

DOCTORAL THESIS

Production processes and technology the making of quality in the platform subtitling industry

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**Production Processes and Technologies:
The Making of Quality
in the Platform Subtitling Industry**

by

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*A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of PhD*

School of Arts
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Abstract

This thesis analyses production processes and the use of technology in the Audiovisual Translation (AVT) industry, aiming to document professional subtitling practices from different points of view in order to identify how the concept of quality is constructed in contemporary industry settings. The research intends to fill a gap in the qualitative study of real-life subtitling processes in the workplace, and to account for current industry practices that rely on the use of digital and cloud technologies, following new models of platform economy. The research is based on two phases of data collection. Study 1 was conducted in partnership with an AVT company which provided the researcher access to their work premises, thus ensuring that the contribution of the thesis reflects actual working practices. Study 2 consisted in semi-structured interviews with a sample of freelance professional subtitlers, which ensured that their point of view as key players in the translation process was fully considered.

The research is grounded on constructivist theoretical premises and on the fundamental assumption that quality is a multifaceted concept. Thus, it seeks to overcome functionalist perceptions that see quality as an attribute that can be found and assessed solely in the product of translation. Instead, the thesis broadens and complexifies the concept of translation quality by looking into translation processes, products, environments, working conditions, and social actors. As a way to consider multiple quality aspects in the subtitling industry and their mutual influence, an ethnographic approach based on participant observation and interviews has been chosen (Study 1). The participant observation fieldwork examined various processes as carried out in a large AVT company, and extracted indicators that helped to explore the concept of process quality from a variety of perspectives. The interviews (Study 2) shed light on the subtitlers' views and focused on their working conditions as indicators of the quality of their process and social environment. Reflecting on both studies

together and against each other, the thesis concludes that there is a clear need to rethink quality from novel perspectives in response to the rapid standardisation of practices that characterises contemporary subtitling production. Diversifying views on quality and audiovisual translation production can challenge the functionalist approach which has pervaded the industry, and has found new iterations under the cloud platform model, increasing unsustainability in the subtitling ecosystem.

Ethics declaration

The research for this project was submitted for ethics consideration under the reference

MCL 18/046 in the Department of Media, Culture and Language and was approved

under the procedures of the University of Roehampton's Ethics Committee on 05.03.2019.

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Table of contents

1	Introducing production networks and quality in the subtitling industry	12
1.1	A historical overview of audiovisual translation production networks.....	12
1.2	Research questions and aims.....	18
1.3	Research design and methodology	25
1.4	Theoretical positioning in literature.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.5	Scope and limitations of the thesis	27
1.6	Structure and chapter summary	30
2	Translation as a socio-technical activity: a multidimensional quality approach ..	35
2.1	Introduction	35
2.2	Translation as a socio-technical activity.....	40
2.2.1	The <i>total quality approach</i>	48
2.3	Translation as a product.....	53
2.3.1	Translation as a product, and as an act.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2.3.2	Conceptualising quality beyond the product dimension.....	57
2.3.3	An analysis of industry standards for translation and subtitling	61
2.4	Translation as a process	64
2.4.1	Translation and cognition.....	64
2.4.2	Process and their relation to quality	65
2.4.3	Ethnographic studies of translation processes and technology	67
2.4.4	Subtitling processes.....	70
2.5	Translation as a social activity.....	76
2.5.1	The role of professional training	83

2.6	Conclusion: The act of translation	85
3	Ethnographic methods in researching professional subtitling practices	87
3.1	Methodological premise	87
3.2	Introducing a mixed philosophical stance.....	88
3.3	What is ethnography?.....	91
3.3.1	Ethnographic research in Translation Studies.....	94
3.4	The workplace study and its methods	101
3.4.1	The fieldwork environment.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
3.4.2	Participant observation	103
3.4.3	Shadowing.....	105
3.5	Interviews.....	107
3.5.1	Study 1 interviews	108
3.5.2	Study 2 interviews	110
3.6	Data analysis	114
3.6.1	Study 1 – workplace study	114
3.6.2	Study 2 – interviews with subtitlers	116
3.7	Conclusions.....	118
4	A workplace study of process quality in corporate subtitling production.....	120
4.1	Introduction	120
4.2	Setting the scene	123
4.2.1	Initial considerations	125
4.3	The quality of a subtitled product.....	127
4.4	Analytical framework: terminology and <i>total quality approach</i>	130
4.5	Conceptual framework: Actor-Network Theory.....	133
4.6	Main challenges of the subtitling production processes observed.....	136
4.6.1	Piracy fears and preliminary workflow	138

4.6.2	The workflow.....	140
4.6.3	The relations between actors and quality.....	150
4.7	Defining process quality.....	155
4.7.1	The work request.....	160
4.7.2	The template creation.....	166
4.7.3	The QC phase.....	169
4.8	Concluding remarks on process quality.....	176
4.8.1	The triad of subtitling production processes.....	177
5	The evolving role of the subtitler.....	182
5.1	Introduction.....	182
5.2	The subtitler profession.....	184
5.3	Subtitlers' profiles.....	189
5.4	The freelance subtitler's working conditions.....	195
5.4.1	Job assignment.....	196
5.4.2	Rates and deadlines.....	203
5.4.3	Workflow, template files and use of skills.....	207
5.5	Performance of technical actors and quality of working material.....	214
5.5.1	Interaction with technology.....	218
5.5.2	Automation.....	224
5.6	Quality of communication and interaction.....	226
5.7	Stress factors linked to working conditions.....	233
5.8	Quality measured quantitatively.....	237
5.9	Reflections on quality and conclusion.....	242
6	Standardisation and the making of quality.....	244
6.1	Introduction.....	244
6.2	Situating AVT in Platform economy.....	245

6.3	Standardisation	251
6.3.1	Division of labour	256
6.3.2	Centralisation of technology	262
6.4	How quality is constructed in the industry	271
6.4.1	ISO 17100 and translation quality assessment model	274
6.5	A critique of functionalist theories in the AVT industry	278
6.6	Conclusion.....	286
7	Constructing scenarios of audiovisual translation, and imagining new ones.....	290
7.1	Answering the research questions.....	290
7.2	Expanding perspectives in audiovisual translation	299
7.3	Future visions.....	303
	Bibliography.....	310
	Appendix I.....	331
	Appendix II.....	332

List of acronyms

ASR – Automatic Speech Recognition

AV – Audiovisual

AVT – Audiovisual translation

TS – Translation Studies

LSP – Language Service Provider

PM – Project Manager

PFA – Platform for All

ST – Source text

TT – Target text

QC – Quality control

QA – Quality assessment

1 Introducing production networks and quality in the subtitling industry

1.1 A historical overview of audiovisual translation production networks

In the past decades, the audiovisual market has undergone an unprecedented expansion to which many factors have contributed. Amongst these, the digitisation of technology and content over the last decades of the 20th century has expanded the means of audiovisual (AV) film production well beyond the possibilities offered by the traditionally consolidated production and broadcasting studios. The development of digital means of audiovisual production – whether for films, documentaries, commercials or videogames – has also been accompanied by the rise of the internet and the concurrent expansion of markets on a global scale. Over time, especially after the advent of web 2.0 in the 2010s, digital technology has become lighter, smaller and more affordable for a larger number of people, whether producers or viewers of audiovisual content, or both. Due to such a conjunction of social, economic and technological factors, the boundaries between national markets – as well as those between content producers and viewers – are increasingly blurring (Chaume, 2019) and new forms of consumption models as well as business have started to appear. This thesis questions the dominant modes of audiovisual translation (AVT) that have emerged recently through business models that follow principles of platform economy, exploring the principles and the conditions of contemporary subtitling practices, and how these contribute to constructing the notion of quality in the related industry.

This thesis deals with professional subtitling practices as carried out in globalised production networks, as far as production and distribution for the cinema (theatrical) and for

streaming platforms are concerned. In light of this, the thesis will focus specifically on these areas – and not, for instance, on the production or distribution of filmed and digital content for television, advertisement, or videogame purposes, or on other global or local subtitling production networks that do not share the same characteristics. In the context of this thesis, “global” and “globalised” do not indicate phenomena that are dominant across the globe – since other business models could be dominant at local levels – but those pertaining to one dominant model among others in the globalised, internationalised economy. Geographically, the corporate practices for audiovisual production that I observed and analysed took place in Europe, and follow specifications that are standardised across most of the European, American and Asian markets¹.

The following paragraphs summarise the various developments of AV production, with particular attention to the evolution of business models and to production networks. The latter is understood as ‘inter-firm relationships that bind sets of firms into larger economic groups’ and which ‘do not exist in a vacuum but within a complex matrix of institutions and supporting industries’ (Sturgeon 2001, pp. 10-11). Overall, this section provides a simplified account of the key developments in the AVT industry, leading up to current scenarios.

The advent of filmic sound in the late 1920s increased the need for translation and localisation of films, and until the introduction of the satellite and DVD technology in the 1990s, audiovisual production and often a major portion of post-production processes were carried out in studios – whether large or small, mainstream or independent, commercial or *d’auteur*. Films were distributed in cinemas across the country of production, and translated

¹ It is worth noting that even though the job tasks and processes might be standardised across these regions, there are significant differences in the living and working conditions of workers (whether company employees or freelance subtitlers) located in non-European, non-US areas such as South America, Africa and Asia.

for foreign audiences according to budgets, commercial interests and national policies, alignment and sensitivities (Betz 2009; Pérez-González 2014). While for almost a century translated films were almost exclusively distributed in cinemas around the globe, and later on television, from the 1980s they also became available on VHS for home entertainment purposes, generally a few months after their cinema release. Distribution agencies in the receiving countries were often responsible for the translation of the audiovisual content – whether through subtitling, dubbing or voice-over – and tended to carry out the appropriate mode of audiovisual translation (AVT) in their own facilities, which were generally located in that country's centre of film production. In this traditional business model, the production networks centred around the studios, where most of the production and post-production processes, such as translation, were carried out. The peripheral nodes were constituted by the distribution agencies, which were nevertheless strongly linked to the core (the production houses) through commercial relationships that were often long-standing and mutual. AV translators were generally working for the various distribution agencies, adapting and translating dialogues with their target audiences in mind. At the time, the European distribution market revolved primarily around production centres located in the US, UK, France and Italy (Betz 2019). Albeit complex in the sense that they relied on many different professional roles and expertise, traditional production and localisation networks were relatively compact, as they had a limited number of nodes which work closely in collaboration with one another (O'Sullivan and Cornu 2019).

The introduction of satellite and DVDs to the market triggered a major shift in the AV industry, with the advent of new business models which are referred to in this thesis as pipeline models (following a definition by Sakamoto, 2018). These technologies introduced the concept of content on-demand, and considerably shortened the time needed to release

versions for home entertainment – thus contributing to an initial reduction in timeframes between production and international distribution. In addition, the DVD itself, small and compact, was a medium capable of storing a high-resolution version of a film, as well as extra contents, and all the necessary data to enjoy the film in its original language or in dubbed and subtitled versions for multiple languages. The DVD simplified the possibilities for international distribution and contributed to the rise of those AVT agencies and language service providers (LSP) who could take care exclusively of the translation of AV content into multiple languages, therefore providing a capacity that few distribution agencies were able to match. The DVD technology also brought a need for standardisation of translation products: in fact, several dubbing and subtitling files needed to be mastered and superimposed on the original version, and for this reason these files had to comply to the same conventions mainly from a technical point of view (Díaz Cintas 2020). As far as subtitling is concerned, standardisation measures started to be introduced by LSPs to ensure a relative homogeneity in layout and style. This led to the creation of the subtitling template file, a master file containing timed subtitles in the source language, often English, that provided the basis for its translation in a number of different languages. The template-based workflow implied a higher degree of standardisation and streamlining of practices, as well as reducing production times and labour costs by separating out the two main tasks of subtitling: time-cueing or synchronisation, and translation (Georgakopoulou 2009; Kapsaskis 2011).

Initially, most agencies and LSPs hired their translators in-house, although in the early 2000s (and especially after the global economic recession of 2008) the pressure for cost reduction increased exponentially on a global scale, and gradually the translator workforce was let go from the LSP's offices and the work of translation outsourced through subcontracting jobs on a freelance basis. The phenomenon of outsourcing was largely facilitated

by advances in computerisation, automation and technology for remote working, and the global diffusion of the internet and the possibilities that these entailed for the demolition of traditional organisational borders (Risku et al. 2013). This pipeline business model gave rise to the current type of production networks, which acquired an increased complexity: the centre of content production remained in the traditional studios, while the post-production phase of AVT branched out into a network of its own, in which the LSP acquired a strongly mediating role and became the core (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007). Since the early 2000s, a new constellation of nodes started forming as a result of outsourcing practices, which saw audiovisual translators assume an increasingly peripheral position, farther away from the centre of production. At the same time, many LSPs began acquiring their smaller competitors in various countries, with the aim of widening their international reach and diversifying their services, thus leading to fewer and larger LSPs operating in the language industry (ibid.).

The shift towards the centralisation of the LSP has continued to the present day and is now in full force with the development of new business models under platform economy. The growth of digital capitalism has opened up new avenues for profit, where cost-effectiveness and technological innovations have become 'systemic imperatives', and data has become the catalyst and main raw material of the so-called digital economies, also known as gig economies (Srnicsek 2017). At the same time, the wider availability and affordability of technology for both audiovisual production and consumption led to a dramatic increase in content production, as some content producers decided to use digital platforms as a way to bypass the traditional distribution system and started offering on-demand AV content directly to viewers through the so-called streaming platforms (Chaume 2019; Georgakopoulou 2020). Capitalising on phenomena such as crowd-work and the establishment of virtual, real-time working environment hosted on cloud servers, a large portion of LSPs specialised in AVT have migrated

their services to a cloud platform and work directly with content producers to offer a range of translation and localisation services – which are provided by wide pools of outsourced freelance translators. The production network that emerges in this platform business model is one where the LSP still holds a crucial and mediating role between stakeholders: the production house (or client) on the one hand, and the translators on the other. The thesis, however, claims that translators are found in a decidedly peripheral position, from which they have comparatively less access to contextual information which may be crucial for the completion of their task. This is important information that is negotiated extensively between the content producers and the LSPs, a relationship in which patterns of collaboration and communication are considerably different from those found in pipeline business models, let alone traditional ones. This research therefore asks what practices are currently gaining traction in subtitling production networks, especially those on cloud platform, a phenomenon which is referred to throughout the thesis as cloud subtitling. Moreover, the thesis asks what pressures are imposed on the subtitlers' profession, and in what way working conditions are being affected as a result of the new technological and structural/organisational models introduced.

Arguing that platform business models exacerbated dynamics of division of labour, standardisation and outsourcing, the present thesis aims to comprehend contemporary processes and working conditions and what repercussions these have on quality, and ultimately to understand how quality itself is constructed within the international subtitling industry. The idea that underlies this research is that the quality of a translated product, in this case interlingual subtitling, is strictly interconnected to the quality of the subtitling process, and that both are mutually constructive and predicated on the quality of the social and ethical environment that produces them (Abdallah 2007). The data collected in the present research

focus primarily on processes rather than products, and social factors rather than linguistic ones, shedding light on current subtitling practices and on the working conditions of various professionals that populate contemporary production networks.

To do this, data were collected by means of two studies, an ethnographic workplace study at a company's premises (Study 1), and a series of interviews with professional freelance subtitlers (Study 2). The processes, practices and social environments of the company as well as the subtitlers (both protected in the thesis through anonymisation and pseudonymisation) are analysed through a quality-oriented lens, and the picture that emerges confirms that quality is a multifaceted, complex notion that is the result of various types of labour involving the interaction of a range of factors. The combined datasets, however, suggest that exploring quality reveals further implications than this. Indeed, as the thesis will argue, quality is a concept that is being *constructed* by key players in core market positions (the clients, i.e. content producers and translation requesters; and the LSPs) in a way that shapes processes, practices and uses of technology in the subtitling industry. Specifically, the thesis asks in whose interest quality is constructed in this specific way and proposes that the current conceptualisation serves a business model centred on the dominant position of clients, companies and LSPs, to the detriment of most of those that contribute with the labour of translation provision, that is translators, subtitlers and proof-readers.

The next section provides a breakdown of the research questions which have guided the investigations and outlines the aims that motivated the research design. In doing so, the section will also uncover the gaps in literature that this thesis addresses.

1.2 Research questions and aims

As cloud platforms and automation became more and more present in the commercial provision of subtitles, the initial interaction with both academic and industry literature and

environments generated questions around subtitling workflows and their inextricable link with economy and technology. This required the consideration of social, organisational and economic factors so as to understand the wider economic context of AVT and the distribution of audiovisual content, together with the key role of digital and automation technology – and how all these influence not only the quality of processes and products, but also the definition of quality in the industry. In this light, the thesis intends to explore and answer the following three research questions:

1. How is the concept of quality constructed in the context of contemporary professional subtitling contexts?
2. How does the interplay of human and inanimate actors unfold in subtitling production dynamics?
3. What is the role of technology in relation to the quality of professional subtitling provision, processes and products?

Specifically, the need to observe and analyse social elements (workplace, social actors, working conditions) and process elements (such as workflow and materials) has led to the formulation of research question 2, which aims at identifying the interaction of human and inanimate elements and how they define one another. This was the main research question behind Study 1, a workplace ethnographic study conducted in a partner Company, as will be seen in the next section. The attention to technology in relation to working conditions and the various dimensions of quality in professional subtitling (research question 3) is linked to the need to identify and ascertain the parameters that lead to quality perceptions, as these are connected to technological aspects, and conditioned by wider economic forces behind it. These are addressed in both Study 1 and, more extensively, in Study 2, that consists of interviews with professional subtitlers. Taken together, and against each other, the findings of

the two studies led to considerations that address research question 1 (How is the concept of quality constructed in the context of contemporary professional subtitling contexts?).

Before moving on to the details of the design and methodology for data collection employed in this thesis (Section 1.3), it is useful to state the aims that, together with the overarching research questions as outlined above, motivated the research design. These will also uncover the gaps in knowledge that the thesis addresses. The first aim of the thesis is to look at a representative part of the contemporary subtitling industry, with particular attention to the processes, the working conditions and the working environments pertaining to the cloud subtitling model. Indeed, cloud subtitling is an increasingly common working reality which has not yet been fully explored. Several authors have mentioned and commented on this phenomenon (Chaume 2019; Díaz Cintas and Massidda 2019; Bolaños-García-Escribano and Díaz Cintas 2020; Bolaños-García-Escribano et al. 2021) but at the time of writing there is no substantial published study that focuses on specific features of cloud subtitling, its relation to platform economy, or the ways in which users experience working on these platforms.

The second aim of the thesis, which relates strictly to the explorative aim delineated above, is that of embracing and pursuing a constructivist point of view. The thesis intends to provide an articulate and polyvocal understanding of the audiovisual translation industry and cloud subtitling in particular, and of the intertwined roles of translators, companies and software technology. The constructivist approach was chosen because it allows us to navigate the complexity of the social, economic and technological factors at work in the contemporary subtitling industry, to assess their impact on existing working conditions as well as linguistic and technical processes, and to focus on specific concepts, such as that of quality, without losing sight of the broader context of operation. To provide a working definition, constructivism is an ontological and epistemological position which maintains that knowledge

is constructed through social interaction (Costantino 2008, p. 116), and that social phenomena need to be analysed in context, bearing in mind that all the actors involved contribute to their creation (Risku 2010). This is also referred to as social constructivism, a position that looks at human knowledge (and artifacts, such as technologies) as a construct 'determined by the intersection of politics, values, ideologies, religious beliefs, language, and so on' (Costantino 2008, p. 118). As will be seen throughout the chapters, subtitling technology acquires a particular prominence on the basis that it cannot be separated from the effects (social and economic among others) that it has on translation practices (Nunes Vieira 2018). In this light, I argue that practices and technologies should not be separated from their social causes and should be clearly intended as encased in the business models and logic of profit which are in turn served by their design and deployment. Processes and relations to subtitling software and the cloud platforms are analysed, so as to reveal the assumptions and decisions that are made around technology, what these choices allow and what they exclude, as inspired by the work of Frabetti (2015).

Constructivist perspectives have proved highly valuable in the field of Translation Studies (TS), and I argue that there is a strong need for constructivist studies in AVT as well, to finally take into consideration contextual factors such as the international distribution of film and media, the broader economic structures within which AVT takes place, and the key role of technology, well beyond subtitling software and its immediate functionalities. In TS, constructivist explorations of technologies, work procedures, workplaces and economic frameworks have proved particularly relevant for the collection of diverse datasets coming from diverse points of view, as demonstrated by Risku (2006); Abdallah and Koskinen (2007); Abdallah (2010); Karamanis et al. (2011); Dunne (2012); Bundgaard (2017, 2017a); Födösch (2017); Olohan and Davitti (2017); and Moorkens (2017, 2020). Nevertheless, there are

precious few socio-constructivist studies in AVT that examine workplaces, workflows, as well as wider contextual elements. These include workplace-based studies by Gummerus and Paro (2001), Abdallah (2011) and Beuchert (2017) although their focus is restricted to organisational procedures, working conditions and processes respectively. While quantitative studies of workplace and technical processes are largely found in AVT literature, qualitative investigations about workflows and the intrinsic quality of translational processes and working contexts are largely missing. As will be argued extensively in the next chapter, this approach addresses a perceived need to reflect the reality of complex phenomena so as to avoid a compartmentalised focus on translation products, technology, quality, or processes such as is often found in studies of translation and audiovisual translation contexts and practices. More widely, this aim also seeks to provide a basis to rethink the ways of conceptualising audiovisual translation processes, roles, and quality.

A third and central aim of the thesis is that of shedding light on perceptions of quality in the audiovisual sector and on the mechanisms by which the meaning of “quality” is constructed by the AVT industry. As anticipated above, this aim includes finding out what characterises these perceptions, how they are conditioned by economic forces and for the benefit of whom. The present thesis relies on the hypothesis that translation is a multi-dimensional activity, encompassing product, process, and social dimensions, and therefore its quality needs to be conceptualised and investigated across these three dimensions, as first proposed by Abdallah (2007); an extensive literature review on translation quality can be found in Chapter 2. In light of the above, this thesis aims to demonstrate the multi-dimensional nature of audiovisual translation by highlighting the strong links between the various dimensions. This is done through an exploration of subtitling processes, workflows, technology, working conditions and environments, consistently seen through the lens of their

quality aspects and implications. The research reveals a construction of a quality concept which closely follows the features of the business model observed, shaped on the principle of fitness-for-purpose. In such construct, process- and product-related aspects of quality obey to the principle of client-first, and therefore clients are those who receive the highest level of attention and consideration and benefit the most from this status quo, followed by the LSPs at the centre of the production network, and lastly, the translators at its peripheries and the product of their labour.

The fourth and last aim is that of accomplishing the intentions stated above by creating an interdisciplinary and innovative methodological approach to AVT research based on ethnography, qualitative data collection and sociological interpretation. Indeed, constructivist studies 'emphasize participant observation and interviewing for data generation as the researcher aims to understand a phenomenon from the perspective of those experiencing it' (Costantino 2008, p. 119). Participant observation is also defined as ethnography, a methodology in which the researcher enters a social community, observing and participating in it, and extracting meaning from the interactions that take place amongst the actors involved (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 149). In the case of workplace and organisational ethnography, 'researchers seek to obtain both the insider perspective of translation practitioners in the field and an insight into their work environments' (Milošević and Risku 2020, p. 113) and the 'immersion and close observation of the life of others in particular settings [which] requires careful attention to the everyday interactions, situations and occurrences' (Ciuk et al, 2018, p. 2). The data collection phases that inform this thesis consist in an ethnographic workplace study and a series of semi-structured interviews aimed at gathering qualitative data with a sociological orientation (as delineated in the next section and in Chapter 3).

In the last decades, sociologically oriented and ethnographic studies have entered Translation Studies, in response to a gap in frameworks encompassing social and ideological considerations around translation (Hermans 1996). In 2005, Buzelin suggested that sociological concepts pertaining to Actor-Network Theory could function well to explain translation phenomena, thus creating a link between the discipline and socio-constructivist theories of technology and artifacts which encourage, if not presuppose, the use of ethnography. Shortly after, Wolf and Fukari (2007) proposed that social (and socio-technical) aspects of translation could be better explored by expanding the array of methodologies, so as to gain awareness of the translators' social environments, working conditions, and other factors that impact translation and its processes. While ethnographic methodologies are not traditional in TS, they have been increasingly gaining attention in the late 2000s thanks to the work of some scholars such as Risku (2006, 2014), Koskinen (2008), Karamanis et al. (2011), Bundgaard (2017a), Olohan and Davitti (2017) and Födisch (2017)² who focus on various situated and collaborative aspects of translation. In AVT Studies, the only ethnographically inspired work so far is that of Abdallah (2011). It might be worth pointing out that, as ethnography entails the researchers' presence on translation premises, the gap in workplace-based ethnographic studies in AVT can also be attributable to a generalised reluctance from the industry to open its doors to external researchers, possibly due to a fear of revealing strategic information on procedures or software. Fortunately, in the case of the present research, this obstacle was overcome thanks to the relationship of the University of Roehampton with translation and AVT companies operating in the UK, which allowed to establish a partnership with a leading company for the purpose of Study 1. In light of all of the above, this thesis aims to expand the presence of ethnographic methods in AVT as a way of

² For a comprehensive list of ethnographic approaches in Translation Studies, see Milošević and Risku 2020

researching the new subtitling production networks, in this case cloud-mediated environments, through a sociological lens that voices the points of view of various participants while also looking at technological and economic contexts.

1.3 Research design and methodology

This section aims to summarise the design principles and methodologies for the two studies in this thesis, which are defined and described extensively in Chapter 3. With the aim of exploring different dimensions of quality in subtitling working environments, and how these linked with one another as well as with economic and technological contexts, I chose to develop an ethnographic workplace study.

In 2018 I was granted access to the partner Company with the objective of observing and analysing procedures in their workflow and elements in their physical and virtual working environments, and their related implications in the quality of processes and subtitling products. For three months, I was based in their localisation department, which takes care of coordinating and delivering AVT services in dozens of languages; more specifically, I was an intern in the QC (Quality Control) team. Having been given the possibility to access an actual corporate workplace for Study 1, I decided to adopt an ethnographic approach, mainly consisting of participant observation and occasionally shadowing and interviewing methods. My position was that of participant-as-observer, which entails an active participation within the context, and a clearly stated intent to observe individual or group dynamics (Waddington 2004). For the duration of my placement, I observed the working environment, dynamics and the human actors' interactions with each other and with technology. The initial aim was to trace the subtitling workflow so as to understand the life of a subtitling file, from creation to final delivery. To do this, I conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from each team that had a role in the subtitling workflow. Choosing an ethnographic methodology

allowed me to explore the social, process and product dimensions of quality in and of subtitling, with the self-reflective stance of a researcher, and the insight of an in-field insider. Accessing the workplace, the technology used, and the social context proved a source of diverse and rich data that enabled the comprehension of translation as a social, technical, and economic activity (Koskinen 2008; Flynn 2010; Risku 2014).

In addition, behind my academic engagement with the subject and the methodological approaches chosen in both studies, there is also the personal experience that I have acquired as a translation graduate and a freelancer navigating the subtitling industry for the best part of the 2010s. This motivated me to obtain a more complete picture of working practices and quality in the subtitling industry, and in order to do so I planned to directly access the voices of the actual providers of translation: the subtitlers. In fact, Study 1 had confirmed that a crucial part of the workflow was carried out by translators and proof-readers who worked as subtitlers on a freelance basis, therefore outside of company premises. Study 2 was planned with the precise aim of gathering information and perceptions from subtitlers about their working experience, habits and practices, their interaction with technology, and their views of quality, which were conveyed in a series of questions compiled into a semi-structured interview. A number of subtitlers were identified and contacted, which resulted in a sample of seven professional subtitlers who agreed to take part in this study. The interviews, which lasted approximately one hour each, were carried out between the end of 2019 and the first months of 2020. The first ones took place face-to-face while the later ones had to be conducted online due to the participants' location and the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. The pre-determined questions had been developed during Study 1 and were tailored to test my initial assumptions around working conditions, the relationship with technology, and the subtitlers' views on quality and subtitling practices. The interpersonal,

one-to-one dimension and the use of semi-structured interviews were in line with the ethnographic approach, which was instrumental also in the phase of drafting questions, in the sense that they aimed at exploring the individuals' relation to their subtitling work and to technology. The interviews allowed the research to acquire a broader scope and provide a wider-encompassing overview of subtitling practices in the industry. Also, the participants' engagement and interest in the subject became visible in the quality and depth of the resulting dataset.

The ethnographic approach was instrumental in collecting the various sets of data – something that would have been unfeasible through less social and interpersonal methods such as online surveys or observation in a laboratory setting. In fact, the researchers' immersion in an actual workplace context (Study 1) and the personal contact in face-to-face interviews (Study 2) allowed me to gather complex and complementary first-hand qualitative data. As seen earlier, ethnographic methods have acquired great relevance in Translation Studies as they allow researchers (and readers) to enter contextual dimensions with a variety of qualitative approaches. I argue that, for the same reasons, ethnographic methods can be highly valuable in Audiovisual Translation Studies as they allow the researcher to adopt an immersive point of view which is fundamental to obtaining as complete a picture as possible of a complex environment. Lastly, looking at these environments through a social as well as technological and economic lens, helps to overcome the risk of falling into deterministic assumptions around processes, technologies and working practices.

1.4 Scope and limitations of the thesis

The thesis is premised on the overall hypothesis that translation is a socially embedded activity, which depends on a number of factors that go beyond the translator/text/reader paradigm. Following this thought, quality is a construct that is found and created at different

levels of the social fabric and can be conceived differently by the entities that inhabit the translation environment. The thesis focuses on subtitling processes and technology as employed by representatives of the international AVT industry as defined above, and this section aims to point to the boundaries of the research scope of the thesis and its possible limitations. The two studies conducted for this thesis deal exclusively with the provision of interlingual subtitling services for theatrical and streaming purposes carried out according to global requirements. An initial limitation in the scope of the thesis is that it does not look at the worldwide landscape for AVT provision, but at that portion of the global industry that mostly deals with the translation of mainstream entertainment content for theatrical and streaming release, and mostly does so on a cloud platform. As for the workers' side (employees and freelance subtitlers) the studies are relevant to the UK/European areas, since working conditions are strongly influenced by local labour trends and regulations.

In doing so, the research focuses greatly on the subtitling workflow processes and the social, economic and ethical dimensions of workplace and practices. Other professional aspects such as recruitment, training, or contextual aspects such as ergonomic issues fall outside the scope of this thesis. In Study 1, the Company under study (which is protected by an anonymity clause and will only be referred to as the Company throughout the thesis) is an established player in the AVT market across the globe, and like many of its main competitors, it had transferred translation workflows and operations onto a cloud platform – following a platform business model similar to the one described in section 1.1. The technical element that is analysed and discussed the most is indeed the cloud subtitling platform as observed in Study 1 and described by subtitlers in Study 2, and for this reason the findings cannot be generalised to all types of subtitling software. As for corporate behaviour, the research does not intend to provide a picture of subtitling practices as carried out exclusively in the UK, as

might be assumed by the geographical location of the studies' participants, but rather provides an overview of practices that seem to be common to those companies that belong to the globalised audiovisual market, regardless of their geographical base. Indeed, the Company observed in Study 1 is a multinational with both employees and freelancers working for them across the globe, and whose practices tend to be standardised across its global offices. The outsourcing and standardisation of practices observed during Study 1 was corroborated by the subtitlers in Study 2. In fact, regardless of their language combination and the country in which they were based, all the interviewed subtitlers worked freelance for a similar range of clients, and followed similar working processes. Nevertheless, although these corporate practices are becoming increasingly widespread, they do not represent the totality of AVT practices across the world. While the thesis explores subtitling practices that are globalised, corporate and platform-based, it does not look at small, medium-sized, local, or independent audiovisual translation companies that populate the AVT market – which is still relatively diversified in spite of the growing acquisitions from larger corporate groups. As for employees' and translators' labour, it is crucial to remind that workers' conditions and pay are subject to local rates and regulations, and therefore the findings of the two studies that relate to these issues are only applicable to workers living in the UK and Europe, as their counterparts in the so-called *global south* are subject to different conditions and rates of pay.

However, the limitations mentioned above have offered me the possibility to focus on the specificities and nuances of platform economy as applied to AVT practices, and in doing so to provide the first systematic study – to my knowledge – of the corporate practices of what can be called cloud subtitling.

1.5 Structure and chapter summary

Chapter 1: *Introducing production networks and quality issues in the subtitling industry* is the present chapter, which introduces the thesis' topic and summary, provides an outline of the aims and research questions, design and methodology. The chapter also highlights gaps in literature and positions the interdisciplinary approach of the thesis within the academic literature of Translation Studies, and more specifically Audiovisual Translation Studies, identifying the additional contributions that come from other disciplines. Finally, it outlines the limitations of the thesis and provides a comprehensive summary of the content of each chapter.

Chapter 2: *Translation as a socio-technical activity: a multi-dimensional quality approach* provides a literature and historical review of Audiovisual Translation Studies, with the aim of positioning translation as a socio-technical activity, providing key definitions and presenting the theoretical framework. The chapter points to differences in quality focus between academia and the industry, and proposes that a socio-constructivist approach can help understand these different views of quality. Such an approach consists of combining principles from Latour's Actor-Network Theory – mainly concerning the interaction between social and inanimate actors – and Kristiina Abdallah's concept of Total Quality, which entails the identification of quality factors across the product, process and social dimensions of translation. Through a tripartite structure based on these dimensions, the chapter explores translation as product, as process, and as social activity in a review of relevant literature in translation theory, translation quality assessment, and audiovisual translation, with references to concepts coming from the sociology of technology and human/machine interaction theories. The clear socio-constructivist and interdisciplinary perspective as established in this chapter will recur throughout the thesis, allowing academics and professionals alike to reflect

on the different actors that make up translation networks, and the technical, organisational and economic choices that impact on their profession.

Chapter 3: *Ethnographic methods in researching professional subtitling practices*, provides the methodological framework and introduces the two studies carried out for data collection, that is to say, a participant observation study in a translation workplace, and a series of semi-structured interviews with subtitling professionals. The chapter begins by defining the ethnographic methods of research employed and provides an overview of ethnographic methodologies found in Translation Studies and AVT. The ethnographic, qualitative methods for data collections are presented (observation, participant observation, interviews), followed by a reflection on the importance of borrowing concepts and methodologies from different disciplines. The chapter then goes on to describe the context and modalities of the two studies. The need for in-depth definitions and descriptions of the methods used arises from the fact that ethnographic methods of inquiry are still relatively unused in Translation Studies and especially AVT, while at the same time being crucial to carry out research that looks at several dimensions of the translation profession. The templates for the interviews as carried out in the two studies can be found in the two Appendixes at the end of this thesis.

Chapter 4: *A workplace study of process quality in corporate subtitling production* begins with a short introduction to workplace and workflow studies of translation, in light of the multi-dimensional theoretical framework, and the methodology chosen. The chapter then goes on to describe the Company setting where the fieldwork took place, together with my positioning as a researcher in the workplace. The analytical and theoretical bases of the chapter are outlined, with a focus on the analysis of processes and on their quality, which sets the ground for an exploration of the complex qualitative dataset which comprises different types of actors (human and technological), their roles, and the dynamics of their relations.

Such diverse data could not be gathered were it not for the use of ethnographic methodology and the partnership with the Company. In this regard, a representative of the Company acted as my co-supervisor for the data collection and approved the chapter before completion. The chapter provides an outline of the workflow and of all actors involved in the various processes, mainly addressing research questions 2, and partially 3. It is primarily a descriptive chapter that combines observations and insights about real-life working practices of one of the key players of the AVT industry, and helps identifying organisational, technical and social parameters that affect perceptions of quality in subtitling-related processes.

Chapter 5: *The evolving role of the subtitler* moves from the process dimension mainly explored in the previous chapter, to the social dimension of freelance subtitling professionals working in the industry. In fact, while the workplace and workflow study resulted in a wealth of data coming from the environment, processes and actors involved, the perspectives of freelance subtitlers and proof-readers were missing, as they were not physically in the workplace. The data coming from the second qualitative study aimed at professional subtitlers, forms the basis of this chapter, and complements insights from Study 1. After a short review of the relevant literature on freelance translation practices and the freelancers' working conditions, the chapter presents a summary of the seven subtitlers who participated in the study, outlining their education and experience, and analysing working modalities and use of technology. The layers of analysis are the same as in Chapter 4, nevertheless the picture that emerges is focused on the subtitlers' *perception* of their processes, and not the processes themselves, which could not be observed. Their working practices as subtitlers and their interplay with other actors in the production network constitute the focus of the chapter and provide answers to research questions 2 and 3. In considering the respondents' working quality as they reflect on their own processes, Chapter 5 provides an outlook of process quality

through an individual and personal lens, which clearly places the focus on the social aspects of quality, and in doing so it sheds light on patterns of communication and their strong relation to both social quality and the platform business model.

Chapter 6: *Standardisation and the making of quality* brings together conclusions from the two previous chapters and combines them with a stronger focus on business and economic dynamics that currently impact the audiovisual industry, to better make sense of the complex context where subtitling companies and professionals operate. The chapter starts with a brief overview of the so-called platform model, the economic and business model that characterises the portion of AVT industry observed, and that heavily features outsourcing, standardisation, division of labour and centralisation of technology. Specifically, the standardisation of subtitling processes is identified as a key critical element to understand not only the professional practices as discussed in the previous chapters, but also the construction of the concept of quality in the industry, thereby providing an answer to research question 1. In this light, standardisation, division of labour and centralisation of technology are not only defined in depth, but also identified in the data coming from the two studies. The critical discussion of the data is then informed by insights from the industry literature, which brings the discussion closer to conceptualising quality in the industry and academia – a conceptualisation that closely follows the principles and dynamics of the business model in question. The academic functionalist approaches of translation assessment found in industry literature and quality standards, prompt a critical discussion on the applicability of such theories to current contexts of AVT production, pointing to the unsustainability of applying certain translation principles within these contexts.

Chapter 7: *Constructing scenarios of audiovisual translation and imagining new ones* summarises the findings of the research, providing conclusive remarks on the outcomes of the

studies and their analysis. The chapter also brings together the answers to the research questions as identified in previous chapters, and in doing so it outlines the contribution and limitations of the thesis. Finally, the chapter points to possible future avenues for research in subtitling and AVT practices within and outside cloud platform environments, and attempts to reimagine sustainable subtitling production networks with alternative conceptualisations of quality that value more, or differently, translation's and translators' needs.

2 Translation as a socio-technical activity: a multi-dimensional quality approach

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter offers a thematic review of literature from the fields of Translation Studies (TS) and Audiovisual Translation Studies (AVTS), and provides the theoretical framework, some historical context, and also definitions for the main notions that guide the research project. As outlined in the introduction, the project stems from the idea that the quality of a translated product is strictly interconnected to the quality of the translation process and depends on the quality of the social environment that surrounds them.

Up until the 21st century, the predominant tendency in academia has been that of considering quality from the point of view of the finished translation, thus developing models to evaluate a translated product (Drugan 2013). Meanwhile, in the last two decades, the translation industry has been focusing on implementing quality procedures in translation processes, while taking into account organisational and financial constraints (Drugan 2013). The present project revolves around the idea that quality in a translated product is a multidimensional concept and constitutes a goal that can be reached through effective collaboration among all the different entities involved in the translation process and through paying attention to quality-enhancing factors and practices (Gummerus and Paro 2001; Gabr 2007; Mellinger 2018; Nunes Vieira and Alonso 2018). Establishing a common understanding of quality has been the subject of debate in academia and industry alike. Indeed, historically there has been strong disagreement in notions of quality within academia, but the divide is even more visible when comparing concepts of quality between academia and industry (Lauscher 2000; Chesterman and Wagner 2002; Drugan 2013).

Different conceptions of quality in academia and industry can be summarised – and simplified – as follows. While academia looks at those intrinsic characteristics that contribute to an idea of a well-translated product, the industry looks at those elements, both internal and contextual, that characterise a translated product that satisfies the customers' requests, and at the processes which can lead to those elements. Within those points of view, quality is to be found in different – but in my view complementary – places. A large portion of academic discourse around quality is concerned with identifying the strategies behind language transfer, and tends to look at the linguistic, cultural and communicational elements which make up a translated product (a target text, or TT), while often neglecting aspects that relate to the translation process, or to the professional and social contexts.

In terms of paying attention to the process of translation, academic research has shown an interest in cognitive processes (Szarkowska 2018; Massey and Judd 2020), technological processes (often around the use of translation memories or Machine Translation, as in Cadwell et al. 2018; Nunes Vieira and Alonso 2018) and workflows in collaborative crowdsourcing environments (García 2015, 2017). However, the academic focus on research is often compartmentalised and tends to look only at textual features, or only at processes or social aspects, thus failing to produce holistic studies of translation quality in its various dimensions. On the other hand, the industry is more concerned with establishing and measuring levels of formal compliance to quality-inducing processes, creating quality metrics and measuring production efforts, mainly to satisfy customer needs and arrange appropriate workflows and technologies (Drugan 2013, p. 39). In terms of compliance, the current translation industry – as well as the European Commission / DGT – seems to agree around quality standards modelled on the EN ISO 17100:2015+A1 2017. As for reaching definitions of quality, there seems to be a similar gap across the industry, namely in the lack of a holistic or even

standardised approaches to Translation Quality Assessment (TQA) across different companies and markets (Castilho et al. 2018).

Due to this variety of perspectives in the translation landscape, this chapter argues that translation quality – and its assessment – cannot be conceived solely as being related to translation as **product**, but needs to be framed within a **social** dimension (the overall context and human landscape that populates it) and a **process** dimension (the series of procedures required to carry out a project) (Abdallah 2007). This is the basis for the socio-constructivist approach that guides this research and provides the theoretical framework, as will be explored in the section 2.2. Indeed, the concepts used throughout the study clearly position the thesis within a set of constructivist theories borrowed from social sciences. The section goes on to complete the framework behind the thesis, based on the Total Quality Approach as theorised by Abdallah (2007), which presents translation as an activity ingrained in its own context and dependent on the collaboration of social actors and technology.

This sociotechnical perspective played a crucial part in the choice of theoretical framework, which was necessarily interdisciplinary to make sense of the diverse data that was collected around workplace, labour, technology, quality and the interaction between humans and machines. As it will be seen in the next sections, it was necessary to complement the contribution of translation and AVT literature with a range of studies coming from the fields of social construction of technology (Pickering 1993; Rose and Jones 2005; Olohan 2011), technology, business and organisation studies (Brache and Rummler 1988; Orlikowski 1995; Luff et al. 2000; Doherty and King 2005), studies of capitalist economy and business models (Harvey 2005; Huws 2014; Srnicek 2017) and the sociology of work (Terressac 1995; Durand 2004). As for the fields of translation and AVT studies, the thesis draws from – and is positioned at the intersection of – studies that present translation as a socially situated activity (Abdallah

2007, 2010, 2011, 2012; Olohan 2007, 2017; Koskinen 2008; Kuznik and Verd 2010; Risku 2014, 2016, 2017) and as a technological activity (Risku 2006; Olohan 2011; O'Brien 2012; Sakamoto et al. 2017), embedded in production networks (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007; Risku et al. 2013; Risku, Rogl and Pein-Weber 2016; García 2015, 2017; Jiménez Crespo 2018; Sakamoto 2018) and within economic systems (Olohan 2007; Dunne and Dunne 2011; Dunne 2012; Moorkens et al. 2016; Moorkens 2017, 2020, 2021).

As briefly mentioned earlier, Abdallah conceptualises quality as a heterogeneous element that can be found in three dimensions of translation activities: the product-related dimension (the translated text), the process-related dimension (including steps and tools that lead to the final text), and the social dimension (the working environment and conditions). In view of this, the structure of the present chapter reflects this three-dimensional view and is designed as follows: section 2.3 will look at some of the main points of view in Translation Studies about the translated product and its quality assessment. The section does not intend to provide a comprehensive review of such a vast portion of TS, but rather points at the reasons why such product-based approaches to translation have not been extensively adopted in the present thesis. The academic point of view on quality will be then complemented by a review of quality standards and models implemented in the industry, focusing on the quality assessment of the translated and subtitled product.

Section 2.4 focuses on those publications in Translation and Audiovisual Translation Studies that shed light on processes, working procedures, and the ways in which technologies and practices impact on the quality of the process itself, and that of the final product too. The literature has been divided thematically: the first sub-section acknowledges the contribution of cognitive explorations in Translation Process Research (2.4.1), while the second goes on to discuss publications that link processes to quality considerations (2.4.2). The third sub-section

looks at those studies that explored processes through real-life observations and ethnographic methodologies (2.4.3) and the last sub-section focuses more specifically on the literature around subtitling processes (2.4.4).

The following section (2.5) considers literature that looks at translation environments and workplaces as well as social actors, thus dealing with translation as a professional activity. Indeed, at the moment, the translation industry and the audiovisual sector seem focused on achieving tangible quantitative results in terms of productivity at increasingly short turnarounds, and for this reason the exploration of industry practices and the quality of real-life workplaces and working conditions becomes essential to recognise the multifaceted environment in which translation and subtitling take place. Issues of professional identity and perceptions are discussed (2.5.1) together with aspects of training (2.5.2).

The themes that guide the structure of this chapter (socio-constructivism, social, process and product) reflect the framework in which the whole thesis is inscribed, aimed at portraying translation as a socially embedded activity depending on a number of factors, where quality is conceptualised on different levels of this social fabric, and in different ways by the actors that populate this social environment. The thesis expands and departs from the theoretical frameworks and methodology which are traditionally found and associated with Translation Studies. In fact, the overall theoretical framework is strongly inspired by organisational and business studies, the sociology of work, and contemporary constructivist philosophy, and its interdisciplinarity will become apparent throughout the thesis. The present chapter therefore offers the first interdisciplinary links in the thesis, showing where AVTS embraces sociological and constructivist positions as a way to make sense of the increasingly fast and complex environment in which professional subtitling is carried out.

2.2 Translation as a socio-technical activity

This thesis aims to analyse professional subtitling practices by investigating the socially constructivist nature of translation as an activity and a profession. The theoretical framework for this research project is based on existing literature on social-constructivist approaches both within and outside Translation Studies, and it is necessary to first explain a few basic concepts in order to fully appreciate it.

As introduced in the previous chapter, a constructivist point of view – that is the epistemological view that our knowledge is co-constructed and co-dependent on human actions and social experience – is the basis for constructivist approaches, such as those drawn from the theory of Social Construction of Technology (SCOT) as postulated by Bijker et al. (1987). A socio-constructivist perspective towards technology is grounded in the assumption that any technological system or artefact can be thoroughly explained and examined only in conjunction with the social system and social actors it interacts with (Olohan 2017, p. 6). Furthermore, it maintains that society and technology evolve and influence each other in variable and not necessarily predictable patterns. Such an approach directly contradicts deterministic views, which see events and behaviours as determined by prior events or phenomena, in a relationship of cause-effect. A technologically deterministic perspective would be to think of technology as the most important, if not the only, determining factor for change (Adler 2008). However, as Olohan (2017) notes, the key notions of technological determinism presuppose that technological advances occur independently of social, economic and political forces, and that technology has the power of determining social change and events. As a result, under deterministic assumptions, there would be no need to consider the human choices that are made about the adoption of technology, and no need to take into account the users' responsibility for choosing and using certain technologies (*ibid.*, p. 2). In

following this point of view, this thesis recognises and addresses the need to focus on the mutual influence of technology and society through a socio-constructivist angle, and explore technological choices in the subtitling industry, and how these may ‘relate to ideological, institutional and political perspectives’ (ibid., p. 5). In order to explore said relations in a subtitling environment, and thus ‘account more fully for the interplay of social, technical, cultural, economic and ideological factors’ (ibid., p. 7), it was necessary to find not only an ontology, but also a terminology that allowed to categorise and examine those factors. In this respect, the project borrows one of the core terms (and its related assumptions) of Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (Latour 1987; Law 2009), which is *actor*, defining an entity that can be human or inanimate.³ Actor-Network Theory (ANT) presupposes that such actors – be they people, technologies, ideas or texts – combine and weave relations with one another while generating knowledge and scientific products (Law 1992, p. 2).

ANT was developed to analyse the ways in which scientific knowledge and products came to be, regardless of discipline (Law 2009, p. 142), providing a toolkit to describe the actors that make up the observed phenomenon. Yet this approach is not limited to science, as the same principles can apply to the study of organisations, economic contexts, working environments – in sum, all social phenomena where different actors define relations with one another (Latour 1996, p. 373; Law 2009 p. 2). Most importantly, as actors delineate and affect one another, they create the socio-technical reality – or ‘seamless fabric’ – in which they coexist (Law 1992, p. 4; Buzelin 2010, p. 7). The idea that all actors are considered equal in the

³ The key figures in Actor-Network Theory (Latour 1987; Callon 1999; Law 2009) use the terms *human* and *non-human* actors. However, in order to avoid doubts that may arise around other non-human living species, throughout this thesis I will adopt the general term ‘inanimate’, which refers to actors that do not occupy a living body. In the context of the present study, those actors are mainly texts and pieces of technology, and they will be referred to as *inanimate* actors in a general sense, and more specifically as *texts* and *technology/machines*, respectively.

eyes of the Actor-Network comes from the nature of this approach, scientifically driven field research, where humans, texts, technical tools, regulations and external conditions are all deeply involved in the production of knowledge⁴ (Cressman 2009, p. 3). The status of *actor* attributed to human and inanimate entities indiscriminately is conceived within a semiotic lens: anything 'that acts or to which activity is granted by others' can be considered an actor, or *actant*, and it 'can literally be *anything* provided it is granted to be the source of an action' (Latour 1996, p. 373, my emphasis). Latour maintains that living and inanimate actors have an interactive relationship and mutually contribute to the construction of the social fabric and, as it follows, it is not possible to study and analyse any given actor without referring to the network of relations that revolve around it. This aspect becomes particularly relevant, as ANT provides a series of concepts that allow to generalise and theorise complex social, economic and technical environments, such as that of subtitling practices in the AVT industry. This is done by observing and analysing the dynamics between actors which generate such a layered environment, paying attention to the interaction of human and inanimate efforts – an interaction which is rarely choreographed in advance, and can become irregular or unpredictable as resistance and accommodation emerge (Pickering 1993). This dynamic,

⁴ In Actor-Network Theory, the dynamic which refers to the production of knowledge and artefacts is called *translation* (a term that Latour and Callon borrowed from Michel Serres' *La Traduction*, 1974). Actor-Network Theory presupposes that knowledge-making "is a process [...] in which bits and pieces from the social, the technical, the conceptual and the textual are fitted together, and so converted (or "*translated*") into a set of equally heterogeneous scientific products" (Law 1992, p.2, my emphasis). For Actor-Network theorists then, the term *translation* indicates a process by which different entities interact, negotiate and delimit one another within the socio-technical context to produce a piece of technology for instance, but also to produce technological development in the long term – such as ideas that *translate* into projects, or a company's objective that *translates* into a certain type of technology use (Callon 1981). ANT provides therefore a framework that allows to concentrate on various stages of translation, as they come into play in the creation of the socio-technical reality (Cressman 2009). For this reason, ANT is also known as the 'sociology of translation'. However, in this thesis is employed as the basis of a different theoretical framework, and it is not implemented in full. In addition, due to the theme of this thesis and the wider significance of the term *translation*, in order to avoid confusion, I will not use the term as defined in ANT, but only in relation to language transfer. The dynamic described above will be referred to in broader terms as interaction, interplay, or influence amongst actors.

which becomes particularly visible in Chapter 4, is summarised here through the definition given by Rose and Jones (2005, p. 34), who explain that ‘in encountering problems (resistance) in using a technology, human actors adjust (accommodate), for example by revising goals or practices, or adjusting technological parameters’. In practice, this can be related to a dynamic of trial and error, or a piece of software that requires workaround strategies by the user, who has to respond to software’s unexpected behaviour by resorting to other means (Olohan, 2011). If both human and inanimate actors share the ability to act, it could be argued that they also share agency. In terms of considering agency, the present study follows Pickering’s (1993) vision, according to which the human and inanimate actors can both have agency, but diverge on the basis of *intentionality*, which is an exclusive feature of human actors, and the motivation behind human choices. Asymmetrically, there is no such thing as ‘inanimate’ intentionality, while inanimate agency emerges through the dialectic relation of actors. The terminological distinction between agency and intentionality serves as a reminder of the need to address the human responsibility in making choices that revolve around technology. Indeed, studying the relations between humans and software technology in an audiovisual translation context allows me to explore not only the instrumental side of software, but also the human decisions and intentions behind the type of technology available in the AVT industry, together with the implications that certain technologies have on various professionals, on their relationship with one another, and on the quality of the work that is carried out.

After outlining the principles of Actor-Network Theory that are most relevant to this study, the following paragraphs present the main reasons why this approach has been chosen. Firstly, Latour is one of the scholars who gained considerable attention in Translation Studies during the so-called sociological turn of TS, which saw translation as an activity and a product that are ‘necessarily embedded within social contexts’ (Wolf 2007, p. 1). Socio-constructivist

theories in general, and ANT in particular, provide a lens to seeing subtitling production processes as a locus where many actors interact, negotiate their position, and experience contrasts or conflicts. This point of view was first proposed in Translation Studies by Buzelin (2005), who explicitly introduced the application of Latour's Actor-Network Theory in TS, observing how Latour's perspectives offer the chance to analyse all actors in their context and consequently to explore the active role of their practices, together with challenges, changes, and tensions that may arise in the process. In terms of methods, the fact that Latour attributes the ability to perform actions (and therefore generate impact) to humans but also inanimate actors (such as technological tools) allows the researcher to explore the relationship between those actors in the field, and to appreciate how those interactions shape the translation process (Buzelin 2005, p. 212). In terms of methods, ANT finds an ideal application through ethnographic approaches, as these encourage the observation of phenomena in real-life settings (ibid., p. 198; Córdoba Serrano 2020). Indeed, the methodology used for the different phases of data collection for the present research have been drawn from ethnographic methodologies, as will be detailed in the next chapter.

Secondly, Actor-Network Theory becomes crucial in the study of all phenomena which have a strong technical component, as it encourages reflections on those processes and actors that contribute to technology and interact with it. As mentioned before, this aspect acquires a particular relevance in this study, given that translation, and particularly AVT, is a practice that cannot exist without tools (O'Brien 2012; Cronin 2013). Within a broad, interdisciplinary, sociological and historical approach, Cronin (2003) shows how translation is and has always been an activity that is strongly enmeshed with technology. He explores translation technology since the making of the Rosetta stone to the age of scribes and scrolls, and then to the tremendous leap due to the invention of printing, and the introduction of dictionaries. The

advent of the computer and consequent digitisation is then considered the latest shift in the history of translation, marking the 'indissociable link between language and tools [that] not only does not disappear with the advent of technical complexity but is in fact strengthened by the phenomenon' (ibid., p. 27). This point of view has informed the present thesis' focus on exploring technology actors in translation in a proactive and constructive way, a point which is also raised by O'Brien (2012) and Alonso and Calvo (2015). While O'Brien (2012, p. 4) advocates a consciously interactive and mutual relationship between translators and technology, Alonso and Calvo (2015, p. 148) propose a new paradigm for Translation Studies – strongly influenced by socio-constructivism and ANT too – which takes into consideration:

an extended cognitive, anthropological and social system or network which integrates human translators and technologies, whether specific to translation or not, and acknowledges the collective dimension of many translation workflows today. A technology-mediated approach envisages technologies in action and interaction with the human, fostering a plethora of instrumental developments, not only as isolated fragmentary tools utterly dominated by the human. The creative and learning dimension of technologies in both directions, from the user to the tool and vice versa, also plays a shaping role in this proposed construct.

An area where technology has shaped processes in a mutual and inseparable way is subtitling, as developments of digital technology drew increasing attention to the ways in which audiovisual texts could be translated through subtitling. The acronym AVT, which has become widely accepted and used in the last decade, covers the linguistic and sensorial transfer of aural and visual media, and comprises all modes of translating content that is distributed on screen (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007) thus including practices such as subtitling; live subtitling; surtitling; dubbing; voice-over; and accessibility practices such as SDH (subtitling for deaf and hard of hearing audiences), and AD (audio description for the blind and partially sighted). For the sake of clarity, it is worth reiterating that the present research focuses solely on the professional production of interlingual subtitles from one language (English) into multiple languages, and the term subtitling will be used here to refer to this practice only.

In the last 20 years, AVT has become academically recognised and established within the discipline of Translation Studies as its professional practices and technological developments rapidly advanced (Pérez González 2014). For this reason, I maintain that adopting a constructivist stance informed by principles of Actor-Network Theory allows us to ‘account fully for the challenges and complexities of the integration of technology into the translation process’ (Olohan 2011, p. 354) and to acknowledge the responsibility that organisational stakeholders have when making choices, in that they ‘interpret, appropriate and ultimately shape their information systems in a wide variety of ways’ (Doherty and King 2005, p. 1). Indeed, reflecting on the deliberate choices that are made in relation to the use of software technology becomes crucial in the AVT industry, as software becomes an actor which comes into being in view of fulfilling industry purposes, and thus exemplifies the structures of control in the socio-economic fabric of the translation industry (Olohan 2017, p. 13). My approach in this thesis integrates the above points of view, adjusting them specifically to subtitling practices; in doing so, it updates existing AVT theory and research on the phenomenon of cloud platform subtitling, while refining the concept of quality to account for technological and economic phenomena.

Thirdly, Actor-Network Theory contributes to the idea that all human actors that work towards shaping a piece of technology, not only design the technology but also the social context in which it exists and acts (Callon 1987) and this inextricable link between AVT and technological development is one of the factors that adds to the complexity of this practice. The fast-changing and highly technical nature of subtitling calls for a technology-oriented approach, and an actor-based approach also allows us to point the attention on the social as well as economic contexts surrounding the subtitling practice, which is becoming increasingly competitive and time-pressured. In attempting to make sense of a global, socio-technical, and

complex practice such as AVT, a constructivist perspective is needed to include those heterogeneous actors and elements that shape it.

Indeed, translation can be seen as a very complex practice in contemporary socio-economic contexts, where developments created new and different ways to work, live and communicate through the digitisation of content, the rise of the internet and the expansion of markets. Within the translation industry, these differences can be observed not only in the increasing number of computerised tools at the translators' disposal, but also in three other areas, which had already been noticed by O'Brien (2012a). First, the increasing pressure for reduction of costs, which is usually paired with short turnaround times (Georgakopoulou 2012; Georgakopoulou and Bywood 2014). Second, significant changes in the way text is conceived, meaning that translatable content has more shapes and forms than a few years ago, and quite a few more since O'Brien's contribution in 2012. Indeed, the nature and scalability of audiovisual content has multiplied between 2000 and 2020, and translated (and translatable) content is now enjoyed by users on TV, computers or smartphones screens, and it is accessible on social media platforms, on one of the many free and subscription-based streaming platforms, or Video-On-Demand services – all of which can be added to the varied landscape of more traditional media (TV, satellite, DVD, Blu-ray). Third, the stronger industry focus towards the end-user, noticed by O'Brien (2012a, p. 56), is intensifying, due to the development of Web 2.0 and the possibilities for the user to generate and interact with audiovisual content. The effects of such an increase in content, text modalities, technology, audience demands and focus on the quality of translation are further substantiated by Drugan (2013), who goes on to analyse technology and other socio-economic factors and their implications for translation quality in the industry. While Drugan (*ibid.*) points to the differences between approaches in academia and industry, O'Brien (2012a, p. 67) calls for the

adoption of a holistic quality model that takes into consideration the processes of content creation and translating, in view of the complex evolution outlined above. I argue that the need for exploring social, technological and economic factors in the translation profession and industry is now stronger than ever, because of the current pace of technology and the nature of the international markets.

2.2.1 *The total quality approach*

The intrinsic quality of processes found in key phases such as content creation and translation are seldom considered in translation quality models, as it will be explored in section 2.3. However, they do constitute important elements within the diverse and complex reality of professional practices in AVT, though are usually found outside the paradigm that only sees translation as the product of a socio-technical activity. This section intends to create a bridge between the socio-technical approach and the topic of quality, by introducing a framework that considers translation activities across three dimensions, as discussed below.

To observe and account for the interplay of heterogeneous elements in the current professional AVT reality, this thesis adopts the three-dimensional approach to quality in translation as presented by Abdallah (2007) and summarised in English by Jääskeläinen (2016). Abdallah's concept aptly expresses the interconnected, and mutually constructive nature of today's AVT processes, characterised by the joint efforts of many different actors. The starting point is the consideration of translation as a diverse set of activities where humans and machines interact, and those activities often take place within complex production networks (Kuznik and Verd 2010). In this spirit, Abdallah (2007) argues – regardless of how final quality is conceived – that the quality of a product is inextricably linked to the quality of its production

process, and to the quality of the social environment in which it is created, as illustrated in Figure 2.1:

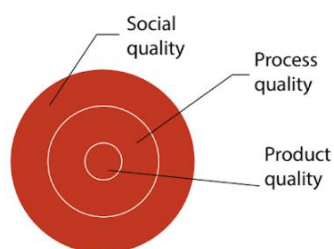


Figure 2.1. Abdallah's Total Quality (2007, in Jääskeläinen 2016, p. 91)

This has also been argued by Kuznik and Verd (2010, p. 29), who, to my knowledge, were the first to explicitly identify a possible intersection between translation and the fields of sociology of labour and sociology of organizations, by analysing components of a professional translation context (Kuznik and Verd 2010, p. 29). The authors here refer to theories formulated by work sociologists such as Durand (2004) and Terssac (1995), who stress that issues of workplace and working conditions are made up of elements such as 'the productive techniques, the work organization, the forms of pay and the professional relationships' (Kuznik and Verd 2010, p. 31). The authors make a strong case for the insights that can come from the sociology of work, as a field that presents production processes as a series of cognitive, empirical and technical interactions between human and inanimate actors. Although similar remarks cannot be found in Abdallah's (2007) publication on Total Quality, her references to economic and globalisation studies, and quality control in the localisation industry align with the same interdisciplinary framework proposed by Kuznik and Verd. The tripartite approach proposed by Abdallah shows a clear affinity with the Three Levels of Quality proposed by Brache and Rummler (1988), which aim at improving industry performance by looking at

quality at the organisational, process and individual levels. Indeed, the management of industry performance is strictly linked to the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) – which plausibly inspired the name that Abdallah chose for her theorisation. By drawing from different disciplines and tapping into the organisational and business-oriented aspects of translation production, Abdallah’s approach aims to promote awareness of practices and of actors’ interaction, which could in turn constitute the basis for a holistic quality model in a translation environment. The perspective adopted in this thesis is inspired by Abdallah’s idea of Total Quality as a way to consider different elements in the conceptualisation of quality, but it is an approach that aims to “exploit” the term rather than fully embracing its significance as proposed in the manufacturing industry. Indeed, in business and organisation studies, TQM has been theorised as a way of increasing productivity with a focus on the customer, as defined by Gabr (2007, p. 67):

[TQM is] a quality-centred, customer-focused, team-driven, senior management-led process that enables service/product providers to assess their services and products in order to improve customer satisfaction, increase efficiency, and continuously improve productivity concurrently with any development that may emerge in terms of customer needs.

In this thesis, the concept of Total Quality differs from the above definition in the sense that the concept of totality is indeed ‘quality-centred’, but not necessarily ‘customer-focused’. In the present research, totality means approaching the issue of quality from different perspectives, precisely in the spirit of escaping the narrowness of customer focus, and reaffirming the centrality of translators and their text- and audience-oriented processes into the quality equation. Such totality, as inspired by Abdallah, is represented by three dimensions. From a point of view of translation practices, the social dimension refers to clients, agencies and companies, related actors and working conditions – including the recruitment, training, working culture, experience and skills of the professionals involved. This dimension impacts on the features of the translation process, which include the quality of the workflow structure,

the source text and reference material, and the technological tools used. Eventually, what happens in the social and process spheres will impact the linguistic, textual, functional (and, in case of subtitling, technical) quality of the translated product.

The concept of quality of the process itself as being instrumental to product quality can be linked to Terssac's (1995) work on 'disturbances' during production processes. His considerations contributed to the theoretical development of the sociology of work, and are not specific to the translation industry. Nevertheless, Kuznik and Verd (2010, p. 28) argue that the identification and definition of elements that impact negatively on working processes (thus interrupting the flow of work) can be verified in professional translation contexts as well, and can therefore be of great help in the conceptualisation of quality within different dimensions, as it will be discussed in the data-driven chapters, 4 and 5. The present approach acknowledges and substantiates the claim that translation is a complex, socio-technical activity in which both processes and products are strictly connected to the social and organisational structures in which they exist. In this light, translation quality in the three dimensions appears to depend on a number of variables, and yet the result is never a plain sum of these variables, but the result of the variables' interaction (ibid., p. 26).

It is worth pointing out that the audiovisual translation industry makes extensive use of technology in processes, following decisions made by social actors, which will impact not only procedures but also the translators' working conditions (Jääskeläinen 2016, p. 94). For this reason, considerations on technology will appear in both process-related and social-related discussions. In this chapter and throughout the thesis, the concepts of social, process and product quality will refer to the following:

<p>The social dimension of translation quality looks at...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation workplaces • Translators' working conditions • Social choices surrounding technology • Industry conditions • Social actors, individual and collective (translators, managers, clients, agencies, companies, etc) and their role • The actors' working conditions • The actors' skills, experience, training, recruitment
<p>The process dimension of translation quality looks at...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workflow structure • Use of technology, related training and support • Source and reference material, template files, instructions and guidelines
<p>The product dimension of translation quality looks at...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linguistic features • Textual features • Functional features • Technical features • Cultural-specific / idiomatic / stylistic etc...

Table 2.1 A three-dimensional view of quality

Through an interdisciplinary framework, as summarised above, the present thesis aims to interpret phenomena that relate to quality in the process and social dimension of translation. The following sections in this chapter will reflect this three-dimensional view which acts as a basis and guide to the thesis and its arguments, by presenting a selection of relevant academic literature that looks at products, processes, and the social dimension of translation and subtitling. It is important to note here that, in reality and also in the context of my study, the three dimensions are neither confined nor separated, they rather intertwine continuously. Indeed, some of the following contributions span across two or more dimensions, as the relations between these are not sharp, univocal, or deterministic. Nevertheless, as pointed out

earlier, these dimensions have often been treated discretely in Translation and AVT literature, and it is why they are presented here in separate sections. Finally, in the following sections, technology is mainly considered within a process dimension, as literature on translation processes focuses considerably on technological functions; however, it is important to bear in mind that not only technology is an integral element of procedures and workflows, but it is also the subject of significant decision-making processes on the social level, and instrumental in maintaining the business model observed – especially when it comes to the increasingly omnipresent cloud platform technology (Chaume 2019; Díaz Cintas and Massidda, 2019). Because of this, in the following sub-sections technological tools and functions will be considered in relation to the translation process and its social dimension, and will constitute a recurring theme through Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

2.3 Translation as a product, and as an act

The study of translation has traditionally looked at the product of translation and at the translation act in general, conceived as a series of textual processes and individual choices performed by a translator in a relatively undisturbed or ideal situation. This section aims at showing how the production of a TT is at the core of Translation Studies, but also how translation as a product has taken less space in TS in recent years. In translation theory, progressively, the social and individual context around translation became more and more prominent, as the locus of agency started to encompass not only the text, but also its author, its translator and its receivers. This section aims at tracing a genealogy of holistic approaches in TS by reviewing a selection of TS scholars that look at translation as text, but have gradually broken away from the product-only perspective.

The basis of Translation Studies as a discipline was established by scholars such as Jakobson (1959) and Nida (1964) who first incorporated principles of linguistic and applied linguistic to language transfer, and introduced the idea that meanings and their equivalences are strongly dependent on both source and target context and culture. Indeed, the study of translation and the related contextual and cultural representations on a textual level soon reveals the intrinsic multi-dimensionality of this practice. The work of Nida (1964, p. 164) is instrumental in this respect, as he first introduces another 'actor' in the study of translation: the receiver, or audience, with their cultural expectations. This constitutes a clear example that socio-cultural dimensions have been long explored *within* the act of translation, and informed parameters for quality at the product level. However, the fact that they have been considered solely in conjunction with textual production can make it hard to relate similar conceptualisations of translation and quality to real-life professional contexts, conditions and processes.

Within sociocultural considerations around the translation of texts, the influence of scientific and technological developments starts making its way into traditional translation discourse at the time of Catford (1965). Starting from the communicational function of language, Catford's theory of translation shifts is a systematic attempt at categorising translation choices through a mathematical probability approach which calculates the distance between translation equivalence and formal correspondence. As Munday notes (2016, p. 97) this was linked to the increasing interest in machine translation from mathematics and linguists at the time, though Catford's approach was later criticised for its reductionist view. However, Catford goes on to present equivalence as depending on *function, relevance, situation and culture*, therefore surpassing the mere linguistic criteria. I argue that the same categories apply to translation processes as found in the industry. Processes can depend on

the function of the text in the target audience (or as defined by the client), on the relevance that the receiving culture places on them (and also on the relevance and value that the client places on them), on the situation in which the translator works (working conditions and environment), and on culture, as in the translator's *working* culture (which may be the same as the employer's) and the translator's *own* culture (i.e. the receiving culture). The quality of translators' and other actors' processes will be discussed and described in detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

Newmark (1981) widens considerably the notion behind Catford's (1965) shift analysis by placing translation within acts of communication on a social and individual level, thus considering the effect on the readers, and the relation between the translated text and the audience. A similar relationship has been explored by Reiss (1977), who analysed source text types and the transposition of their function in the target language as a way to determine equivalence and assess translations. Her work sheds light on the communicative function of translation, while she also highlights how the translation approach depends also on sociocultural pressures and the translators' position and aims. From this contextualisation of translation, a series of scholars started to largely adopt a focus on *function* (Vermeer 1978; Holz-Mänttari 1984; Reiss and Vermeer 1984).

According to the functionalist approach, the translation act is less dependent on the ST, its relationship with the source audience or its intended purpose (as debated by the equivalence-oriented approach) than on its function or purpose – *skopos* – as determined by the client's needs. Vermeer's Skopos Theory (1989, p. 200) places the focus of translation choices around the client's commission (or briefing document, project specifications etc), therefore first introducing a consideration of social and process elements into the translation act, and theorising about the act of translation as a commercial transaction. Holz-Mänttari

(1984, p. 109) widens this view by placing translation within a contextualised environment where many actors cooperate and, for the first time, the roles and goals of those different actors interacting within a context of professional translation are analysed. Her contribution considers professional translation within the academic discourse, thus furthering an awareness of the practice in its socio-economic context. Indeed Holz-Mänttari's (ibid., p. 27) theory of *translatorial action* maintains that this action is rooted in the social order, where different players negotiate and define the function of a target text. The *function* is then what ultimately allows (and at the same time compels) the translator to include the translation product in a collaborative professional network, but also include actions and processes in the social order, which is one of division of labour (Schäffner 2011, p. 159). In analysing the translation commission which includes the specifications for the TT, Holz-Mänttari mentions a series of external factors which have an impact on the translator's actions: the aim, the modality in which the work is carried out, the rate paid and deadline agreed, the roles of the actors, and the context in which their interactions take place, amongst others (Schäffner 2011, p. 160). Although this view contributed greatly to generating a wide awareness around professional translation contexts, Holz-Mänttari proposes a horizontal view of actors, and acknowledging the fact that power is not considered, concedes that power dynamics limit the translators' action (Schäffner 2011, p. 161). Her theory aims to create a model for an *ideal* system that does not necessarily relate to actual working conditions, nor does it identify possible conflicting situations (Martín de León 2008). This constitutes the main limitation of this theory – as I will argue in more detail in Chapter 6.

Some of these views were later advanced by Nord (1997, p. 125), who included the element of loyalty as an 'interpersonal category referring to a social relationship between people' as a way to establishing a closer relation between source and target text, and also to

depart from the stricter focus on the translation brief. She did so also by placing considerable importance on ST analysis, an element which was later expanded by the discourse-based model in the 1990s, strongly influenced by Halliday's linguistic model (1961, 1994). Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics introduces a strong constructivist perspective in language studies, by presenting language as a conjunction of different systems, a complex network of meaning-making systems, which echoes the *multi-dimensional* reality of human life. In his model of language, the socio-cultural environment influences the aims and functions of communication, represented by the genre of a text which in turn influence the register, and related lexical and grammatical choices. The word *multi-dimensional* is key here – as I have already referred to the three different dimensions in this chapter (product, process and social) as presented by Abdallah (2007) and which constitute the starting point for my analysis of subtitling practices and conceptualisation of quality. While Halliday's model aims to look at social, process, and product dimensions within textual production itself, Abdallah's theory can be seen as an application of Halliday's model to the extrinsic elements that surround the act of translation. According to the Hallidayan model, analysing the linguistic patterns of a text can help identify how meaning is woven into text, thus paving the way for House's conceptualisation of quality (1977, 1997), who proposes a logical comparison between the analysis of the ST and that of the translated text. Drawing a parallel, I argue that language-based and process-based trends and patterns in the current AVT industry will reveal insights about the conditions in which texts – and their quality – are conceived and produced.

2.3.1 Conceptualising quality beyond the product dimension

House (1997, p. 31) laid the groundwork in the area of Translation Quality Assessment (TQA), based on the evaluation of the semantic, textual and pragmatic aspects of a translated text.

Thus, the main focus of her work – as well as that of the authors mentioned above – is the textual level, or the dimension of translation-as-product. While recognising the value of Halliday's model not only in House's consideration, but also and more widely on translation discourse and evaluation, I argue that situational elements cannot be ignored in either academic or industry discussions around translation, and the assessment of its quality. Indeed, from a Hallidayan perspective, analysing the social and process elements – i.e. the ways in which the translated text is produced and the actors' interactions in the translation production – could provide valuable insights not only on the conditions which led to those processes, but also on how these affect textual quality.

In this light, the present sub-section maintains that text-based theories of translation alone are not sufficient to explore quality *in* and *of* professional subtitling practices, as is one of the aims of the thesis, and need to be complemented by considerations on processes and socio-economic contextualisation, which critically reflect on reality, and not refer to idealised principles. Indeed, theorising quality solely from a textual dimension has been contested in the last decades on the basis that models for TQA (such as House's) do not reflect – nor fully consider – the actual conditions for quality assessment in the workplace (Lauscher 2000). Lauscher presents evidence to the effect that neither the equivalence-based nor the functional approach can be easily applied in 'real-world' professional contexts, mainly for practical reasons, and for failing to address the 'prescriptive judgement' nature of the professional evaluation procedures. This point of view is shared by Drugan (2013, p. 47), who goes on to ponder, 'Where do professional ideas about TQA fit in House's schema?'. In her qualitative study across a large number of language service providers, the scholar analyses the main approaches to TQA and then looks at their applicability in real-life situations. In addition, she also presents a series of professional approaches to quality, albeit briefly. After exploring

House's revisited model (1997), Drugan (2013) goes on to examine with the same level of detail other TQA models, all of which are deemed to be of difficult application in real-life professional workflows for two main reasons. One is the practical challenge as the more comprehensive or detailed a model is, the more time- and effort-consuming it will end up being with the current translation industry. The second is that the models analysed often fail to include complex or evolving text types and formats, such as those presented by the localisation of websites, software manuals, web applications, or subtitles for instance. Furthermore, Drugan (*ibid.*, p. 54) highlights one main difference between the academic theorisation of quality assurance and the professional reality, which is a distance in perspective, as the ultimate goal of academic TQA is finding the mismatches between source and target and pointing out the reason behind such lack of correspondence, while a professional TQA is focused on avoiding errors in view of the approval of a translation and the fulfilment of performance metrics. It follows that quality models focusing only on translation as a textual product can be considered incomplete if they do not take into account the actual professional practice as the foundation of theory (Lauscher 2000, p. 161). Nevertheless, while applicability to reality is necessary, practice need not be the only foundation for theory; the risk is that of uncritically justifying and perpetuating practices which are not rooted in translational, cultural, communicational or ideological principles, but only on principles of economic transactions. The main challenge, therefore, is that of balancing the needs of all main actors, that is to say not only clients' but also audiences' and translators'.

As mentioned above, the predominant perspective on translation quality within Translation Studies has been mostly focused on the evaluation of translation as a textual product, and not on the processes involved in the translation act. Audiovisual Translation, and specifically subtitling, could provide an exception, since due to the highly technical nature of

audiovisual transfer, contributions based on product- and process-based perspectives seem more balanced in AVT literature. However, the focus on *quality* in subtitling literature has primarily focused on the product level, with the most prominent contributions providing insight on those specific linguistic and technical elements that are inherent to this practice. Subtitling depends on two main tasks, the linguistic transfer, and the technical dimension of spotting, or time-cueing, so as to synchronise the text with the aural and visual dimensions. It is relevant to note that these two tasks are often separated in current workflows, where translators carry out the linguistic transfer on a subtitling template file which has already been synchronised. There is a wide agreement within academia as to what constitutes good subtitles: they need to be stylistically and grammatically correct, comprehensive yet concise, unobtrusive yet easy to read in terms of reading speed, segmentation, and position on screen. Several studies look into the linguistic and technical elements that need to be analysed when looking at the quality of a subtitled product (Karamitroglou 1998; Ivarsson and Carroll 1998; Díaz Cintas 2005; Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007; Georgakopoulou 2012, 2019; Kuo 2014; Pedersen 2017). It is worth noting that the basic principles of the *Code of Good Subtitling Practice* published in 1998 by Ivarsson and Carrol are still considered relevant, while their suggestions on technical procedures are not pertinent anymore, as these have significantly changed since its publication (Remael and Robert, 2016; Oziemblewska and Szarkowska 2020).

As for models to assess subtitling quality, it is necessary to mention the NER⁵ model for live intralingual subtitling through respeaking by Romero Fresco and Martínez (2015), and Pedersen's (2017) FAR⁶ model for interlingual subtitling. While the former is designed to be applied also to work procedures, the latter aims at assessing quality in the final translated

⁵ An assessment that takes its acronym due to its formula based on the **N**umber of words in the respoken text, **E**dition errors and **R**ecognition errors.

⁶ An assessment model named for its three main variables, **F**unctional equivalence, **A**ceptability and **R**eadability.

product, presupposing that quality-enhancing processes have been followed. Thus far, it has not been possible to find an academic approach to quality in interlingual subtitling that truly looks at process-based as well as product-based principles and requirements. The need for further research in this direction has been expressed by various authors, including Díaz Cintas (2015) and Kuo (2014), who stress the shortage of interest in the professional procedures and conditions that directly impact quality, especially when time-to-market and anti-piracy measures constitute significant priorities and constraints in the profession.

To conclude, it is worth emphasising that text-based discussions around strategies, approaches and procedures are fundamental to the discipline in order to maintain and strengthen the basis of what constitutes translation quality in subtitling. Nevertheless, Translation and AVT Studies must address and account for more diversified environments and emerging professional practices, if they are to avoid de-contextualising the act of translation and to promote an awareness of industry conditions, so that professionals are encouraged to demand appropriate conditions when they are asked to produce good quality work. In addition, contextual studies raise awareness around working environments, therefore filling the perceived gap between traditional translation discourse and the conditions found in the working environment (Olohan 2017) – a situation that could potentially cause conflicts in the working habits and values of professionals (Abdallah 2012), as will be explored in Chapter 5.

2.3.2 An analysis of industry standards for translation and subtitling

Holz-Mänttari's view of translation as a profession which revolves greatly around the purposes of the client resonates with the current client-driven approach in the industry, as will be explored in this section, and in more detail in Chapter 6. In terms of processes, translation businesses need to adhere to the ISO standards that control translation quality; in addition,

the ISO standard also constitutes a blueprint that has informed the creation of standards responding to different domains and geographic areas, in the sense that they strive for the standardisation of ‘process, procedures, product specifications, and terminology used in creating and evaluating goods and services’ (Wright 2019 p. 21). As a standard for quality management, ISO 17100 describes practices for translation and revision, but appears to be ‘quite vague when it comes to pinpointing quality in the actual translation product’ (Pedersen 2017, p. 212). A standard for translation quality, in fact, is not provided: what the ISO 17100 defines is the need to provide a translation service that will ‘meet or exceed the customer’s expectations of quality and/or ensure customer satisfaction’ (Bass, 2006 p. 72). It seems therefore that quality standards focus mostly on processes and procedures aimed at client satisfaction – whatever the clients’ definition of quality might be (Jiménez-Crespo 2018). This client-oriented approach resonates with the functionalist theories of translation, as presented in section 2.3, and as will be discussed in Chapter 6. Current quality standards (such as ISO 17100 and related update) as well as models for quality assessment (such as MQM/DQF; Lommel et al. 2015) can be considered a direct usage of functionalist views, particularly *skopos* theory (Calvo 2018; Jiménez Crespo 2018). These same perspectives are also strictly tied to the fit-for-purpose quality model which has gained enormous traction in the last decades within the language industry (Jiménez Crespo 2018). Indeed, the fitness-for-purpose model relies on translation clients *not knowing* how to define nor assess the quality of a translation, and therefore base their decision on the different quality levels that are offered by translation providers at different price points; a choice established on the price and value that the client itself assigns on the translation (ibid., p. 79). This issue will recur in both Chapters 5 and 6.

Quality standards are necessarily generic and, indeed, finding *universal* points of quality that apply to a global market could be highly unfeasible if not counterproductive,

because of the specificity and wide variety of the translation as well as the AVT profession. The international standards such as ISO are therefore complemented by regional guidelines, which are usually compiled and provided by translation and AVT companies. In the case of subtitling, publicly available guidelines (such as those by broadcaster BBC and streaming provider Netflix) are generally inspired on the same principles and indicators as found in the Code of *Good Subtitling Practice* (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998), albeit being extremely more detailed. According to Pedersen's (2018) analysis of Netflix guidelines, subtitling norms have become more and more detailed and restrictive, constraining the subtitlers' behaviour in an attempt to reduce variation from a supposed norm. At the same time, local norms have been standardised to more international set of values in response to market forces, and more specifically to respond to outsourcing practices in the industry – which clashed with many local norms and habits that had been forming in subtitling countries (ibid., p. 86-87). This signals the clear tendency towards the standardisation of subtitling processes within a structure that aims to avoid or eliminate any of the *risks* that could arise from subjective interpretations of quality, or subjective translation choices. In addition, guidelines seem to have a stronger focus on technical aspects (usually related to temporal features) as these are easier to identify and assess (Szarkowska et al. 2020). Overall, through detailed and restrictive guidelines, subtitlers, proof-readers and quality controllers are required to apply functionalist principles (i.e. reproducing textual function) and instrumentalist principles (i.e. prioritising information) (Venuti 2020). In no case are they allowed to contravene their work provider's instructions and guidelines, as these constitute the yardstick against which the suitability of their translation is assessed (Strandvik 2017, p.130), as will be explored further in Chapters 5 and 6.

2.4 Translation as a process

In Translation and Audiovisual Translation Studies, processes have been considered from different points of view. The following sub-section presents the main perspectives on process, according to their focus (cognitive, quality-oriented, observation of processes and technical functions) and will concentrate particularly on subtitling processes.

2.4.1 Translation and cognition

The dimension of production processes in translation has been largely explored in the branch of Translation Process Research (TPR), which focuses on measuring and assessing the internal processes of the translation task, both in terms of cognition and mode of working (i.e. the individuals' approach to task, speed, amount of text reduction) in order to understand what the cognitive functions behind the creation of a translation are, or to profile the required skills for certain tasks (Szarkowska 2018). TPR, until now, has mainly relied on methods derived from psychology (thinking-aloud protocols, eye-tracking, keylogging, retrospective interviews). However, given that cognitive processes are 'context-dependent, i.e. they are dependent on and partly constituted by the social and physical environment in which they are carried out' (Risku 2014 p.335), it is argued here that these methods ought to be complemented by contextual observational studies, as together they can provide an ideal path to study the research subjects in their own environment.

TPR is used extensively within Translation Studies, but scarcely in audiovisual practices (Massey and Judd 2020, p. 359). Orrego-Carmona et al. (2016, 2018) aim at consolidating the so-called branch of Subtitling Process Research by exploring the subtitling process from temporal, cognitive and production perspectives, to determine how the process is influenced

by experience and the use of technology. In their studies, cognitive, temporal and production efforts are measured quantitatively through eye tracking, screen recording, mouse clicks and keystroke logging, while post-experiment interviews provide the basis for the qualitative analysis of the subtitling process (Orrego-Carmona et al. 2018). Since AVT can be regarded as a relatively novel practice, which relies heavily on the use of technology, this type of experimental, quantitative studies of processes are unquestionably needed. Indeed, understanding how subtitlers process visual and textual information allows to provide better and more specific training tailored to the needs of this activity, but also to develop software and workstations which benefit subtitlers from a high technical quality in their processes, a smooth interaction with tools, and minimise physical strain from an ergonomic point of view (Ehrensberger-Dow 2014; Teixeira and O'Brien 2017). Cognitive studies are also increasingly used in conjunction with reception studies, so as to improve audiences' experience by looking at the *process of viewing* subtitles on screen (Szarkowska 2018).

2.4.2 Processes and their relation to quality

Gouadec (2007) provides what is possibly the first detailed contribution focused on translation professional processes while drawing considerations on quality and providing guidance for best practices at different stages of the translation task. As if responding to an early suggestion by Mossop (2000), who proposed a study of translation procedures, Gouadec (2007, p. 58) discusses in detail the tasks and roles in a translation environment, looking at the conditions that should be fulfilled in order to obtain good results in the 'whole process of translation service provision, i.e. all the operations performed by 'translator''. Here, 'translator' is an umbrella term that the author uses to identify several different actors whose tasks contribute to the creation and delivery of a translated product (such as project and client managers,

finance managers, proof-readers, IT technicians). Its counterpart is the 'work provider', which refers to all actors on the client's side. With this publication, the author offers an overview of numerous tasks and sub-tasks and provides guidance as to the issues that could generate errors in the translation, misunderstandings or delays in the workflow. Gouadec's (ibid.) contribution exemplifies the multi-layered and complex environment of translation networks, implicitly acknowledging the importance of looking at the social interaction, communication and collaboration between actors.

The same can be said for the quality-oriented approach to professional processes in Drugan's contribution (2013). In considering approaches to quality in professional translation processes, she lists all the procedures which have an impact on quality within an imagined, yet 'average' workflow in a language service provider. The list is extensive and detailed and, significantly, the author includes even more aspects from a social dimension – especially working conditions and actors' communication (ibid., p. 80), with an emphasis on the internal QA procedures applied in the translation industry and a more precise focus on technology. Nevertheless, both Gouadec's (2007) and Drugan's (2013) discussions on the right procedures to achieve high quality in the translated product presuppose a best-case scenario situation for all actors, something that might be difficult to find in real-life professional contexts, perhaps also due to the lack of real-life examples from the observation of translation environments. Indeed, a clearer methodological approach is missing, especially in Drugan's (ibid.) stronger industry focus, as it is not clear which data comes from the actors' accounts of such realities, and which from a direct observation of translation environments.

As suggested by Jääskeläinen (2016), a comprehensive analysis of translation and quality should be informed by process-oriented research, with the aim of informing both academic theories and professional practices. Mellinger (2018) reiterates the need for a wider

conceptualisation of quality and focuses on the processes of editing and revision, arguing for their inclusion in academic models of Translation Quality Assessment, thus echoing Mossop (2014). He also expands on these processes by stressing that quality is the result of different factors across the process and social dimensions, including technology interaction. The focus on revision and editing in translation demonstrates indeed the profound intersection between process and product quality, exposing the ‘necessity of investigating that activity where and when it occurs’ (Ehrensberger-Dow 2014).

2.4.3 Ethnographic studies of translation processes and technology

This sub-section explores those studies of translation processes which adopt an ethnographic methodology, such as is the case here. As introduced in chapter 1, and presented in detail in Chapter 3, this research adopts qualitative ethnographic methods of inquiry for the data collection phases due to the relevance of such methodology in researching real-life processes. Nevertheless, it is worth adding that ethnographic approaches are of great relevance and usefulness to research social aspects, whether connected to specific processes or not. Indeed, some of the authors mentioned in this sub-section also recur in 2.5, the section dedicated to the study of translation as a social activity. In terms of processes, the use of contextual, ethnographic methods to study translation practices started with Koskinen’s (2008) ethnography of translators working in the European Commission. Ethnography provides an ideal method to look at social interactions and process features, especially when discussing the relation between translation and technology, as in Désilets et al. (2009). Here, the authors identified a gap between the knowledge of technology in translation research, and the actual use of technology in professional contexts, adding considerations on the use of tools that are enriched by observations in the translator’s own working environments in non-controlled

circumstances. A similar study by Karamanis et al. (2011) looked at the use of machine translation in a localisation company, stressing once again the idea that the exploration of real-life processes unveils a complex web of relations, in which collaboration becomes an essential factor in establishing and maintaining suitable quality levels across professional translation projects.

Risku's contributions to the field (2010, 2013, 2014, 2016, 2016a, 2017) are extensively ethnographic and advocate the use of ethnographic and contextual study to gain a holistic awareness and a higher visibility of translators' processes and procedures. Her field study of interviews and participant observation of a small network, formed of only one translator dealing directly with one client (2014), reveals a context where the relationships are highly complex. At the end of the observational section, Risku (ibid.) acknowledges that the concept of *translation process* is wider than what she previously imagined. The author then provides a definition of process which corresponds to the one adopted in the present thesis:

The process is defined as starting with the decision to have something translated and ending when the translation is approved and paid, last contacts in the project are completed and the translation is made available in the target setting.

(ibid., p. 349)

Another feature in translation environments that has been observed through an ethnographic-inspired methodology and a process-oriented approach is project management. In her doctoral thesis, Födisch (2017) builds on Risku's work and highlights the advantages of researching work practices and actors' relationships. In her workplace study on the role of the translation project management through the lens of quality, the analysis of real professional translation practices helps to understand how these change with time and with the introduction of new technologies. Both scholars conclude that more research in the workplace is needed in order to bridge the perceived gap between theoretical academic training and

professional practices in the translation industry, which can only be attained by adopting an integrated and contextualised methodology. Academic interest in the processes, although recent, is visible in the amount of literature published in the last decade, and increasingly through the adoption of ethnographic methodologies (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007; Abdallah 2010, 2012a; Drugan 2013; Risku et al. 2013).

Other contributions worth mentioning for their interest in researching processes and technologies – though with a less evident influence of ethnography – include Olohan (2011) and Cadwell et al. (2018), who respectively analysed the use of translation memories and the introduction of machine translation in professional translators' practice. The importance of considering both actors and their working context becomes crucial when the application of technology in the workflow is explored together with the organisational aspects on which this is dependent (Nunes Vieira and Alonso 2018; Way 2018). Through this focus, Cadwell et al. (2018) analyse the translators' interaction with machine translation and post-editing tasks, explaining how the understanding and tuning of the dialectic of resistance and accommodation can improve greatly the interplay between translators and technology. Their use of terminology refers directly to the literature on human-machine interaction as presented in section 2.2.1. Similarly, while Rose and Jones (2005) explain how humans and machines can be considered complementary actors in a non-translational context, Lumeras and Way (2017) implicitly express the same point of view in their study of machine-translated content, by listing and examining what machines can do best, and what are the most distinctive (and irreplaceable) skills that human translators have.

In taking into account quality processes in a highly technological workplace, where professionals perform their tasks with an array of computerised tools, the present project is situated in a framework where human and inanimate actors coexist. The interaction between

human agency and inanimate *actancy* is easily found in the subtitling process, which is the topic of the following sub-section.

2.4.4 Subtitling processes

The first book on subtitling theory and practice (Ivarsson and Carrol 1998) set forth the practical aspects of this activity, in delineating the required skills of this profession. Their recommendations remain relevant today, although the modes of employment and the use of technology have radically changed since the birth of intertitles and subtitles, and even more since the publication of their book. Ivarsson and Carroll (1998) contributed to the academic literature on AVT with a seminal volume that not only describes in detail the making of subtitles since their inception, but also gives recommendations to practitioners and students alike. Its contents have contributed to the training of subtitlers both within and outside the academic environment. It is worth noticing that the subtitling conventions set forth by the authors paved the way for the development of subtitling as a discipline and as a profession, and while their basic principles can still be found in current guidelines, considerable technological advances and economic changes have continued to shape the translation and communication world in general, and the subtitling landscape in particular. In more recent publications, Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007; 2021) offer a brief overview of the history of subtitles as well as an extensive description and breakdown of the tasks involved when subtitling audiovisual content. For its pedagogical function, the manual can be considered an in-depth update of Ivarsson and Carroll's (1998) publication. In fact, the process of formalisation of the discipline of AVT and subtitling within the academia is clearly visible in Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007), and in part it constitutes this book's achievement, as the level of analysis from the perspective of students, professionals, and viewers has considerably gained depth.

While looking at subtitling processes, or aspects of them, several authors have contributed to a description of the procedures involved in subtitling, and how these have evolved in the past four decades (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998; Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007; Kapsaskis 2011; Artegiani and Kapsaskis 2014; O'Sullivan and Cornu 2015; Díaz Cintas and Massidda 2019; Oziemblewska and Szarkowska 2020). The above publications also provide insights on the way the profession has been carried out in the industry over time, but most importantly process studies in subtitling help us to explore processes as a way to reflect on the intrinsic relation between economic and technological trends in the audiovisual market, and their link with notions of quality.

By defining all the fundamental components needed to carry out a subtitling task, Ivarsson and Carroll (1998) provide an excellent basis to reflect on subtitling processes in relation to product quality. First of all, the quality of the source text (the film) and additional material is of paramount importance (ibid.; O'Brien 2012a; Kuo 2015). This means access to clear audiovisual content, and additionally a transcript, or ideally a dialogue list. In current workflows, the ST often comes in the form of a film accompanied by a time-coded template. Additional supporting material (such as glossaries, consistency sheets, dialogue list) are also created in this phase. Another quality-enhancing factor mentioned is the subtitlers' familiarity with research tools while translating. Then, the authors suggest carrying out self-revision and quality control of subtitles on a print-out, and finally, the subtitles should be proofread and revised by another professional (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998). Twenty years later, those elements are still completely relevant when it comes to creating a link between process execution and quality in the product, and will be considered in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Process-based literature in subtitling has also contributed to enrich the knowledge about the historical developments of such profession over time. According to Ivarsson and

Carroll (1998, p. 11), between the early 1930s and late 1970s, subtitling used to be carried out by two different actors: a technician spotted the film, and then a translator would carry out the linguistic transfer; the titles would then be inserted manually on the film by the technician. When personal computers and subtitling workstations became more accessible, translators could spot the film themselves, which gave them considerably more independence over the content to be included, both quantitatively and stylistically, since they had full control of the spotting and the reading speeds. As further elaborated by Kapsaskis (2011, p. 166), this type of workflow, carried out by one multi-skilled and multi-tasking person, was the norm until approximately the end of the 1990s, when 'translation companies have brought back the distinction between an initial timing phase and a subsequent translating phase' by introducing the subtitling template file, which will be presented below.

The reasons for the reintroduction of division of labour are to be found in the remarkable increase in the volume of audiovisual content since the introduction of satellite and DVD technology (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007; Georgakopoulou 2012), and even more after the rise of online platforms for sharing and viewing content (Díaz Cintas and Nikolić 2018), an aspect which will be explored in further detail in Chapter 6. According to Díaz Cintas (2005), until the beginning of the 21st century, subtitling was the area of AVT which expanded the most; this could be due to the fact that subtitling is considerably less expensive and time-consuming than dubbing, the other major audiovisual translation mode (Luyken et al. 1991). This market expansion has been accompanied by substantial changes in the way subtitles are produced, distributed, and consumed (Kapsaskis 2011). One of the pivotal changes in the production of subtitles has been the introduction of subtitling template files, also called master templates, that are files 'containing the master titles [...] [where] translators are requested to translate the English subtitles into their respective working language, filling the

corresponding empty boxes of the template (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2021, p. 35). As Georgakopoulou (2009; 2018) explains, the template file meets the needs for a cost-effective production of subtitles in multiple languages, and a streamlined management of such files. The use of template has therefore introduced a substantial change in the subtitling industry, that is 'an economy of scale, whereby the greater the number of languages involved in a project, the larger the cost-savings to be made' (Georgakopoulou 2009, p. 31).

More than 10 years after the advent of the template in the subtitling industry, conditions that call for a high volume of work at reduced cost and within brief timeframes are even more persistent, and still constitute considerable constraints for subtitling. The media industry tends to consider computational and automation technology as a "fix" needed to provide a solution to that challenge (Olohan 2017, p. 267). Moreover, the need to reduce cost and turnover times in order to ensure competitiveness and profitability after the global financial crisis of 2008 may have triggered a renewed interest into the use of automation technology in subtitling (Bywood et al. 2017). In fact, companies which handle a high volume of subtitling production into a great number of languages have turned to standardisation and automation of tasks in order to improve productivity by reducing the time needed to perform certain tasks. For instance, by adopting cloud platforms where freelancers can access company-uploaded content, or through the use of automated quality control tools so as to speed up the revision stage, and improving both technical checks and linguistic consistency, as will be detailed in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Another solution that is currently being tested for the translation of subtitle template files into multiple languages is the introduction of MT in the subtitling workflow (Armstrong et al. 2007; Volk et al. 2010; C. M. de Sousa, Sheila et al. 2011; Etchegoyhen et al. 2014; Burchardt et al. 2016; Bywood et al. 2017). Overall, these studies show how MT could be employed to

speed up the translation phase of subtitling production, with promising results in terms of productivity. Importantly, they all point out the need for process studies, and for sustained communication and collaboration between researchers and professionals, in order to develop automated systems capable of leading to both cost-effective and good quality results. Furthermore, they reinforce the notion that the discipline and profession of translation is closely enmeshed with technology, and that the companies' desire of meeting increasingly diverse and complex market needs has the power to shape technology, processes, and ideas of quality, as will be argued in Chapter 6.

Finally, from a similar perspective, Beuchert (2017) follows Orrego-Carmona et al. (2016) in their intention of engaging with Subtitling Process Research by focusing on the working context of professional subtitlers' practices in Denmark. In line with Risku (2014), the author proposes a subtitling process model through the combination of quantitative data from a questionnaire on workflow, practices and employment conditions, and qualitative data coming from screen recording and observation of subtitlers at work (therefore in their usual working context and not in a laboratory setting). Grounded in a constructivist theoretical framework, Beuchert's (2017) thesis explores at great length the complexities of subtitling processes, identifying internal elements pertaining to the individual skills and working modalities of the subtitler, and external elements which include workflow, project instructions and technical guidelines. These elements cross over continuously between themselves, and with the so-called intersectional elements that have more to do with the materials needed for subtitling, and the viewers' reception. Her model, rather than providing prescriptive guidance on processes, exposes the complexity of the work of freelance subtitlers, and although her research is limited to subtitlers working in Denmark, the fact that 95% of the questionnaire respondents work as freelancers for companies that are not necessarily based in the country

(ibid., p. 122), allows us to draw conclusions that go beyond the study sample. Primarily, the study provides insights on key process elements such as the provision and quality of supporting material, and the use of tools. Beuchert's (ibid.) model touches upon social, process and product dimensions, including cognition, and it has been placed in this sub-section for reasons of convenience (since it has been named 'process model') even though it well exposes the heterogeneous and multifaceted nature of the subtitling profession.

A constructivist approach has also been used by Silvester (2021), who analyses working conditions and the practicalities of subtitling *auteur* cinema through a questionnaire filled out by 6 French professional subtitlers, which revealed an environment characterised by strong collaborative practices, including relations with the film directors. Her work points to the importance of looking at the variety of subtitling practices outside the mainstream AV production, and outside the dominant models of globalised AVT production.

As seen above, perspectives on subtitling processes have contributed to positioning this practice in the academic discourse within AVT. The main publications on subtitling processes emphasise their pedagogical and disciplinary aim (Ivarsson and Carroll 1998; Díaz Cintas 2005; Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007), while some highlight professional procedures and issues of workflow (Ivarsson 1998; Georgakopoulou 2009, 2012, 2019; Kapsaskis 2011; Artegiani and Kapsaskis 2014). In terms of quality assessment, there seems to be a lack of quality-oriented research that looks at both products and processes. Pedersen (2017) points out that the two are usually kept separate, and notices how the landscape of metrics and models for assessing quality seems to be very diverse across companies around the world. The need for further research into subtitling quality has been expressed by various authors including Díaz Cintas (2015) and Kuo (2014), who in her thesis highlights the lack of correspondence between academic research on subtitling quality and on the quality of

subtitled products, and the actual quality of translation processes and environments – which the present thesis aims to directly address.

2.5 Translation as a social activity

Translation Studies went through a pragmatic-linguistic turn in the 1960s, a cultural turn in the 1990s, and a sociological turn in the 2000s (Wolf 2012. p. 129). Section 2.3 has shown how translation theories progressively distanced themselves from stricter linguistic considerations, starting to adopt a broader perspective based on translation as a cultural and commercial product. However, as Wolf (*ibid.*, p. 130-132) notes, even the cultural turn fails to address the contextual and social influence on text production, or the elements that impact on translation processes. Discourses around agency and power in TS started to emerge at the end of the 1990s, together with the increasingly consolidated idea that translation is deeply enmeshed within the social fabric (Wolf and Fukari 2007, p. 6). Wolf and Fukari (*ibid.*, p. 10) argue that the sociological turn has been strongly driven by Herman's work (1996), who emphasises the importance of exploring actors and their behaviour in complex translation environments so as to 'contextualize the social dimension of the creation and reception of translation'. More specifically, Hermans (1996) focused on those social factors that guide the creation and application of translation norms (which in turn influence translation processes and reception) and identified a gap in theoretical frameworks that encompass social and ideological considerations around translation). In this light, the main ideological element of the subtitling ecosystem that this thesis aims to address is the business and production model and related economic forces, and their influence on communication patterns and technology choices, as will be seen in Chapters 6 and 7. Wolf and Fukari (2007, p. 10) suggest that a way to consolidate the focus on the social aspects of translation could be that of expanding the array of

methodologies, so as to gain awareness of the translators' social environments, working conditions, and other factors that impact translation processes. In terms of borrowing theoretical and methodological frameworks directly from sociology, the application in TS of Bourdieu's theory of *field* and *habitus* (Inghilleri, 2005) started to appear around the same time as the application of Latour's Actor-Network Theory, as discussed in 2.2 (Buzelin 2005, 2007). As Inghilleri (2005, p. 126) notes, the sociological interest indicates a disciplinary shift (or *turn*, as Wolf calls it) that has the potential to provide a 'more powerful set of concepts than norms and conventions to describe socio-cultural constraints on acts of translation and their resulting products'. This is acknowledged and explored also by Bielsa Mialet (2010) who analyses aspects of TS which could radically change with – and benefit from – the application of sociological perspectives. One consideration is that sociology encourages a change of focus and a wider outlook that allows us to investigate translation aspects at a more encompassing level. The other, fundamental point is that a sociological perspective allows us to eliminate any possible separation between text and context, by placing the focus on the empirical study of translation practices (ibid., p. 168-169). Ethnographic methodologies – such as the one employed in this thesis – originated in anthropology and the social sciences, and have gained traction in translation research in the last decades, as they provide researchers with an array of qualitative methods to study social aspects in relation to translation practices, cognition, and diverse working contexts⁷.

The following paragraphs build upon the introductory section (2.2) by expanding on those contributions in TS and AVT that specifically look at translation activities in their social context through socio-constructivist perspectives, mostly with an ethnographic approach. The

⁷ For a comprehensive list of ethnographic approaches in Translation Studies, see Milošević and Risku 2020, p. 114.

idea of translation as a situated activity has been largely explored by Abdallah (2010, 2011, 2012), Kinnunen and Koskinen (2010), Risku (2014, 2016) and Risku et al. (2013, 2016, 2017). A common trait of these studies is the underlying idea that not only the translation act and actors are inextricably embedded in the social context, but also that the concept of agency cannot be separated from context. The same position is strongly followed by Kuznik (2015) and Kuznik and Verd (2010, p. 29), who lament the fact that translators' work has been de-contextualised because of the difficulty of accessing workplaces, or the large use of the survey method as a way of facilitating access to data. In this regard, as will be detailed in Chapters 3 and 4, the access gained to a subtitling workplace has been of key importance in this thesis' study of processes and social interactions.

From the same point of view, Abdallah and Koskinen's (2007) paper on translation production networks blends knowledge in the translation industry with social science considerations, borrowing concepts of network analysis and applying them to the translation practice, explored through the qualitative analysis of six interviews with professional translators and their working habits. Abdallah and Koskinen (ibid.) examine a working modality for translators – the production network – and explore roles and interdependency of the actors taking part in the network through the lens of trust. What emerges from their analysis is that the translator's position has increasingly less bargaining power and visibility within the network. In light of this, the authors highlight that filling the gap in critical and empirical exploration of actual translation practices can offer solutions and possibly heighten researchers' and translators' awareness of problematic issues in the profession (ibid., p. 685).

Similar conclusions are also reached by studies that integrate social aspects such as the economic sides of translation seen as a commercial transaction (Dunne and Dunne 2011; Dunne 2012; Moorkens et al 2016; Moorkens 2017, 2020, 2021) as will be outlined in further

detail in Chapters 5 and 6. These studies shed light on market dynamics within the translation industry – showing increasing tendencies towards logics on Digital Taylorism (Moorkens 2020) in which jobs are standardised and there is a considerable increase in the use of centralised and impersonal virtual working environment. At the same time, these economically oriented studies invariably keep an eye on the translators' agency, looking at the expertise required from them or their level of precarity and inclusion in the production networks (Dunne 2012; Moorkens 2020). Economic, social and agency-based perspectives are also found within contextual and situated studies which contribute to raise professional awareness – such as Koskinen's (2008) long-term study of several social aspects surrounding translators. Her considerations on the perceptions and identity of Finnish translators working for the European DGT not only contributed to shaping and defining the use of ethnographic methodology in translation, but also provided insights on the professional and personal background of translators, thus strengthening translators' visibility in TS literature.

The studies on translation as a social activity explored here suggest the importance of combining empirical and exploratory studies with a contextual, situated or ethnographic perspective, especially when looking at the translation workplace. In this regard, Abdallah's work as a whole is possibly the most extensive in terms of ethnographic observation. Her published doctoral thesis, *Translators in Production Networks. Reflections on Agency, Quality and Ethics* (2012) is the sum of five articles published between 2007 and 2011, where the author merges the different points of view adopted throughout the years, compatible and at times complementary, and presents a multifaceted landscape of translation working practices. Through different theories and methods, largely borrowed from the social sciences, Abdallah (ibid.) explores places and modalities of work, together with the changes, needs, and challenges that emerge within the current global economy. In her conclusion, the author is

able to present the complexity of a diverse professional landscape in which external pressures such as time and costs have the power of modifying the actors' behaviour considerably, and issues of trust and ethics can significantly influence the communication and collaboration between all actors, which ultimately have an effect on the quality of the final product (ibid., p.45). Abdallah (2011) also carried out the first ethnographic-based study within AVT, through interviews and observation conducted in a subtitling company. Using a method of thick description (see definitions in Chapter 3), she analyses the main features and roles of each and every actor, material and non-material: people, technology, concepts, organisation, money, and contracts. This example of ethnographic inquiry into AVT particularly inspired the study described in Chapter 4, which blends Actor-Network Theory and ethnographic observations, as outlined in Chapter 3.

While Abdallah was the first to formally contribute to the literature of AVT as a social practice, a first attempt had been made a few years prior to this by Gummerus and Paro (2001), who analyse social and working conditions in a subtitling office in Finland, and draw considerations that come directly from their working experience in the field. Their publication focuses on working conditions, training and recruitment in workplaces and, to my knowledge, is the first publication that considers organisational factors and management in an audiovisual translation environment, and the position of the translation department in the overall company structure. A limitation of this study could be the fact that their claims are substantiated only by their own experience, and do not take into account contemporary theoretical debates. Nevertheless, their portrait of a real professional context in a subtitling department of a Finnish broadcaster throughout the 1990s constitutes a sort of continuation to Ivarsson and Carroll's (1998) publication, as they also were professional subtitlers who wrote about their practices and challenges. Gummerus and Paro's (2001) explorations may

represent somewhat ideal standards in an ideal world, but now seem naïve and perhaps dated; and yet, they point to the same conclusions as their formal counterparts: quality is seen as the result of a joint effort (not only amongst subtitlers and proof-readers, but also with content producers and broadcasters), which is greatly dependent on social and process aspects. However, in the years since these publications, considerations on subtitling from a social point of view are scarcely found, and for this reason, these studies and the gap that they highlight have supported the choice of this thesis of obtaining first-hand, empirical data from a real-life workplace.

In her thesis about quality in translation and in the subtitled product, Kuo (2014) dedicates a chapter to process and social elements which she explored through a large-scale survey aimed at Chinese subtitlers. She presents the linguistic factors that influence quality in subtitling in great detail, and stresses the shortage of interest in exploring external factors in subtitling, and how these elements affect the quality of professionals' work. On this note, it is important to specify that external is not to be understood here as in Nord's (1991) extra-textual and intra-textual factors, but as external to the translators' cognitive processes and often the translators' control, and refers to aspects of translation such as working conditions, deadlines, client specifications and the like, which in this thesis are referred to as social and process-related elements. Indeed, the notion of subtitling as a sociotechnical activity is consistent in Kuo's exploration, which ranges from working conditions (including contract and negotiation habits) to recruitment and training, as fundamental elements to consider in the creation of a good quality subtitled product (Kuo 2014, p.214). The present thesis shares similar assumptions with her in embracing the claim that the final quality of a subtitled product is the effect of the interaction of many different and external elements. The author, however, does not explore the inanimate elements that come into play during the production of

subtitles and, in this regard, her contribution differs from the present thesis. Indeed, following the socio-constructivist position presented earlier (sections 2.2 and 2.2.1), in order to explore the social and process dimensions of subtitling, I adopt an ethnographic approach to research professional subtitling workplace and practices (see Chapter 3).

Kuo's (2014) thesis and survey and Beuchert's (2017) research on subtitling process model (see 2.4.4) represent unique studies in subtitling which exemplify the necessity to contextualise the subtitlers' professional processes within an academic context. Their insights and conclusions strengthen the importance of considering that environmental and workflow-related elements play key roles in subtitling quality, especially when time-to-market and anti-piracy measures constitute some of the main constraints of the current mode of production (a notion that had been encouraged by other studies on aspects of social dimensions, such as Karamanis et al. 2011; O'Brien 2012a; LeBlanc 2013; Ehrensberger-Dow 2014; Kuo 2015, 2017; and Mellinger 2018).

In particular, recruitment has received attention on the basis that working with experienced, or appropriately skilled, professionals is key to achieving and maintaining quality in translation (Kapsaskis 2011; Kuo 2015). From a quality assurance perspective, candidates could prove their skills during the recruitment process through the assessment of the quality of a past translation (Brunette 2000). Since cooperation between the different actors in a project is believed to be one of the issues coordinators and their freelance pool, another expanding area is that of translation project management. Publications in this respect focus on communication and trust-building between translators and project managers (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007; Olohan and Davitti 2015) but also touch on practices around client-mediation, instructions, notice, deadline for a subtitling assignment (Rodriguez Castro 2013;

Kuo 2015; Beuchert 2017; Födisch 2017; Födisch and Sakamoto 2017) and their potential impact on quality.

Other publications that consider the socio-technical and socio-economic context of subtitling take on a more historical approach, such as those by O’Sullivan and Cornu (2019), which allow us to understand the context that led to the invention of subtitling. The authors focus on the history of subtitling with a chronological, step-by-step approach, and succeed in mapping the development of such practice together with the development of film techniques and distribution habits. As the authors explain, in the early days of film, subtitles were born as snippets of text inserted between film scenes, in what were the first years of montage and editing techniques (*ibid.*). Ever since, subtitling has become a fundamental step which allows the distribution of films abroad, and at the same time, the interaction between forces of globalisation and technological progress has shaped media flows, modified audience types and modes of consumption (*ibid.*), placing new and growing demands on the AVT market, an element which will emerge from the data-based Chapters (4 and 5) and will be further examined in Chapter 6.

2.5.1 The role of professional training

Technical training, whether academic or acquired on the job, can be considered central to any kind of translation profession, and this is especially true in the case of a highly technological workplace. In addition to developing a good working relationship with technology, the primary function of training is that of preparing students or new recruits to the work they will be carrying out in the workplace. Gabr (2007, p. 69) argues that ‘if designed and delivered in isolation from the realities of the labour market, training cannot be effective’. In this paper, the author presents training as an area that could greatly benefit from Total Quality

Management principles. By drawing a parallel between the quality of translated products and that of training, Gabr (*ibid.*, p.74) claims that effective training can be seen as the result of dedicated efforts placed in every step of the process, although it is important to remember that his focus is on customer-oriented efforts, and not translation-oriented.

The idea that academic training could benefit from practice-based insights is also shared by Olohan (2007) in her study of the translation sector based on economic performance data. After analysing data on the size and volume of translation companies internationally, the author reviews the European standards for translation, and then proceeds to outline the relevance of such data according to translators' training. For her, training needs to reflect two precise phenomena that emerged from the data: one, that most students of translation are likely to work as a freelance and/or self-employed and two, that companies value primarily those students who pursued specialised fields. As a result, the pressure placed on universities to fulfil those training objectives increases since, as Olohan (2007, pp. 55–59) argues, they are considered solely responsible for translator training.

In subtitling, training is an essential factor in both employability and performance (Kapsaskis 2011; Kuo 2015), as the currently developing professional landscape requires translators and subtitlers alike to expand their skillset so as to improve their interaction with technology through training on informatic systems and translation memory tools, machine translation systems and automated tasks (Aranberri 2017; Christensen et al. 2017; Mellinger 2018; Beseghi 2021; Bolaños-García-Escribano et al. 2021).

2.6 Conclusion: The act of translation

This chapter has provided a thematic review of literature that touched upon quality in translation and subtitling, and the relationship between humans and technology, through a tripartite lens inspired by the three-dimensional approach to quality adopted in this thesis. In this chapter, two elements emerge strongly from the various points of view: the first is that there is a considerable gap in existing literature in terms of studies that look at the quality of organisational processes. Indeed, technical processes and quantitative investigations seem to be clearly predominant in TS and AVTS literature, while more qualitative aspects of workflow and the intrinsic quality of translational processes are largely missing. The same can be said for social-oriented studies in subtitling: while the quantitative exploration of technical practices is more common, the observation and analysis of real-life subtitling environments has not attracted much interest.

Second, literature across several domains confirms that production dynamics in translation workplaces are highly dependent on collaborative efforts from all actors involved in the process, and the same can be said on the issue of achieving good quality in a translated product. Collaboration entails the cooperation between forces that are often considered separately; in fact, as shown before, there seems to be a distance between conceptualisations of quality in academia (where the aim is to evaluate the quality of a product) and in the industry (where the focus is on quality procedures and on a “fit-for-purpose” approach), which results in a lack of academic approaches to quality in the process, especially when it comes to subtitling.

The chapter also established that translation, and particularly subtitling, has always been an activity deeply embedded in technology, progressing over time until becoming a truly human/computer interaction. Subtitling has been presented as a complex mode of translation,

one that needs a high degree of linguistic attention, and where the interaction with technology is constant. However, subtitling constitutes an area that cannot do without humans if it is to retain its quality. It can be argued that the adoption of technological innovation within a given organisation is a deliberate choice, encouraged and influenced by economic trends and choices of the industry. Finally, this chapter has shown the interdisciplinarity of the thesis, which is needed in order to make sense of current production processes in the AVT industry and subtitling specifically, strengthening the reason why a socio-constructivist approach is instrumental in conceptualising AVT practices.

3 Ethnographic methods in researching professional subtitling practices

3.1 Methodological premise

While the previous chapter introduced the theoretical framework and presented the current landscape of Audiovisual Translation and subtitling, this chapter provides an overview of the research methods that guided this research project. As seen in the introduction, the thesis focuses on different dimensions of quality in a portion of the current subtitling industry, which is increasingly found in virtual cloud platform ecosystems. More specifically, the thesis explores how the concept of quality in interlingual subtitling is understood and constructed, achieved, and assessed. Instead of looking at the quality in the product of subtitling, the thesis analyses production processes and perceptions around corporate multilingual subtitling workflows, and how technology influences these elements. With this in mind, I explored subtitling practices from two points of view. First, I carried out ethnographic fieldwork in a subtitling company (Study 1) which allowed me to observe which procedures in the workflow and elements in the environment contribute to processes, and to recognised quality in the product. Second, I carried out interviews with subtitlers in order to gather their perceptions on the quality of their work, their workflow and their use and choice of technologies (Study 2). The studies had to be conducted separately because most AVT companies have long outsourced audiovisual translators and proof-readers, subcontracting their services as freelancers, and therefore it was not possible to include their point of view at the same time as the workplace study.

The chapter offers an overview of the thesis' epistemological and methodological perspectives based on theoretical stances (as presented in Chapter 2) drawn from the relevant

literature and enriched by a description of the contextual conditions found in the workplace under observation. The following section will introduce the use of ethnographic methodologies within Translation Studies, as well as insights on the methods of data collection adopted in the two studies through a description of observation, shadowing and interviews. Finally, the chapter will outline the criteria that were used to analyse the data which inform the following Chapters 4 and 5.

3.2 Introducing a mixed philosophical stance

The previous chapters have already defined notions belonging to social and technical constructivism, such as actors, agency as intentionality and human/machine dynamics, through the review of relevant literature that helped to frame the present project on a clear socio-constructivist agenda inspired by Actor-Network Theory (Latour 1987). This section will contribute to defining the overall project structure by presenting the methodological assumptions that guided the study design, data collection and analysis. The thesis relies on the idea that reality as a whole is socially constructed and can be understood by paying attention to social phenomena and subjective meanings. The reality in question is the multilingual subtitling production in the contemporary language industry, seen as a social and economic activity, with a strong technological element. In order to identify, observe and interpret social, technical and economic phenomena in practice, I used methods and approaches that fall within a constructivist perspective, and carefully incorporate ethnographic methodologies, as will be detailed in the following sections.

Figure 3.1 below (Saunders et al. 2009) schematically presents four common philosophical stances (positivism, realism, interpretivism and pragmatism) and the related research paradigms, and it is used here as an aid to better position the concepts presented in

this section. The summary below was used in a context of Business studies, but the same guiding principles are found in research in Translation Studies (Saldanha and O'Brien, 2014), and the main purpose of the table below is that of providing a neat summarisation, as well as exemplifying the influence of Organisational and Business studies in the development of the present thesis.

	Positivism	Realism	Interpretivism	Pragmatism
Ontology: <i>the researcher's view of the nature of reality or being</i>	External, objective and independent of social actors	Is objective. Exists independently of human thoughts and beliefs or knowledge of their existence (realist), but is interpreted through social conditioning (critical realist)	Socially constructed, subjective, may change, multiple	External, multiple, view chosen to best enable answering of research question
Epistemology: <i>the researcher's view regarding what constitutes acceptable knowledge</i>	Only observable phenomena can provide credible data, facts. Focus on causality and law like generalisations, reducing phenomena to simplest elements	Observable phenomena provide credible data, facts. Insufficient data means inaccuracies in sensations (direct realism). Alternatively, phenomena create sensations which are open to misinterpretation (critical realism). Focus on explaining within a context or contexts	Subjective meanings and social phenomena. Focus upon the details of situation, a reality behind these details, subjective meanings motivating actions	Either or both observable phenomena and subjective meanings can provide acceptable knowledge dependent upon the research question. Focus on practical applied research, integrating different perspectives to help interpret the data
Axiology: <i>the researcher's view of the role of values in research</i>	Research is undertaken in a value-free way, the researcher is independent of the data and maintains an objective stance	Research is value laden; the researcher is biased by world views, cultural experiences and upbringing. These will impact on the research	Research is value bound, the researcher is part of what is being researched, cannot be separated and so will be subjective	Values play a large role in interpreting results, the researcher adopting both objective and subjective points of view
Data collection techniques most often used	Highly structured, large samples, measurement, quantitative, but can use qualitative	Methods chosen must fit the subject matter, quantitative or qualitative	Small samples, in-depth investigations, qualitative	Mixed or multiple method designs, quantitative and qualitative

Figure 3.1. Saunders et al. 2009 p. 119

Ontologically, constructivism considers the coexistence of different, individual interpretations of reality, and traditionally relies on hermeneutics to create a system of interpretation and objectify the researchers' considerations (Mayring 2014, p. 7). This can be

regarded as a completely or partially subjective position, since the researcher is interested in exploring the subjective meanings attached to the observed actions – as expressed by the actors – in order to comprehend them (Saunders et al. 2009, p. 111). However, adopting a strict interpretivist paradigm presented some limitations on an epistemological and axiological level, which instead required to lean towards pragmatic positions – also due to the diversity in content and context of data collected, which called for the application of different research questions. For instance, while Study 1 considers subjective interpretations of both subject and researcher, it strongly focused on processes that were observable; on the other hand, the emphasis of Study 2 is on the subjective interpretations and perceptions of both participant and researcher, as elicited in interviews in which the subtitlers reported and reflected on their processes.

Indeed, an underlying interpretive perspective made me reflect on social phenomena and the subjective meanings attached to them, and my actions in the two studies were strongly motivated by the research questions, which shifted and shaped themselves during the first phases of research – including the workplace study – according to the events and to my understanding of them, as is typical and almost expected of ethnographic studies (Koskinen 2008). As for Study 1, while it is true that qualitative studies cannot avoid a subjective component, and my educational and professional background has been similar to that of the observed actors, I was and have always been external to the Company, and so not a part of the researched context. Nevertheless, I was what has been termed ‘indigenous ethnographer’, that is the kind of researchers ‘who are themselves also translators’ (Milošević and Risku 2020, p. 117), and this being ‘indigenous’ has also played a relevant role in Study 2. Indeed, my personal background as translator and subtitler undoubtedly contributed to my interest in exploring the experiences and perceptions as voiced by the actual providers of AVT services,

while at the same time this position required me to interrogate my interpretations and ‘not blindly trust one’s own insider knowledge’ (Koskinen 2008, p. 9).

From an axiological perspective, therefore, this research is pragmatic in that it combines subjective elements, as the researcher’s interpretations are inevitably affected by her personal values and experiences, with objective elements through the systematic and careful implementation of a multi-method design. In order to reflect on the interaction between human and inanimate actors and identify quality within the AVT industry, I needed to rely not only on the subjective interpretations of the human actors as observed and interviewed, but also on observable phenomena such as the working procedures and technical functions that I could witness during Study 1. To conclude, the guiding philosophical stance of the project can be positioned between interpretivism and pragmatism, and the same can be said of its ethnographic methodology, which can be regarded both as a stance and a toolbox, a methodological choice of framework rather than a simple method, as it allows us to design complex studies which value different forms of data collection and interpretation (Koskinen 2008, p. 36), and which will be presented in further detail below.

3.3 What is ethnography?

In light of the socio-constructivist theoretical framework presented in section 2.3, the present research embraces the claim that any social phenomenon needs to be analysed in context, bearing in mind that all the actors involved contribute to the phenomenon (Risku 2010), and that translation is a socially situated activity, deeply ingrained in the current production and reproduction of knowledge at a global level. As mentioned above and presented in Chapter 2, the thesis is based on a clear constructivist framework inspired by Actor-Network Theory, a perspective which looks at artefacts, knowledge and technology by paying attention to – and

following – the actors that constitute and populate the observed context. From a methodological point of view, this perspective aligns with an ethnographic approach, relying on fieldwork and methods of participant observation (Buzelin 2005). A clear link between constructivism in general, workplace studies and ethno-methodologies has also been highlighted and explored in Milošević and Risku (2020). In light of this connection, the research adopts an empirical method of enquiry which belongs to the field of ethnography, borrowed from anthropology and the social sciences, where the researcher enters the social world under study, observing and participating in it, and extracting meaning from the interactions that take place amongst the actors involved (Koskinen 2008; Saunders et al. 2009). Given that the study aims at gaining insight on conceptualisation of quality as well as the use of technology in a professional subtitling context, the empirical research of subtitling practices is bound to unearth ideologies connected to the current mode of audiovisual content production and distribution (Flynn 2010, p. 116).

Empirical research can be either observational or experimental: according to Williams and Chesterman (2002, p. 63), an experimental study ‘interferes with the natural order of things [...] and sets up controlled conditions’ under which the subjects (and the related assumptions) are tested. By contrast, field studies can be defined as naturalistic or observational since they are conducted in a non-experimental setting, allowing the researcher to gather first-hand data about the researched situation and the actors involved ‘as it takes place in real life in its natural setting. The researcher tries not to interfere with the process (as far as possible), but simply observes it and notes certain features of it’ (ibid., p. 62). As Saunders note (2009, p. 149), ethnography is commonly considered a naturalistic approach, however ‘naturalism’, understood here as a methodological approach favouring observation in existing situations, is often related to positivism and because of this, it is necessary to clarify

that the present research does not adopt positivist positions, and the ethnographic is to be considered naturalistic only since it explores 'the phenomenon within the context in which it occurs. Inspired by the following definition by Geertz (1973, p. 6) a three-month fieldwork has laid the ground for the present research of subtitling practices:

doing ethnography is establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on. But it is not these things, techniques and received procedures that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in, to borrow a notion from Gilbert Ryle, «thick description».

For Geertz, thick description is the product of ethnography, and defines a comprehensive, in-depth description of the fieldwork, in which the researcher not only recounts but also interprets what is observed, and extracts patterns from the actors' relationship in the network (Holloway 1997). The notion was discussed in Translation Studies by Hermans (2003), who proposed a transfer of the ethnographer's interpretive and constructive description skills to the study of translation across languages and cultures. Conceptualised as an alternative to Descriptive Translation Studies, thick description:

has the potential to bring about a double dislocation: of the foreign terms and concepts, which are probed by means of an alien methodology and vocabulary, and of the describer's own terminology, which must be wrenched out of its familiar shape to accommodate both alterity and similarity.

(Hermans 2003, p. 386)

From the subjective point of view of the researcher, in the case of the present project, the 'foreign terms and concepts' to which Hermans refers are interpreted as those belonging to the professional, process-driven practice in the translation industry and in the workplace, which seem foreign because they are not associated with the same context and perspective as found in more traditional and descriptive academic translation discourse. Although Hermans does not mention process-focused studies nor ethnography as methodology, he

encourages the research of individual case studies and the importance of bringing to the surface the ‘many’, instead of ‘the one’ – possibly hinting at the multitude of elements that construct interlingual transfer and its situated context in the industry. Indeed, the two chapters that follow, 4 and 5, are partly an exercise in thick description of the data collected in the two studies, and may appear almost excessively descriptive to a reader who is mostly accustomed to translation research in a more traditional sense. Nevertheless, as will become apparent in Chapter 6, the two data-driven, thickly descriptive chapters aim to shed light on a certain state of affairs, rather than point at the supposed universality of established theoretical approaches. The qualitative ethnographic methodology, combined with the theoretical stance inspired by Latour’s Actor-Network Theory (1987), strengthens the constructivist elements, which contributes to positioning the thesis within the sociological shift in Translation Studies, as noticed in Wolf (2012), and provide the instruments to navigate a complex reality in which the social, technical, and economic elements are indissolubly enmeshed.

3.3.1 Ethnographic research in Translation Studies

This section explores ethnography as a method and aims to highlight the need for in-field engagement, together with the possibilities that ethnography offers in Translation and Audiovisual Translation Studies. Ethnographic methods of data collection originate in anthropology and social sciences, and although they now occupy a sizeable relevance within Translation Studies, especially in researching workplaces and human-machine interaction (Risku et al. 2017), in the field of AV there is currently a gap when it comes to ethnographic studies on workplaces and procedures. In TS, the direct observation of workflows and practices in translation has begun to gain attention thanks to the work of translation scholars who (increasingly after 2010) decided to adopt a socio-constructivist set of approaches, combining

it with a workplace-based ethnographic methodology (Risku 2006; Koskinen 2008; Karamanis et al. 2011; Ehrensberger-Dow 2014; Risku 2014; Beuchert 2017; Bundgaard 2017a; Födisch 2017; Olohan and Davitti 2017). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that such gap in AVT academic contributions is also due to a widespread reluctance on the part of the media and localisation industry to open its doors to outsiders, mainly attributable to the fear of sharing copyrighted content, strategic procedures, or company-specific software. However, when access to industry settings is achieved, workplace studies have proved a valuable source of data, enriching translation perspectives into cognition, process research, ergonomics, and overall contextual, situated studies (Risku et al. 2017).

The use of ethnographic methods in this thesis is important for various reasons: first, as outlined in the previous chapter, socio-constructivist premises do not separate the object of research from its context, as actors and phenomena are seen as interdependent and constantly interacting. For this reason, ethnography is a most suitable methodology in constructivist studies. Second, translation practices and workplaces are under-researched in literature and deserve more attention on the basis that translation is not only a cognitive activity but a socio-technical one too, involving a number of factors that are found in the workplace, the technology used, and the social context (Koskinen 2008; Risku 2014). Third, ethnographic methodologies have recently been identified as highly valuable in Translation Studies, and have gained increasing traction and attention, as seen in Risku et al. (2017) and Milošević and Risku (2020). Fourth, because of this, I argue for its increased use in AVT Studies – where it is still an under-employed methodology – in view of the identified need to find new and alternative research avenues to look at audiovisual practices in context, which are social, economic, linguistic and technical activities. This point of view reflects the core of my argument which is the need to find original methods to explore and navigate technology and

the industry, as well as ways of reimagining the production of subtitles as a mode of translation and a profession, as will be proposed in the conclusion. The present chapter argues that ethnography offers a flexible methodology for AVT Studies, as it allows us to investigate practices and improves our comprehension of translation as a social activity (Koskinen 2008; Flynn 2010). Within TS, this methodology approach was first proposed by Buzelin (2005, p. 205) who conceived the introduction of ethnography (and actor- and agency-based theories), on the basis that:

the observation, recording, and analyses of translational practices locally (...) will generate data that should enable us to get a better idea of who participates in the translation process, how they negotiate their position, and of how much and where translators, in practice, comply with or contest norms.

Regardless of the field or mode of translation in question, it can be argued that ethnographic methods are particularly suitable for conducting translation workplace studies because they encourage naturalistic observation in a social environment (Koskinen 2008, p. 37). Indeed, most workplace studies have three common traits, which are worth outlining here. Firstly, they look at the contextual arrangement and management of workplace activities, and at 'the ways in which tools and technologies, objects and artefacts, feature in practical action and interaction in the workplace' (Luff et al. 2000, p. 13). Secondly, they all follow Geertz's (1973) definition of thick description to depict different actors and their interaction in complex networks; and thirdly, they stem from the need to rethink the notions, theories and assumptions that are commonly held towards the use of technology (Luff et al. 2000). Adopting an ethnographic method was crucial for the gathering of diverse data – something which would have proved highly unfeasible via online surveys or observations in experimental settings, which are less constructivist and social-oriented in nature, and entail less interpersonal relationships. Indeed, the immersion in the workplace observed in Study 1, and the personalised nature of face-to-face interviews in Study 2 allowed me to collect

complex and in-depth first-hand qualitative data. Because of this, I argue in favour of the use of constructivist and ethnographic methods of research and analysis in Translation and Audiovisual Translation Studies, as discussed above, as a way to adopt a contextualised and personal point of view which is crucial to get as complete a picture as possible, and overcome the pitfalls of deterministic assumptions, especially around the use of technology. Other disciplines which – like Translation Studies – have extensively relied on the use of technology and are now fully embedded with issues of software design and human/computer interactions, have largely borrowed concepts and methods from social sciences, mostly due to the need to explore the development and impact of new technologies (Luff et al. 2000). In a way, it could be argued that this trend validates the mutually constructive relationship between human cognition, professional processes and technological innovations, and the consequent need to look at the contextual factors when it comes to technology-mediated practices:

there has been particular interest in those [methodological orientations] that are naturalistic and not stipulative, and account for the contingent and situated nature of organisational activities. However, it is apparent that these demands placed upon CSCW (Computer-supported Cooperative Work), HCI (Human-Computer Interaction) [...] *cannot be met by a pre-existing set of tools and techniques*. [Practitioners should] rethink their current conceptions of everyday work activities in order to reconsider the frameworks underpinning current methods both for the analysis of conduct associated with new technologies and for the design of novel systems.

(ibid., p. 11, my emphasis)

A similar argument is made in TS by Désilets et al. (2009), who conducted an empirical naturalistic study aimed at highlighting the use of tools by translators, and by Bundgaard (2017, 2017a), who explored human-computer interaction in the workplace by observing in-house translators in a Danish company, and integrating her data with a semi-controlled experiment and semi-structured interviews. Both studies achieve a degree of granularity and insight into the use of technology that could only be managed through close observation and

interaction, which opens a range of possibilities for translation companies and technological developers aiming to improve the quality of translation memory, terminology or spellcheck tools, just to give a few examples (Désilets et al. 2009). Olohan (2011, p. 353) highlights the importance of ethnography on the basis that it allows a direct exploration of the interaction between human actors and technology actors, that means giving them a voice, as well as being able to gain:

direct access to the workings of the technology, not merely the translators' accounts of the technology's characteristics [...] direct access to the workings of the translator [...], not merely the translators' accounts of their own actions.

The need for ethnographic approaches in translation is aptly and comprehensively expressed by Ehrensberger-Dow (2014, pp. 366-367) on the grounds that:

Factors such as economic, institutional, and technological influences on the work situation as well as the types of tasks that translators are usually engaged in (including expected quality level, deadlines, etc.) [...] are part of the real world that informs translators' mental representations and motivates their actions. Data from ethnographic observations can provide qualitative indicators that contribute towards interpreting the appropriateness of translation solutions with respect to the constraints that translators work under.

Added to this, Koskinen's (2008) study on the professional and personal identity of Finnish translators in the EU commission highlights how neither the study of translation nor that of its production process are going to provide exhaustive and sensible results unless they are grounded in the overall context that shapes them – in her case, the European Commission. Koskinen's (ibid.) is amongst the first ethnographic studies carried out as part of practical empirical research in translation, and the first monograph with an extensive discussion about the use of ethnography in translation. Another advantage of using ethnography in translation research is the option of combining several methods of data collection, such as observation, interviews and participation, which are complementary and allow the researcher to extract

new types of data in the contextual aspects of translation (Koskinen 2008; Nicolini 2013; Födisch 2017).

The need for a multi-method contextualized research of translation practices, work conditions and workplaces is also strongly expressed by Risku (2014), who suggests that ethnographic methods constitute an ideal path to complement process-based studies which seem to rely exclusively on thinking-aloud protocols, eye-tracking, keylogging, and retrospective interviews. The vastness and complexity of translation environments is evident when approaching the subject through ethnographic research.

Indeed, in situating processes, products, and actors within a larger context, ethnography can present the researcher with the challenge of embracing the *mess*, and finding a narrative amongst the multiple types of data reflecting the complexities of the environment (Koskinen 2008, p. 10). The complexity increases when the ethnographic observation prompts the researcher to reformulate research questions, in light of factors that could not have been considered prior to the work in the field – and requires the researcher to be flexible and be prepared to question one's own interpretation. This was clearly experienced during my workplace study (as described in the next section) and can be considered a sort of *loop effect* that also fulfils the constructivist premises and expectations of the research design, in the sense that the structure of the research echoed its philosophical basis, and 'the enquiry is open-ended and theoretically emergent. That is, the approach is not based on testing a prior hypothesis or pre-developed theory but disposed to taking new turns as findings accumulate' (Koskinen 2008, p. 37). While the amount and diversity of data makes for a great depth of insight, one of the main criticisms that are directed towards ethnography is the lack of breadth and generalisability, 'as the focus is typically on one particular situation or phenomenon' (Iacono et al., p. 40). In the case of the present ethnography, this negative aspect is countered

by the fact that the Company observed in Study 1 is a multinational whose practices tend to be standardised across its global offices, and seem to be similar to other companies that belong to the globalised audiovisual market.

There are other, more practical challenges of collecting data ethnographically in the field, some of which are listed in Milošević and Risku's (2020) presentation of a multiple workplace study, which offers invaluable methodological insight on the role of the researcher in ethnographic studies of translation. In the case of Study 1, the first challenge was finding not only a *relevant*, but a *willing* translation setting. When a collaboration is found, an important drawback of doing ethnography revolves around the considerable amount of time and effort to negotiate the terms of access, seek approval, possibly from higher tiers of management, clear ethical approval, and make sure that the interested actors are willing to be observed and / or interviewed. Non-disclosure agreements and issues of copyright or confidentiality can represent barriers for the researcher, who needs to make sure that the appropriate activities are observed and explored, and the appropriate material is accessed. Furthermore, ethnographic researchers need to be careful in minimising their influence, in order not to disrupt the subjects' activities or manipulate the observed situation, so as to strive for the maximum ecological validity (Ehrensberger-Dow 2014; Risku 2017). In addition to that, time is also needed to establish enough of a rapport for the participants to open up with trust and honesty; fortunately, in the case of Study 1, the gatekeeper helped to bridge the researcher/participant gap by involving me in the work of the QC department as a regular intern. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Iacono et al. (2009, p. 42):

Informants may be suspicious of the researcher and reluctant to participate or be eager to please; they may interject their own impressions and biases etc. The personal relationship between researcher and informants may also influence the interaction (e.g. the researcher may empathise with his/her informants and vice versa).

This leads to consider an important potential drawback of ethnography which is that of balancing objectivity and subjectivity in the observation and interpretation of phenomena. As Buzelin puts it, this is a common issue to any qualitative methodology involving fieldwork, and 'looking at things "from the actor's viewpoint" should not mean being complacent nor losing critical distance once and for all' (Buzelin 2007, p. 144) and part of the challenge is that of 'keep[ing] the subjectivity in check and present and analyse the evidence objectively' (Iacono et al. 2009, p. 41).

Another aspect of ethnography that could potentially have adverse repercussions on the study regards privacy: first of all, non-disclosure agreements and issues of confidentiality can represent barriers for the researcher who needs to make sure that the appropriate activities are observed and explored, and the appropriate material is accessed without breaching such agreements. Second, this also means not betraying the confidentiality of participants when they decide to speak openly about their work-related issues, and making sure that their right to privacy and anonymity is maintained during and after fieldwork.

Following this overview of ethnographic research in translation, and discussion on the pros and cons of using it in the context of a fieldwork, the next sections describe the methods that have been used in each study.

3.4 The workplace study and its methods: the fieldwork

This section describes the workplace where Study 1 was carried out. It is worth mentioning that, in order to avoid any risk of possible negative consequences to the participants in the study, the Company will be referred to in anonymous form throughout the thesis, while the identities of all actors involved have been pseudonymised.

The choice for the study sample followed the principle of convenience (Saldanha and O'Brien 2014, p. 34), that is recruiting the sample that is most straightforwardly available. Indeed, among the companies that already had a partnership with the University of Roehampton, the Company was selected because of their international role as localisation service provider in the AVT industry, and their extensive technology-driven approach. The Company is an international firm employing over 7000 people across the US, UK, Asia and Australia, and providing a wide range of services, including AVT. At the time of observation, the UK office employed approximately 400 people and hosted a wealth of teams, including distribution marketing, computer graphics, human resources, client management services, project management, live subtitling, editing, and subtitle quality control, both for streaming and broadcasting purposes, and for cinema release. The research partnership with the Company was established in the first year, and after a few months of discussion and negotiation with the relevant contacts, I was able to secure a three-month placement to conduct fieldwork in their UK branch. At the end of 2018, from Monday to Friday, I was based as in-house intern in the Company's localisation department that deals with the range of AVT services, which were available in over twenty languages for the EMEA region (Europe, Middle East and Asia), as detailed in Chapter 4.

The methodology chosen for the workplace study includes different methods for data collection, which can be categorised within the array of ethnographic methods and are generally inductive and produce qualitative data. These are participant observation, shadowing, and structured and unstructured interviews, which will be outlined in the following sections.

3.4.1 Participant observation

Participant observation can be defined as an active involvement with the research subjects in their own environment, so that their daily experiences can be observed and recorded, if need be, and the participants can be asked questions about their feelings and understandings (Coffey 2006; Waddington 2004). The level of participation in the activities taking place in the observed context determines the stance of the researcher – with participation and observation being ‘at either end of a continuum of research positions’ (Coffey 2006).

Waddington (2004, p. 154) summarises four types of participant observation researcher:

1) the complete participant, who operates covertly, concealing any intention to observe the setting; 2) the participant-as-observer, who forms relationships and participates in activities but makes no secret of an intention to observe events; 3) the observer-as-participant, who maintains only superficial contacts with the people being studied (for example, by asking them occasional questions); and 4) the complete observer, who merely stands back and ‘eavesdrops’ on the proceedings.

In light of these definitions, the position adopted during the fieldwork can be identified as the second option, that of ‘participant-as-observer’. In addition to that, because of my intentions to observe and comprehend both context and object of study (the subtitling production) from my point of view as well as the participants’, and the willingness to represent their voices collectively and individually, my position in the workplace can be considered one of a ‘passionate participant’ (Lincoln et al. 2011, p. 99), which is fully coherent with a qualitative constructivist research paradigm (Milošević and Risku 2020).

As it will be explained in detail in the next chapter, I was based in the localisation department of the Company and received the same treatment as a regular employee or intern, in the sense that I was given a company email and platform account, a desk and workstation, and was sitting next to the employees in the Quality Control team (often referred to as QC). For the three months, I observed the working environment, participated in team meetings,

received training, and sometimes worked alongside the team members to help them with tight deadlines. I also spent my time arranging and conducting interviews, shadowing colleagues, and spending my lunch and coffee breaks with Company employees from various departments. I kept a fieldwork diary throughout the three months, where several times a day I would annotate my observations, but also experiences and reactions. Along with fieldwork, ethnography in fact entails *deskwork*, during and after data collection, as the researcher's interpretations of the data contribute to weaving the narrative from data extracted in field (Koskinen 2008, p. 38; Milošević and Risku 2020, p. 115).

The Company operated under a strict data privacy policy that is related to their clients' confidentiality requirements for the handling of copyright-protected material. For this reason, I had to sign a Non-Disclosure Agreement on my first day, according to which it was not possible for me to integrate my notes with Company documents, nor to record audio or video, or take pictures. I could indeed access Company material (such as guidelines, job instructions and training modules) and also translation files (source files, subtitling templates, and reference material), however, my access was restricted, as I could consult these materials but was not allowed to make copies or reproduce them in any way.

Ethnographic fieldwork cannot happen without gatekeepers. An integral part of field studies, gatekeepers are the figures who recognise the research value in their environment, admit the researcher, and control research access. In organisations, gatekeepers are usually in a managerial or executive position, or other positions which grant them recognition and influence over the observed group (Saunders 2006, p. 126). In my case, the gatekeeper was the leader of the QC team, Sylvia, who welcomed me on the first day, and immediately introduced me and my research to all team members, who were already aware of my position and my intentions. The overt nature of my participant observation was fundamental to gain

the participants' trust, which allowed me to discuss specific research interests with all subjects, and also openly explore dynamics or events while they were taking place. The establishment of trust and positive relationship in the fieldwork is indeed crucial, because in ethnographic settings the collection of data depends on the level and quality of interpersonal relation and communication between the researcher and the participants (Pole and Hillyard 2016).

The elements that were observed include the workplace in general and focus on daily challenges, communication, working modalities, and collaboration within and across teams; additionally, it was possible to also observe people's attitudes towards tasks and technologies, tensions or pressures coming from within or outside the team, and the general organisational structure. As mentioned in section 3.3.1, even the smallest translation networks can prove to be highly complex structures because of the dynamics at play amongst the actors (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007; Risku 2014). The observed workplace is far from being a small network, and the complexities due to the actors' interactions could surface at any point in time: indeed, as will be explored in the next chapter, clients' decisions and technical factors seemed to constitute very significant variables within the production process.

3.4.2 Shadowing

Shadowing is understood here as 'a research technique which involves a researcher closely following a member of an organisation over an extended period of time' (McDonald 2005, p. 456) and this can include a whole day of work, a whole shift or a longer period of time. While participant observation involved the working practices on a wider scale, including the actual facilities and the different actors who occupied them, the shadowing efforts focused exclusively on members of the QC team. This decision was strategic in the sense that it represented a way to concentrate on a crucial phase of the workflow – one which allowed the

research to maintain a precise focus on quality and technology, two aspects which are part and parcel of subtitling QC practices. Furthermore, the shadowing efforts in the QC team offered insights on the quality of the workflow in action, and provided useful data on the source, template and reference files, as well as on how the team members handled, regarded and managed them.

In this study, shadowing was performed on a reduced timescale, usually from the beginning of the day until midday, or from midday until end of day. Each session was devoted to shadowing one actor's activities, before moving on to others. During this time, as is customary in this practice, I wrote a continuous flow of fieldnotes (McDonald 2005, p. 456), which included the participants' personal disposition, thoughts, conversations and indications of non-verbal communication (ibid., p. 457). Approximately 8 to 10 shadowing sessions took place during the whole duration of the fieldwork. The sessions would follow the usual flow of work of a Quality Controller, and therefore include lunch and coffee breaks, and would end either at the end of the working day, or when the subtitling file had received its full quality control and was ready for submission. To schedule sessions, every week I would ask team members to let me know about their availability and the progression with the files they were working on – as I wanted to observe different stages of the QC task. At times, Quality Controllers volunteered for the shadowing, while other times they were approached more directly by either me or Sylvia, provided they were not working with a tight deadline. Having enough time to work on a file ensured that they could work at a pace that allowed me to ask questions about their processes, and allowed them to explain and verbalise their actions while they were working. In my view, these allowances did not compromise the validity of the findings: in fact, given the open-space office, I was still able to observe (not shadow) those working on a tight deadline without interfering with their work, and possibly add to their stress.

3.5 Interviews

Interviews were carried out in slightly different ways during the two studies. The first part of this section will provide a general introduction to conducting qualitative interviews, and then the section will move on to delineate how these were carried out during Studies 1 and 2.

Interviews can be categorised as structured, non-structured and semi-structured (Saldanha and O'Brien 2014). With structured interviews, the researcher uses a predefined set of questions for all participants, ensuring that their wording and order never changes, and closed questions are preferred to open ones. The main advantage of structured interviews is that they fully allow the researcher to compare (and also quantify) the participants' response – while the main drawback lies in the closed and pre-established nature of the questions, which make the exploration rigid and possibly limiting for the researcher (ibid. p. 172). The second type of interview, non-structured (or unstructured), defines a 'free-flowing process' (ibid. p. 172), where information is obtained according to the circumstances, and the researcher can improvise. While this type of interview offers ample potential for the interviewees to express their opinions and perceptions, the resulting data is more difficult to analyse and require higher levels of interpretation (ibid. p. 172). The last type, semi-structured interviews, has features of both structured and non-structured, as it is based on a predefined schedule, but questions tend to be open-ended, they can be changed, and new questions can be added, if need be (ibid. p. 173).

3.5.1 Study 1 interviews

Throughout the three months of fieldwork, I conducted fifteen interviews with the aim of mapping the workflow and identifying the different actors involved, their roles, their relationship, and primarily their working practices and interaction with technology. I chose not to use structured interviews because of the different possibilities, availabilities, and dynamics that would emerge in the Company on a daily basis, which were prompting me to ask further and unexpected research questions, and therefore elicit data from different actors, at different stages. At the same time, I reckoned that non-structured interviews would result in scattered pieces of data, and for these reasons I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews (see Appendix I). Some of them were planned informally during the week by the team supervisor or me, while others were agreed more or less organically, during conversation. My interlocutors were aware of my research in collaboration with the company, and participant consent was obtained with each and every one who contributed to this research. Being open with Company employees about my fieldwork aims, and having enough time to familiarise them with those aims, provided good conditions to build trust and increase the 'acceptancy of the study' (Ehrensberger-Dow 2014, p. 367). Eventually, this allowed me to form relationships in order to extract not only collective but also individual perceptions of translation quality, and the quality of their work.

The choice of informants was based on the workflow structure: after identifying the roles within the subtitling production workflow, I set about to interview at least one senior representative for each role. For this reason, I spoke with professionals from the client management services, project management, template and scripting teams, QC, and final technical control teams (whose position in the workflow is schematised in Chapter 4). Furthermore, I also chose to speak with representatives of recruiting and training in order to

gauge the company's professional criteria and standards when choosing translators and proof-readers who only work remotely, as freelancers. My aim was to find out what the interviewees' job entailed, what were their experiences and perceptions of their role, and of their interaction with technology. I was interested in knowing as much as possible about their processes, how they were structured and why, and the way these intertwined with the other actors' while they were all working towards a shared objective – the delivery of a subtitled product – and what they thought of their contribution to the final quality of said product. This helped to answer Research Question 1 by adding knowledge of corporate AVT production processes, and of the idea of quality that was shared by the Company actors.

All interviews were one-on-one, with the exception of one group interview, where the team representative came along with the whole team. I would first ask participants whether we could discuss their work, and upon consent we would continue the conversation. Consent was given orally at the time of arranging interviews, and then a consent form was given to the participants, who had the time to read it, ask questions and sign it before our interview. The structure which I invariably used in all interviews is reported in Appendix I, and aimed at gathering the following information:

- Which role they had in the company
- How long they had been in the company
- What challenges they usually encountered and how they dealt with them
- How was their relationship with technology at work
- How much they thought about the final quality of the product
- What were their criteria for recruiting people to their team

The conversations lasted one hour on average. Most took place face-to-face, at the company premises, mostly in a meeting room that had been previously booked by me or Sylvia, the gatekeeper. The rooms allowed for a comfortable degree of proximity, and only in one

case there was little room for everyone (during the group interview). The walls cancelled any noise that came from outside, thus providing a private space for conversation. If a room was not available, we would find a quiet seating at the top of the cafeteria, where informal or last-minute meetings were sometimes held. Three interviews were conducted over Skype since the informants were based in Asia and the US. As mentioned above, I had signed a non-disclosure agreement which prevented me to use audio or video recording devices of any sort, and for this reason I had to take notes continuously during the interviews. Because of this, on some occasions it was necessary to return to that person in order to confirm or clarify some information. Then, I would copy those notes in a more discursive form as soon as possible, usually right after the meeting or phone call, adding details or information that I had missed on paper, but I could still remember.

3.5.2 Study 2 interviews

After the fieldwork, the analysis of the fieldwork data led me to theorise about the reasons behind the Company's procedures, and the quality of work of those under study (see Chapter 4). However, to obtain a more complete picture of the current subtitling production network, I decided to validate my assumptions about the quality of subtitling procedures with professional subtitlers, a category that was not hired in-house, as previously mentioned. For this reason, I set up a second qualitative study, which addressed the following questions:

- How do subtitlers work?
- How do they negotiate their position in their production networks?
- What is the quality of their work and working conditions, as perceived by them?
- What is the quality of their interaction with workflows / working materials / technical actors, as perceived by them?

These questions echoed the type of data that had been collected in Study 1, in terms of working processes and their quality, and relation to technology actors. More specifically, as will be detailed in the next section dedicated to the data analysis, the findings of Study 1 resulted in five broad indicators of process quality in subtitling: (1) workflow and communication structure; (2) performance of technology actors, and quality of interaction; (3) time to complete a task; (4) quality of working material; and (5) quality of working conditions and presence of stress factors. The interview questions for the freelance subtitlers have been modelled upon these five categories, adding questions that related to the participants' profile, with a focus on working experience, education and training (for the complete list of questions, see Appendix II). This correspondence led to a degree of consistency amongst the two different datasets, which both directly addressed research questions 2 and 3 (How does the interplay of human and inanimate actors unfold in subtitling production dynamics, including the workplace? What is the role of technology in relation to the quality of professional subtitling provision, processes and products?). Altogether, the consistency of approach allowed me to draw parallels between the findings of the two studies, as outlined in Chapters 4 and 5. In turn, this led to considerations that address research question 1 (How is the concept of quality constructed in the context of contemporary professional subtitling contexts?) which is the subject of Chapter 6.

In terms of the difference between the two datasets, one comprised a complex body of data coming from participant observation, shadowing and interviews, while Study 2 provided a relatively simpler set of data, which came primarily from the interviews and their interpretation. Nevertheless, the two datasets are complementary as they aim to represent two aspects of the same phenomena, that is, multilingual subtitling as carried out between 2018 and 2020, from different points of view. Possible discrepancies related to differences in

participants' location can be disregarded due to the fact that the great majority of the subtitling workforce is outsourced, and therefore the subtitlers' location does not imply differences in terms of how the work is carried out⁸. Indeed, both the production observed in the workplace and the work of the freelance subtitlers interviewed are physically conducted within the European market area – however, all this takes place through multinational providers working for international clients. Lastly, the freelancers interviewed worked for several companies and LSPs at a time, in some cases also for the Company involved in Study 1, and shared very similar – if not the same – end clients with one another, and with the Company, which reduces the risk of potential incompatibility between the datasets.

Specifically, Study 2 was designed with the aim to capture personal points of view and experiences of subtitlers: the processes that subtitlers needed to follow in their work were described to me clearly during the first study at the Company, and given the size and reach of the Company, it was safe to assume that such processes were similar also for their competitors. The nature of processes themselves, and the similarity across the workflows of different LSPs were confirmed by the subtitlers who participated in the study, who all worked for different companies within the same range. In addition, their interviews present strong similarities in their processes and dynamics, which reveals a strong degree of standardisation in that portion of the AVT industry, as will be argued in Chapters 5 and 6.

The choice of sample followed the principle of convenience, where seven professional subtitlers who were known to me or my network, were selected on the basis of their familiarity with subtitling work, and a minimum of 2 years' working experience. I tried to ensure variety

⁸ This aspect does not impair the comparability of data because participants in Study 1 and 2 are all located in the UK/European area; nevertheless, it is important to note that, in general, workers' location does imply significant differences in living and working conditions, such as remuneration between European and non-European subtitlers and employees.

and representation within the sample, therefore in order to widen the pool of possible participants, I decided to set the minimum limit to 2 years. The semi-structured interviews were carried out separately between February and March 2020 and lasted approximately 55 minutes each, on average. All the subtitlers worked on a freelance basis, and this constituted an advantage in the sense that their status as independent professionals allowed them to speak freely about their personal perceptions and opinion around their job and use of technology, without fears of direct retaliation and repercussion. Some of them had signed NDAs with their clients (intended as LSPs) and were not able to name their end clients nor details about the projects, although this did not impair the quality of the data in the study – which was focused on their opinions and perceptions, as said above. End clients and project details were also protected by NDAs in Study 1, and therefore were never included in the actual data collection and analysis. As an added layer of security, a careful anonymisation of personal data, and pseudonymisation of the subtitlers' identity has been carried out for the purpose of this thesis.

The interviews started with a predefined list of questions, most of which were open-ended and encouraged the subtitler to expand on the themes they felt the most strongly about. Four interviews could be conducted face to face and took place in public spaces, where a degree of privacy could be obtained – usually, the back room of a café. This was done for two reasons, first to put them in the most comfortable position for them to talk about their work, and second to minimise background noise and voices that could impair the quality of the recording, as all interviews were audio recorded. Three interviews could only be carried out remotely via Skype because of the participants' location and the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Before starting, I would present the consent form to the participants, and they were given time to read it and ask questions about it. After consent was given, the interview would

start, and participants were notified that I started the recording on my phone. Upon arriving home, I would immediately transfer the recording to my secure external hard drive and store it according to the University regulations as detailed in my Ethics agreement.

3.6 Data analysis

3.6.1 Study 1 – workplace study

Having collected over 20,000 words of qualitative data from the fieldwork, I compiled them all into one large file with all the observation, shadowing, and interview notes, together with my in-field annotation and elaborations (Leavy and Saldaña 2014, p. 5). I then carried out two rounds of analysis. For the first round, I started selecting and prioritising data to make sure that I could interrogate it on the following questions. For this reason, at this stage, my own annotations and elaborations were not included in the selection.

- Who were the actors involved in the subtitling workflow?
- What tasks did they carry out, and at which stage?
- What was the relation between human and technology actors?
- Which aspects of product quality were addressed at each stage of the workflow?

Once the data had been selected, I started the coding process – that is, assigning a word or short phrase to a portion of data, in order to classify and organise the body of knowledge, and identify patterns (Leavy and Saldaña 2014, p.7; King 2004, p. 257). Using a software for qualitative analysis, NVivo (Bazeley and Jackson 2013), I assigned descriptive codes to my data, which are words, usually nouns, that condense the topic of a portion of data. As noted by Leavy and Saldaña (2014, p. 24), descriptive coding is most useful when there is a diverse body of data – as in this case, where observational notes differed from interview and

shadowing notes – as it helps not only to categorise, but also to index the data content. The first coding phase resulted in a coding template, which is the basis of ‘template analysis’, defined by King (2004, p. 256) as an array of strategies:

for thematically organizing and analysing textual data. The essence of template analysis is that the researcher produces a list of codes (*template*) representing themes identified in their textual data. Some of these will usually be defined a priori, but they will be modified and added to as the researcher reads and interprets the texts. The template is organized in a way which represents the relationships between themes, as defined by the researcher, most commonly involving a hierarchical structure.

After reviewing the data in its entirety and deleting, changing, or inserting codes, I developed the template for analysis, which produced five highest-order codes, divided into one, two or three levels of lower hierarchical order codes, for a total of 27. Indeed, hierarchical coding gives the researcher the opportunity to analyse textual data at different degrees of specificity and detail (King 2004, p. 258). In the first round, I noticed that my analysis had stopped at the first and sometimes second level of hierarchy. At that point, I had a clearer picture of all the workflow steps, what aspect of quality they aimed at, and what happened during these steps. I repeated these steps during the second round of analysis. In the selection phase, I included the data chosen in the first round, though prioritising it so as to introduce two more questions that I wanted to answer in my analysis:

- What happens when actors carry out their tasks?
- Are there elements that disturb or facilitate their work?
- What are the challenges for the human actors?
- How are these solved, and who finds a solution?
- What are the human actors’ comments and experience of their own procedures?

This second round of coding added more information to the 2nd and 3rd orders of the coding hierarchy, and resulted in three more codes added to the lower orders. I then analysed

the information in those coding nodes, and during this step, five indicators emerged, allowing me to categorise elements linked to the perceived (and experienced) quality of the actors' processes. By combining the conclusions that I had reached after the two rounds of analysis, I created an indicative structure to evaluate the quality of processes in subtitling production, which is presented in Chapter 4. As previously explained, after exploring the quality of subtitling processes observed in Study 1, I decided to test my assumptions by interviewing professional subtitlers in Study 2, as detailed in the next section. The analysis resulted in findings which form the core of Chapter 5. The figure below provides a representation of the overall analytical process:

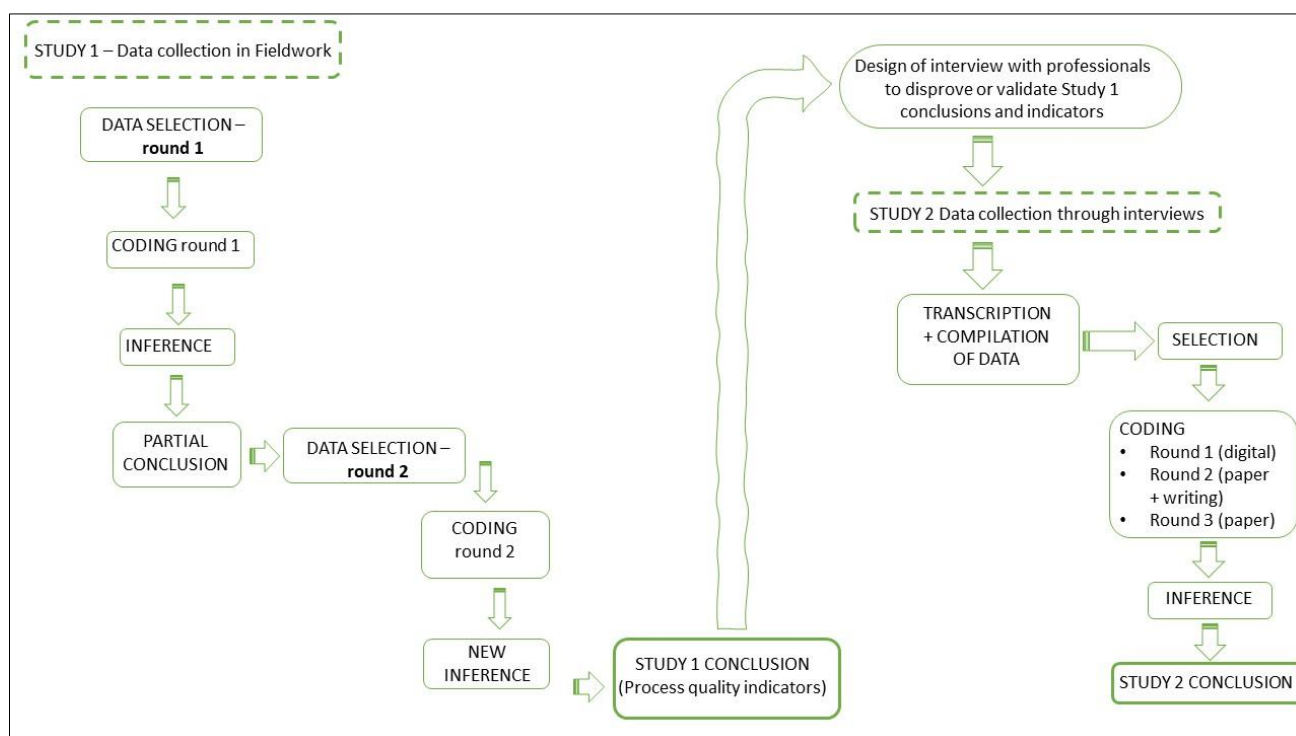


Figure 3.2. The analytical process

3.6.2 Study 2 – interviews with subtitlers

As a result of the seven interviews, I collected approximately 400 minutes of audio recordings. After each interview, I made sure I transcribed the responses within a few days, so as to note down my own impressions and thoughts (in a different font and colour). The transcription was done mostly verbatim and sometimes slightly abridged to eliminate interjections and

repetitions. I then re-read all the transcription files and selected the data to include only the participants' responses; at that point I started doing a first round of thematic coding in NVivo using the same coding strategy as detailed in the above section (Bazeley and Jackson 2013).

After having identified loose patterns in the first round, I collated a spreadsheet with all the respondent's answers by question, and then grouped them according to the category of questions (which revolved around the individuals' profiles; workflow and communication; interaction with technology actors; quality of working materials; working conditions and time to task; and issues of stress / motivation / frustration, as seen in the section above). I then printed out the spreadsheet and proceeded to do a second round of coding, analysing the data on paper and using colours to mark different concepts across the sheet. I started analysing columns one by one (each of which comprised one question, and seven corresponding responses) comparing and contrasting the data, and highlighting the concepts that would emerge; each time a column was analysed, I would write down discursive notes about what surfaced. Once all the columns were analysed, I continued working on paper and connected all the different themes and concepts across the sheet, therefore carrying out a third round of analysis by main theme, which generally validated the loose patterns identified in the first round of coding. Nevertheless, this round added considerable depth and highlighted the interconnectedness of some concepts (such as quality, communication and trust) and phenomena (such as those involving technology and standardisation measures in subtitling production). These elements would appear in one theme and affect another, as well as recurring amongst the participants' experience in different ways, as will be seen in detail in Chapter 5.

3.7 Conclusions

The dimensions afforded by the ethnographic approach, as well as the opportunity to engage in fieldwork allowed me to draw on a number of data collection methods (Födisch 2017, p. 87), which resulted in a very rich dataset on subtitling workplaces, processes and professionals. The constructivist position adopted from the start, which built the basis for the theoretical framework and methodological choices, has been instrumental in the design of the two studies, which could not have been possible without an ethnographic fieldwork as carried out in Study 1. Indeed, as Ehrensberger-Dow (2014, p. 366) observes, ‘it is only on the “translation floor” of a [Language Service Provider] that certain potentially interesting factors as well as problems can be identified and built into the study design’. The elements that have been observed in fieldwork could not have been thoroughly explored in other ways. These include the workplace and the general organisational structure, daily challenges, communication, working modalities, use of technology, and collaboration within and across teams. As for Study 2, the insights provided by ethnography inspired greatly the interview design, and the position of ‘indigenous ethnographer’, which I continued to adopt in the interviews, allowed me to position myself as a trusted and knowledgeable researcher. All of this, together with the informal settings in which the interviews were conducted, enabled the establishment of trust and therefore the collection of in-depth data on the subtitlers’ professional procedures and personal preferences and perceptions about their work.

In addition, the originality of the data gathered during fieldwork and interviews strongly influenced my analytical method, such as the decision to review the data multiple times and carry out two or more full rounds of analysis, so as to join dots that were coming from the human, the technological, the social, and the material aspects, and weave a narrative that connected all of them. This narrative is delineated through a description of working

processes that will be the topic of Chapters 4 and 5, where the dimensions of quality in subtitling will be explored, with a focus on the quality of the process in a subtitling workplace, and the role of the freelance subtitler, respectively.

4 A workplace study of process quality in corporate subtitling production

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims at outlining and describing processes in subtitling production through the analysis of workplace data, insight on quality procedures and use of technology in a professional subtitling context. Specifically, the chapter is inspired by the work of Buzelin (2005, 2007, 2007a, 2010) and Abdallah (2007, 2010, 2011, 2012). The chapter presents a descriptive analysis of the data gathered during the first phase of data collection, a study based on a three-month ethnographic fieldwork conducted in an international company that provides multilingual AVT services on an international scale. The workplace and workflow observed is a context where human and inanimate actors coexist and construct one another, that is to say, an environment designed for human/machine interaction, as most businesses nowadays. The analysis presented in this and the next chapters borrows the term ‘actor’ from Latour’s Actor-Network Theory to define heterogeneous entities, whether living (human) or inanimate, which interact in a socio-economic network, as well as using its core concept that all actors are considered equal. Here, ANT constitutes an ideal approach to observe and analyse translation contexts in that it ‘reminds us that the translation process involves a multiplicity of mediators, some of which are technological, and that the latter [enclose] stable forms of knowledge, consensus and presuppositions over what constitutes (good) translation’ (Buzelin 2005, p. 212).

This chapter will start by introducing the workplace examined in Study 1 (section 4.2), and then move on to the analytical and conceptual framework used to make sense of the complex qualitative dataset which comprises different types of actors, their roles, and the

dynamics of their relations. The framework in question builds on conceptualisations of quality in subtitling and combines the three-dimensional conceptualisation of quality as presented by Abdallah (2007), with Latour's Actor-Network Theory, which will be explored in sections 4.3, 4.4 and 4.5, respectively. Conceptualising quality in a subtitling workflow together with Abdallah's Total Quality and Latour's Actor-Network Theory has a double importance. First, it allows us to place the project within the sociological shift in Translation Studies (Wolf 2012) as it looks at quality in subtitling, by borrowing concepts from socio-constructivist assumptions in the social sciences. These posit that reality is co-constructed by social actors and external elements, and phenomena should be analysed in context – the same guiding principles in designing the fieldwork presented here. Specifically, the sociological turn in TS sees translation activities as carried out by social actors, and both activity and actors are implicated in social institutions and structures (ibid., p.132). Although common ground between Abdallah's Total Quality and Latour's Actor-Network Theory may seem limited, both stem from socio-constructivist premises, and Abdallah explicitly quotes Latour as her main inspiration. As will be shown in this chapter, the combination of these two approaches provides the basis for a theoretical stance that presupposes the coexistence and constant interaction between actors which make up the 'social fabric' and shape any knowledge or product that comes out of it.

Second, this particular set of theories was chosen because of their relevance to my pre-fieldwork idea of quality in subtitling, in combination with the data collected. In Translation and Audiovisual Translation Studies, it can be argued that quality is made up of different aspects (cultural, linguistic, functional, etc.) and levels of quality can be conceived differently according to the viewers' perspective (Abdallah 2007, 2012; O'Brien 2012; Drugan 2013; Jääskeläinen 2016; Beuchert 2017). In addition to this, the observation in the field revealed a constellation of actors, each of which worked to deliver a specific aspect of quality, as will be

seen below. It is important to consider that in the observed Company and in current business models of translation services, the translator is often several steps away from the client, and their indirect interaction is mediated through a plethora of actors (Nunes Vieira and Alonso 2018, p. 11) – some of which are human, and some are not. Using a theoretical framework for this chapter based on Actor-Network Theory proved necessary in order to rationalise the human and inanimate actors' positions, actions, and interactions. Furthermore, the combination with Abdallah's approach to quality allows us to take a step back and see all actors in their respective dimensions, and to observe what these actors do in relation to quality. This is a methodological and analytical avenue that allows workflow and workplace researchers to explore and theorise about what actors do in professional contexts, and what the implications are for the translation profession and practice. With this, I do not intend to deny the central role of the translator (which remains the core actor of any translation service provider and translation activity (Nunes Vieira 2018) and will be the subject of the next chapter), but to shed light on some of the dynamics that shape the translation profession nowadays.

The second main section of the chapter focuses on the workflow – intended as the series of processes that are in place in a large-scale subtitling production company (section 4.6) and points at the relations between actors and aspects of quality. Finally, section 4.7 will analyse the data related to three key processes (client management, template creation and quality control) in order to identify elements of quality in the process as they emerge from the relations between actors. The interaction between human and technological actors will recur as a theme throughout the chapter, and will be further discussed in the conclusion.

4.2 Setting the scene

This section briefly describes the setting where the fieldwork was carried out. It is worth noticing that in order to avoid any risk of possible negative consequences to the participants in the study, the identities of all actors involved, including the main piece of technology discussed, have been pseudonymised. Since the study aims at exploring subtitling practices in the workplace, the use of technology, and most of all how quality is achieved and maintained in a multilingual subtitling workflow, the Company was chosen in view of its international role as localisation and post-production service provider in the AVT industry, and its extensive technology-driven approach. After a few months of discussion and negotiation, a research partnership was established thanks to the University of Roehampton's connections with the Company. It is important to mention that research on professional subtitling practices is scarce, and this gap is also due to an unspoken, yet widespread reluctance by the industry to open its doors to external researchers, mainly attributable to the fear of sharing copyright-protected content, strategic procedures, or company-specific software with outsiders. The communication and related agreements took several months to conclude, and eventually I was able to secure a three-month placement in their UK branch.

As outlined in the previous methodology chapter, an ethnographic fieldwork approach was deemed suitable for the study since it allows us to explore human/machine dynamics as they occur in the workplace (Olohan 2011, p. 353), and because interesting elements and issues can be identified and explored only in the field (Ehrensberger-Dow 2014, p. 366). As described in the previous chapter, ethnography allows the researcher to draw conclusions from a number of data collection methods (Födisch 2017, p. 87), and this study combines participant observation, shadowing and semi-structured interviews in order to access diverse data sources, and grasp the full picture.

At the end of 2018, I spent three months in the Company to conduct my fieldwork during their working hours, from Monday to Friday. On average, there were 100 to 150 people sitting on each floor, and there were three working floors in total, where the employees work, in an open-plan office. The building has large windows running through on the east and west sides, however these are often blinded, and most of the time the work is done under artificial light. The open plan is divided into two sides, each of which has a series of tables which accommodate four employees each. On the floor where I was based, the workstation consisted in a desktop PC equipped with two separate monitors, a mouse, a keyboard, and a pair of headphones. Each employee has a desk phone, and those who have to work from home more often, or travel for work, have a laptop attached to a docking station instead of a desktop PC.

I was based as in-house intern in the Quality Control team, part of the larger Localisation department that deals with the range of AVT services available in over sixty languages, including subtitling, dubbing, audio description, live subtitling, and accessibility. I was able to observe their work, receive training, participate in their daily activities, and enquire about the work of the other departments that were also based in the same location. Sylvia, the person supervising my research in the Company (who was also the QC team leader), suggested I focused my efforts on the QC team on the basis that it allowed me to always trace procedures back to quality issues, and identify steps and elements that are likely to have a direct effect on the final quality of the subtitled product. At the time of starting the placement, the team comprised 13 people, including the team supervisor, and they were sitting next to the project management team. My aim was that of observing social elements (workplace and actors) and process elements (workflow and material) in the attempt to answer research question 2, thus identifying the interaction of human and inanimate actors and how they

define one another, paying particular attention to how their relationship shapes quality in professional subtitling practices (therefore providing an answer to research question 3).

4.2.1 Initial considerations

Before describing and analysing the observed working practices, I will outline some of the initial difficulties observed in the workplace. It immediately became clear that mapping the workflow was not going to be an easy task, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the workflow can be seen as a process subject to many contingencies, and part of a production network (the Company's subtitling production) that is usually never the same, though is based on a standard workflow which is then shaped according to the client's needs. The workflow used at the time of observation (2018/2019) may not be the same used the following year, or for the next project, and may differ from previous ones as well; and this is mainly because workflows change according to the services that are provided. Working procedures are subject to changes that happen across different dimensions, from the availability of company resources or changes in the clients' requests, to advances in technology that allow different performances and handle different formats. Secondly, the workflow observed involves a high number of professional figures, some of whom are based in other offices, and most of whom work as freelancers around the globe. Indeed, all translators and proof-readers are sub-contracted on a freelance basis and are not Company employees. As a result, in virtue of the Company policy on the treatment of personal data with third parties (such as the researcher) it has not been possible to make contact with any of them or, therefore, to include considerations on their working environments and procedures. The point of view of freelance subtitlers is the focus of a second qualitative study, which will be explored in Chapter 5.

In the QC team, my research objectives were clarified to everyone from the start, during a team meeting held in my first week. In a few cases, it was not possible to speak with some employees due to their burdening number of daily tasks, which was predictable. In general, however, most employees were willing to communicate and collaborate, there was a considerable level of interest in my research questions and objectives, and quality in subtitling proved to be a heartfelt topic. Sylvia in particular, the team supervisor, was fully aware of my research questions, and very attentive in making sure that I spoke with the people that I needed to. We met on a weekly basis to discuss the progression of my research, and she would always provide insights for further reflection, and introduce me to employees who could help me answer my questions.

Data collection in the workplace was carried out through participant observation, shadowing and interviews, as detailed in Chapter 3. In general, although a particular focus was placed on the QC team, the participant observation was extended to the other functions of the Company that deal exclusively with the workflow for multilingual subtitling for theatrical release. This was for two reasons: first, most theatrical teams worked in the UK office and were easily accessible; second, because theatrical projects are often associated with high-profile productions, thus ideally requiring a higher attention to quality. I was keen to gather as much data as possible about the workflow structure, and the dynamics within and between teams. Within the QC team, once a week I would spend half a day, or the whole day, shadowing the work of a quality controller, depending on workload. In terms of interviews, I carried out a total of fifteen semi-structured interviews with representatives from several teams. The choice of informants was based on the workflow structure. After identifying the roles within the theatrical subtitling production, I interviewed at least one senior representative for each role. Before outlining the workflow, and the various actors taking part in it, I will present the

analytical and conceptual framework applied in this study, starting with an overview and definition of quality in subtitling.

4.3 The quality of a subtitled product

As defined in Chapter 2, subtitling is a translation practice based on an audiovisual text and therefore polysemiotic in nature, encompassing temporal, spatial and textual dimensions (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007, p. 9) and requiring multiple skills, including the use of the technical tools needed to perform this activity. This section provides a brief review of three subtitling standards and assessment parameters as found in the relevant AVT literature.

In his proposal for subtitling standards in Europe, Karamitroglou (1998) outlines the features that need to be considered when subtitling an audiovisual text, dividing them into four categories: spatial, temporal, punctuation and target text editing:

- Spatial aspects include the subtitles' position on screen, the number of lines and positioning of text, font, colour and background (ibid., p. 2)
- Temporal aspects relate to the duration of subtitles, and contain guidance on spotting (ibid., p. 3)
- The punctuation dimension refers in great detail to all features of punctuation, including the use of ellipsis, dashes, italics and bold (ibid., p. 5)
- The target text editing section contains guidance on syntax and segmentation, adherence to source text, on the treatment of redundant speech, acronyms, dialect, swearing, and on possible translation strategies to deal with culture-specific elements.

Along the lines of the Code of Good Subtitling Practice (1998), Kuo (2015) draws elements of quality in subtitling in three dimensions: temporal, spatial and stylistic:

- Temporal aspects relate to duration, reading speed and spotting (2015, p. 68)

- Spatial aspects refer to the safe area, position, line length, font, background and colour of the subtitles (ibid., p. 78)
- Stylistic aspects refer to the treatment of style, register, idioms, idiolects and swearing (ibid., p. 97).

While Kuo focuses on identifying quality factors in the subtitling task, she does not aim to create a standard for measuring quality. A quality assessment model has instead been developed by Pedersen (2017), who proposes three sets of parameters for evaluating subtitles: functional equivalence, acceptability and readability.

- Functional equivalence relates to semantic and stylistic choices (ibid., p. 218)
- Acceptability refers to aspects of grammar, spelling, and treatment of idiomatic expressions (ibid., p. 220)
- Readability refers to segmentation, spotting, punctuation, reading speed and line length (ibid., p. 221).

The categories identified in the above models can be easily applied for quality assessment purposes when the subtitling project has been carried out by one person. The present study observes an environment which is strongly shaped by practices of division of labour, and the above features of quality are addressed by several different actors within the workflow. Therefore, applying his model would entail a further fragmentation of the categories, which is likely to result in confusion, and could impede practical applicability.

Representing the separation of tasks observed in the subtitling environment under study, product quality will be categorised as follows. Four categories have been used on the basis of the data gathered on workflow, which sees different actors taking care of the following aspects of quality:

Textual quality	Semantic and syntactic choices, grammar, spelling, punctuation, consistency
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Stylistic quality	Style, register, treatment of idiomatic expression and swearing, foreignization / domestication strategies, adherence to source text, treatment of redundant speech
Technical quality	Segmentation, time-cueing, reading speed, line length, position and layout
Client requirements (functional quality)	Adherence to project instructions (including timescale and budget), adherence to project-specific terminology (often provided by client)

Table 4.1. Identifying subtitling product quality

While the first two categories can seem self-explanatory from a translational point of view, the third aspect refers to the visual, spatial and temporal constraints that are typical of subtitling tasks. The technical quality of a subtitling file includes all those elements that require specialised knowledge in terms of understanding and interpreting the filmic narrative, working with technical tools to perform time-cueing, and making stylistic choices that do not apply to the content of the translation, but to the way the subtitles appear on screen. The choice to include the last quality item (client **requirements**) arises from the fact that, as in any commercial translation service provision, quality is conceived in a functionalist lens and therefore corresponds firstly to the satisfaction of the client's needs (Hansen 2008, p. 260), and not only to the fulfilment of textual, stylistic and technical quality.

The above categories are indicative of the processes observed during fieldwork, where the efforts of most actors are primarily focused on one aspect of quality – though many (if not all) of them address the fourth aspect, client requirements, to some extent. The categorisation above has limitations since it does not take into consideration the actors' interaction nor the technology that mediates it, as it only aims to represent quality in the product dimension. Nevertheless, it constitutes the basis on which quality has been explored in the social and process aspects observed during fieldwork, as a starting point to adopt Abdallah's (2007) quality framework, as delineated in the next section. Indeed, it was necessary to devise parameters for product quality in order to connect the actors and their processes to the aspect

of quality that they were expected to deliver – so as to create and maintain a conceptual link between the different dimensions of quality in the situations observed during fieldwork.

4.4 Analytical framework: terminology and *total quality approach*

As presented in Chapter 2, the research follows the three-dimensional quality framework of Total Quality (Abdallah 2007; Jääskeläinen 2016), which provides the basis for exploring quality in the social and process dimensions that surround the quality of the actual product. Before presenting the framework, it is necessary to define what **process** indicates here. In order to avoid ambiguity, it is worth noting that the branch known as Translation Process Research generally intends process as the set of cognitive and professional skills of translators, in relation to their translation choices and strategies – which is not the case of this study, nor an objective of this thesis. Here, the term process is a synonym for *practice*, and indicates those professional choices, strategies and procedures that are visible and observable, and take place outside of the actors' mind. A “process step” or “phase” indicates an action or task that is part of the overall process observed. The translation process (or simply process) designates the series of steps that are taken from the start of a translation project, until its delivery. It involves all the actors that participate in this chain of actions and it takes place:

between the moment the need for translation arises and the moment the translated material is made available to its end-users in the required form and on the appropriate medium. It includes the whole process of translation service provision, i.e. all the operations performed by “translator”.

(Gouadec 2007, p. 58).

The social dimension is that of social actors (clients, agencies and companies, in-house employees, freelance translators and proof-readers), their working conditions, rates paid, levels of stress, and so on, as well as those aspects linked to their recruitment, training, working culture, experience and skills. It also includes wider, inanimate elements that have an

impact on the quality of the social and working environment, such as market forces, technological trends, fear of competition and piracy. The radical aspect of this approach is that the focus on quality is not concerned with the translation itself, as a product, but with the conditions found in the three dimensions (social, process and product). In fact, translation is conceived as more than a mere result of the sum of elements in the social dimension where actors coexist and collaborate, and elements found in the process. According to this approach, the quality of a translation product cannot be assessed or even considered unless the social and process-related conditions are taken into account (as seen in 2.2.1). It can follow that the intrinsic *nature* and *quality* of social elements – for instance, the quality of translators’ training and recruitment, the quality of their working conditions, of company policy, or the actors’ communication skills (just to name a few) – will impact the ways that processes are shaped. For example, the size of a company can influence the type of workflow used, and the resources that can be acquired; the negotiation of deadlines and budget can influence the allocation of resources and priorities in a project; the translators’ levels of experience can influence the type of workflow designed by a company or agency, and so on.

It may be necessary to remind ourselves that Abdallah’s (2007) Total Quality theorisation is an indirect transposition of the Total Quality Management explored in Business Studies, as discussed in Chapter 2. This conceptual overlapping exemplifies the interdisciplinary nature of the thesis, although the idea of Total Quality adopted in this thesis aims to expand the original perspective of Total Quality in a business sense so as to overcome its strong client focus.

The aim of this chapter is to look at processes within an organisation – also on the basis that ‘any organization is, at its most basic level, a process that creates an environment’ (Cronin 2019, p. 524). The process dimension, as considered here, includes all the steps and elements

that contribute and lead to a translated product: these include the workflow structure, the allocation of resources, the availability of technical tools and support, the time to complete a task, the management and availability of source and reference materials. A “good” process quality can be defined as a condition in which the processes involved in a translation project have positive qualities. For instance, a good process quality could signify that the workflow is efficient and flexible, that technical tools work smoothly, or that source and reference materials have been appropriately managed and checked. It is worth pointing out that technology is a key mediator in AVT practices, and therefore constitutes an actor which is part of the process dimension. However, the choice of introducing or imposing a piece of technology can have a clear (and mutual) impact on certain company policies, or the working conditions of translators, and for this reason it is an actor that is found across different dimensions (Jääskeläinen 2016, p. 94).

Following this line of thought, the conditions found in the social and process spheres will influence the quality of the subtitled product, intended as linguistic, technical, functional quality and so on. Through this framework, not only will the present chapter provide a description of the professional practices witnessed, but also – and primarily – shed light on the dimension of process and its quality. It could be tempting to assume that *good social quality* is likely to result in high process quality; however, there are no studies that assess quality in these two areas of translation production, and it is not possible to substantiate this claim. Some work on process quality has been carried out by Gouadec (2007) and will be discussed more specifically in section 4.7. The links between product and process features will be then discussed later in this chapter, while the social and interpersonal dimension of quality will receive greater attention in Chapter 5. The following section will delineate the theoretical framework used, in light of the context of study.

4.5 Conceptual framework: Actor-Network Theory

Actor-Network Theory has been adopted together with Abdallah's Total Quality framework as a conceptual reference on which the description of the actors' positions and relations are based. While Chapter 2 has provided an overview of the wider theoretical framework based on socio-constructivist approach and human/machine interaction, this section will sum up the main concepts of Actor-Network Theory (ANT) and clarify why it is used here.

ANT is not implemented here in its entirety because, although it guides the description and part of the analysis, it does not constitute the whole theoretical framework: in fact, ANT provides an overarching approach and a source of terminology for the key concepts explored in this thesis (mainly those of human and inanimate actors). ANT is an ideal toolkit of concepts as it provides a lens to explore practical case studies, and describe the actors that make up the observed phenomenon (Latour 1987; Law 2009). The core concept is that actors 'from the social, the technical, the conceptual and the textual are fitted together', and weave relations with one another, and that human and inanimate actors are considered equal entities (Law 1992). The status of *actor* attributed to human and inanimate indiscriminately is conceived through a semiotic lens: in fact, anything 'that acts or to which activity is granted by others' can be considered an actor, or *actant*, and it 'can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of an action' (Latour 1996, p. 373). While the chapter makes a terminological distinction between human and inanimate actors, it does not present them as being in opposition to one another, and the distinction is only used to highlight the heterogeneous nature of the context under study. As indicated in Chapter 2, the present research agrees with Latour's view that all actors are equal on a semiotic level, but analytically, the human and inanimate diverge on the basis of *intentionality*, which is the motivation behind human actors

(Pickering 1993). Asymmetrically, inanimate agency does not come into being spontaneously and intentionally, but it emerges through the dialectic relation of actors, and their problem/solution dynamics.

The observation during fieldwork revealed the presence of the following seven categories of actors:

- **Client actors:** define the clients that commission a subtitling project, usually identified as production companies. This term can refer to a collective entity or to single clients.
- **Company actor:** the company under study in this project; it mainly includes managerial, technical and administrative actors. Here it is mainly used to refer to a collective entity.
- **Language actors:** those actors who primarily perform linguistic operations on subtitling files, mainly comprised of the translators and proof-readers (which are outsourced and sub-contracted from either the Company pool or the distributor, as it will be explained further down).
- **Technical actors:** those actors who primarily perform technical operations related to the technical quality of a subtitling file. This includes the technical support and platform development team, which do not feature in the actual workflow but play a crucial part in the quality of technical processes.
- **Language / technical actors:** those actors who perform both linguistic and technical operations on subtitling files, such as template creators.
- **Administrative actors:** those actors who perform administrative and management tasks. This term includes client managers, project managers, localisation managers and quality managers. Localisation, quality and upper managers do not usually feature in the actual workflow but do play an important role in the decision-making phases which determined the observed processes.

- **Technology actors:** the pieces of technology which are instrumental in the observed workflow.

Table 4.2 below shows the same actors divided into categories, and described briefly in terms of their overall role in the workflow:

Human (collective / individual)		Inanimate (technological / environmental)		
Actor	Category	Actor	Category	
Client	Client actor	PFA (Working platform)	Technology actor	
Distributor		Mastering software		
Company	Company actor	Information communication technology (ICT) e-mail, Internal Messaging		
Distributor translator	Language actor	Competition	Environmental actor	
Freelance translator, sub-contracted		Piracy fears and data protection policies		
Freelance proof-reader, sub-contracted		Technological trends		
Quality controller	Language/Technical actor			
Template / script editors		Company actor		
PFA developers	Technical actor			
Mastering editors	Company actor			
Client managers	Administrative actor			
Project managers		Company actor		
Localisation managers				
Quality managers				
Upper management				

Table 4.2. Actors identified and categorised

Finally, the Actor-Network observed is influenced by environmental actors such as economic pressures and trends, competition, piracy fears and more generally data protection, and technological trends. These elements influence the associations of human and technology

actors (in this and other Actor-Networks) and in turn their existence depends on such associations – hence the mutuality – and for this reason they are to be considered in this analysis.

4.6 Main challenges of the subtitling production processes observed

The methods of ethnographic observation outlined above allowed me to concentrate on one aspect at a time, as new process steps emerged. Importantly, being in the field allowed me to explore the two key themes, quality and technology, in a careful and systematic manner, with every person I spoke to, and relate them to the position and role of the actor interviewed or observed (Buzelin 2005).

In terms of work-specific technology, all teams and freelancers in the subtitling workflow use the same cloud-based collaborative platform, which is pseudonymised as PFA (Platform for All). PFA is a cloud infrastructure that can host a high number of tasks, both administrative and technical, and is used by both in-house and freelance users, regardless of their location. The introduction of the platform in the company (prior to the internship) brought significant change, as it is to be expected. All procedures had to undergo substantial revision and rearrangement, and teams had to be expanded to accommodate the rearrangement of workflow. The three main reasons for implementing the platform were presented to me by Maxime, the localisation manager. First, the cloud-based nature would offer a secure environment for sharing content – proving that market trends and piracy fears play a strong role in influencing the Company's decisions. Second, online tools allow freelance actors to join the workflow regardless of their location, thus increasing the number of languages and therefore the Company's geographical reach in the market. Third, the software infrastructure would improve performance for all users, leading to greater productivity.

At the time of conducting fieldwork, PFA had been recently acquired and had been operational for over a year, and comprised a series of applications for handling audiovisual content for AVT purposes. Client managers and project coordinators share the same administrative interface, while language and technical actors will see a subtitling platform. Thus, the cloud environment is the same, but the interface and functions are very different for these two groups. The platform often goes through enhancements and upgrades in order to improve the efficiency of its processes; when new functions appear for a given team, these actors need to receive training, adapt or change their working procedures.

However, these technological changes rarely appear overnight, unlike changes brought by human actors. While a new PFA function would take some time to develop, test, improve and then deploy, client requests are expected to be dealt with immediately or in the shortest possible time. In virtue of the role they held in the network at the time of observation, clients held a strong influence over the company, which gave them the power of adding or changing the job specification at any point during a project. For instance, a client could require translation in four more languages while the translation process was well under way and all resources had been already allocated – while the Company was able and willing to accommodate additional needs and requests, such changes have the potential to disrupt the established process and the work of all involved actors, with possible consequences for the quality of the final product. As explored in Chapter 2, even the smallest translation networks can prove to be highly complex structures because of the dynamics at play amongst the actors (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007; Risku 2014). The observed workplace is far from being small, and the complexities due to the actors' interactions can surface at any point in time. At first glance, as seen above, the workflow seems strongly client- and technology-driven, revealing the influence of client and technology actors within the network observed.

4.6.1 Piracy fears and preliminary workflow

At the beginning of my fieldwork, Sylvia explained that the main challenges for localisation teams while completing a project relate to the client's provision of working materials. In fact, due to compressed production times, and in order to minimise content leaking – leading to potential piracy risks – the client will send the finalised video file as late as possible. According to her, these conditions constitute the most significant challenges in the subtitling production, since it means that the workflow needs to start on a set of files which are preliminary, implying that the source text provided is not final, and will then be updated one or more times during the project. As a consequence, each and every single step (administrative, technical, linguistic) is repeated every time that the client updates the file, until the final version is sent. When the final cut is ready, the Company receives it little time before the agreed deadline. Since all the many steps are multiplied by the number of file updates, this working modality is likely to present a number of issues which can impact the process quality (and possibly the quality of the product). The phenomenon highlights, once again, the direct link between the social and process dimensions from a quality perspective. Within the context observed, this complex situation for the Company reveals that the client-actors were – at the time of study – in a dominant position towards other actors, which allowed it to dictate terms on the provision of material for external services, regardless (or unaware) of the potential disruptions that this may cause. This imposition is seen as the result of negotiations which have been bilaterally sealed by a contract, which consolidates the association between the client-actor and the Company. The link between this process dynamic and product quality will be explored later, in section 4.7.

As mentioned above, all files are handled in PFA for safety reasons. It is worth noting that in the past few years, the transition to cloud-based collaborative platforms has been a common trend amongst AVT providers and post-production companies, as the technology enables the centralisation and standardisation of complex processes, and also allows everyone working on a project to access copyright-protected content which has been securely stored on cloud, without having to use e-mail attachments or third-party file transfer services that can increase piracy risks. Debating whether this method is 100% secure or not is beyond the scope of this study, however it is important to note that data safety appears to be one of the main reasons to adopt this type of platform – which more often than not imply considerable investments, a thorough restructuring of tasks, and a consequent need to train all users. It follows that, if a company introduces an element which is believed to minimise piracy fears, logically there should be no need to provide the final file at a very short turnaround time to prevent content leaking. However, this does not seem to be the case in the context observed, because the content is provided by the clients according to their own ways of operating during production. Indeed, the release of preliminary file versions and several updates ultimately accommodates the pace of production companies, which work with this modality themselves, and therefore send what they have at each stage of their production. This allows the localisation team to carve out more time for translation before the final version is sent, which is often very close to the release date.

In light of this, and given the size and reach of the Company, it could be argued that piracy fears and competitive pressure from the audiovisual industry are external⁹ actors which exert a strong degree of influence over the efforts of the human actors observed here. The co-

⁹ By internal and external, I refer to the position of actors in regard to the physical environment observed.

constructive lens also allows us to understand that actant forces such as piracy and competition are also furthered by the internal actors' choices. In other words, the Company and Client's relationship is strongly based on the Company's performance with regards to competitive advantage and anti-piracy measures, while at the same time creating processes and conditions (in the content delivery and use of platform) that shape their own – and likely other companies' – competitiveness and data treatment. The fact that the Company places high importance on these elements in order to win clients' favour could be a key factor in generating a situation whereby all actors involved in the actual operations find themselves with considerably more complex workflows, and shorter turnover time to plan, allocate and carry out the subtitling work. It is fundamental to stress that the efforts required to update a feature-length film in the SL once or more times, and then in all the TLs, can be highly challenging in corporate, high-volume subtitling processes like the one under study. Clearly, the preliminary workflow presented above seems to represent the biggest process challenge faced by professionals working in and for the Company at the time of observation, and while good processes do not constitute a straightforward guarantee of good quality in the product (Jääskeläinen 2016), it is reasonable to argue that unfavourable process conditions are more likely to be detrimental to the quality of the final subtitled product.

In order to continue with the exploration, it is now appropriate to move on to the workflow, and introduce the actors that contribute to it, their role and their relation to quality in the product.

4.6.2 The workflow

A workflow defines the chain of steps that are taken from the beginning to the end of a project. This section situates the localisation efforts as they happen in the workplace, reveals quality-

defining phenomena, and reflects on the amount of technical interaction involved. While the previous section listed all the actors identified in the study, the following provides a short description of the roles of all human actors within the workflow, before moving on to the workflow itself:

Actor name	Actor type	Role in multilingual subtitling workflow
Client	Client actor	Commissions the subtitling of content into a number of languages.
Distributor	Client actor	Represents the client's office in a given country. It is responsible for coordinating language-specific material together with the Company's client managers, and sometimes hires its own translators to carry out the work. It is also responsible for the approval of content distribution, and is the actor that receives the final product from the Company.
Translators	Language actors Outsourced	The language and translation professionals who perform the translation into their native language. They are sub-contracted and can be sourced from the Company's translators pool (freelance only), or from the Distributor's.
Proof-readers	Language actors Outsourced	The language and translation professionals who perform proof-reading on the translations. They are always sourced from the Company's translators pool, and therefore sub-contracted on a freelance basis.
Template editors	Language + technical actors Company actors	Employed by the company to create an English master template from the script, or from human transcription. They perform an initial quality control on the ST, carry out the time-cueing, and add explanations of idiomatic or culture-specific expressions in the ST.
QC controllers	Language + technical actors Company actors	Language professionals who are employed to perform textual and technical checks on the translated subtitling file. Their work is usually assigned by the Head of the QC department.

Client managers	Administrative actors Company actors	They negotiate the client's localisation needs and requirements according to the available resources. They agree distribution deadlines and budget, close the deal with the client and initiate the project. They will not contact the client again before delivery, unless issues arise that need the client's attention.
Project managers	Administrative actors Company actors	They receive project specifications from client managers and start allocating translators and proof-readers in the languages requested. They coordinate and monitor the project progression and communicate with all parties, especially to solve issues.
Mastering	Technical actors Company actors	They receive the final target files and create the DCP (digital cinema package) in the languages requested by the client. They communicate with client managers, who then arrange the delivery of content.

Table 4.3. Human actors in the workflow

All the human actors listed here work in conjunction with one another, plus a series of technology actors whose overall role is that of complementing the human actors' functions and responsibilities in the subtitling workflow. Communication technology actors, found in all modern working organisations, are telephone and e-mail systems, and a messaging system for internal communication (IM) that allows the Company employees to exchange textual messages in real time through their computer screen. The omnipresent technology actor in the workflow, PFA, has already been introduced, though the range of its functionalities will become clear in this section. While the former actors' aim is that of enabling communication, PFA not only passively supports human actors' work, but it provides the virtual capacity and environment to support the whole range of processes needed in a project's lifetime. It also actively performs a portion of the functions and therefore shares responsibilities, as in the

case of language and technical actors that work with PFA's automated functionalities (such as spelling and terminology checks), as it will be described below. As mentioned in section [4.4](#), the workflow in the Company is structured in such a way that different actors carry out specific tasks, which address different aspects of quality. The fragmentation of the subtitling workflow into several smaller tasks, known as micro-tasking, is due to the standardisation of processes in the translation and localisation industry, which allows the processing of high volumes of work in dozens of languages around the world. What follows is a brief description of the workflow processes focused on the actors' roles, which will serve as a basis to look at the different aspects of product quality being addressed.

When clients require the Company's services to subtitle a feature film for a number of countries and locales, their first and only point of contact is its client management team, a global team which in the UK is led by Chris. While defining the service provision, they negotiate two elements that affect the quality of a translation, which are deadlines and budget (Kuo 2015; Gambier 2008). Chris explained that the clients' distribution date is rarely negotiable, due to set release dates and distribution requirements, and once an agreement is finalised, the team creates the work order and calculates the time needed by the production teams to carry out the work. In this phase, PFA supports the human actors' processes by providing secure storage of client-provided material such as the ST and reference materials, and contain all the basic information that other human actors need to know to carry out their work – the number of languages, the type of service requested, and the status of the video file, whether it is in preliminary stage or the final cut. At any point, the client management team can access PFA to track, manage, and/or modify the project. The highly crucial phases of decision-making and negotiation are carried out by human actors, via communication technology actors; technology enables communication and, in the case of PFA, supports the management of

content. Chris specified that the client managers' responsibility, in juggling the client's requirements and expectations together with the other actors, is twofold. Firstly, it consists in ensuring that language and technical actors are aware of the client's instructions and deadlines and respect them. Secondly, it involves managing and sharing source and reference files so that the client's textual, technical and terminological specifications are followed (Gouadec 2007, p. 60). In light of this, it can be said that out of the four product quality aspects identified, client managers' processes are aimed at addressing **client requirements** and **textual quality**.

The work request is then picked up by the project management team, and the scripts and template-editing teams. At the time of observation, while the former team was based in the UK, the latter two teams were located in a different country, with the exception of the team supervisors who were mostly working from the UK. Tyler, a senior editor, explained that the scripts team is in charge of producing the dialogue list, unless already provided by the client, while the template team creates the master template starting from the dialogue list, and following client specifications. Both dialogue lists and templates go through at least two rounds of QC before being finalised. The English template contains a list of subtitles, each with its own in-time and out-time; in addition, abbreviations, slang or culture-specific expressions are explained in the annotation section just below the subtitle. Excluding communication technology, PFA has an enabling role in the time-cueing phase, and an active one in running the automated textual and technical checks as part of the quality control phase. As Tyler pointed out, the scripting team is in charge of ensuring the **textual quality** of the source text (through rounds of spellchecks) which is an important step when aiming for high product quality (Gouadec 2007, p. 66). Through a close interaction with PFA, template editors ensure that subtitles are time-cued (**technical quality**), segmented (**textual quality**), and annotated

(stylistic quality) with ancillary information, terminology, or explanations, intended to help the language actors' work (Gouadec 2007, p. 72). These aspects are dependent on client-provided material, and follow both clients' requirements and Company guidelines.

In the meantime, the project management team starts to recruit all of the translators and proof-readers needed to translate and review subtitles in all the requested languages from within their pool, unless the client has chosen specific translators for the project. Kevin, the team leader, explained that their role is instrumental in supporting the client managers' functions by coordinating the language actors' efforts. In fact, they are responsible for the communication with translators and proof-readers in order to ensure that **project specifications and deadlines** are respected. Communication is enabled by the dedicated technology, while PFA supports the monitoring of translators and proof-readers tasks. Translation, proofreading and revision are assigned according to the freelancers' language pair, availability for the job, and level of quality. These phases happen outside of company premises since all translators and proof-readers are outsourced and sub-contracted on a freelance basis and therefore, they usually work remotely¹⁰.

In terms of procedures, what follows is a description of their processes as recalled by Kevin, and as gathered by the observation of the PFA subtitling interface. Once a translator accepts the job, they¹¹ will receive an e-mail confirmation by the project manager, and also an automated e-mail from the PFA system with a link to access the project files. PFA provides translators with a standard subtitling interface: on the left side there is the video window

¹⁰ It is worth noting that translators' and proof-readers' first-hand processes and perspectives are not addressed in this chapter, since it has not been possible to establish contact with them due to company policy related to sensitive data safety (as per the European General Data Protection Regulation), though the next chapter will shed light on the freelance subtitlers' working experience based on the second, separate study conducted for this thesis.

¹¹ All actors that are mentioned generically are referred to with the plural pronoun "they", even if the passage refers to one person only, as gender-specificity is not considered in the present study.

which can be scaled up or down, and on the right side there are two columns, one with the English template, and one with empty rows, where the subtitles are to be typed in the required language. A restriction has been added to PFA which does not allow them to modify the timecode, although there can be exceptions to this rule, and in any case, translators can express their time-cueing choices in the annotation box, should they differ from the template editors' choices. When the translation is complete, translators prompt a command and PFA runs a series of automated checks to verify spelling, punctuation and syntax, and only then can the file be submitted. A freelance proof-reader will then review the file, correcting linguistic or stylistic errors and offer alternatives in the annotation section below each subtitle. In correcting files, proof-readers also insert the error category for each and every error they encounter, in the dedicated drop-down option in PFA. This task then generates an error report linked to the project file, and to the translators' and proof-readers' profile, thus providing data to monitor the actors' performance.

During revision, the translator revises the proof-reader's comments and acts upon them, either rejecting or accepting them. As, it has not been possible to gather insights on translators' and proof-readers' strategies, working processes, motivations and views of quality, these considerations are based exclusively on data regarding the type of work that is requested of them by the Company. In terms of technology actors, PFA supports the translation and proof-reading task in synch with the video, and has also an active role in performing the automated checks. It seems that the entirety of the work is carried out solely on the platform, as there should be no possibility to export text from PFA and onto another tools. What appears is that translators and proof-readers are both in charge of **textual** and **stylistic** operations and, as in any commercial service provision, they also follow instructions

in order to respect the **client's specifications** (i.e. the deadline, possible rate negotiations, and the use of client-specific terminology or other textual and/or stylistic instructions).

Quality Control generally takes place after the subtitle files have been translated, proofread and revised. Once in PFA, the QC team member (in short, the controller) sees the same subtitling interface as that of the translator and proof-reader, and the main difference is in the possibility of accessing different functionalities, such as time-cueing. A short digression on the difference between quality control efforts and proof-reading is needed here: in general, QC is a more technical task, aimed at spotting inconsistencies and breaks in the pattern, while proof-reading looks at the linguistic aspect of the transfer. In fact, it is not strictly necessary for quality controllers to speak or read the target language they're working on, and therefore they usually do not inquire about linguistic issues. Controllers identify language patterns, but they can only point out inconsistencies, and are not in a position to signal linguistic or syntactic modifications – which is the proof-readers' task. They are two intertwined and complementary tasks. It is worth reflecting briefly on the quality control steps as proposed by Gouadec (2007, p. 76), where he lists five 'basic checks and controls' that a translator should always carry out after completing the job:

- a. *Material quality check* (everything has been translated, and it follows the specifications)
- b. *Language, style and register quality check* (spelling, grammar, syntax, terminology, idioms are correct, consistent and compliant to specifications)
- c. *Technical-factual-semantic quality check* (all factual information and data are correct and compliant to specifications)
- d. *Transfer quality checks* (all relevant elements have been transferred and appropriately localised)

- e. *Homogeneity and consistency checks* (style, terminology, idioms and register are consistent)

Those checks that are specific to the subtitling medium (such as checking the technical layout or synchronisation of subtitles) can be included in *a, Material quality check*. These are performed automatically in PFA and consist in a series of checks that are mandatory for all language actors. The data gathered reveals that, out of these five checks, quality controllers mostly perform *a, c, and e*, and proof-readers carry out mainly *b, and d*. In fact, QC efforts consist in searching for a series of elements in those three categories, and verify that they adhere to Company-specific, client-specific, and language-specific guidelines, and to the provided reference material. While the search function is enabled by PFA, other sub-tasks are actively performed by PFA, which (when prompted) runs automated check functions to verify spelling, numbers, layout, punctuation. In sum, quality controllers and PFA are both actors that are accountable for **textual consistency** and correctness, **technical quality** of the subtitling file, and **adherence to client specifications**.

Subsequently, the translator revises the controller's comments and either rejects or accepts them; this work is not paid extra, but is included in their agreed rate. The reason behind this second revision was presented to me as such: on the one hand, translators are regarded as the most competent actors in that they are native speakers of the TL, saw the film in its entirety and translated it and, because of this, should be held accountable for their choices and take relevant action; in addition, ultimately the translators are usually credited and so need to agree with all linguistic comments to their text. On the other hand, the controllers are clearly not qualified to make linguistic changes since they might not speak nor read the target language. This exemplifies the fragmentation of actors' tasks and

responsibilities according to their ability to provide a certain aspect of quality, as demonstrated in this section.

If requested, the file goes through the distributors' approval: distributors are the clients' local agencies, responsible for releasing content in a given country. They have been categorised as client-actor in view of their close association with the client, who either owns such agencies, or sold them the distribution rights.¹² When such approval is needed, the project manager communicates with the approver in the distributors' office. Approvers can provide assistance in case of terminology mismatch, translators' doubts, and perform a read-through (or a watch-through) of the whole file. When the project is complete, the localised content is delivered directly to them. Again, due to data confidentiality it has not been possible to gather first-hand information from distributors, and therefore the following considerations come from indirect knowledge provided by project and client managers, and personal hypothesis. It appeared to me that distributors' efforts were focused primarily on stylistic elements, however it is not known how consistent the distributors' approval is across various countries, and the rest of information gathered on these actors points to conflicting statements.

After approval, and only after the final cut has been received, the QC team will perform a final check. The controller, who may be a different person than the one who did the first check, follows the same QC processes as described earlier, together with PFA. Once all checks are performed, assets may be delivered to the distributor or other 3rd party, as well as the Company's internal mastering team, which works with an array of technical tools specific to

¹² Some distributors can also resemble Language Service Providers (with the added function of distribution, of course), as most of them have their own pool of translators, which the client can choose over the Company's pool of translators.

theatrical post-production (the details of which fall outside the scope of this study) in order to perform the final technical steps and prepare the file for final delivery.

4.6.3 The relations between actors and quality

This summary of the workflow allows us to draw some conclusions on the actors' role in multilingual subtitling production, and on the aspects of product quality they address in their practices. The data visualisation provided below is indicative of my fieldwork observation, which is limited in space and time and did not allow audio, video nor screen recording of data. The methodology for the data visualisation and the following analysis will be briefly summarised here. Having collected 20,000 words of qualitative data from observation, shadowing, and interview notes, I coded them thematically in NVivo, following analytical coding principles for qualitative data, as specified in Chapter 3. I then mapped out defining quality aspects in subtitling (section 4.3), and at the same time charted all the actors and steps in the workflow (section [4.5](#)). I then returned to the data and extracted all the instances that had been coded under *actors' process* or *procedures*, and looking at the roles performed by all actors at work, I isolated the main five sub-tasks performed in each phase of the workflow.

At that point, I had a clearer picture of all the processes, the aspects of quality they aimed at, and what happened during these processes, at least in the time that I was there. I then visually represented actors, tasks and quality aims, and drew links between actors and quality type. This allowed me to maintain a constant and solid focus on the aspects of quality that each actor contributes to, and in which part of the workflow. I analysed the data again, focusing on the actors' comments and experience of their own procedures as recalled by them in interviews. During the manual coding, elements emerged that allowed me to categorise processes according to their perceived (and experienced) quality (or lack thereof). This

analytical process highlighted how quality is constructed heterogeneously and is also fragmented in that so many actors contribute to one or more aspect of quality in the product dimension.

Sub-tasks for each step were analysed further, and this allowed to identify what role was played by human and by technology actors (mainly PFA and communication technology) and what type of interaction was there between human and inanimate actors. Communication technology, for instance, has a passive function – in the sense that email or telephone represent ways to convey messages, but the content of the message is generated by human actors. In the case of the platform, technology could be said to have an active role for two reasons. First, the platform would carry out a considerable amount tasks through automated functions, after being prompted by a human actor, and second, the platform constitutes the only environment in which these processes can be practically executed. These considerations suggest that, as workflows and workplace evolve, AVT and Translation Studies could greatly benefit from opening its explorations towards Science and Technology Studies, and Organizational Studies in order to consider the dynamics behind technology choices, and make sense of relations and dynamics in professional practices (Olohan 2017a).

The following tables aim to visualise the quality-related aspects presented in the above description. Upon considering the technology actors' roles, Table 4.4 links this data with areas of quality, showing an indicative proportion between human and technology actors, according to the active/passive role that technology actors had in a given task. Each process step has been broken down to five sub-tasks, and after analysing them, a point between 0.5 and 1 has been assigned to each sub-step. If the human actor had a predominant role, 1 point would be assigned to human; if the technology actor had an active role, 1 point would be assigned to inanimate; lastly, if the technology actor had a passive but instrumental role, the point would

be split between the two. The weight of technology actors in this scheme is primarily found when looking at technical quality, though technology actors play a relevant role also in achieving textual and stylistic quality, for instance through automated spell-check tasks, and semi-automated functions that enhance the use of client terminology.

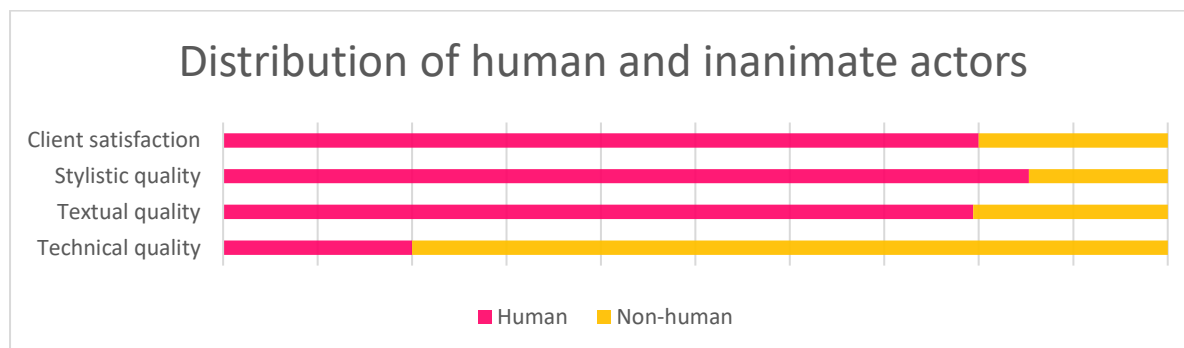


Table 4.4. Human and inanimate actors

By looking at the processes described, and at the aspects of quality they are associated with, the workflow can also be schematised as follows. For each step, the relevant areas of quality are highlighted:



Table 4.5. Processes and aspects of quality

The chart represents clearly how the different aspects of quality are required within different processes. The table shows that the fulfilment of client satisfaction is clearly a priority for administrative actors, and in general it appears that this responsibility falls on Company actors rather than the outsourced actors. On this note, the following table allows us to see at a glance the extent to which textual and stylistic quality are largely outsourced, that is to say assigned to freelance actors outside of the Company, while technical quality and client requirements are largely taken care of in-house.

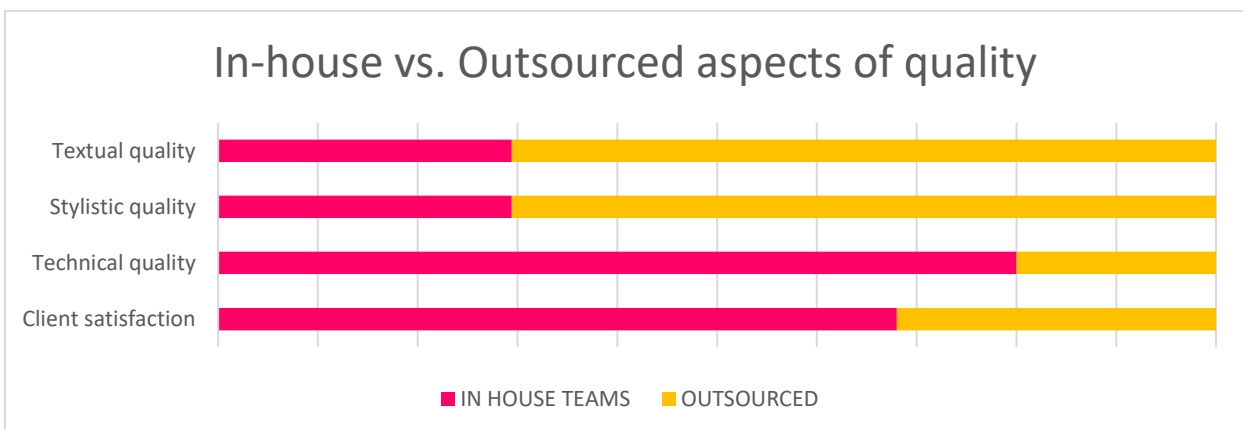


Table 4.6. In-house vs. Outsourced quality

Below, the table shows the indicative proportion in which the four aspects of product quality are addressed by the groups of actors in the workflow. This reinforces the notion that quality is a collaborative effort, and it becomes clear how many actors interact within each single aspect of subtitling quality.

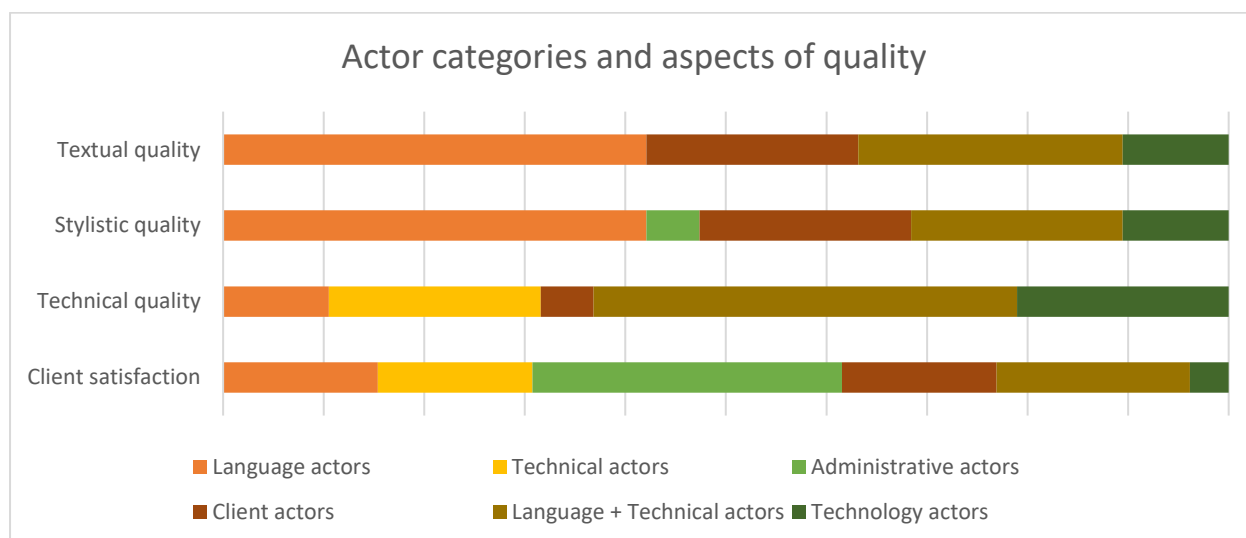


Table 4.7. Actor categories and aspects of quality

Data visualisation helps to shed light on the fact that not only is quality made up of different aspects (Abdallah 2007; O'Brien 2012a; Jääskeläinen 2016; Födich 2017; Mellinger 2018), and the result of a collaborative effort amongst actors (Risku 2006; Gabr 2007; Gambier 2008). This can also point to the fact that quality can be conceived differently from one actor to another (Hansen 2008; Drugan 2013) and, from this viewpoint, it appears that the Company's internal focus is on achieving technical quality and adhering to client specifications (functional quality). Since the freelancers' performance is also monitored and measured through error reports (as discussed in 4.6.2), their contributions to textual and stylistic quality are also part of the Company's focus. The coexistence of different ideas of quality can problematise the identification of a common quality objective, generating issues especially

when a great number of actors collaborate in a large production network (Abdallah 2010, p. 22), such as the context observed.

As will be presented in the following section, the interplay between actors and the ways in which they interact while achieving (a certain aspect of) product quality can help us to draw certain conclusions about their processes. Looking at the interaction of different actors – each with different needs, priorities, and possibly views of quality – while they work towards *product* quality allows us to step into the *process* dimension of quality. What these actors do in their interactions and how they do it determines the quality of their own working processes which, as seen before, has an impact on the final quality delivered.

4.7 Defining process quality

Conducting fieldwork over a period of three months allowed me to observe the complex and highly populated environment that is the multilingual production of subtitles, as well as the processes involving a multitude of actors. While the previous section situated and described the subtitling workflow, connecting the various actors and their actions to a certain aspect of product quality, the present section will look at the intrinsic quality of the process dimension. The workflow described above is made up of a number of sub-tasks. What follows is an analysis of three crucial processes, and it is worth noticing that, although considerable time has been spent observing, shadowing, and talking to actors, examining every single process of every available Company actor would have required considerably longer, and as a result the section does not aim to evaluate the quality of *all* working processes of *all* the actors observed in the Company. The actors' relations in the workflow can be visually represented as in Figure 4.1 below:

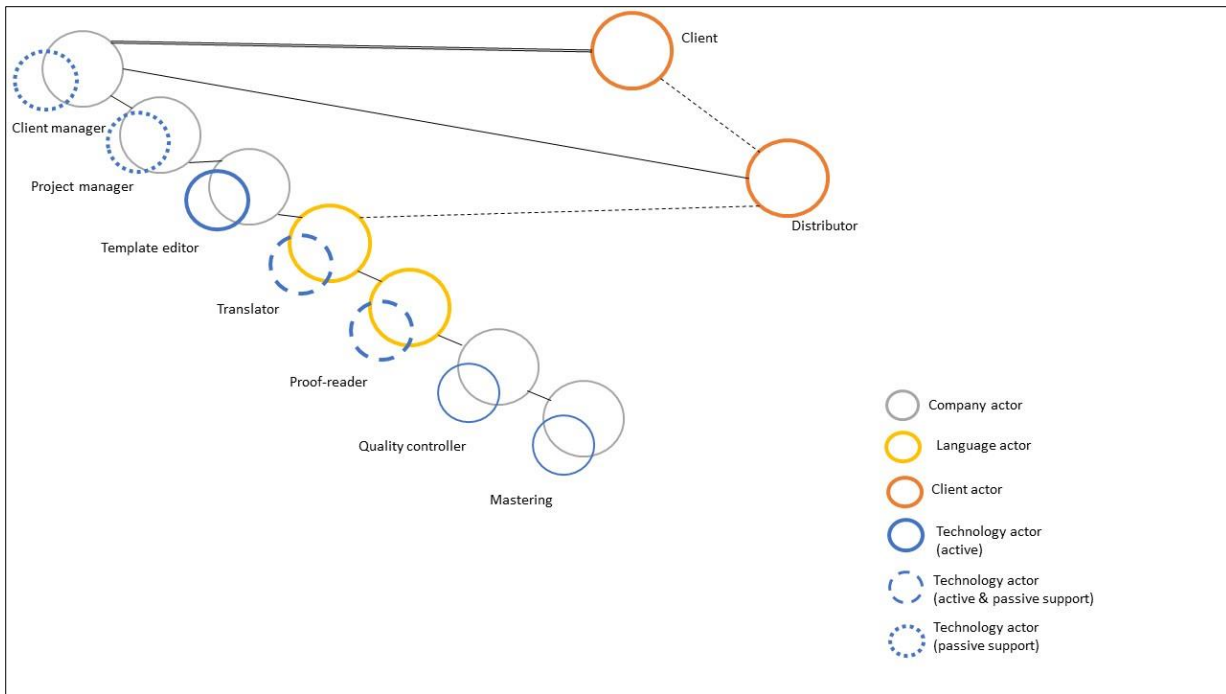


Figure 4.1. The actors' relations in the workflow

In the figure above, all actors are symbolised by a circle, and the main relations plotted out. The dotted line indicates a working relation that exists independently of the context explored here, which is the one between the client and the distributor, and between distributors and (some) translators. These relations will not be taken into consideration at this stage, primarily because the two client-actors are outside the Company and therefore could not be observed, and the reason they are represented here is for fairness of information, and for their relevance in the overall workflow. A straight line indicates a working relation which is invariably established. There is one connecting all actors in the workflow and one between the distributor and the client management team, while the bold line between the client and the client management team indicates a specific and exclusive working relation. The technology actors, represented in blue, are juxtaposed with the other actors to indicate their interactive relation. What is more difficult to represent visually is the complex, non-linear network of relations by which they interlace with one another, and the creases and ripples that these

relations cause, which generate the conditions for favourable or unfavourable working processes.

A short digression is needed here on the notion of favourable process quality versus unfavourable process quality. As with product quality, there is no single definition of process quality and, as seen in Chapter 2 and in section 4.4, there is scarce literature regarding quality in practical and environmental translation processes – as opposed to translator’s cognitive processes. A “good” process can be said to be a successful and efficient one, in that it leads to good product quality (Jääskeläinen 2016, p. 94) although, this statement is by no means conclusive. Abdallah (2010, p. 20) maintains that in translation networks, good translation processes need adequate source and reference material, and as much information and knowledge about the product as possible. Specifically, when dealing with large working environments, Abdallah (*ibid.*, p. 23) describes how processes can be impaired by lack of direct and clear communication between translators and client, though more forcefully by lack of alignment in the actors’ views of quality. A similar aspect is highlighted by Risku (2006, p. 18), who offers valuable insight in her ethnographic study on technical translation processes. She argues that quality of source and reference material is paramount for good process quality, and the use of technology is fundamental to handle large volumes and maintain terminological consistency (*ibid.*, p. 21). In her view, intermediaries (i.e. translation companies) play a fundamental role in ensuring good communication and flow of knowledge between the actors, with the aim of facilitating their efforts in the attempt to meet the tight project deadlines (*ibid.*, p. 20-21). The issue of communication is central also in Risku et al. (2013, p. 32), where the authors add that adequate communication technology can support the information flow and facilitate centralised monitoring of practices and related quality. Often discussed within a lens of improved processes, technology has been the subject of a great portion of process-based

literature. Cadwell et al. 2018, echoing Moorkens and O'Brien (2017) and Koskinen and Ruokonen (2017), point to the fact that, for improvement to take place and benefits to be reaped, the relation between human and computer must not be imposed unilaterally, and the technology has to be perceived as useful, and easy to use.

Gouadec (2007) provides what is possibly the most detailed contribution in terms of defining quality within the translation process, providing prescriptive information as to what should be done at different stages. His model is very comprehensive yet generic: in order to list all the potential procedures that translators and other actors perform while working on a project, a degree of generalisation is needed. His considerations on the procedures to adopt in order to achieve high quality in the translated product have been integrated into the previous sub-section (4.6.2) relating to the workflow description. Nevertheless, it would seem hard to adopt his model as the basis for 'best practice' in the observed Company, and possibly in many real-life practices in professional translation, for a number of reasons. First, Gouadec (2007, p. 58) considers only relations between the translator and work provider, declaring that these two terms can actually identify a number of actors, and so *work provider* can double up as project manager for instance, and what applies to the *translator* can also apply to the reviser. However, it does not account for the presence of numerous actors between translators and client, nor for the division of labour encountered. As seen in 4.6.2, the management and quality control of source and reference material is split between client managers and script/template editors, and the QC phase is carried out by both language actors and QC actors, in different proportions, and in different steps.

Second, Gouadec's (ibid.) remarks on translation practices provide an excellent basis for the translator looking to know more about what could be required in professional contexts, and how to address it best. His considerations are first-rate from a purely translational point

of view, however they all refer to a simplified scenario (that does not take into account the interaction between multinational industry players, digital technology and multimedia content) or to a best-case scenario, one in which the translator has the professional freedom to provide quotes for time and budget. In his analysis of procedures, the possibility of working under constraints or time limitations imposed by the client or the intermediary company/provider is never mentioned. Third, although in 2007 translation could already be considered a highly computerised activity, there is very little mention of informatic systems, and no guidance nor suggestions about the common possibility of technical issues – which possibly indicates how much more predominant such systems have become in the last decade. Fourth, though this reason applies only to the present chapter, Gouadec focuses greatly on the processes of the translators, which could not be observed in this study.

In light of these perspectives, process quality has been explored and evaluated by looking at how the actors' interactions, associations, behaviours, and intentions (in the case of humans), shape their efforts, processes, and those of others around them. What follows is a model of five indicators which, according to the above literature and the observation and analysis of workflow and workplace, directly influence process quality and can be therefore used for purposes of process analysis or evaluation:

1. Workflow and communication

- i. Structure of workflow (smooth / cumbersome)
- ii. Communication (direct / restricted / mediated / symmetrical)

2. Performance of technical actors and quality of interaction

- i. Availability and quality of tools
- ii. Availability and quality of human actors' training + type of use (restricted / unrestricted)
- iii. Availability and quality of technical support

3. Time to complete a task

4. Quality of working material

- i. Availability and quality of source and reference material (including modes and times of delivery)
- ii. Availability and quality of working materials (instructions, guidelines, etc.)

5. Working conditions and affective factors

- i. Presence of stress or frustration linked to working conditions (such as deadlines, rates, human/technology interaction, communication, negotiations)

The first four elements relate to more or less observable process dimensions (Jääskeläinen 2016), while the last parameter relates to the social dimension – which demonstrates once more the connected and interdimensional nature of quality. This section aims to illustrate process quality in three key workflow phases, as they emerged during data collection, and as they have been brought up by the participants in the study.

The first process to be analysed is the work request, because the decisions taken in this phase will affect all the other actors that participate in the workflow, and the provision and management of source and reference material are of paramount importance for the translation process. The second is the template creation, which acquires particular importance since template files are a key element in the subtitling workflow observed, and their quality affects the translation product quality. The third and last step to be examined is the QC phase, because the QC team's processes are directly concerned with product quality.

4.7.1 The work request

The work request is the first macro process involved in the workflow, where the terms are negotiated, and the project is initiated by the client management (CM) team. As mentioned before, the team's responsibility is that of mediating clients' requirements and company's capabilities, and setting up the subtitling chain according to the negotiated terms. Looking at

the actors' associations, CM constitutes the only point of contact with the client in the whole workflow, and since the CM's processes involve defining and communicating a number of factors that are at the basis of the subtitling provision, such as budget and the clients' quality requirements, certain decisions taken at this node will impact the quality of all other human actors' processes. Being the only point of contact with the client implies that there is no direct communication between client and any other team/actor, including translators. In fact, in the context observed, the only human actors communicating with translators and proof-readers are the project managers, which constitutes an extra degree of separation between client and translator. The lack of direct access between these two actors is debated in the literature: Drugan (2013, p. 30) finds that translators see it as negative, and Abdallah (2010, p. 20; 2011, p. 181) argues that the lack of direct contact impairs the information flow and, therefore, the translation quality. Since translators cannot access information directly, Födisch (2017, p. 56) finds that this adds time and work to the project managers' schedule, who need to mediate the translators' queries. Indeed, in the observed environment, the management of translators' and proof-readers' queries can take multiple steps and time and, therefore, the exclusivity of such relation could impair the workflow efficiency. However, this can also be seen as positive: in fact, since different actors may have different views of quality, the CM needs to rely on trust-building communication to identify the clients' knowledge of subtitling services and idea of quality, and help them understand the type of service they need (Olohan and Davitti 2017, p. 398). In this light, the exclusive relation between clients and CM does not constitute a negative element per se, as it allows the CM to engage with the client in a personalised way. Indeed, in our interview, Chris returned more than once on the importance of keeping up frequent communication with the client, to make sure the client's mind is at peace with the Company's service provision. If such relationship were symmetrical, in light of this successful communication, the CM should be able to request all necessary materials and propose the

best working conditions for all actors involved (Risku et al. 2013, p. 34). However, as stated more than once by Chris and her team, the provision of materials and the establishment of other conditions are rarely negotiable and depend completely on clients' decisions. This, in my view, constitutes the most problematic issue observed here. Figure 4.2 below focuses on the CM actor, and the arrows along the relationship lines indicate how process quality is impaired (red, downward arrow) or improved (green, upward arrow) in the interaction with client, technology, and other actors.

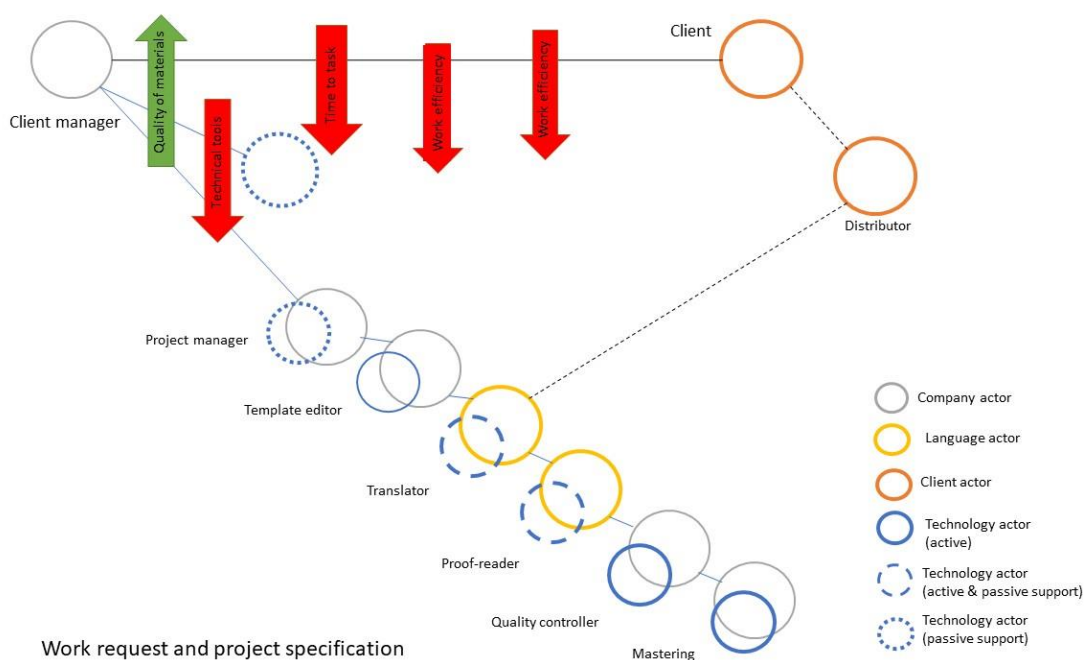


Figure 4.2. The work request phase

In fact, in the case of client management, most issues discussed here impact not only their own processes, but those of all other actors in the workflow as well. The only exception would be the distributor, who is not affected by decisions taken by CM (as they were previously taken in agreement).

Födisch (2017, p. 166) elaborates on the strategies used by translation project managers to maintain quality when working with limited amounts of time – thus pointing to the fact that time to task is an important factor in overall translation quality, crucial to all actors

involved. Indeed, client managers calculate the time needed by the production teams to carry out the work, but such calculations are based on company-provided reference times which do not always reflect actual production and communication times, and do not necessarily account for unforeseen delays such as system malfunctions, difficulty in finding translators for unusual language combinations, or delays caused by the distributors in the approval phase – all of them elements which constitute potential factors for loss of quality (Abdallah 2010).

In the context observed, Chris mentioned that deadlines are rarely negotiable, and their biggest challenge was to make everything happen within the established turn-around times. Thus, it can be said that **short time to task** constitutes a negative process quality feature here. In order to improve this, the CM use 'elements of understanding, knowing and meaning in order to organise the production process based on fast turnaround times' (Födisch 2017, p. 170) and technically rely on PFA to speed up their process. However, at the time of interview, Chris noted that PFA allowed them to perform a number of different tasks within the same platform in a more seamless way than in the past, but the handling of files and reels took longer, and that, consequently, all their operational times had shifted slightly, thus worsening time pressures. This is an individual experience, but it can be argued that in those cases in which the interaction between CM and PFA is slow and problematic, this constitutes a negative process element that can be categorised under the **quality of technical tools**.

At the time of observation in late 2018, PFA represented a crucial actor which contributed to defining the Company's competitive advantage in the eyes of clients. In fact, it had become strategic in client negotiation on the basis that it standardised and simplified (thereby potentially accelerating) the Company's operations, and provided a secure environment for the clients' contents. As discussed earlier in section 4.6.1, ensuring safety of content to prevent piracy is one of clients' major priorities, and the use of PFA contributes to

the Company's response to this need. However, such priorities result in conditions that are unilaterally imposed on all actors through the clients' interaction with CM, namely the provision of preliminary files and the blurring of the source video file. These conditions, which are referred to here as *preliminary workflow*, have already been described as the biggest challenges in the localisation department, as they can potentially result in cumbersome interactions between actors, thus leading to **poor work efficiency**. As for the video file provided by the client, it can be blurred, darkened and / or watermarked to prevent any misuse of content. According to second-hand translators' comments, as reported to me by QC team members, in some cases the video was watermarked so heavily that it was not possible for the translator to figure out character's gender, or shot changes. Given that the video file is the ST in question, the watermarking practice brought about the CM/client relation (influenced by external actors such as piracy fears) is able to generate a negative condition for **source text quality**.

A crucial part of the CM's processes consists in managing the reference material, whose availability and quality depends completely on the client-actors. Client managers know that the provision and quality of reference material is an important factor in translation quality (Risku 2006; Gouadec 2007; Abdallah 2010; Kuo 2015; Jääskeläinen 2016; Födisch 2017) since it can offer information crucial to interpreting the audiovisual text, such as guidance on terminology, and indications on how to render a certain character's register. However, the provision of such materials is inconsistent; each client will provide material in their own layout, and refer to it with their own terminology – a tendency that could be due to the lack of industry standards in this regard (Abdallah 2010, p. 20). Chris mentioned that the reference files are usually updated together with the project files, until the final cut, which means that every piece of reference material is sent multiple times, at each update and for each language. This

could possibly cause difficulties or hiccups over a missed update or a duplicate file, and she found a system to easily keep track of all reference material through a dedicated spreadsheet. Her individual initiative signals the need to find solutions to rationalise complex sets of files, and greatly improved the **efficiency** – and therefore quality – of her team’s processes, in order to avoid potential issues at later stages.

To sum up, the interactions between the client management-actor, the client, and PFA, create a series of conditions that can negatively influence the working processes of client managers and many other actors. At the same time, some individual or team working processes are improved as the result of personal initiatives, which reflect a solution-oriented mentality. The grid in Table 4.9 serves as a quick visualisation of the analysis provided above, and a similar table will be found at the end of the critical analysis of each process. This type of grid also provides a model for gathering information on real-life processes, so that they can be analysed or assessed if need be. The grid allows us to see all internal and external actors in relation to the phenomenon observed (process and its features). This can help to conceive quality as multi-dimensional, as it offers a bigger picture that helps to contextualise translation processes, and come to conclusions with regard to their quality. If information on the final product is available, this grid could also be customised to include information about the result that certain processes had on the translators’ work, and on the quality of the product.

The analysis of client managers’ procedures, as discussed above, can be schematised as follows:

Actors (internal)		Actors (external forces)	Process characterised by	Process quality
Client management (CM)	Client	Time-to-market	Little to no negotiation of deadlines	Time to task – negative

	Client	Piracy fears and production times	Imposition of preliminary workflow	Work efficiency – negative
	Client	Piracy fears	Imposition of blurred video	Quality of working material – negative
Client management (CM)	PFA	/	Frequent system slowness ¹³	Quality of technical tools – negative
Client management (CM)'s filing system		/	Management of reference materials	Work efficiency – positive

Table 4.9. Work request – process quality

4.7.2 The template creation

At the time of observation, the master templates originated from the scripting and template editors (STE), which followed different procedures according to the material provided by the client. For instance, if the client had provided a script, editors would segment, time-cue and compile the characters' utterances into a time-cued dialogue list. When a script was not available, a human transcription of the original dialogue would precede the creation of the dialogue list. Either way, the dialogue list went through at least one round of quality control. Next, template editors create the master template file, always in English. Editors perform reduction strategies and adjust time-cues, and the template goes through at least one more quality control by a senior team member before it is made available in PFA. The steps described above acquire particular importance because, as part of their processes,

¹³ It is necessary to point out that, while the other conditions included in this table are more or less recurrent in the Company's procedures, the slowness of the system is a phenomenon which is both relative and limited in time. Indeed, often the respondents' personal perceptions were based on how their previous tools worked, to which they frequently compared PFA. In addition, it is also necessary to consider the users' learning curve. Because of these factors, had PFA been developed earlier and/or had the employees become fully familiar with it at the time of study, the findings would have been considerably different. Furthermore, it is also worth mentioning that PFA and previous technical tools are actually barely comparable, as PFA constitutes a whole virtual working environment for management and production, while other previously used tools were designed and employed solely as production tools, and their functions and instrumentality in the context of the workplace were very different from the platform model.

script/template editors perform a crucial action, that is, the **quality control on the source and reference materials** provided by the client (Gouadec 2007, p. 66), thus improving process quality for the language and QC actors, and overall product quality.

STE interact primarily with client managers and technology actors (communication technology, PFA), although they also communicate with Maxime, the localisation manager (to which they report), project managers and the QC team if the need arises. It is worth noticing here that the script and template team is not located in one office, but editors collaborate across the UK and the other Company offices abroad, and therefore they need to rely strongly on technology for their communication. Figure 4.3 below focuses on the STE actor, and the arrows along the relationship lines indicate where and how process quality is impaired (red arrow) or improved (green arrow) in the interaction with other actors:

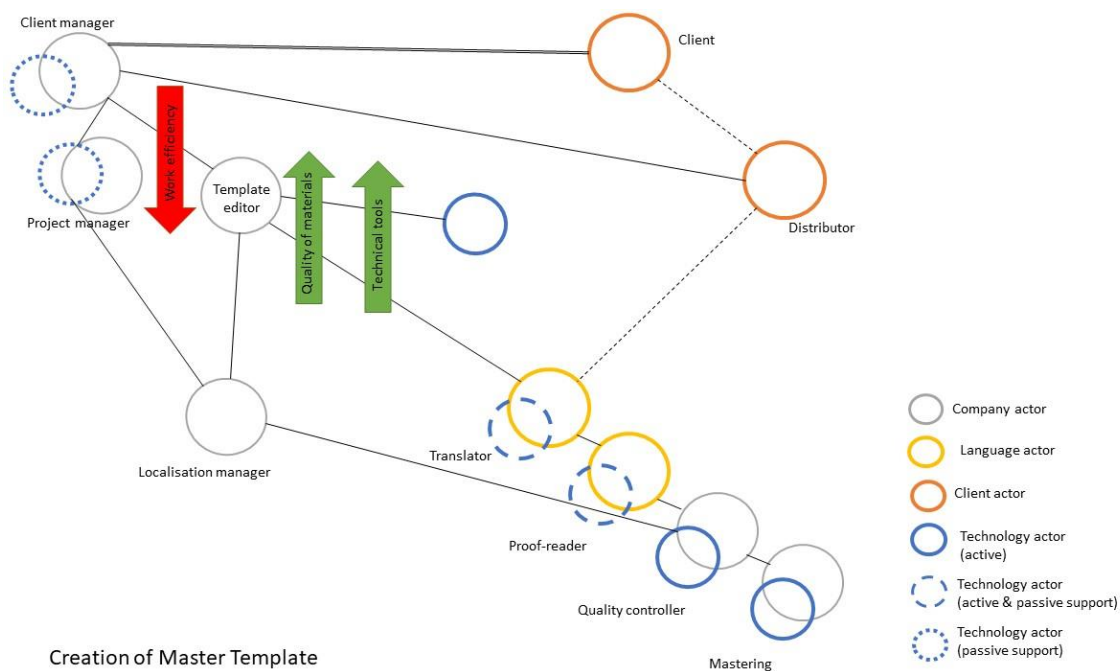


Figure 4.3 The creation of the master template

Time constraints represent a considerable obstacle for internal process quality (Risku 2006) and, due to temporal restrictions, projects are often split amongst STE actors. Tyler, a

senior editor, explained that on the one hand, splitting tasks allows them to meet the deadlines but, on the other hand, it may result in textual consistency issues. The fact that actors have to arrange collaboration across different time zones might complicate or slow down communication and, thus, coordination. Because of this, senior managers sometimes had to implement further QC steps in order to avoid potential errors in the template. Maxime, the localisation manager, mentioned that setting up multiple QC steps is only done when necessary, as it involves a possibly cumbersome process because of the many back and forth iterations, and thus more time. In this light, it can be argued that time pressures imposed by the client have repercussions in the relation between client managers and STE actors, and could result in issues of **work efficiency**. The analysis of the script and template editors' procedures discussed in this section can be summarised as follows:

Actors (internal)		Actors (external forces)	Process characterised by	Process quality
Script and Template editors	Client management	/	Quality control of source and reference material	Quality of working material - positive
Script and Template editors	PFA	/	Transcription, template creation	Quality of technical tools – positive
Script and Template editors	PFA	Time-to-market	Time constraints > splitting tasks > arranging efforts across time zones / performing multiple QC	Work efficiency – negative

Table 4.10. Template creation – process quality

The interactions between STE and technology actors suggest an overall **positive** process quality: in fact, apart from the commonly experienced slowness when working in PFA at the time of observation (see section 4.7.1), editors have not expressed particular frustration with carrying out their daily tasks, to my knowledge. However, it was surprising to discover that the transcription is done traditionally, i.e. through a human transcriber, in the person of the template or scripting editor. When speaking with Ian, a STE manager, he mentioned that Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technology had been tested, but the maximum level of accuracy ever reached at the time was still not sufficient. Research on accuracy levels in live subtitling suggests that investing in state-of-the-art ASR technology, and training native speakers (in this case, English) to post-edit ASR output could be a solution to increase process efficiency and product quality, and reduce costs in the long term (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007; Romero-Fresco and Pérez 2015). Similar professional figures are already employed in the Company. They are based in the UK office, but as they are not concerned with theatrical subtitling, they have not been mentioned before. These are the live subtitlers, native English speakers who use ASR tools and their own linguistic and interpreting skills to produce subtitles in real time. Hypothetically, the quality of template creation tasks could benefit greatly if it were to be performed by the same type of actors, which would already have the necessary skillset and could require a lighter quality control.

4.7.3 The QC phase

QC actors start their processes by making sure that they are working on the latest video version, and whether updates have been correctly reflected on the template and on the language file. Preliminary workflows are missing from the existing literature on subtitling processes and related issues. This could be specific to the working procedures and client relations of the Company, or a trend in the industry which has not been recorded before.

Either way, as seen before, it is an element that poses considerable challenges to all subtitling actors including QC actors, since it entails repetitions and extra effort, including a series of extra steps to the QC processes in PFA. As mentioned before, the QC actors' responsibilities involve working closely with PFA to run a series of (more or less automated) checks to make sure the file has no errors on a technical and textual level, and that it complies with client specifications.

QC actors' processes are highly dependent on the smooth functioning of PFA, and process quality can be greatly influenced by the relationships between QC actors and PFA, which are partly the result of relations between localisation managers and PFA developers (based in different continents). During shadowing and also while working to support the team's activities, I could observe that PFA caused **efficiency issues** in regard to process quality, namely because PFA could not handle a full-length subtitle file, but only one reel at any time. Indeed, at the time, theatrical clients used to provide content in reels rather than full-length. This meant that each and every linguistic and technical process in the whole production of subtitles, from the template creation to translation, proof-reading and QC, had to be done reel by reel, thus repeated multiple times – implying a potential risk of task disruption which may affect consistency and/or overall attention to detail, as explained by Lisa, a senior QC controller. A digital reel usually runs for approximately 20 minutes, therefore in every feature film there is usually a minimum of 4 reels, and a maximum of 9. When performing QC, the controller needed to perform all tasks for each reel in each file in the assigned language, and for each file update, and therefore the workflow in reels contributed to negative **work efficiency**.

Unlike simpler and lighter subtitling or QC tools (like, for instance, those made by linguists for linguists which the Company used before the transition to cloud), platforms are

largely more complex systems, and comprise a number of software. In the case of PFA, the cloud platform is at the same time a subtitling software, a QC software, an administrative software, a data collection system, a storage facility, etc. In light of this complexity, each request for implementation or modification of certain functions, aimed at better support the work, needs to be discussed thoroughly amongst the interested parties. The communication and mutual commitment of social actors (in this case among PFA developers and localisation management actors) are crucial in resolving problems linked with technology implementation and improving the quality of technical functionalities (Doherty and King 2005, p. 2), and therefore process quality. Making decisions around technology implementation and updates without in-depth analysis and agreement on all the terms of service provision risks to widen the gap between the actors' interests, in particular between managerial decisions and actors' needs / ease of use (Abdallah 2011, p. 185). Maxime explained that the first step towards **improving the communication and engagement** with PFA developers was that of setting up a monthly call between teams, to discuss priorities, issues and solutions. A second, fundamental step in this direction was creating a job role that would take into account the needs of in-house teams and freelance users, and turn them into requests for developers. The role in question was filled by Gianni, who represented a link between language and technical actors, and PFA developers. As will be seen shortly, the introduction of Gianni's role contributed greatly to process quality, as his efforts to increase communication with PFA developers **improved the quality of technical support** as well as some of the tools' functionalities. What follows (figure 4.3) is a visual representation of the processes surrounding the QC phase, in which the arrows along the relationship lines indicate negative examples of process quality (red arrow) or positive ones (green arrow):

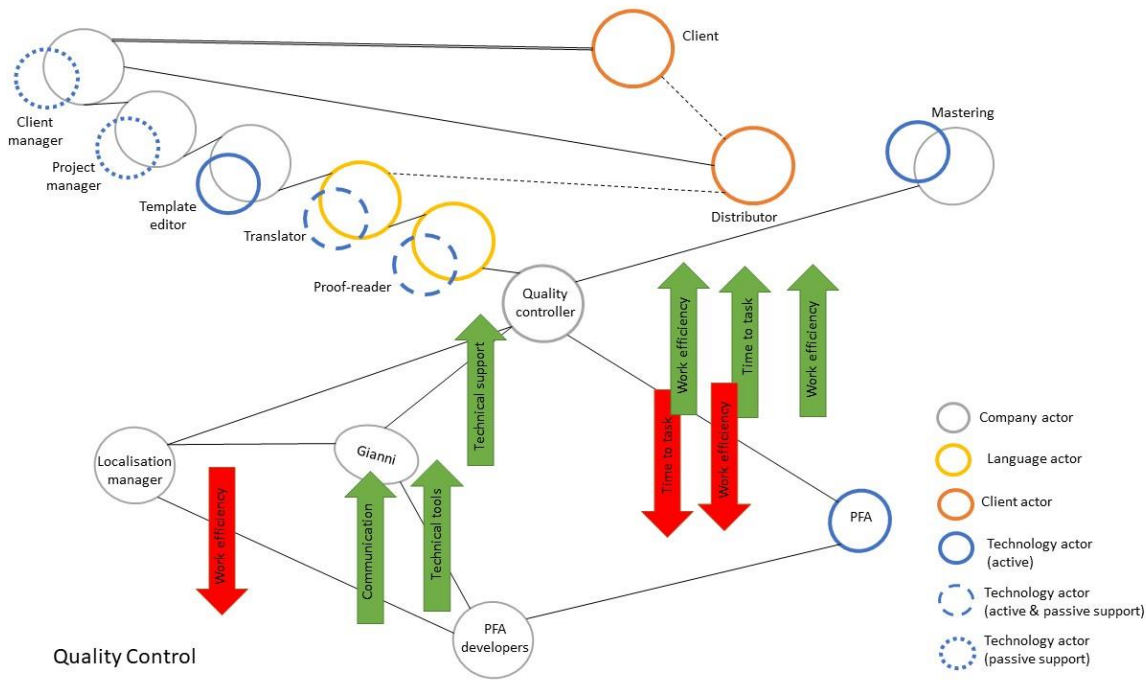


Figure 4.4. Quality control

Often, working in reels caused considerable frustration in the QC actors, due to the fact that each reel had to be loaded onto the platform, an operation which took considerable time. As a result, **time pressure** increased in the QC actors' work, thus possibly impairing the quality of their working processes. The struggle of working in reels is often presented in the QC team as a reason for frustration due to the increased task repetition (something that new technology is often introduced to avoid or automate) and the amount of time spent on it. The same can be argued about the second technical issue observed in PFA. At the time, when running the automated checks (to verify the presence of errors in spelling, punctuation, line length, layout and formatting elements), QC actors had to deal with several false positive errors, i.e. items that PFA recognised as potential errors but which were not, an issue which created considerable frustration and was particularly time-consuming. Over time, Gianni and PFA developers managed to **improve** the results of the automated checks in some of the most common languages, although at the time of observation, the number of false positives had lowered but was still high, in my view.

While shadowing Simone in the QC team, I had the chance to witness this type of situation. Probably because of the natural learning curve, and the fact that the tool was still being adjusted, Simone said that she felt she needed more time to perform the usual QC compared to the pre-PFA tools, since she had to thoroughly verify each of the automatic results that PFA gave. Error results had been improving since the very beginning, however, at the time of observation, PFA did not allow the user to see which ones had been checked already and which ones were left to check. Simone and other controllers would write down the number of each subtitle checked on a piece of paper, before moving on to the next, and this old fashioned and time-consuming strategy was their way of **improving the quality of her own processes** and make sure that they did not miss real errors.

One of the reasons why the subtitling interface in PFA was not always working smoothly, at the time of observation, is its nature as a very complex and rigid multi-layer platform, with several environments and virtually unlimited storage space, which clearly required some time for its implementation to work in a fully efficient manner, and also required considerable efforts from users due to the natural learning curve. Because of the novelty and complexity of the system, all internal training documents and tutorials always included extensive and repetitive guidance on paths, i.e. the series of items to click on in order to get to the desired information or function. At all times, controllers are required to refer to a spreadsheet which instructs them on all the steps they need to take while working on a file, in which order, and how to do that on PFA, including detailed paths for each single command. This checklist is constantly updated to reflect changes either in PFA functionalities, and in client specifications, and constitutes **valuable working material** for the team. The creation of most of the team-specific guidelines such as this one comes from the work of senior controllers,

acting within pre-established, centralised and standardised Company frameworks for internal training and support.

In fact, shortly after the implementation of PFA, Lisa, a senior controller, devised the checklist as a way to deal with the novelty and the complexity of the platform, and the difficulty associated with memorising such a large number of technical commands for each sub-task. Also, the QC team in the UK often shares the project with other QC teams and freelancers located in Europe, the US and Asia, and the checklist is useful to maintain consistency of procedures across remote teams, thus **improving work efficiency**. Finally, following the localisation manager’s suggestions, Lisa and Gianni decided to meet periodically to work on technical improvements in PFA. Gianni would share the functionalities that were being developed, and in turn, receive feedback for the PFA developers. When a new or improved function was finally ready to use, Lisa was in charge of providing technical training to her team in the UK office and abroad, thus **improving** their use of tools. The following table summarises the processes of the QC phase, and the considerations on their quality as discussed in this section:

Actors (internal)		Actors (external forces)	Process characterised by	Process quality
Localisation managers	PFA developers	/	Technical issue (working with reels)	Work efficiency – negative
QC actors	PFA	Time pressure	Technical issue (working with reels)	Time to task – negative
QC actors	PFA	Time pressure	Technical issue (false errors)	Work efficiency / time to task - negative

Localisation managers	PFA developers	/	Creating a linking role (Gianni)	Quality of communication – improved
Gianni	PFA developers		Technical issue (false errors) lowered	Quality of technical tools and training – improved
QC actors – individual initiative		/	Technology adjustment issues solved with handwritten checks	Work efficiency – improved
QC actors		/	Technical complexity is managed internally with checklist	Quality of working material / work efficiency – positive
QC actors	Gianni	/	Technical issues are tackled, and tech training is provided	Quality of technical support – positive

Table 4.11. Quality control – process quality

On a final note, it is worth pointing out that in the Company, the work of localisation managers in the UK, often in collaborations with Quality Managers based in the US, greatly improved overall process quality during the observation period, by promoting the creation of sets of instructions, guidelines, training materials and opportunities. In fact, script and template editors, translators, proof-readers, and QC actors all refer to the set of instructions contained in the project e-mail, the information provided in the reference materials, and the guidelines which are specific for every language and every client. In sum, it appears that the establishment of instructions and guidelines is fundamental for the standardisation of processes, which avoids variation from the established quality guidelines and helps ensure compliance with the Company’s and clients’ quality requirements. In this sense, the wealth of material can indicate a **positive process feature** – as it is summarised in the additional table below:

Actors interacting			Process characterised by	Process quality
Localisation managers	Quality managers	Language and technical actors	LM actors promoting guidelines, training material, instructions	Work material – positive

Table 4.12. Localisation manager

While I was unable to obtain detailed information on the principles and processes of quality managers, the language leads were readily available in-house, and keen to discuss all their preventive and reactive actions to ensure quality. After weeks of attempted contact, it became clear that a direct conversation with them was not possible, and so I sent them some key questions via email, to which the Head of Quality replied with standard sentences regarding their overall approach to quality management. The only information that I was able to obtain from the Company in this regard was that their quality management strategy is based on industry standards (arguably inspired by the principles set out in one of the most widespread industrial standards for translation quality, ISO 17100:2015). This specific difficulty may simply mean that at the time the team was too busy, or perhaps reluctant, to discuss conceptual and potentially strategic implications of quality with an external researcher.

4.8 Conclusion: remarks on process quality

This chapter has dealt with several topics which have been scarcely researched in the literature of AVT, namely the professional practices involved in the multilingual subtitling of audiovisual content, and their implications in terms of quality and interaction with technology. After a general overview of the workplace under observation, the chapter provided a suitable analytical and conceptual basis to study the actors that populate the observed context, and their associations. The chapter then focused on how the multilingual subtitling workflow is

structured in the Company, and how process quality can be assessed, according to the actors' responsibilities, priorities, permissions and interactions. The chapter has also looked consistently at the interaction between human and technology actors in order to show the constant interplay observed in the workplace, in line with the theoretical framework adopted.

The challenges faced by audiovisual professionals in the observed context provide a window on wider issues of the AVT industry as a whole, and this chapter has highlighted them, together with the efforts of human and inanimate actors to overcome them. Finally, the chapter has analysed three key processes that have a defining impact on the whole workflow and on the quality of the final subtitled product. This provides the basis for the development of AVT research into actual working practices, which has the potential to positively influence the definition of quality in the translation workplace, training for audiovisual translators and the development of efficient subtitling tools.

4.8.1 The triad of subtitling production processes

From the descriptive analysis provided, it emerged that it is arduous to single out all the specific, clear-cut processes and elements that weigh on quality – and that this is due to the very nature of production networks, where social, process and product dimensions are inextricably linked (Abdallah 2007). Also, I argue that it can be particularly challenging to find where the responsibility for quality lies in the corporate workplace observed, as the actors' tasks are heavily fragmented, and so is their responsibility towards the portion of product quality they work on, as shown in the corresponding charts. Three considerations worth exploring come out from the workflow: first, the heterogeneous nature of the environment, intended as a complex composition of human and inanimate actors. Second, the coexistence

of many types and levels of quality, assigned to different actors, and third, the presence of several limitations in the ways human and technology actors interact.

There seems to be a direct correlation between technology innovations and the creation of guidelines and instruction material, which was noted by LeBlanc (2017). After all, technology, especially automation technology, is generally employed to standardise procedures, while guidelines and instructions are created to maintain such standards. He stressed that the disadvantages that users *perceive* in their daily tasks – associated in this case with the work in preliminary files, or with technical issues – often do not relate to the files or the technology themselves, but to the ways in which technology offers impositions or restrictions on actors' processes, together with the related instruction material (*ibid.*). Given the strong technological requirements in the Company processes, the use and subsequent (dis)satisfaction with technology constitutes an important element in determining process quality – or triggering process improvements. Users' satisfaction in working with technology depends on several factors, which are still being researched (Koskinen and Ruokonen 2017; Moorkens and O'Brien 2017; Cadwell et al. 2018) but can loosely be ascribed to three categories: the perception that the technology is not imposed on them, that it is useful, and that it is easy to use. All three elements are crucial in the adoption and acceptance of said tool, which are prerequisites for the productivity gain expected by its use (Venkatesh and Bala 2008). Instructions and guidelines are generally written internally – thus without the input of language actors – and they aim to improve efficiency and quality when using PFA. As seen above, however, the platform itself does constitute an imposition, in that everything has to take place on PFA, and users cannot employ other tools or software (except from the usual communication technology). Also, the novelty and complexity of the platform and the natural learning curve progression may have led participants to think that the previous tools were

better than the current platform. As Olohan (2017, p. 267) notes, technology tools should be 'offering an extension of human capabilities' and when these extensions do not provide, or are perceived as not providing, the expected level of support, what remains is the feeling that the use of the platform is due to factors that go beyond the usefulness or performance of its functionalities.

What emerges from the workflow is the constant interaction between humans and software, as instructed by the company procedures in place. In fact, by regulating the professionals' use of skills and their working practice, instructions create strong links at the social and process level, which are then sealed and imposed by contracts. In virtue of such strong bonds, instructions constitute a way for the Company to meet the clients' expectations by balancing the employees' tasks, regulating their use of tools, but also their skills. Indeed, there is a risk that the skillset of language actors (editors, translators, proof-readers and quality controllers) is undervalued due to the division of labour enacted by the Company management. This is visible in the diversified and constant interaction with technology and other actors, where language and technical actors are asked to perform tasks in small chunks, each of them contributing with few pieces to the overall subtitling puzzle. As seen above, some actors' skills are restricted by company instructions – for instance, neither translators nor proof-readers are usually allowed to modify the timecode, and QC actors cannot make linguistic modifications or suggestions because they do not necessarily speak or read the target language. From an industry perspective, division of labour is enacted with a view to improving quality and productivity, and in this light, the restrictions on time-cueing are seen as measures that improve quality as they let the translator focus only on one aspect of subtitling, and also reduce the risk of subjective variation from the agreed rules.

Nevertheless, it is important to mention potential long-term deskilling risks that could ensue by splitting the translation and time-cueing task, as Kapsaskis (2011) stated in his study on the use of template files and their implications for the translator's skills and training. In fact, this practice may leave the subtitling task to translators who may not be experts in the specificities, and constraints, of the subtitling medium (*ibid.*, p. 169), as will be explored in Chapter 5. The workflow structure shows that skills and certain aspects of quality have been fragmented and assigned to many different actors: there are positive sides to this, which is that each actor can thoroughly focus on one task, and be considered an expert in that type of quality. On the other hand, I argue that the fact that translators are only allowed to perform a restricted range of tasks may be problematic for the development of well-rounded professionals in the long term. Given that this form of division of labour seems a rather common practice across the audiovisual industry (Oziemblewska and Szarkowska 2020), it may discourage the employment of subtitling professionals that are able to successfully perform a wider range of tasks – something that might possibly contribute to what the industry calls 'talent shortage' or 'talent crunch' (Estopace, 2017; Georgakopoulou 2020).

The coexistence of different quality standards and priorities – which could imply an apparent lack of common objective across different actors – has been already identified as a potential issue for the smooth cooperation and agreement of all actors. As seen in 4.6.3, the Company's efforts are mainly directed towards client requirements, but there is the possibility that other actors' views and ideas of quality might differ. The fragmentation of skills could be seen as a way to deal with the coexistence of different quality standards and priorities: if actors perform standardised and limited tasks, and stick to the project instructions, they are less likely to follow their own idea of quality, and more likely to deliver a product that complies with the Company's vision, even in the absence of a common quality objective (with the exception of a

functionalist quality perspective). This will in turn facilitate production processes on a large scale.

In sum, the workplace and workflow observations show that both local and outsourced groups of actors are managed through a skill-fragmenting workflow, supported by a centralised virtual working environment (the platform) and extensive sets of instructions which lay out the Company's idea and view of quality, and allow every actor to comply with these, regardless of their own. In general, many Company actors mentioned that they felt their processes were dictated solely by the instructions received, and that the quality of their processes was dependent on PFA's performance and the restrictions placed upon it, which did not always reflect their actual working needs, or allow them to express a wider range of skills.

In this case, instead of providing a platform built around the processes (Risku et al. 2013, p. 42), the Company shaped and structured the subtitling production processes around the requirements and constraints of PFA. This situation means that the workflow has been built around the technology actor, but also, and primarily, around the client-actor. In fact, earlier considerations on the workflow steps show that Company efforts are focused on meeting clients' specifications and needs, which can be seen as a common feature of corporate commercial relations. In this case, client-actors' needs impose the use of a secure informatic system, the use of preliminary source files, non-negotiable deadlines, and the inconsistent provision of reference material. As the chapter has shown, all of these conditions contribute to potentially lowering the quality of the human actors' processes, and thereby affect those aspects of quality with which the actors enter into contact.

5 The evolving role of the subtitler

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided analytical insights on data coming from the first phase of data collection, an ethnographic workplace study into the in-house AVT practices of a post-production company (Study 1). This resulted in a series of considerations around the quality of processes in subtitling in the environment observed, where human and inanimate actors worked in close contact. The workplace study also revealed the absence of subtitling actors from the environment, and for this reason a second qualitative study (Study 2) was set up with the aim of interviewing professional subtitlers working in the industry, so as to gain a broader picture of current subtitling production networks, and related practices – as explained in Chapter 3. Within the thesis' exploration of subtitling practices under a constructivist lens, collecting subtitlers' perspectives represented a crucial step when testing assumptions around process and social quality, as theorised in the previous chapter. While touching on all the indicators for process quality proposed in Chapter 4,¹⁴ this chapter focuses on certain aspects of social quality (mainly working conditions and affecting factors, interaction and communication with human and inanimate actors) as the subtitlers' processes and practices within their production network – as reported by them – are analysed with attention to social and economic dynamics.

¹⁴ **Workflow and communication** [Workflow structure; Quality of communication]; **Performance of technical actors and quality of interaction** [Availability and quality of tools and training; Availability and quality of technical support; Type of interaction]; **Time to complete tasks**; **Quality of working material** [Availability and quality of source, reference, and working materials (instructions, guidelines, etc.)]; **Working conditions and affective factors** [Presence of stress or frustration linked to working environment and conditions]

Starting with a short literature review on the freelance translation practice and environment, and on professionals and their working conditions, the present chapter goes on to outline the profile of the seven professional subtitlers who participated in the interview study. Their working practices as subtitlers and their interplay with other actors in the production network will be the focus of the chapter. Their education, experience and working modalities are discussed and related to the different dimensions of quality in subtitling: this acquires particular relevance in the discussion of quality in professional subtitling for two reasons. Quality in this chapter acquires different and more complex nuances, as the product and process dimensions are observed through the eyes of social actors and therefore the analysis acquires a social, individual and ethical dimension. Firstly, defining personal skillsets, working cultures and experiences is fundamental within the holistic, three-dimensional approach to quality adopted in this thesis, which focuses on the interplay of the social, process and product dimensions of translation (Abdallah 2007).

Indeed, this study provides insights on the individual and social quality of a group of subtitling actors working in the same – or similar – market as the participants involved in the workplace study seen in Chapter 4. In this light, data from both studies can be compared and contrasted so as to provide a wide picture of current subtitling practices from different points of view, and across different dimensions of quality, so as to come closer to the conceptualisation of quality in the industry, which will be the focus of Chapter 6. Secondly, the data reveal the extent to which the subtitlers' increasingly virtual working environment impacts on the nature and quality of their processes – especially the ways in which automation shapes the ways to acquiring information, receiving jobs and training, or benefitting from linguistic or technical support. The multi-dimensional, multifaceted combination of the factors considered here intends to provide a wide picture of the subtitlers' working conditions, as a

way to infer and theorise upon the quality of their process and social dimensions, with a focus on the latter. Indeed, this chapter is based on the respondent's *working quality* and their reflections around their processes. The process layers are the same as those that emerged in Chapter 4, nevertheless the picture is entirely different as is more focused on the subtitler's perception of their processes, and not the processes themselves – which have not been observed, like they have been in the ethnographic study presented in Chapter 4. This chapter therefore provides an outlook on process quality through an individual lens, and for this reason the social aspects of quality (such as communication, interactions, stress and motivations) acquire a greater prominence because they stem from personal point of views.

5.2 The subtitler profession

The freelance translator profession has been widely explored in research about the social aspects of translation, and the selection of studies presented here highlights contributions looking at working conditions from a socio-economic perspective, as a way to anchor data to their context. In an early study of translation production networks, Abdallah and Koskinen (2007, p. 675) delineate this 'new' business model based on outsourcing and subcontracting model, and the rise of the translation agency as intermediary, explaining relationships between the actors in the network economy with a focus on trust. Their contribution, obtained with an ethnographic method, defines production networks as a series of 'hubs' (clients and vendors) which are connected to one another and to which 'nodes' (language actors – translators, linguists etc.) are attached and dependent and 'where the end client might be several links away from the actual translator, with no contact or interaction between them' (ibid. p. 677). Indeed, the authors draw a picture that is very close to the network described in the previous chapter – as for the positioning of the actors in the workflow – as well as to the

professional environment in which the interviewed freelancers currently operate. Abdallah and Koskinen's (ibid., p. 678) considerations maintain that production networks' main vulnerability is the inability to generate a sufficient level of trust, which is crucial for the most exposed and peripheral links, those between agencies and freelancers. Trust is linked to having shared points of view and interests, shared knowledge and clear, accountable information – however, the authors warn that the vertical structure of networks and their long succession of actors generates asymmetric information, as translators are usually not included in discussions about the job requirements and working conditions (ibid.).

Imbalances in shared knowledge and / or communication patterns can point to a situation of asymmetric information (Akerlof 1970), a concept from economic theory which recurs in this chapter as it has been identified in the ways the subtitlers' working environments are managed – specifically, it defines phenomena in which information is withheld from some actors, in favour of others. Abdallah (2010) found it in translation networks, while analysing freelance translators' working conditions and their relationship with their employer. She highlighted an asymmetric and imbalanced structure in terms of power but also communication practices, which confirms the earlier study's assumptions that if actors are distant and far removed, information is not (or cannot) be communicated evenly enough within the economic transaction (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007) – a lack of communication which 'may be accidental or intentional' (Abdallah 2010, p. 14). In asymmetric relations, economic interests play in favour of companies (and their client, but never the translator) and trust, and lack thereof, can become a way for the translator to either exercise their agency, or realise that the relation is off balance, and needs to be severed or re-established.

A similar analysis is later proposed by Abdallah (2011) within the AVT sector with an agency-based exploration of the working conditions and relations of a group of subtitlers in

Finland, a contribution which acquires a certain importance in this chapter due to its thematic relevance. The description of outsourcing and vendor-based subcontracting practices, and of the wide network in which subtitlers are inscribed, still corresponds quite closely to current practices and trends. Abdallah (ibid.) describes power relations that are asymmetric due to the low negotiation power of the subtitlers, and in which the subtitlers' notion of quality was not in line with that of their employer – and point out how such imbalance leads to many leaving their employer, or the industry. Indeed, the definition of quality and its alignment across the different actors in a production network is crucial to understanding the effects of information asymmetry, one of which is the widespread use of the fitness-for-purpose quality model. As Jiménez-Crespo (2018, p. 79) points out, when dealing with fairly uninformed translation clients, who may not recognise the level of quality of a translation, decisions concerning quality are 'based on the price and the value that they [i.e. the clients] place on the translated text'.

This is linked to another effect of information asymmetry, adverse selection, as mentioned earlier in Abdallah (2011) and later theorised by Dunne (2012) in his analysis of translation production networks in microeconomic terms, in which he explains the effects of adverse information on market rates, product quality, and skill erosion in the language industry. As LSPs cannot truly define, assess, and guarantee the quality of all the translation volume they produce:

the prices LSPs are willing to pay do not reflect the true quality of translation provided by a given freelance translator but rather the LSPs' probabilistic estimates about the quality of translation provided by individual freelance translators in the market as a whole.

(ibid., p. 148)

It follows that, if vendors sell good and bad translations at the same price, translators – and subtitlers – might feel that it is not convenient for them to continue in that sector. In

turn, driving good translators away causes the average quality level to drop, which can lead LSPs to even lower the prices, and so on (ibid., pp. 148–149).

This is visible in the peripheral position of subtitlers in production networks, as noted by Abdallah (2011), but also Kapsaskis (2011), who explores outsourcing and standardisation practices through the use of subtitling template files. His considerations point to the fact that cost-cutting strategies in the subtitling industry, including the use of templates together with falling subtitling rates, do not constitute convenient conditions for skilled subtitlers – thus leading to the adverse selection phenomena as described above, by which a lower-skilled workforce enters the market. Short-term deskilling and long-term skill erosion in subtitling, plus a degradation of the subtitlers' role are the risks identified by Kapsaskis (ibid., p. 175) as a result of cost-effective practices, which contribute to the overall lowering of average quality not only in the product, but of the status and therefore the social quality of the actors involved.

His and Abdallah's descriptions of working conditions and subsequent projections of trends in subtitling have been partly confirmed by Kuo (2015, 2020) in her study based on a survey of 429 subtitlers, and its follow-up. Focusing on their working conditions, the author provides crucial data on actual negotiation power, the downward tendency of rates, the quality of working materials and the level of recognition of skilled subtitlers. Her considerations indicate the emergence of patterns in working relations, such as low levels of communication and negotiation associated with the isolated nature of freelance work (2015, p. 7-8). Furthermore, a situation in which a skilled workforce abandons the subtitling sector could contribute to what the industry currently calls talent shortage or 'talent crunch', as seen in the previous chapter (Estopace, 2017; Georgakopoulou 2020).

The academic contributions above are fundamental to the study presented here, as they provide ways to reflect on social and economic aspects of the subtitling profession, by

looking at the ways in which subtitlers engage with the existing working conditions, which include increasing automation and standardisation of practices. The economic and business-related concepts introduced above acquire particular prominence in this chapter, as the subtitlers' contributions to the study often refer to their position within a production network, where communication is hindered and does not flow freely amongst actors (Abdallah 2010; Drugan 2013). This can place translators in a peripheral position, with negative effects on professional status, as have been acknowledged by many in Translation Studies (Dam and Zethsen 2008; Katan 2009, 2011; Kushner 2013; Dam and Zethsen 2016).

Since the 2010s, audiovisual production volumes have increased dramatically, and the challenges posed by high volumes have been met with an increased standardisation of practices, made possible by digitisation and automation. Production networks have indeed become increasingly virtual working environments, as noted by Risku et al (2013) in their comparative study on translation processes in the so-called digital network economy. Noticing that companies have turned to digital platforms on cloud servers to streamline collaboration and communication with clients and providers, the authors highlight how this phenomenon has limited the range of personal approaches to translation work (ibid., p. 41) – a consideration which becomes fundamental in light of the data presented in the following sections. Although cloud platforms could potentially improve the actors' visibility into each other's processes, Risku et al. (ibid., p. 43) point out how difficult it has been for them to observe the translators' working situations, as 'the increased transparency of the work processes seems to be restricted to the viewpoint of the project managers and the heads of the company'. This aspect is explored in depth by Rodríguez-Castro (2013), who analyses the figure of the translation project manager (PM) in virtual translation teams. Her study confirms that remote working environments consist in a range of dynamics between actors, often unexplored, and can lead to different degrees of visibility and trust-building, as will be argued later on. Similar concerns are shared by García (2015, 2017), who analyses cloud marketplaces and their assembly-line principles, where translation projects are broken down into micro-tasks, and assigned to the quickest bidder within a large crowd of professional and non-professional translators. García (2015 p. 24) highlights how, initially, cloud environments have facilitated the birth of translators' communities, and the streamlining of complex processes such as subtitling until around 2008, when companies started exploiting this phenomenon, generating a new type of translation marketplace: "unabashedly aimed at serving not translators, but clients. The most innovative combine implementation of a sophisticated platform [...] with management of the broadest possible pool of paid translators".

Indeed, the potentiality to use large numbers of translators together with the virtual environment offered by cloud platforms have shaped the platform business model that

emerged from the participants' respondents, and which is described in this and the next chapter.

The literature presented in this section, strongly influenced and informed by socio-economic organisational studies and sociology of work, reiterates and reinforces the aim of analysing features of the subtitlers' processes and working conditions to identify patterns and behaviours of human and inanimate actors, and relate them to quality considerations across multiple dimensions. The themes presented here reflect the chapters' approach to the data analysed, focused on real-life business contexts and phenomena as experienced and perceived by the respondents – spanning from communication issues to the assessment of quality through rating systems, or the impersonality of a working model which could lead to professional disempowerment (García 2017, pp. 61–68), as will be seen in the following sections.

5.3 Subtitlers' profiles

The selection of subtitlers for my sample (as described in detail in Chapter 3) resulted in 7 professionals who made themselves available for an interview between the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020. The sample was chosen so as to include a certain degree of variety in terms of years of experience, age, professional status and markets in which the subtitlers operate, which will be the object of analysis and reflection in this section. The sections that follow complete their profile in terms of their use of skills, working conditions and use of technology. Table 5.1 below presents key data for the seven participants:

Pseudonym	Mimi	Carl	Alma	Edie	Zachary	Violet	Katia
Age range	25-30	25-30	25-30	35-40	35-40	45-50	55-60
Years of experience	2	3	3	8	12	21	34
Education level	Master	Master	Master	Master	PhD	Master	PhD
Subtitling skills acquisition	MA in AVT, UK	MA in AVT, UK	On the job, UK	On the job, CAN	On the job, KR	On the job, IT	On the job, SV
Language combination	EN-DE, DE-EN	EN-EN, FR-EN	EN-DE	EN-IT	EN-CR	EN-IT	SWE-EN, EN-SWE
Professional status	Ex-Freelance	Freelance contractor	Freelance contractor	Freelance part-time	Freelance part-time	Freelance full-time	Freelance full-time
Located in	UK, DE	UK	UK	IT, CAN	UK, KR	IT, UK	UK, SWE
Working market	EU	EU/UK/US	EU	EU	EU	EU	EU/UK/US

Table 5.1. Profile of participants

The data collected through the interviews shows that the subtitlers tend to be highly educated, and actively interested in their own education and training. In terms of education, it is interesting to notice the respondent's backgrounds and progression: only Alma and Edie chose a translation-specific Bachelors' degree, while the other five all studied languages (modern or classical). Out of these five, three of them trained as language teachers, and/or worked as language tutors for a while, meaning that there could be a correlation between the interest in subtitling and that of language teaching, and it also shows a will for career progression and skills acquisition.

The table also specifies where the subtitlers received their AVT training, in which countries they were based at the time of interview, together with the markets in which they operate. Since the study is not aimed at evaluating training or working practices from a geographical perspective, their different locations did not constitute an issue because all the subtitlers' work took place in the same continent (Europe) and contributed to the same global audiovisual market for production and distribution. This allows the data to acquire a comparable relevance, as all the different working conditions, statuses and processes of professionals in the sample follow patterns that are being increasingly standardised across audiovisual distribution markets, as it will be seen in the following sections¹⁵. As mentioned in Chapter 3, this dataset is also compatible with data collected in Study 1 (as presented in the previous chapter) as the actors' reference market for production and distribution is the same. The data indicates that the participant's subtitling background can be grouped generationally, rather than geographically, that is to say that participants within the same age range shared similar experiences in terms of training and skills acquisitions.

Violet and Katia, the oldest respondents, both started subtitling almost by chance, while they were finishing their postgraduate degrees in languages, introduced by a friend who already worked in the industry. Neither of them had the option to specialise in audiovisual translation, as these university courses did not exist at the time they started subtitling (late 1980s to early 1990s). They learnt subtitling on the job by working alongside their more experienced colleagues, educating themselves on the subject in any way they could. The main difference in their background is cultural, rather than geographical: at the time, Katia and

¹⁵ At all times, it should be reminded that subtitlers outside the UK/European area (who nevertheless work for the same, international clients), experience significant differences in living and working conditions, such as rates of pay. The "global" subtitling industry categorises languages and their variants into locales, such as Castilian Spanish for Spain, and South American Spanish for the Latin American variations; therefore, for doing the same job, subtitlers are paid according to their language variant, which follows local salaries' range.

Violet were respectively based in a subtitling and a dubbing country, therefore, their learning path and methods have been different. Katia, based in a country with a solid subtitling tradition, could count on the support of her peers who had been working with their well-established guidelines. On the other hand, Violet was based in a dubbing country, where subtitling was largely neglected, with the exception of film festivals. Indeed, she recalls how she often had to figure things out for herself, as many professionals like her were making the rules “on-the-go”, and she started attending festivals to learn how other subtitlers in her language pair were working.

The two respondents in the 35-40 age range, Zachary and Edie, both studied languages and received in-house subtitling training shortly after graduating. Edie got formal translation training in her BA, then started working as a subtitler in Northern America; after 5 years, she returned to Europe and to university in order to pursue a part-time language teaching career in academia. Zachary trained originally as a language teacher in Europe, then worked as a subtitler for 10 years, and then moved to the UK to acquire a formal specialisation through a Master in AVT, and then a PhD in the same subject. Both of their backgrounds and careers denote a clear interest in languages not only in their work, but from an academic point of view as well – and perhaps it indicates the need to diversify one’s activities (as in Edie’s case) or to deepen one’s knowledge of the subject (Zachary). Both were based in two different continents while they acquired their subtitling skills and started their career, but data shows that they were working for the same multinational clients, and therefore their approach to subtitling could have been similar.

The three respondents in the youngest age range all chose to do a Masters’ degree in specialised or audiovisual translation, and two of them moved to the UK for this purpose. To different degrees, they all acquired the basis of subtitling in these courses (Mimi and Carl), or

during the work placement that their university offered (Alma). This sparked an underlying interest in them, and they all decided to pursue this practice professionally while they were finishing their degrees. Their common path could be a result of the growing popularity of AV courses within translation curricula in the UK, a phenomenon which reflects and responds to the increasing presence of subtitling across media and mobile media consumption in the globalised market.

All of the subtitlers work freelance, with some exceptions: Alma and Carl have also been contracted as in-house freelancers, and can benefit from working in the office on a part-time basis, a solution which they find convenient. Indeed, the possibilities offered by personal, face-to-face interaction are strongly felt as advantageous by both, especially when it comes to accessing information directly, as it will be explored in section 5.6. Five respondents out of seven learnt the specificities of subtitling while at work (Violet, Katia, Zachary, Edie and Alma) and they had the chance to do so because they all started subtitling in an office, but for different reasons all of them (except Alma) left the workplace after the first year. Zachary mentioned he felt constrained by the working hours and the targets he had to meet in the office, and preferred the freedom of working freelance as soon as he became acquainted with subtitling. He then worked freelance for over ten years before moving to the UK to research subtitling from an academic perspective. Before returning to academia herself, as a part-time researcher and then teacher, Edie worked as a full-time freelance subtitler for five years, and spent the first year as an in-house contractor. In the wake of the economic crisis of 2008, the office where she worked went through a substantial downsizing, and all the subtitlers could keep working for the same company, but from home and in a freelance capacity. If she had a choice, she would have stayed in the office – in her words, it was extremely helpful and made a huge difference in terms of learning the specificities of the subtitling profession. Violet

started subtitling while working in-house for a production company, although she reported her work as subtitler was undervalued in that environment, and pursued the freelance career as soon as she acquired the necessary skills. Finally, Katia received her training in-house and then continued working from home as a freelance for the same company, as it was customary in her environment.

The benefit of receiving in-house training becomes evident from the respondents' experiences, as they consider it crucial for the development of their careers. Another major advantage of working in-house is the fact that this arrangement lifts some of the freelancer's pressure of having to actively look for jobs, as they can count on a more reliable source of income, at least in part. Indeed, the issue of job security was mentioned by all participants, though is felt differently on an individual level. After learning on the job during an internship, Alma was offered a contractor position in the company and decided to accept: in her words, it was "the perfect setting for her to start working while not having to look actively for jobs all the time", as they were coming from the company. Mimi worked successfully as a freelance for two years, and while she was satisfied with her freelance status and the freedom associated to it, she grew frustrated with the industry practices she encountered, and decided to suspend her subtitling activity to pursue a more stable occupation. Edie went back to freelance subtitling, although part-time since she also teaches in Higher Education. Violet, Katia and Zachary work with established clients, freelancing is their preferred option, and do not feel pressure to look for new clients.

These data confirm that freelancing is still the most widespread solution for subtitlers, as it has been for more than a decade (Díaz Cintas and Nikolić 2018) and it is largely perceived as a necessary or common thing to do by roughly 80% of translators in the overall language industry (Kelly et al. 2012). It is seen as a fairly positive solution, as the main benefits

mentioned by participants revolve around the freedom to manage one's own time and decide how much and when to work. The most positive responses came from those who are well established and do not have to worry about incoming work – nevertheless, the ideal benefits of working in-house (steady flow of work, fair pay, socialisation, access to information) are recognised or sought-after by the majority of respondents. It may be necessary to note here that all respondents who work in-house, do so as contractors and not as employees. While the two figures share the same working space, contractors do not have the same obligations as employees have towards the company. On the other hand, contractors have to manage their own taxes and contributions, and do not have the same benefits as employees (pension, medical or dental insurance, or other employees schemes), which results in considerable savings from the company (Srniczek 2017; Moorkens 2021). The data also confirm that companies have played a crucial role in the training of subtitlers in the last three decades, and that they were the only resource available until formal subtitling training started to appear and gain ground in higher education (Gummerus and Paro 2001).

5.4 The freelance subtitler's working conditions

This section outlines some of the specific working conditions of the participants, such as work assignment, the types of projects they work on, and their approach to the subtitling task. This will provide a view into their skills and the extent to which they are used, leading to considerations on the working conditions that are found in the subtitling industry sector.

The types of working relationships between subtitlers and other actors that are described in this section are occurring within what is referred to here as the 'platform business model', as contrasted and compared to the more traditional translation practices defined as 'pipeline' model, following Sakamoto's definition (2018). In the pipeline model 'an LSP receives

an order from a client and commissions it to a freelance translator [engaging in] step-by-step arrangement for creating value, with the translator at one end and the client at the other' (ibid., p. 87). Instead, the platform model is based on the centrality of the LSP which adopts a cloud platform as main working environment, therefore positioning itself as the only intermediary between clients on the one hand, and large pools of remote translators on the other (Srnicek 2017, p. 44) and reducing interpersonal communication to a minimum. The platform business model includes a series of features that are common to vertical production networks which have been moved to virtual environments, first of all the obligation for translators to work on the vendor's technology (which provides a free tool, but also entails restrictions of usage and the vendor's ownership of data, as noted by García (2017) and Srnicek (2017). Other features include a lack of face-to-face communication and interpersonal relationship between the actors, the standardisation of practices and rates, the distribution of smaller tasks across a number of actors, and the centralisation and automation of project management as well as quality management (Risku et al. 2013; Rodríguez-Castro 2013; García 2015, 2017; Moorkens et al. 2016; Sakamoto et al. 2017; Sakamoto 2018; Nunes Vieira and Alonso 2019). The following sections highlight the respondents' experiences, and will analyse the nature and quality of their working conditions in light of the above factors – for the sake of clarity, pipeline and platform models will also be referred to as 'off-cloud' and 'cloud subtitling' respectively.

5.4.1 Job assignment

This section outlines the type of content that subtitlers work on the most, the environment in which their work is carried out, and how the work is assigned. Six out of the seven respondents work for the same type of client, i.e. producers and distributors of streaming content that carry

out work on a platform. The only exception in this group is Violet, who categorically refuses to work on cloud platforms because she wants to be able to retain a copy of her work, something which is not possible on cloud platforms and on which legislation is not internationally standardised (Kuo 2015) – an issue which will be discussed in further depth in section 5.5.1. Her jobs are assigned through direct communication (email or phone) with either project managers or the client’s points of contact. Her main working areas are subtitling for museums and for corporate material, which she acquires through agencies. Sometimes she subtitles documentaries or feature films, acquired by word of mouth or traditional postings, and in these projects she usually deals directly with the producer or director thanks to the professional network she has built over the years, and her familiarity with the film production environment. The fact that she is now an established subtitler gives her the advantage of being selective to choose the most interesting and/or financially profitable jobs.

As for the remaining six, they work across the same range of content, that is to say mostly mainstream content for streaming (and less frequently for television) and sometimes feature films for theatrical release, and documentaries. To different degrees, they all work for producers and distributors of streaming content. These clients do not provide work directly to subtitlers, but outsource it through a number of vendors, usually localisation agencies or post-production companies (LSPs) who in turn subcontract the work to freelancers, as explored in Chapter 4. Nowadays, as noted in the previous chapter, most of these LSPs have moved most of their post-production on secure cloud servers as a way to avoid piracy of client-owned content, and provide a single place where thousands of users can work at the same time, anywhere in the world (Gough and Perdikaki 2018). The six respondents use the agency’s cloud platform to subtitle – all platforms are different but share the same basic functions and principles. The cloud platform which was described in Chapter 4 provides an example for the

type of remote environments that are considered here. It could be worth adding that subtitling for streaming providers seem to be invariably associated with working on cloud platforms. Streaming content includes a wide range of genres (short films, feature-length films, animation, documentaries, and a large number of tv series) and constitutes a medium to large portion of the overall working volume for the six respondents. These freelancers may work for more than one agency and have different end-clients, but when they subtitle for a cloud-based LSP, they are all required to work exclusively on the LSP's platform.

Data from the workplace study (Study 1, which informs Chapter 4) confirm that the PMs' role is decisive in the selection of the freelance translators, their coordination, and to ensure that project specifications and deadlines are respected. One of the characteristics of cloud subtitling as experienced by the respondents, is that jobs are assigned automatically. In fact, in the 1.5 years that elapsed from the workplace study (chapter 4) and the interviews with subtitlers analysed here, the assignment of jobs had been largely automated across many LSPs (including the Company where the workplace study was conducted, according to the plans being developed at the time of study). Therefore, the two studies in this research have allowed me to document two different ways in which projects are assigned. In both modalities, project managers load the jobs onto the cloud platform, and index them according to the task required (i.e. translation, proof-reading), the language combinations, delivery date, and level of quality required for each job. Often, client or project manager add a short description to the content, and also specify the genre and format (such as 'TV series', 'theatrical', 'crime', 'medical', etc.). This means that while inserting the clients' contents onto the platform, the languages, deadlines and tasks needed are specified through tags. All of these are visible to the translators who log into the platform, except the level of quality required, which generally seems to be hidden from the translators, according to PMs interviewed in the workplace study.

While in chapter 4 project managers contacted their freelance pool to assign jobs, in the subtitlers' experiences on cloud the assignment is automated and self-performed, meaning that these jobs appear on the subtitlers' dashboard once they log into their platform. Subtitlers read the information available for each project (which is kept to a minimum, according to three out of six respondents), choose one to work on and "claim" it, thus assigning it to themselves. Zachary, Katia, and Edie, the three most experienced in this group, usually prefer to choose whole tv series rather than single episodes. In this way it is easier for them to maintain terminological consistency, and more convenient as it provides a guarantee for a long-term project. They are generally satisfied with this system, primarily because their professional status and client-base allow them to choose the most profitable jobs on the platform, and intersperse them with other projects, usually longer-term, coming from direct clients or other agencies.

However, when subtitlers need to rely on this automated assignment system for all or most of their work volume, things become more difficult. Edie specified that she is satisfied with this system only because subtitling is her second occupation – otherwise, making a full-time living through her main LSP would be very hard, in her opinion. In fact, all the projects are assigned on a 'first come, first served basis' (Sakamoto et al. 2017, p. 10) – implying that full-time freelance subtitlers need to check their platforms' dashboards and emails constantly, and might have little time to select projects, for which they have received little information. A third of the platform users experienced drawbacks with this system, because once a project is accepted, the deadline countdown starts automatically. While the same can be said for traditional, non-automated forms of assignments, it is not uncommon for project managers (PM) and translators to discuss a project before the actual start date, which gives freelancers the possibility of moving deadlines and plan their workload on a longer time basis, something

which becomes hard with the automatic assignment system. This is what Carl experiences, too: “Picking up work becomes a challenge, as most clients are American and post the jobs in the morning, US time. Sometimes I check my dashboard at 11.30pm and grab some work to do the day after: if I waited for the morning, I would get the scraps. But then, once I accept assignments, the deadline countdown starts, and I would have less hours to complete it because it’s night-time for me”.

Mimi appreciated the freedom of choosing assignments herself, although she soon found it increasingly hard to diversify her work, as her main agency was specialised in naturalistic and educational documentaries. She found it hard to say no to work, and became frustrated with the fact that all jobs were offered at the same rate, and in her words, she had to choose from many jobs which “were simply not worth it”. This was because the number of subtitles per video was often very high, and the rate was set as per industry standards (that is based on video minutes and not on number of subtitles). Similar concerns around the lack of information available about the working materials and the nature of rates were brought up by Edie and Alma, which will be explored in more depth in section 5.4.2.

As described above, the automation of job assignment works through filtering criteria that are inserted by client managers and/or project managers when loading and indexing the working materials onto the platform. Although the principles of assignment (language, level of quality and availability) might be the same as in a traditional agency, the fact that there is no visibility into the human actors’ work contributes to the perceived impersonality of the system (as noted by half of the cloud users). As mentioned earlier, the most experienced subtitlers in the sample had previously worked in-house, and spontaneously reported about their experience of job assignment and its relation to the communication patterns in the office. They all suggested that visibility into the working practices (and their criteria) used to be much

higher when they worked in-house, and job assignment was a collaborative task, in which individual availabilities and specialisations were considered ad-hoc and briefly discussed by the whole team before assignments. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that in-house positions no longer constitute the norm amongst the freelancers interviewed. All subtitlers reported a satisfactory degree of collaboration in pipeline freelance-agency relationships, whereby freelancers communicate on a regular basis with company actors (usually project managers) who tell them of upcoming or urgent projects, potential extensions or other conditions that inform the subtitlers' decision to accept or reject the project.

It can be argued that the automated assignment system lowers or removes the possibility that freelancers negotiate their rate for each assignment – as content is very varied, and might need different types of effort according to its genre, or how dense it is in terms of number of subtitles. It is true that in the traditional freelance translator/agency relationship, the translators' standard rate is taken as the basis for all jobs, but that does not exclude the possibility of negotiating terms and rates for every project, especially if the work has a short deadline or it is highly technical – something which experienced professionals like Zachary, Katia and Violet do every time they work off-cloud. With the automated assignment system, there is no option to do that: indeed, subtitlers can raise these issues to an invisible (and often unknown) PM by submitting a ticket on the cloud platform, but it might take some time for the PM to respond, during which the job is likely to have been taken by someone else. Also, freelancers working on a platform do not always have a direct email address for their PM (according to three respondents, who work with very large vendors) and, very importantly, they have little information on the project, and no access to a sample of the file in order to make an informed decision. On the basis of this, it can be argued that the automated assignment relies exclusively on human/machine interaction, as subtitlers are required to

interact with an inanimate system, where the human input from the job provider is apparently hidden.

To sum up, the automated assignment of jobs contributes to lowering visibility into the LSPs' processes, as well as decreasing communication and negotiation opportunities for freelancers. Also, freelancers are given little information on the projects prior to assignment, there is no sample to view, and usually no one readily available to answer their question before a job is accepted. The automated assignment points to the asymmetric distribution of information described by Chan (2005), Abdallah (2010) and Dunne (2012) as a condition in which 'the lowering of quality arises because principals and agents do not have access to joint information' (Abdallah 2010 p. 15). The platform business model seems to consolidate an asymmetrical distribution of information by restricting the human actors' communication and collaboration possibilities (Dunne 2012). I argue that the lack of physical proximity or even consistent, reliable personal contact amongst translators and with project managers reinforces information asymmetry, fostering distrust and feelings of impersonality and invisibility from the freelancers' part – which could contribute to lowering quality in the process due to low motivation or negative emotions, with a risk to affect quality in the product too.

This section has delineated the professional profile of the respondents, while shedding light on professional subtitling practices through first-hand insight which could not have been gathered from the observation of workplaces only. In addition, it contributes to updating the academic literature on cloud-based audiovisual practices, not only because these constitute a working modality which appeared in the AV industry only since the early 2010s, but also because the automation of the assignment phase analysed here is of crucial importance to freelance subtitlers, as it provides a basis to establish and define their own position in relation

to the client and the company actors, and it highlights quality issues in the work conditions of the respondents.

5.4.2 Rates and deadlines

The platform business model has been reinforcing working processes which rely consistently on outsourcing and on the centralisation and standardisation of practices, rates and deadlines. This business model could be seen as an evolution of the DVD model, which since the late 1990s brought a rapid increase in working volumes, as well as shrinking turnaround times and localisation budgets (Kapsaskis 2011; Kuo 2015). These circumstances were polarised in the early 2010s by the largest actors in the streaming industry, who decided to resort to wider automation and standardisation measures across project management and workflows. As will be argued extensively in Chapter 6, such practices seem to be essential to manage huge volumes of work across the globe, as opposed to an ad-hoc management of subtitling projects, and as seen in the previous section, the standardisation and automation of job assignment has repercussions on the quality of the working conditions for many respondents. When it comes to working with cloud-based LSPs, a principle of standardisation is also noticed within the management of other working conditions, such as rates and deadlines.

From all the respondents' comments, rate negotiation depends on several factors, spanning from their experience, workplace, and the quality of communication (Chan 2005; Fulford and Granell-Zafra 2005; Abdallah 2010; Dunne 2012; Kuo 2015). As a general remark, the more experienced subtitlers (Katia, Violet, Zachary and Edie) benefit from higher rates, and are overall satisfied with their pay, while novice translators struggle to negotiate higher rates, and even reported to have "low negotiation power" with their clients. Experience might increase the confidence to negotiate better rates in exchange for the high-quality work that

comes with it, as reported by Violet and Katia, however it does not seem to be the only essential factor that impinge on rates. The main issue that emerged from the subtitlers' responses about rates is linked to the actual possibility of communicating and negotiating, an element in which experience does not always play a part. For instance, Zachary (12 years of experience) and Carl (3 years) both work with two types of clients: a large cloud based LSP and a smaller subtitling company. Their negotiating attitude is different, but when working for the smaller company they are both in a position to discuss and negotiate rates, something which is not possible with the larger LSP.

As a rule, whenever he is not working for the cloud-based LSP, Zachary negotiates his rate, and is often granted a higher rate – and the same occurs with the other most experienced subtitlers. Out of the sample, he is the only one to have negotiated his rate with a cloud-based LSP, because of his experience and long-standing working relation: he states his fee is reasonable, but nevertheless is fixed and not open to further negotiation. As seen in the previous section, the cloud platform model does not encourage rate negotiation: Carl, Alma, Mimi and Edie all said that their pay per video minute is categorically non-negotiable, and any type of communication in this regard is considered to be useless. While Edie thought her fee is not bad, the others said they felt their rates were too low, and too fixed. They all said that negotiating rates with cloud based LSPs never occurred to them, and that the little communication they had about it was on a “take it or leave it” basis, which has led them to not feeling comfortable about discussing the issue again, confirming findings by Kuo (2015).

Rate negotiation seems to be therefore tightly linked with the type of company and its degree of automation vs. personal approach: when Carl started working with a smaller company (which he visits in-house as a contractor) he said that he had established a sufficient level of mutual trust and familiarity to have a conversation with his managers, who agreed to

raise his basic fee. This mutual knowledge favoured by the option of having direct, face-to-face communication with managers and colleagues contributed to building trust and loyalty which was perceived as necessary to carry out certain conversations, as discussed by scholar such as Abdallah and Koskinen (2007) and Olohan and Davitti (2017). Mimi did not have the advantage to experience open conversations about rates, in fact although her level of experience is similar as Carl's, she was mainly working with one cloud based LSP where her rate was set, and non-negotiable. She internalised this issue to a certain degree, as she considered that her inability to negotiate a fairer rate was due to her lack of experience. She was in her first year, and she sensed that her job providers did not believe she could do a good job – something she felt perfectly capable of, in her words. On the other hand, her translation rate was a source of frustration, as it did not allow her to dedicate the necessary amount of effort to a project. In fact, regardless of the deadline, Mimi had to work on as many projects as possible in a given day or week, in order to reach a target which guaranteed her enough income. She expressed that this was hard for her; she genuinely wanted to provide a good level of quality and prove her skills to the vendor, but reported that she could not really do it in those conditions.

Alma also benefits from working as in-house contractor, but for a much larger company than the one that provides Carl with in-house work. When Alma started working as a freelance translator there, she had the impression her rate was fixed and thus she did not question it. While working on a highly technical project, she realised that she needed a higher compensation for the amount of terminological research she was carrying out. She wrote to the project coordinator and asked for an increase; the coordinator escalated the request to the senior project manager, who in turn let Alma know who she had to contact for her raise. She then contacted this person, who ultimately raised her fee for that project only. As it will

be explained further down in the section related to communication (5.5), Alma was in a position to contact the project coordinator directly only because, as a contractor, she had admin rights on the project and could therefore see the coordinator's email address on her cloud platform. This is an option that the normally outsourced freelancers do not have, as the coordinators' contact is usually not visible. Therefore, while it seems that working in-house can be an advantage when it comes to direct communication and rate negotiation, it can be argued that the size and the type of company plays an equally important role. The bigger the company, and the most reliant on cloud platforms, the harder it is to navigate, even when working in-house. On the other hand, smaller or more independent companies which rely more on human management of resources tend to provide the necessary conditions to communication and trust-building (as experienced by Carl, Zachary, Katia and Violet), which in turn enables a good level of rate negotiation.

Deadline negotiation seemed less of an issue for the participants in the study, as most of them found them overall feasible. Problems would arise with negotiation – for the same issues encountered while negotiating rates – but in general respondents decided to leave out the so-called “rush jobs”. Alma, Mimi and Edie reported that problems occurred usually when accepting projects through automatic assignment system, because they could not know in advance the number of subtitles that were to be translated in a given file. If the number of subtitles were very high, indicating a dense dialogue, the deadline would often prove insufficient to carry out the job, but impossible to extend without a “reasonable” excuse. This would frustrate Edie, as she believed that rates and deadlines should reflect the number of subtitles in a file instead of runtime, constituting a more reliable indication of effort, in her opinion. She mentioned that she was deprived of key information, which did not allow her to make a well-informed decision about accepting a project or not. Working on highly dense

content generated frustration also in Mimi and Alma, who said they could not ask for an extension, and that they had to rush through the file in order to complete it by the deadline. The frustration was due to their commitment to quality, something that they couldn't fully provide under these circumstances, as reported by them.

The two senior respondents, Violet and Katia, have been autonomously running their translation activity and so they were in a position to always have their rate accepted as well as their deadline, because of their wide experience in the field. They also reported that their position allowed them to have an open conversation with clients (such as companies, agencies, or direct clients like film producers, distributors or directors) and that setting their own rates and deadline was their condition and guarantee for a high-quality work. It can be said that subtitlers perceive their rates and deadlines as being indicative of the value of their work. However, the issue is more varied than this and it strongly emerged that being able to communicate and negotiate also contributes to their confidence in asking for higher rates, while the impersonality of cloud platforms seemed to lower their willingness to actively engage in negotiation, as it will be analysed in further depth in section 5.6. Rate negotiation and issues of communication seem to impact the subtitlers' level of stress and therefore impair their process quality. Similar responses were also collected around standardisation measures in the subtitling industry, visible in the fragmentation of tasks through the use of template files, as presented in the following section.

5.4.3 Workflow, template files and use of skills

When asked about their workflow, the respondents provided varying answers on the ways they use their skills to approach subtitling tasks. As a general note, the more experienced subtitlers such as Violet and Katia (and to a lesser extent Edie and Zachary) described a well-

rounded workflow, focused on filmic rhythm, sound and context, and the importance of watching the subtitled content completely, at least once, before delivering the project. On the other hand, the less experienced respondents (Alma, Mimi and Carl) described their workflow mainly in terms of the tasks they have to carry out on the (platform) software. They also seem to rely strongly on their LSPs' instructions and template, and the warning systems in place on their cloud platforms.

The use of English timed templates emerged as a key topic when discussing workflow, as all seven participants in the study work with templates and voiced their opinions about it. The only exception in the group is Carl, whose main job was creating English timed templates for the cloud based LSP and therefore, unlike the others, transcribed the dialogue and originated the subtitles (thus creating templates). When he was subtitling for his second client, he translated and originated without a timed template. The reason why Carl's second employer did not use template files may be the fact that Carl translates into English, while templates are commonly employed in the transfer from English into another language. Also, being a small distribution company which worked with a limited amount of languages, the cost savings associated with the use of template files might not apply to the needs of their workflow. In fact, it could be more time- and cost-consuming to have two or more subtitlers create and proof-read a template file for each project, rather than employing a small team of competent subtitlers who can be trusted to originate subtitle files in their TL following the company guidelines. All the other respondents translated with the aid of templates to varying extents, as shown in the Table 5.2 below:

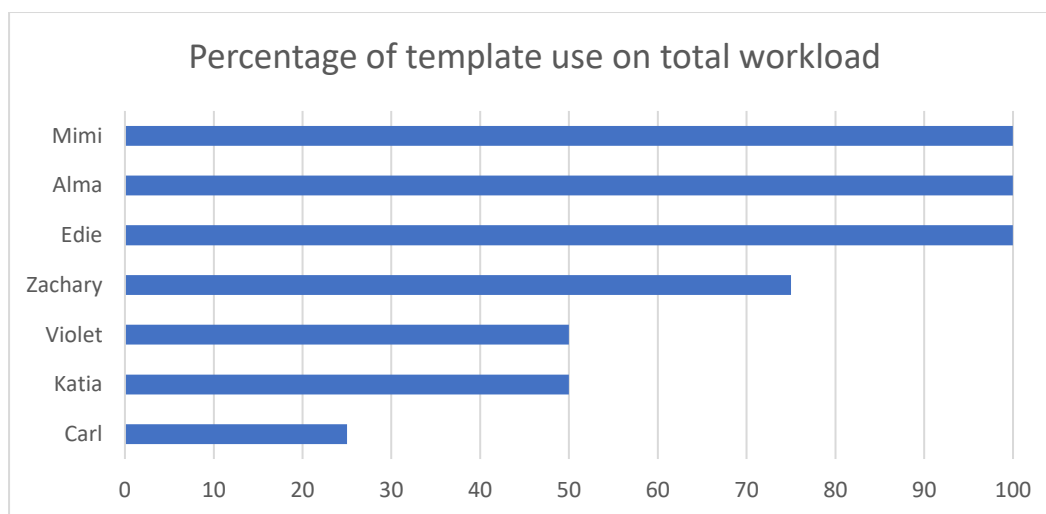


Table 5.2. Percentage of template usage on total workload

The participants' responses on template files revealed a number of different aspects, which have been grouped around the templates' perceived advantages, main implications in terms of language, time-cueing, and industry practices, and the related repercussions on the different dimensions of quality.

- **Time saving**

The data reveal that amongst the six participants who regularly translate with templates, none of them seem particularly enthusiastic to use them, but they recognise that it speeds up their work most times. Their experiences and perceptions point to conflicting opinions, but the main advantage on which all subtitlers agree is time saving, associated to financial considerations. Indeed, the six respondents recognise that using a template allows them to be faster and so increase the number of projects they can work on in a given timeframe, therefore raising their profit margin. More specifically, the most experienced subtitlers in the sample pointed out that they accept to use templates when the job is particularly rewarding in financial terms, which can compensate for the disadvantages experienced, as will be seen below.

- **The focus on language**

As described in Chapter 4, timed template files are based on the division of the two main subtitling tasks, translation and time-cueing. They speed up the subtitling process by providing an English version of the dialogue with a timecode, removing the need for the subtitler to time-cue. Also, templates can reduce research times when they include annotations on cultural references or idiomatic expressions, and can aid comprehension by giving contextual information when a video is darkened for anti-piracy reasons. Because of this, some of the subtitlers (Zachary, Alma and Mimi) find that working with templates is easier as it allows them to “focus more on the language, and not worry about time-cueing”, although they recognise the degree of language reduction that comes with strict timing rules. Instead, the most experienced subtitlers (Katia and Violet) do not agree on the ease of use of template files: they reported that having to resort to extreme linguistic condensations (which do not feel authentic to them) actually make the translation task harder than it would be if they could use their time-cueing skills.

From a time-cueing perspective, participants stated that vendors either provide a “locked” template (where the time-cues cannot be modified) or allow a degree of “re-timing”, which gives the possibility of adding, merging and splitting subtitles, and slightly modifying in- and out-cues in order to comply with the LSPs’ specifications. In both cases, this is consistent with the restriction of tasks experienced particularly on cloud platforms, which seem to standardise processes and minimise subjective choices and risk of errors. The LSPs’ guidelines are described as very strict by the participants, who nevertheless see the re-timing option as a considerable improvement compared to having a locked template. Restrictions in the time-cueing task imply an even more constrained use of language, calling for stronger reduction strategies (Kapsaskis 2011; Artegiani and Kapsaskis 2014; Oziemblewska and Szarkowska

2020) – an aspect clearly indicated as a source of frustrations by most template users (Alma, Mimi, Edie, Katia, Violet), who said that extreme condensation often impaired the linguistic and stylistic quality of their translation. The re-timing option mainly provides room for manoeuvre to adjust the reading speed, but rarely allows creative subtitling, as noted by Edie, but also less experienced respondents like Mimi and Carl. Indeed, all template users also spontaneously recognised that having complete freedom to time-cue would be the best condition in terms of subtitling process and product quality, as it makes a considerable difference in terms of applying creative and stylistic choices, and also due to their satisfaction and engagement with a creative task.

- **Template files as source text**

When asked about their workflow, three out of seven subtitlers (Zachary, Alma and Mimi) spontaneously said they focused more on the template than the AV material, and the description of their workflow suggests that, instead of seeing the audiovisual content as their main ST and the template as a reference material, they use the English timed template as their ST – and the video as supporting material, if and when they are trying to solve a translation doubt. Carl, who is the only one who does not have to use a template file when translating, seems to place a considerable importance on having one. When he is working for his second client, he benefits from a comfortable deadline and the freedom of deciding his own subtitling workflow, unlike most of the other respondents. When describing his approach, he reported that if he does not have a script, he listens to the audio and transcribes the full dialogue before translating it. He said he transcribes the whole film “because I do not have a template there, so I have to figure it out myself” – which might imply that he does not feel comfortable translating directly from the audio and video, as it is often the case when subtitling without a template or script. This could be partly due to his limited experience, however it is very likely

that the template-mediated workflow has been consolidated so strongly by key industry vendors in the last decades, that those subtitlers who have entered the market in the last few years had little option to work without a template, and struggle to imagine a subtitling workflow without one. More generally, the tendency to use template files as STs could be due to the fact that the LSP indirectly encourage subtitlers to rely on the template – for instance by providing a darkened video file which needs contextual information found on the template only, or offering a rate and deadline which can only cover one task, either the linguistic or the time-cueing one.

- **Implications for subtitling product, process and social quality**

Katia raised her dissatisfaction with the template files in relation to their intrinsic quality: in her view, the standardisation and cost reduction measures that led to the adoption of the template file have also meant that the template itself is created under cost-saving principles. She maintains that not enough attention is paid in the making of a good quality template, an opinion which is fully shared by Edie, Mimi and Carl, too. In the short term, if the quality of the template itself is low, then it is highly likely that the quality of translation in various TLs will be negatively affected (as Edie and Katia noted frequently while proofreading). This would be also due to the tendency to take the template as the only (or most reliable) ST, as seen above, given that the quality of a translation relates strongly to the quality of the ST (Födisch 2017). The quality of templates also seems to be associated to the value placed on the project, as will be further explored in the next section.

As the most experienced of all, Katia also expressed her concern that using templates will lead translators to become less aware of filmic specificities and time-cueing strategies and issues – suggesting that this practice implies a risk of skills erosion, which could spread across the dimensions of social, process, and product quality. Indeed, along the line of Kapsaskis

(2011 p. 169), it can be argued that, paired with limited rates and deadlines, using templates does not encourage novice subtitlers to develop their linguistic and reduction strategies in combination with time-cueing techniques – thus impairing their use of skills and expertise (elements of their process and social quality). In the long term, the final product quality could also suffer, as subtitlers would be less prone to successfully overcome the limitations offered by template files, and more likely to give in to adopting a telegraphic, flat, and unauthentic style .

As seen before, carrying out the linguistic task only, and employing heavy reduction strategies can often be frustrating to subtitlers, thus potentially contributing to a perceived low process quality. Another social effect of the limitations imposed by the template is the threat to their professional identity. Mimi, Katia and Edie all have very different experience and use templates to different degrees, but they all feel that their professional satisfaction is related to the freedom to use their skills – and that their degree of autonomy defines how much they own their profession, and may determine how long they decide to stay in the industry (Sakamoto and Födisch 2017). The three of them said that not being able to make subtitles from scratch makes them identify less with the professional figure of the subtitler, to the point that they feel “second-hand translators” (Edie), or that they do not see their work as their own. Once, Mimi had the chance to originate subtitles for a film, and this produced in her an unfamiliar feeling: “I was so proud of what I did, I felt they were mine”. This increased her sense of frustration with this industry practice, which contributed to her choice of leaving the subtitling career at the time, thus revealing a phenomenon of adverse selection, as introduced in 5.2.

The template file can be considered another working material in the subtitling process, but it is crucial to remember that its inception is the result of standardisation and cost-

reduction measures in the industry, and therefore it can be regarded as a crucial working condition, whose impact goes beyond the process and product dimension and into the wider socio-economic sphere. Indeed, as will be explored in depth in Chapter 6, standardisation measures entail the fragmentation of tasks so as to manage smaller work units in a way that is easier to streamline and control. From the subtitlers' point of view, the smaller the task, the smaller the skill required for it, the smaller the price paid for it. From a company perspective, the smaller the task, the easier it is to assign it to freelancers, and also to assign quality indicators for its evaluation. Nevertheless, this type of division of labour entails a number of consequences, such as the risk of deskilling a large portion of the subtitling workforce and of lowering the level of satisfaction in the job.

5.5 Performance of technical actors and quality of working material

The English timed template is only one of the materials involved in the production process of subtitles, together with many others. The present section reports findings about the perceived quality of source and reference materials according to the respondents' answers, and then reflects on their observations about subtitling software and other technology actors. The subtitlers' perceptions on the quality of their working materials can be categorised mainly in two areas, according to the work environment: off-cloud, and cloud subtitling. The subtitlers working mainly or exclusively off-cloud (Violet, Katia and Zachary) reported that the source material they receive (the audiovisual content) has a good video quality on average, and that the client is generally willing to send a higher resolution video, if needed. Violet and Katia also specified that although they systematically have to ask for as much reference material as the client can offer, clients are always willing to send what they have. Templates are generally found to be of good quality (or at least error-free) when provided, and the same can be said

of other reference material such as scripts or dialogue list. Glossaries and terminology lists seem to be less available in the direct subtitler-to-client relation, perhaps due to the absence of an intermediary (the LSP) where usually project or client-managers take time to compile these documents, and so both Violet and Katia reportedly carry out the necessary terminological research themselves, and may create a glossary for their own use, if necessary.

As for the subtitlers who work mostly or exclusively on cloud platform, the quality of their working material is highly varied, and this depends on the profile that has been assigned to the project, a finding also discussed by Dunne (2012), Jiménez Crespo (2018) and Moorkens (2021). Indeed, LSPs offer their services at different price points, so as to cater for projects according to the budget allocated and the prominence of a certain content, as specified by the client, and categorise them into high and low profile. The high-profile projects are usually high-budget productions for theatrical distribution, but also highly anticipated and sponsored streaming series and films, which have been increasingly accompanied by international marketing campaigns. Conversely, low-profile projects are all those who do not fall into the previous specifications. The high-profile projects present a contradictory mix of conditions: on the one hand, the quality of reference materials (glossaries, terminology lists, key nouns and phrases lists, and English timed templates) ranges from error-free to good and are considered useful, as Edie and Zachary point out. On the other hand, the quality of the video constitutes a major disadvantage, as the image is heavily desaturated, often presented in black and white with a darkened or grainy background, for anti-piracy reasons. This is seen by most respondents as a restriction, as it barely allows the subtitler to make out the characters and understand what happens on screen (although the template annotations should help them with context, as seen earlier in 5.4.3).

Working on high-profile projects is also perceived as contradictory by the subtitlers themselves. Indeed, they enjoy the task because of the interesting challenge it presents, and because they generally receive a higher rate, but it eventually loses its appeal if and when they cannot really see the image (Edie, Alma). Another drawback is the fact that high-profile productions are usually subject to simultaneous shipment (i.e. their release date is the same in more than one country or continent) and therefore, due to compressed production times, LSPs receive these materials in their preliminary form, subject to one or multiple updates, as explained in Chapter 4. This phenomenon is found also by those working off-cloud, as subtitlers across cloud and off-cloud environments reported working on preliminary files. This is perceived as satisfactory, as they feel like they are contributing more to the film post-production process (Katia, Edie), but at the same time “frustrating because it’s the best content, but we work on it at the worst conditions”, as Edie put it. Indeed, after the preliminary file is translated, subtitlers are required to update the file for each version that the client sends, until the project is finalised. Working on updates (which reflect the clients’ modifications) can be challenging due to the short turnaround that they are subject to, and the fact that the client might not provide a change list. Table 5.3 provides a quick visualisation of the working condition described above:

	Off-cloud	Cloud subtitling	
		<u>High-profile</u>	<u>Low-profile</u>
AV content	Good quality, high visibility	Low quality, saturated image	Good quality
Script / dialogue list/ template	Error-free to good quality	Error-free to good quality	Low quality
Glossaries, terminology list	Usually not provided by client, subtitlers make their own	Error-free to good quality	Low quality or not provided
Preliminary workflow	Yes	Yes	No

Table 5.3. Quality of working materials

Low-profile projects show the opposite combination in terms of quality of the material: with the AV content deemed to be of lower value and / or at lower piracy risk, the quality of the video image is usually good or at least much more visible. However, glossaries and terminology lists are either non-existent or barely useful, as they may contain mistakes or double entries that generate confusion in translators, and mainly end up creating other issues (Edie, Katia). In terms of template files, the low-profile templates are found to be of poor quality both for time-cueing and language, according to Zachary, Alma and Mimi. Nevertheless, data show inconsistent quality levels for English timed templates, as low quality has also been occasionally observed when working on high-profile content (Edie and Katia), which suggest that some cloud based LSPs may experience problems in the quality assurance of template files. Both respondents reported encountering reading speeds that are already too high, implying a lack of concern for the language expansion in translation. In addition, three respondents described miscomprehension issues when working with templates that had already been translated into English from a different language – in these cases the English rendition is often not clear enough or does not seem related to what happens on screen (Oziemblewska and Szarkowska 2020).

Mimi and Zachary hypothesised that low quality templates were made by “either automatic speech recognition, or someone underpaid, under stress and under pressure”. This proved to be particularly stressing for Mimi, as she often had to spend extra time and effort to understand what was being said exactly (as the template did not correspond to the actual dialogue) and research specific terminology that was not explained in the template notes. Eventually, it generated a sense of disillusion in her, due to the higher expectations that she held when entering the subtitling market for the first time: “you come here with your degree

in translation and then you see these templates... and you ask yourself, 'is this what I have to work with?'. I found it frustrating that the materials didn't correspond to the quality standard that we learn in translation courses".

Indeed, as it will be explored in further depth in 5.5.2, more and more templates seem to be realised with the help of automation, and while it appears that the high-profile templates are either human-generated or heavily post-edited, the low-profile templates seem to consistently receive less attention.

5.5.1 Interaction with technology

As seen in Chapter 4, the interaction with technology actors is intrinsic to the translation profession, and acquires an even more central role in subtitling, as technology is an instrumental actor for the creation of the subtitle file on a practical level and, from a broader point of view, to the very existence of the current industry and business models. All respondents have an ongoing relationship with communication technologies, and with specific software that process and allow operations on audiovisual content. This section will explore specifically the relationship between the participants and the subtitling software that they use, as these have repercussions on their own process quality. As already noticed in the sections above, almost all respondents subtitle with a tool embedded on a cloud platform. The respondents' sample can be divided into two groups, those who work with the software provided by the agency they work for (mainly on cloud), and those who own a subtitling piece of software, as Table 5.4 below shows:

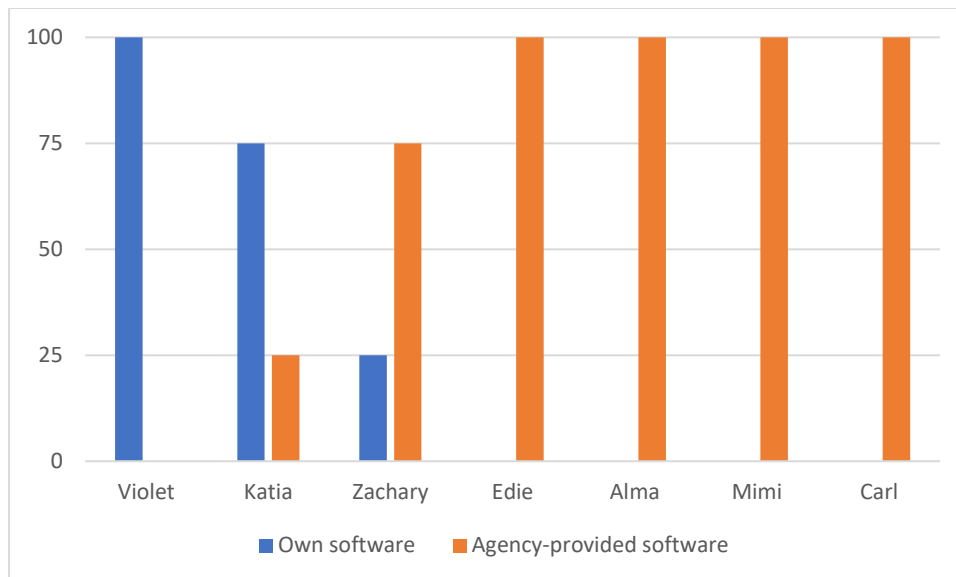


Figure 5.4. Use of own vs. agency-provided software

A deeper analysis of the data regarding human/machine interaction reveals that the subtitlers' choices of software mainly fall into two categories, those responding to client's needs and preferences (client-orientation), and those coming from personal needs and preferences (self-orientation).

- **Client oriented choices**

For three out of the seven respondents, the relation with subtitling can be clearly classified as client oriented. Indeed, Zachary and Carl, who carry out most of their work on cloud platforms, enjoy the "simple, intuitive and straightforward" design of such virtual environments, which are also very similar to one another in terms of features and interface. They see this as an advantage, as opposed to desktop-based software that generally imply a longer learning curve. When working for other clients, Zachary originates subtitles using his own license-based software, which he chose because of its advanced options that meet the technical requirements that many clients demand nowadays (such as sound spectrogram, frame focus, and shot-change recognition). In light of this, it can be argued that his relation to subtitling

software is **client oriented**, as he has no issues with working on the platform, and when choosing his own software he focused on clients' demands.

Either on or off-cloud, Carl values the convenience of working with a tool which is freely provided, serviced and maintained by the agency – a point of view which is shared by Alma, too. Both think that the software should be the client's responsibility, and do not consider investing in a license-based software program; Carl even refused jobs that required him to own specialist software. However, they were both critical of the cloud subtitling software: both dislike the restrictions placed on communication and added that the spellcheck and syntax check functions need improvement in general, something which is especially annoying for Alma. If she could choose, she would work on a customisable and more efficient tool, however she also said that, eventually, her choice of software would be "*whatever the client wants*", as long as she receives training and knows "*where she has to click*". In sum, as both would be satisfied to continue working on any functioning tool that the client provides and maintains, it can be said that their relation to subtitling software is **client oriented**.

- **Self-oriented choices**

Eddie works on one cloud platform, of which she has a fairly tolerant opinion – she reckons that "it does the job" but also finds it very frustrating that some functions (mainly spellcheck and search) do not work properly often times. Since subtitling is her second job, she finds it acceptable to work on a client-provided software which did not require prior investment (and for which training was provided), and for this reason it can be argued that her relationship to technology is **self-oriented** as it aims at maintaining her own preferred balance between effort and financial convenience. Her attitude is similar to Katia's, who accepts the platform – with its related restrictions and occasional malfunctioning – because the work she does there has a convenient price-to-effort ratio for her. Also, Katia mentioned that in the platform she uses,

she can customise keyboard shortcuts. This is an advantage that she values from an ergonomic point of view as it allows her to only use her keyboard and avoid repetitive strain injury, an issue that led her to abandon other cloud platforms in the past. However, Katia carries out most of her work with direct clients, for whom she works with her own licensed software that “has been created by subtitlers, for subtitlers”, and would not negotiate on this. Either on or off-cloud, Katia’s relationship with subtitling technology is entirely **self-oriented**, as is modelled upon her own professional needs.

Another professional who does not compromise on technology choices is Violet: she works for different clients, big and small, direct clients and agencies alike, although she consciously and actively refuses to work on cloud subtitling platforms. The main reason is that she wants to be able to retain a copy of her final subtitles, an option that is not allowed with cloud based LSPs (a practice which is largely confirmed by Kuo, 2015 and by AVTE, 2021). She added that, when working through agency or direct client, she is usually free to keep a copy of her work. In addition, in these working relationships she also has the option to negotiate moral rights for her work – though often these are not granted easily. Because the vendors on cloud platforms do not allow subtitlers to even save and retain a copy of the subtitles for her records, let alone negotiate moral rights on the subtitles, Violet refuses to do any work for them. A brief distinction between rights may be needed here to better understand what is at stake. As defined by the UK Copyright Licensing Agency (CLA), the intellectual property rights attached to an original work are referred to as copyright, and allow the copyright owner (in this case the audiovisual producer, i.e. the client) to protect against others copying their work (plagiarism) or reproducing their work without authorisation (piracy). At the same time, the Berne Convention (1886) considers translations as a resulting work that ‘shall be protected as original works without prejudice to the copyright in the original work’. In 1948, the Berne

Convention introduces the notion of moral rights: these are ‘linked to the personality and reputation of an author [...] and allow a person to claim authorship and to object to distortion or modification of a text’ (Moorkens and Lewis 2019, p. 471). In the case of Violet, for instance, moral rights would bestow authorship of the created subtitles on her, which also implies that her consent would be needed in case the client or agency wanted to use her subtitles as a template for other language. Claiming moral rights on one’s translation, therefore, is entirely legitimate and possible, and although largely it does not imply any transfer of royalties, it can be argued that it makes a positive difference in the professional recognition of AVT translators as authors. Nevertheless, while the regulation on copyright seems to be more homogeneously enforced internationally, the remits of moral rights seem more complicated to ascertain as they are regulated by norms at international, regional, and national level (Troussel and Debussche 2014). In addition, international legislations state that ‘copyright for work created by an employee during the course of their employment is owned by the employer’ (CLA) and neither UK/European nor US copyright laws recognise any moral right attached to authors (SACD), thus actively creating a grey area that risks to override the Berne convention’s provisions on moral rights. In this situation, the most viable option seems one in which translators associate and become organised so as to appeal to their regional and national regulations for the protection of their moral rights. The lack of standards on moral rights across international laws leads to ‘a loosened hold on intellectual property and ongoing data dispossession [which] is part of a larger disempowerment of creative workers’ (Moorkens 2017, p. 472).

In terms of software, she said she could accept to work with a client’s software only if it were a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. So far, she has always accepted work that she could carry out with the software she carefully chose and learnt how to use proficiently – in this

case, a licensed software which she selected for its interface and the functionalities which suit her workflow best, and therefore it can be said that her relationship with subtitling technology is entirely **self-oriented**. Her uncompromising attitude – and Katia’s to some extent – reveal a link between one’s perceived professional identity and the freedom to choose one’s working tools. Indeed, neither Violet nor Katia find the convenience of having access to ‘free’ software appealing, as it inevitably comes with a cost, usually in the guise of restrictions – such as limited communication, the reduced and sometimes faulty functionalities, or the impossibility to negotiate conditions as well as moral rights, as seen above. The same attitude is shared by a much less experienced respondent, Mimi, who did not interact happily with the cloud platform for the same reasons she did not welcome the use of template files: she did not need “something easy that helps” her in completing the task, because that help was in fact an imposition which came with limitations in her use of skills, which lowered her internal motivation in the job. She likened the cloud software to the template file, as actors that are both limited and limiting, and said that these working conditions contributed to decreasing the degree of ownership she felt towards her subtitling profession, to the point that she decided to abandon the career, which indeed can be seen as the ultimate **self-oriented** choice. If she had the chance, she would buy a licensed software which would allow her to have full control on her work, and be creative with her subtitling choices, something she longed for and was not feasible in the cloud platform- and template-mediated environment where she used to work. Katia echoed the same thoughts, by describing the cloud software (and templates) as an effective system to manage mass production through small tasks that can be done as in an assembly line, i.e. in a production cycle in which the “true craft of subtitling” is simply not possible.

In sum, respondents with opposite levels of experience associated the ownership of (and control over) technology to the freedom of establishing one's working conditions, and to the reinforcement of one's professional identity through the pursuit of a "full" subtitling, as opposed to a fragmented version of the profession, which the platform business model seem to encourage.

5.5.2 Automation

Four out of the seven respondents described varying degrees of automation in their subtitling workflow, and mentioned that templates sometimes contain repeated mistakes, which do not look like human mishearing errors, and so they imagined that dialogue had been transcribed with automatic speech recognition (ASR) technology. Their inference was confirmed by Carl's interview, in which he described his workflow as a template creator and explained that his employer generates templates through automatic time-cueing technology as well as ASR. While there is no evidence to demonstrate that other companies use ASR and automatic time-cueing too, the company that Carl works for is a large vendor with a long-standing relation to major streaming clients – the same end-clients whom the other respondents work for, in theory.

From what has emerged so far in this and the previous chapter, a standardisation tendency can be noticed in the practices of the subtitling industry, and so it is plausible that many LSPs want to include the use of automation for the creation of templates, so as to be more competitive in the market. Carl said that the language extracted is mostly "wrong, all nonsense", and that automation is mainly useful on a time-cueing level to recognise the beginning of the dialogue and not lose sight of shot changes. Despite saying that he invariably deletes the automatic transcription and enters his own, he likes the fact that he is not starting

on a completely blank page, and did not consider himself a post-editor. Nevertheless, he did not reflect on the extra labour that he incurs by having to feed the engine with his own transcriptions.

Edie spoke of a similar phenomenon she has been experiencing with her cloud based LSP. Her subtitling files are pre-populated, too: her translation column in the template is never blank, as it contains results from a MT engine. Without considering herself a post-editor, she also welcomed MT because it meant she was not starting on a blank file: “you can choose between two machine-translated options, and you can modify or reject one or both of them, but you never start from scratch. It’s kind of helpful, but maybe it’s because I like editing”.

She also mentioned that this practice was “scary” to her due to the fact that her intellectual property (i.e. her translation, either chosen from the MT options, edited or created from scratch) was used to feed the neural / hybrid¹⁶ MT engine database. This raises issues of data ownership, the translators’ moral and exploitation rights, as well as hidden labour and consequent labour exploitation, where ‘resources are originally created by human translators whose rights with regard to their creation are not always respected, and who are disempowered by the vendor model widespread within the language services industry’ (Moorkens et al. 2016, p. 1). Regarding effort, while Carl said he mostly discarded the automatic transcription and transcribe from scratch, Edie finds the suggestions increasingly useful, and recognises that her efforts have decreased since the introduction of this feature. In terms of professionalism, the two respondents did not identify with the post-editing profession. However, while Carl seemed mainly concerned by the lack of accuracy, Edie was worried about the increased accuracy of the automated translation, and reflected on how her

¹⁶ Her LSP had not disclosed information about this and had only announced a new feature powered by machine learning. From this, it can be assumed that a neural or hybrid MT system is used to create subtitles, by at least one European vendor.

work is being utilised to improve an automated system which, in her words, “eventually will replace a chunk of people working in this sector”.

Apart from the future of MT in subtitling, which goes beyond the scope of this thesis, it is worth reflecting on the ethical aspect of using subtitlers’ intellectual property as valuable data to feed MT engines. Indeed, this is not a situation in which Internet users willingly enter text on freely available MT engines and rate its translations, and sometimes edit it to improve it. This issue concerns professionals who are creating an immense corpus while carrying out their work, and yet they are only paid for their subtitling work and not compensated for the fact that they provide valuable learning material for the MT engine. Instead, Edie believes their rates will decrease precisely because the MT engine is improving rapidly, and they will be asked to post-edit content which will require less and less effort. The use of automation in cloud platforms has deeper implications on the subtitlers’ interaction and communication habits, which is explored in depth in the following section.

5.6 Quality of communication and interaction

Table 5.5 summarises the interactions between the respondents and other actors in the subtitling workflow:

	Project manager via email	Project manager via cloud ticket	Colleagues (translators, proof-readers, QCers)	Direct client representative
Zachary	Often	Often	Only if working off-cloud	Only if working off-cloud
Edie	Rarely	Mostly	Yes, though not allowed	Not allowed
Alma	Rarely	Mostly	Not allowed	Not allowed
Carl	Rarely	Mostly	Only if working off-cloud (in-house, face to face interaction)	Occasionally, through cloud ticket
Mimi	Always	/	Not allowed	Not allowed

Violet	Sometimes	Never	Often	Often
Katia	Sometimes	Occasionally	Only if working off-cloud	Often

Table 5.5. Interactions at work

As a general observation, cloud subtitlers have less options to communicate and interact with other actors, compared to those working off-cloud, whether from home or in-house. Indeed, the respondents with a direct contact with the client (or an LSP operating off-cloud) benefit from an open communication that allowed them to negotiate rates and deadlines more comfortably (as reported by Zachary and Carl in section 5.2.4) and, overall, benefit from the personal relationship that they establish with their project managers and colleagues and the information they could exchange on projects, requirements and availabilities.

Violet explained that working with direct clients and smaller agencies gave her the option of establishing a respectful collaboration based on clarity, politeness, and professional commitment. Experience has taught her how to avoid the “less respectful clients” (those who offer low budgets and/or short deadlines) and, as discussed in section 5.4.2, an open communication has allowed her to establish satisfactory conditions in her projects – as experienced also by Katia, and to a lesser extent by Zachary too. Carl, who had recently started working for a second client (a smaller in-house company as seen in 5.3), could also benefit from a pay rise after familiarising himself with the PM and the company owner. In general, he prefers the face-to-face communication with the PM and his translators and proof-reader colleagues for the amount of direct feedback and information that results from it, as compared to the depersonalised communication via cloud tickets that he experiences with his main employer on platform. He even said he prefers “*working with actual people*”, as if the cloud-

mediated interactions were perceived as being less “real” or the people at the other end of his screen were less human.

Indeed, on the cloud platforms adopted by many larger LSPs, there is no direct contact among translators, and even more rarely between them and the end-client. The only interaction allowed is between translator and PM, although often this is filtered by the platform, an actor which ultimately constitute the subtitlers’ first point of contact. Indeed, project managers are located either at the vendors’ premises or are outsourced, and they mainly answer *through* the platform to tickets sent by users (the translators) they hardly know, if at all. On occasions, translators can contact them via email, although this contact detail is not always provided. Alma reported that her PM are usually outsourced to other areas, and if she has a project-specific query she contacts them through the internal chat service, or email. However, she can only do this because her position as in-house contractor allows her to access the project manager’s email address, and if she did not have an in-house account, she would not have been able to do the same. The other respondents confirm that the communication with PMs is mostly done through the platforms.

From their side, subtitlers send their queries but rarely know when they will get an answer and from whom, and so an open communication (identified as the basis of a good collaboration by the other respondents) seems to be out of the question. Not having a stable relation with their PM has led the participants to perceive platforms as being fully “impersonal”, to the point that their job providers sometimes do not even seem to be physical or real, which is sometimes felt as a source of stress or unease, as reported by the participants. Katia, Edie, Zachary and Carl have all expressed their unease when dealing with “huge, anonymous companies”, and added that the more outsourced a company is, the more problematic their interaction and experience becomes. Three of them “really hated” the fact

that the only times that PMs sent emails, these were always addressed to the whole pool of freelancers, rather than to them personally. Not knowing the project managers was perceived as a negative aspect by all of them, on a personal level but also practical, such as the risk of deleting important emails from people they had never heard of, as experienced by Edie. They also pointed out that their interactions were hindered by the time differences (PMs located in other time-zones, as discussed in 5.4.2), and language differences, especially when dealing with outsourced PMs in non-English speaking countries, which may also entail a possible distance between working cultures and email etiquette. This implies a considerable influence of outsourcing practices on communication patterns.

Mimi worked for a small agency and, even though her work was done on a platform, she benefited from a more direct relationship with her PMs, an element which she valued and made her feel “very lucky”, compared to what she had heard from other people’s experiences. However, she missed the interactions with fellow subtitlers, whom she was not allowed to contact – a restriction which is also placed on all the other cloud subtitlers. Edie recalled she was feeling “lost, and new to the industry” when she started subtitling again after a five-year hiatus and wanted to connect with her colleagues – but this was only allowed if she insistently claimed a valid reason, such as resolving an issue with the proof-reader. Indeed, one time her project manager allowed her to get in contact with her proof-reader and her QCer, and she reportedly “learnt enormously from collaborating closely with them, the quality of the work improved so much because of that communication. I work so much better in this way”. Her comment strengthens the link between communication and product quality, because of the agreement that she could reach with her reviewers, mainly on semantic and stylistic choices. As a rule, she was not allowed to contact her colleagues, but she managed to find their details and began what she described as “a grassroots initiative”, which resulted in an email thread

with all the subtitlers and proof-readers working for the agency in the same language pair – a line of communication which had to be kept private from the agency.

Similarly, at the time of our interview, Katia had been trying to convince her project manager to let all language actors in a long-term project communicate. Together with several others, she was working on a 50+ episode series and grew concerned around the low quality that they were producing, caused by “very unpolished templates”, which in turn posed frequent challenges of reading speeds, due to language expansion. She raised the issue of quality to her project manager, pointing out that those issues could have been solved more quickly and efficiently through collaboration, but was left without an answer. Her PMs did not seem to respond to her concerns (nor request for collaboration with her peers) and could only point to the related guidelines, which reinforced her view of the platform as impersonal, and also made her question the PM’s knowledge of subtitling: “the platform system is almost intentionally made to make you feel small. They make you feel like you bother them if you write them too much. They act like they are scared of us communicating freely, they don’t want translators talking too much among themselves, thinking too much about their tasks. [But then] it is also difficult to resolve issues with project managers [who] often don’t know the specificities of subtitling very well.”

The quality of communication and the company type (on/off-cloud) are elements belonging to the social dimension of translation. Together, they can have direct repercussions on process and product quality elements, such as the negotiation of rates and deadlines (section 5.4.2). Indeed, it can be argued that the subtitlers’ process quality lowers when they have to rush through subtitling projects because of low rates or a short deadline that could not be negotiated. Three quarters of the participants noticed that in those cases they would skip QC phases, or just work with less attention overall, so as to get the project done as quickly

as possible, which inevitably leads to varying degrees of quality loss at the product level, as acknowledged by most. In turn, the feeling that they cannot deliver their best work feeds back into their process and social quality, as they accumulate stress and frustration about the quality and quantity they cannot provide, combined with the fact that they cannot openly communicate and negotiate their terms. In this respect, the participants' experience and their preoccupations about the work they deliver under these conditions represent a direct link between social, process and product quality. Furthermore, Edie's and Katia's experiences, as presented earlier in this section, represent a link between unrestricted communication and collaboration, and the improvements on product quality that directly result from it.

A key factor that emerges is that communication is heavily, and negatively, affected by automation and virtual environments, as project managers as well as translators become unknown and invisible actors, and any familiarisation between the freelance translator and other actors in the subtitling production, and content production in general, becomes highly unlikely. The data collected confirms that automated workflows are characteristic of complex production networks used by businesses that rely heavily on outsourcing, a point already noted by scholars such as Abdallah and Koskinen (2007) and Srnicek (2017) and, therefore, on actors who are geographically dispersed, as investigated in section 5.2. Abdallah and Koskinen (2007) maintain that in these business models, the company structure and the virtual dimension of translation do not support horizontal links between the outsourced actors that are individually linked to the vendor. This is because information sharing between the peripheral actors might increase their level of association and collective bargaining (Moorkens 2017) thus affecting the centralisation of the vendors (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007 p. 679), which is a similar concept to that expressed by Katia in the quote above. The automation of key tasks of project management, such as job assignment, and the fact that PMs are

considerably less visible and available, further prevents a symmetrical distribution of information. Not having shared access to information nor direct communication options is detrimental to the building of trustful collaboration, as ‘trust entails that each of the actors’ perspectives and interests are addressed, that knowledge is shared, and that information is clear, accountable and legitimate’ (ibid., p. 678). At the same time, the lack of actual collaboration also undermines the quality of these apparently “collaborative” projects, to which dozens of language experts and administrative actors contribute.

Four of the respondents also provided a view on what it meant to work as a subtitler under different business models – indeed, those who started working in-house before 2010 (Violet, Katia, Zachary, Edie) all said that in “pre-streaming” business models, the option of learning the subtitling profession in-house provided them with direct knowledge and feedback, but also a well-rounded and contextualised picture of their activity as ingrained in the wider AV production and distribution system – elements which Sakamoto and Födisch (2017, p. 347) relate to high internal motivation for the employee. Then, after leaving or being removed from their offices shortly after the advent of the DVD industry, they increasingly had to rely on agencies as intermediaries (pipeline model) and became familiar with subtitling project managers who had knowledge of the profession and dealt with them, albeit remotely. This still provided the option to exchange information and build long-term and trustful working relationships, although with greater difficulty if compared to direct client/translator relationships or in-house settings, as also confirmed by Abdallah and Koskinen (2007) and Olohan and Davitti (2017). The phenomenon of increased marginalisation of the translators’ professional figures under outsourcing-based models such as pipeline, discussed by scholars like Abdallah and Koskinen (2007) and Moorkens (2017), has been consolidated by the platform business model and demonstrated by the interviewees’ responses and their

decreasing involvement in the production processes, to the point that translators risk feeling they are ‘loose parts’ in a process which they know very little about. On this note, it can be argued that automation has increased the LSPs’ centrality while isolating translators, leading to each actor working within their “pocket of knowledge”, as Katia aptly expressed, without the training and learning possibilities that result from communication and collaboration. This is an aspect that has been identified as carrying serious repercussion on the potential replaceability of outsourced actors by other actors with the same (little) “pocket” of knowledge (Dunne 2012; Jiménez-Crespo 2018; Moorkens 2021) – something that was, perhaps less consciously, expressed by most subtitlers in the sample.

5.7 Stress factors linked to working conditions

The main sources of stress for the respondents have been grouped thematically according to the elements mentioned in relation to stress. After highlighting the passages in the respondents’ interviews which mentioned stress and frustration (through a word search of these two terms, along with emotional-related terms such as ‘like’, ‘love’ and ‘hate’), I have grouped relevant responses and identified the four working conditions that subtitlers associated with stress, as illustrated in Figure 5.5. These are time-to-task and rates, quality of working material, personal working conditions, and client demands.

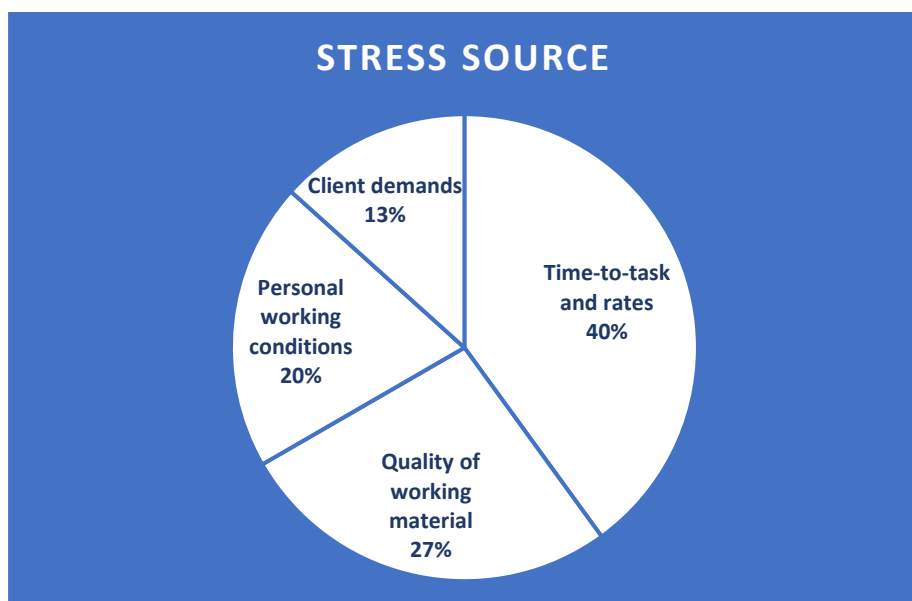


Table 5.5. Stress sources for participants

- **Working conditions: Time-to-task and rates**

These were sources of pressure, especially for Mimi and Alma, as they had to rush through their files, which caused a high level of stress due to the hurried translations that they were producing – a situation that was acknowledged by other respondents, too. Rates and deadlines were also perceived as stressful elements as they did not allow them to put the necessary effort and time to carry out appropriate research. Time-to-task (and lack thereof) emerges indeed as a key indicator for the subtitlers’ process quality. Time is also perceived as an effort indicator, and the subtitlers’ reactions to the issues of low rates suggests they perceive their time as “lowly valued”. In response to this, low rates result in lower effort on the part of the subtitlers (Mimi, Katia, Edie, Alma). The time spent on subtitling is also brought up critically in the rate-setting system, as Edie stated that she felt that a rate by number of subtitles (as opposed to runtime minutes as it is now) would be a fairer indicator of the time and effort

required, and would allow her and others (Mimi, Alma) to make a better choice when picking jobs from the platform.

The limits to communication were also a source of stress for Carl and Edie, especially when it came to feedback on their work, project instructions, and interactions with PMs and colleagues. The shortage of information and communication needed to be complemented with tickets and emails which took away precious time, and was often not as effective as a personalised and direct relation with the PM, although remote, let alone as face-to-face communication in in-house settings. Considering the amount of time that she had to spend explaining issues via the ticket system and waiting for a response, Edie said the rate offered by the vendors was too low.

- **Working conditions: materials and technology**

Time is also at stake without good-quality reference material (Födisch 2017 p. 185) as low-quality glossaries and templates require extra time for research, or even comprehension of the ST (Mimi). This also reinforces the need for collaboration with the other actors working with the same materials (Katia, Edie). When time and/or collaboration are not available, having to work with low-quality material represents a source of stress and frustration. Working with preliminary files was also reported as a stressful condition, as the numerous (and often urgent) updates on multiple languages present a high risk of human error.

Cloud platforms and automated job assignment are perceived as limiting interaction and communication, though only two participants reported frustration associated directly to the actual performance of technical tools, which sometimes causes them to shift other projects' deadlines (Carl) or to experience downtime due to technical malfunctions (Edie).

Nevertheless, technology relates strongly with most (if not all) the stress factors mentioned, as these are more or less directly associated to cloud subtitling within the platform business model. In this study, the largest source of stress most closely related to technology lies primarily in the fact that automation reduces the autonomy of all subtitlers by restricting their tasks and room for manoeuvre, as also highlighted by Moorkens et al. (2016) and Sakamoto and Födisch (2017). Also, the imposition of the platform and the impossibility to negotiate moral rights does not suit all respondents and could point to low levels of satisfaction (Moorkens and O'Brien 2017; Koskinen and Ruokonen 2017; Cadwell et al. 2018). At the same time, cloud platforms reduce the opportunities of communicating with project managers and with fellow translators, which points at the disempowerment of freelance translators and subtitlers due to the low possibilities of association and collective bargaining (Moorkens 2017, p. 469).

- **Personal and client-related sources of stress**

The personal working conditions which generate stress in the participants are mainly related to the financial insecurity connected to working as a freelance (Carl, Mimi) and the challenge of managing multiple deadlines (Katia). Although they are defined as 'personal' here, these conditions do not derive solely from the will of the participants, but from their actual viable options in the AV industry.

Lastly, client demands can directly increase the level of stress felt by participants, especially when these result in changes to the project (Zachary), or shorter deadlines (Zachary, Alma, Edie). Having to deal with clients or LSPs who are bad payers was a considerable source of stress according to both Zachary and Violet, which can be avoided with time and experience. However, it is important to notice that while direct client-induced stress seems limited, many of the working conditions determined by the LSPs are a result of client demands – the content

owner acquires therefore a great responsibility in setting the ground for good / poor working conditions, and good / poor subtitling process quality. From the need to work on a secure server (hence the adoption of cloud platforms), to the negotiation about budget and timeframes, the provision of reference material (quality of terminology/glossary) and the compressed production times leading to the use of preliminary files in the workflow, the dominant position of the client in the overall working conditions of subtitlers cannot be underestimated.

5.8 Quality measured quantitatively: the rating and ranking system

Amongst the client-oriented measures adopted by several LSPs, there is an aspect that greatly contributes to the stress of two participants and is worth a separate analysis. To keep track of the quality of their output, and demonstrate that level of quality to clients, some amongst the major LSPs have recently adopted a statistics-based quality measurement system. Carl and Edie are not the only subtitlers subject to this type of rating and ranking (Zachary, Alma and Katia also experience that) but they mentioned this system so often and with such a strong emotional response attached to it that its relevance became evident, especially due to its relation to the conceptualisation of quality.

Carl and Edie first brought up the quality assessment system when describing the training received when they started working on the cloud platform. Apart from the platform functionalities, and the LSP guidelines, they both had to undergo training about quality metrics and the error categories that need to be applied when reviewing others' work. Indeed, all files in a project are subject to proofreading and often QC: in these phases, the proof-reader and QCer review the files, and while doing so they apply error codes each time they see fit, by selecting them from a dropdown window. They might add a short comment to explain their

choice, and then the file is returned to the original translator or template creator so that the corrections can be accepted or rejected. When proof-readers and QCers assign error categories to a file, this automatically generates an error report, which is attached to that file but also to the translator's (or template creator's) profile. Carl and Edie mentioned that the error report provides little qualitative feedback: what they receive is a spreadsheet file with the number of errors by category, sometimes accompanied by brief comments.

The error categories are many – and they might differ from one LSP to another – but roughly revolve around three dimensions:

- 1) Linguistic – translation errors, consistency issues, spelling and grammar, missing content
- 2) Layout – formatting, punctuation, segmentation, positioning, treatment of text on screen
- 3) Synchronisation and time-cueing – adherence to shot changes, minimum and maximum duration, minimum gap, reading speed.

Carl and Edie's responses suggest that the error definitions could be worded more clearly, as both of them reported confusion, related to the rationale behind the error categories themselves and their application, and to the criteria according to which their error reports are used. Edie mentioned that the hardest part of her training was learning the error categories, and how to apply them while proof-reading other people's work. This is striking, as Edie is a highly educated individual with a solid translation background, and a near-native knowledge of the English language and yet she specified that she had to make a considerable effort to not only understand the nuances of the error categories, but also to get into that frame of mind of rating other people's work according to quality categories – which, in her

case, had been defined by the end-client (a large producer for streaming content) and not the LSP.

In addition to having their work evaluated, Carl and Edie evaluated other translators' files themselves when performing proofreading and both raised concerns to their project managers about the ways in which these scores are used in the agency, but did not receive an answer. Edie's project manager told her "not to worry" – but she specified that she needed more transparency and information in order to trust her PM, as she believed that her position at the vendor was determined by those numbers. In fact, in case their error count increased, the LSP would contact the subtitlers and offer extra training, according to the error category they "hit" the most. They also reported that the communication of errors was the sole reliable form of communication that both experienced on cloud, and the only type of feedback that they received.

Both reported that being subject to individual ratings stresses them "in a negative way" precisely because of the little transparency attached to this practice. They understood that receiving constructive and detailed feedback in every project would be desirable but unfeasible under those working conditions, however they both stated that this type of feedback is not useful to them, as it is not constructive enough – an opinion shared by Katia, too. They said that the LSP's first reaction to loss of quality was that of pointing the finger or blaming the translator (a similar approach was noted also in Sakamoto and Födisch 2017, p. 348), with an attitude that seemed "more destructive than constructive" and tended to isolate freelancers even further, often creating resentment amongst translators, proof-readers and QCers (Edie, Katia). These feelings were exacerbated by the impossibility to contact one another and discuss the nature of certain translation problems, or the reasons behind a negative feedback, and also because it was difficult to receive personalised or reassuring

answers from the PM. Edie called it a “very psychological issue” because every time an actor reviewed another actor’s file, they could potentially impair their performance, and possibly impact on their position with their LSP. Carl, Edie and Katia reported that sometimes they did not understand why a certain error was selected, or why their file had been evaluated through what seemed subjective criteria to them. A few months prior to our interview, Edie experienced high error counts on her file, which she attributed to a general disagreement with the QCer about her own linguistic choices, and not to objective errors. She repeatedly asked her project manager to put her in contact with the QCer “because they were screwing up my metrics”, and she feared that this could affect her position at the agency. Eventually, after repeated requests, the PM put Edie and the QCer in contact, they were soon able to resolve what was a subjective disagreement on a lexical choice, and the project went smoothly from that point onwards – however she was not able to reach the same degree of collaboration after this isolated occasion.

Ranking seems to be a determining factor also for the (automated) assignment of projects: from the two studies, it appeared that high-profile projects can be taken only by subtitlers whose ranking reaches a certain threshold. Another consequence of this practice is that the error reports which measure the performance of subtitlers and template creators could possibly be used for termination of contracts for freelancers, although it is not known how systematically or strongly this is enforced, as this option did not come across with certainty from the respondents, and it is a personal inference linked also to observations carried out in the workplace study (Study 1). What came out strongly from the respondents’ answers was the stress and pressure attached to this practice.

The rating system is instrumental to an LSP’s quality management as it allows to centralise quality control quantitatively. Indeed, these ratings create data that rank the

performance of subtitlers and template creators, as well as monitoring the error rate of single files and whole projects. This is only possible through an infrastructure that allows its owner to record activities which automatically generate performance and production-related data (Srnicek, 2017). Working on a cloud platform implies that huge quantities of performance data, including all data about errors, client's rejections and feedback are recorded and available to the platform owner – a phenomenon that might raise questions around data collection, management and safety that needs to be addressed in future research in AVT. The rating and ranking system highlights once again the information asymmetry which characterises the platform business model. As explained by Dunne (2012) through economic theory, in contexts where information is distributed asymmetrically, translation buyers – in this case the vendors – cannot know their translators personally nor they are always skilled in translation assessment, and therefore need to find solutions to distinguish good translations from bad. In light of the subtitlers' responses above, it appears that the use of rating and ranking systems fulfils this purpose.

Furthermore, these data also provide evidence on how well LSPs are performing in terms of quality of their outputs. This can be used to defend their own position in the market: since clients traditionally have no solid way of assessing the vendors' quality output and trustworthiness, except through experience (Akerlof 1970), vendors need a way to signal their status and retain their competitive edge, as well as proving they can contribute to maintaining the client's reputation.

In sum, it seems that the LSP's own ratings could enable end-clients to make informed decisions when choosing LSPs, and the subtitlers' ratings enable LSPs to make informed decisions when it comes to choosing freelancers. It appears, however, that subtitlers – who are effectively the service providers – are those who can make the least informed decisions

about their work, as they are required to work with little information and little transparency around the ranking and rating system, and are subject to restrictive communication and negotiation patterns.

5.9 Conclusion: reflections on quality

The subtitlers' perceptions and responses offered a view into their workflows and working conditions, which point to different levels of process and social quality as seen in the sections above, but also raise more questions than provide answers. A balanced interaction between inanimate and human actors needs to be explored and fostered, as it would be instrumental in coordinating translation labour globally in a way that looks at the subtitlers' needs, and also caters for clients' requests. At any rate, technology is not to be considered neutral, i.e. that its implications depend exclusively by who uses it and how. Indeed, technological functions depend on their inherent design by human actors, based on choices that follow a logic (usually of profit), which in turn determines and delimits the ways in which it can be used (Frabetti 2015; Olohan 2017). The advantages posed by cloud technology that is made freely available to freelancers come indeed at a cost, which is calculated in terms of data – from the metadata which provide all types of insights into the actual procedures of all platform users, to the quality management choices and measures that are made through the proof-readers' ratings, to the effort to feed MT systems. All of this constitutes considerable surplus that companies gain from the freelancers' labour (García 2017 p. 66), an issue that is still to be fully acknowledged not only by the freelance workforce as a whole, but also within academia.

The use of automation and translator-generated data to evaluate quality in a LSP's production highlights the difficulty of evaluating and maintaining suitable levels of quality across a global workforce when dealing with huge volumes of work (Dunne 2012).

Conceptualising and defining quality for a wide range of different actors, who are barely visible to one another, seems indeed to be one of the biggest challenges for current production networks, and it can be recognised that the widespread reliance on automation in job assignment and the use of rating and ranking methods of quality assessment can lead to positive outcomes in quantitative terms. Nevertheless, these are practices that require the application of experience-based knowledge and qualitative judgement with a necessary degree of subjectiveness, which, together with the restricted communication patterns, might constitute adverse conditions for the subtitlers' professional satisfaction and recognition, their visibility and prominence in the industry. This, of course, risks affecting the quality of their processes and ultimately of their product. Human interaction, collaboration and communication need more consideration and integration in the technology design, in the interest of both final quality and the subtitlers' professional satisfaction in their role.

The picture of quality that has emerged from this chapter contributes to our understanding of different facets of quality from the subtitlers' point of view – just as the previous chapter helped recognise quality aspects from a company perspective. In the next chapter, these multifaceted viewpoints will be combined and analysed from a wider economic angle, so as to theorise about the conceptualisation of quality in the current subtitling industry.

6 Standardisation and the making of quality

6.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters feature an extensive, thick description of the working practices observed during fieldwork in an AVT workplace (Chapter 4), and as they were reported by professional subtitlers during interviews (Chapter 5). The current chapter moves from the data that emerged from the two studies to a consideration of the industry and its processes from a wider angle. The aim is that of forming as complete a picture as possible of the very complex social, technical and economic environment in which the observed portion of AVT industry operates. The data from different sources create a dialogical and multifaceted narrative which aims to outline the main features of cloud subtitling practices in the globalised audiovisual market for theatrical and streaming production (as delimited in Chapter 1) and how these are being defined through industry trends, production processes and technological innovations.

The first sections (6.2, 6.3 and their subsections) will provide a brief overview of practices and business models, arguing that most of the mainstream AVT production occurring in the globalised market arena is currently inscribed in the so-called ‘platform economy’ and characterised by standardisation measures spanning across different companies. Here, standardisation emerges as a key concept, inextricably tied to the concept of quality – the main thread of the thesis – and the business practices discussed in the previous chapters. In fact, division of labour, centralisation of technology, and standardisation are three key features of the platform economy model in which many AVT practices are inscribed; the three will be analysed in depth, with constant references to factors coming from the two studies (described in Chapters 4 and 5).

The sections that follow (6.4 and 6.5) present insights from industry literature. They inform a critical discussion of the data that veers towards an analysis of how the meaning of quality is constructed in the industry, and how the concept of quality is used to enforce a standardised approach to subtitling work in the industry. The interlinked nature of social, economic and technological spheres, which characterises this thesis, is even more palpable in this chapter, and so is the relationship between industry and academic views of quality. Indeed, the chapter goes on to trace the links between academic functionalist approaches to translation, industry literature and quality standards, which prompts a critical discussion on the problematics arising from the application of functionalist theories in current contexts of mainstream AVT production under platform economy.

6.2 Situating AVT in platform economy

Current economic trends which define business models in the globalised language industry have been identified with umbrella terms such as ‘gig economy’, ‘digital economy’, and ‘platform economy’. Without using consistent or precise terminology in reference to the economic form, authors in translation and audiovisual translation literature (Abdallah 2011; Risku et al. 2013; Rodriguez-Castro 2013; García 2015) have been discussing the fact that the challenges posed by higher translation volumes have been met with outsourcing and increased standardisation of practices, which seems to be essential to manage work across the globe, as opposed to the ad-hoc management of translation projects. As it became clear also in the previous chapters, since the early 2010s, outsourcing and standardisation (made increasingly possible by technological advances) have become a feature of modern companies in the creative sector. This implies that freelancing is now the standard mode of employment for

many creative workers such as translators, proof-readers, subtitlers and so forth (Huws 2014; Moorkens 2017, 2020, 2021; Pielmeier and O'Mara 2020).

Outsourcing and standardisation align with the business models that have emerged from the platform economy, which, as Srnicek (2017) explains, defines those businesses that provide hardware and software foundations for others to work on. Such hardware and software ecosystems, commonly called 'platforms', 'cloud platforms', 'virtual collaborating environments' and so on, are currently being adopted by many LSPs, which have decided to transfer their activities to the 'cloud', as seen in the previous two chapters. It may be worth mentioning that the first instances of collaborative translation on cloud platforms emerged in the 2000s amongst fan-subbing communities. The platform model was then appropriated in the 2010s by corporate entities for crowd-sourced translation, whether voluntary or for profit (García 2015, 2017). Platforms are digital structures that allow different groups of people to interact within a provision of services, and act as the primary mediating actor between these groups such as clients, LSPs, and freelance actors (García 2017, p. 43). It follows that platforms constitute the actual environment where activities occur and, as in the case of the two studies conducted for this thesis, they provide the means to produce, transfer and process audiovisual content during the post-production phase. The fact that all working processes take place on a virtual infrastructure allows its owner to record such activities, which can automatically generate performance and production-related data (*ibid.*, p. 44). Proprietary commercial platforms, usually owned by service providers, are designed to represent the owner's principles and policies, who can apply such policies by imposing restrictions on the ways in which platforms are used (*ibid.*, p. 47).

It is worth noticing that terms such as digital, gig or platform economy encompass all those 'businesses that increasingly rely upon information technology, data, and the internet

for their business models' (Srnicsek 2017, p. 4). The terms 'platform economy' and 'platform business model' are used in line with Srnicsek (ibid.), for two reasons. First, because current AVT production is increasingly being carried out in virtual working environments which are already referred to with the term 'platform' by the actors who work there. The intention of this terminological choice in the thesis is therefore that of maximising comprehension and awareness in all readers, academic and/or professionals, by pointing out that translation and AVT platforms are indeed a representation of such platform economy. Second, Srnicsek's (ibid., p. 3) approach to defining the platform economy resonates closely with the aims of this thesis, which is that of considering and analysing entities as economic actors within the current mode of production, each with its agency, intertwined with the agency of the originating actor, namely financial capital:

For some, this focus on capital rather than labour may suggest a vulgar economism; but, in a world where the labour movement has been significantly weakened, giving capital a priority of agency seems only to reflect reality

This last point also resonates with the thesis' overall theoretical approach, which puts human and inanimate actors on the same level of analysis, and recognises their agency (see Chapter 2). Through an economic and business-oriented lens, Srnicsek (ibid.) identifies different types of platform economy based on various governing principles, one being Taylorism. This resonates particularly with Moorkens (2020, p. 15), who places translation production within a logic of *Digital Taylorism* (DT):

[in] DT: jobs are standardised, methods documented, but now new technologies enable more varied and invasive monitoring and surveillance of workers to ensure that their role is carried out as expected, using devices that can 'control and extract value from creative and knowledge work as well as physical labour in more precise, quantified ways' (Moore and Robinson 2016: 2781).

Moorkens highlights the features of the digital environments where translation work is now commonly carried out, which include standardisation of practices, the use of a centralised and impersonal virtual working environment, a lowering of the agency of freelance translators and of the expertise required from them (due to the fragmented and restricted nature of the tasks), and a higher level of precarity for freelancers, all of which has direct correspondence with the data collected in the two different studies of this project, and with the features of platform business models delineated by Srnicek (2017). In light of the elements discussed above, I argue that a potentially large chunk of commercial, paid subtitling production takes place within a platform economy, and under the tenets of Digital Taylorism.

In translation literature, Moorkens et al. (2016) argue that the technologisation of the translation industry (defined with a wider term as ‘vendor business model’) has reduced translators’ autonomy and agency through data dispossession and lack of recognition for the linguistic efforts towards the development of MT, and the fact that translators are displaced through outsourcing and so in a difficult position to associate, exert their agency and negotiate terms, working conditions and moral rights. García (2015, 2017) explores cloud-based CAT tools and the possibilities for ‘paid crowdsourcing’, another variation of platform economy that predates the fully bloomed, professional platforms in use nowadays, while Sakamoto (2018) discusses LSPs operating on digital platforms, but does not provide an economic term for the context. Nevertheless, both García and Sakamoto point to common features of automation and standardisation, and general reliance on data. Díaz Cintas and Massidda (2019) describe current technology use and workflows in AVT, specifying that cloud platforms have been rapidly gaining ground since the early 2010s. Their contribution details the features of different cloud platforms with different purposes (knowledge dissemination, educational, commercial) but does not contextualise these business models in economic terms. My thesis

aligns with the above literature in examining the centralisation of technology in subtitling practices, while attempting to frame it within the socio-economic context in which it emerged, and what implications it has in the construction of quality in the audiovisual language industry.

The sub-sections that follow will focus on three aspects of platform economy and Digital Taylorism: standardisation, division of labour and centralisation of technology. The tripartite distinction serves only to ensure clarity within a complex body of knowledge, and is not an indication of causal relationship or priority, as the three elements occur and recur together, intertwine and constantly emerge from the data analysis as found in the previous two chapters. In fact, one of the underlying premises of this thesis is that AVT practices have been faced with challenges brought on by a dramatic increase in the volume of work since the introduction of satellite and DVD technology in the early 2000s (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007; Georgakopoulou 2012), and even more since the rise of online streaming platforms (Díaz Cintas and Nikolić 2018), and by their popularisation afforded by lower technology costs. These developments coincided with a global situation of economic recession, which intensified the need to lower costs (Moorkens 2017). Altogether, this resulted in significant changes to the ways in which subtitles are produced, distributed, and consumed (Kapsaskis 2011), with virtual production networks, such as cloud platforms, becoming increasingly common (Risku et al. 2013; Rodríguez-Castro 2013). Such significant changes align with the massification of creative jobs, relying on standardisation of practices as well as outsourcing and division of labour as a way to increase workers' availability and reduce the costs associated with in-house employment (Moorkens 2017 p. 465). In fact, standardisation of work is a requirement for outsourcing, as it allows the transfer from a centralised to a dispersed form of knowledge; in turn, standardisation enables more outsourcing (Huws 2014, p. 61).

Both aspects are greatly facilitated by advances in technology, given that outsourcing is enabled by technologies designed in a way that allow actors to work from anywhere in the world, provided they have an internet connection. As for standardisation, from an industry point of view, audiovisual products need technical adjustments to abide by certain requirements (for their mastering for different purposes, such as content for television or theatrical distribution) and technology can enable the creation of a technically standardised product. From a point of view that takes into consideration not only industry needs but the experience of all actors, including freelance translators and subtitlers, technology enables standardisation because it can be designed and configured to allow (only) certain actors to do certain tasks in a certain way, according to company standards set up in order to deliver an error-free and functioning product. Technology therefore provides the means to centrally tune users' functions (whether allowing or restricting them) while standardisation intensifies the need for technology in a mutually recursive manner (Huws 2014, p. 37).

The following section explores the issue of standardisation in depth, by tracing its links with quality management and its implications in creative practices. Standardisation constitutes a central notion in this chapter as it is regarded by some in the industry as a way to ensure and improve quality, and thus brings together the two pillars of this thesis, technology and quality. In the eyes of the industry, technology enables standardisation, which in turn is what enables the establishment of predefined levels of quality. It can be contended that processes that result in massification and commoditisation, now found amongst creative jobs like audiovisual translation, in some ways reflect those which characterised factory productions a century ago (Huws 2014; Moorkens 2020). Yet, whereas in the mass production of material objects companies often aim for uniformity in the objects produced, in translation the uniformity seems to concern the processes by which translations are produced, rather than the product.

6.3 Standardisation

In order to clearly identify and explore instances of standardisation in subtitling practices, it is necessary to first understand what it entails from a broader, organisational point of view, where standardisation is seen as part and parcel of modern capitalistic economies. In an industry publication on quality management, Brache and Rummler (1988, p. 46) define the concept of 'Total Quality' by stating that quality should be defined at organisation, process and individual level, and that 'at each level, the organisation needs to define its quality systems and standards. [...] in a total system that ultimately determines the quality of an organisation's products and services'.

At organisation level, it means that workflows are analysed and then divided into standard procedures that allow the identification of minimum quality indicators; at process level, this implies that processes themselves are broken down into standardised units that can be assigned indicators for quality control and assessment; at individual level, this suggests that performance indicators are identified (according to tasks) and can be used to ensure and assess quality of workers' output. In a publication on quality management within Organisation and Business Studies, Liu and Liu (2014, p. 1247) specify that such quality systems and standards are part of quality management measures, which 'comprise a set of techniques and procedures to reduce or eliminate variation from a production process or service-delivery system so as to improve efficiency, reliability, and quality'.

The AVT industry adopts a number of quality management approaches, such as the ISO 17100 Quality Management System, whose primary function as a quality standard is that of reducing or eliminating the possibility of variation by providing a framework which aims to avoid subjective interpretations of quality. However, as Bass (2006, p. 72) notices in his

analysis of quality standards and models in the language industry: 'the ISO 9001:2000 Quality Management Systems standard does not define a translation quality standard. The ISO standard simply requires that the service provider meet or exceed the customer's expectations of quality and/or ensure customer satisfaction'.

This constitutes a crucial shift in the understanding of the conceptualisation of quality in the current industry: there is nothing inherently wrong with the definition of quality standards and the consequent designation of standards for production processes and practices (Calvo 2018, p. 28). Nevertheless, on closer examination it becomes evident that quality standards such as ISO (together with other widespread standards in the translation industry) aim not to define translation quality, but to provide guidance for a procedural approach to identify processes in the pursuit of customer satisfaction, an approach in which 'the notion of quality need not be defined' (Jiménez-Crespo 2018, p. 76). So, the system that in principle should inform the industry's quality management strategy is narrowly focused on the practices associated with client satisfaction, thereby strongly limiting the definition of quality and actively shifting the notion of quality from a set of values ideally rooted in translation principles, to a set of standardised actions following the principle of client-first (ISO 2015).

It is true that finding universal points of quality that apply to a market (which is not only national nor international, but global) could be unfeasible or counterproductive because of the specificity and wide variety of translation and AVT work. In view of this considerable challenge, it appears that the industry settled for a standardisation of practices which essentially becomes a substitute for quality definitions, thus proposing approaches that lead to varying levels of quality corresponding to the client's demands. I argue that standardisation of practices is the element that 'turns' quality into quantity: standardisation is presented as

quality-driven, while in fact it produces quantity in two ways. First, it implies a breakdown of the different processes in the workflow, and the assignment of strict quality indicators to the resulting products, which are then assessed and measured thus leading to a quantification of the products' quality. Second, standardisation creates the conditions for managing and processing increasing quantities of work in a mass production. Through standardisation of processes, the application of narrow quality indicators for each product as well as the emphasis on data centralisation, product quality can be quantified easily and in little time, as seen in the discussion around rating and ranking systems in Chapter 5. And so, most processes that standardise are called (or considered) quality processes, while in fact they almost exclusively facilitate quantification, rather than actual improvements in quality, or in productivity.

Although the setting of quality standards can be necessary in order to manage production processes and complex workflows, in the business model observed, standardisation is a means to improve productivity and keep up with target levels of quantity. Such means, however, can have a side-effect of lowering quality, especially if those processes involve creative practices. As Huws (2014, p. 53) puts it:

[Studies of creative labour in capitalism show a] noticeable standardization and intensification of work and a speed-up of its pace. Linked in many cases with a growing precariousness of work, these had strongly negative impacts not only on the quality of work but also on feelings of security and career prospects.

What is more, standardisation can bring a flattening of creative practices, which by their very nature could suffer under standardised procedures (ibid., p. 61). A very complex concept, creativity entails finding the efforts put towards open-ended 'problems' which have no determined or single solutions (Mackenzie 1998). According to non-translation scholars, problem solving requires two skills in order to be considered creative: '(1) the ability to

generate alternatives, and (2) the ability to evaluate alternatives’ – competences that are constantly deployed and developed by professional translators in their work (Beylard-Ozeroff et al. 1998, p. xii). Although I do not see linguistic and cultural specificities strictly as ‘problems’ that need ‘solutions’, the translators’ ability to generate and evaluate alternatives through strategies, choices and shifts makes this activity ‘inherently creative’ (O’Sullivan 2013, p. 44). In addition, creativity has been associated with constraints, intended as textual, cultural and linguistic limitations that are inherent to STs and even more so to their translations, which have to adhere to certain media and contexts (Boase-Beier and Holman 1999). In this respect, AVT can be considered particularly creative in view of the specific constraints of the practice (Chaume Varela 1998).

Consistent with Taylorist principles, the standardisation of creative practices implies breaking down jobs into smaller units, thus allowing to manage those units more flexibly, apply performance indicators to each unit, and model quality control measures on those indicators so as to maintain and improve productivity levels as well (Huws 2014, p. 36-37). In Huws’ (ibid.) words: ‘Once processes have been standardized, or ‘modularized,’ it becomes possible for the units to be reconfigured in different permutations and combinations’, meaning that not only the different work units can be easily outsourced, but they can also be easily transferred to a different environment altogether, such as a cloud platform. In the AVT industry, the needs for cost reduction and faster turnaround of translation projects, which increased in the early 2000s with the expansion of DVD technology and the onset of the global economic recession, were met by increasing the outsourcing of work to freelance contractors, and through the creation of corporate divisions located in countries where labour is cheaper. Unlike company employees hired in-house, freelancers do not occupy office space, do not receive company benefits, and are in charge of their own taxes and insurance, and for these reasons,

outsourcing represents the first step towards a substantial lowering of production costs. The outsourced freelancers as well as employees in local offices should comply with the same vision and practices as the central corporation which employs them, and be able to access the same resources regardless of their location. It follows that, to manage large volumes of work carried out by a global (and often dispersed) workforce, it is necessary to standardise procedures, workflows, training, instructions and processes. The heterogeneous and constructive nature of the socio-technical environment recurs visibly as the conditions that make possible (and desirable) the standardisation of tasks and the creation of guidelines and instructions that travel from the centre to the outsourced peripheries of the production network, also generate the conditions to outsource labour.

Standardisation can be identified in many of the features of current subtitling practices, which have been analysed in the previous two chapters. First of all, the breaking down of processes into smaller units corresponds to the division of labour which was identified in the workflow based on template files, representing the basic division of subtitling labour into two distinct phases, time-cueing and translation (Kapsaskis 2011). In terms of technology, standardisation is facilitated by a centralised management of technological means (the cloud platform), and the restrictions embedded in their use. It is also the force behind the identification of quality indicators attached to the products delivered, which allow the ranking and rating of subtitlers working on cloud platforms, as discussed in Chapter 5. Ultimately, standardisation requires the establishment of a rigid set of instructions and guidelines that are necessary for the work to be carried out by the various actors who have been displaced and outsourced. From this brief overview, it is evident that these elements and phenomena are strongly interlocked and reliant on technology, which confirms the mutually inseparable relation between standardisation and technologisation of work under digitally Taylorist

premises (Beverungen et al. 2019; Moorkens 2020). In the present context, this translates into a total reliance on the cloud platform, which becomes the place where standardised units of work are carried out, functions are configured and sometimes automated, and performance and quality data can be easily recorded and stored. The following analysis is based on aggregated data from the two studies and revolves around the two pillars of standardisation as identified above, division of labour and centralisation of technology. It might be worth reminding that the two studies for data collection concern mostly the UK, however both samples were based in Europe and operated in the same global market, and the data reinforced the notion proposed in Chapter 1 that the production and distribution of AVT services is being increasingly centralised by fewer and larger multinational companies – which also contribute to the need for standardisation. For these reasons, all the practices analysed here resonate closely with the UK market, but there is no reason to believe that these cannot also be found in other market areas, if not globally¹⁷.

6.3.1 Division of labour

Division of labour is the act of ‘breaking down of jobs into units’ (Huws, 2014) as quoted above, so that each unit can be assigned their own quality indicators, and can be managed separately, thereby becoming an instrumental step in the standardisation of practices. First and foremost, division of labour is visible in the fragmentation of the subtitling task through the use of template files: on a production level, templates represent the fragmentation of labour required for the standardisation of practices, in the division of subtitling labour into its two main units (linguistic and technical). This facilitates outsourcing of the two different tasks as

¹⁷ While corporate practices are applied globally, it is important to remind that the workers’ conditions (for both employees and freelance translators, subtitlers and proof-readers) are subject to local labour forces and regulations.

well as lowering time-to-task and costs, as the skills of a professional who can do both, spotting and translation, are no longer required (Kapsaskis 2011). On a linguistic level, templates probably constitute one of the first, large-scale standardising measures adopted in the subtitling industry, as they provide ready-made transcriptions of the dialogue and predefined timecodes which serve as the basis for all the different interlingual translations to prevent mishearings and subjective deviations which could lead to errors. While this undoubtedly saves time and labour, it can also constrain the subtitlers' creativity and flatten linguistic renditions (Georgakopoulou 2012; Artegi and Kapsaskis 2014; Oziemblewska and Szarkowska 2020).

The workflow itself has also been subject to division of labour, having gone from a more traditional '1. subtitling > 2. proofreading > 3. revision' to the average workflow as analysed in Chapter 4, comprised of '1. template creation > 2. template quality control > 3. template revision > 4. translation > 5. translation proofreading > 6. translation revision > 7. translation quality control' (without counting the back-and-forth iterations which can characterise even the simplest of workflows). The more fragmented the workflow, the more actors are responsible for each file in each step in the process, and for the portion of quality that has to be delivered within that file, as was shown in the breakdown of actors and quality aspects in Chapter 4. Additionally, the more the workflow is fragmented, the smaller the tasks become, and the lower the rate paid for them (see section 5.4.3).

The workflow structure, as analysed in Chapter 4, represents the division of labour which is necessary to standardise work: skills and aspects of quality have been fragmented and assigned to many different actors, each of whom can perform a limited number of actions within their task. If, on the one hand, each actor can be considered an expert in that type of quality then, on the other, the employment of well-rounded professionals is clearly not

encouraged in these systems. Indeed, the fragmentation of subtitling labour into smaller tasks at lower pay can potentially encourage the employment of non-specialised translators, and while this can certainly widen the pool of available freelancers globally (Georgakopoulou 2006) it is important to remember the deskilling risks that are associated with such standardisation and cost-cutting strategies in the AVT industry, which may result in subtitling tasks assigned to professionals who are not familiar with the specificities of the subtitling practice (Kapsaskis 2011, p. 169) and who only work within their “pocket of knowledge”, as expressed by one of the respondents in Chapter 5. A long-term consequence of such division of subtitling labour entails precisely the degradation of the subtitlers’ role in this type of business model, given that subtitling is no longer required of one person only (ibid. p. 175). In addition, interview data show that the less experienced subtitlers, who entered the market when cloud platforms were being massively introduced in the industry, are strongly encouraged to think ‘inside the box’, as all of them described their own workflow solely in terms of the tasks they have to carry out on the platform, dictated by their guidelines and the warning systems in place, which alert the subtitlers of any deviation from the expected norm. In turn, this could decrease creative freedom and also the sense of responsibility for one’s own task. Nevertheless, the interviewed subtitlers themselves, including the less experienced ones, demonstrated awareness and realised that having to do smaller (and less well-paid) tasks made them feel like “second-hand subtitlers”, which again could point to the erosion of the subtitler’s professional status in the long term.

6.3.1.1 The management of projects and quality

If labour is divided, so is quality: each aspect of quality which characterises a task is delegated to the actor that carries out that task. It follows that, if quality is to be ensured and maintained across a wealth of tasks and actors, project management and quality management need to be

structured accordingly, through measures that make sure that jobs are assigned to the appropriate actors, quality objectives are communicated, and performance is assessed. The management of a translation project plays a crucial part in the overall quality management, as the PM needs to ensure that the right professionals are selected for a project, and that the client's expectations and needs are aptly communicated. Personalised communication and interaction between PMs and freelancers are crucial to these aims (Dunne and Dunne 2011; Olohan and Davitti 2017).

As detailed in the previous chapter, Study 1 and 2 allowed me to document two different ways to manage and assign projects: a more communicative and personalised interaction as observed in the workplace study, and the automated job assignment, paired with a decrease in personal communication, which characterises cloud subtitling. With automatic assignment, PMs load and index the working materials onto the platform, while inserting the filtering criteria (language and level of quality required) to facilitate the automation of job assignments. On their dashboards, subtitlers see those projects that have been automatically filtered by their language pair, availability, and their ranking within the translators' pool; here, they can self-assign the projects they see, on a first come, first served basis.

In project management, personal interaction is critical because it allows PMs to assess risks with higher precision: over time, interacting with freelancers leads to familiarity, which is necessary to establish their level of competence and reliability, and thus their suitability for a project (Olohan and Davitti 2017). According to Olohan and Davitti's ethnographic study of project managers in a translation workplace, the trust that PMs place on freelancers can be defined as a process that goes through three phases: expectation (what the client and the LSP expect from the freelancer), interpretation (of experience-based knowledge taken from past

projects and feedback), and suspension (when the PM suspends doubts and engages in a ‘leap of faith’ in the freelancers’ abilities). The process of trust therefore involves qualitative and subjective evaluation of potential risk factors in assessing the possibility that expectations might or might not be fulfilled (ibid., p. 394-395). However, when the freelancer pool includes thousands of translators, it is hard to maintain personalised communication with them well enough to ensure that they will deliver the level of quality expected. Similarly, it would be difficult to guarantee that they will continue to deliver quality consistently over time (Chan 2005; Abdallah and Koskinen 2007; Olohan and Davitti 2017). In addition, because of high working volumes and the expansion of the LSP’s language provisions, PMs might not speak most target languages and so it would be highly unfeasible for them to keep a close eye on the quality of each translation. The PMs’ subjective evaluation is therefore eliminated from this system, possibly out of unsustainability.

Not knowing the freelancers’ skills and working habits reveals once again that platform-based subtitling is an environment where asymmetry of information is deeply rooted, and therefore companies substitute the experience-based knowledge of PMs with *figures* that can be picked up by the algorithm for job assignment, which aim to represent the freelancers’ performance and ability to deliver quality. Such a quantification appears as a rationalised method which can replace other methods of demonstrating a freelancer’s “worth” (Brankovic 2021). As seen above, standardisation implies breaking down jobs into smaller units, each of which is assigned quality indicators that allow companies to centrally access quality- and performance-related data, and indeed, as seen in Chapter 5, the project managers’ knowledge of outsourced freelancers is often represented by their error rates. The automated assignment system therefore works by filtering available projects not only by language, but also by translators’ rankings.

The rating and ranking system has been adopted by many companies in the current AVT industry as a solution to assess and improve the quality of thousands of files produced by thousands of outsourced actors (a detailed description of ranking and rating practices can be found in 5.8). In brief, all translation files in a project are subject to proofreading and often QC. In these phases, the proof-reader and QCer review the files, and this automatically generates an error report, which is attached to that file but also to the translator's (or template creator's) profile: these data rank files as well as the performance of the language actors by error rate. Just like division of labour into smaller, restricted and thus 'easier' tasks aims at reducing variation, the automation of job assignment aims at substituting the subjective elements of interpretation, with an apparently objective calculation of the freelancers' past and present performance that relies on quantitative data. Both phenomena are linked (and lead) to standardisation, presupposing that variation and risk are natural enemies of quality. To this aim, LSPs standardise practices through automation and division of labour to minimise variations and risk in order to avoid financial loss of profit margin, or damages to credibility or professional prestige in the eyes of the clients. Automated job assignment could be a way of rationalising those risks, and make sure that projects reach only the translators who rank above a minimum quality threshold. Meanwhile, PMs remain crucial in the monitoring of the project to make sure that deadlines are respected, but their communication and quality-monitoring tasks seem to have shrunk with the introduction of platform environments and increased automation, which leave them little opportunity to assess translators personally. At the same time, it could be argued that assigning jobs according to performance-related data does not completely eliminate the risk that translators may not respect deadlines, or that they may not be capable of providing the required skills at a given time, and could therefore be a measure that enables time (and therefore cost) savings, but not improvements of quality through actual risk-avoidance.

The sections above showed how standardisation practices enable the management and assessment of different portions of a project file through division of labour and, in turn, how data related to such files and the actors who worked on them facilitate the automation of job assignments as well as the rating and ranking of both product (template and subtitling files) and producer (template creator, translator, proof-reader...). The metrics for quality assessment allow the AVT provider to establish standard levels of quality by capitalising on the reviewing work of proof-readers and QCers, who are required to choose and select errors through keywords, easy-to-use parameters that sum up very complex quality concepts in a word. Similarly, the available information on principles of quality management in today's industry tends to be generic and vague, somewhat in line with the ISO requirements mentioned above.

6.3.2 Centralisation of technology

From the above analysis, it is evident that managing subtitling practices through division of labour and increasing reliance on data and automation requires a virtual infrastructure which should be managed centrally. Furthermore, the fragmentation of tasks and roles requires infrastructure to be designed or configured in a such a way as to allow certain users, and not others, to perform certain functions and not others. Standardisation practices are therefore facilitated by the centralised management of digital technological means, and the cloud platform represents the ideal setting to do so, as it is an environment where almost all of the AVT provider's workload is carried out, and where the provider, who owns the platform, can monitor and record activities and use the resulting data. In the environment of paid subtitling platforms, the restriction placed on functionalities and tasks follows the principle of risk aversion identified above, that is to say that the more restricted a task, the less variation is

allowed, and so the lower the risk of errors. Restrictions can be identified mainly from the point of view of translators, proof-readers and QCers, who raised issues during the interviews and the workplace study. One of the most common restrictions encountered by most subtitlers (who mainly worked as translators but also as proof-readers occasionally) was the fact that template files are often 'locked', or provide a very limited range of actions to modify the time-cueing, a finding also made by Oziemblewska and Szarkowska (2020 p. 16). According to some of the subtitlers interviewed, this complicates the translation process, which becomes even more constrained because of the strictness of the timing rules – and indeed, these can strongly influence translation decisions, as they determine the length and space for subtitles to appear (Artegiani and Kapsaskis 2014; Pedersen 2018). By restricting or impeding modifications to the timecode, AVT providers do not leave room for variation and therefore this restriction, which now seems a widespread practice, especially when it comes to streaming productions, limits the range of creative translation decisions even more – decisions that may depart from the standards, and thus be considered errors.

As described in Chapter 4, platform technology had been introduced relatively recently in the Company under study, and therefore the apparent limitations in its use were most likely due to the natural learning curve, and a need to harmonise processes to platform development and vice versa. The restrictions identified by QCers involved the fact that they could not customise functionalities according to their own needs, could only perform certain types of textual search, and did not have the freedom to search in their most efficient order and manner, as it is often the case in licensed QC tools. While the platform's way of performing quality control actions was aimed at streamlining the search for potential inconsistencies or discrepancies, this did not correspond to the methods and processes which had been developed within the QC team over time. Nevertheless, as all employees were still in the phase

of learning how to work on the platform, and the platform itself was undergoing further developments to accommodate workflows and processes, it is highly likely that this discrepancy has been overcome in the meantime. It is also worth adding that the automation of QC itself is not to be seen as a negative element per se, as there are considerable gains coming from consistency checks and the higher likelihood of detecting human errors.

At any rate, the first and main restriction which emerged in both studies, and seems to be common to all platforms, is the imposition of the platform itself, in the sense that everything has to take place within that cloud infrastructure. Indeed, all processes needed in a project can only happen within that system and according to its rules, often without ‘workarounds’ nor ways to do things with other tools. While it seems that most subtitling interfaces in current platforms allow a degree of customisation (font size, background colour, shortcuts, and so on), the principles that control the cloud platform will invariably obey the governing principles of their owner – therefore rules can change and functionalities can be unlocked, but only if that is the will of the owner, not the users’. Platforms are indeed self-contained environments that presuppose a total reliance and dependence on the basis that contents on the platform are secured and safe, i.e. free from piracy threats, and therefore any deviation from the platform processes constitutes a risk to the integrity of the content owner’s copyright.

At the same time, the idea that ‘what happens in the platform stays in the platform’ also applies to the fact that no one, except the content owners and the platform owners, can claim moral rights for the work produced on platform – or so it seems, as policies in this area remain blurred (Moorkens 2017, 2021; Basalamah 2021). In addition to that, cloud subtitlers are often not at liberty to let their professional network know that they are working on certain content or for certain clients, which could ideally be within their rights. Indeed, creative

practices professionals do care about the intellectual, cultural and /or entertainment value of the content they work on and the sense of pride associated to it, but in a context of standardisation and massification of creative jobs:

This strong identification with the product of the labor can leave workers with an illusion of continuing ownership, even when their intellectual property rights and control have been handed over. [...] expropriation may come as a recurring shock, closer to the surface of consciousness than in other forms of work where alienation is taken for granted. To the extent that it is genuinely innovative, creative work could be said to be permanently poised at the moment of alienation, and the creative worker repeatedly present at the center of a contradictory drama of expropriation: the work, as it comes into being, both belongs to and is torn away from its begetter.

(Huws 2014, p. 58)

In view of this, it can be argued that the principles that govern cloud platforms and dictate their restrictions point to the prioritisation of end-clients' assets and their safety, even when these imply a total reliance on technology, or a disregard for previously established processes and practices which worked effectively. Technological dependency, linked to the obligatory and exclusive nature of some technologies, connects to the idea of 'solutionism' and the trend of identifying issues as technological 'problems', whereby 'solutions' take the shape of technological fixes (Harvey 2005; Olohan 2017). Technological dependency is a concept that can be found when a certain technology is obligatory and there is no way around it. It connects to a deterministic vision according to which technology can solve any problem and so there is a 'tech fix' for everything: this perspective can be highly detrimental because it 'tackles complex social issues as neatly defined problems for which there are convenient computational solutions' (Olohan 2017, p. 267). In this light, complex contexts like AVT production processes risk to be undervalued or simplified through the application of obligatory technology. The most immediate form of dependency is precisely the impossibility to carry out processes without that particular software or server, which can leave entire teams stranded – and their work delayed – in case something goes in unexpected ways. At the same time, the

two studies show that a large portion of the AVT industry has adopted the same 'solutions' on cloud, meaning that it is hard to go against the trend as this would imply a disadvantage from a market perspective. Cloud platform seems therefore an obligatory solution not only for the most intended users (employees and freelancers) but also for companies themselves, as it currently constitutes a huge competitive advantage. Another implication of this type of dependency regards the fact that if cloud software is seen as merely and ineluctably instrumental, it can be harder for human actors, especially in corporate environments, to question its adoption and imposition and to imagine other solutions, other environments in which subtitling work can be done in other ways – and the same applies to business, where alternatives to the platform business model in AVT seem harder and harder to imagine.

Presented as technologically innovative, cloud platforms allow businesses to increase productivity and profits through practices that monitor workers and divide labour (with considerable deskilling risks), thus representing and reproducing the most common feature of capitalist modes of production (Olohan 2017). In this light, it is crucial to remain critical of technology choices, possible impositions and the dependency that follows, and question the industry discourse surrounding the adoption of technology (ibid., p. 267). For instance, platforms are often presented as a “free and easy subtitling tool”, as reported by various respondents in both studies, whether freelance subtitlers or in-house employees; however, platforms are not only that, but also highly complex and all-encompassing systems (Oziemblewska and Szarkowska 2020, p. 3-4) hosting management, parts of production, post-production and delivery of content, and in doing all of this they constantly reproduce the market-related ideology of their owner, which is at the basis of their design (Olohan 2017). The need to critically analyse software and cloud technology does not arise from a technophobic standpoint, but from the necessity to overcome the function-based

instrumentality of software (Frabetti 2015) through the consideration of social, political and economic forces behind current technological models. In fact, presenting platforms only as ‘subtitling tools’ reduces them to mere instruments, thus hiding or toning down their deeper design and purposes, perhaps to disguise the potential professional limitations that these structures could imply, such as risks of exploitation, deskilling, loss of autonomy or undervaluing of translators (Moorkens et al. 2016).

6.3.2.1 Restricting communication

Another significant restriction operating in cloud subtitling concerns communication patterns. Indeed, as it can be seen from the data presented in Chapter 5, the ways in which practices have been standardised through division of labour and automation, together with outsourcing, have not encouraged a symmetrical distribution of information, nor a free flow of information. These limitations can be identified in three aspects coming from the data: first, the lack of personalised communication around projects and feedback between PM and freelancers, and the increasing difficulty for translators to communicate with their PM on platforms; second, the limited information available to translators when they choose projects through automatic assignments; and third, the impossibility for freelancers to contact one another when they are working on the same file and project.

During the workplace study, as described in Chapter 4, client managers stressed that good, personal communication with the client is key to establish a trusting relationship, which is crucial to define project and quality specifications; in order to maintain trust and continuity, they were the only team who could contact clients. At the same time, the Company had an internal messaging system through which all employees, including outsourced colleagues in decentralised offices, could reach one another with ease. Communication issues could refer

to differences in time zones, conflicting priorities (such those between internal and external teams) and differences in working culture (due to the presence of offices in various continents). While Company communication was almost entirely regulated by the internal vertical hierarchy, reliant on email templates and likely monitored, it was not actually restricted.

The situation changes when adopting the freelancers' point of view, which looks different from that of clients or company employees by the reports of interviewed subtitlers as seen in Chapter 5. In fact, personalised communication between PM and translators had progressively lowered due to the expansion of the freelancers' pool and was experienced only by those freelancers with a long-standing relation with an agency, or occasionally working in-house. The communication of feedback seemed either non-existent or limited to the data-based spreadsheet containing the freelancers' error rates (Sakamoto and Födisch 2017), and when email communication occurred it was largely depersonalised, limited to the solution of a specific issue related to the project, and sometimes even coming from unknown project managers. Indeed, freelancers working on platforms do not always know which PM is in charge of supervising their project – some platforms display that information, but it seems that others do not, and that includes not only the PM's name but also their contact email. When subtitlers working on platform need to communicate with their PM, they can submit 'tickets' in the dedicated platform area, provided they have valid reasons (the list of allowed reasons from contacting PMs spans from asking additional information about a project, to inquiring about an issue). A PM will respond on the platform, and contact freelancers directly if needed. The importance of communication between PMs and freelance translators, as analysed in the section above, is crucial to make sure that projects are assigned to the right professional, and that the latter has understood the project requirements clearly (Olohan and Davitti 2017).

However, the increasing technologisation and standardisation of processes has reduced the range of personalised approaches (Risku et al. 2013) and, where job assignment is automated, this type of communication seems no longer to be needed. From the point of view of PMs, it might occur that they are not able to ensure that freelancers have understood project specifications and instructions thoroughly, which could cause delays in the translation and revision phases, and loss of quality altogether, but it appears that they are not allowed (or perhaps do not have the time) to contact translators directly, except when issues arise, or a 'ticket' is received.

Most interviewed subtitlers reported not having enough information to choose projects, such as the specificity of terminology, or the number of subtitles in the template, which they regarded as an indication of effort, and for this reason they wished the communication with their PMs was more consistent and reliable. Furthermore, they all regarded information access and communication on platform as a source of stress or a waste of time, and in no way comparable to the personalised approach with other agencies (mainly off-cloud), let alone the face-to-face interactions that some had experienced during in-house work. Indeed, respondents who benefitted from unrestricted information exchange and interaction with project managers, team managers and colleagues reported enormous advantages that improved not only their skills acquisition and performance, but also the quality of their work and their personal satisfaction. Quality of work can improve significantly not only through the interaction with PMs, but also with fellow subtitlers and the proof-readers and QCers working on the same files and the same project, as highlighted by two of the most experienced respondents who worked on platform. On rare occasions, and only after asking their PMs insistently via the platform, were they allowed to interact with fellow translators and proof-readers. While in in-house environments communication occurs

organically, it can be argued that in more traditional 'pipeline' arrangements, translators and proof-readers do not necessarily communicate, and therefore there might not be a need for it. However, these settings presuppose a more engaged role of the PM, whose work includes facilitating the exchange of information and feedback amongst actors who work in isolation, and from different parts of the globe.

In theory, cloud platforms have a potential for expansion and collaboration that would be unthinkable for physical company settings, and could easily allow horizontal communication between 'users' so as to create truly cooperative environments, as in the case of non-profit, fan-subbing collaborative platforms (García 2015) or the subtitlers' forum in Plint Core, in use in the European Union (Marking, 2021). Nevertheless, when companies started to use the same virtual environments as fan-subbers to provide paid professional translation, thus operating for clients and not translators and audiences (García 2015, p. 24), horizontal communication links disappeared. The restriction in horizontal communication patterns can also be attributed to a policy of risk-aversion, referring to the risk of weakening the vertical structure of the companies operating on platform, thus undermining the centralisation of management (Abdallah and Koskinen 2007). It can be argued that the current state of cloud subtitling presents a strong threat to the creation of a truly collaborative environment, where well-rounded as well as novice subtitlers would not only carry out full tasks (instead of micro-tasks) but would also be able to discuss views and solutions in real time, and benefit from such exchange. Indeed, production networks with a vertical structure have not necessarily supported horizontal links even before the widespread adoption of platforms, also because of the displacement of actors through outsourcing (ibid., p. 679) and it appears that platforms have consolidated this tendency by impeding communication between the freelancers, as reported by subtitlers in Chapter 5. This can generate an increased feeling of isolation from

the centre of production, and even the sensation of not working with ‘real’ people, as expressed by half of the subtitlers interviewed. Such isolation points to the disempowerment of subtitlers, due to the low possibilities of association and collective bargaining (Moorkens 2017, p. 469) – a scenario worsened by the rating and ranking system which could potentially pitch freelancers one against the other.

From a wider perspective, the restricted communication patterns are to be seen within a context where information and communication follow a precise directionality: starting from the centre of production where communication is stronger and most personalised (client and AVT provider), information trickles down to the relevant in-house employees which experience adequate levels of communication, occasionally complicated by external relations linked to technologisation and outsourcing, and finally some information reaches the periphery, i.e. the outsourced contractors – the freelance subtitlers and proof-readers – who no longer experience personalised communication, have to work with a limited amount of information, and are not allowed to contact one another.

6.4 How quality is constructed in the industry

After considering standardisation, division of labour and centralisation of technology as the basis of current subtitling practices, this section presents a critical discussion about how quality is constructed and enacted in the observed portion of AVT industry, informed by industry literature, quality standards and models. In terms of industry literature, a systematic search has been carried out in the following way. A number of keywords have been identified and used consistently across all the data sources (audiovisual / media / multimedia translation; media / multimedia localisation; language industry; subtitling industry) and each of these keywords has been associated with the Boolean indicator AND to the keywords quality, and

quality assessment. The search has been conducted across the following sources, in order of priority: the Roehampton library database search; the LexisNexis repository; the search engine Google; the search engine Google Scholar; the language industry research company Common Sense Advisory (CSA Research). Industry sources have been selected primarily for their thematic relevance, according to their date of publication, and their availability for consultation. The timeline for selection has been set to 5 years, therefore comprising only those publications between 2017 and 2021, because of the time-sensitive relevance around industry news and technology implementation, and the inclusion of information about the transition to cloud platform operations. After eliminating duplicate results, most of the relevant reports and articles focused predominantly to the language industry in general, thus signalling a lack of comprehensive and freely available material on the AVT market – which, in the industry is often referred to as ‘media localisation’. Out of the results obtained, I decided to exclude those reports that bore less relevance to the topic of quality concepts and quality assessment; in fact, albeit being specific to the AVT industry, many of these sources reported news about market performance for specific sectors or for the main industry players, updates on mergers and acquisitions, and technology forecasts (which mostly revolved around the introduction of artificial intelligence and machine translation in audiovisual practices). Other industry reports on ‘media localisation’ or ‘multimedia translation’ were excluded because of their extremely generic nature – as they aim at clients who are just starting to consider localising their products through audiovisual content. In sum, despite the fact that the demand and provision of AVT services has grown steadily, with a considerable and consistent peak after the rise of streaming on demand platforms (Ene, 2019), the reports that are freely available about the industry’s quality principles focus on the global language industry at large, sometimes mentioning AVT amongst its components, though not extensively. The industry literature selected, however, is not presented here in a systematic fashion, but it has been

integrated in this section and the next (6.4 and 6.5), according to its thematic relevance to support the arguments proposed.

All measures that represent or favour standardisation practices are presented by the industry through the angle of quality enhancement: the use of cloud platforms, outsourcing, and rating and ranking systems allow to maintain and manage productivity in large volumes, but quality is often the word and concept that justifies them (Pielmeier and O'Mara 2020). From the language industry's point of view, outsourcing measures can improve quality as they increase a company's reach and ideally extend language diversity, through a larger number of mother-tongue translators across the globe (Massardo and Van der Meer 2017). In the industry's narrative, division of labour and the use of template files, enabling standardisation and higher productivity, are presented as quality measures as they make the tasks smaller and simpler, meaning that they can be carried out by specialists in that particular task. The imposed technological environment is considered to improve quality on the basis that all processes and transfers are leak-proof, and that automated functions (such as spelling and search) improve consistency; the rating and ranking system ensures quality in that quality levels are monitored and maintained, and only the highest-ranking subtitlers (supposedly the best) are qualified to get the higher paid jobs, and/or a higher number of projects.

Lastly, working with updates seems an increasingly standard practice, and is worth a mention even though it is not presented as a quality measure per se, but it is connected to an important element of quality for the industry, that of maintaining customer satisfaction, i.e. the attitude of doing whatever it takes to satisfy the customer, such as adapting to compressed production times as confirmed in Chapter 4, even when this is disruptive or detrimental to translators or others (Bond, 2019). Undoubtedly, customer focus is one of the governing principles of business, as clearly stated in the ISO's principles for quality approach (ISO 2015,

p. 2), but customer focus and customer subservience are two separate things, as will be argued later on. The focus on the customer is primarily expressed through the preliminary workflow and the use of technology and cloud platforms which allows faster operations for the LSP and more visibility for the client. Technology and cloud platforms feature prominently in the reports analysed. Specifically, in a large-scale study conducted by Pielmeier and O'Mara (2020), 89% of the sample (consisting of approximately 1600 individual translators) voiced their opinions on platform work. Their insights confirm that perspectives on platform are conflicted and multifaceted, that while some aspects and features are considered easy and intuitive, platforms foster impersonality overall. Communication is seen as a company's responsibility, and improvements in that area are strongly needed, within and beyond the platform. The impersonality of platform work, paired with harsher working conditions (low prices and faster turnaround times) also prompted a considerable portion of the sample to feel isolated and to perceive a lack of respect and recognition for their skills (ibid., p. 60).

6.4.1 ISO 17100 and translation quality assessment model

The most widespread standard for translation quality in the industry is the ISO 17100 (2018), based on the ISO (2015) principles for quality management. As anticipated in section 6.3, the standard does not define textual/linguistic (product) quality, but does present and define the aspects of processes that can lead to customer satisfaction. There is no definition, narrow or broad, of translation quality in the standard, although the translation section (2015, p. 10, my emphasis in italics) indicates a few quality requirements and starts by stating that the translator '*shall*' follow the '*purpose*' of the translation project, according to the relevant conventions and specifications. The international standard then indicates '*compliance*' with reference material and terminological consistency, semantic '*accuracy, appropriate*' spelling,

syntax and punctuation, lexical cohesion, '*compliance*' with style guide, locale, formatting; attention to target audience and purpose is specified often. All the other sections of this standard largely focus on the establishment of a process quality, and the social aspect of communication, that needs to be 'appropriate', although the definition of such appropriateness is not given. Appropriate is probably one of the most recurring words to describe processes and aims, which makes the standard very general; this makes sense as ISO 17100 is intended to be applicable to very diverse companies in a very diverse industry, where each company would – and should – know what 'appropriate' means in their case. Nevertheless, there are limitations to this approach as it will be seen in section 6.5.

But what happens when such appropriateness is not defined across a company? The standard assumes that the notion of appropriateness is '*appropriately* communicated' with all the relevant parties, and the same goes for quality definitions and thresholds. ISO 17100 highlights the significance of communication, stating that all relevant information and materials need to be communicated and shared with '*all relevant parties*', but does not specify which parties are relevant. Between what is stated and what is left unsaid, the standard does not require companies to pay specific attention to the communicational needs of the external suppliers (the translators and proof-readers), leaving it to the companies to determine relevance – and therefore direction – of communication patterns. Companies would easily comply to standards as long as communication takes place amongst the parties that they consider relevant, and in any case the standard allows them to shape communication according to their own idea of communication appropriateness and relevance.

A closer look into the principles behind ISO reveals a clear difference between the status of company employee and that of supplier. This difference is inherent to the seven ISO principles of quality management (ISO 2015, my emphasis in italics), which present

suggestions aimed at employees, and separate measures for suppliers, i.e. the outsourced translators. Suppliers are amongst the '*interested parties*' involved in the organisations' work, as they have an effect on the organisation's performance, but they are not considered on the same level as employees. Across the principles of *Leadership and Engagement*, companies are encouraged to communicate relevant information across the board, to involve and respect employees, who deserve trust, recognition and empowerment in their work, and their competences need to be measured and enhanced. The ISO principles clearly state that while employees need to be '*engaged*', suppliers need to be '*managed*': suppliers are only introduced in the last principle, *Relationship management*, and there is no mention of respect, trust or particular communication strategies. The relationship needs to be fruitful, the suppliers' performance measured, and improvements deserve encouragement and recognition, but the communication of information and feedback is discretionary (ISO 2015, p. 14). In light of this, I argue that ISO implies a difference in the treatment of suppliers, which is then reflected in the practices of LSPs across the language industry. In turn, these find a perfect justification for perpetrating outsourcing and relegating suppliers to peripheric and subordinate positions, despite the fact that the language service provision is almost completely outsourced to such external suppliers – and therefore are not only influential but entirely crucial to the core business and its performance.

What is more, the ISO 17100 does not include AVT services anywhere in its scope; subtitling and voice-over are mentioned at the bottom of the *Non-exhaustive list of value-added services*, in Annex F (the very last one). The fact that the most widely used international standard does not address AVT and its needs could point to a lack of recognition of the status of the profession, or to the fact that it is hard to address the specificities of the AV medium within a general view of translation services. At the same time, the lack of standards for AVT

presents the ideal conditions for unregulated ways of structuring this sector of translation services, which is nonetheless gaining traction economically, and contributing more and more to the revenues of the whole language industry (Ene, 2019).

What is certain is that quality control, assessment and management continue to be a crucial issue for which there seem to be countless solutions, all revolving around an industrial approach to quality based on standards such as ISO. From an industry perspective, Lommel (2018) summarises the process that led to the standardisation of quality assurance as a way to overcome the ad-hoc nature of quality evaluation with a systematic approach. Quality models in the localisation industry (LISA QA) and standard quality approaches (ISO) have provided the basis for current quality models in the translation industry such as MQM and DQF. These models encompass and reproduce functionalist perspectives (Calvo 2018) by identifying metrics that correspond to standard specifications, thus allowing reviewers to measure the correspondence of a translation towards those specifications (Lommel 2018, p. 119). These models would be too time-consuming to be consistently applied in full in the context of a mass production and, in fact, their authors do not expect companies to use the MQM/DQF models in full, nor to customise their approach for each and every project. Instead, Lommel (*ibid.*, p. 120, *my italics*) specifies that *implementers* can create templates for different project types and use them accordingly. Standardised metrics allow the transformation and configuration of different types of quality: *implementers* can assign varying levels of importance to the error categories (such as style, or terminology) according to the importance of different aspects of quality in a given project (*ibid.*, p. 121). Using metrics to tailoring and tweaking the definition of quality according to clients' priorities seems in line with the division of tasks and resources that allow standardisation of labour into 'units' that can be configured according to client's budget and needs (Huws 2014). The granularity of parameters that

models such as MQM/DQF present can be an advantage, but data coming from my studies reveal that subtitlers' work is assessed on the basis of a small number of error categories, ten in total, comprising textual, technical, linguistic and stylistic. When looking at these quality assessment models, complex translation concepts are summed up into as simple a set of parameters as possible. Quality is reified into words that include and convey a range of translation concepts and actions, which facilitates its quantification. Proof-readers select those categories, which are automatically compiled in a database that processes them and quantifies the quality of the deliverables and the resources who produced them (i.e. products and professionals). According to the data coming from both the workplace study and the interviews, quality assessment in the industry follows principles of fitness for purpose, which can be measured by counting the variations from a norm that is supposedly shared amongst all parties – but is in fact constructed between the originating clients and the vendors that subcontract the work.

6.5 A critique of functionalist theories in the AVT industry

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, quality principles, standards, and models for assessment in the industry are modelled upon functionalist theories of translation (Calvo 2018), such as *Skopos* theory (Reiss and Vermeer 1984) and the *theory of translatorial action* (Holz-Mänttari 1993), which generally postulate the prominence of the purpose or function of a translation over other quality aspects, ideally contained in the translation brief as provided by the client. My argument in the context under study is that the purpose and function of the audiovisual text takes second place, since client satisfaction seems to be the absolute priority, which indicates compliance to the clients' rules and instructions, resulting in a defect-free product that allows clients to achieve their primary purpose: profit. To reach this aim, as detailed in

Chapters 4 and 5, reference materials can provide definitions and character descriptions, and template files indicate and explain idioms, so that the translators can better understand the textual functions.

Through a wealth of instructions and guidelines (informed by industry quality standards and principles as elaborated above), subtitlers, translators, proof-readers and quality controllers are tacitly asked to apply functionalist principles (i.e. reproducing textual function) and instrumentalist principles (i.e. prioritising information) (Venuti 2020). In no case is the translator allowed to transgress the instructions and guidelines (nor deviate from what had been prioritised in the template) because those instructions and compliance are the yardstick against which the suitability of a translation is assessed (Strandvik 2017, p.130), and their role is to ensure that it is the client's function – not necessarily the text's – that is fulfilled. Therefore, if quality is measured against compliance with requirements and if the client's requirements are the yardstick, then the latter replace the importance of the textual functions, even if such requirements are ultimately based on logics of profit, and less on the desire to make content available internationally because of its artistic value and function (and even less on translation principles). However it might be worth pointing out that according to the industry literature consulted, clients want speed, and sometimes a mix of speed and quality, and often choose the cheapest service they find. In this light, time-reduction measures can be included in the industry's conceptualisation of quality because they contribute to client satisfaction. A narrative that often recurs in companies' claims is also that clients want "what audiences want", which brings about an entirely different set of issues that are usually addressed by audience and media reception studies. Finally, the ultimate indicator of client satisfaction for an LSP would be that their AVT provision allows the client to turn the expected profit.

Strandvik (2017, p. 130) claims that the industry – and EU – have modelled translation standards upon functionalist theories on the basis that these ‘work in practice and make sense, not only for translators but for all the stakeholders involved’. However, according to Schäffner (2011, p. 161), the theory of translatorial action, which is explicitly presented as ideal, is only applicable to a best-case scenario:

Holz-Mänttari acknowledges that in the real world, the power of clients may constrain professional expertise. She argues, however, that this does not affect the theory of translatorial action which is not intended to describe actual facts, but rather to model variables and their interrelations as a system (Holz-Mänttari 1993:304). It is thus a model of an ideal system, describing optimal behaviour of expert translators who act rationally

Functionalist approaches in theory are the equivalent of client-based approaches in practice, as they provide an ideal theoretical excuse for the application of client prioritisation in translation business transactions. It is therefore easy to see why the industry, and the EU translation bodies, have adopted such theories: functionalist approaches were the only to apply to professional practices of translation. At the same time, their principles systematised and legitimised approaches embedded in capitalist, corporate practices. On the surface, they make sense in the industry because they go hand in hand with the client-first principle as outlined by ISO; however, when the functionalist model of translation and assessment is applied to the heterogeneous and variable patterns of platform business models, I argue that it highlights – if not generates – a shift of the concept of quality, as *function* ceases to define the clients’ idea and purpose in relation to the text, and exclusively defines instead the capacity of generating profit. Overall, the application of functionalist theories to AVT practices under platform economy seems problematic for several reasons, which for the purpose of this discussion will be grouped into three main areas: the clients’ dominance, the subtitlers’ role and expertise, and the emergence of different facets of quality.

1) Clients' dominance

Strandvik (2017 p. 130) states that the functionalist approach 'made sense not only for translators but for all the stakeholders involved'. However, such a paradigm allows organisations to prioritise and support the client at every step along the way, and not properly consider the working needs of translators as key suppliers. For instance, the prioritisation of clients' needs during AVT production could influence the directionality of communication according to what companies consider appropriate to share and communicate in view of the business transactions (as anticipated in 6.4.1), thus contributing to situations of information asymmetry which benefit clients at the expense of translators (Chapter 5).

Functionalist approaches to translation can lead to the interpretation that the ST is subordinate to the *skopos* and has little intrinsic value, and this could be one of the factors behind the variance in levels of attention – or lack thereof – to the ST. Overall, the relegation of the text to the *skopos* could be one of the reasons behind the assumption, suggested here and in the previous chapters, that translation processes and choices are of less importance than the clients' expectations. Massardo and Van der Meer (2017, p. 22) mention the clients' tendency to dominate processes and dynamics of the language industry as one of its limitations, thus recognising the unhealthy level of client's interference in the industry. The data presented in Chapters 4 and 5 point to several instances of client dominance:

- The fact that there seems to be no regulation for the provision of reference material from the clients' part: clients would send what they have, when they have it, and in any form they have it – which can result in issues that go from inconsistent file formats, to incomplete STs and STs that have not been checked for spelling, for instance.

- The conditions that lead subtitlers to consider the template files as their ST because the video is too blurred or darkened for anti-piracy reasons, or because the dialogue is in a language that they do not know.
- The conditions (piracy fears, production timescales, cost savings) that lead to preliminary workflows, in which clients send preliminary materials when available, and then follow up with updates, usually urgent and often without a change list. As pointed out in Chapter 4, working with updates can be not only stressful but also risky from the point of view of textual consistency and coherence.
- The fragmentation and standardisation of complex processes and practices simplifies quality assessment and makes it more understandable for clients, who benefit from a high degree of visibility and participation in the processes. However, the LSPs' emphatic provision of *quick and easy* tasks acts as a reductive operation which negatively downplays the complexity of text production.

As far as the observed portion of AVT industry is concerned, I argue that functionalist theories have contributed to a situation of unsustainability, as the industry fails to impose its own requirements, or those of the translators, in order to content producers and distributors, thus submitting itself to client dominance and engaging in a power (im)balance that could also reinforce the idea of AVT services as a less important step, or an afterthought, instead of being part and parcel of the production and distribution of audiovisual material globally. Ideally, the end to client dominance could be achieved through a restructuring of production and post-production processes in ways in which AVT is not a rushed activity. This would mean setting industry-wide regulations for the provision of material, and also drafting frameworks of collaboration between production and post-production teams to ensure that decisions around

distribution and release dates fully take into consideration translation and localisation timeframes as crucially as other production timeframes.

2) The role of translators

In functionalist theories, translators are presented as competent experts, independent authors in TT production (Reiss and Vermeer 1984; Holz-Mänttari 1993). While this can be seen as an empowering point of view, in the context of platform business model, and especially cloud subtitling, the translator's role has not acquired much independence, rather the contrary, and although the translator's expertise is recognised, it can also be exploited. In theory, their expertise is recognised by the LSPs, at least externally: it is convenient for companies to present their linguists as competent, as this is a positive signal of their attention to quality. Within the cloud platform system, the recognition of translators' expertise through the appreciation of a job well done seems to be barely acknowledged, and detailed feedback also seems to be rare. The competence of subtitlers is instead expressed through their rating in the freelance pool, directly tied to their error rates. In some platforms, competence is used as an excuse for the little support available by PMs. Indeed, according to most cloud subtitlers interviewed, PMs seemed to discourage subtitlers from contacting them, on the basis that they are competent and should be able to find solutions individually.

As for the agency that should correspond to independent translators, as described in Chapter 5, subtitlers' working conditions are usually as good as their negotiability, but cloud platform environments do not encourage the establishment of trust and familiarity between professionals such as freelancers and project managers, crucial not only to negotiate appropriate terms of service, but also to establish a good working relationship. For this reason, many suffer from feelings of isolation and experience a lack of communication with PMs and

other colleagues. Cloud subtitlers do not conform to the functionalist idea of translators as authors able to exercise independent judgement because they are very dependent on the process steps that must be followed exclusively within the platform, and cannot consider *independent* translation choices that may require variation from the rules, or from the platform's available functionalities. It is no surprise, then, that according to a large-scale survey, the main reason why freelancers prefer working with direct clients, in a more direct and horizontal fashion rather than through an intermediary company, is professional freedom, which allows them to earn higher rates, brings more collaboration and creativity, and leads to higher satisfaction (Pielmeier and O'Mara 2020, p. 29).

3) Quality measures and assessment

Client dominance and translation expertise are the two poles of a relationship mediated by vendor companies, which is key to understanding the different aspects that quality can acquire under a functionalist regime. Functionalist theories of translation place the emphasis on textual purpose as defined by the client. Originally, functionalist principles were partly developed so that certain categories of texts, such as highly technical manuals rather than literary works, for instance, could be translated and understood by end-users. In this light, the heightened attention to the clients' specifications and brief acquired an entirely different relevance, as these could be crucial for the understanding of certain technicalities and the intended purpose of the text in a user-oriented perspective. However, it can be argued that in cloud platforms the subtitlers are more than ever disconnected from the end users, i.e. the viewers, and the overall system seems to bring client and LSP closer together, while distancing subtitlers and audiences.

AVT companies, in a functionalist perspective, prioritise the textual purpose as defined by the client. In the context under study, the expected quality is *defined* internally by the LSP on the basis of the clients' budget allocation, and at the same time it is *expressed* formally through project instructions. The functional paradigm allows the commodification of quality by establishing price points that depend on the client's investment (Jiménez Crespo 2018). The client's purpose (the profit) is reflected on the number of resources on which they invest (budget) and so fitness for purpose (used as a synonym for quality) will depend on the human, temporal and technological resources that can be deployed for that budget. As mentioned in Chapter 5, high/low profile projects usually have corresponding higher/lower budgets and better/worse process conditions than average. This suggests that platform subtitling is indeed reinforcing the consolidation of the functionalist paradigm in the industry, which had been already observed in instances of crowdsourcing platforms (*ibid.*, p. 88).

These two yardsticks of quality, the one based on textual purpose and the other on profit, can normally coexist when translation is the object of a commercial transaction. However, in platform subtitling the *definition* of quality on the basis of the clients' budget is hidden from the freelancers, who are left with the formal *expression* of such quality, in the form of project instructions. Such instructions include tacit quality measures that do not correspond solely to the appropriate fulfilment of textual, linguistic, communicative functions but are based on profit, and thus serve to play a different game to that of the translators. The distance placed between these two measures of quality essentially reinforces the difference between the idea of translation in the industry, and the idea of translation that freelancers generally acquire from academic settings, and the possible conflict of priorities that ensues – an issue unaddressed by functionalist theories (Martín de León 2008). This poses a problem in terms of the assessment of fitness for purpose, as to 'how one can determine whether a given

translation fulfils its *skopos*' (House 2015, p. 11) when the yardstick for quality could potentially acquire very different connotations according to the interests and points of view of freelancers, vendor companies, clients, and ultimately audiences. The solution that many AVT providers have adopted is that of combining the assessment carried out by proof-readers and quality controllers on textual and technical quality metrics, with direct client feedback through dedicated areas on the cloud platform that are accessible to clients only. However, these methods reinforce the centrality of vendor companies as intermediaries, thus increasing the distance between translators, clients and audiences, and also between the two yardsticks for quality: what the client wants and what the translator knows (or can say) about it. It is a distance that highlights the idea that translators need mediators (in the form of project managers or client managers), who can deal with the profit-based measure of quality, while translators can just follow the instructions and do what they are told (thus automatically invalidating the functionalist idea of the translator as an independent expert in intercultural communication). As long as the industry is governed by functionalism, as long as the client's priorities and financial interests unilaterally determine the de facto perceptions of quality and text function and are managed solely by companies, *audiovisual translation* and *the AVT industry* are to be considered, treated, and named as two different phenomena.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the context under study with an economic and organisational lens, in order to explore the conceptualisation and quantification of quality through its connection to the standards at the basis of the AVT industry, which define processes aimed at the success of a commercial transaction, rather than translation-specific processes. Some of the points made in this chapter can be found separately in Translation and Audiovisual Translation

Studies, and they may have currency in other disciplines. At the same time, to my knowledge, this is the first extensive study that systematically brings together various economic, organisational and translational aspects to explore how the concept of quality is constructed in the industry of cloud subtitling.

The chapter has demonstrated that the choices around quality and technology that are made by AVT companies in a platform economy derive from a strong focus on the client, to the point of subordination. Cloud platforms become the only environment for many audiovisual translators, and the restrictions that they entail extend not only to the technical possibilities, but also to the freedom and room for manoeuvre for textual manipulation and intervention. Platforms are presented as essential to carry out AVT work under current market conditions, and they are indeed essential for LSPs to control and restrict processes – the process being the easiest aspect that companies can control to guarantee formal compliance to standards. Subtitlers, on the other hand, can only act within a predetermined and limited range of functions, which aims at limiting the chance that they will make an error. Their communication is also heavily limited, which impairs their power of associating / unionising, thus generating collective bargaining power (Moorkens 2017).

Standardising AVT down to one way of carrying out subtitling processes, and one way of conceiving texts, looks like the industry's preferred way to deal with today's challenges in the AVT market. Hence, the importance of exploring other technological choices and standardisation measures as a way to opening up to different possibilities of doing AVT, as a first step to imagining different ways of translating audiovisual content which go beyond the necessity of standardisation of work practices and the submission to production dynamics.

Here, the analysis of industry working practices through an academic lens has explored the application of functionalist theories in the platform AVT industry, which could apparently

signal a degree of proximity between academic and industry views on quality. Nevertheless, the functionalist approach fails to effectively align those views. While it can be said that working conditions in the AVT industry have been inspired and informed by functionalist translation theories, a breaking down and analysis of the industry's notion of quality reveals discrepancies between conditions that could better support the subtitlers' work, and actual working conditions. Indeed, functionalist principles allow the industry to assign different meanings to quality, which, from a textual point of view, stands to signify *quantified* and *quantifiable* compliance to rules and instructions.

What the subtitling industry does by focusing all efforts on processes, as well as client-driven *skopos*, is fragmenting and simplifying complex processes of textual intervention, placing emphasis on compliance to rules. The application of the functionalist approach in the platform subtitling industry has resulted in a context in which the terms and modes of TT production are strictly dictated by the client and have little to do with the translation needs, or translators' competences. Instead, it has created a circle of power dynamics that seems hard to break within this very business model, not only for post-production and AVT, but also for production and distribution. Furthermore, it can be argued that functionalist theories have not only pervaded the industry and validated profit-making purposes, but also permeated the pedagogy of translation in preparing students of AVT courses to follow and accept certain perceptions of quality in the industry, and a certain business model. Finally, the adoption of functionalism implies that academia can and does infiltrate industry, and I argue that the current situation of platform AVT models and their construction of quality call for a reimagination of translation theories that go beyond functionalism and are able to influence – and not justify – production and post-production dynamics in more virtuous and sustainable ways. Indeed, as will be further developed in the next and final chapter, alternative models

could imply that the focus on quality is not limited to product specifications but extends to the substance of product, processes and working conditions; that the translators' work is valued differently; and that processes are made more sustainable through increased communication and cooperation among all actors.

7 Constructing scenarios of audiovisual translation and imagining new ones

7.1 Answering the research questions

Underpinning the questions raised by the thesis is the hypothesis that quality in translation (and audiovisual translation) is the result of the collaborative efforts of many actors in production contexts, but also the outcome of many and varied aspects, some contextual and some extrinsic, relating to product, process, and social dimensions. In addition, the notion of quality is open to different interpretations, although in principle it is generally desirable that all participating actors agree on definitions of quality from the start, in order for such collaborative efforts to be coordinated efficiently. In light of this, and also taking into account the socio-constructivist framework of the thesis, the exploration of different aspects of quality together with the social, technical, and economic actors that produce them led me to formulate the first research question around three primary concerns: what quality is, how it is constructed in the portion of subtitling industry observed, and why it is constructed in this way.

1. How is the concept of quality constructed in the context of contemporary professional subtitling contexts?

In answering this question, it is crucial to understand that in the subtitling industry under study, quality is a concept which is strictly dependent on the business model being adhered to, i.e. a platform business model. The particular quality construct that thus emerges is bound to serve this particular business model, which, in turn, means that it is a construct shaped around this model's key features, one of which is standardisation. The governing principles of this and similar models will have an effect on the type and quality of processes, of working

conditions, and of final products. Standardisation indicates the systematisation and control of industrial processes so that companies can meet clients' needs; at the same time, though, the quality standards that companies apply do not provide definitions of textual / translational quality, but tend instead to limit themselves to recommendations about the processes that lead to client satisfaction. It might be worth recalling that "client" does not equate to the end-users of the content (the audience) but the work requester, that is to say, the content producers and owners (production houses).

Making sure that clients' demands are met is the leading principle behind current quality standards in use in the industry (such as ISO 17100, analysed in section 6.4.1). This thesis has found that in the part of the AVT industry under study, standardisation measures consist mainly in practices of division of labour, centralised management of quality, processes and technology (through cloud platforms), a restricted use of technology, heavy limitations on human communication, as well as an abundance of instructions and guidelines. In the industry contexts observed, these standardisation practices are usually referred to as 'quality measures' due to their purpose of limiting the risk of variation from a norm, thus facilitating quality assessment and control.

Quality standards used in the AVT industry – centred on or inspired by ISO 17100 – are designed on the basis of functionalist premises (Calvo 2018), intended as those translation theories revolving around the *function of a text*. In academic terms, such approaches aim at identifying and then representing a textual function, which in the case of an audiovisual production could be one of entertainment and/or education, for instance. Functionalist theories also place considerable importance on the client's brief as a key element to understand the function that the text needs to fulfil. However, as exposed in section 6.5, in industry quality standards and in the professional practices examined in this thesis, it appears

that the focus is not placed on the textual function as defined in the client's brief but, rather, it is placed on the client itself and its satisfaction. Quality standards, and the companies' quality management, assessment and control practices, reveal that client satisfaction is invariably the primary function to fulfil. Instructions and guidelines as given by – or negotiated with – the client are the yardstick against which quality is assessed, which means that their primary role is that of fulfilling a clients' function. If quality is commonly associated with compliance to clients' requirements, these become the yardstick.

The application of the functionalist paradigm, in addition, allows quality to be conceptualised as 'fitness for purpose', with the purpose being ultimately the clients' interests. The idea of 'fit for purpose' allows quality to be commodified at different price points (Jiménez-Crespo 2018; Moorkens 2020), whereby clients' instructions, provision of material, and quality of provided materials reflect the value attributed by the client to a certain content. It follows that clients' requirements and materials are strongly dependent on the clients' investments and, therefore, based on a logic of profit, which risks overshadowing other necessities linked to translational principles, strategies and processes aimed at fulfilling the text-related function. Thus, I argue that in the AVT production observed, the primary purpose, the *function* of a filmic text, is no longer its ability to entertain, educate and/or generate emotions in the target audience; the film *function* is that of generating a profit for the client.

However, this conceptualisation of function and quality is not presented in this way to translators, subtitlers, proof-readers and QCers. In fact, the *definition* of quality, as openly based on the logics of profit, is operative exclusively between the client and the company. On the other hand, what is communicated to translators in the form of instructions and guidelines is a different *expression* of quality. To the translator, such expression is presented as if uniquely related to translation and its lingua-cultural features, and the relevance of the profit logic,

while still present, is underplayed or not mentioned at all. Defining quality with a view to profit is not necessarily wrong and, at the same time, this thesis has argued that the more traditional, lingua-cultural definition of quality is not sufficient in itself. Nevertheless, data presented in Chapters 5 and 6 strongly suggests that such definitions and expressions of quality are actively confounded in the observed cloud subtitling environment and processes. In addition, the data analysed in Chapter 5 clearly reveals that in this environment and these processes, translators are increasingly more isolated from one another and from the centre of production. The centralisation of companies, even stronger in cloud platform environments, corroborates this idea that quality is confounded between different yardsticks – profit-related and text-related – by reinforcing the distance between clients and translators, and between what clients want and what translators can do or say about it.

Given that such quality construct follows the platform business model, it is reasonable to assume that it does so in a way to serve those actors that benefit the most from this model: first of all the clients, who can benefit from audiovisual services at the price they choose to invest, and then the AVT companies, which centralise the whole audiovisual production through a restricted and controlled technological environment that allow them to maximise translation labour resources. Amongst other restrictions, controlled platforms contribute to maintaining the status quo and the distance mentioned above by reinforcing a phenomenon that was already in place from the previous predominant business model, that of preventing translators and subtitlers from communicating freely and associating with one another, thus potentially endangering the companies' central position.

It is clear, then, that technology plays an instrumental part in the construction and maintenance of quality in the contemporary platform subtitling industry. For this reason, it was necessary to explore closely the relationship between human and technological actors

(question 2) and, more specifically, the intertwining aspects of quality that are mediated through technology, so as to elucidate the links between technology and the quality of products, processes and working conditions (question 3).

2. How does the interplay between human and inanimate actors unfold in subtitling production dynamics?

All participants in Study 1, and almost all in Study 2, work partially or entirely in cloud subtitling platforms and adhere to a certain business model that has developed within platform economy (Srnicsek 2017). For company employees, the transition to the cloud involved a considerable revision of procedures, the rearrangement of workflows, and a learning curve for all users. Cloud platforms have also expanded companies' possibilities for concurrent remote working, and reduced piracy threats in the handling of content in all operations. For the freelance subtitlers, platforms provide a free and relatively user-friendly subtitling tool with more automated functions, but also restrictions on its use, and on patterns of communication within this setup. In addition to being used to accomplish other administrative tasks, platforms provide the virtual capacity in which all the linguistic post-production work can be done, and the users' relation to the platform is exclusive: when working for a cloud based LSP, whether as in-house employee or outsourced freelancer, no process is allowed outside the platform.

Data analysed in Chapter 5 point to the hypothesis that imposing a restricted working environment such as the platform conveys the idea that the process steps that need to be followed are the only way of doing subtitling work. For instance, the younger subtitlers who started working on platforms directly and have no experience of older business models and working routines, think of the predefined and obligatory steps that need to be taken within

the cloud platform as their subtitling workflow. The choice and imposition of cloud platforms, which is increasingly common in the AVT industry, is attributable to a focus on productivity, but is in fact mainly aimed at client satisfaction, and so it can be considered the primary expression of the client focus mentioned above, in the answer to research question 1. Indeed, clients require a secure server from which content can neither be leaked nor tampered with in any way, and benefit from an all-in-one environment in which the translation and localisation tasks in all desired languages can be managed and monitored by the LSPs. In fact, platforms facilitate production processes on a large scale, as well as the recording of all performance activity happening within their servers. Some also have a dedicated client interface that allows clients to check the progress of their translated products at any time.

For the sake of productivity and adherence to quality requirements, platforms can be fine-tuned so that functions can be restricted or imposed to avoid subjective variation, which would naturally occur when many different translators and subtitlers are part of the equation, in so far as they would be free to make their independent choices. This restriction can bring about the compartmentalisation of subtitling tasks, which does not require the employment of a well-rounded subtitler and can lead to professional deskilling in the long-term. As presented in section 5.6, most, if not all, cloud subtitling platforms restrict vertical and horizontal communication patterns, namely between project managers and translators and between fellow translators, proof-readers and quality controllers. In doing so, and in automating crucial negotiating tasks such as job assignment, cloud platforms deepen the information asymmetry between human actors, thus increasing distance amongst them and encouraging dynamics of competitive behaviour.

The centralisation of communication and management allows LSPs to retain their core position as mediators, and prevents translators and subtitlers from associating freely, and from spending time to discuss translation choices and strategies.

These exclusive and restrictive relations between human and technology actors have been analysed in depth, to reveal the connections between technology use and quality of products, processes and working conditions for the human actors. The analysis of technology use and its relation to quality has led me to conceptualise quality in the subtitling process as presented in the answer to question 1, and more widely to acknowledge the interplay of human and technology in the overall landscape of quality in the subtitling industry, as seen below.

3. What is the role of technology in relation to the quality of professional subtitling provision, processes and products?

As argued above, the adoption of cloud platforms reflects the industry's strong focus on the client, primarily as far as data safety and compliance to client instructions are concerned. For this reason, it is essential to understand the ways in which subtitling technology can influence translation quality in the three dimensions that have been considered in this thesis: product, process and social environment and interactions.

Cloud and automation technologies play an important role in the delivery of subtitling product quality, as far as technical quality is concerned, but also from a textual and stylistic point of view, for instance through automated check and search functions that aid spelling and adherence to terminology lists. In Chapter 4, the performance of technology actors and the quality of their interaction with humans have been identified as important indicators for process quality, as well as for productivity. In fact, the performance and configuration of

technology actors can strongly determine the quality of process-related factors such as time-to-task and smoothness of procedures. Satisfaction in technology use is one of the determining elements impacting process as well as social quality – the latter being the quality dimension that includes working conditions. Indeed, restrictions or impositions in technology use can affect satisfaction and willingness to engage with certain technologies, leading to acceptance or rejection dynamics. The studies presented in Chapters 4 and 5 have shown that cloud technology is imposed exclusively over human actors, and it often entails restrictions in order to regulate their use of skills. While this proves instrumental in standardising and systematising complex processes on a large scale, in the long term the restrictions on subtitling functionalities could raise issues of technological dependence, alongside the subtitlers' deskilling or loss of professional autonomy or identity, for instance.

In addition, as seen earlier, cloud platforms do not encourage vertical or horizontal communication channels, which can be crucial to human negotiation and trust-building dynamics, elements of particular importance in the subtitlers' working conditions and the quality of those conditions. Issues in communication and negotiation add stress to the subtitlers' work, and can contribute to feelings of depersonalisation, alienation and disempowerment, as seen in sections 5.5 and 5.7.

It must be reminded that this analysis relates solely to the data collected within the portion of the AVT industry examined, and may not necessarily be generalised to all technology – or even all cloud platforms – that exist. In reality, I believe that cloud technology has great potential that could be further explored and deployed to benefit all the different stakeholders. However, it is crucial to remain critical about technologies, in that they are invariably designed to serve certain business models or certain ideological agendas. In this case, my critique of the cloud platform stems from the fact that the environments studied in this thesis have been

designed, and are therefore structurally oriented, to serve the clients' needs and bring commercial and productivity benefits for both clients and LSPs, to the detriment of the subtitlers' experience, empowerment, and professional development.

As noted earlier on, cloud platforms have contributed to the centralisation of the LSPs within the audiovisual production network, and to the centralisation of the management, assessment and control of quality. Through cloud platform technology, LSPs can in fact record all performance-related data, which strongly impinges on the product, process, and social dimensions of quality, as discussed in 5.8. Among other functions, data recording allows LSPs to:

- Monitor the number of errors associated with all processed files, thus quantifying the product quality of subtitled texts.
- Devise quality management strategies, quality assessment procedures, as well as preventive and reactive actions such as organising extra training or terminating contracts.
- Quantify, rate and rank the subtitlers', proof-readers' and template creators' *quality* of work.
- Provide rankings on the LSP's own performances in the AVT market.

This last element has repercussions for social quality in the sense that LSPs' market reputation and credibility can vary according to their ratings, which are often publicly available. This system can be a source of great frustration or stress for many freelancers – especially when paired with low communication opportunities – as they do not receive qualitative feedback but a quantification of their errors, which ranks them competitively within the pool, thus possibly determining future employability, and pitches them one against the other, thereby

discouraging association amongst the freelancers and inhibiting relations of trust and collaboration between them, which ultimately reinforces the centrality of the LSP.

7.2 Expanding perspectives in audiovisual translation

In responding to the research questions as delineated in the above section, the thesis has contributed to the literature in audiovisual translation studies, expanding traditional research scopes through an interdisciplinary approach in which qualitative and ethnographic methodologies have been deployed to highlight a wealth of technological, organisational, social, and economic aspects underlying the subtitling profession. This highlights how crucial it is to explore professional practices empirically and critically, so as to raise the awareness of translation researchers, students and professionals, as well as other language specialists, around problematic issues in the industry. The following paragraphs will highlight the contributions of the thesis around specific facets of subtitling production and the identification of the notion of quality in the industry. In doing so, the contributions will refer and respond to the aims outlined in the introduction, namely (1) focusing on the cloud subtitling sector; (2) adopting a constructivist perspective; (3) shedding light on quality and its construction; and (4) employing innovative methods in AVT research.

The overall contribution of this thesis lies in this analysis of representative parts of the subtitling industry in the late 2010s-early 2020s with a consistent constructivist approach that looks at processes, professionals, working conditions and environments in the cloud subtitling sector. Adopting sociological, organisational, technological, as well as economic perspectives has allowed me to shed light on key aspects of the subtitling production system and its viability, as well as on the construction of quality.

When looking at the cloud subtitling sector (1), the thesis complements studies that refer to cloud subtitling within a platform business model, such as Chaume (2019), Díaz Cintas and Massidda (2019), Bolaños-García-Escribano et al. (2021), or address it in further depth (Bolaños-García-Escribano and Díaz Cintas 2020). This aspect of the thesis contributes to widening the knowledge about how cloud platforms are used and experienced by companies, employees and freelance subtitlers, providing information and insights on recent yet common procedures, such as the automation of job assignments and the methods to assess quality. A close exploration of both the technological environment of cloud platforms and the users' experiences in the cloud has provided further understanding of how platforms can centralise the role of the companies who own them. The research has showed how platforms can be strong facilitators of automation, as well as powerful mediators of social interaction between the users, in both positive and negative ways. These insights could help to raise awareness around social and process issues of audiovisual translation and be of interest not only to students and researchers, but also to cloud platform developers, AVT and localisation managers, and project managers.

As for adopting a constructivist perspective (2), this thesis has provided as comprehensive a picture as possible of the processes, working conditions and environments within the cloud subtitling sector (taking into account the restrictions set by the Company), contributing to filling the gap for socio-constructivist studies in AVT. In Translation Studies, the direct observation of workplaces and procedures through a socio-constructivist lens has proved of considerable importance in gathering diverse sets of data coming from different points of view, as seen in Chapter 2, and the present thesis demonstrates the relevance of doing so in AVT research as well. In this respect, the thesis adds value and recognition to the academic study of workplaces and processes in AVT, highlighting the importance of exploring

their quality. From an academic point of view, this approach avoids any de-contextualisation of translation labour and promotes awareness of industry conditions. Specifically, the exploration of cloud subtitling processes together with the relations that get established between humans and machines and also amongst human actors, proposes a view of technology that goes beyond the instrumentality of software (Frabetti 2015), intended as an enabler of AVT. Instead, the technical and the social are taken together constructively so as to reveal principles and choices that influence the design, use and imposition of cloud software, and point to the fact that such choices allow a restricted range of opportunities for translators and other actors in peripheral positions, and in doing so they automatically exclude other ranges of opportunities. As argued below, it is crucial to reflect on the fact that even if the current cloud environment seems to have become the dominant working model in the subtitling industry, this does not mean that there are no other ways of doing subtitling work. In addition to that, contextual and constructivist studies of translation can encourage academics and professionals to reflect on the viability and sustainability of business models, working processes and working conditions in general. Specifically, in Chapter 4, the thesis also provides a blueprint for evaluating and reflecting on the quality of translation and AVT processes and the many factors that need to be considered when carrying out or planning translation activities. This could be useful to researchers, translators (both students and professionals), academic and industry trainers, translation managers and project managers.

With regard to shedding light on perceptions of quality in the audiovisual sector and on the mechanisms by which the meaning of quality is produced by the AVT industry (3), by looking at quality from different points of view, this thesis has overcome the compartmentalisation of quality dimensions generally found in academic and industry literature (Drugan 2013). In particular, it has focused on the process and social dimensions in

relation to how and whether quality is maintained in the translation product and also conceptualised (Abdallah 2007). At the same time, it aspires to be an accessible contribution to the organisational and economic side of translation for industry members and practitioners, grounded in real-life phenomena and practices.

The thesis has shown that the conceptualisation of quality that emerges is, like the business model on which it is based, one amongst many possible. In particular, exploring the construction of quality from different dimensions – process, product and social – has brought to light another equally important dimension of working environments and of quality: the ethical one. This ethical dimension is visible in the ways in which actors interact, and in whether these interactions allow them to establish trust and respect or to have their needs acknowledged and met. Considering quality from an ethical perspective has highlighted, particularly in Chapter 6, a system in which trust, communication and needs are not always fulfilled in a balanced way, thus pointing strongly to a scenario of unsustainability.

A crucial contribution of this thesis is that it provides opportunities to reflect on practices from various points of view. Companies in both production and post-production sectors can use the themes and analysis of the thesis to reflect on their own practices; freelancers can draw inspiration to consider their own modes of employment and find ways to claim different working conditions; academic trainers could draw suggestions in terms of how these realities can be presented and taught to translation students. Finally, it is also important to mention that the narrative of quality presented in this research overlaps with other modes of translation, and the thesis could thereby serve as a way for all of the above figures to rethink other realities of translation work that can operate in fairer ways for everyone involved.

As for the final aim, employing innovative methods (4), the thesis has introduced an interdisciplinary approach to AVT research based on qualitative data collection, ethnography, and socio-constructivist and interpretative elements of analysis. The methodology employed in the thesis helps to consolidate our knowledge of the social and ideological aspects that impinge on translation, by expanding the array of available methodologies (Wolf and Fukari 2007), and responds to the identified gap when it comes to qualitative and observational studies in and of AVT, including its workplace. In particular, the ethnographic approach based on participant observation and adopted in the workplace study differs from the quantitative methods more frequently employed in AVT Studies, representing an alternative way to look at translation as a socio-technical activity. The use of an ethnographic methodology also denotes the need to find new modes of enquiry, opening up original ways of imagining the translation and AVT disciplines and their pedagogy, and the processes and work environments found in the industry. Indeed, the ethnographic research design and methods can also be employed in explorations that shed light onto alternative types of realities that are not global or dominant but are perhaps more sustainable. These settings could potentially be accessed more easily by researchers so as to expand the knowledge about the various shapes that the AVT industry currently assumes, and which have not yet been mapped.

7.3 Future visions

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the interdisciplinary framework and methodology adopted in the thesis were chosen as a way to expand our research perspectives on AVT practices, especially subtitling, and propose new research avenues in the discipline, as well as new ways of doing AVT in the industry. Certainly, reimagining the audiovisual post-production and translation industry would require a vision into new and alternative configurations of film

and audiovisual production dynamics that deviate from current dominant norms. In this regard, I believe that it is possible to imagine a different kind of audiovisual production and post-production dynamics which is more ethical, inclusive and sustainable, without vertical domination from clients, and in which the social, ethical and professional needs of all animate actors involved are duly considered and supported.

Ideally, an end to client dominance as was highlighted in the last chapter could be achieved through a restructuring of production in ways in which AVT – despite being one of the last post-production processes in the chain – is not an activity that is rushed across compressed production times, but thoughtfully budgeted, cared for and planned for. This would include the establishment of industry-wide regulations for the provision of material from content producers, but also new frameworks of collaboration between production and post-production to ensure that decisions around distribution and release times consider translation and localisation timeframes, and budgets, to be as crucial as other production timeframes. Such realities would entail different and more collaborative channels of communication between content creators, producers and translators. A fairer and more sustainable production system would also mean that the interests and needs of translators and subtitlers are valued, protected and preserved; indeed, the thesis has shown that the current model carries risks of deskilling and weakening of the subtitlers' professional identity and leverage, as their skills are restricted or only partly employed. This means that the craft of audiovisual translators and subtitlers risks becoming a quick and easy operation, thus reducing the act of translation and its quality to a procedural rather than creative act, which arguably does not do justice to the content and its audience. Reflecting and acting on these issues so as to avoid these negative consequences would serve the interests of many (if not all) actors,

including post-production and AVT companies, which would then be able to count on a competent and satisfied community.

Importantly, it may not be necessary to imagine all this from scratch as such realities already exist outside of the dominant paradigm, depicting alternative ways in which companies and professionals have a different role within production dynamics, but also new and different ways of producing films and audiovisual media (Romero-Fresco 2019; Silvester 2021), even if these are not explored sufficiently in the existing literature. The thesis has highlighted the sustainability risks entailed in globalised and dominant cloud subtitling practices in the platform business model and heightens the need for more studies into alternative business models and production networks which enhance collaboration and in which every professional role is properly valued.

The thesis has foregrounded many aspects that lead to further gaps and future research possibilities for studies in AVT but also within the wider discipline of Translation Studies. The points below take into account social, cultural, and labour-related points of view, and provide some open, unanswered questions and issues to date. The list is by no means exhaustive, but it aims to offer a starting point that might spark future reflections:

- In light of the industry practices described and the low level of attention to translational needs and issues in the contexts observed, how can lingua-cultural aspects be balanced in the current audiovisual production on cloud platform, in a way that benefits all actors, including the target audiences?
- The thesis has highlighted practices of standardisation and automation in cloud subtitling. What are the implications of these practices for the pedagogy of AVT in academic and non-academic training? This line of enquiry could open up questions as

to what the current relation might be between training and practice, and the extent to which academic programmes are tailored to comply with concepts of quality that have been constructed within the industry.

- The need for the rating and ranking of freelancers and companies is an increasingly common practice which can be linked to a modern narrative in which the world is conceived as being orchestrated around a 'stratified order' in which all actors need to compete against one another (Brankovic 2021). This exacerbates the semantic reversal, which is visible in the construction of quality as quantity. Is it possible to conceive and assess translation strategies and creativity in a competitive framework (which is so common in contemporary approaches to service provision, including education)? Can translation quality be assessed in different and qualitative ways in large-scale production networks?
- As a way to escape the client-first paradigm, is it possible to break away from the strict consideration of translation as a service? How is it possible to bring back the idea that translation is part and parcel of production and therefore needs to be valued as such, and not as an external afterthought that can be outsourced?
- Through the contrastive analysis of industry standards for translation and AVT provision and the conditions of subtitling work in the context observed, the thesis has revealed that while there are many standards relating to companies' and freelancers' practices, clients' practices are less regulated. This revolves around the issue of client dominance as outlined in the previous chapter, and merits further research and investigation. First, there is a lack of regulations and standards for the clients' provision of source and reference material and their quality. In addition, there seems to be a lack of industry-wide norms that regulate minimum timeframes for post-production, so as to avoid rushed AVT operations and therefore provide companies with ample time for

translation and localisation, which could help reduce costs. Second, while the clients' copyrights to audiovisual content are highly regulated and protected, and although the moral rights of translators' work are covered by the Berne Convention, the system of rights is highly complex as is not homogeneously regulated across different countries. This means that often, 'copyright does not recognize any moral right attached to authors, even if it is defined in the Berne Convention' (SACD). Paired with the increasing individualisation and isolation of translators' work, these conditions weaken the translators' possibilities to claim moral rights for the content they work on and for these reasons they would deserve further academic attention.

- More widely, the thesis has highlighted the precarity of freelance outsourced workers such as audiovisual translators, and more specifically their loss of association and negotiation power under the business model observed (Moorkens 2017). Some steps in this direction are being taken by the European Union (Collective bargaining agreements for self-employed, 2021) and labour issues are also raised by professional associations such as SUBTLE (Code of Good Practice in AVT: Recommended Working Conditions, 2020). Nevertheless, the thesis stresses a strong need for research into the subtitlers' professional status, potentially leading to impact on issues of international regulation of the translation profession, as well as regulatory and protective, union-backed frameworks to establish and protect the working rights (including their moral rights) that outsourced freelancers can claim when working for companies or direct clients.
- The thesis has highlighted the use of automation, and also alluded to the use of machine translation results in some cloud subtitling workflows. Apart from technical and workload-related aspects of MT use in subtitling, which are already being investigated (Matusov et al. 2019), how does MT change the nature of subtitling, and

what are the implications for the subtitlers' status? Where does subtitling end and post-editing begin? More specifically, this thesis presents the fact that some subtitlers can choose their rendition from MT results, which has a double implication: while it does provide translators with a pre-populated choice, in choosing, amending or rejecting such MT output, the translators are training the MT engine as to what the best rendition is according to them. Further research could focus on whether this training activity is acknowledged and paid for by companies, or does it account for hidden (and unpaid) labour? The same question can be asked in relation to any other translation modes within and outside the audiovisual sector in which pre-populated MT results are used.

- Communication emerged as a key factor for the establishment of collaborative and trustful relationships among social actors; these heighten social, process and ethical quality, and therefore have positive effects on product quality as well. Questions that fell outside the scope of this thesis involve, for example, the specific perspectives of clients and project managers about the communicative restrictions that come with cloud platforms. But also, how does communication unfold in different business models and translation settings that currently exist within and outside the cloud paradigm?
- In terms of social actors, the thesis has included some points of view from a company and its employees (localisation managers, template and script editors, client managers, project managers, language specialists, technical coordinators, and quality controllers) and those of freelance subtitlers. However, as first-hand perspectives from clients (and their distributors) are missing, studies that take into consideration their point of view are much needed, so as to increase the variety of angles in regard to practices in this field.

- Finally, there is a need to expand the focus of research to cover also the variety of business realities, and roles of social actors, in smaller, local, different working environments. This could shed light on different ways to do production and post-production work, to conceive quality and collaborative practices, and to manage communication and quality control and assessment, such as in Silvester (2021). What is the landscape of AVT production outside of the dominant model? How many dominant and non-dominant models can be found? Mapping local and national realities is crucial to imagining new and improved realities as proposed above, and overcoming the risk of concluding, wrongly, that the dominant business model for the provision of audiovisual translation is necessarily the right one, or the only viable one.

The chapter has articulated the answers to the thesis' research questions, pointed at the impact and contribution of the research, and indicated some of the possible avenues for future research that emerge from the issues discussed throughout. Through an investigation across academic positions and industry practices, the thesis has successfully explored economic factors and their influence on the working technologies, processes and conditions of translators and subtitlers, on the basis of something held dear in both academia and industry: quality in translation. The thesis has critically analysed current practices and technologies in the so-called cloud subtitling, benefitting from precious cross-pollination between the two perspectives. Thanks to this, the present work is able to raise academic awareness about subtitling processes and how the notion of quality is constructed in the industry, as well as raising professional awareness about principles of quality that extend beyond functionalist theories.

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Appendix I

Study 1 – Workplace study interview structure

- Which role do you have in the company?
- How long have you been in the company?
- What does your role entail?
- What are your criteria for recruiting people in your team?
- What challenges do you usually encounter in your work? How do you deal with them?
- How is your relationship with technology at work?
- What is your role's relation to the final quality of the translated product?
- What are your thoughts about quality?

Appendix II

Study 2 – Interviews with freelance subtitlers

- Profile

1. Where did you acquire your subtitling skills?
2. Please tell me about your professional career as subtitler up to date
3. What is your employment status at the moment?
4. If status is / has been diverse, what are the main differences between working freelance / in-house / as a company owner?
5. What types of projects do you work on most often, and for which type of client? [e.g. cinema / streaming / promotional]?
6. Who do you collaborate/interact with most in your work as a subtitler?
7. Could you describe to me your workflow when subtitling a project?
8. What differences do you find in working on different types of projects (such as cinema vs. streaming)?

- Use of technology

1. Which subtitling software(s) are you using? How long have you been using it/them for?
2. Is the software you use your choice, or the employer's?
 - a. [If employer's] what type is it? cloud-based, license-based?
 - b. Did you receive specific training for it?
 - c. Would you choose a different software, and if so, why?

3. Could you please highlight the pros and cons of the subtitling technology that you use at the moment?

- Working conditions

1. Have you got room to negotiate rates and deadlines with the client/agency?

2. Do you find the deadlines feasible, on average?

3. [If not] in terms of the quality of your job, do you have to compromise to make sure you meet the deadline?

4. Do you have to cope with stress?

5. Can you give me an example from your work, in terms of working conditions?

6. What can you tell me about the quality of the source and reference materials that you receive? [audio/video quality, terminology, film scripts, templates?]

7. What can you tell me of the quality of communication? Do you communicate directly with the client?

- Use of skills

1. How often are you asked to originate subtitles, i.e. to time-cue and translate vs. how often you work with a template file?

2. To what extent are you able to modify the templates' timecodes? What procedures do you need to go through, if needed (e.g. directly / through the project manager or QC?)