Is indirect translation a friend or a foe of sustainable development? Pivot subtitlers' perspective

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Pivot subtitlers' perspective

Ester Torres-Simón, Susana Valdez, Hanna Pięta & Rita Menezes
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona | Leiden University | Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, FCSH, CETAPS | University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies

This article addresses the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) through the lens of pivot template subtitling, a practice deemed logistically efficient by some and ethically suspicious by others. Drawing on (i) a critical review of 29 European codes of ethics promoted by professional translation associations and (ii) the answers to our online questionnaire on pivot subtitling (completed by 376 subtitlers based in Europe), we analyse the main concerns raised about pivot subtitling from the standpoint of access to decent work and economic growth in the AVT industry. Findings suggest that, from the professional subtitlers' point of view, current practices in pivot template-centred workflows may slow down the progress on SDG8, worsen working conditions and clash with professional codes of ethics. We end by suggesting ways to improve the use of indirect translation, so it does not hinder progress on SDG8 in the AVT industry.

Keywords: indirect translation, professional subtitlers, SDG 8, pivot templates, ethics, survey research

1. Introduction

The 2015 United Nations (UN) list of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has provided a framework to address global issues from the perspective of sustainability and aims at a peaceful and prosperous world by 2030. Sustainable development, a "development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987, 43), has

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the aim of avoiding the depletion of natural resources while ensuring an economic development that relies on these resources. The 17 SDGs are intertwined: actions geared towards one goal affect outcomes in other areas. Therefore, "development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability" (United Nations 2015).

This article centres on SDG8, which aims to "[p]romote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" (SDGs). We approach SDG8 through the lens of pivot subtitling and particularly from the point of view of one group of stakeholders – subtitlers. For the purpose of this paper, we define pivot subtitling as subtitling by means of a template with time codes and an interlingual translation in a language that differs from the language of the original audiovisual content and the final subtitles. It is controversial whether pivot subtitling addresses inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all. On the one hand, vendors tend to see pivot subtitling as the quickest, cheapest, and logistically easiest way to provide viewers with access to non-English language content (Georgakopoulou 2019). On the other hand, professional translators typically voice serious ethical concerns related to translation quality, rates, and working conditions (Oziemblewska and Szarkowska 2020, 438; Künzli 2022, 12). Is it a helpful ramp or a bottleneck?

Drawing on a critical review of 29 European codes of ethics promoted by professional translators' associations and views about pivot subtitling obtained through a questionnaire among subtitlers ($n=376$), we explore how translating indirectly relates to decent work, working conditions and economic growth in the audiovisual translation industry. For better contextualisation, we first critically review related research.

2. Related research

2.1 Sustainability, SDGs, and translation

The relationship between translation and sustainability has been approached from various angles. Meng Ji (2021) argues for the relevance of translation in the successful implementation of SGDs. In this case, translation is sometimes understood in a restricted sense as interlingual translation (p. 9) but also as a broader process of localising ideas (p. 4). International NGOs are considered "key actors in delivering the SDGs" and their language polices arguably have a "direct impact on aims of creating inclusive societies", yet little research has been carried out on the topic (Tesseur 2021, 262). While language diversity and translation are often recognised as playing an essential role, Federici et al.'s (2019) and Tesseur's (2021)

results suggests that there are hardly any institutional mechanisms and strategies to achieve language inclusivity. Additionally, within international NGOs, discussions and communication related to SDGs are almost exclusively in English. This is clearly problematic, considering that SDGs are intended for diverse audiences and members of vulnerable communities, many of whom may not understand or speak English (Tesseur 2021).

On a more theoretical level, eco-translatology urges translation researchers and practitioners to engage with linguicide and global monocultures. In this context, eco-translation is defined as "all forms of translation thinking and practice that knowingly engage with the challenges of human-induced environmental change" (Cronin 2017, 2). In this sense, it criticises how geopolitics impacts translation and, consequently, hinders linguistic heterogeneity. That is, if "translation flows indicate the potential drift towards monolingual, epistemic monocultures" (Cronin 2022, 2), the diversity of human environments is at risk. Thus, translators are encouraged to question their role (regarding agency, responsibility, and accountability) in the sustainability of societies, cultures, and languages.

2.2 SDG8 in translation studies

SDG8 aims to "promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" (Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators 2017). The goal is broken down into two key aspects (8a and 8b) and ten secondary targets (SDG8.1 to SDG8.10). Aspect 8a focuses on trade, while 8b seeks to "develop and operationalise a global strategy for youth employment and implement the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization" (Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators 2017). This pact aims to generate employment, extend social protection, respect labour standards, promote social dialogue, and shape fair globalisation. These aspects have attracted increasing attention from translation scholars in recent years, sometimes with explicit reference to the notion of sustainability – see Cronin (2020), Drugan and Tipton (2017), Moorkens (2017) and Kenny, Moorkens and do Carmo (2020). The next section discusses research related to SDGs 8.2, 8.3, and 8.5, i.e., secondary targets that are directly linked to our topic. The remaining secondary targets will not be covered because they go beyond our thematic scope due to their predominantly macroeconomic focus.

2.2.1 *Target 8.2, economic productivity, and innovation*

Target 8.2 aims to "[a]chieve higher levels of *economic productivity* through diversification, *technological upgrading and innovation*, including through a focus on

high-value added and labour-intensive sectors" (emphasis added). Increased economic productivity is measured as the annual growth rate of real gross domestic product per employed person (Inter-Agency and Expert Group on SDG Indicators 2017). This can be directly linked to the translation profession, which has changed substantially in recent years due to technological advances. For instance, machine translation (MT) was once seen merely as disruptive, but now, knowing when and how to use MT effectively is a key transversal competence for professional translators (EMT Expert Group 2017; Rothwell and Svoboda 2019). Importantly, MT might have increased productivity, but not necessarily translators' economic well-being. For instance, the *Machine Translation Manifesto* by the association Audiovisual Translation Europe (AVTE) discusses the "long-term sustainability" of the profession and the industry, and how the "unscrupulous" use of MT threatens and weakens translators' agency and position (AVTE 2021, 11; 14). The *Manifesto* proposes that to support sustainability, it is essential to improve translators' working conditions, for instance by paying rates that can fairly represent the translator's effort to post-edit machine-translated content and the training of MT engines (AVTE 2021, 10).

So, new technologies have the potential to improve productivity, which is a positive outcome. However, the disruption brought along by innovation might be used to renegotiate power positions, thus reinforcing already existing problems. That is, the expected improved productivity might not benefit the translators, if unfair rates and bad working conditions are not addressed.. This links to Target 8.3: decent job creation.

2.2.2 *Target 8.3, Decent job creation and entrepreneurship*

Target 8.3 aims to:

> promote development-oriented policies that support *productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship,* creativity, and innovation, and encourage the formalisation and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services" (Target 8.3, emphasis added)

Progress towards this target is measured by observing the percentage of informal employment in total employment, by sector and sex. A reduction in this macroeconomic indicator is a sign of success.

Target 8.3 is particularly relevant in the language industry where self-employment is the norm. Data suggests a growing demand for translators (ELIS 2021; Nimdzi Insights 2022) despite global instability during the COVID-19 pandemic and claims that MT would take over translation jobs. This increased demand could provide economic stability for freelancers, yet translators change career paths and leave the industry due to job dissatisfaction (Courtney and

Phelan 2019). This is reportedly linked to job insecurity, low rates, and worsening working conditions in production networks (see Abdallah 2010). The pre-COVID-19 European Language Industry Survey (ELIS 2020) pointed in that direction too, with freelance translators considering financial issues and the general economic climate as the main stress factors in their professional practice. The extent of this concern within the industry is shown in the replies to a follow-up question, in the 2021 edition of the survey. The 2021 ELIS survey asked participants about what solution would tackle "the fear that many professionals will leave the industry due to declining revenues, increasing expectations and lack of recognition" (ELIS 2021). 79% of respondents proposed solutions, thus accepting the possibility of such a gloomy scenario, while only 21% of the respondents considered the statement as unfounded (ELIS 2021, 79).

2.2.3 *Target 8.5, Equal pay for work of equal value*

The status of the translation profession varies considerably by country. Chan and Liu (2013) surveyed translators in ASEAN-5 countries and reported a low translator status in terms of pay and recognition. Pym et al. (2013, 92–94) show differences in rates in the European context. In a globalized competitive market, translation rates do not necessarily depend on the quality of the translators' work but on where translators are based.

Language Service Providers (LSP) have been reported to take advantage of template use (a practice often linked to pivot subtitling) in the global competitive market to cut on costs. Kapsaskis (2011, 166) reflects on price dumping in the context of subtitling and cites Carroll (2004) on how the use of templates facilitated rates cuts. Actually, Carroll (2004) was referring specifically to how "lower rates of payment in many of the countries in question [the "territories" or former British colonies] help reduce the overall costs for subtitling." Oziemblewska and Szarkowska (2020, 448) point to earlier reporting on how template creation in the subtitling industry was outsourced to low-income countries with multilingual speakers, "such as India, Malaysia, or the Philippines". The international status of English and its use as the main pivot language could encourage a distribution work that favours countries with lower rates.

2.3 SDG8 and indirect translation

So far, to the best of our knowledge, no published research has explicitly linked SDGs in general and SDG8 in particular with pivot subtitling or, for that matter, with other types of indirect translation. However, the question of how indirect translation relates to economic productivity, innovation, and job creation and satisfaction has been addressed in passing in a number of publications.

Regarding innovation and economic productivity, worth mentioning are Georgakopoulou (2019) and O'Hagan (2022), who focus on subtitling and game localization, respectively. Both show how, to meet new market demands, content developers have innovated their workflows by using old solutions. Indirect translation was strategically used to enhance productivity: it streamlined processes, increased the pool of available translators, and helped cutting costs (translating from English is cheaper than translating from other languages). However, the solution is not foolproof. Focusing on game localization, O'Hagan (2022, 524) stresses that despite an assumed extra revenue generated by indirect translation, this extra loop (the use of an intermediary language) is a transaction cost which might put the reception of other-language versions of a localised game at risk. In other words, O'Hagan (2022, 524) claims that non-English language users, especially those who are more averse to cultural mediation, may be dissatisfied with a highly mediated, purportedly unauthentic product.

In Nikolić's (2015, 113) survey study among Croatian subtitlers concerning job creation and satisfaction, some respondents consider templates "an excuse for cutting rates" and "as if a part of the subtitling work has been taken away from them." This is because technical aspects like timing and segmentation, which have been an integral part of subtitlers' skillset, are sometimes handled by someone else (the templator). Similar opinions are shared by respondents to Oziemblewska and Szarkowska's survey, which focused on subtitlers' views regarding the quality of templates. While many seem to agree that templates lead to a "reduction of both the role and the numbers of top professionals", there are also those who argue that pivot templates allow subtitlers to translate more content (i.e., have access to jobs for which they would not have been considered otherwise) and to "focus mostly on the translation[, which] is much more satisfying" (Oziemblewska and Szarkowska 2020, 438).

3. Methods

To evaluate the alignment of pivot subtitling with the SDGs in general and specifically with SDG8, we combined two approaches that focus on subtitlers. First, we assessed a cross-section of professional codes of ethics. Second, we analysed the professional subtitlers' responses to our self-administered questionnaire on indirect translation. Below we outline how data from each approach was collected and analysed.

3.1 Codes of ethics

The analysis was carried out between May 2021 and June 2022, covering 29 codes of ethics (see Appendix 1 for a complete list). Codes of ethics establish a set of values shared by professionals in a given industry, including those related to "obligations and working conditions" (Chesterman 2001, 445). Therefore, the analysis of codes of ethics foregrounds professionals' expectations on working conditions and provides an overview of the status of the relevant SDGs, and of indirect translation. We analysed mainstream codes developed by AVT professional associations located in the top ten countries represented in our questionnaire: Portugal, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Croatia, Belgium, Slovenia, Italy, and Poland. Those countries account for 78% of our participants (cf. Section 4.2.1). Where we lacked language knowledge, we used various MT engines for gisting, and consulted qualified language experts. Croatian Društvo Hrvatskih Audiovizualnih Prevoditelja (DHAP), Italian Associazione Italiana Dialoghisti Adattatori Cinetelevisivi (AIDAC), Polish Sympatycy Tłumaczeń Audiowizualnych (STAW) or Slovenian Drustvo slovenskih filmskih in televizijskih prevajalcev (DSFTP) do not have their own deontological code but, in the words of Croatian DHAP, these associations encourage their members to "[r]espect and implement the code of translation ethics and international principles on translation, translators and translation organizations" (DHAP 2019). Therefore, we analysed international codes, such as UNESCO's (see Appendix 1 for the full list of consulted codes), that could serve as models for local codes. We also looked at the codes of some associations of literary translators, like the Dutch Auteursbond, that welcome audiovisual translators as they are considered content creators, too. Adopting a similar method to Lambert (2018), for each code of ethics, we searched for explicit and implicit mentions of innovation (SDG Target 8.2), decent working conditions (Target 8.3), fair job distribution (Target 8.5), youth integration and globalisation (Target 8b), as defined in Section 2, as well as indirect or pivot translation. Therefore, we paid special attention to references to rates, competition, working conditions, productivity, technology, or language requirements.

3.2 Questionnaire

Our questionnaire aimed to collect the experiences and expectations of subtitlers regarding pivot translation workflows. The rationale for using a questionnaire was that actual practices differ from what is recommended in the codes of ethics, and personal ethics can differ from deontological codes promoted by professional

associations. Hence the need to compare and contrast these with subtitlers' reported experiences and beliefs about pivot template-centred workflows.

The questionnaire was designed in SurveyMonkey and included 56 questions, grouped into three sections aimed at different audiences: subtitlers, template creators, and subtitler trainers. The present article focuses on answers by professional subtitlers. The section aimed at professional subtitlers had twelve closed multiple-choice questions about their experience in working from and/or for pivot templates and eight questions related to concerns about the impact of indirect translation on the translation profession (Likert-type questions and open questions). The complete questionnaire is available at https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.19368896.v1.

The questionnaire underwent three rounds of pilot testing. The call for respondents circulated between January and March 2021 on social media, through professional translators' associations, universities, and our personal networks. GDPR procedures and our universities' ethical standards were followed throughout.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 SDG8 in codes of ethics

Codes of ethics support translators in identifying ethical issues and in addressing them according to what translators perceive to be the "correct" or "appropriate" responses (on this topic, see Lambert 2018; Drugan 2021, 111–112). In the analysed codes, there seems to be a common position towards different aspects related to SDG8, but there are also some country-related differences. Most associations present the rights and obligations of translators and tackle issues that are specifically relevant to the scope of this research: relevant skills for a quality translation (specialisation and language skills), the attitude towards indirect translation and the importance of fair competition.

4.1.1 *Relevant skills*

Deontological codes, whether AVT-specific or not, indicate the importance of having the skills to complete an assignment. Differences lie in what skills are considered indispensable and how lacking those skills is framed.

Some AVT codes of ethics link quality to the principle of trust: since clients put trust in them, translators should not accept projects if they cannot ensure their quality. See, for example, the Portuguese Associação de Profissionais de Tradução e de Interpretação (APTRAD) statement: "Specifically, you must refrain

from accepting, carrying out, or allocating assignments that you cannot guarantee the quality of." (APTRAD, n.d., our translation). Similarly, in the Italian AIDAC (n.d.), the importance of one's competence is highlighted as "responsibility": "By accepting a professional assignment, the translator assumes responsibility for their competence to carry out such assignment" (our translation). Beyond language or field, the code puts the focus on the "respect for the original work": "As part of the translator's authorial responsibility, they must respect the spirit of the original work they are asked to work on" (our translation). In this sense, the Polish Stowarzyszenie Tłumaczy Polskich (STP) does not frame linguistic abilities as an obligation but as a right. That is, "[t]ranslators and interpreters shall have the right to refuse to provide translation or interpretation if it goes beyond the scope of their knowledge or their language, translation or interpretation skills" (STP 2005). The Portuguese Associação Portuguesa de Tradutores (APT n.d.) suggests proposing colleagues if a project falls beyond their expertise: "If the translator receives a request to translate a text which does not fall under their competence, they should, as far as possible, put forward to the commissioner the name of a colleague more qualified for that type of work" (our translation).

All in all, rejecting work beyond one's competence is framed in relation to the client (trust), to the source text (respect), to oneself (right) and to one's colleagues (social responsibility). Trust is associated with competence and accountability in these codes of ethics. It is implied that society trusts competent professional translators (on the link between trust and competence see, e.g., Chesterman 2016, 65). But how is "competence" defined?

Some general translation codes of ethics, like German Fachverband der Berüfsübersetzer und Berufsdolmetscher (ATICOM 2015) or Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer (BDÜ 2014) specify limitations by languages and subject areas: "Members of the BDÜ shall only accept assignments in those languages and specializations in which they or their subcontractors have the skills and abilities to be able to carry out the assigned tasks in the required quality" (our translation). When AVT codes list requirements, they point towards linguistic knowledge as key to quality. In the code of the French ATAA and other similar codes of the associations affiliated to AVTE, the burden of the requirement is on the linguistic ability:

> The translator has a solid knowledge of the language from which they are translating (also known as the source language), as well as of the culture of the country of origin of the work. They have a perfect command of the language in which they express themselves (also known as the target language), which must be their mother tongue or a language that they have mastered to the same degree as their mother tongue. If this is not the case, they commit to working collaboratively with a native speaker of the target language (ATAA n.d., our translation)

APTRAD (n.d.) is clearer: "Translate only into your native language" (our translation). The focus on the mother tongue, which dates back to other international deontological codes like FIT's (2011), links to SDG8 because it defines which characteristics are necessary for translation quality, and by extension, for a model professional. This is clearly exemplified in the "Tips for Newbies" document on the AVTE webpage, which states:

> Translators taking on jobs into a language that is not their mother tongue or through a third language will take jobs away from colleagues who are better suited for them, which will eventually undermine the quality of our work and lower the status of our profession (AVTE, n.d.)

Unfair competition is expressed by AVTE as "tak[ing] jobs away from colleagues who are better suited for them" and is closely related to SDG8 Target 8.3. AVTE here chooses to focus on competition among translators and suggests that translating into L2 and indirect translation can be considered unfair competition, and lowers translation quality, and therefore also the status of the profession and its sustainability. It could be argued that these practices are frequent in some linguistic contexts, where the available pool of professionals with linguistic combinations involving languages of limited diffusion is smaller, and thus these recommendations are very specific to major languages.

The importance of linguistic ability as a required skill for translators is indisputable, regardless of how a translator's competence is framed, whether as a form of respect, client-provider trust, or social responsibility. Halverson's (1999, 15) review of translation conceptualization confirms that interlingual translation is central to most translation definitions. From a professional perspective, language skills are often perceived as more easily assessable compared to other relevant skills. As Dunne (2012) argues, translation buyers may struggle to assess translation quality and may rely on other signals, such as education or experience, to determine who gets the job. Translators often include their linguistic information, such as nationality or language level certification, on their CV, which may serve as a guarantee for potential employers or clients. Even if this information is not fully trusted, linguistic abilities can still be inferred from other tests. On the other hand, confirming translation or technological competences can be more challenging (see Brogueira 2022 for a case study on recruitment practices).

4.1.2 *Indirect translation*

As exemplified by the quotes in the previous section, the associations' position towards indirect translation is negative.

For example, the Subtitlers' Association's (SUBTLE) "members are expected to: (…) not translate through another language (pivot translation) unless

absolutely necessary, and in this case make clear to their client the limitations of this practice" (SUBTLE 2020). Other codes echo this idea. In the French Association des Traducteurs/Adaptateurs de l'Audiovisuel (ATAA) "unless absolutely necessary" is toned down to "avoid translating a work from another translation" (ATAA, n.d., our translation). The Spanish Asociación de Traducción y Adaptación Audiovisual de España (ATRAE) starts with a more general approach: "As far as possible, avoid working under conditions that may compromise the quality of the final product, such as translating a work from a foreign language translation (known as a bridge translation) or post-editing" (ATRAE, n.d., our translation).The obligation to inform the client is also contextualized in the guidelines: "As a last resort, if there is no other solution or the decision depends on external factors, the translator will ensure that the client is aware of the limitations of this type of practice" (ATRAE, n.d., our translation). Noteworthy here is ATRAE's recognition that sometimes process-related decisions are not made by translators, but that the responsibility to educate the client is on individual translators. In a recent press release (September 27, 2022), ATRAE (2022) expressed an even clearer message against indirect translation, encouraging clients

> [...]to make an effort to commission translations directly from the original language or, alternatively, if English has to be used as a bridge language, to include in the process a review phase by a person specialized in the source language, thus ensuring that the translation has not suffered excessive deviation or missed important nuances only detectable by professionals knowledgeable in the original language and culture of the product (ATRAE 2022, our translation)

The Spanish ACE Traductores (an autonomous section of literary translators within the writers' association Asociación Colegial de Escritores) also favours direct translation. Apart from criticising the possibility of "bridge translation" they stress the importance of adequate permissions and credits: "In cases where it is not possible to translate from the original text and the translator uses a "bridge translation", they must have the author's permission to do so and give credit to the translator whose work is used" (ACE Traductores, n.d., our translation).

Indirect translation is also referred to when associations reflect on technology, and more specifically MT. In the *Machine Translation Manifesto*, a position paper on this technology drafted by Audiovisual Translators Europe, one envisaged development of MT is that newly trained engines will "eliminate the need for pivot languages" (AVTE 2021, n.d). Essentially, even in discussing such controversial issues as MT, indirect translation is presented as a handicap.

In general, practically all recommendations boil down to suggesting that indirect translation should be avoided if possible. We found no recommendations in the codes on how to responsibly translate indirectly if pivot workflows cannot be

bypassed. AVTE's (n.d) "tip for newbies", summarises their position: "[F]or the sake of quality one should avoid translating via a third language (…). This is not always possible, but it's a good rule of thumb" (AVTE, n.d.). It seems that these codes of ethics attempt to create a trustworthy image of the translator who translates only according to their competences and directly to assure the "best" and "most correct" translation possible. As observed by Chesterman, the value of trust is "overriding": "Translators, in order to survive as translators, must be trusted by all parties involved, both as a profession and individually. They must therefore work in such a way as to create and maintain this trust." (2016, 179). Indirect translation seems to be detrimental to creating and maintaining this trust. Thus, pivot subtitling is presented as a practice that could be problematic and potential advantages to the use of indirect translation, such as increased productivity (and thus improved working conditions, SDG Target 8.3) or access to more work (and thus fair job distribution, SDG Target 8.5), are not mentioned.

4.1.3 *Fair competition and rates*

References to fair competition seem to differ between deontological codes of general translator's associations and AVT associations.

General translators' associations highlight the importance of fair competition (linked to fair job distribution, SDG Target 8.5). ACE Traductores, for example, stipulates that "the translator shall refrain from undermining the profession by accepting conditions that do not guarantee a work of quality or deliberately harm a colleague" (ACE Traductores, n.d.; our translation). German ATICOM (2015, n.d) specifies that "[i]nterpreters and translators shall refrain from any form of unfair competition" and continues by listing some relevant examples of malpractices, like trying to force colleagues out of a contract or undercutting the usual rates. The same applies to the Polish codes of ethics. That is, codes tend to reinforce the importance of respect to colleagues but also to oneself.

AVT associations frame malpractice as a threat to the profession. The French ATAA (n.d.) states, for example, "the translator shall refrain from causing harm to the profession as a whole, including accepting working conditions that are incompatible with the requirements of this code" (our translation). It is in this way that (decent) working conditions (linked directly to SDG Target 8.3) are framed in codes of ethics.

But which rates are adequate? The approach to rates varies substantially among associations and might be linked to national regulations and expectations. Some associations provide starting fees. Slovenian DSFTP indicates minimum fees on their main page, and Portuguese APT indicates average rates. Italian AIDAC does not give figures, but reminds members that offering rates below Collective National Agreements counts as disloyal competition. Portuguese codes of

ethics stress how rates "must be paid in money" (APTRAD, n.d.) as opposed to receiving "personal benefits in addition to fees owed" (APT, n.d., our translation). This refers to avoiding being paid in kind or working for free, which would be a sign of informal trade (an indicator used to measure development in Target 8.3) Again, we see here how some codes of ethics frame some practices as unsustainable for the larger translators' community and reflect on a fair job distribution (SDG Target 8.5.).

SUBTLE (2020) suggests how "newbies" can calculate fair rates. Other associations have similar advice. ASETRAD has an online tool for calculating rates (ASETRAD, n.d.). APTRAD includes this advice in its code of good practices:

> In determining fees, the translator and/or interpreter shall take into account their experience, their unique competences, the importance of the services rendered, the difficulty and urgency of the matter, the degree of intellectual creativity of their services, the time spent, and other professional practices
>
> (APTRAD, n.d., our translation)

Although none of the codes explicitly mentions indirect translation, if we apply the above rationale for calculating rates, creating a pivot template should be paid significantly more than a "regular" translation, given the "importance of the provided services" (it will be a bridge for multiple translations) and the "difficulty and urgency of the matter"(APTRAD, n.d.). Unfortunately, research in indirect translation in other fields indicates that pivot template creation is not necessarily more lucrative than subtitling (see, for instance, Oziemblewska and Szarkowska 2020). Also, no indication of copyright retention has been found. However, rates for subtitling tend to vary when it includes or excludes timing, so translators working from pivot templates will probably see their rates diminish because some part of their jobs is supposedly done for them (timing and segmentation). This signals a conflict with the goal of decent job creation of Target 8.3.

4.2 SDG8 in questionnaire results

All in all, the analysis of translator's deontological codes shows an awareness of disruption caused by indirect translation, which can work against Target 8.2. Also, the practice is deemed damaging for the profession due to the translations' assumed lack of quality, which is linked to diminishing trust on translation as a whole.

Therefore, we wanted to compare the position found in deontological codes to the views of professional subtitlers. This paper reports on the answers of 376 participants. Of those, 272 subtitlers (74%) had experience working from pivot templates, and 100 (27%) had experience creating pivot templates. These respondents show a

strong representation of European countries (see Appendix 2 for details). As stated above, codes of ethics were selected based on the ten top countries represented in the questionnaire: Portugal (61), the Netherlands (59), Spain (38), the United Kingdom (27), France (24), Germany (20), Croatia (16), Belgium (16), Slovenia (11), Italy (11) and Poland (10).

We asked participants to rate their beliefs in aspects related to pivot subtitling. Statements were divided into question blocks introduced by the instructions "Below you will find a number of statements regarding general beliefs about translating from a template. Read each one and indicate to what extent you agree or disagree" (Q21, Q22, Q23). Participants had access to different statements according to their profile and experience. Therefore, each figure includes information on what group was interpellated and its size.

Statements were related to topics like the quality of pivot templates, professional repercussions of their use, expectations regarding the ideal translator profile and views on disruption caused by technology. For each topic we collected answers on what the respondent does (actions), what the ideal situation would be according to them (individual beliefs), and what the group expectation is (collective beliefs).

4.2.1 *Subtitlers' views on quality*

As seen in Figure 1, subtitlers are concerned with how pivot templates impact subtitling quality: just under half of the subtitlers (93; 48%) disagree or strongly disagree with statement 1: "The quality of the templates is high and therefore I trust templates". As a comparison, only 37 (19%) subtitlers agree or strongly agree with the statement, and 62 (32%) do not agree or disagree.

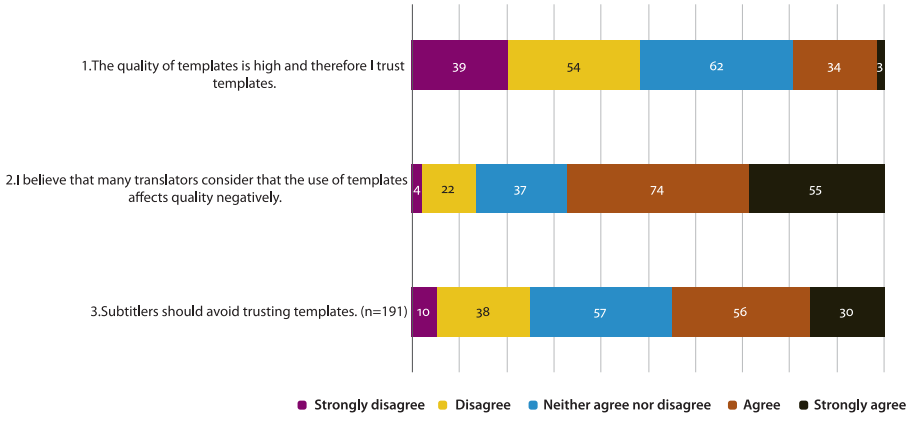

Figure 1. Subtitlers' views on trust ($n = 193$, unless otherwise indicated)

In the same vein, most subtitlers seem to consider "the use of pivot templates affects quality negatively" a shared belief among colleagues: 67% of the respondents (129 subtitlers) believe their colleagues are against pivot templates, while 13% (26 people) do not think so. In this case, there are also fewer subtitlers that neither agree nor disagree: only 19% (37). It is worth noting the difference in reported individual beliefs about trust (statement 1) and collective beliefs (statement 2): while both suggest mistrust of pivot templates, 48% vs. 67%, the percentage for a negative collective belief is 19 percentage point higher. When the statement describes the belief that "subtitlers should avoid trusting templates", agreement weakens slightly: 86 (45%) agree or strongly agree with statement 3, while 48 (25%) disagree or strongly disagree. This may hint towards a change in the perception of the practice. In any case, this lack of trust towards pivot templates and its impact on quality is in line with recommendations to avoid indirect translation seen in the codes of ethics.

4.2.2 *Subtitlers' views on the market and pivot templates*

The usefulness of pivot templates to provide wider access to audiovisual products is recognized or rejected by nearly the same number of subtitlers: 71 (37%) agree or strongly agree with statement 4, "Without templates the audience would find it difficult to access many audiovisual products", while 77 (40%) disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. Also, despite previously stated concerns, over half of the subtitlers (110, 57%) report that pivot templates "provide them with more opportunities". This is in contrast to only 16% (31 subtitlers) who disagree or strongly disagree with this statement.

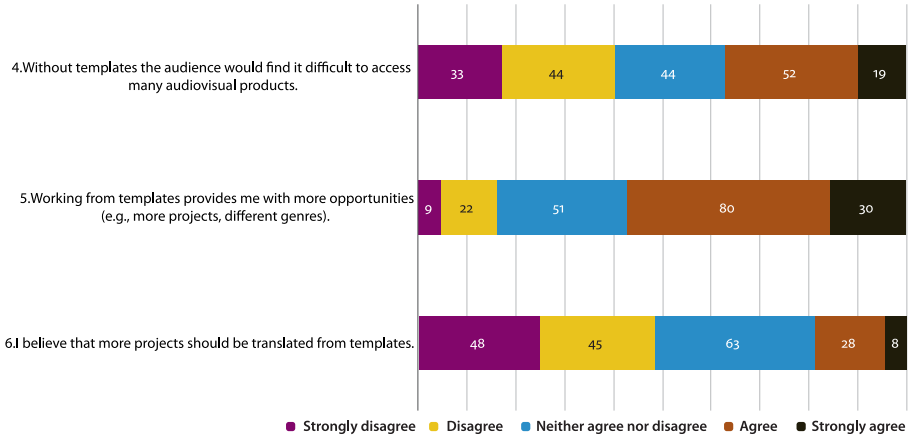

Figure 2. Subtitlers' view on the market and pivot templates ($n = 193$)

These results could imply that pivot subtitling encourages the diversification indicated in SDG Target 8.2 and even the job creation listed in SDG Target 8.3. However, subtitlers would not like to see the number of pivot workflows increase: 93 (48%) disagree or strongly disagree with this possibility, while only 36 (19%) support it. The fact that subtitlers are so strongly opposed to this practice, despite the positive consequence of increased work it seems to have for many, indicates an interiorised shared belief or, if we may speculate, an indication that the practice is not fulfilling.

4.2.3 *Subtitlers' view on disruptive processes in subtitling*

Despite the assumed lack of trust in the quality of pivot templates, results seem to indicate the practice is not shunned: 83 (43%) respondents would not refuse an indirect translation project in an ideal world, while 77 would (40%) (see Figure 3, statement 7).

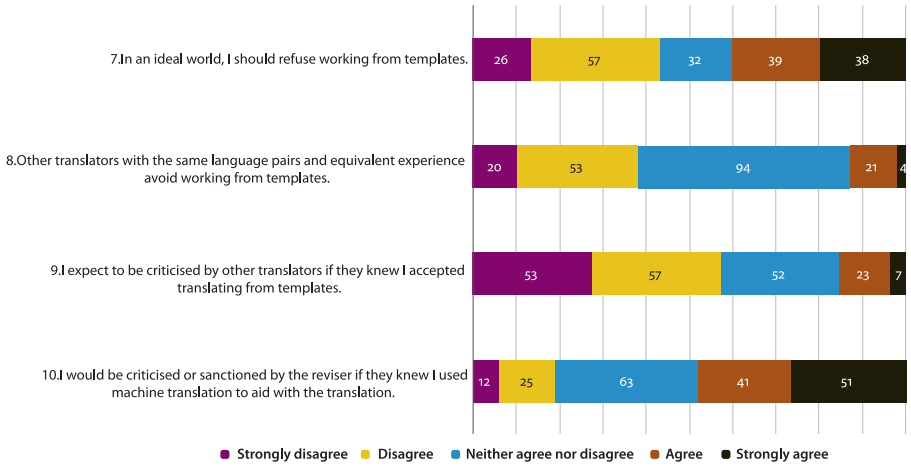

Figure 3. Acceptance of pivot templates and machine translation ($n = 193$)

In general, pivot subtitling seems to be a common practice. Most respondents neither agree nor disagree with statement 8: "Other translators with the same language pairs and equivalent experience avoid working from templates" (94; 49%). 73 (38%) believe that colleagues work with pivot templates, while only 25 (13%) seem to believe that is not the case. We wanted to know if their beliefs were impacted by their personal experiences, so we looked at whether these respondents had worked with templates before. Among those 25 who believe their colleagues do not work with pivot templates, the majority had minimal pivot translation experience (10 rarely translate from pivot templates, 12 sometimes, and

3 usually). The group that believed their colleagues work with templates included more experienced pivot translators (5 always, 20 usually, 33 sometimes, 15 rarely).

A neutral view on professional decisions regarding working with templates is reinforced by answers to statement 9: only 30 (16%) agreed with the statement "I would expect to be criticised by other colleagues if they knew I accepted working from templates". The majority, 110 (57%), do not agree with the statement, and 52 (27%) neither agree nor disagree. Percentages of respondents who believe other translators avoid using template and respondents who believe that action would be subjected to criticism are very similar. In all instances, professional associations are aware that sometimes translators do not have a choice (see ATRAE 2022 and ACE Traductores n.d. in Section 4.1.2)

On the other hand, the hidden use of MT is perceived more negatively: only 37 (19%) respondents disagree or strongly disagree that they would not be "criticised or sanctioned by the reviser if they knew I used machine translation to aid with the translation". The statement does not specify any intention of deception, but a breach of ethical codes could be assumed – unsurprisingly given that uncritical use of MT leads to any saved effort being shifted to the reviser, one of the points highlighted in the *AVTE MT Manifesto* (AVTE 2021, 2).

4.2.4 *Subtitlers' view on language related issues*

There seems to be a consensus among respondents regarding the ideal linguistic abilities of subtitlers, with most identifying audio, rather than the pivot template, as the ideal source text. Subtitlers' answers to "I believe that the right thing to do is to assign templates to translators competent in the source language of the audio file" and the answers of template creators to "Templates should only be created by native speakers of the source language" highlight the importance of having knowledge of the source language. These beliefs are also in line with translators' association's perspectives on only conducting translation work for which quality can be guaranteed (see, e.g., APTRAD's formulation on this under 4.1.1) or for which the translator has a solid linguistic knowledge (see, e.g., ATAA).

155 (81%) subtitlers think it is fair to prioritise translators competent in the audio language. However, 49 (58%) template creators agree or strongly agree that the template creator should be a native speaker of the audio language. This can be understood as favouring L2 translation over L1 translation for pivot template creation. Language combination is an aspect that must be considered as it places SDG Target 8.3 (improved working conditions) and SDG Target 8.5 (fair job distribution) in contradiction. Specifically, if one of the most innovative aspects of pivot subtitling (speeding up the process), which can help SDG Target 8.3, largely relies on the availability of professionals working with major languages, equal and fair distribution of work (Target 8.5) is negatively affected.

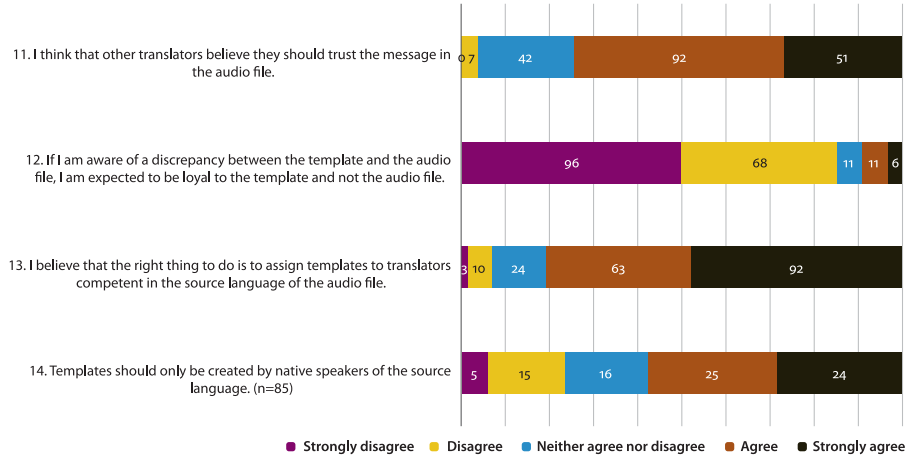

Figure 4. Subtitlers' beliefs on language related issues ($n = 193$, unless otherwise indicated)

From another point of view, favouring the audio language can also be interpreted as an attempt to allocate pivot subtitling work to those translators that are competent in the ultimate source language and not only in the pivot language. This, if put into practice, would be a way to bypass those that argue that pivot subtitling creates quality problems because the translator does not have the sufficient knowledge to translate directly. As ATRAE (2022) puts it:

> [...] if English must be used as a bridge language, [we encorauge] including in the process a review phase by a person specialized in the source language, thus ensuring that the translation has not suffered excessive deviation or missed important nuances only detectable by professionals knowledgeable in the original language and culture of the product (our translation, see Section 4.1.2)

Simultaneously, if there are contradictions between the audio file and the written pivot template, subtitlers adhere to the audio file over any possible mediated decisions. 164 (85%) subtitlers report following the audio (agreeing and strongly agreeing with the statement), and 143 (75%) indicate that they believe other subtitlers would do precisely that (agreeing and strongly agreeing with the statement). Only a few subtitlers disagree or strongly disagree: 17 (9%) respondents would prioritise the pivot template over the audio file; 7 (4%) would expect other subtitlers to do the same. The reasoning behind following the pivot template might lie in the subtitling brief itself: translators are paid to translate from a pivot template, not from the audio.

5. Conclusions

How does pivot subtitling affect the aspirations to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all (SDG8) from the standpoint of professional subtitlers? Our findings offer a multi-layered answer.

First, as English is the most commonly used pivot language, pivot workflows create more job opportunities for subtitlers working with English (a vast majority of professionals) and therefore diminishing opportunities for subtitlers who can directly translate rare language pairs ("taking jobs away from colleagues", as stated in AVTE, n.d.). Both the analyzed codes of ethics and subtitlers' answers suggest that pivot subtitling threatens translation quality and brings into question the trust towards translators, the translation process, and the use of pivot templates. Linguistic and (even potentially) financial imbalances and unfair competition – already present in the industry– are also important factors to consider, as per translators' associations. Among other arguments, indirect translation was presented as a solution to a problem: the lack of qualified translators in some language pairs. However, it has the potential to make the problem worse. Indirect translation can lead to a decrease in the diversity of subtitlers' language competences: why invest in teaching and learning how to subtitle from, say, Polish into Korean, if de facto the only source language is English?

However, subtitlers' responses seem to support the idea that they do collectively have access to more work (linked to "Equal work pay for equal value", SDG Target 8.5, and "shaping fair globalisation", Goal 8b). Maybe, the mediated version provides visibility to a given content, thus increasing the global interest on content coming from a particular region and a subsequent demand for its direct translation into third languages (which would be beneficial for achieving higher levels of economic productivity (target 8.2) if confirmed). From an economic perspective, Nurminen (2019) argued that initial access to content through MT encouraged further translation by human translators. Pivot subtitling might be creating a similar scenario in some contexts.

Second, indirect translation causes concerns among translators' associations: they assume clients see its benefits (productivity and moneywise) but not its drawbacks (possible loss of quality). The fact that pivot subtitlers work without understanding the original audio language brings additional risk, as it is unclear who takes responsibility for the translation outcome if mistakes occur. They also fear that the assumed lack of quality will be detrimental to the profession as a whole. Many codes of ethics recommend educating the client, a burden that is tasked to individual subtitlers.

Third, although pivot subtitling allows a faster overall reach with lower costs, additional benefits do not reach translators. Actually, subtitlers might even be offered lower rates as part of the work (spotting) is supposedly done for them.

If we consider the three previous concerns to be correct (favouring translators working with English and reduced quality and financial imbalance), the current use of pivot subtitling would slow down progress on SDG8 from the perspective of translators' associations and professional subtitlers. However, as suggested by our respondents (4.2.2), indirect translation may well accelerate progress on other fronts. For example, by helping to provide readers and viewers with access to non-English content, irrespective of their language, indirect translation can contribute to SDG10 (reduced inequality) or SDG4 (equitable education). Since all SDGs are intertwined, working towards achieving one SDG encourages development towards other goals. Therefore, instead of arguing for the avoidance of pivot templates, it makes sense to reflect on best ways in which pivot template-centered workflows can be improved, so that they work towards SDG8. Such reflection seems particularly relevant considering that pivot templates seem to be here to stay. It is unlikely that in the profit-driven industry companies ignore the time and cost benefits related to indirect translation. Alternatives seem equally problematic in terms of sustainability. For instance, an oft mentioned alternative involves combining automatic speech recognition with MT. Professional associations claim that this alternative hinders job creation and brings along its own unfair job distribution issues (see AVTE 2021 reflections in the Machine Translation Manifesto). The other alternative, direct subtitling for all language combinations, is utopic given the common issue of limited time and funding.

Therefore, we would suggest addressing the main three concerns: improving quality, monitoring linguistic imbalances, and addressing working conditions. Regarding quality, we would like to suggest improving the process around the template format and use, which Artegiani and Kapsaskis (2014) found especially faulty, when looking at the quality of pivot template usage. Extensive use of annotations (that is, explanations of any items in the original audiovisual product or in the pivot template that might be unclear to the subsequent subtitlers) has been suggested as a key aspect in quality control measures implemented along the pivot subtitling workflow (Pięta, Maia, and Torres-Simón 2022). ATRAE's recommendations to include the revision of a source language specialist (2022) would address quality and also linguistic imbalances. These imbalances seem to be exacerbated by current practices (Pięta et al. 2023), but monitoring in the following years could prove whether it is a temporary situation or needs to be fully addressed. Also, researchers and translation trainers can play an important role in addressing inequalities and working conditions. They can opt to offer training on pivot template creation that is not only aimed at subtitlers of peripheral languages

but also free and openly accessible to all, so that social or economic disparities between translators from different regions are not reinforced. Finally, template creators should receive fair rates and author rights with the aim of improving working conditions. As seen in the section on codes of ethics, some associations of professional translators publish white papers on the use of MT. As a further suggestion, we also advocate creating similar documents on the responsible use of pivot templates in the AVT industry.

We have observed a parallelism between the situation of pivot subtitling and the past situation of MT. Pivot template-centred workflows and MT have a similar impact on subtitlers' working conditions in the name of productivity and innovation: LSPs maintain that translating from pivot templates and MT is faster and more efficient, and therefore subtitlers' rates are lowered; LSPs claim that it is challenging to find qualified and talented subtitlers in certain language pairs and the use of pivot templates and MT may be a useful workaround. Both practices risk being abused in the industry but have the potential to accelerate progress in SDG8, if deployed more ethically.

All studies come with limitations, and ours is no exception. The questionnaire was not designed specifically to draw insights on SDG8 (sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all), but to learn more about pivot templates in general. Therefore, some SDG8-related questions remain to be asked and answered. In addition, the review of the deontological codes included, almost exclusively, codes of ethics from Europe, as did respondents to the survey. Given the sharp divide in rates and work distribution (see Section 2.2.3), responses from the Global South and other peripheral countries and languages might provide other insights.

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Appendix 1

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Appendix 2

Portugal	61	Turkey	10	Bulgaria	<4
The Netherlands	59	Austria	9	Hungary	<4
Spain	38	Greece	7	Ireland	<4
The United Kingdom	27	Czechia	6	Slovakia	<4
France	24	Finland	6	Switzerland	<4
Germany	20	Russia	6	Belarus	<4
Croatia	16	Denmark	5	Albania	<4
Belgium	16	Sweden	5	Latvia	<4
Slovenia	11	Luxembourg	4	Lithuania	<4
Italy	11	Romania	4	Norway	<4
Poland	10	Ukraine	4		<4

Address for correspondence

Susana Valdez
Leiden University Centre for Linguistics
Arsenaalstraat 1
2311 CT Leiden
The Netherlands
s.valdez@hum.leidenuniv.nl
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5461-2078

Co-author information

Ester Torres-Simón
Facultat de Traducció i Interpretació
ester.torres@uab.cat
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8109-4357

Hanna Pięta
Department of Modern Languages Cultures and Literature
NOVA School of Social Sciences and Humanities
hannapieta@fcsh.unl.pt
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5229-1941

Rita Menezes
Centro de Estudos Anglísticos da Universidade de Lisboa (CEAUL/ULICES)
Alameda da Universidade
rita@ritamenezes.com.pt
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7918-6412

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