CORA Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Title	Collaboration between subtitling academics and practitioners: A proposal for SubComm
Authors	Silvester, Hannah;Tuominen, Tiina
Publication date	2021-12-28
Original Citation	Silvester, H. and Tuominen, T. (2021) 'Collaboration Between Subtitling Academics and Practitioners: A Proposal for SubComm', Journal of Audiovisual Translation (JAT), 4 (3), pp. 108-125. doi: 10.47476/jat.v4i3.2021.188
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed)
Link to publisher's version	https://www.jatjournal.org/index.php/jat/article/view/188 - 10.47476/jat.v4i3.2021.188
Rights	© 2021 Silvester & Tuominen. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License. This allows for unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. - https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/
Download date	2026-11-07 05:51:37
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/12690

UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

Journal of Audiovisual Translation

Collaboration Between Subtitling Academics and Practitioners: A Proposal for SubComm

Hannah Silvester✉
University College Cork, Ireland

Tiina Tuominen✉
University of Turku, Finland

Abstract

This article proposes the application of public translation studies put forward by Koskinen (2010) to the field of audiovisual translation (AVT). We argue that AVT scholars and practitioners would benefit from the implementation of a long-term, reciprocal collaboration. This would involve the formation of a community of academics and subtitlers, creating a space for regular dialogic communication that would be mutually beneficial. The article first explores the concept of public translation studies, examining how and why this framework might be useful in AVT. We then present the findings of a scoping questionnaire, in which subtitlers working in the UK and Ireland were surveyed about their interest in collaborating with academics. Respondents indicated an interest in opportunities for professional development, community-building and collaboration. In addition, based on the results we highlight a number of areas around which these activities could be centred, including, for example, opportunities for subtitlers to enhance their practical skill set, to improve their career opportunities and the collective standing of the profession, to discuss translation dilemmas and to inform academia. We end by proposing some concrete next steps for the development of a subtitling community, and the possible role of academics and subtitlers within such an initiative.

Key words: subtitling, public translation studies, survey, working conditions, networking, professional development, collaboration

Citation: Silvester, H. & Tuominen, T. (2021). Collaboration Between Subtitling Academics and Practitioners: A Proposal for SubComm. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation,* *4*(3), 108–125. https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v4i3.2021.188

Editor(s): J. Pedersen

Received: March 15, 2021

Accepted: July 26, 2021

Published: December 28, 2021

Copyright: ©2021 Silvester & Tuominen. This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License. This allows for unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

✉ hannah.silvester@ucc.ie, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1640-2165
✉ tiina.k.tuominen@gmail.com, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0665-6970

1. Introduction

In many countries, the audiovisual translation field tends to be fragmented, heterogeneous and lacking in unifying community (see, e.g., Kuo, 2015; Jankowska, 2012; Abdallah, 2011). This fragmentation can lead to reduced opportunities for professional development, to a weak negotiating position when determining working conditions, and to low status for the profession at large. It also presents a challenge for academia: in subtitler training, it is difficult to prepare students for all the uncertainties they may face, and in research, difficulty in building contacts with practitioners and limited flows of information can hinder impactful research projects. Practitioners and their organisations frequently call for more unity and collaboration to increase their professional standing (see, e.g., AVTEurope, 2021; Subtle, 2007a). Indeed, many organisations and virtual platforms currently exist to facilitate collaboration both locally and across national borders. However, the challenges of fragmentation and deteriorating working conditions persist, and it is worth considering whether new academic initiatives could provide additional positive impact to lift the profile of audiovisual translation professions. Is there a role for academics in supporting practitioners in their efforts? How could academics and practitioners work together productively and in a way that would benefit all involved?

This article reflects on how collaboration between academics and practitioners could be advanced in the field of subtitling. While research is often based on data from practice and there have been numerous efforts to share research findings with practitioners, academics could do more to generate systematic and mutually beneficial dialogue and collaboration. In this article, we propose some ways to do that, and we discuss what that kind of activity would mean for both practitioners and academics. The proposals are founded on the concept of public translation studies, coined by Kaisa Koskinen (2010, 2012), which suggests a public, even activist role for academics. We intend to explore the relevance of such a concept in audiovisual translation, and in subtitling in particular.

To lay the groundwork for a collaborative initiative, we have conducted a scoping survey with subtitlers based in the UK and Ireland. The purpose of the survey was to investigate their interest in collaboration, professional development, and networking. We will discuss the key findings from the survey below, with the purpose of exploring how a model of public audiovisual translation studies could be constructed to meet practitioners' needs and interests, what role academics might play in activism and community-building in the subtitling field, and what challenges such an initiative may face. In addition, we will shed some light on how the global COVID-19 pandemic has affected these subtitlers and their professional community.

In the following, we will first introduce the concept of public translation studies and the broader trend towards translator studies which advocate for a closer relationship between research and practitioners. We will discuss why such ideas are particularly relevant in audiovisual translation. Then, we will describe the main findings from our scoping questionnaire and demonstrate how they could fall within the objectives of public translation studies. Finally, we will offer our proposal for public audiovisual translation studies and reciprocal engagement between subtitlers and academics.

2. Models for Reciprocal Collaboration Between Practitioners and Academics

With the rising prominence of sociological and cognitive research topics in translation studies, academic attention has been turning more and more towards practitioners and other stakeholders in translation processes (Angelone et al., 2016; Sela-Sheffy, 2016). This trend towards the human aspect in translation has prompted Andrew Chesterman (2009) to propose a new addition to James Holmes's mapping of translation studies, a branch that he calls "translator studies." In comparison to product-focused research topics where researchers mostly work with translations and other texts, looking at the human dimension encourages researchers to interact with practitioners more actively. As such, it has the potential to foster connections between academics and practitioners and increase practitioners' awareness of translation research. However, it remains an open question how impactful this collaboration can be, and how much benefit translators see in it. Some studies suggest that translators do not tend to consider research useful for their practice or for raising the status and profile of translation (Katan, 2009, pp. 149–150; Williamson, 2016, pp. 191–192). The prominence of translator studies is turning academics towards practitioners, but it can be challenging to foster reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships.

There is also a growing interest in translator studies within audiovisual translation studies. Process research has so far been more limited in audiovisual translation studies than in other areas of translation, but there are some emerging examples of an interest in it (e.g. Orrego-Carmona et al., 2018; Beuchert, 2017; Hvelplund, 2017). There are also numerous examples of studies which explore audiovisual translation as a profession using methods such as questionnaires and interviews (e.g. Kuo, 2015; Jankowska, 2012; Abdallah, 2012; Tuominen, 2018; Silvester, 2021). Audiovisual translation studies is thus building a broad-ranging foundation for audiovisual translator studies. Frederic Chaume (2018, p. 42) has outlined the development of audiovisual translation studies as a discipline through four "methodological turns:" the descriptive, the cultural, the sociological and the cognitive turn. The two most recent turns, sociological and cognitive, have drawn attention to practitioners, which demonstrates the movement towards translator studies. Although many of these developments are fairly recent, there is a long tradition of turning to practitioners and the AVT field for research topics and data. As Jorge Díaz-Cintas (2020, pp. 216–217) points out, much of AVT research is practical or applied in nature, and many researchers have a background in AVT practice. In addition, Díaz-Cintas (2020, pp. 219–224) lists an impressive number of studies with direct practical relevance, demonstrating that research has much to contribute to practice. However, it is less clear how much impact research is truly having on practice, and how researchers could better reach practitioners.

2.1. Public Translation Studies

One means of describing ways in which practitioners and academics could – and perhaps should – work together is the concept of public translation studies. Kaisa Koskinen (2010, p. 23) has stated that engaging with and disseminating research findings to stakeholders both across disciplinary

boundaries and outside academia is a crucial task for translation studies, because "as a discipline we cannot matter to others unless we communicate with them." Koskinen (2010, p. 24) maintains that such engagement has always taken place, but it has received little attention, which has diminished its impact. There is thus a need for rethinking how to go about communicating with external groups, or even "creating the relevant publics" (Koskinen, 2010, p. 23). Employing the concept of public translation studies could help enhance the visibility and impact of research by foregrounding this outward-looking strand of translation studies.

In Koskinen's (2012, p. 6) definition, public translation studies would encompass any research that involves translation practitioners at grassroots level and where the researcher in some way engages with the activities of the community. Some possible research topics suggested by Koskinen include "workplace studies of translators in the new market economy; action research aiming to improve and develop the existing situation; […] direct engagement with the field, dialogue and co-construction of meaning." Furthermore, Koskinen emphasises that public translation studies is intended to be "critical and empowering," as well as reciprocal, so that research findings are communicated to non-academics to make a difference in the field, and information and data is fed back to academia for further research.

Koskinen (2010, p. 24) even nudges translation scholars towards an activist view of their role. There are a multitude of changes underway in the translation industry, and many translators are facing considerable difficulties, including deteriorating working conditions and general uncertainty about the future of the profession (Hubscher-Davidson, 2020). Therefore, academics may want to use their research to draw attention to these problems and to alleviate them, even if it requires them to question the traditional view of the academic as an objective, external observer. In many places, the abovementioned challenges are being compounded by the fact that translators, who often work as freelancers, do not always have cohesive and effective professional communities that would allow them to advocate for change collectively. Practitioners could therefore benefit from more active collaboration with academics, both as a way to improve their work with the help of relevant research, and as a way to network and build a more unified community.

The idea of activism is not foreign to the field of translation. Academics may assume the role of an activist when working on topics that encourage critical reflection, such as queer and feminist translation studies, postcolonial research and other topics related to power structures and ideologies. However, it is a further ethical challenge for translation researchers to take on an activist role on behalf of the translation profession itself, and there are many factors that contribute to the debate (Hekkanen, 2007, pp. 240–241). For example, as Hekkanen (2007, p. 241) points out, translation scholars may want to conduct research that is useful in some way, but usefulness can have many definitions, such as making translation projects more cost effective, creating translations that are pleasurable to read, or helping translators improve their standing in the job market. These aims are, in part, contradictory, so aiming for one could be harmful to another. In addition, the researcher is always faced with the fundamental question of whether it is appropriate for the researcher to put their finger on the scale in favour of an objective they have defined, and whether

research will continue to be seen as reliable if the researcher has an obvious agenda. Nevertheless, public translation studies provides a rationale for adopting an activist view of the researcher's task. Not all researchers are expected to become activists who engage in public translation studies, and theoretical academic endeavours continue to have significant value, but public translation studies is relevant to the discipline as a way to effect change, to show the practical importance of translation research, and to empower and inform students who may enter the translation industry in the future. In order to accomplish that, an activist orientation may occasionally be called for.

2.2. Towards Public Audiovisual Translation Studies

The framework of public translation studies and the accompanying activism is a promising way to foreground interaction between academics and practitioners in audiovisual translation. Audiovisual translators across the world struggle with a variety of challenges, including problematic work processes, low rates, challenges with the introduction of new technology such as machine translation, and other factors which complicate their daily work and make the future of the profession unpredictable and insecure. Academic activism and a subtitling community could therefore provide much-needed support for the profession.

Globally, subtitlers are working in diverse conditions, and Arista Szu-Yu Kuo (2015, p. 163) notes the difficulty of studying these working conditions given the freelance nature of their work. In a survey of 429 subtitlers, she sought to compare global subtitlers' working conditions for the first time. Her findings indicated that in countries with strong unions, "the working conditions of subtitlers […] were more homogenous and more likely to remain at a certain level, particularly as regards rates, royalties and credits" (Kuo, p. 189). However, there is relatively little research examining specific contexts, and existing studies argue that closer examination of other contexts is "crucial […] so that we can map the situation at an international level" (Jankowska, 2012, p. 56).[1] In addition to providing an opportunity for academics to support practitioners in working together to overcome the challenges facing them, creating a space for regular structured collaboration between subtitlers and academics would offer more opportunities for the study of working conditions.

Another outcome of collaboration between subtitlers and academics could be improved visibility and recognition of subtitlers and their work. The name of the subtitler is not always acknowledged, which "can be considered as an attempt at enforcing invisibility" (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 59). This invisibility can also be seen to affect research undertaken in the field of audiovisual translation. Kristiina Abdallah examined translators in production networks, and highlights the importance of a consideration of the translators and their working conditions in studying translation quality. She notes that "the outermost, invisible third dimension called social quality affects process quality, which in turn affects product quality" (Abdallah, 2012, p. 45). This deeper understanding of the

[1] See for example, Tuominen (2018), Beuchert (2017) and Jankowska (2012).

contexts in which translations are produced can feed into work on subtitling quality, as highlighted by Abdallah. Research that engages more actively with subtitlers themselves will improve practitioners' visibility, and will allow for better communication between practitioners, industry and academia, making it easier for academics and practitioners alike to consider an activist role. In addition, collaboration with subtitlers working in a range of contexts could result in an improved understanding of a multitude of factors affecting their work, and possibly in the identification of models of best practice. A structured and dialogic collaboration will allow for greater insight into the challenges facing the profession, and an understanding of how members of the professional community may already be addressing these challenges. Such challenges could also include practical questions concerning the daily work of the subtitler, such as how to translate humour or dialect, what would be an optimal reading speed, how to improve the readability of subtitles, and so on.

AVT researchers are, as was mentioned above, rather actively engaged in research topics that would be relevant for public translation studies. Thus, there appears to be readiness in academia to work towards positive change with and for practitioners. If academics are willing to adopt an activist role to disseminate their research findings and engage in dialogue with practitioners with the explicit objective of improving conditions in the field, they may be able to play a meaningful role in helping practitioners reinforce their professional community, whilst also defining new directions for the discipline and forging long-standing links with industry. What we need are innovations that would allow for systematic reciprocal collaborations, a framework for public audiovisual translation studies. Numerous events have already worked to bring academics and practitioners together, including the regular Media for All and Languages and the Media conferences which are attended by academics, practitioners and industry representatives alike. In addition, researchers and practitioners often reach out to each other through events and informal personal contact for knowledge exchange and collaboration. One example of an academic project that has succeeded in building bridges towards practitioners is the EU-funded ILSA project (2017-2020) on interlingual live subtitling (ILSA), where impact was a clearly defined component of the project. However, it can be challenging to try to maintain long-term contact after individual events or after a project has run its course, and it would be useful to work towards a constant venue that would facilitate the construction of a genuine shared community. Such a community would allow for a reciprocal exchange of ideas, where neither practitioners nor academics are just invited guests but rather members who have a shared interest in maintaining the community and who jointly decide on the topics of interest. In this article, we propose one step towards such a shared community which espouses the ideas of public translation studies.

2.3. SubComm: A Proposal for a Community of Subtitling Practitioners and Scholars

Building a community of subtitling scholars and practitioners would create a space in which we could work together to enhance the quality and impact of AVT research, and fight some of the above-highlighted working condition and social recognition challenges in a way that would benefit both academics and practitioners. Through a survey of 352 translators and interpreters in South Korea,

Taeyoung Yoo and Cheol Ja Jeong (2017, p. 381) found that "citizenship behaviours positively affect translators' professional identity." They highlight voluntary activities within the profession as one example of such citizenship behaviours (Yoo & Ja Jeong, p. 368). There are a number of associations in which practitioners can become involved, either for translation in general, or specifically for AVT. These associations are valuable for practitioners and offer a range of benefits, though in many associations, there is "more information flowing from the administration to the members than the other way around" (Pym, 2014, p. 470). What we are proposing here is a community allowing for a bi-directional, circular flow of information. In this way, academics would be able to use their expertise to support practitioners in a range of areas, through helping to address their training needs, or through sharing the findings of our research, for example. Practitioners, on the other hand, would be able to highlight challenges they face regularly, and inform academics of their professional environments, offering an understanding of the industry within which academic research could be contextualised. Together, all members of the community would have the opportunity to shape the future of the discipline and engage in the kinds of citizenship behaviours that can empower and inspire all participants.

In order to provide the kind of continuity that would allow for a meaningful, mutually-beneficial and long-term collaboration, we envision this community to be built around the shared interests of academics and practitioners, not a single research topic, or a single location or institution. Organising regular events with varying themes and providing forums for an exchange of ideas could allow for lasting collaborations and for the joint development of ideas. We are provisionally calling this initiative SubComm, a community built around subtitling. The name does not foreground either practitioners or academics. Instead, it emphasises the sense of community, communication and a shared interest in subtitling.

In order to gauge interest in such an initiative, we sent a questionnaire to subtitlers in the UK and Ireland with the goal of establishing how far practitioners might want to be involved in the project, and the ways in which academics could give back to the professional community. In what follows, we examine the results of this questionnaire, before proposing the next steps to be taken in the implementation of a subtitling community.

3. A Scoping Questionnaire for Subtitling Practitioners: Methods

The data examined here was collected between 26th October and 10th December 2020. A Microsoft Form was used to collect responses, and the study was granted ethics approval.[2] The questionnaire was an exploratory/scoping questionnaire, through which we primarily sought to examine how far practitioners would be interested in participating in networking and continuing professional development (CPD) activities with academics and other practitioners. The survey therefore aimed to

[2] Log no: 2019-189, approved by the Social Research Ethics Committee at University College Cork, Ireland.

collect some background information on participants, and to examine their opinions regarding certain future activities. Indeed, the use of a survey here was an attempt to "better understand the profession, and reach beyond the ivory tower" (Sun, 2016, p. 276), in order to identify the most appropriate avenues and methods for further exploration. In the spirit of our vision for a shared community, we wanted to elicit ideas and topics from practitioners rather than dictating them solely from our own perspective.

The participants in the study are subtitling practitioners based in the UK and Ireland. The reason for this limited outreach is that the survey was conceived prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it was anticipated that initial events would take place in-person. However, since the move to working from home and online events, and the lack of feasibility of travel for the foreseeable future, we envisage future events taking place online. Subtitlers were recruited through social media, as well as via the mailing lists of professional organisations: the ITIA (Irish Translators' and Interpreters' Association), the ITI (The Institute of Translators and Interpreters) and Subtle (the Subtitlers' Association). We posted in Facebook groups and on Twitter, indicating that we were seeking to examine how academics and practitioners might work together, and how we could build a community and facilitate an exchange of experiences and ideas. Nevertheless, the nature of the survey distribution did lead to some responses from practitioners not based in the UK or Ireland – these responses were removed prior to the analysis.

A survey was chosen to allow for the collection of a larger amount of data, and to allow participants to respond in their own time. The questionnaire consisted of a yes/no question related to informed consent, followed by 17 questions, including the option to provide contact details to be informed of future networking activities. In terms of the background information elicited, respondents were asked about their working languages (open question), their training in audiovisual translation, their other work activities, their use of subtitling software, their interest in networking activities (online and in-person in the longer term) and their availability throughout the year for such activities. Some of the closed questions were multiple choice, allowing the selection of more than one response in relation to the type of clients worked with, or the months of the year which would best suit the respondent for attending future networking activities. Four open questions were included: "Which subtitling and industry issues/challenges/processes would you be interested in discussing with subtitlers and academics?"; "Please outline any training needs that you would find it useful for academics/other practitioners to address at an event"; a question related to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the subtitlers' need for CPD/community building/networking opportunities; and a space for any additional comments. The open questions were designed to allow the practitioners to raise any issues they might be interested in exploring, without being influenced by our own anticipated topics of discussion. In this way, we aimed to avoid leading questions that might "suggest[s] the answer the researcher is looking for" (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014, p. 155).

The scoping survey received 64 responses. Given the relatively small pool of respondents, the data is used here to offer an initial insight into the backgrounds and views of the subtitlers surveyed, rather than as representative of the profession. As we were specifically targeting subtitlers based in the UK

and Ireland, it is likely that the full number of eligible subtitlers was rather limited. For example, a significant proportion of the Subtle membership lives outside the UK and Ireland. There is no dedicated AVT association in Ireland, so it is hard to say how many audiovisual translators are based there. Prior to the analysis, the data was cleaned, and 12 responses from subtitlers based outside of Ireland or the United Kingdom were removed, along with an additional response in which only consent was provided, with no further answers to the questions. This left 51 responses; 42 from respondents based in Great Britain, and nine from respondents based in Ireland. The respondents worked with a total of 21 languages including English, which was a working language for all respondents. The languages mentioned in the responses can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1.

Respondents' Working Languages

Respondents' Working Languages		
Arabic	German	Polish
Chinese	Greek	Portuguese
Danish	Hungarian	Russian
Dutch	Irish	Spanish
English	Italian	Swedish
French	Japanese	Turkish
Gaelic (Scottish)	Norwegian	Welsh

Source: Data collected for this study

Participants self-identified as subtitlers, and the responses show that their backgrounds are varied, in that some have no training in audiovisual translation, though 34 respondents have some training in AVT, either through a specialised AVT degree, a translation studies degree including some AVT, or AVT training. 15 respondents had a specialised degree in AVT. Nine of the respondents do not do any other work alongside subtitling, while 32 do translation work, and 10 do other non-translation work alongside subtitling.

The responses to open questions were coded in relation to the kinds of activities proposed, topics raised for discussion/training, and the respective roles of academics and practitioners in these events or discussions. We then carried out a thematic analysis of the data; an inductive approach was taken, and the categories for coding were derived from the data (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014, p. 189). Answers to open questions were also examined in relation to certain responses to the earlier closed questions, in order to examine evidence of any potential trends. It must be reiterated that any statements regarding trends will be very tentative, given that they are not statistically significant, but in places they raise questions worthy of further exploration or consideration in future events.

4. Main Findings From the Scoping Questionnaire

The primary aim of this data collection was to examine how far subtitlers in the UK and Ireland would be interested in the development of a community of subtitling academics and practitioners, and how far they might benefit from this kind of public translation studies initiative. In this way, we were examining the subtitlers' interest in participating in activities evoking the "citizenship behaviours" outlined above (Yoo & Ja Jeong, 2017). The response is clear; the participants do want these kinds of initiatives, many of them want to be involved and have ideas regarding the kinds of topics that might be discussed among academics and practitioners, as well as areas in which they would like CPD opportunities. 49 out of 51 respondents answered "yes" to the question "Would you be interested in opportunities to network with other subtitlers and academics working on subtitling?", and 50 out of 51 subtitlers responded "yes" to the question "Would you be interested in attending free online networking and/or CPD events?" It should be noted here, though, that the data is skewed since it would generally be expected that someone choosing to respond to a questionnaire on this topic would be interested in networking and CPD activities. Nevertheless, there is evidence of an interest for such initiatives among subtitlers.

The respondents' answers to the open questions revealed that many subtitlers were interested in opportunities to network with other subtitlers, but also that they would be happy to have the opportunity to discuss issues such as rates and working conditions. Some of the areas in which they would like training/CPD opportunities included finding work and negotiating with clients. In addition, a number of the subtitlers were keen to discuss machine translation (MT) and its impact on the profession. There was also evidence that some subtitlers would like to find out more about academic research, and some would like to be involved/find out how to be involved in academic research. Furthermore, although none of these topics were explicitly mentioned in the questions or information provided, some subtitlers would like to discuss dealing with specific challenges presented in audiovisual translation, such as subtitling humour, subtitling films and children's shows, and also questions of readability.

4.1. Prominent Themes: Industry Practices, Community-Building and Translation Challenges

We received 41 responses to the first open question on possible topics of interest and 23 responses to the second question on training needs. There is a great deal of variety in the responses, and they include both general requests to organise anything and specific ideas for targeted training. Many of the responses contain more than one idea or proposal, and were accordingly coded in more than one category where appropriate. We have categorised the responses under five themes: broadening and updating one's practical skill set; improving one's career opportunities and the collective standing of the profession; discussing translation dilemmas; informing academia; and learning about or discussing anything at all (see overview in Table 2). All five categories call for the involvement and collaboration of practitioners who can share experiences, learn from each other and work together towards improvements, but the role of academics is different in each category.

Table 2.

Themes in Open Responses

Theme	Responses in first open question	Responses in second open question
Broadening and updating one's practical skill set	21	16
Improving one's career opportunities and the collective standing of the profession	25	6
Discussing translation dilemmas	9	5
Informing academia	3	1
Learning about or discussing anything at all	5	0

Source: Data collected for this study

The category mentioned most often in the responses to the two questions is broadening and updating one's practical skill set, and it was mentioned in 21 responses to the first question and 16 responses to the second. This category includes responses that express an interest in developing some practical skill or updating one's skills to keep up to date with developments in the subtitling industry. Many of the comments mention technological skills, such as learning about machine translation and post-editing, but there are also references to other practical matters such as style guides, reference materials, working with pivot languages, spotting, and discussing subtitle quality. What these topics have in common is their close association with the subtitling process and the day-to-day work of a subtitler. These topics have links to research, and the involvement of academics in discussions could be beneficial, but they are also related to the practical operations of the subtitling industry and could be usefully approached by collaborating with industry experts. Furthermore, these are often topics on which academics, who may not have daily contact with the industry, can learn from practitioners and the industry.

The second most frequent category is improving one's career opportunities and the collective standing of the profession, mentioned in 25 responses to the first question and in 6 responses to the second. This category covers all responses that reference working conditions and opportunities, either on an individual or a collective level. The individual responses include comments about finding work, negotiation skills and marketing, while the collective responses most often reference rates or working conditions in general, or state that there is need for collective action or networking. The prevalence of this category demonstrates the respondents' concern about the future of their work and their desire to collaborate with academics and other practitioners towards improvements. This is the category that is perhaps most suited for academic activism, such as using research findings on working conditions to steer conversations and lobby for improvements. However, research-based information is again only one tool for engaging with these issues. In addition, practitioners are looking for ways to work with each other, and the role of academics may be that of a supporter or facilitator,

helping individual practitioners find each other, connecting them with subtitlers' associations or other relevant groups that are already collaborating successfully, and providing a venue for dialogue.

The third most frequent theme, which was present in nine responses to the first question and five to the second, is translation dilemmas. This category includes responses which have a more straightforward academic underpinning than the two previous categories. They cover translation- and subtitling-related challenges that are a frequent topic of research and would easily lend themselves to a discussion between academics introducing research findings and practitioners sharing their experiences from subtitling projects. Topics mentioned by the respondents include reading speed, translating humour or songs, translating for children, and even more explicitly academic themes, such as "subtitlers' (sdh) knowledge and experience of accessibility and disability studies," or research topics on audiovisual translation in general. While many of these comments arise from a practical interest in solving problems that subtitlers encounter in their work, they indicate an interest in topics that have been addressed in research rather than focusing on conversations within the subtitling industry. Therefore, the role of academics in this category is more prominent than in the previous two.

The final two categories contain considerably fewer responses than the first three. The first is informing academia, which is mentioned three times in response to the first question, and once in response to the second. This category contains comments which display the respondents' interest in sharing research needs from the field or discussing gaps between practice and academia, or even helping academics with AVT research. Thus, this category shows practitioners taking an active role in informing and initiating research rather than receiving training from academics. Although the number of these comments is small, it is worth noting that there is some foundation here for an interactive collaboration where both practitioners and academics can teach and inform each other. Finally, in the fifth category, five responses to the first question and none to the second indicate that any events would be welcome, or that the events could concern training without specifying what is meant by training.

The responses to these two questions show that subtitlers feel the need both to learn new things, especially to keep up with technology, and to empower themselves professionally. In both efforts, academics can provide training, facilitate communication, and raise the profile of the initiatives to combat the fragmented nature of the professional community. However, a significant emphasis is on practitioners networking with each other, sharing experiences and building a closer community, as well as on learning from other stakeholders in the industry. Although the number of comments explicitly suggesting dialogue with academics is smaller than the number of comments proposing community building, the fact that several comments do address academia suggests that there is potential for collaboration. Most practitioners do not immediately see collaborations with academics as reciprocal, and the role of academics may be seen either as peripheral or as disseminators of information rather than as parties collecting feedback to initiate research. Therefore, some encouragement may be needed to build up the reciprocity of shared initiatives.

4.2. Areas for Further Exploration

In addition to coding the open question responses, these responses were cross-referenced with some of the background information provided by participants. The open responses were examined in particular in relation to the respondents' use of subtitling software, their existing networks, the type of clients with whom they work, and specialist training in AVT. Given the small number of responses and the diversity within the group, some of this analysis did not reveal trends worthy of discussion here. At the same time, we would tentatively highlight some interesting avenues for further exploration.

Firstly, where the participants' existing networks are concerned, there were 27 responses from subtitlers who are not involved in formal AVT networks, and among these 14 were not involved in any formal translation networks such as the ITI/ITIA either (they responded either "none," or "Facebook groups/Online forums"). This question was formulated as a multiple-choice question, where respondents could choose more than one option, including the possibility of "other" and providing further details. 24 respondents, on the other hand, were involved in formal AVT networks such as Subtle and ATA Audiovisual Division. Requests to receive training or participate in discussions concerning the topic of "finding work" were slightly more frequent among those not involved in any formal organisations at all. The topic was mentioned by one subtitler among the 24 involved in formal organisations, while it arose in five of 27 responses from those not involved in formal AVT-specific organisations (and among these five, four of the subtitlers were not involved in any formal organisations at all). Although the number of responses cannot imply a strong trend, this is certainly an issue worth exploring further. On the other hand, comments related to workers' rights/working conditions, quality and MT were more common among those involved in formal AVT networks. Workers' rights/conditions were mentioned by six of 24 respondents involved in formal AVT networks, but by only two of the remaining 27 respondents who were not. Similarly, quality was mentioned by five, and MT by four among the 24 subtitlers involved in formal AVT networks, while each of these issues arose only once among the remaining 27 responses. This could suggest that these are frequent topics for discussion among AVT-specific networks.[3] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the topic of rates was frequently raised, regardless of involvement in formal AVT or translation networks.

Only six respondents selected "AVTE" as a network in which they are already involved. This does raise the question of how much subtitlers in the UK and Ireland engage in networking beyond borders. Given what might be described as the increasingly "borderless" nature of AVT,[4] and the possibility of

[3] At the time of writing, the blog post Machine Translation and the state of the translation industry (Landes, 2021) is one of the first items listed on the website of AVTE – Audiovisual Translators Europe, and the first few lines of the Manifesto for Subtle – The Subtitlers' Association (Subtle, 2007b) highlight deteriorating working conditions and a threat to subtitling quality.

[4] Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2021, p. 247) note that the significance of cloud systems in the industry mean that "a common professional scenario is one in which a substantial number of individuals work together […] in different geographical spaces, at the same time."

working for clients in a range of countries, one possible action within SubComm could be to highlight the presence of these broader networks, where subtitlers often working and networking within one country-context could expand their contacts and learn from practices elsewhere.

Another interesting point arose from the analysis of the responses of those subtitlers who have a specialised degree in audiovisual translation (as opposed to those who had some exposure to AVT as part of another degree or attended an AVT training course). Among all of the responses there were three explicit requests for help with negotiation, where the subtitlers mentioned "communication and negotiation strategies," "negotiating rates" and "negotiation skills, marketing skills, business skills" respectively as topics they would like to discuss with subtitlers and academics, or training needs that could be addressed at an event. These three comments were all provided by subtitlers possessing a specialised AVT degree. Again, given the limited number of responses, all that can be identified here are areas for further exploration. However, these constitute what might be described as higher-level training needs to be addressed, once a subtitler has been trained in the use of software and the resolution of specific AVT challenges, for example.

One open question included in the study was "Could you comment on the impact the Covid 19 pandemic has had on your need for further professional development and/or community building or networking opportunities?" The decision was made to include this question given the significant shift in working context and lifestyle caused by the pandemic. Indeed, although the idea was conceived prior to the onset of the pandemic, the responses to this question highlighted the timeliness of this initiative. Responses suggested that in some cases the pandemic has reduced workflow or rates, and that subtitlers are now seeking to enhance their profiles. One respondent noted

> COVID-19 has almost entirely crippled my ability to expand professionally, with the ITIA basically being my only lifeline to my career as a translator. I am badly in need of the development mentioned in this survey and look forward to any such opportunities.

Though some responses highlighted the lack of in-person events taking place, others noted increasing opportunities to participate in online events, and this should be highlighted as one of the good things to emerge as a result of reduced travel opportunities.

5. Conclusion: Next Steps for SubComm

In this article, we set out to make a proposal for public audiovisual translation studies, following Koskinen (2010). We have argued that such an initiative would see AVT academics working closely with practitioners, and that this would present a number of benefits to all involved. Public AVT studies could also provide an opportunity for some academics to take on more of an activist role, becoming involved in the profession and working towards the improvement of the working conditions, recognition and practices of practitioners. We have here presented data collected among UK and Ireland-based subtitlers that indicates an interest in such an initiative as a forum for exchanging ideas,

but also providing networking and training opportunities. The benefits of a systematic, dialogic collaboration between subtitling academics and practitioners are numerous:

- Community-building, thus helping to counteract the isolation felt by some practitioners, particularly given the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Collective action to overcome some of the challenges facing the profession, such as poor working conditions, recognition and quality issues, and to manage changes such as the growing popularity of machine translation;
- A space to learn more about the current state of the industry and practices, resulting in an understanding that could underpin research into AVT products and processes, as well as the training of future subtitlers;
- An opportunity for subtitlers to shape the future of AVT studies, highlighting potential areas for research that could inform their practice or assist them in overcoming specific challenges;
- An occasion for subtitlers to learn about existing research in a way that is tailored to their needs.

Ultimately, these tangible benefits that respond to immediate challenges could act as first steps towards an even more radical realignment of AVT practice and research. A closer collaboration and a unified community would allow its participants to explore shared interests that could reshape both practice and research and build new types of collaborative relationships, such as research projects with active participation by practitioners, or a revolutionary rethinking of working practices based on both practical experience and research innovation. Such a reconceptualisation of what researchers and practitioners can do together could reshape the field by giving more of a voice to individual practitioners to complement other types of industry partnerships where large companies tend to dominate.

Based on the questionnaire responses and the needs highlighted therein by subtitlers, we are taking a number of next steps for SubComm. The first of these is an online event to debrief the UK and Ireland-based subtitlers who participated in the study, sharing our findings and offering an opportunity for practitioners to respond to these, and to meet one another informally. This will allow for the community building and networking identified as important. Following the initial debriefing event, we will continue to facilitate networking through informal events, and we will organize a training event that could address one or more of the specific needs highlighted by practitioners in the responses, around the question of MT/post-editing, or the question of quality, for example. This would begin to address the most prominent theme emerging in the responses to the open questions – that of broadening and updating subtitlers' practical skill sets. Following these initial events, we would aim to arrange two online focus groups, in which we could further explore exactly what subtitlers need from these collaborative efforts. The discussion points would be guided by the findings of the questionnaire, but would allow for a more in-depth examination of needs. These focus groups could also further clarify the role of practitioners in the range of possible activities and events to be organized, and could be an opportunity to further examine some of the potential trends arising in the analysis.

This is the beginning of what we hope will become an ongoing collaboration between academics and practitioners that would be broad in scope, encompassing academics and practitioners working in a range of contexts. These activities will be supplemented by the creation of a platform designed specifically for the sharing of ideas between academics and practitioners; the first step is a website with space for blog posts covering a range of topics, and discussion spaces to allow for ongoing interaction.[5] The latter could also offer a space for discussing translation dilemmas and informing academia – two other areas of interest that arose in the subtitlers' responses. In this way, SubComm would allow for community-building and collaboration, for the sharing of academic findings and other information that could enhance the status and recognition of subtitlers, whilst also offering opportunities for academics and subtitler trainers to learn more about the professional realities. At the same time as we implement this initiative, it seems important that we establish clear objectives and intended outcomes for specific events. We are dealing with a heterogeneous group of participants (from languages, to experience, to clients), which could present its challenges. Nevertheless, the responses to the questionnaire discussed in this article suggest a significant amount of agreement among subtitlers regarding their needs, and a clear interest in collaboration with academics and other practitioners.

References

Abdallah, K. (2011). Quality problems in AVT production networks: Reconstructing an actor-network in the subtitling industry. In A. Şerban, A. Matamala, & J.-M. Lavaur (Eds.), *Audiovisual translation in close-up: Practical and theoretical approaches* (pp. 173–186). Peter Lang.

Abdallah, K. (2012). *Translators in production networks: Reflections on agency, quality and ethics* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Eastern Finland]. Publications of the University of Eastern Finland. http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-952-61-0609-0

Angelone, E., Ehrensberger-Dow, M., & Massey, G. (2016). Cognitive processes. In C. V. Angelelli & B. J. Baer (Eds.), *Researching translation and interpreting* (pp. 43–57). Routledge.

AVTEurope. (2021). *Who we are*. AVTEurope. http://avteurope.eu/sample-page/who-we-are/

Beuchert, K. (2017). *The web of subtitling: A subtitling process model based on a mixed methods study of the Danish subtitling industry and the subtitling processes of five Danish subtitlers* [Doctoral dissertation, Aarhus University]. https://pure.au.dk/portal/files/119118393/PhD_KathrineBeuchert.pdf

Chaume, F. (2018). An overview of audiovisual translation: Four methodological turns in a mature discipline. *Journal of Audiovisual Translation, 1*(1), 40–63. https://doi.org/10.47476/jat.v1i1.43

Chesterman, A. (2009). The name and nature of translator studies. *HERMES – Journal of Language and Communication in Business, 22*(42), 13–22. https://doi.org/10.7146/hjlcb.v22i42.96844

Díaz-Cintas, J. (2020). Audiovisual translation. In E. Angelone, M. Ehrensberger-Dow, & G. Massey (Eds.), *The Bloomsbury companion to language industry studies* (pp. 209–230). Bloomsbury.

Díaz-Cintas, J., & Remael, A. (2021). *Subtitling: Concepts and practices*. Routledge.

[5] https://subcomm.co.uk/

Hekkanen, R. (2007). The role of ethics in translation and in translation studies research. *Across Languages and Cultures, 8*(2), 231–247. https://doi.org/10.1556/Acr.8.2007.2.5

Hubscher-Davidson, S. (2020). The psychology of sustainability and psychological capital: New lenses to examine well-being in the translation profession. *European Journal of Sustainable Development Research, 4*(4), em0127. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejosdr/7901

Hvelplund, K. T. (2017). Eye tracking and the process of dubbing translation. In J. Díaz-Cintas & K. Nikolić (Eds.), *Fast-forwarding with audiovisual translation* (pp. 110–125). Multilingual Matters.

ILSA. *Interlingual Live Subtitling for Access*. http://ka2-ilsa.webs.uvigo.es/

Jankowska, A. (2012). 'I do what I like, and I don't have to go to work every day': The status quo of audiovisual translation in Poland. In S. Bruti & E. Di Giovanni (Eds.), *Audiovisual translation across Europe: An ever-changing landscape* (pp. 35–58). Peter Lang.

Katan, D. (2009). Translation theory and professional practice: A global survey of the great divide. *HERMES – Journal of Language and Communication in Business, 22*(42), 111–153. https://doi.org/10.7146/hjlcb.v22i42.96849

Koskinen, K. (2010). What matters to translation studies? On the role of public translation studies. In D. Gile, G. Hansen, & N. K. Pokorn (Eds.), *Why translation studies matters* (pp. 15–26). John Benjamins.

Koskinen, K. (2012). Public translation studies in the classroom. *The Interpreter and Translator Trainer, 6*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2012.10798827

Kuo, A. S. (2015). Professional realities of the subtitling industry: The subtitlers' perspective. In R. Baños Piñero & J. Díaz-Cintas (Eds.), *Audiovisual translation in a global context: Mapping an ever-changing landscape* (pp. 163–191). Palgrave Macmillan.

Landes, D. (2021, February 14). *Machine translation and the state of the translation industry*. Trans. Jen Metcalf. AVTEurope. http://avteurope.eu/2021/02/14/machine-translation-and-the-state-of-the-translation-industry/

Orrego-Carmona, D., Dutka, Ł., & Szarkowska, A. (2018). Using translation process research to explore the creation of subtitles: An eye-tracking study comparing professional and trainee subtitlers. *The Journal of Specialised Translation,* 30, 150–180. https://www.jostrans.org/issue30/art_orrego-carmona_et_al.pdf

Pym, A. (2014). Translator associations – from gatekeepers to communities. *Target, 26*(3), 466–491. https://doi.org/10.1075/target.26.3.06pym

Saldanha, G., & O'Brien, S. (2014). *Research methodologies in translation studies*. Routledge.

Sela-Sheffy, R. (2016). Profession, identity, and status. In C. V. Angelelli & B. J. Baer (Eds.), *Researching translation and interpreting* (pp. 131–145). Routledge.

Silvester, H. (2021). Working conditions and collaborative practices in the translation of French film: Subtitling *banlieue* cinema. *Perspectives*: *Studies in Translation Theory and Practice.* https://doi.org/10.1080/0907676X.2021.1903517

Subtle. (2007a). *About us*. Subtitlers.org.uk. http://www.subtitlers.org.uk/ajax.php?modulo=paginas&accion=sitio_ver&idpaginas=1

Subtle. (2007b). *Manifesto*. Subtitlers.org.uk. http://www.subtitlers.org.uk/ajax.php?modulo=paginas&accion=sitio_ver&idpaginas=3

Sun, S. (2016). Survey-based studies. In C. V. Angelelli & B. J. Baer (Eds.), *Researching translation and interpreting* (pp. 269–279). Routledge.

Tuominen, T. (2018). Negotiating the boundaries of professional subtitling. The case of Finnish subtitlers and their online community. *HERMES – Journal of Language and Communication in Business,* 58, 83–97. https://doi.org/10.7146/hjlcb.v0i58.111674

Williamson, L. (2016). *The social relevance of research to practice: A study of the impact of academic research on professional subtitling practitioners in Europe* [Doctoral dissertation, Heriot-Watt University]. ROS Theses Repository. http://hdl.handle.net/10399/3117

Yoo, T., & Ja Jeong, C. (2017). Consolidating the professional identity of translators: The role of citizenship behaviours. *Target, 29*(3), 361–387. https://doi.org/10.1075/target.15001.yoo