

The uses of post-editing in the subtitling classroom:

What do subtitlers-to-be say?



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Television



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990

Lost in translation? The one-inch truth about Netflix's subtitle problem



The Observer
Television

Miranda Bryant

Sun 14 Nov 2021 10:00 GMT



Where have all the translators gone?

The global audience for foreign-language streaming shows has never been larger. But **subtitlers are leaving the industry in droves**



rest of world

Reporting Global Tech Stories

REPORTS

Lost in translation: The global streaming boom is creating a severe translator shortage

Industry executives say international hit shows like Squid Game are draining **a limited talent pool.**

Studies

- Study 1: ChangeMakers Project to make educational videos accessible for publication (MA student-staff partnership).

[Audiovisual] conference proceedings of an e-seminar (May 2020)

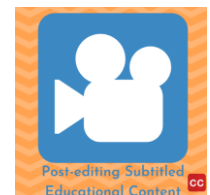
- Study 2: In-class post-editing exercise (MA course)

Subtitle template from the distributed version of a US film

Study 1

UCL Centre for Translation Studies + University of Córdoba (UCO), Spain

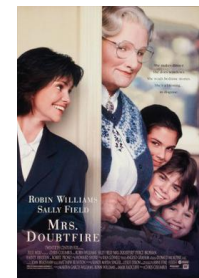
- **Participants:** 8 student collaborators + 5 members of staff.
 - English>Spanish (6 clips, ca. 180 minutes in total)
 - Spanish>English (2 clips, ca. 60 min in total)
 - Software: Aegisub (UCO) and OOOONA Tools (UCL).
- **Online survey** filled in by 5 students (3 UCL, 2 UCO).
 - Translation graduates (4 PG, 1 UG with professional experience).
 - Students had less than 2 years translation experience and no previous experience in PE.



Study 2

European University of Valencia (UEV), Spain

- **Participants:** 13 MA students (12 contact hours, online).
 - Software: OOONA Tools.
- **Online survey** filled in by 7 students.
 - Translation students (PG) who have studied both subtitling and PE in the past (except 2).
 - Only 2 were actively working as translators. Three had some translation experience (<1 year) and one had PE experience.



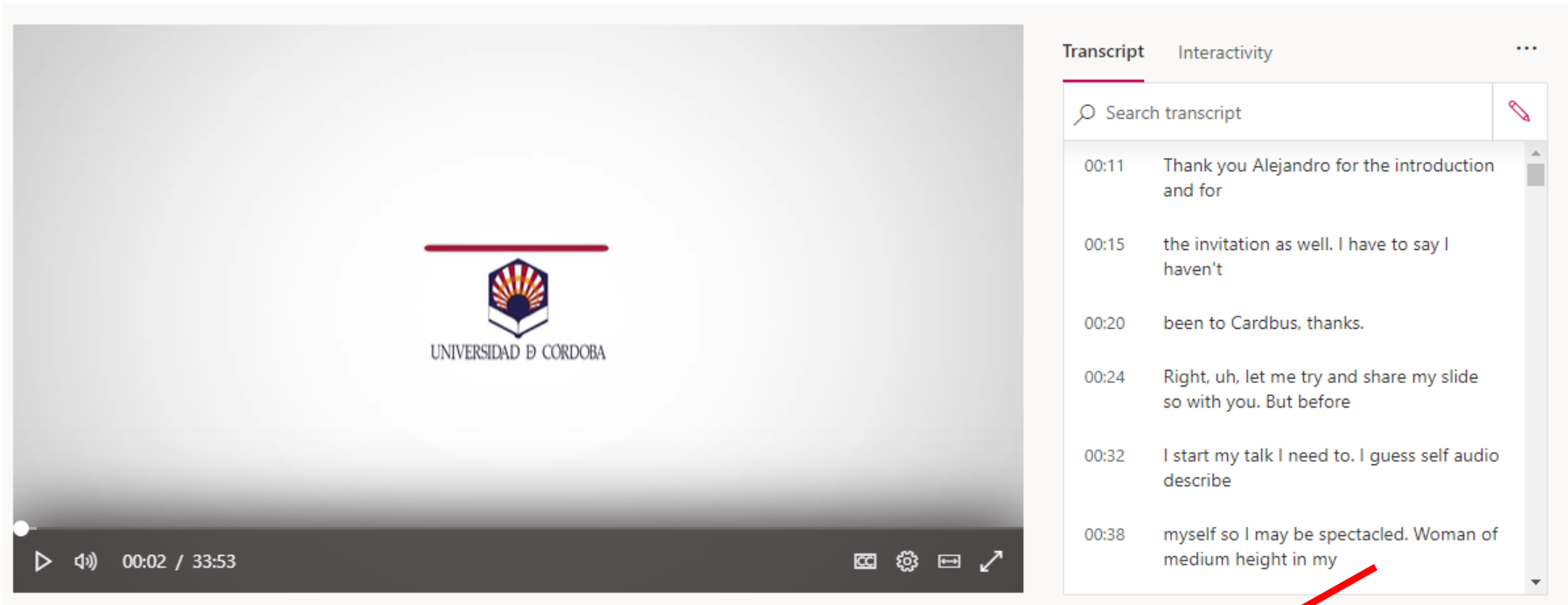
Study 1



transLectures
Transcription and Translation of Video Lectures



Microsoft Stream



Transcript Interactivity

Search transcript

- 00:11 Thank you Alejandro for the introduction and for
- 00:15 the invitation as well. I have to say I haven't
- 00:20 been to Cardbus, thanks.
- 00:24 Right, uh, let me try and share my slide so with you. But before
- 00:32 I start my talk I need to. I guess self audio describe
- 00:38 myself so I may be spectacled. Woman of medium height in my

Captions ⓘ [Download file](#)

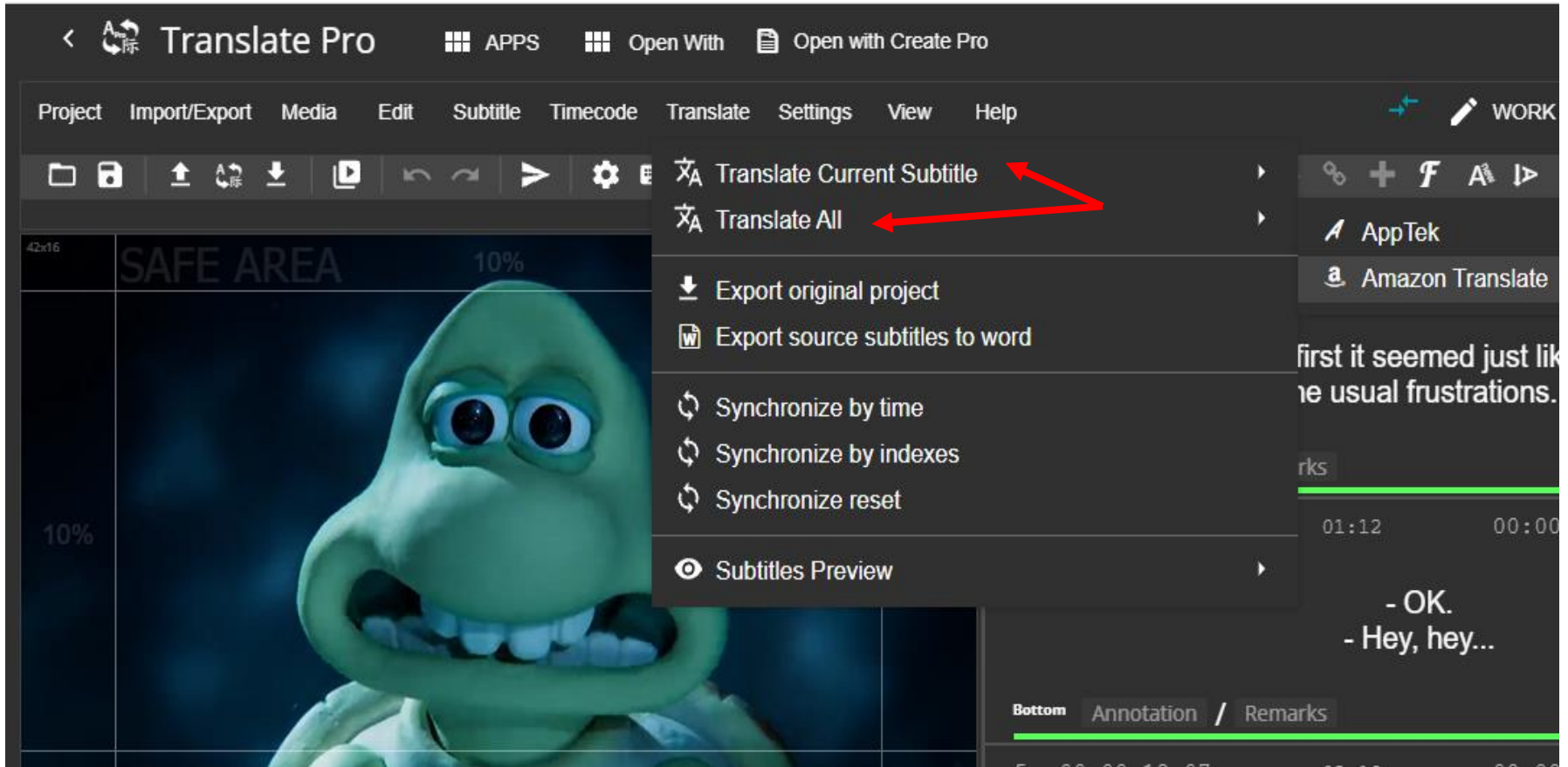
Autogenerate captions ⓘ

Subtitles ⓘ

[Upload a subtitle file](#)

[Learn more about captions, subtitles, and transcripts](#)

Study 2



Study 2

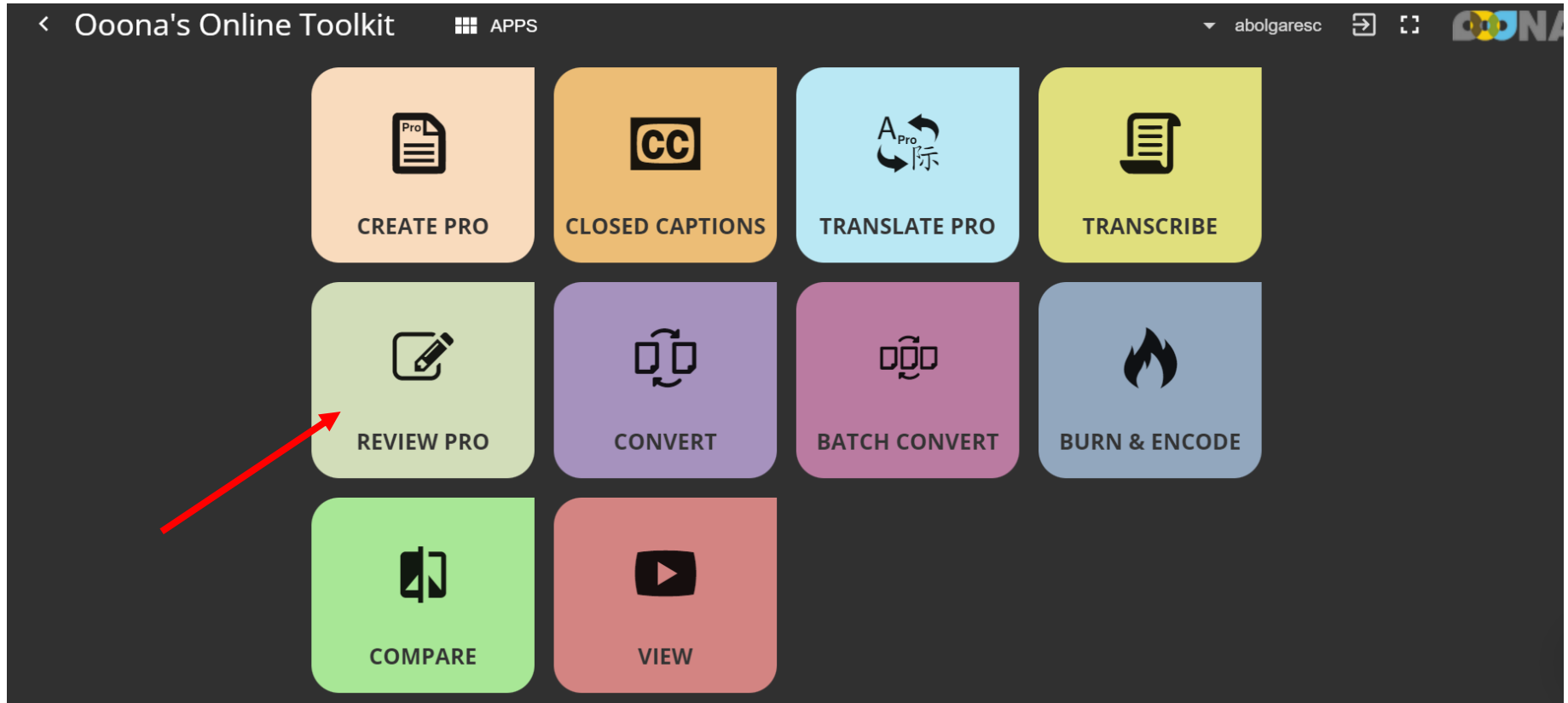
The screenshot displays a video analysis tool with a central grid of subtitle segments. A red arrow points to the first segment, which compares the English subtitle "At first it seemed just like the usual frustrations." with the Spanish subtitle "Al principio parecía como las frustraciones habituales." The interface also shows a video player on the left, a timeline at the bottom, and various control elements like a play button and error count.

Segment	English Subtitle	Spanish Subtitle	Timestamp	Speed
3	At first it seemed just like the usual frustrations.	Al principio parecía como las frustraciones habituales.	00:00:07:03 - 03:09	15.1 cps (51/50)
4	- OK. - Hey, hey...	- OK. - Oye, oye...	00:00:10:18 - 01:12	12.1 cps (18/22)
5	- I want to play a game. - It's a video, mum.	- Quiero jugar a un juego. - Es un video, mamá.	00:00:12:07 - 02:19	15.9 cps (44/41)
6	- Play my game! - Oh...Sorry.	- ¡Juega a mi juego! - Oh... lo siento.	00:00:15:03 - 01:06	22.5 cps (28/19)

Timeline segments (from left to right):

- #5 00:00:15:03-00:00:16:00: 15 - ¡Juega a mi juego! / 16 - Oh... lo siento.
- #7 00:00:16:11-00:00:19:13: Outline
- #8 00:00:19:15-00:00:20:00: 16 RUTA
- #9 00:00:21:02-00:00:22:00: 16 Ugggh...
- #10 00:00:22:19-00:00:23:00: 16 Oye...
- #11 00:00:23:22-00:00:28:15: Outline
- #12 00:00:28:15-00:00:29:00: 15 Espío con mi ojito algo comenzando por W. / 16 activate Windows

Study 2



Study 2

REVIEW MODE English - English, GBR Harry Potter: Boscastle

5 changes #27 1 remark 13 errors

Segment	Start	End	Duration	Text	Speed	Accuracy	Annotations
1	00:00:05:24	02:26	00:00:08:20	At the edge of the Atlantic, on the North Cornwall coast,	19.5 cps (56/43)	10/11	None
1	00:00:05:20	03:00	00:00:08:20	At the edge of the Atlantic, on the North Cornwall coast,	18.6 cps (56/4)	10/11	Different line break
2	00:00:09:01	03:05	00:00:12:06	Boscastle is one of the most magical places in the land.	17.3 cps (55/47)	10/11	None
2	00:00:09:00	03:06	00:00:12:06	Boscastle is one of the most magical places in the UK.	16.5 cps (53/4)	10/11	Line break
3	00:00:13:13	02:09	00:00:15:22	It even has its own museum of witchcraft.	17.8 cps (41/35)	11	None
3	00:00:13:13	02:09	00:00:15:22	It even has its own witchcraft museum.	16.5 cps (38/3)	11	None
4	00:00:15:24	03:18	00:00:19:12	This broomstick belonged to Olga Hunt of Manaton.	13.3 cps (48/5)	10/11	None

Timeline: 00:08:00 to 00:00:19:00

Video metadata generated
Project saved

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Study 1



Microsoft Stream

13. How was the TECHNICAL quality of the subtitle template produced by Microsoft Stream automatically?

[More Details](#)

5

Responses



4.40 Average Rating

"I've only post-edited one file and I had to edit all the timecodes. Don't really know if it was a general issue, but it happened with this one."

"I had to create the template/reset the timecodes myself, as the technical quality is... not very good. It sometimes breaks the subtitling conventions we were given such as the 2 frames minimum gaps. The positive sides are [sic], at least the synchronization is fine, and I didn't find any subtitles exceeding two lines."

"It had lots of repetition and the time breaks weren't clear."

"The line breaks were rarely accurate, though the spotting was quite good."

Study 2

15. How was the TECHNICAL quality of the subtitle template produced?

[More Details](#)



Apptek

7

Responses



2.71 Average Rating

"Many of the subtitles were **above reading speed, had bad segmentation and were also composed of three lines**. These issues make the post-editing task more difficult, as almost every subtitle needs to be re-segmentated, and re-writed [sic]."

"**Wrong cuts, too many lines...**"

"The technical problems had to be with **segmentation, readability, legibility...**"

"The **spotting was all wrong and the segmentation including line breaks was awful.**"

"The template was so **poorly synchronised and segmented** that it **made the post-editing task way more cumbersome than it should be.**"

"The TCR was SO **BADLY adjusted** it was a nightmare. There were subtitles that started five seconds before the character spoke. **Changing every single TCR was dreadful. It would have been better, easier and faster if I just did it from scratch.**"

"It's was **quite good eventually.**"



Microsoft Stream

15. How was the LINGUISTIC quality of the subtitle template produced by Microsoft Stream automatically?

[More Details](#)

5

Responses



6.20 Average Rating

"English transcription was very bad for my video, especially due to connection issues."

"Overall, this was quite good. Understandably, the specific vocab was often misheard and the software struggled a bit with some of the speakers' accents when English wasn't their first language. However, there were fairly few corrections to make."

"There are some misrecognised words, and it didn't follow the line-break rules, but the punctuation is roughly fine."

"Spanish transcriptions had a few mistakes. Sometimes the speech recognition was really useful but it ended up affecting the segmentation."

"Even if the sentence division was awful, generally, everything was correct apart from names, numbers..."

Study 2

17. How was the LINGUISTIC quality of the subtitle template?

[More Details](#)

7

Responses



3.00 Average Rating



Apptek

*"The linguistic part was awful... They don't get **the meaning of idiomatic expressions.**"*

*"**When it has a standard meaning it's OK**, but **when it's a joke or it has another sense or connotation... Not good at all.**"*

*"The machines are not already able to translate ideas, therefore there were loads of occasions in which **the sense was totally different from the original line.**"*

*"The problem with MT is that **it usually translates word by word, so phrases and puns were entirely lost in the process.** There were also several grammatical miscollocations [sic]. **Punctuation was pretty good.**"*

*"The linguistic mistakes had to do with syntax and lexis. **Sentences were often translated in a too literal way.** Double meanings, etc., were not portrayed. **In my opinion, this is not difficult to change, as most of the time it is easy to get what the machine tries to say** and it is just a matter of changing puns, etc."*

Study 2

13. How was the OVERALL TRANSLATION quality of the subtitle template produced?

[More Details](#)

7

Responses



3.71 Average Rating

*“The overall translation was pretty decent. For the most part, you could tell what the meaning was supposed to be, **although it was necessary to rephrase almost everything.**”*

*“**Very literal translations**, same syntactical structures, **the programs are not able to understand references and jokes...**”*

*It was decent but **it had a lot of errors including faux meanings, incorrect translation of puns and word plays...**”*

*“I think **the major problem was the segmentation and timing of the subtitles.** If this part had been done properly, then the post-editing task would be much easier, as the translator would only have to check the linguistic mistakes. [...]. In conclusion, post-editing the linguistic part of the subtitles can accelerate the process of translation. However, **the technical part is not so easy to change, and you begin to wonder whether or not it would be easier to just start from scratch.**”*

*“The translation of **the template was so literal it actually made it more difficult for me to create a good translation of my own**, because **the previous translation conditioned my thinking and my decision making.**”*

Study 1

17. When post-editing the templates, what were the most frequent errors?

[More Details](#)

■ Never/rarely
 ■ Occasionally
 ■ Sometimes
 ■ Rather usually
 ■ Systematically



Study 2

19. When post-editing the templates, what were the most frequent errors?

[More Details](#)

■ Never/rarely
 ■ Occasionally
 ■ Sometimes
 ■ Rather usually
 ■ Systematically

Wrong in/out timecodes

Inappropriate line breaks (subs split in lines)

Inappropriate subtitle duration (too long/short)

Inappropriate segmentation (dialogue split in subs)

Misrecognised words

Grammar errors (e.g. agreement)

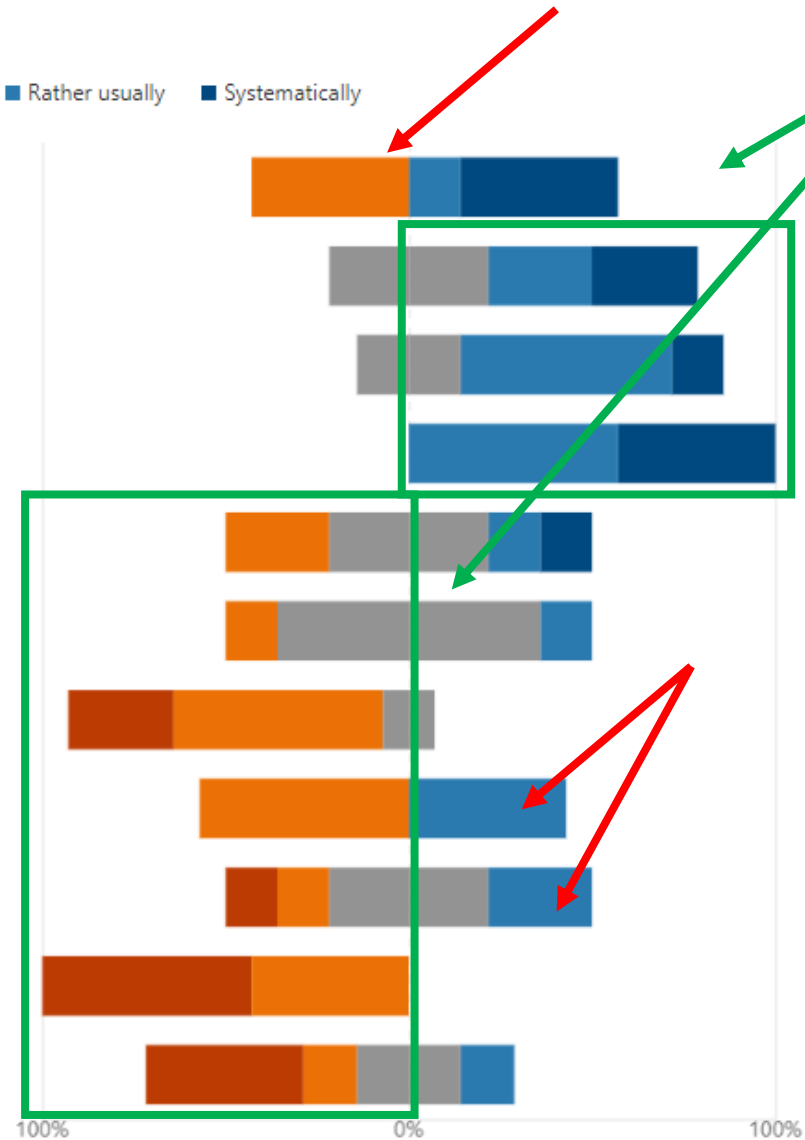
Omissions (missing factual information)

Punctuation errors

Capitalisation errors

Misspellings

Additions (factual information that was not present in the original video)

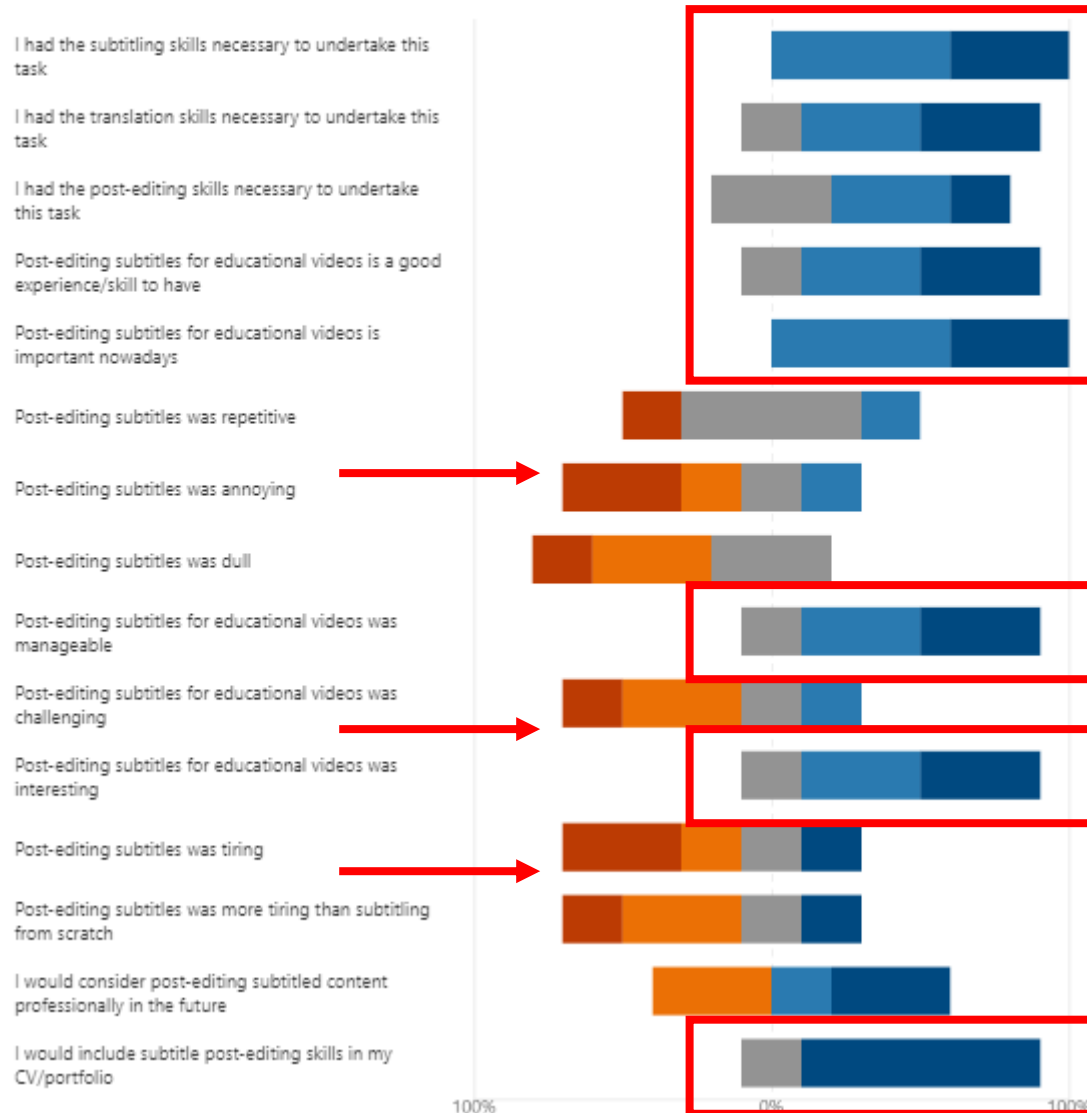


Study 1

20. Please state how much you agree with the below statements.

[More Details](#)

■ Completely disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Completely agree

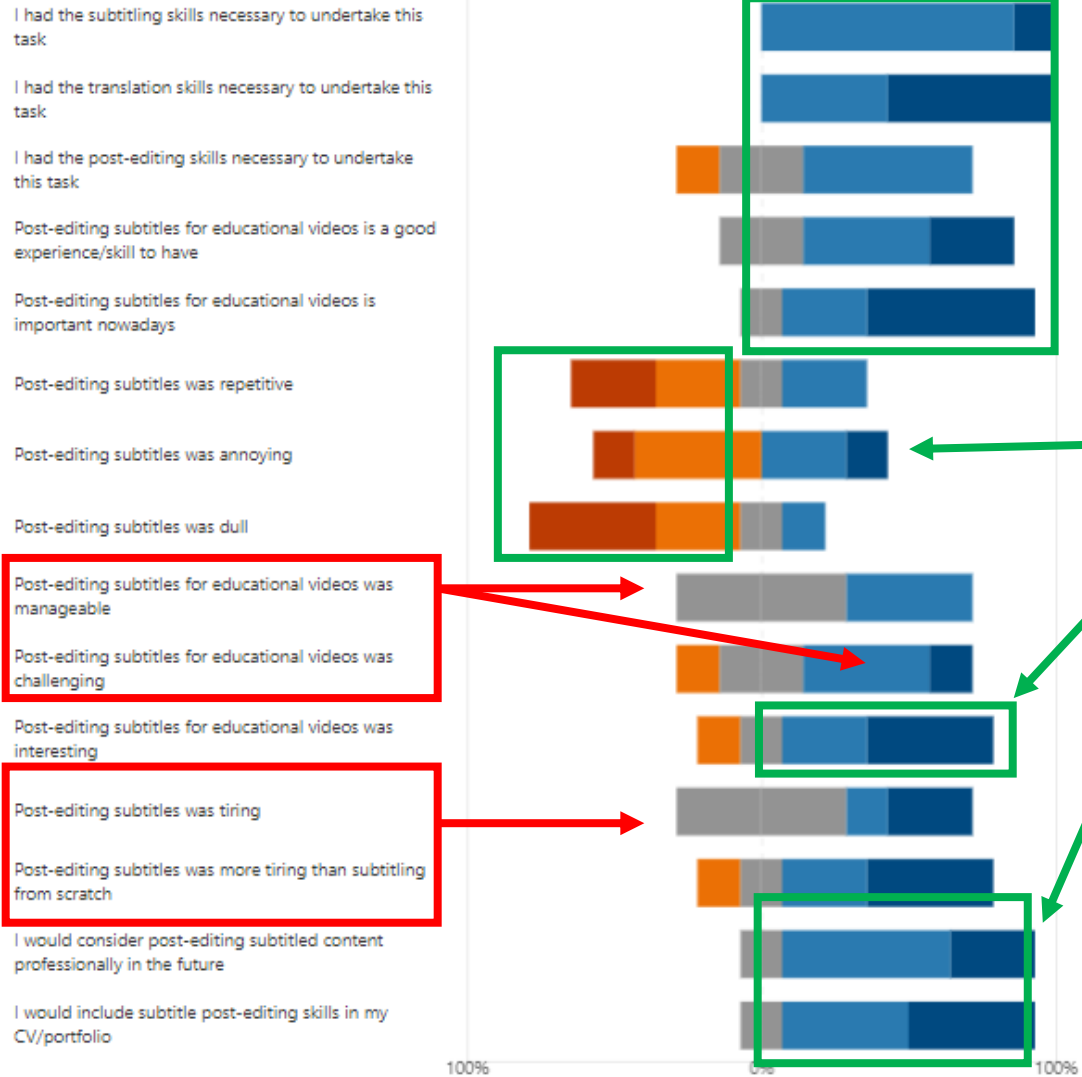


Study 2

22. Please state how much you agree with the below statements.

[More Details](#)

■ Completely disagree
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Neither agree nor disagree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Completely agree



Post-editing subtitles for educational videos was manageable
 Post-editing subtitles for educational videos was challenging

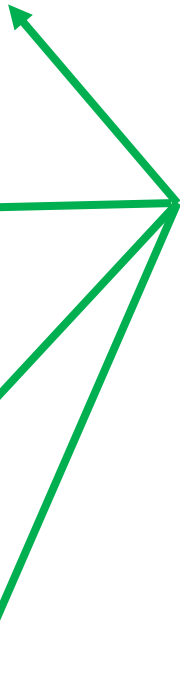
Post-editing subtitles was tiring
 Post-editing subtitles was more tiring than subtitling from scratch

I had the subtitling skills necessary to undertake this task
 I had the translation skills necessary to undertake this task
 I had the post-editing skills necessary to undertake this task
 Post-editing subtitles for educational videos is a good experience/skill to have
 Post-editing subtitles for educational videos is important nowadays

Post-editing subtitles was repetitive
 Post-editing subtitles was annoying
 Post-editing subtitles was dull

Post-editing subtitles for educational videos was interesting

I would consider post-editing subtitled content professionally in the future
 I would include subtitle post-editing skills in my CV/portfolio



100% 0% 100%

I think subtitle post-editing might be useful as a first approach to a subtitling software, as at first subtitling a video from scratch might be a bit overwhelming for a newbie. With post-editing, the student can familiarise with the software while undertaking a smaller task.

Seeing how we can improve what is done automatically by computer software has shown me that, while computers will never be able to do as good a job as we can (thankfully!), they can help us to work more effectively and efficiently. Post-editing is definitely easier than starting from scratch, but still allows you to employ some creativity and I found it to be an enjoyable, if at some times a little dull, task! I would definitely consider doing this as my future career as a translator because it is something that's quite easy to do, which would be a good way to get more work, while not overloading yourself if you have a lot of translation jobs.

I found a new aspect to develop myself because I had forgotten about it. Also, I have reconciled myself with subtitle and enjoyed it so much.

In the educational sense, I consider an useful way to begin with subtitles because you don't have the translation issues and you only have to think about time, segmentation and language, the most important points for beginners.

This is the first time for me to post-edit videos, and I really appreciate this experience. First of all, although I am very interested in AVT and media accessibility, I didn't know much about the ongoing research or didactics on relevant topics. This is an amazing opportunity, and I guess one of the merits of being a subtitler is that I can always get updated information/knowledge from the videos, especially educational videos. Secondly, I guess the post-editing skills will enhance my employability. This project is for publication, and we did follow some subtitling conventions. And to be honest, I have already included this experience in my CV. Thirdly, I was interested in translation project management last year. I should admit that I have learned a bit about the workflows of a project from our project manager. I think if I can work and/or do further research in translation studies, especially AVT, I will express the depth of my gratitude to this project and everyone who made it possible.

I think that subtitles PE is getting more popular and people tend to perform this type of task more often. I would say that it would be better to improve speech recognition since I can recall many issues related to this. I would say that if the audio quality had been better, this type of "mistakes" could be solved more easily or even wouldn't have happened at all. Using speech recognition for online speeches can be really tricky.

Although it seems unusual, various companies offer subtitles PE since it's cheaper and quicker than human translation. The difference is they use professional transcripts that will be modified by a professional translator.

Saying that subtitles PE does not enhance employability would be going against the trend. We can't deny reality and we have to adapt our skills to the new labour work, where human translation might move to the background.

Study 2

I think that when it is just a linguistic task then it could be much easier and quicker for translators.

It takes more time to post-edit than to simply subtitle a movie or series, so I would prefer to create subtitles myself, starting from zero.

I would do it if it's asked for. I found it interesting and I think professional translator should do it.

I feel nowadays post-edition [sic] is a really important and it is more needed everytime. Then it has been great to practice a little bit and I would definitely like to continue working on it.

I think post-editing can be a useful tool in translation but I think machine translation has a lot to learn before we can apply it effectively in AVT in general and in subtitling in particular.

I have a kind of love-hate relationship with subtitle post-editing but I think I will end up doing it professionally at some point because I think this is what the future of subtitling is.

Based on my limited experience, I believe MT could become advantageous for us translators in the future and more likely than not, post-editing will eventually constitute a core part of the translating process, so becoming acquainted with it is a necessity we cannot ignore.

Conclusions

*"I have a kind of **love-hate relationship with subtitle post-editing** but I think I will end up doing it professionally at some point because I think this is what the future of subtitling is." (Anonymous student.)*

- **Situating PE in the AVT industry:**

- Students are aware of industry trends and the ever-increasing presence of PE in the AVT sector (and more specifically in subtitling).
- Students are wary of using machine-translation engines and speech recognition software that can detract from the quality of their work and can have a negative impact on their creativity.

- **Evaluating PE quality in English-Spanish tasks:**

- English subtitle templates, automatically produced by cloud media-sharing platform such as Microsoft Stream, seemed satisfactory both in technical and linguistic terms.
- Spanish subtitle templates (translated by MT engines), especially those containing wrong timecodes, seemed less satisfactory and led to mistranslations and unnatural renderings.

- **Using PE in the classroom:**

- PE, when used appropriately, can be helpful for exercises that attach little importance to the quality of the translated output (e.g. technical checks, rough translation).
- PE allows the subtitler to focus on either the technical or the linguistics aspects of a subtitling task depending on the task.

Why should we teach subtitle PE?

Students who have been trained in PE should be in a better position to accept or refuse PE work and discern how good-quality templates look like as well as calculate the time and effort required for a certain PE project.

Thank You | Go raibh míle maith agaibh!

Questions?



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