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Indirect (pivot) audiovisual translation: a conversation with and among B. Agulló Garcia, D. Orrego-Carmona and G. Spiteri Miggiani

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ABSTRACT

Through a series of questions and responses, in this dialogue-based article we aim to stimulate reflection on indirect translation within the audiovisual translation community, offering perspectives on this practice. We start by delving into the historical roots of indirect translation in the industry, questioning how far back such practices extend. Then we shift the focus to the challenges translators face in indirect translation workflows, to the potential contributions of research to the ongoing debates surrounding indirect translation, as well as to how indirect translation and machine translation intersect. Finally, looking to the future, we examine potential developments in indirect translation workflows and consider how educational programs can adapt to meet the changing demands of the industry.

KEYWORDS

Dubbing; fansubbing; game localization; subtitling; templates; translator training

Introduction

To round off this special issue, we invited three experts in audiovisual translation (AVT) to an asynchronous conversation on past, current and future developments in indirect translation (ITr). This conversation with and between Belén Agulló Garcia, David Orrego-Carmona and Giselle Spiteri Miggiani took place between late 2023 and early 2024, through Google Docs. The aim was to tie together some of the threads that emerged from the contributions to this special issue, and to delve into areas that were not fully covered but deserve closer examination. We start by sharing the experts' bios, as they might help readers contextualize the perspectives shared here.

Dr. Belén Agulló García is a multimedia localization professional with over a decade of experience in the localization industry in a variety of roles in multiple companies, mainly LSPs, research and consultancy firms, and technology service providers. In her

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professional career, she has performed almost every role in the industry, including linguist, project manager, quality program manager, language technology deployment manager, researcher, educator, customer success manager, and vendor relationship manager. This atypical mix of experiences gave her a unique and deep understanding of the industry, which she is currently further developing at Deluxe as AI Strategy Director in the Localization Division. Her engagements as a speaker at international conferences, such as Loc-World, Languages & The Media, and the Game Developers Conference, further highlight her status as an esteemed expert and advocate. With an academic foundation rooted in Translation and Interpreting Studies from the Universitat d'Alacant, an MA in AVT, and a Ph.D. in Language Interpretation and Translation from Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, she has not only pursued knowledge but has also contributed significantly to her field through a user-centered study on accessible subtitles in virtual reality content.

Dr. Giselle Spiteri Miggiani, is a tenured Senior Lecturer in the Department of Translation, Terminology, and Interpreting Studies at the University of Malta. She introduced AVT and Accessibility as a new area of study and teaches and coordinates this postgraduate specialization. She is invited regularly as guest speaker and lecturer at other universities across Europe and delivers consultancy and training to EU institutions and global leading media localization companies. Giselle is also a professional audiovisual translator and dubbing adapter since 2006. Apart from her global-oriented research on dubbing (quality assessment, translation training, cloud technologies, Italian and English language dubbing), her current work focuses on the development of AVT and integrated access in Malta's media and cultural sectors. She is the author of the book *Dialogue Writing for Dubbing: An Insider's Perspective* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), among other journal articles and chapters. She holds firsthand experience with ITr as a dubbing translator and adapter, and as an academic and corporate trainer for dubbing and subtitling.

Dr. David Orrego-Carmona is an associate professor in translation studies at the University of Warwick (UK) and a research associate at the University of the Free State (South Africa). His work deals with translation, technologies and society. His research on non-professional translation has provided insights into how technology empowers users and allows them to become volunteer translators. Through this work, particularly in the case of fansubbing, he has explored how ITr becomes essential in the production and circulation of non-professional translations that support informal international media flows.

Question no. 1

Hanna Pięta (HP), Susana Valdez (SV), Rita Menezes (RM) and Stavroula Sokoli (SS): We would like to kick off by looking back. Much has been written about the history of ITr published in book form, particularly when it comes to literary and sacred texts. But the history of indirect AVT remains largely undiscussed. How far back do you think ITr goes in your subfield? Are there any historical instances that seem practically prominent or periods where ITr may have been particularly important?

Belén Agulló Garcia (BAG): ITr in the audiovisual field is largely related to globalization and the proliferation of content. In the game localization industry, localization teams

were early adopters of ITrs, especially for content coming from Japan. In the 1990s and early 2000s, companies would still contact translators who could translate directly from Japanese into their target languages. However, they quickly realized that if they wanted to translate more games into more languages and faster, the process would be more scalable if they used English as a pivot language for the rest of the languages. That has been the case for decades now, where English has been largely used as a cultural trampoline between Japanese and the rest of the languages. Even though English has been the pivot language for game localization as a standard process, it is not uncommon to systematically offer translators the original source text for them to use as a reference when they come across ambiguity (Japanese and American English languages and cultures are indeed very different), which I find a very good practice that is not always present in other AVT content.

In the last five to eight years, ITr has even been more relevant in the AVT industry and it has become a catalyst to bring non-US content to the masses. Netflix has been a pioneer in creating original content in other locations such as Europe, including Spain, Italy, Germany, and Denmark; and also Asia, with more and more Korean and Indian originals that are captivating audiences around the world. It would have been difficult to meet industry demands in terms of turnaround times and budget limitations without ITrs.

Giselle Spiteri Miggiani (GSM): The concept of pivot workflows has always existed in dubbing, although working with pivot files did not necessarily imply using an intermediary language other than the source or target language. Over the years, traditional dubbing countries have often split the preparation of target language scripts into two distinct phases: translation and adaptation (Chaume, 2012; Spiteri Miggiani, 2019). The latter was primarily aimed at addressing the technical requirements of the dubbing process. This approach typically involved two professionals collaborating on the same script.

The main reason for this division was the limited availability of target language adapters who were proficient in the original source language, most commonly English, due to the vast amount of US content being purchased. Additionally, before the existence of academic training in translation and adaptation for dubbing, adapters specialized in rewriting in their own language rather than performing interlingual translation. In this setup, an interlingual translator would provide a raw translation in the target language, after which the adapter would work with that pivot file in their native language. Therefore, an indirect text workflow, though not in the way it is intended in this context.

When I began my career as an adapter for Italian dubbing in 2006, this workflow had already been in place for decades and remains relevant today, although it now coexists with other workflows. For European titles (German, Spanish, French, etc.) a direct translation was typically sought. In cases involving non-European languages, where finding qualified translators in the target territories was challenging, foreign clients often provided a pivot translation in English. Just as Belén pointed out for game localization, the most common scenario in dubbing involved Japanese, especially in the context of cartoons. As a translator, I was frequently asked to create the raw Italian translation of Japanese cartoons using an English pivot dialogue list, along with the video material in Japanese. This process involved bridging perceived gaps by combining information from both sources.

David Orrego-Carmona (DOC): ITr has been essential for the expansion of fansubbing networks and communities. In the context of fansubbing, ITr is used as a matter of efficiency as you can rely on the most popular languages to create multilingual and multicultural connections that would otherwise be hardly possible. Fansubbing is closely related to anime and Japanese culture, but not many people on the planet speak Japanese. English is the preferred foreign language around the globe, so it is easier to find speakers of other languages who also speak English but not as many who speak their languages and Japanese. Due to the limited diffusion of Japanese and the interest in Japanese products, fansubbing communities started using English as a bridge to translate anime. Some communities would translate from Japanese into English and others would re-use the English translation as source.

One of the main advantages of fansubbing communities is that they can be free from the constraints imposed by a company or commissioner: members of the communities use the resources at their disposal the best they can to effectively reach their goal. This involves quickly adapting technologies but also accessing previous translations as their source text. Free from the requirements imposed by tradition or the industry, fansubbers have smoothly integrated ITr, mainly via English, into their production and creation processes.

Interestingly, while many publications recognize the role of ITrs in fansubbing and their enhancement of international media flows, I am not aware of a systematic analysis that addresses the issue directly. The multilingualism and multidirectionality of non-professional subtitling have allowed fansubbers to create strong international and informal flows of media. In terms of research, the topic still needs attention and requires more thorough consideration to study the type of multilingual connections that are established and the societal factors that influence certain patterns of behavior, such as the selection of content. From a historical perspective, it would be interesting to see how these networks have evolved from the beginning of fansubbing in the 1980s to the present-day multilingual communities.

Question no. 2

HP, SV, RM, SS: Let's shift the focus to the current AVT landscape and workflows. Thinking about your subfield, what challenges do translators face when translating from a pivot version? How about the challenges faced by those who create the pivot versions? And what are the solutions that we currently have at our disposal?

GSM: One of the most significant challenges for dubbing adapters is the need to 'surrender', to have no choice but to rely on a pivot translation when they lack proficiency in the source language. The pivot text acts as a safety net for translators, requiring an unspoken blind trust between the two professionals. Problematically, the video material the adapters must synchronize their work to is in an unfamiliar source language. Therefore, they must also rely on non-verbal filmic cues, such as body language in the visuals (Delabastita, 1989), to ensure semiotic cohesion (Chaume, 2007) within the new target language. Essentially, dubbing translators cannot entirely bypass the original source language, despite the provision of a pivot translation.

Challenges also arise when dealing with software tools or cloud-based platforms that facilitate the translation and adaptation process (Spiteri Miggiani, 2023). These cannot always accommodate both the original script and the pivot translation due to space limitations. Additionally, the so-called ‘rhythm band’ intended to facilitate synchronization may often have to be based on the pivot language translation rather than the original dialogue, thus complicating the process.

From the perspective of a pivot translator, the challenge lies in striking a balance between creating a translation that is both natural and meaningful as well as quite literal, remaining as close as possible to the original.

I believe that to seek solutions we first need to pin down the issues at a granular level. This is necessary to identify seamless workflows, best practices, and a required specialized skillset that these translators must either possess or cultivate (as we’ll discuss further when addressing training). One of the initial steps is to determine the specific traits of pivot translations that either facilitate or impede the work of adapters. Moreover, designing and implementing ‘support’ tools such as centralized glossaries and notes and annotations can help yield better results in terms of target translation output. Enhanced dialogue quality control before recording can also enhance the final translation output.

DOC: When discussing the challenges that ITr poses to fansubbers or non-professional subtitlers, it is important to remember that we are not dealing with a monolithic phenomenon following a single pattern but with a varied series of manifestations that each shapes translation processes and products to their needs. More traditional fansubbing, for instance, by default offers additional cultural, linguistic and contextual information to viewers. Traditional anime fansubbing communities do not only include the translation of the dialogues but integrate some translator’s notes to explain linguistic and cultural references or to provide a wide context of conventions and behaviors. When fansubbers translate from a previous translation that offers this additional information, they effectively have access not only to the dialogues but also to the multimodal information that the first translator considered important to verbalize and make overt. The format of the fansubber’s notes is different from what is included in professional subtitling templates, but the function the information facilitates is very similar. When dealing with anime fansubbing, it is also safe to assume that the translators of the English version and the other translators in the chain are subject-matter experts. The additional knowledge of the genre equips translators in the workflow with the skills and knowledge to carefully inspect the source material and not only depend on the subtitles they are using as pivot.

In another area of non-professional subtitling, the subtitles produced by fansubbing communities are only limited to plain-text srt files. These subtitle files are easy to create and transfer and can be added to videos by simply dragging and dropping them onto standard video players. However, the simplicity of the subtitles also means that indirect translators can be limited only to the interpretation and rendering of the first translator. In most cases, the subtitle file indicates the video version used by the first translator, thus pivot translators and other users can access the video material. It is important in these situations that pivot translators be extremely aware of the production conditions of their subtitles, as the time – and space-influenced decisions made by the first translator will cascade down. In these cases, as well, access to subject-matter

expertise can support the translation process but it is not a given that the product will be translated by experts.

Some crowdsourcing volunteer subtitling initiatives directly integrate ITr as part of their production processes, as is the case of TED Translators or Rakuten Viki. In both platforms, the intralingual transcription or translation is naturally intended as a bridging translation. However, this is not the case for language-specific communities. While it is safe to assume that an English translation of a Japanese anime product can be used as a pivot translation, the main purpose of the translation is to address the English-speaking community. As Liew and Che Omar put it, fansubbing ‘groups who work in other languages, are also dependent on English fansub as the pivot language and the quality of their work is highly dependent on the accuracy of the English fansub’ (2018, p. 112). The production conditions and decisions of the initial translation team will impact the subsequent translations, but the initial team might not take these considerations into account when producing their version.

BAG: I have not worked as a subtitling translator with pivot languages myself, so I cannot speak from experience. However, some of the main challenges that I hear from translators I work with come from original content that is very culturally distant from their own culture. For example, Korean originals are usually a problem when translating from a pivot language, because many translators are not familiar with the cultural and social dynamics of Korean people, and, therefore, translators feel insecure when trying to decipher those dynamics, and using the language that is more suitable for that. One of the main issues is using formal vs informal register. What translators usually desire is that the template creator adds all sorts of annotations when it comes to relationship dynamics and so on, but that is not always feasible due to time and budget constraints. In any case, there will always be nuances that are lost in translation, no matter how deeply we understand the source culture and language. The viewers might not be familiar with those, and so they look for a way to understand and follow the plot. If they are real K-culture fans, following the example of Korean content, they can go and further research online. Content is not limited to the screen, there is a whole universe outside the 60-minute episode where fans can connect and discuss further.

If we cannot have translators who fully understand the source language, it would be worth exploring how LLMs can support translators in researching and helping them make more informed decisions. For example, I just prompted this question to ChatGPT and got the following answer:

Prompt:

In Korean culture, if two people work in an office, and they are at the same level, what formality register will they use to talk to each other?

ChatGPT 3.5.:

In Korean culture, the formality and level of politeness in speech often depend on factors such as age, social status, and the nature of the relationship between the individuals, even if they are at the same level in an office environment. When two people work together and are at the same hierarchical level, the formality of speech they use can vary based on their personal relationship and age difference.

If they are of similar age and have developed a friendly relationship, they might use the ‘banmal’ (반말), which is informal or casual speech. This form of speech is used among close friends, family members, or colleagues who have agreed to drop formalities to foster a closer relationship.

However, if there is a significant age difference between them, even if they are at the same level, the younger colleague might still use ‘jondaetmal’ (존댓말), which is the polite or formal speech, out of respect for the elder colleague. The use of jondaetmal is the default in professional settings, especially when the relationship is not very close or when they are still in the process of building rapport.

The transition from formal to informal speech in a working relationship often requires explicit permission from the elder or higher-status individual. This is known as ‘nunchi’ (눈치), a concept that refers to the ability to understand and respect the unspoken rules of social and hierarchical relationships.

In summary, while colleagues at the same level may start with formal speech (jondaetmal), the use of informal speech (banmal) may become acceptable as their relationship becomes closer and more comfortable, taking into consideration factors like age and mutual consent.

Not bad, right?

Question no. 3

HP, SV, RM, SS: ITr practices in AVT have been the source of debate in the industry. Many consider it a threat to translation quality, jobs and ethics. For examples of negative attitudes towards ITr see ATRAE’s (2022) press release or the Subtitlers’ Association’s (SUBTLE) code of ethics, according to which ‘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). How can research contribute to this debate?

DOC: While ITr has always been a reality in translation flows (Gambier, 1994), it is often loaded with negative attitudes and mistrust. In fact, the UNESCO recommendations for legal translation (1976) already established that ‘as a general rule, a translation should be made from the original work, recourse being had to retranslation only where absolutely necessary’. In the case of AVT, the strong resistance to ITr from professional associations comes amidst the response to the wider implementation of globalization business models in media localization. It is easier to manage a multilingual process integrating a unifying pivot translation than undertaking multiple bilingual projects for a single product. From an industry perspective, this strategy grants access to more resources (e.g. relying on more common language combinations increases the availability of translators), easier planning and oversight and simpler communication channels. Unfortunately, in some circumstances, ITr is implemented indiscriminately as a cost-cutting exercise, eroding the credibility of the practice across the board. As seen in the statement by ATRAE and the SUBTLE code of ethics, however, professional associations consider that this undermines the quality of the translated product. These differences are rooted in contrasting views of translation quality. The industry focuses on regulating production processes as a way to ensure quality while the professional association’s position zooms into the target texts as the main indicator to determine quality (Jiménez-Crespo, 2018).

The statements by ATRAE and SUBTLE stress the importance of awareness. They emphasise that, in the event of relying on ITr, clients must be informed of the limitations the practice imposes on the products. As researchers, we can evaluate these limitations and help align them with the requirements of the production processes. By exploring the impact of ITr practices, we will be well-equipped to inform companies about the scenarios in which these practices are viable as well as alert them of the situation in which implementing ITr processes can undermine the purpose of a translation.

Considering the opposing views of the stakeholders involved, and their different priorities, academia is particularly well placed to weigh into the discussion and assess the role and impact of ITr and colleagues are already doing this. With the rapid expansion of media localization after the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been an interest in the impact of subtitling templates on subtitlers and subtitles (e.g. Oziemblewska & Szarkowska, 2022; Valdez et al., 2023). Research can provide us with evidence to understand what type of production conditions can still lead to high-quality translations even when relying on pivot languages. This evidence can in turn be used to develop guidelines and protocols that will ensure the creation of successful subtitling templates.

BAG: Perhaps I'm going to expose an unpopular opinion, but bear with me. First, what is quality in this context? Who defines quality? I keep seeing the word quality in David's reply, and this is a recurrent topic in the localization industry. In the context of AVT, to me quality is meeting clients' requirements and avoiding file rejections. Quality is also being faithful to the creator's intent and not perverting or censoring that intent. Finally, quality is providing the viewer with an experience that is not disruptive and allows them to enjoy the content.

That said, why are ITrs inherently bad? An ITr can be great and include all the necessary information to deliver a high-quality translation in the rest of the target languages. This practice has many business benefits, and not necessarily only cutting costs. That is the least of the benefits. It is about finding the right translators who are trained to create subtitles and are available to work on a project that needs to be delivered within the next few days because that is the client requirement. Building a translator database with all possible language combinations is difficult, sometimes impossible. It is even more difficult to maintain an engaged translator database in a given language combination when you only receive two or three projects per year for that language pair. When you reach out to that person for the second project six months after you received your first project for that language combination, they have moved on to something else.

Regarding how research can contribute to this debate, I'd love to see reception studies where the impact of indirect vs direct translations is measured by asking the viewers if they have found any difference in their viewing experience. I think that would help us understand what the real impact on the end user of this ITr is product, and see if the negativity towards this practice is well founded. In the same experiment, it would be interesting to compare the two translations of the same work and see how much they differ and what types of changes are observed, and quantify and classify those changes objectively, measuring the impact of those changes on the viewers.

GSM: I think that the concern around quality is legitimate. Let's consider the previously mentioned dubbing workflow, where translation and adaptation are divided into

separate phases and roles. This workflow typically encompasses four stages: source dialogue origination, pivot translation, raw translation in the target language, and final target language adaptation. Consequently, this multiple intermediary handling can increase the risk of veering away from the original meaning and creative intent, possibly compromising cultural authenticity, unless a stringent quality control system is in place at every phase.

That said, as Bélen also points out, ITr workflows are often adopted out of pure necessity and not always simply to cut down costs. It's virtually impossible to cater to the myriad of emerging language combinations worldwide in such a specialized profession, which requires not only interlingual translation skills but also skills specific to AVT. The existing pool of resources barely allows for English pivot translations to be performed by native English translators. Consequently, once a pivot language workflow is implemented, it becomes more time and cost-efficient to apply it across all language combinations. This approach considers the ongoing standardization processes across territories, which facilitate quality control optimization. In other words, while we understand the quality concerns and significant challenges presented by these workflows for translators, we also need to consider practical approaches from a localization management perspective.

I agree with David's perspective on the potential role of academia in highlighting and addressing quality concerns through the presentation of concrete evidence based on different production conditions. While certain stakeholders are already aware of such issues and actively seeking avenues to improve quality standards, pinpointing specific challenges can be challenging. I believe that engaging in interviews with practitioners can prove instrumental in unraveling the complexities of ITr workflows. By doing so, we can thoroughly examine the difficulties they face and generate tangible, systematic data through the analysis of specific examples. Research can therefore play a pivotal role in identifying micro-level issues and proposing strategies, particularly the development of specialized training programs and the creation of guidelines for practitioners and stakeholders like the ones that streaming platforms may provide to their vendors (Netflix, 2022).

Experimental and empirical research can also contribute to this topic by engaging in studies that analyze and compare the subtitled or dubbed output of direct and ITrs of the same source text, in line with what Bélen suggests. This could help further pinpoint the issues that could possibly be addressed by focused training.

Question no. 4

HP, SV, RM, SS: In some settings, machine translation (MT) and ITr are being used concurrently or interchangeably. For instance, video-on-demand (VOD) platforms are increasingly incorporating MT, post-editing, and/or templates to expedite the translation process and cut costs (see, e.g. Choi et al., 2023; Mehta et al., 2020). One example of such a workflow is described in Tardel (2021). This type of approach has been heavily criticized and said to have led to a disconnect with audiences, like in the case of *Squid Game* (Groskopf, 2021; see also Choi et al., 2023). How do you see the combination of these practices in your own subfields? When it comes to combining MT with ITr, what considerations have you observed?

BAG: When we talk about deploying MT in any localization workflows (not only audiovisual), it is very important to understand: a) the reason(s) behind implementing MT in the workflows in the first place; and b) the expected deliverable or end-product.

The main reasons to implement MT in the workflows that clients might have in the audiovisual industry, both in gaming and film industries, are: a) reducing costs, b) accelerating turnaround times, and c) increasing capacity for certain languages or language combinations. The expected deliverables can be: a) a translation where the translator is an author and, therefore, a recreation of the original is expected in the target language, where certain level of creativity, cultural adaptation and authorship is expected; and b) a translation that allows the end users to understand the content, providing linguistic accessibility, with a minimum of language correctness and understanding. Not all types of content require an authorship, and that is yet another consideration when thinking about MT. A help page or some patch notes for a specific video game might not require as much creativity as a cinematic in a triple A game.

So, when we are implementing MT in complex workflows, we need to go over that exercise of understanding why we are doing it, and what is the expected deliverable so that all the stakeholders (client, agency, and translators) are aligned and the expectations are met. Starting from there, we can think about how to implement MT in an even more complex workflow (involving ITr). We need to define the guard rails in the workflow. Can we use raw MT output to create an ITr that will then be used as a pivot to translate other languages? It does not the best idea. If we use MT to translate from Japanese into English, and then from English into other languages, we will need to make sure that the initial Japanese into English translation is perfect because that will have a major impact down the line. So, is it worth it to use MT in that step, when the creation of the English pivot is so crucial for the localization of the rest of the languages? Perhaps it is not worth it to cut costs there, or to accelerate that specific part of the process.

GSM: Introducing automation in the intralingual scripting phase, which marks the initial step in the dubbing script workflow, has the potential to expedite the process without impinging on the human creative aspect. This phase entails source dialogue transcription, along with timing, segmentation, and character attribution, and is still heavily reliant on human transcribers in many companies, depending on the source language in question. When considering subsequent phases and the incorporation of MT, different considerations come to mind.

A first scenario would be bypassing the need for a pivot entirely and executing a direct, machine-based raw translation for the available language combinations. In dubbing, a human translator or adapter can then adapt the raw MT output to align it with dubbing requirements and meet the linguistic and cultural needs of the target territory. However, this workflow may fall short in terms of quality control and revision of the raw translation, which serves as the foundation for adaptation. Once again, the challenge is the shortage of human resources capable of reviewing and adjusting translations for all language pairs. This is not solely a textual challenge, as we are dealing with multiple visual and auditory elements that collectively constitute the audiovisual content. These elements inevitably affect the translation decision-making process. Consequently, when MT is adopted, resorting to ITr workflows becomes essential to enable human post-editing, annotation, and, importantly, quality control at every micro stage, relying

on available, trained resources capable of handling indirect language pairs. In a way, ITr workflows enhance quality assurance (in MT scenarios) by breaking the process into intermediate stages that can be thoroughly examined by human experts.

Incidentally, drawing from my experience as a translator and trainer, when working with human-produced pivot translations the use of MT tools can provide invaluable support for verifying the raw pivot translation. This approach allows us to directly access the original language, whether for researching specific terms or expressions or for analyzing grammatical and syntactic structures. This, in turn, expands our comprehension of specific dialogue lines, enabling us to explore synonyms, antonyms and alternatives directly based on the original language, as opposed to solely relying on the bridge translation provided. However, MT in this scenario is simply considered as an additional supporting tool.

DOC: The combination of MT and ITr is extremely relevant to the changes occurring in the translation industry, as Belén and Giselle mentioned already. Both strategies aim to address barriers to the typical translation process and emerge as efficient solutions in an interconnected society. In the context of fansubbing, the use of MT has been limited, in my view, because the peak of fansubbing production predates the emergence of the more successful MT solutions brought about by neural MT. Additionally, while speed and coverage are embedded in fansubbing practices, these communities do not respond to the same motivations for productivity as formal, profit-making endeavors. Essential to the nature of fansubbing are aspects of community building and interpersonal relationships. Productivity, while still desirable, is not as central in these community-led spaces.

In contrast, in the broader context of non-professional subtitling, there are instances of workflows integrating MT and ITr. Crowdsourcing initiatives with a more centralized structure have indeed been more willing to adopt these alternatives. For instance, in 2021, TED Translators moved their operations from Amara to Caption Hub. The latter, unlike Amara, fully integrates MT into subtitle production. In their blog, Caption Hub mentions that the ‘scale and nature of the TED translator community, as well as the way in which that community workflow had evolved, meant [Caption Hub] had to develop an entirely new approach in how [they] thought about subtitling workflow and scale’ (Jameson, 2021). The move was motivated by reasons related to scale, efficiency and coverage, as Belén mentions.

The case of TED Translators is a particularly good example to consider the suitability of combining MT and ITr. Content on TED is scripted, prepared and rehearsed. While it can use a colloquial register, TED talks also include specialized informative language and aim at science dissemination. On the contrary, media and entertainment content relies primarily on an expressive function and includes cultural creative content. In my view, this is the area that will be impacted the most by the combination of MT and ITr. Previous research has shown that professionally produced translations display higher creativity than translations produced using MT as an aid (Guerberof-Arenas & Toral, 2020). MT and other AI solutions have the potential to contribute to translation production processes, considering the examples that Belén and Giselle have presented. However, it is paramount to test how MT can best support professionals and translation companies. Currently, in professional settings, we are seeing an implementation of MT through standardized post-editing processes that assume new AI capabilities can smoothly be added on top of previous workflows. In the case of AVT, this implementation needs further evaluation, as Tardel

(2021) and Karakanta et al. (2022) suggest. Current workflows integrating MT and ITr rely on human translators to approve the final version of the product and then assume responsibility for it. If production processes require humans to become responsible for these processes, it is essential that their agency in the process is recognized and that they are guaranteed the conditions to make informed decisions about the implementation. MT and ITr can help create stronger and closer global distribution networks, but for these networks to respond to local needs, it is important to fully integrate human translators as cultural and technological mediators in the process.

Question no. 5

HP, SV, RM, SS: Our last two sets of questions are about looking ahead. We know that you do not have a crystal ball, but after looking back and around, how do you envision the future of ITr workflows in your subfield? Any developments that are already on the horizon?

GSM: Pivot language-based workflows aren't just a temporary measure. Considering the exponential volume increase of non-English and non-European content, such workflows are here to stay and are bound to become the standard operating procedure. I envision that cloud-based platforms will actively seek further enhanced solutions to seamlessly integrate pivot translation workflows into their interfaces, with a focus on providing support for translators to leverage these tools to their fullest potential. Offering access to the original script in both textual form and within the rhythm band would be a valuable addition.

Another potential development that appears likely is the expansion of the pool of available human resources. Firstly, there is a growing number of dubbing adapters who are also skilled in interlingual target language translation. The convergence of these roles eliminates one of the intermediary steps in the production of dubbing scripts, with the hope of enhancing quality standards. Additionally, with the increasing demand for translation into English within the industry, we can anticipate a larger pool of trained English-native or bilingual pivot translators who can contribute to the field by translating from multiple languages. So far, English ITrs have been often limited to translators belonging to the source language culture, which of course has its advantages to ensure cultural authenticity. In general, attracting such professionals to the industry will also hinge on factors like working conditions, compensation, and the recognition of the pivotal role they play.

A question that comes to mind is whether different pivot languages other than English will ever be resorted to. In the context of European Institutions, where pivot language templates are often used, considering the various EU languages producing audiovisual content, French is also a viable option.

DOC: The recent increase in multilingual productions demonstrates that companies are interested in providing more diverse entertainment experiences. Ten years ago, fansubbing networks were the main gate for users to access underground, seldom distributed content. Currently, however, streaming platforms carry many more options and target different sectors of the audience at the same time. The variety and reach of streaming

services are diminishing the value of fansubbing and non-professional translation initiatives. For instance, one of the most traditional fansubbing communities in Latin America, aRGENTeAM, recently decided to close after 22 years in operation due to the decimated demand and increasing offers through formal channels (Brodersen, 2024). These changes directly imply that workflows involving pivot translation will continue developing in the industry.

For streaming platforms to maintain this offer in a much more linguistically diverse market and ensure that they address the translation demands of the audience, good pivot templates are key. I hope that companies will recognize that not only the roles of professionals need to adapt but that it is the company's responsibility to create the conditions for that adaptation and to ensure that professionals have access to the resources they need to successfully complete their tasks. ITr and MT can imply some type of cost-cutting exercise, but in the same way that some barriers can be removed through this implementation, a conscious approach must recognize that new needs will also emerge. For instance, templates that lead to accurate ITr will need to be better researched and carefully developed. Professionals creating these templates will need to be paid fairly so they can allocate enough time for template generation.

The combination of ITr and MT could lead to real multilingual production spaces. If translators are given access to other language versions and they can automatically translate them into their working languages, this could grant them access to more information and give them an advantage when making their own decisions. However, it is important to recognize that the more content available to translators, the longer the production process will be. Unfortunately, this contradicts the acceleration of the market and requires us to rethink the process as a whole, not just specific stages in it. The industry will need to reconfigure the workflows so that for some tasks to disappear others will need to become more complex or new ones need to emerge.

BAG: I believe GenAI will play a vital role in enhancing ITr workflows. It can help translators in comparing their translations with the original script, thus addressing some of the shortcomings introduced by pivot languages, which often oversimplify or overlook crucial nuances in other languages.

Moreover, workflows could be tweaked from a linguistic and cultural perspective. Instead of making English the pivot language for everything else, we could directly translate from languages that are quite similar culturally and linguistically. For example, it might be more effective to translate from Korean into Japanese or from Spanish into Portuguese, than going through an English pivot language. MT could be used as a bridge to create such draft versions, and translators could still have the English template as a reference in case something is unclear. This is just thinking out loud, I have not personally tested this potential solution, but it would be interesting to see if it improves the outcome of the translation.

Question no. 6

HP, SV, RM, SS: Finally, how do you see the future of training for indirect AVT evolving? Are there any specific areas of development that you think will or should become prominent? Are there any challenges in the field of training for indirect AVT

that need to be addressed? What type of questions should research into translator training ask?

DOC: As a lecturer, training is the big question. The training program I have implemented at my university strongly embeds core transferable and adaptable skills on top of translation competences, to properly equip future language professionals to tackle the ever-changing challenges they will face in the language industries. The main problem we have as trainers is that our curriculum regularly risks becoming outdated. The recent expansion of generative AI, for instance, has caused us all to review our courses not only to implement changes but to be ready to make further changes on the fly as the industry is in constant evolution. While the practice of translation remains largely the same transfer process, industry requirements constantly and drastically redefine the tasks and functions language professionals need to fulfill. As educators, we must offer a balanced training program that combines translation-specific competences with professional skills that will allow our students to build sustainable careers.

I advocate for a critical education program that encourages students to not only become proficient in a specific task but also be able to evaluate the conditions under which the task is developed and reflect on the wider repercussions of their decisions and actions. In the case of indirect AVT, creating efficient subtitle templates is the type of activity that provides a full-fledged learning opportunity (see Pięta et al., 2023). A good template should equip pivot translators with the linguistic and cultural information to reach a successful translation. When facing the demands of creating a good template, students are openly confronted with the constraints of AVT and the materiality that the mode and production conditions impose on translators. Additionally, apart from actually creating a template, a discussion about the production processes and media flows, the working conditions and the reactions from professional translator associations can provide students with a complete picture of translation from the process and product perspectives. Considering the significant impact that industry workflows are having on the reality of professionals, it is paramount that students engage in broader discussions about industry practices while they develop their translation skills.

Regarding challenges, training and the professional world face a similar key demand: sustainability. University course development processes take time and effort, and these do not move at the same pace as changes in the industry. As educators, we need to be both reactive and proactive to ensure that we can easily integrate technological developments into our teaching while still ensuring we deliver modules and courses that help students achieve the learning objectives of the programs and plan future careers. This is not always easy and could be more demanding in some institutions and countries than in others. Additionally, in the same way that professionals are required to regularly upskill and take on new tasks and roles, educators need to build links with the industry not only to upskill but also to come up with strategies to help students quickly develop these new skills. This puts university programs and staff under constant pressure to remain relevant.

In terms of research and development, close collaboration between the industry and academia can be useful, as long as it recognizes that all stakeholders in the exchange have different aims and goals. Inter-sector collaboration should understand that the role of universities is not limited to providing highly trained translators but critical

language professionals who are independent and can act as decision-makers in the market. Collaboration should provide equal footing to all stakeholders: industry representatives, professionals and academia.

BAG: For me, it is very important to be realistic (not cynical!) when training new professionals and supporting their understanding of how ITrs in AVT work and what the market needs are. I do not think ITrs are going away anytime soon. On the contrary, the need for ITrs is increasing as we see more and more content being created outside of Hollywood, especially after the strikes. That has increased the appetite for non-American content around the globe.

Giving students a clear picture of the real workflows where pivot templates are created and used and how they can contribute to the industry with their different skills and abilities is the most important aspect of the training, and that should be developed more. For example, a Spanish student should know that they can apply for a transcriber job at a company to transcribe scripts for a Spanish show or movie, so that person should learn how to transcribe. A Spanish into English translator will have the opportunity to translate the transcription from the first student and create a pivot template, so they should learn how to translate subtitles, as well as how to enrich the template with cultural explanations that will be relevant and useful to the rest of the translators that will be using that pivot template, without overdoing it (time is gold!). For that, this second student will probably collaborate with the transcriber to make sure that all cultural nuances are properly captured. Then, translators who want to translate from pivot languages need to understand the limitations and the extra time that they might need to invest if they accept a project from a culture that is totally foreign to them. They will not work with templates that are perfectly annotated and that include every single cultural nuance that they would like to know. They need to know how to research, they need to build a network of linguists in other languages that they can resort to when in doubt, they need to know how to professionally communicate with the client if they need support for this type of project. Moreover, translators who are passionate about certain cultures like Korean or Japanese but are not sufficiently proficient to translate directly from the source, should be able to leverage that knowledge to win more opportunities to work in projects where they will understand the cultural context better and do a good job.

So, what seems important is: a) providing students with a realistic view of ITrs workflows and teaching them the skills to contribute to those workflows; b) setting expectations of what they will find in the real world and developing their skills to cope with the limitations as well as make the most out of their special abilities, and c) coaching them to be able to navigate the professional world and how to collaborate and communicate with other professionals efficiently to provide a good translation for any given work.

GSM: I align with the perspectives shared by my colleagues, who have presented interesting insights and proposals. I will consider implementing some of these ideas in a training context. I believe that translators adopting pivot language workflows must cultivate a specialized skill set to ease into the process and uphold the required quality standards. As an instructor who has integrated pivot language training into a university curriculum, I have so far identified some key areas that require attention:

Proficiency in Filmic Language: Trainees must learn how to decode meaning conveyed through various visual and audio cues embedded in film content. Sessions focusing on image and sound and their relevance to AVT can easily be incorporated into a professional training program or an academic curriculum (and some courses do so already).

Cultural Competence: Encouraging trainees to research and become acquainted with the specific source cultures they might frequently work with (e.g. Korean, or Turkish). This could help them navigate cultural-bound elements such as food, name formats, honorifics, vocatives, forms of address and language registers more effectively. An important aspect is also culture-specific body language since gestures and facial expressions are not necessarily universal. In a context where a translator is obliged to rely on a pivot translation, knowing how to ‘decodify’ kinesics conveyed through the visual code can be helpful if not crucial. In the case of lip-synch dubbing, adapters need to familiarize themselves with linguistic structures that may differ. They need to seek solutions where the target language utterances are synchronized (both temporal and semantic coincidence) with the body language and facial expressions expressed in the visuals.

Pivot Language Translation: Trainees who will also work as pivot translators should be equipped to author texts that strike a balance between natural and literal rendering, texts that are faithful to the intent and not overly domesticated or creative. This training should also encompass the skill of effectively annotating their translations and providing alternatives.

Glossary building: Trainees may benefit from learning how to identify key terms and phrases and creating appropriate definitions. Many companies adopt centralized glossaries or terminology databases to ensure consistency.

Awareness of the Dubbing Chain: Enhancing trainees’ understanding of the entire dubbing process and how the next translator or professional in the pipeline will use their text instills a mindset where each role considers how to provide a useful working tool for the next person in line.

Integrating this type of training comes with its own set of challenges, one of which is the availability of materials due to confidentiality issues. This refers to the accessibility of a diverse range of source texts (both video material and original dialogue lists) and a bridge English translation. So far, I have had to personally create pivot translation templates for my students by producing English bridge translations of content in other languages, while relying on outsourcing transcription and raw translation for specific source languages, such as Arabic or Chinese. With this varied repertoire of materials, I can tailor classroom tasks by deliberately assigning specific source languages to those students who are not familiar with them.

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