francophone audience.
2. All subtitlers needed to translate from English into French.
3. Each subtitler needed to have a minimum of 1.5 years of experience in the subtitling industry. This ensured that participants had worked in the subtitling industry before the COVID-19 outbreak, because collaboration and communication are areas of interest in this research and these work patterns might have changed due to lockdown.
4. The subtitlers' activity had to constitute remunerated employment formally commissioned by a client.

The methodology employed in this study presents both advantages and limitations that have been carefully considered. Introductory interviews were used to collect data related to the participants' opinions and thoughts; however, the weakness of this method is that there might be differences with their practices (Saldanha and O'Brien 2013: 170). To address this bias, direct observation was used to give access to the subtitlers' processes and allow for the triangulation of data. The Hawthorne effect was also taken into consideration, as participants' behaviour might be affected if they are aware of being observed (*ibid*.: 222). In order to mitigate these biases, I avoided disclosing to the participants which aspects were being observed or what results were expected, and carried out retrospective interviews to allow them to reflect on the tasks produced. These interviews highlighted that the subtitlers generally followed their usual workflow but tended to take fewer breaks and be more focused on their work due to my presence. The limitation of this study is that the findings are based on a small sample of subtitlers in different production networks of the French subtitling industry and cannot be generalised to the entire francophone market nor to other linguistic areas.

This study was granted ethics approval by the Social Research Ethics Committee at University College Cork (Log 2019-219), as well as by the Comité d'Éthique de la Recherche at Sorbonne Nouvelle – Paris 3, where the research was carried out.

6. Findings

In the first instance, the participants and their projects will be introduced. This will be followed by a proposed classification of collaboration patterns in three areas and two modes. This section also examines the opportunities they have for community collaboration.

6.1. Participants

The table below offers an overview of the participants' demographics, background, and the nature of the subtitling project(s) undertaken during the observation. The study involved a diverse group of seven subtitlers, with professional experience ranging from 1.5 to 28 years, working on projects for TV, cinema, and VOD platforms on the day of the observation.

Participant	Gender	Experience in the industry	Subtitling project(s) observed
A	F	20 years	Film for cinema
B	F	1.5 years	Series for VOD platform
C	F	28 years	▪ Film for cinema ▪ Film for VOD platform
D	M	19 years	Italian film for VOD platform (with English as pivot language)
E	F	21 years	▪ Film for TV channel ▪ 3 Series for VOD platform[2]
F	F	13 years	Series for TV channel and VOD platform
G	M	18 years	Series for VOD platform

Table 1: Information on participants.

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[2] On the day of the interviews, Participant E showed me these projects, but did not work on them as she had a quiet day after submitting her latest subtitles. Feedback and new bonuses to subtitle would come in the following days.

It should be noted that some participants were working on multiple projects at the time of data collection, which allowed for the investigation of different patterns across diverse clients with the same subtitler. These subtitlers may also work on translations intended for different distribution mediums or clients than those observed during data collection. For instance, Participants A and G reported that prior to the COVID-19 outbreak, they primarily worked on cinema subtitling. However, with the closure of French cinemas due to the pandemic, they exceptionally accepted different projects, such as for VOD platforms. Therefore, it should be noted that the subtitlers' practices may differ for other projects intended for different distribution mediums.

6.2. Classification of collaboration

Collaboration, which encompasses both communication and cooperation among team members, is a crucial aspect of subtitling workflows. While communication involves the exchange of information and ideas between individuals, collaboration allows for a more comprehensive and efficient approach to subtitling tasks through a collective effort. The subtitlers' collaboration practices can be categorised into three distinct areas: with clients, with colleagues, and with other agents. These can then belong to one of two modes: formal or informal. While the first area of collaboration (with clients) is formal because it is part of the subtitlers' brief, collaboration with colleagues and other agents can be classified as either formal or informal, as it is not always required by clients, nor officially part of the brief, but can be encouraged or even entirely voluntary. In this section, I will consider each area of collaboration in turn, including the prevalence of the formal and informal mode in each case.

6.2.1. Collaboration with clients

While there are some similarities depending on distribution medium, collaboration and communication can vary considerably from one client to another, and some clients are more organised than others, which can impact workflows. Subtitlers who often work for cinema distribution, such as Participants A, C, and G reported that they communicate mainly with the primary clients, such as the technical directors of distributors or majors. They usually communicate via email or telephone, depending on the formality of the relationship between them. In cinema subtitling, there are

no intermediaries in these discussions, as secondary clients provide solely technical services. Therefore, the communication of project details, as well as negotiation of deadlines and rates, are conducted directly with the primary client, which is consistent with findings from previous studies that have shown this approach to be more rewarding than working through intermediaries (Abdallah 2012: 46; Díaz Cintas and Remael 2020: 55). In the project under investigation, Participant G was working for a VOD platform, but was also able to collaborate with the primary client, which allowed him to negotiate good rates and "comfortable working conditions". Apart from him, the five other subtitlers who work on video projects reported that their interactions are generally limited to French post-production laboratories or the French branches of LSPs. They do not communicate with the primary client directly, because the laboratory requires all communication to go through them. Instead, they liaise with a project manager or a subtitling manager who oversees the projects, commissions the translations, and provides feedback. In confidentiality-driven contexts, most subtitlers reveal communication challenges due to incomplete information from clients regarding processes and broadcast dates, resulting in shorter deadlines and constant rescheduling, impeding effective collaboration. Participant E shared that her experience differs between her VOD clients' global approach and her TV projects, which are more organised and offer better communication. For TV projects, she usually receives detailed information, a purchase order, and all the video files in advance, which is crucial for efficient subtitling. As previous studies have highlighted, missing or asymmetrical information is a potential factor impacting the processes and quality of subtitling (Abdallah 2012; Artegiani 2021). Participant F who works for TV and VOD platforms reports that communication can be challenging when she is not informed about where her subtitles will be broadcast. This can later result in a necessary conformation of her subtitles to a specific destination broadcaster's subtitling norms. This has already generated problems with copyright declarations, as she declared subtitles for one medium, which in the end had been done by a different translator, while her subtitles ended up elsewhere. Di Giovanni (2016: 6) highlights that this is due to the ease of reproducing subtitles compared to purchasing copyrighted files and reusing them, as well as to a "lack of communication/collaboration among the operators". These issues are compounded by the absence of client archiving, which in Participant F's case could be mainly attributed to her laboratory acting as an intermediary

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to a major client, who then redistributes the subtitles to various media (TV channels or VOD platforms).

6.2.1.1. *Collaboration in quality control*

Subtitling quality control processes are another important form of collaboration with clients. These processes are needed to ensure the accuracy and quality of subtitles, and are another area in which the study revealed significant variations between distribution mediums. The three participants working for cinema can often attend in-person simulations, whereas participants who work on video projects rarely or never attend simulations at laboratories. Only Participant E reports that the quality control processes of her VOD and TV projects involve a commissioned simulation, which is arranged by the post-production company who appoints an external subtitler. Whenever she can, she prefers to attend in-person with this simulation operator and her co-subtitlers. Subsequently, she mentions an additional simulation done internally by her TV client "who has an in-house simulation operator".

When working for video, the other subtitlers carry out their simulations themselves or remotely with their co-subtitler(s). They receive written feedback, usually via email, following an internal quality control process by the project or subtitling manager in the post-production company. Some believe that this feedback is followed by a simulation or verification from the primary client, but they cannot all ascertain whether this step happens. During these 'quality checks', subtitlers sometimes receive a second round of feedback. However, it is not always clear whether the feedback is from a subtitling reviser or a project manager at the primary clients' company. This indicates a lack of synchronous collaboration between subtitlers and revisers in the quality control process. It therefore remains unclear whether the revisers are themselves subtitlers, which could potentially bring two sets of translation competences into the process, as suggested by some studies (Di Giovanni 2016; Menezes 2022). Nevertheless, this supports Menezes' (2022) suggestion that further investigation is needed into the roles and responsibilities of subtitling revisers. Regardless of the source of the feedback, subtitlers are responsible for addressing it and making the requested changes to the subtitles. Occasionally, Participant F disagrees with the edits and changes made by clients, leading her to remove her name from the credits. This raises

concerns over copyright and recognition, given that in France it is a legal requirement to credit subtitlers.

The quality control process thus highlights a range of collaboration patterns with clients, which are far from homogenous and vary between in-person simulation, remote simulation, or written feedback. It aligns with Beuchert's (2017: 141) finding from a study of Danish subtitlers' working practices that "all respondents ensure the quality of their subtitles in some way, but that some agencies may not have a procedure in this regard". While in cinema subtitling practices seem to be harmonised and to encompass the highest degree of collaboration, in most cases, in video subtitling there seems to be a lack of collaboration between translators and primary clients, and of consideration of the subtitlers in the quality control process. In-person simulations are preferred by most participants as they provide an opportunity to correct errors, discuss translation strategies, and improve the quality of subtitles. Nevertheless, written feedback and remote communication are often privileged by clients, indicating a divergence in preferred approaches to quality control between the two parties involved.

The responses from most of the subtitlers seem to reveal a lack of transparency regarding workflow, quality control, task assignments, and the overall subtitling process. This lack of transparency can lead to a decrease in the subtitlers' status, pushing them further down the post-production chain. Beyond the dichotomy between collaborative processes in cinema and video subtitling, when asked about their role in the subtitling production network, the majority of participants expressed a lack of comprehensive understanding and shared that they were unfamiliar with the processes preceding and succeeding their file submissions. For many, the challenges of flawed collaboration patterns highlight a lack of consideration for their profession and its creative process, which negatively impacts its sustainability and the quality of subtitling. Nevertheless, these subtitlers generally express high job satisfaction, which is closely linked to collaborative practices with colleagues.

6.2.2. Collaboration with colleagues

This form of collaboration consists of communication with a diverse range of colleagues through formal or informal modes, and can be required or encouraged by clients, or may be voluntary.

The first colleagues that are generally formally involved are co-subtitlers, with whom video subtitlers tend to split series in half. Participants

B, E, and F, who work on series, are required to collaborate with a co-subtitler, to harmonise the translations across seasons and proofread each other's episodes. This collaboration may also be voluntary, as for Participant E who requested to add a third subtitler to one of her VOD projects. In addition to proofreading, she meets in person with her co-subtitlers to do simulations, they exchange ideas via group emails, and collaborate on a glossary. All video subtitlers reported exchanging ideas with co-subtitlers on a regular basis to harmonise their translations with respect to terminology, relationships between characters, and language register. The exception was Participant G, who translated a mini-series for a platform by himself as it only contained 6 episodes. In contrast to Aleksandrowicz's (2022) findings, which often highlighted inconsistencies due to changes in translators between modes, seasons or individual episodes, in the present case study, the episodes are usually shared among the same teams from season to season. They agree from the outset to ensure consistency between episodes and maintain it throughout.

Formal collaborations required by the client commonly involve the dubbing team, to ensure consistency between both versions. They usually collaborate on shared documents, through emails, or send each other their translated files. In her VOD series, Participant B was required to collaborate with the dubbing team prior to the translation process to deliver files containing terminology and forced narratives, i.e., textual elements that appear on screen (Georgakopoulou 2019: 153). Subsequently, however, she was disappointed by the lack of communication with the dubbing team, because she would have liked to be included in the discussion of some translation choices that were made without consulting the subtitlers. On her series, Participant B thus collaborated retroactively with the dubbers, which was similar to Participant G's collaboration patterns on his mini-series. They were sent the dubbing files after their submission and could only check for consistency between the two versions, ensuring there was no major difference in meaning or terminology. This allowed them to review important translation decisions made in the French version, as clients require consistency. Nevertheless, Participant B reported inconsistencies in the dubbing dialogues, which could be corrected in a second recording session, thus highlighting the advantage of collaborating synchronously between translation modes. While cinema subtitlers work alone on the subtitling of their films, they usually are encouraged or required to consult with dubbing teams to harmonise their versions. For her VOD film, Participant C reported that collaboration with the dubber presented

challenges, because the LSP's cloud-based platform does not allow them to export their files in order to share them with one another, despite their translations "being their property". This phenomenon has been highlighted by Boiron and Syssau (2020: 19), and presents legal and ethical issues that would warrant investigation. Nevertheless, the client asked Participant C to communicate with the dubber and follow their choices for important catch phrases, as the dubbed version is the reference "that will be remembered by audiences". A similar request was also made of Participant E by her VOD client, who required collaboration with the dubbers to agree on terminology and forced narratives. As the dubbing was already done, she had to change her subtitles to match what is said in the French audio to avoid inconsistencies, despite sometimes disagreeing with the translation. Although this is frustrating, she acknowledges that she needs "to put [her] ego aside". This highlights a power dynamic in which dubbers hold more decision-making power than subtitlers, which can be linked to consumer preferences as France is traditionally a "dubbing country" (Díaz Cintas and Zhang 2022: 12; Gambier 2012: 46).

For the medical series she is working on, Participant F is not required to work with dubbers. Nevertheless, she was surprised to learn about a 'forced' passive collaboration with dubbers that she had previously been unaware of. She found out about this "when a dubber recently wrote to [her], [about] a typo in a subtitle". The laboratory had shared her subtitling files with the dubbing team without her knowledge, which she finds disrespectful. The unauthorised sharing of copyrighted content not only highlights communication issues and raises ethical and legal concerns for intellectual property rights but also has significant implications for the professional status of audiovisual translators, as it undermines their copyright ownership and rightful recognition for their work.

These collaborations with dubbers highlight the importance that clients place on consistency between modes. Three participants mentioned a 'bible', provided by the clients or self-made, to harmonise terminology. The 'bible' is a list of translations for character names, recurring places and events that appear in the series, as well as the characters' relationships with one another throughout the episodes, including forms of address such as *tutoiement* and *vouvoiement*,[3] which is shared with dubbing teams to avoid

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[3] Translating from English into French presents the challenge of choosing the appropriate form of address between the formal *vous* and the informal *tu* when translating the word 'you', which "must be evaluated carefully" (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2020: 187). Many factors must be considered and therefore, "subtitlers have to resort to other visual,

continuity errors (Loison-Charles 2022: 14). Another form of collaboration that is required by clients, and can be defined as passive, is to collaborate globally through filling out multilingual files with previously established translations, forced narratives, or Key Names and Phrases (KNPs) in every language, which was the case for Participants B and C's VOD projects. This highlights wider formal collaboration and centralisation of translations as a new area of exploration. Although his study focuses on the Polish context specifically, Aleksandrowicz (2022) identifies that, when translators collaboratively edit KNP files, consistency is improved throughout the content. However, within the French context, the proliferation of such supplementary tasks has been identified as problematic due to the increased workload they impose, without corresponding remuneration or extended deadlines (Penot-Lenoir and Renard 2023), thus constituting "free work" (AVTE n.d.).

As regards informal collaboration, voluntary pre-simulations were reported by four participants, who enjoy inviting colleagues over to carry out an informal viewing, despite not always being possible with short deadlines. This step is listed in Gourgeon's (2014: 30) glossary as a preparatory step to refine the text before the official simulation, although here it was sometimes the only in-person simulation. Most subtitlers enjoy sharing their work and exchanging thoughts about translation because, as stated by Participant A, "subtitling is a rather solitary job", and professional growth is fostered through discussions with peers. Participant D also regularly voluntarily engages in informal collaboration with another translator, with whom he either splits episodes and films, exchanges ideas, or condenses and synchronises his first drafts. Many informal exchanges among colleagues also take place on social media, notably on Facebook groups, which aligns with findings in other linguistic contexts such as Denmark (Beuchert 2017: 138).

To summarise, in formal collaboration, film translation is primarily performed by a single subtitler, whereas in the subtitling of series, splitting seasons between two (or more) subtitlers seems to be the norm, except for mini-series. In these collaborative settings, subtitlers agree on terminology and forms of address between characters, discuss solutions, and give each other feedback. Apart from Participant D's Italian film, for which no dubbing seemed to be planned to date, all participants also highlighted collaboration with dubbers, to varying extents. This collaboration is mainly

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linguistic and narrative clues in the source film to determine relationships between characters" (*ibid.*).

requested by clients, and, in some cases, may require further investigation into legal and ethical considerations. Informal collaboration, on the other hand, occurs frequently when translators voluntarily decide to engage in collaborative practices, proofreading, or simulations with colleagues who are external to the project.

6.2.3. Collaboration with other agents

Where the subtitlers' collaboration with other agents is concerned, this is often informal. Six subtitlers mention informal collaboration with experts on specialised forums and through calls to associations, when working on projects requiring specific terminology. Participant C mentions that she also often contacts experts through social media to ask questions or recruit them for later projects. Sometimes, she collaborates financially with the dubber to pay these external consultants, and in rare cases she makes a request to her primary clients to pay them, thus officialising the collaboration in the process. The only other occurrence of formality in such exchanges is in Participant F's medical series, in which she collaborates with a doctor hired by the client, who provides feedback and suggestions on the translation of terminology.

 In total, three participants collaborate informally with English-native colleagues or friends that they regularly consult for proofreading or to ask questions. The same number of subtitlers also informally collaborate with other language consultants when translating from English as a pivot language. Among them, Participant G specifies that he pays these consultants a daily rate, while Participant D mentions a friendlier exchange with translators and friends who are native speakers of other languages than English, who proofread or contribute to his translations.

 Cinema subtitlers report that they are only rarely in touch with film directors or producers, who do not come to simulations and do not interact with post-production as opposed to the case of French to English subtitlers (see Silvester 2022). Occasionally, subtitlers may be able to email them questions if the distributors have put them in contact. In the French industry, subtitling for mainstream distribution thus reveals a lack of inclusion of the subtitlers during the pre-production or production phases. As Participant C states, "Tom Cruise doesn't come to check the subtitles", and subtitlers primarily collaborate at post-production level with clients, colleagues, and experts.

6.3. Community collaboration

Participants in the study highlighted ATAA's role in promoting fruitful collaboration among subtitlers. ATAA[4] is a community in which members can build networks and collaborate with colleagues, including through peer-recommendations and informal pre-simulations. Participant B, who was new to the market, also reported that the ATAA community provided her with a mentor who recommends her for projects, proofreads her work, and includes her in collaborations. This illustrates the effectiveness of the community in supporting effective collaboration and promoting knowledge sharing between established practitioners and newcomers to the profession.

ATAA also has a forum, which is a valuable space for peer recommendations, discussing technical and linguistic issues and seeking advice on specific terminology from subtitlers with expertise in particular fields. The association's members interact through various channels: the Discord forum, the ATAA blog, social media, or the committee. Furthermore, ATAA aims to create connections between clients and members, providing a database for clients containing the translators' contact information, language pairs, and any other information they wish to display, as well as a section to make job offers.

ATAA's guidelines and reference documents, particularly the subtitling and dubbing guide (ATAA 2019), have been recognised as essential in promoting best practices in the industry. The association notably advocates for greater recognition and visibility of AVT professions and promotes unity among translators in the community. ATAA monitors the AVT industry in order to provide valuable information and insights, while also supporting French audiovisual translators by defending their rights and ensuring proper working conditions and fair rates (e.g., Blake *et al.* 2023).

Community collaboration has proven to be effective in enhancing working conditions in the AVT industry, as seen in the online collaboration among subtitlers in the Finnish industry that resulted in harmonising their working conditions (Tuominen 2018), and in the SubComm proposal by Silvester and Tuominen (2021), aiming to bring together subtitling practitioners and academics to increase subtitlers' visibility and recognition. The importance of community collaboration has also been recognised in a recent survey of AVT stakeholders (Nikolić and Bywood 2021), which identified the need for greater cooperation and standardisation in the

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[4] ATAA (n.d.). https://beta.ataa.fr/

industry. Widening the scope of collaboration could improve the working conditions of subtitlers (Kuo 2015: 190), and as such, it is clear that cooperation between subtitlers, academics, and other industry stakeholders could also improve recognition, visibility, and ultimately the sustainability of the profession.

7. Collaboration in the globalised age

The globalisation of processes has generated changes to the subtitlers' traditional workflows, leading to a "cloud turn" (Bolaños-García-Escribano and Díaz Cintas 2020), in which social dynamics have shifted. Research conducted in other contexts has indeed shown that the primary change in collaboration occurred due to the shift from traditional face-to-face interactions to online collaboration (Artegiani 2021; Künzli 2023), particularly when working for VOD clients. In this study, the clients' need for confidentiality has been reported to create challenges in processes, such as LSPs typically sending episodes one by one, thus limiting the subtitler's ability to watch the final episodes before submitting the first ones and make changes if inconsistencies are discovered in previous episodes. Similarly, as a result of the increasing demand for simultaneous translation across multiple languages, Participant E reports being frequently tasked with translating episode summaries and titles for VOD projects prior to viewing the content. Four out of seven respondents mentioned globalisation and automation as decreasing the quality of collaboration. They reported experiencing challenges in regard to the imposition by LSPs of non-user-friendly cloud-based subtitling platforms, including the need for high-speed internet to work; locked templates; lack of rights on their copyrighted translations; no systematic access to the full and final video content before subtitling; replacement of in-person simulations; and monitoring of the subtitlers' progress in real-time. Künzli (2023: 9-10), who has identified similar evolutions in German-language subtitling, notes that collaboration on subtitling platforms has been "marketed as an advantage for subtitlers", when in reality it has increased anonymity and the monitoring of productivity, thus generating further ethical challenges. While Massidda (2022: 27) states that "[t]he future of subtitling is in the cloud", Artegiani (2021) argues that cloud subtitling platforms are unsustainable, because they isolate subtitlers and decrease visibility, communication and collaboration between agents in the network. Her study analysed platforms that

automated many processes, including task assignment, which did not allow for much collaboration outside the platform. In contrast, the present study found that despite reduced collaboration in cloud-based environments, participants also communicated externally to the platforms, e.g., via emails, with project and subtitling managers, notably regarding information on the project, deadlines and rates negotiations, as well as with dubbing teams and other agents.

Oziemblewska and Szarkowska's (2022) survey of 344 subtitlers provided insight into their opinions on templates used in cloud-based subtitling and highlighted that the subtitlers did not all welcome this trend and that templates can negatively impact rates and professional status. Nikolić (2015: 201) argues that "templates are here to stay", but that better communication and understanding between subtitlers and clients could result in better products for viewers. Improving template files and understanding the needs of the translators could thus increase quality. Guidelines for improving templates have notably been suggested by Georgakopoulou (2019) and Oziemblewska and Szarkowska (2022). In this study, two participants deplored that templates and other tasks are often outsourced to countries with lower labour costs, which impedes the improvement of skills and the exchange of knowledge between generations through interactions. Participant A agrees with the idea that "to exchange ideas and debate with a fellow translator will most likely lead to higher quality translation" (O'Brien 2011: 19). Decreases in collaboration thus challenge the subtitlers' workflow and can subsequently hinder the quality of the final product. In this study, over half of the interviewees expressed concerns about the decrease in subtitling quality and reported a lack of interest from LSPs in producing quality content. These findings are consistent with other studies that have highlighted concerns about declining quality as a result of deteriorating working conditions (Künzli 2023). By prioritising speed over quality and accelerating processes, LSPs create challenging time constraints that reduce possibilities for collaboration. Nikolić's (2021) investigation found that deadlines are often too short for quality control, and that not all clients prioritise this step. Abdallah (2012) also emphasises that translators are not solely responsible for quality, as it depends on collective decisions and the involvement of multiple agents and factors that can influence the outcome. This highlights the need for further research exploring the link between collaboration and the quality of subtitles.

In this study, it is important to note that the majority of participants had extensive experience in the industry and had been following the well-established French guidelines and processes for decades, before encountering significant changes due to globalisation. From their perspective, these changes might have significantly altered their workflows. However, investigating the attitudes of new subtitlers towards globalised practices would be insightful, as those who have not experienced different working conditions may express less concern. Participant B, for example, expressed overall satisfaction with the processes and collaboration with globalised clients. Nevertheless, she expressed concern over decreasing rates and tighter deadlines, a common attitude shared by all subtitlers, highlighting an overall decline in compensation across all areas of the profession. Despite these challenges, six out of seven subtitlers expressed their enjoyment in collaborating with colleagues and the satisfaction derived from engaging in the creative process of translating subtitles.

Conclusions

This research has demonstrated the value of adopting the Translator Studies paradigm in exploring the perspectives of subtitlers and their roles in the AVT industry from a sociological approach. This study has filled a gap in the existing literature by undertaking a comprehensive exploration of the collaborative dimension of subtitling. By examining the perspectives and experiences of French subtitlers, it has identified three key areas of collaboration within production networks, thereby providing valuable insights in response to the research question.

By highlighting the challenges and benefits of collaboration and their variations in different settings, the study has demonstrated that it is an essential factor to consider for processes, working conditions, and product quality. Collaboration can significantly benefit the subtitlers' job satisfaction, can help to mitigate the sense of isolation that subtitlers can feel from working as freelancers, and can improve their skills and productivity. However, this study has also identified areas where the lack of collaboration, such as with primary clients and revisers, as well as globalised and virtualised practices, negatively impact the production networks and ultimately the quality of subtitles. Moreover, inadequate transparency and communication within the workflow may give rise to ethical concerns regarding copyright and translation ownership.

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The findings of this small-scale, in-depth study provide valuable insights into the importance of collaboration within subtitling production networks. These can be used to inform future research in the AVT industry by encouraging further investigation into the relationship between collaboration and subtitle quality, or the ramifications of global collaborative files on final products, and exploring the attitudes of new subtitlers towards globalised working conditions. Furthermore, this study's findings can inform industry practices by emphasising the need for greater transparency and communication within the workflow in order to address ethical concerns. This study ultimately emphasises the importance of fostering community collaboration among subtitlers, as well as with the various stakeholders involved in the AVT industry.

Acknowledgements

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