

Subtitling, video consumption and viewers: The impact of the young audience

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The emergence of international audiences and the activities of prosumers are modifying international media flows. Consumers have become active mediators in the distribution of audiovisual contents through the Internet, overstepping official distribution channels. As an efficient way to overcome linguistic barriers, non-professional subtitling plays an important role within this framework. In order to analyze how the new environment is altering users' behavior and attitudes, this article looks at the case of video consumption and non-professional subtitling use in Spain. By drawing on questionnaires, interviews and documentary sources on the Internet, the article aims at providing a general picture of current consumption habits of audiovisual material in a globalized society. It explores users' engagement with audiovisual content, their attitude towards subtitling and non-professional subtitling, and how they manage their expectations and adapt to the new conditions.

Keywords: audiovisual habits, audiovisual translation modes, fans, international audiences, media flows, non-professional subtitling, subtitling

Introduction

The globalization of audiovisual content and the configuration of international media flows have had a major impact on the expansion of non-professional subtitling and, at the same time, on users' general view of subtitling. This change of events is likely to ultimately have repercussions on the external view of translation in general. This impact can be seen and studied at different levels. On the production side, prosumers—consumers who have adopted some of the characteristics of the producer roles—have become aware of the possibilities and the power they have to alter distribution chains, to gain a voice in the production process of the material they enjoy and indeed to participate in the distribution of the material (O'Hagan 2009). On the reception side, users are now increasingly more dependent on the actions of these prosumers: rapidly subtitled TV shows and films available on the Internet are becoming an important source of entertainment for the general audience. These users of volunteer-translated content are not always (and do not necessarily need to be) aware of the mechanisms put in place to provide them with subtitles, nor may they know about the impact their activity might have on general media flows, but their actions indicate they are evidently willing to become beneficiaries of the prosumers' products.

Prosumers do not need to cross territorial boundaries but rather connect through virtual channels, avoiding political and geographical borders and overcoming linguistic differences through translation. In the case of the prosumers producing subtitles for foreign audiovisual material, their knowledge of English as a foreign language, their

ability to translate and the technological tools at their disposal grant them the possibility to act in an interculture, a secondary culture that exists in the intersection or overlaps of other cultures (Pym: 2002), and serve as connections between the producer in the source culture and the audience in the target culture. Further, the relevance English has acquired as an international language also affects the distribution of the content prosumers produce: in a world where the majority of young people in developed and developing countries have some degree of knowledge of English, translation does not operate from a wholly foreign language into a mother tongue (Pym 2013). English is not totally foreign to the audience and this alters the relation between the prosumers, the young audiences, and the media.

By drawing on the results of questionnaires and interviews and with reference to Internet sources, I intend to shed some light on the situation of subtitling in Spain. I resort to data collected from users of audiovisual products to discover the young audience's attitude towards subtitling and to illustrate the influence that non-professional subtitling may have on media flows and society. To illustrate this, I analyze how a season premiere of *Game of Thrones* in Spain caused controversy on social media due to the use of subtitles. I draw on user interactions and reactions on Twitter to present the arguments for and against using subtitles in a traditionally dubbing country to provide a wider picture of the impact of translation on society. The subsequent discussion focuses on the consequences that the viewers' actions may have on a larger scale.

Users, user-generated content and media flows

Online technologies have created numerous unofficial networks for the distribution of audiovisual material, causing a change in media flows and a redefinition of audiovisual habits. The television and film industry recognizes the issues brought up by international audiences. The industry's reactions to illegal online distribution of content have varied depending on their piracy policies, as well as the measures they take against it. Some companies, especially international distributors, have decided to do all they can to reduce delays in the international release of content. For instance, in Spain and Latin America, some TV series are now released just one day after their original screening in the United States. Even within the United States, some TV broadcasters have decided to release the TV series in English and its translation into Spanish on the same day, and sometimes at the same time on different TV channels. By contrast, some sectors of the industry adopt a clear position against piracy but also recognize that an increase in the illegal distribution of a given product could be understood as a signal of popularity. In 2013, the HBO programming president mentioned that the levels of piracy of *Game of Thrones* were a type of 'compliment' and were also something expected for a popular show running on a subscription network (Hibberd 2013). He also pointed out that sales were not affected, and that illegal distribution might eventually end up generating new subscriptions.

The globalization of audiences has created an environment where access to the content can also be mediated by users themselves, thus democratizing content distribution and bringing into the discussion agents other than the producers and distributors. TV producers have helped a great deal in the creation of global audiences, and the media in general has reinforced the feeling of a consumption scenario escalating at an international level. Producers and distributors are interested in establishing contact with the audience and promoting the use of social media (Twitter profiles, Facebook pages, websites dedicated to the shows and their fans). Engaging the audiences through

multi-platform strategies has become a useful strategy not only to create loyal viewers, but also to attract the attention of new ones. Along the same lines, local newspapers and magazines in different countries now report news on TV series and films even before the products reach their countries. By doing so, they recognize the importance the audiovisual products have in their readers' lives. This significantly affects the audience's habits, since it increases expectations and makes the audience more aware of the differences in programming between the United States, as the producing country, and the rest of the world, as users of that content. Furthermore, reporting news on a given series or a film according to the original release schedule implies that newspapers and magazines acknowledge viewers have found workarounds to overcome the programming barriers and access the content before the official programming in their respective countries even begins.

Traditionally, Spain has been a dubbing country. As is the case in most large European countries, the political situation of Spain during the last century created the conditions for a generalized preference for this mode of audiovisual translation and the establishment of a solid dubbing industry. As a result, the vast majority of imported audiovisual material is distributed using dubbed versions, and the dubbing industry has a very long tradition. Nevertheless, this consumption norm is possibly changing under the current conditions of media flows.

The ways in which online users relate to translated content and to translation are probably being reshaped. Chaume (2013) points out that in some European dubbing countries, including Spain, subtitling is gaining popularity. The current consumption of foreign audiovisual material in Spain reflects a situation that is unfolding all around the globe: TV series produced in the United States have developed loyal international audiences, and the users recognize the value of technology and exploit the possibilities opened up by the technological tools. It seems these audiences, in order to have early access to the audiovisual content, are willing to alter their audiovisual consumption habits.

The impact of non-professional translation on the media and society in general is still uncharted territory. Up to now, Translation Studies has mainly focused on the groups producing non-professional subtitling, production conditions, the nature of the subtitles produced, and the quality of said subtitles (Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006; O'Hagan 2011; Orrego-Carmona 2011; Massidda 2012; Pym et al. forthcoming). Although Pérez-González (2012) has worked on the contextualization of non-professional translational action within a political framework, little is known about how the users who benefit from the subtitles act as agents in the distribution of audiovisual content over the Internet and the effect their actions have on society. Technology is evidently affecting translation at a social and professional level (Pym 2011); so it might be reasonable to assume that it also affects the users of translation, which in turn has consequences on translation as such. The new terrains gained by subtitling thanks to the online distribution of subtitled content help generate more opportunities for viewer interactions and, are probably shaping new viewer habits.

To study the young audience's preferences and attitudes, the data included in this paper was collected through questionnaires, interviews, and documentary sources on the Internet. The questionnaires and the interviews were conducted with students at the Universitat Rovira i Virgili (Tarragona, Spain) between May and October 2013. The guiding principle was to identify how participants use the different modes of audiovisual translation and especially subtitling, both professional and non-professional, and what they think about watching subtitled material. The Internet data was collected in April 2014 from audience reactions on Twitter and blogs after Canal+ Spain

broadcast a subtitled version of the fourth season premiere of *Game of Thrones* only 18 hours after its original release in the United States.

Instruments

The population of the study was defined mainly according to two criteria. First, using convenience sampling, the study included university students only, from undergraduate to graduate level. The second criterion is defined by the key demographic most widely used by TV channels in the United States. Although the key demographic varies depending on each network and the type of content they produce, ranging from 18 to 54 years, the target demographic for television has traditionally been young adults. Considering the key demographic and the sample population at hand, the participant's profile was defined as 18–30 year-old university students.

Apart from collecting data about audiovisual consumption habits, the questionnaire was used to screen the population based on their level of listening comprehension in English. Thus, the screening procedure included a listening test. I contacted students during classes at the Engineering, Law, and Humanities faculties in the Universitat Rovira i Virgili in Tarragona (Spain), as well as in the library of the Catalunya Campus of the same university. Before filling out the questionnaire, I verbally informed the students about the broad purpose of the research, without making any specific reference to subtitling, and also explained to them the conditions of their participation in the study and their rights. Once I made sure they did not have any further questions about the study, they gave the appropriate consent and filled out the questionnaires. All the questionnaires were administered on paper and included nine questions. In total, 332 valid responses were collected. The questions were related to three main categories: language skills, audiovisual consumption habits, and audiovisual translation preferences.

After the questionnaires were processed, more than 100 possible candidates were invited to take part in the second part of the study, which consisted of a one-hour individual eye-tracking experiment and an interview of about 15–20 minutes. In total, 54 participants volunteered to participate in the second stage but only 52 of them were interviewed. The interview aimed at gaining more insight into the participants' preferences related to audiovisual translation modes, their habits regarding audiovisual-content consumption and the way they engage with the content. The eye-tracking session is mentioned only as contextual information here and will be analyzed in future publications.

The last instrument used to collect information was the Internet. On Monday, April 7, 2014, the premiere of a new season of the TV series *Game of Thrones* triggered an interesting reaction among fans. As will be explained later, the fact that the channel decided to broadcast a subtitled version of such a popular show caused the audience to complain on social media. This situation allowed me to collect some additional data on audience attitude towards subtitling and the nature of audience engagement with audiovisual products.

Results

First stage: Questionnaire data

Linguistic knowledge. All participants had Spanish or Catalan as their mother tongue. Since the material used for the eye-tracking experiment was in English, an

internally-developed listening comprehension test was applied to classify the participants into three groups depending on their level of English listening comprehension.

According to the results, and using the levels included in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 57 (17%) of the participants were in the proficient user group category; 142 (43%) in the independent user group and 133 (40%) in the basic user group. Considering the data, 60% of the population appears to have considerable proficiency in English, which would suggest a high level of contact with English as a foreign language. This might be explained by the fact that students from all undergraduate programs at the university are required to prove they have a B2 proficiency level in English before they graduate.

Audiovisual consumption. This initial questionnaire also collected general information on the participants' habits related to consumption of audiovisual materials. Participants were asked about how much time they spend per week watching audiovisual products and the means they most frequently used for accessing the content. Television and Internet were the most popular choices as means to access content among the participants, whereas going to the cinema or using DVDs and Blu-rays were not that popular.

Table 1. Weekly consumption of audiovisual products in terms of time and means.

	Less than 1 hour	1–3 hours	4–6 hours	7–9 hours	More than 10 hours
Television	16% (54)	31% (103)	29% (95)	15% (51)	9% (29)
Internet	9% (29)	19% (63)	22% (77)	23% (75)	27% (88)
DVD/Blu-ray	74% (248)	22% (72)	3% (9)	0% (1)	1% (2)
Cinema	62% (206)	31% (105)	6% (19)	1% (2)	0% (0)

As can be seen in Table 1, participants who watch between 1 and 6 hours of audiovisual products per week prefer television, while heavy audiovisual-content consumers who watch more than 7 hours of content per week rely more on the Internet. The answers to this question are consistent with the findings of the Video-Over-Internet Consumer Survey 2013 (Accenture 2013) which indicates a significant increment in the consumption of online video material. According to the survey 90% of the overall sample population, which includes 3,501 consumers in Brazil, France, Italy, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States, watch video content over the Internet on digital-online devices. In the case of Spain, this is the case for 95% of the participants. This trend towards consuming online video is especially marked among younger Internet users. The findings are consistent with the results from the questionnaire, which show that 50% of the participants are heavy users of the Internet and watch more than seven weekly hours of audiovisual material obtained from the Net. An additional 41% watch between one and six hours of audiovisual content from the Internet.

Audiovisual translation modes. The questionnaire asked the participants about their consumption of translated audiovisual material during the last six months.

As shown in

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Very frequently	Always
Dubbing	4% (13)	12% (41)	18% (59)	46% (153)	20% (66)
Subtitling	6% (19)	25% (83)	33% (110)	30% (100)	6% (20)
Voice-over	18% (60)	41% (135)	23% (77)	17% (57)	1% (3)
Closed caption	57% (191)	26% (85)	12% (40)	5% (15)	0% (1)

, 66% of the respondents say they use dubbing very frequently or always, which supports the general supremacy of this translation mode in the country. Nevertheless, 33% percent of the respondents indicate they use subtitling occasionally, while 36% say they use it very frequently or always. Voice-over is less used, although 40% of the participants say they use it occasionally (23%), very frequently (17%), or always use it (1%). Given that voice-over is characteristic of documentaries and reality shows, this might also offer information about the type of material being watched. As would be expected since it is primarily targeted to deaf and hard-of-hearing people, closed captioning ranks in the last position.

Table 2. Use of audiovisual translate modes.

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Very frequently	Always
Dubbing	4% (13)	12% (41)	18% (59)	46% (153)	20% (66)
Subtitling	6% (19)	25% (83)	33% (110)	30% (100)	6% (20)
Voice-over	18% (60)	41% (135)	23% (77)	17% (57)	1% (3)
Closed caption	57% (191)	26% (85)	12% (40)	5% (15)	0% (1)

Second stage: Interview data

The interview questions aimed at going deeper into the aspects that were previously explored in the questionnaires in order to complement the information already available. One of the most interesting results of the interview stage had to do with the amount of non-local content that is consumed by the participants in the study. Most of the participants mentioned that half or more than half of all the audiovisual content they consume is not produced in Spain but imported from other countries. This is consistent with what is reported in the Accenture survey, which states that in Spain 39% of consumers use local/national online video providers while 61% of them access content using international online video providers.

During the interviews, various aspects were revealed as to the factors influencing the participants' choice of different translation modes:

The time between the original release in the United States and the availability of the content in the Spanish market. Time was one of the main triggers for the creation and expansion of non-professional subtitling. Viewers wanted to access audiovisual content

as soon as possible, but the lengthy delays required for international distribution posed a problem for most of them. In order to overcome this issue, they started to distribute content on their own; to confront the linguistic problem they organized themselves to generate their own subtitles for the content.

The trend is continuing; people want to access the content as soon as it is released in the United States. Some of the participants said during the interview they watch subtitled content because it is available sooner than the dubbed version that is released in Spain. Here are the opinions of two of the participants:

Participant 8: [Veó] muchas, muchas series. Veo bastantes de la BBC. Veo *Doctor Who*, *Sherlock*, *Downton Abbey*. Después de americanas también veo *Orphan Black*... no sé, bastantes. Así de comedia también veo *New Girl*... Todas en Internet, pero si las pasan al poco tiempo de haberlas sacado allí, las veo por la tele. Pero, pocas veces. *[[I watch] lots and lots of TV series. I watch many from the BBC. I watch Doctor Who, Sherlock, Downton Abbey. When it comes to American TV series, I watch Orphan Black... I don't know, lots of them... In terms of comedies, I watch New Girl and... I watch all of them on the Internet, but if they are on TV soon after they were released in the United States or the United Kingdom, then I watch them on TV, but that almost never happens.]* [Hereinafter my translation]

Participant 48: [Sigo] *Falling Skies*, *Juego de Tronos*, *The Walking Dead* y también películas. Todas en Internet. Si salen antes las dobladas, las dobladas, y si no han salido todavía, pues me tengo que mirar las que tienen subtítulos. [Con el doblaje] puedo estar más atenta a la imagen. *[[I follow] Falling Skies, Game of Thrones, The Walking Dead and also many films. I watch all of them on the Internet. If the dubbed version is available first, then I watch it, but if it is not ready yet, then I have to watch the version with subtitles.]*

They see fast production of subtitles as the best way to access content and keep up with the releases in the United States. In some cases, subtitles are mentioned as a necessary evil. People want to access the content, but find themselves confronted by a linguistic barrier. Although some of them would rather watch the dubbed version, they decide to put up with the subtitled one in order to watch the content. Even in those cases, participants said that they enjoyed the content, and that was the reason why they decided to continue using subtitles. They recognize the value of subtitling as a way to keep watching the series. For instance, Participant 30 says she prefers to watch the material dubbed into Spanish because it is easier for her than combining reading the subtitles and watching the image; nevertheless she watches *Orphan Black* and *New Girl* online with subtitles because they would not be dubbed and distributed in Spain until much later.

The use of different translation modes depending on the audiovisual content. Surprisingly, a recurrent issue mentioned by participants was the classification of translation modes and preference for them depending on the type of content they watch. In some cases, participants provided information on how they would incline towards a given translation mode in an informed and structured way. Some participants said they preferred watching dubbed films because films are mostly made of only one

‘instalment’ or just a few of them in the case of sequels and trilogies. For the participants, watching a film implies a lower degree of personal engagement with the content. On the contrary, when it comes to TV series, they would be more inclined towards the use of subtitles. Since TV series normally have more than eight episodes per season (with the exception of miniseries) and possibly several seasons, participants are able to acquire more knowledge about the characters, the way they interact, their behavior and, especially, their speech. Listening to them on a more regular basis allows the participants to anticipate characters’ behavior and to use their prior knowledge to compensate for any information that might possibly go unnoticed or that they do not fully understand. Participants pointed out that they understand subtitling as *good enough* for their purpose of keeping up-to-date with the events and being able to watch the show as it is broadcast in the United States. For instance, Participant 46 explains how she decides about translation modes based on the genre of the content:

Participant 46: Veo [las series] en internet subtituladas. Prefiero verlas en inglés que dobladas y no que no haya subtítulos [...] En cambio, las películas, normalmente las miro en español. Siempre las veo dobladas, no lo sé, es una costumbre. Supongo que porque cuando sigues una serie, más o menos conoces a los personajes, lo que van a decir, el tema y voy aprendiendo sobre cada tema un poco escuchándolo en inglés. En cambio una película que son solo dos horas quizás debería estar demasiado concentrada y prefiero relajarme y verla tranquilamente sin tener que esforzarme para comprender. [*I watch the subtitled [TV series] on the Internet. I prefer watching them in English than dubbed and without subtitles [...] But when it comes to films, I mainly watch them [dubbed] in Spanish. I always watch dubbed films, I don't know why, maybe because I am used to it. I guess it's because when you follow a TV series, you somehow know the characters, what they're going to say, the topic and I also learn about each topic if I listen to it in English. But, as films go for about two hours, then perhaps I would need to be very focused on them and I prefer to relax and watch them without any pressure to understand.*]

The relation of audiovisual translation modes to language learning. During the interviews, it was evident that most of the participants, regardless of their level of English, assumed a direct relation between subtitling and language learning. Participants in general pointed to the benefits of subtitling for vocabulary learning and for becoming familiar with the foreign language. Those participants who felt they had a higher level of English mentioned that they do not follow the subtitles entirely. For them, the subtitles act as an aid to understand the content. The participants use the subtitles as a tool to confirm they understand the content or as a source of information where they can look for what they might have missed, instead of relying completely on them. Interestingly enough, this points towards a cognitive process that allows participants to watch subtitles in a selective manner, similar to what Künzli and Ehrensberger-Dow (2011) and Ramos-Pinto (2013) found in their studies analyzing reactions to subtitles. Participant 43 explains how she uses subtitles only as a source of confirmation:

Participant 43: Más que nada para mí [los subtítulos] sirven para ver si lo que has oído es lo que has entendido. Yo preferiría que [los subtítulos] estuviesen en inglés, porque en español me distraigo y tengo la tentación de

seguir en español porque es más cómodo. *[[Subtitles] for me work, mainly, as a way to confirm if you understand what you hear. I prefer to have the subtitles also in English. If they are in Spanish, then I become distracted and I am tempted to follow the Spanish subtitles only because it is easier for me.]*

In all of them, nevertheless, it was evident that the feeling of *reading* subtitles while watching a film is a more demanding activity than watching dubbed films. They do it mainly because watching subtitled material is considered by them an activity with a twofold intention: watching a film for entertainment and making some effort to improve linguistic skill in the language of the material. As participants 35 and 47 put it:

Participant 35: *Friends* la veo subtitulada para practicar el inglés. Y las otras [series] las veo dobladas. Los subtítulos son solo para practicar. Como ya he visto *Friends* en español y ya más o menos entiendo lo que dicen, entonces me es más fácil seguirlo y no tengo que estar leyendo todo el rato. Puedo practicar más el audio. *[I watch Friends with subtitles to practice my English. For the other [TV series], I use the dubbed version. I use the subtitles only as a way of practicing. As I have already seen Friends in Spanish and I am able to follow what they say, it is easier for me to follow the episodes and I don't need to read all the time. I can practice some listening.]*

Participant 47: En la época en la que tenía que estudiar para inglés, las veía todas [las series] en versión original y subtituladas en inglés, pero cuando no tuve que hacer esto, las veo normal. *[When I was learning English, I used to watch [all the TV series] in the original version with subtitles in English. But since I finished my English classes, I watch them the normal way.]*

The integration of viewing time into participants' routine. In terms of time management, most of the participants pointed out that when it comes to multi-tasking, dubbing is without any doubt the only possible solution. If they are doing chores at home or are busy on the computer, for instance, then they would immediately select the dubbed version as the best option. Additionally, the time of the day when the participants watch the material also affects their decision. Participant 20 comments on the benefits of watching shows on the Internet:

Participant 20: *[Veo las series en Internet] porque a la hora que la ponen por la tele o los días que la dan, pues no la puedo ver por la tele porque no se compagina con mi horario. En cambio, por Internet puedes verlo cuando a ti te vaya bien. [[I watch TV series on the Internet] because when they show them on TV, I can't watch them because it doesn't fit in with my schedule. But on the Internet you can watch them whenever you want.]*

Another circumstance that immediately prompts this decision is related to the company they have when they are watching the video. Even participants who prefer subtitling would easily adapt and watch the dubbed version if the people who they will be watching the product with do not like subtitling, feel incapable of following them, or simply prefer the dubbed version. In some cases, however, the influence of company

also works for the benefit of popularizing subtitles. About half of the participants mentioned they decide to watch a certain TV series or film based on their friends' recommendations. Although they also enjoy the content, watching a certain type of product also becomes a social instrument to interact with their group of friends. By following the influence of others, they adopt translation modes and video service providers that would not necessarily be their first option if they looked for audiovisual content by themselves. Additionally, another claim that was mentioned during the interviews was that being able to watch a TV series or a film in the original language with subtitles indicates that they are able to understand the film and also to appreciate the content in its original form, which grants them additional recognition among their peers. When asked how he decides which translation mode he uses for a given product, Participant 10 mentions:

Participant 10: Si me recomiendan que es mejor en versión original, la veo en versión original. Si me lo recomiendan que tiene una buena traducción, la veo con traducción. [*If [my friends] recommend the original version because it is better, then I watch the original version. If they say that it has a good translation, then I watch the translated version.*]

Following the same line of argumentation, some participants mentioned that reading becomes tiresome and demands that their attention be fully directed to what is happening on the screen. This makes it impossible for them to watch subtitled material when they are feeling tired after work, for instance. The participants say they prefer to watch subtitled material when they are totally relaxed and are willing to read the subtitles and follow the action. Participant 35 and 51 comment on the shortcomings they see in subtitling, considering the cognitive effort it demands:

Participant 35: Bueno, le puedes poner los audios en idioma original, los subtítulos. Y a veces lo hago. Hay días que no tengo ganas y digo, hoy en español, porque no quiero leer. Pero hay días que sí. [*Well, you can play it with the original soundtrack and the subtitles. I sometimes do. There are some days when I don't feel like doing that and I'd rather just watch it [dubbed] in Spanish, because I do not want to read. Other days I do it.*]

Participant 51: Es mejor si lo ves y entiendes sin subtítulos a la primera, porque el hecho de estar para abajo y para arriba es un poco incómodo, pero no me molesta. [De todas formas] cuando estás leyendo pierdes bastante la imagen. [*It's better when you can watch it and understand it without reading the subtitles. Looking up and down the screen can be inconvenient, but it doesn't bother me. Anyway, when you are reading, you lose a lot of what is happening in the image*]

Non-professional subtitle quality. The participants in the study have, in general, very different opinions about the subtitles available on the Internet. From their comments, it is possible to see that they are aware of variations in terms of quality but, considering the aspects mentioned above, they have also learned to interact with the subtitles, classify them, and decide when they can use them or how to come to terms with the complex situation. Participant 48 mentioned that for her having the possibility of watching the series is more important than having *perfect* subtitles. Participant 13 explains how he tries to look for the best subtitles available:

Participant 13: A veces hay muchos errores y lo notas o incluso se saltan trozos, o la traducción no es buena. [Los uso] para asegurarme que entienda [*sic*] lo que están diciendo. A veces si fueran muy diferentes, muy malos, o los saco o busco otros de otra persona. Además también a veces hay latino y a veces español. [*Sometimes there are many mistakes and you can spot them, or they even skip some parts, or the translation is not good. [I use them] to make sure that I understand what they are saying. Sometimes when they look very different from the original or the quality is too bad, I look for another subtitle file made by a different person. Also, sometimes there is also the Latin American version and the Spanish version.*]

And Participant 24 mentions variations in the subtitles depending on the source language of the material:

Participant 24: [En cuanto a la calidad de los subtítulos de Internet] Depende... hay mucha variedad, depende de dónde los saques. Generalmente, algunos están muy desfasados. Por ejemplo, en inglés no lo cojo tanto, pero cuando cojo películas de Brasil, la traducción suele ser bastante mala. [*The quality of subtitles on the Internet] depends... there are many options, it depends on where you get them. Normally they are completely out-of-sync. For instance, I do not notice it that much in English, but when I watch Brazilian films, the translation is usually very bad.*]

Data from the internet: audience disappointment

Even considering the data presented above, a full shift from dubbing to a generalized acceptance of subtitling is not likely, nor is there general acknowledgement of subtitling as a valid option. It seems to be an option for one sector of the population: educated young people especially interested in language improvement. A preference, or even a welcoming attitude, towards subtitling is far from being the first choice among the Spanish audience, as evidenced by a recent conflict over a popular TV series release.

Game of Thrones is a series that has been breaking all popularity records in recent years; some of its episodes have become the most-watched and most-downloaded episodes of all times, generally reaching more than 6 million viewers in the first airing of each episode and peaking at 7.2 million for the seventh episode of the fourth season. This has caused promotional campaigns of the show to have an international reach, which is in line with a solid international audience, as previously described.

The fourth season of *Game of Thrones* was broadcast in the United States on April 6, 2014, and its distribution in Spain is done by Canal+ Spain. The channel announced the release of the first episode of the fourth season with subtitles to be available on April 7, only 18 hours after its first release in the United States. They scheduled the release of a dubbed version one week after that. This fast progression can be seen as a natural strategy to give something to the audience in order to make them loyal and, at the same time, diminish the threat of pirate versions that might offer the audience faster, freer, and perhaps easier access to the content. The subtitled transmission started a heated debate on the social networks, mainly on Twitter, and on television blogs. These tweets, taken from a blog entry by Travieso (2014) give an idea of the fans' response:

1. Osea [sic] entrenan [sic] juego de tronos en canal+ y lo ponen subtulado con las voces en ingles? [sic] Estaran [sic] de broma no? [So, Canal+ releases *Game of Thrones* and broadcasts it with subtitles and the voices in English? They're joking, right?]
2. En inglés???? cabrones!!!!!! #JuegoDeTronos [In English? You bastards! #GameofThrones]
3. :(Todo el día [sic] esperando para ver online el primer capítulo [sic] de la temporada de Juego de Tronos y va y esta [sic] en inglés, que [sic] puta pena :([I have been waiting all day to watch the first episode of this season of *Game of Thrones* online and they broadcast it in English. It's a bloody disgrace]

This being a pay-television channel, subscribers started to complain about having paid for a product with subtitles when they wanted a dubbed version. They vehemently showed their displeasure and disillusion when they realized the episode was subtitled. They argued that they did not understand the English audio, were not acquainted with the original voices, and could not read the subtitles. Further, they said they did not understand why they had to watch *Game of Thrones* subtitled when other TV series, like *The Walking Dead*, have been broadcast in dubbed format one day after their release in the United States.

The complaints caused a response by another segment of the audience: those who were in favor of subtitling. They started to comment on Twitter, and FormulaTV (2014) collected some of the tweets:

1. Sin arremeter contra el doblaje, la polémica de Juego de Tronos y la VO demuestra lo ignorantes y paletos que somos en este país. [I do not want to rail against dubbing, but the controversy about *Game of Thrones* and original versions proves how ignorant we are in this country]
2. que [sic] coraje tío, juego de tronos solo está en inglés, y no pienso verlo en VOSE. #Putada [This really pisses me off! *Game of Thrones* is broadcast in English and I ain't gonna watch it in original version with subtitles. #shitshower]
3. Yo me voy a esperar hasta el 17 de Abril para ver Juego de Tronos en castellano. Qué inculto soy eh, y qué gilipollas vosotros. [I'll wait for April 17 to watch *Game of Thrones* in Spanish. I'm so ignorant, aren't I, and you're a bunch of morons.]

Followers of the show who supported subtitling mentioned the lack of knowledge of a foreign language and a lack of appreciation for the original product as defects of those who were complaining. They added that the complaints also revealed total ignorance of the time required to produce the dubbed version of a TV show with so many characters, as is the case with *Game of Thrones*. There were also tweets mocking the complaints about what they considered only a minor shortcoming. One of the most recurrent arguments included in this second wave of tweets was that the prominence of dubbing in Spain had partly caused a low-level of proficiency in English, which proficiency they considered necessary in today's world.

The arguments in favor of and against subtitling reveal another interesting consideration about translation: the people who comment do not seem to consider the subtitles to be a translation. This is probably due to the fact that they are presented

together with the original text. For the tweeters who participated in the discussion, the released episode *was in English* and the dubbed version that was to be released the week after *was in Spanish*.

The controversy coincides with a recent political debate in Spain that focuses on the popularization of subtitling as a language-learning tool. Since subtitling is considered to enhance proficiency in English as a foreign language, some politicians and journalists have declared themselves in favor of offering subtitling as an option for all audiovisual content in the country instead of reserving it for art-house cinemas. *Europa Press* (2001) reported on a decision of the Spanish Senate about this issue in July, 2011. Arguments in this debate can be seen in commentaries published by different newspapers such as *La Vanguardia* (Amiguet 2011), *El País* (Pantaleone 2008), the Spanish version of *The Huffington Post* (Carretero 2013), as well as in a recent piece by writer Antonio Muñoz Molina (2014) in the magazine *Muy Interesante*.

As a continuation of the controversy created on Twitter, the newspaper *20 Minutos España* (20 Minutos 2014) one of the five most popular online newspapers in the country, carried out an online survey to ask its readers' opinions on the issue of dubbing vs. subtitling. The survey was answered by 2,156 people and indicated that 50% agree with the use of subtitles, 41% prefer dubbing and 9% were indifferent. Evidently, a survey carried out online by a newspaper risks being biased, but since the debate developed completely over the Internet, the information offered by the survey can be seen as an extension of how audiences interact on the Internet.

Discussion

This discussion centers the issue on the participants and tries to map how they position themselves in relation to the content, their linguistic abilities, and their professional and personal needs.

The responses from the questionnaire indicate that at least 36% of the participants use subtitling on a regular basis. Data from the interviews indicate participants relate the use of subtitles to higher cognitive effort and tend to associate subtitling with language learning. Most of them, regardless of their level of English, use subtitles as a means to improve their listening skills and to expand their vocabulary. Participants mentioned that at least half of the total amount of audiovisual material they consume is not produced in Spain.

The development of the audience as an empowered agent in the audiovisual production and consumption process is something that should be considered more carefully. Until recently the decision to use dubbing, subtitling, or voice-over for a product relied solely on the producers of the content. That the use of audiovisual translation modes is based on the type of product is not entirely new. In many countries, voice-over is used as the predominant mode for documentaries and reality shows, regardless of the mode preferred in the country. Nevertheless, in the former case, the decision to adopt voice-over is made by the industry, mainly for economic and budgetary reasons. By contrast, in the situations described by the participants in this study, it is increasingly possible for the decision to be up to the content consumer—to choose one mode or the other. The possibilities offered by the Internet and digital television have made it possible for the audience to have a decisive say in this discussion. As seen in the interviews, they have developed strategies to decide which translation mode will be more beneficial for their situation depending on different factors, such as the type of content they want to watch, the people with whom they will watch it, their mood and physical condition at the moment, or what added value they

want to obtain from the activity, among other reasons. Participants' abilities to weigh the benefits and burdens that each translation mode offers to them show an additional capacity of users to assess different types of translations. As exemplified by the decision of Canal+ to broadcast both, a subtitled and a dubbed version, television channels are beginning to respond to users' demands. Perhaps the translation profession could take advantage of the moment and consider similar reactions to the non-professional subtitling phenomenon.

The comments participants made about the quality of the subtitles might reveal a problem resulting from the young audience's generalized knowledge of English. As becomes clear from the interview data, the fact that participants have a certain level of knowledge of the source language somehow allows them to contrast the original and the translation, and spot what they consider to be *mistakes*. This situation forces the audience to come to terms with the subtitles. Because English has expanded in its use as an international language, the language itself has become a not-wholly-foreign language (Pym 2013) to the general audience. Everyone knows some English, at least at some level, and can easily recognize a number of words and expressions. Since more people are able to make a rapid comparison between the two texts and probably also feel more capable of doing so, the audience's necessary suspension of disbelief is harder to reach. Subtitlers normally resort to certain translation techniques to transfer, condense, or adapt the translation according to time and space constraints and in order to follow professionally established standards. These standards, however, are unknown to the general audience. More often than not, its lack of familiarity with translation techniques risks making them understand translation as a word-replacing process which does not require many alterations. Thus, when faced with modifications that are not in line with their expectations, their trust in the subtitles might be affected. Ultimately, this might also alter their willingness to suspend their disbelief and challenge the purpose of the subtitles. Participant 35 said that she has noticed that subtitles available on the Internet do not include the wordplays included in the original version, but she says she assumes they just cannot be *translated* and understands the translators' choices. Other participants mentioned that they often notice that the subtitles do not say *exactly* the same as the dialogue.

Evidently, the relatively frequent use of subtitles among the participants, their willingness to watch subtitles, and the importance they attach to them as a second-language learning tool are also aspects that should be considered here. It seems participants think using subtitles to watch audiovisual content grants some type of status. If you can watch a subtitled product, it means you are interested in learning about the language or already have enough skills to understand the product without much trouble. Additionally, it implies that you have the knowledge required to appreciate and enjoy the value of the original composition. From the participants' perspective, they decide to make an additional effort and watch subtitled material because watching it confers an added value to subtitling as a language learning activity. They feel that in addition to the enjoyment and satisfaction they receive from the audiovisual products, they are also obtaining a return in terms of linguistic knowledge.

The fact that most of the participants in this study declared that more than half of the audiovisual content they watch is produced in foreign countries helps us understand why they tend to be more inclined towards using online-video options instead of waiting for the official release in Spain. The actions of the volunteer subtitlers and the active participation of the general audience, in this case, a young audience, have caused the media distribution channels to reconsider the industry's conditions and alter their

models in order to overcome the possible inconveniences resulting from the participatory culture of international audiences.

Conclusions

The young audiences' urge to access content forces them to negotiate their expectations of the products they consume and adapt to new conditions. It is likely that the future of subtitling in Spain will continue to be transformed in the coming years. On the one side, there is constant political and social debate about the linguistic benefits of subtitling and discussion about bringing more subtitled material to the country. On the other, the general audience's intention to access audiovisual content even if that means they have to accept or, at least, come to terms with the use of subtitles, indicates that users are willing to take on new habits in accordance with their needs. But on top of that, even if not mentioned here, the country and the audience will also be affected by changes unfolding at a global level, as suggested by the steady growth of the television market and the constant innovation that companies like Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon are bringing to the industry.

Non-professional translation has played a key role in empowering users, who increasingly want to take part in media production and distribution channels, and have influenced changes of the media flows. It is thanks to translation that users can access the content. The users' collective actions are forcing the media distribution channels to redefine their nature and adapt to the new needs. Translation Studies could consider how it might become a more visible force under these conditions. Viewers seem to be more open to communication and have proven to be very responsive. Users are already doing their own translations, but making them more conscious about the translation process as such and the impact it has on their lives could be a true game changer: The moment to analyze how translation can contribute to this development initiated by translation users may have arrived.

Additionally, Translation Studies could look at the broader picture that is being assembled as all these pieces come together. The audience's adaptation to the different audiovisual translation modes is creating a scenario in which Translation Studies could develop an important role as a mediator between all the agents involved: media industries, distributors, translators, and users.

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