

Do You Second That Emotion? An Empirical Study on the Emotional Impact of Subtitling on the Subtitler

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Abstract

This paper discusses the emotions experienced by subtitlers who subtitle sensitive audiovisual material. “Sensitive audiovisual material” refers to audiovisual texts which deal with controversial and emotive topics, such as abuse, war, torture. This topic has remained under-researched in subtitling, despite having been sporadically explored in other fields of translation (Hubscher-Davidson, 2017; Rojo and Ramos Caro, 2016; Tabakowska, 2016).

The data presented in this paper expand upon and complement the findings discussed in Perdikaki and Georgiou (2020) based on an online survey completed by 170 subtitlers. For the current paper, the data discussed come from an online focus group with three professional subtitlers and face-to-face interviews with one freelance subtitler as well as a team interview with two in-house quality control editors. Having confirmed in our previous study that many subtitlers are affected by the sensitive AV material they subtitle, this paper aims at a more nuanced exploration of how subtitlers regulate emotions elicited on-the-job, offering specific examples as well as emotion management techniques. Finally, the perspective of emotional responsiveness, depending on socio-economic contexts as well as the linguistic arsenal of the subtitler, is briefly discussed.

Key words: emotions, empirical study, sensitive audiovisual material, subtitlers, subtitling process.

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1. Introduction

The auspicious co-development of Translator Studies (Chesterman, 2009) and translation psychology (Bolaños-Medina, 2016, Bontempo & Napier, 2011) in the early 21st century has expanded the research agenda of Translation Studies. The focus on translators as practitioners has ushered in research possibilities which include exploring topics such as translator status (Dam & Zethsen, 2016), job satisfaction (Rodríguez-Castro, 2015), and the ergonomics of the translation profession (Ehrensberger-Dow & O'Brien, 2015).

The issue of translation and emotion, its regulation, the impact of the source text (ST) and the translation process on translators, have also received some attention recently (Hubscher-Davidson, 2017; Rojo & Ramos Caro, 2016). Accordingly, the emotional impact and on-the-job stress among professional interpreters have been frequently recorded (Hsieh & Nicodemus, 2015; Doherty, MacIntyre & Wyne, 2010; Tryuk, 2016). Yet despite Hubscher-Davidson's observation (2017) that translation often is or has the potential to become an emotion-eliciting and impactful event for the translator (pp. 119–120), there is very little research regarding the experiences of subtitlers and the impact of a potentially emotionally challenging subtitling process. The current study addresses this gap in literature by asking subtitlers to share their emotionally impactful experiences while subtitling.

For the exploration of emotional impact on subtitler performance, an online survey was designed and completed by 170 professional and amateur subtitlers, in which subtitlers were asked to report on whether emotions affect their translation process and if so, how. The findings of the survey, reported in Perdikaki and Georgiou (2020), demonstrated that subtitlers are frequently affected emotionally when they work with sensitive audiovisual material. The participants were free to include and comment on any other type of emotional experience during subtitling, as in fact many of them did, but the survey focused on capturing negative emotions elicited during the subtitling process. The most common emotions that the subtitlers reported experiencing were sadness, anger, and disgust, with the most emotionally challenging topic being that of abuse.

The survey findings offered a macroscopic view of the multifaceted issue of emotion and subtitling. Some of the specific examples shared by subtitlers in their free-text comments demonstrated the necessity for more nuanced data which would reveal the rationale and logic behind the responses of the affected subtitlers. Thus, the current paper is presented as a complementary, more in-depth study, exploring in greater detail the question of how subtitler performance may be affected and what kind of strategies subtitlers use to regulate on-the-job elicited emotions. For this paper, we have included qualitative data collected from one online focus group with three subtitlers, one face-to-face interview with two quality control (QC) editors and one face-to-face interview with a subtitler. The qualitative approach allowed the respondents to take their time while recounting their emotionally charged translation experiences and presented them with the opportunity to offer more insightful and detailed examples and explanations regarding their thoughts and processes. In retrospect, we realised how the online focus group offered the participants a welcome opportunity

to discuss with peers, offer and receive emotional support, which, we believe, acted in a therapeutic way. This effect was also observed by Abdallah (2012, p. 19).

The following section offers some key definitions of the terms used in this study. A brief overview of the relevant literature regarding emotions and translation practices is offered in section 3, with mentions of emotion-related accounts by translation practitioners. Section 4 presents the design and implementation of the methods. The findings are presented in section 5 and the subtitlers' examples of emotionally charged translation tasks and their coping strategies are discussed in section 6. Finally, section 7 concludes the paper by exploring potential avenues for future research in subtitling theory and practice.

2. Defining Key Concepts: Emotions, Subtitling Performance, and Sensitive Audiovisual (AV) Material

A crucial concept for the purposes of this study is that of emotions. The concept has caused much vexation to affective scientists and psychologists due to its recalcitrance to clear definitions and definitive measurements (Mauss & Robinson, 2010). While emotions have been defined as “internal mechanisms for a small set of reactions [...] that, once triggered, can be measured in a clear and objective fashion” (Feldman Barrett, 2006, p. 20), a more useful definition for the purposes of this study views emotions as “complex, hypothetical states that are **inferred** on the basis of various kinds of **evidence**, which may include subjective reports, display behavior, goal-directed behavior, physiological changes and peer reactions, among other things” (Plutchik, 1989, p. 5; emphasis added). The definition implies that even physiological evidence, such as electrodermal (i.e. sweat glands) or cardiovascular (i.e. blood circulatory system) responses, which may be linked post hoc to the participant experiencing specific emotions, are as much subject to interpretation as self-report data, of the kind that are used in this study.

Another significant definition concerns the conceptualisation of subtitling performance for this study. The concept of “performance” has been associated with assessments of translators' linguistic skills (Hatim & Mason, 2005; Orrego-Carmona, 2015; Bogucki, 2020). However, our study focuses on the subtitlers' own perception of their subtitling performance, which is assumed to refer to the subtitling process, during which the subtitler is watching, and processing both cognitively and emotionally, the audiovisual text, while producing the subtitles for it. For this reason, the data presented and discussed revolve around subtitlers' examples which showcase instances of affect during their subtitling process. The emphasis is on the subtitlers' own perception of how they perform while subtitling and their own responses to the stimuli presented by the AVT.

The final definition is that of “sensitive” text. This is a complex task due to the various definitions regarding the concept of sensitivity. The sensitivity of a text depends on the context in which the text is situated and on the context of the receptor (Simms, 1997). In addition, the perception of a text as

sensitive as well as the nature of its sensitivity are open to change depending on time and place (Simms, 1997, p. 5). Schäffner (1997) argues that any text causing irritation or confusion can be considered as sensitive. For the purposes of this study, sensitive audiovisual material is defined as an audiovisual text that includes and/or refers to controversial and emotive issues, which can elicit a strong emotional response in viewers, including the subtitler.

What follows is a foray into research on translation and emotion as well as brief accounts of translation practitioners on the topic of emotions. The aim is to observe how the topic of job-related emotions is presented and negotiated within the field of translation before moving on to the presentation and discussion of the qualitative data collected for this study.

3. Emotions and Performance in Translation Practices¹

The issue of emotional impact has been extensively covered in interpreting literature. In areas such as public service interpreting (PSI), healthcare interpreting and mental health interpreting, interpreters often deal with emotionally demanding situations and are affected emotionally when relaying traumatic experiences (Doherty et al., 2010; Hsieh & Nicodemus, 2015; Loutan, Farinelli & Pampallona, 1999; Valero-Garcés, 2005). Interestingly, Doherty et al. (2010) point out that the interpreter's own background plays an important role and, by extension, so does their resilience when performing under emotionally challenging circumstances. The emotional impact of the profession on the interpreter has even been the subject of fiction, as in the novel *The Mission Song* by John Le Carré (2006).

With respect to literary translators, Tabakowska (2016) highlights the multiple affective events that unfold in the process of translating literature. According to Koskinen (2012, p. 26), the affective response towards a given text may depend on textual stimuli, the reading context, one's personal and cultural experiences, and one's disposition and emotional state. Hubscher-Davidson's (2017) work on emotion and translation also focuses, mostly, on literary translators and emotional intelligence (EI). Hubscher-Davidson investigates "whether emotionally intelligent translators are more likely to demonstrate adaptive translating behaviours than are translators with a lower level of trait EI" (p. 26). Throughout the study, Hubscher-Davidson highlights the necessity for translators to modulate their affective responses to the ST before they reproduce an intended emotional effect in the receptor text (p. 121). This recommendation is also supported by the study of Rojo López and Ramos Caro (2016), who found that translators who were better at monitoring their affective responses handled their negative emotions more effectively.

¹ For purposes of brevity and functionality, we have opted for a briefer literature review on emotion and translation practices. For more detailed reviews of the current literature, see Hsieh & Nicodemus (2015), Hubscher-Davidson (2017), Walczyński (2019), Perdikaki and Georgiou (2020).

Regarding discussions of emotions in the accounts of literary translators, while they may go into the more nitty-gritty details of their metier by elaborating on their translation process and even recording their responses to the ST, the emotional engagement with the ST and its impact on the translator and the translator's performance, are not so frequently examined (Levine, 1991; Allen & Bernofsky, 2013).

The emotional challenges experienced by interpreters and literary translators are also likely to arise in the context of AVT. In cases of fictional AV material, subtitlers should, in theory, be better able to distance themselves from the action on screen, thus managing to control their emotions. However, audiovisual material, with its distinct multimodal nature, as a composite of image, dialogue, sound, and movement, often appeals to the viewers' emotions and empathy (Phillips, 2000). On a more practical note, the turnaround time for many AV texts is tight (Georgakopoulou, 2009), which results in less time to first watch and then translate the AV text. Consequently, subtitlers have less time to distance themselves from the first, potentially emotionally challenging, viewing of the material and opt for a more clinical approach, which would allow them to treat the AV text more objectively.

In their testimonials,² subtitlers often focus on the linguistic aspects of AVT, with humour and swearing explored frequently. Such are the cases of the interview of the English-language subtitler Victoria Ward (Crutchley & Ward, 2015), or the interview of AVT scholar and subtitler Jorge Díaz-Cintas with Max Deryagin (Deryagin & Díaz-Cintas, 2018, June 20th). Revealingly enough, only one example of the subtitler's emotive responses to sensitive audiovisual material can be found in Sinclair's interview (Cartland & Sinclair, 2017). When asked how she dealt with a film deemed frightening, disturbing, or offensive, and whether the focus was on the technicalities of the job rather than the subject matter, Sinclair answered the following:

Generally, you **just had to work through it**, though sometimes it did cause issues—often you would be working on films that came with **no guidance**, so it was easy to get **a nasty surprise**. Mostly, you were **just expected to be sensible** and **take plenty of breaks** and working in teams meant that **other people would sometimes help out** if something got **too much for you** or you had a **particular sensitivity** around something. [...] the torture scene in *Oldboy* **had to be done by someone else** [...] I think the worst I suffered was **cumulative fatigue**—I did one of the first films about Rwandan genocide then a movie about the Holocaust in quick succession, and that was **very upsetting** and **took a lot to shake off** (Cartland & Sinclair, 2017, emphasis added).

Sinclair's response reflects and neatly encapsulates many of the emotions and coping strategies the subtitlers shared with us via the interviews and the focus group discussed in this study. These range from broader institutional issues, such as the lack of a debriefing in the form of instructions or

² To the best of our knowledge, there is one subtitler's memoir, briefly mentioned in Fong and Au (2009, pp. 24–5). It is entitled *50 Years of Film Translation* (1985) and it is written by the Japanese subtitler and translator Shimizu Shunzi.

warnings regarding the topic of the material to be subtitled (“no guidance”), to pre-established norms within the field that demand subtitlers to demonstrate a certain type of attitude (“just had to work through it,” “just expected to be sensible”).

Sinclair’s statement also demonstrates the consequences of the lack of forewarning. More specifically, the subtitler can encounter “a nasty surprise” in the form of unexpectedly upsetting material, while a case of “cumulative fatigue” could ensue the fast pace of assignment and delivery of such emotive projects. Moreover, these negative feelings could be lasting and difficult to overcome (“very upsetting,” “took a lot to shake it off”). At the same time, the subtitler appears to develop certain coping mechanisms in the form of frequent breaks, consultation, and collaboration with other colleagues. Admittedly, Sinclair’s response indicates how inherent the issue of encountering controversial and emotive material is to AVT, since professionals, like herself, feel that dealing with sensitive material and having a blasé attitude towards it is expected of them.

This paper aims at foregrounding subtitlers’ experiences of working with sensitive AV material and uses self-reporting as its main method. As a result, this research review was complemented by mentions of the emotional aspect of the practices of translation professionals, as found in subtitler interviews. The pattern that emerges is one of relative homogeneity with respect to the issues discussed by these language practitioners: there is an emphasis on the textual handling of the ST, which highlights that, although the translator is given a platform to voice their thoughts and concerns, the norms of the profession continue to promulgate their invisibility as fully-fledged agents. Therefore, our study opens up the discussion to include the emotional aspect of translating by discussing subtitlers’ reports on how AV material affects them and whether they believe that their emotional response to the material may affect their subtitling performance.

In the following section, the data collected for this study are presented and followed by a discussion.

4. Methods: Design, Analysis, Implementation

The current paper presents the interview and focus group data collected as the second, complementary phase of a two-pronged approach, which included a survey for the initial phase (Perdikaki & Georgiou, 2020). The research questions explored were as follows:

- RQ1: Are subtitlers who work with sensitive material affected emotionally?
- RQ2: What (negative) emotions do subtitlers experience when working with sensitive material?
- RQ3: Is the subtitler’s performance affected by the emotional impact?

As the overall aim of the project was to capture subtitlers’ responses to the emotional impact of the audiovisual material they translate, we chose to initiate the project by conducting a survey for the purposes of a broad canvassing of the topic. The survey satisfactorily explored RQ1, with the findings demonstrating that the majority of subtitlers who participated in it were affected emotionally while

working with sensitive material. Equally, RQ2 was also partly answered by the survey responses and the free-text comments offered by the participants (Perdikaki & Georgiou, 2020). The qualitative data presented in the present paper shed more light on the types of emotions experienced by subtitlers while working with sensitive material (RQ2). At the same time, the data explore the self-reported emotional impact that handling sensitive material may have on subtitlers' performance (RQ3), thus justifying the complementarity of the methods selected.

It should be noted, as mentioned in our definition of performance for the current study, that the focus has been on how subtitlers experience on-the-job emotional impact and how they vocalise it. It only came to our attention during the writing-up phase that RQ3 should have been further modified and refined in order to reflect that distinction. Our aim at designing RQ3 was to have an open-ended question, considering that the word "performance" could potentially capture and reflect aspects of the subtitling process that go beyond the period when the subtitler is on the job. While this is an interesting topic to explore (with questions such as "How long do subtitlers feel the emotional impact initiated during the subtitling process?"), it is beyond the scope of the current paper. At the same time, the current phrasing of RQ3 may cause confusion due to the specific associations of "translator performance" in TS. Therefore, retrospectively adjusting RQ3, we would modify it to ask: How is the subtitling process affected by emotional impact?

The survey responses were complemented with information gained from in-depth face-to-face interviews with two in-house QC editors and one professional subtitler. An online focus group was also conducted, advancing further our understanding of the topic. All participants read the participant information sheet, signed consent forms before the focus group and the interviews, and were anonymised in the data processing.

The two face-to face interviews with the in-house QC editors took place in Athens, Greece. They were conducted in Greek and were later transcribed and translated into English. The interviews were semi-structured, with the interviewer asking a specific set of questions, though there was time for the participants to return to previous questions or speak on tangential topics. The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes and they took place in the editors' place of work. Both editors were interviewed at the same time, as the project manager decided that the concurrent interview was preferable for reasons of time management. The project manager was present during the interview, and this may have affected the editors' responses to some degree. In retrospect, the authors considered that the concurrent interview may have led the editors to draw support and encouragement from one another, and from the project manager, and may have affected them positively.

The face-to-face interview with the professional subtitler took place in London, UK, and was conducted in English. The interview took place in a public café and as such, the levels of noise impacted the quality of the transcription. The interview was also semi-structured as it was felt that, due to the subtitler's experience of more than 30 years, any information they wished to share, in

addition to the specific questions for which the interview was being conducted, would be valuable. The subtitler came prepared with examples and thoughts on the subject of emotional impact during the process of subtitling and was also asked the same set of questions as the QC editors.

The online focus group with three professional subtitlers took place via Google Hangouts. Both authors were present, and the discussion was semi-structured, using the same set of questions as for the interviews. Participants and interviewers alike discussed subjects tangentially connected to emotional impact, yet always relating to subtitling. The conversation was conducted in Greek, as it is the native tongue of the three subtitlers and the two authors, and it was later transcribed and translated into English. The data analysis was based on the English version. Two of the participants are freelance subtitlers and one is an in-house subtitler. Their subtitling experience varied between five and fifteen years. The focus group lasted over one hour with all three participants and two hours with two of the participants, as one of them had to leave earlier due to prior engagements. The authors and the remaining focus groups participants had been notified in advance that this would happen. All three participants completed the survey before the focus group.

Regarding the data analysis method, we opted for thematic analysis. The categories that were created were those of examples of negative subtitling experiences, which were further sub-divided by genre, types of emotion experienced, and types of response (psychosomatic or other). Coping mechanisms constitute one more category. Finally, positive responses to emotionally impactful material were one more category that emerged.

Finally, a note should be added regarding the transcription of the data from audio form. The authors strove to retain the orality of the discussions recorded and have, therefore, only made corrections, within brackets, only when necessary for the clarification of meaning. The use of punctuation has also been kept to a minimal. This is a conscious choice, and one recommended by other researchers in applied linguistics (Pavlenko, 2007), as the authors' aim is to represent the subtitlers' testimonies and capture the individuality of their voices as much as possible, despite the double layer of editing some of the material has undergone after being translated from Greek into English and transformed from oral into written text.

In the following sections the participants are notated as follows:

- Subtitlers FG1, FG2 and FG3 (online focus group),
- Subtitler I (face-to-face interview),
- QC editors QC1 and QC2.

The authors are presented by their initials (KP and NG).

5. Presentation of Data

In the collected data, the subtitlers' responses frequently came in the form of a specific example, which was then followed by the emotions experienced by the subtitler and their reaction to the sensitive material. This can be seen in the following examples, the first one from the online focus group (FG2):

FG2: I had a terrible time honestly I can't really do horror films and there was a scene that was very realistic and I because of my working schedule I had to work on this at dawn and the entire ambiance was very appropriate at that time to I mean I would stop, cry, then start again it was a very difficult situation I experienced.

NG: Was this because the images were very realistic?

FG2: Yes and I also have a specific issue with I have no problems if I see blood but if I see tears on skin or disembowelments and all that was shown I find it difficult, I can't it makes me sick it honestly makes me feel sick and I had a very, and the problem is that it wasn't just one image which I could skip forward because there would only be screaming they were also talking at the same time [laughs] and I had to make subtitles and watch this thing frame by frame.

A similar example was mentioned in the face-to-face interview, where the subtitler (I) also discloses their coping mechanism for dealing with such material:

Another thing that for me would be sensitive is horror films I don't like watching them and my way of coping before because the picture was quite thick was to hide with a piece of A4 the screen [...] I can be quite scared and I don't like that and I don't like watching horror so I'd prefer not to do it.

Apart from disliking a genre, the participants mentioned potential scenes within otherwise largely innocuous material. As the focus group participant (FG1) shares,

I had one recently in which someone was being tortured, at some point I had my suspicions [...] I didn't press play on the video but I went forward a few frames at a time manually skipping a few frames just to see what it was happening and I only looked at the bits where there was dialogue [...] I heard a blow just one blow it wasn't much but I got this feeling here in my diaphragm [...] my reaction was ah! I can't deal with this I was suffocating and then I stayed in that state for a couple of days because of it so it wasn't that the entire film was like that but it had such scenes.

Specific scenes that may affect the subtitler were also the examples provided by the second in-house QC editor (QC2):

That was the only thing that affected me because it was about animals [...] I've seen so many murders and so many horror movies and such that I understand that it is fiction. I can make this distinction in my head. But when I watch the animals in a documentary, I know that he [the hunter] has killed it and the idiot is smiling. And he is happy and takes photos with a dead animal. Those scenes were really tough.

Interestingly, the same participant (QC2) claims being very little affected by the material they translate, as can be seen from the below comment:

I am not that affected. I get flashbacks afterwards usually but because I'm very much into horror stories and I read that stuff a lot and watch it too, I can't say I'm that affected. The only thing that could affect me is [watching] rape. But I don't remember having come across it.

Documentaries, likely due to their stronger link to reality than most other types of audiovisual text, seem to be a particular source of emotional controversy and potential disturbances for subtitlers. As QC2 observes, horror stories are fictional and therefore it becomes slightly easier for the subtitler to distance themselves from the material.

Apart from QC2's comment regarding the hunting documentaries, almost every other participant mentioned an example that affected them or a colleague. Our third focus group participant (FG3), reveals a situation experienced by their in-house colleague:

We had a lot of material about the Nazis [...] and that was very difficult. A colleague started working on that [...] and she couldn't handle it and she ended up switching with someone else halfway through the film.

The QC editor (QC1), who along with their colleague (QC2) sits on the farther side on the spectrum of experiencing emotional impact when working with sensitive AV material, remembers how the TV prison documentary *Lockup* impacted them emotionally:

That one affected me, it made me feel low [...] I would wake up in the morning and think "Oh no", I felt weighted down [...] I would go to my colleague and ask "That again? How many have we got left?", I didn't like, it definitely affected me, as much as I try to turn a blind eye.

The freelance subtitler interviewed (I) had a similar example:

There was a documentary called the *Thirteenth* [...] which is an Amendment in American Law and it's about incarceration in prisons in America and I found that quite disturbing [...] you know you can get really angry.

Some of the "tricks" subtitlers use to minimise the impact of the material are neatly summarised by one of the focus group participants (FG1). The existence of such techniques problematises notions of emotional detachment and impartiality during the subtitling process:

Little tricks we do, like minimising the screen, lowering the volume, or even switching the sound off completely or covering the screen [...] also going forward frame by frame.

Finally, an aspect of subtitler professionalism is the fact that they experience a heightened responsibility to render the messages conveyed in AV texts or to represent otherwise silenced or marginalised voices:

NG: Do you think this sensitive material, handling it, do you think it affects how you translate, your process in any way?

I: Probably, I think, if you're emotionally attached to a job, which with some jobs you are, you tend to do a better job I think

KP: So, you're saying that the effect can be beneficial?

I: Not necessarily beneficial but mostly. I did before Christmas a series of documentaries ten episodes about the WWII. It wasn't specifically difficult but it was quite emotional. At the same time this was history and it was very well done and I felt I had to give everything that I have and make this really good, create the same experience for the viewers, I think that makes work a bit harder. I also I did a QC of [...] this one show of this Australian comedian and it was going to be their last show but you don't know that when you start watching it [...] it became so emotional about her struggle in Australia, it's difficult just thinking about it and it was just so good and it was just get the tissue box out and you feel that you're connecting with a person, that there's something there, you feel you have to give her the same voice as she's got in English, it has to come out in Norwegian as well cos it was so important to her.

As may be seen from the above extract, given the mediating duties inherent in the profession, subtitlers have a sense of responsibility for the text they are translating and the target audience that will watch that audiovisual text, often despite the emotional impact they experience as viewers and translators.

These responses are further discussed in the following section.

6. Discussion

The responses to the interviews and the focus group discussion have shed considerable light on the research questions of the project. Firstly, in terms of the negative emotions subtitlers may experience, the reactions mentioned here echo the survey findings (Perdikaki & Georgiou, 2020), in which 113 out of 170 participants said they have experienced sadness while translating. Similarly, 85 participants reported to have experienced anger and 39 respondents reported fear.

Secondly, on the matter of whether subtitlers who work with sensitive audiovisual material are affected, the data collected, and in particular the interview conducted with the two in-house QC editors, allowed for exploring further a seemingly controversial image coming out of our survey data. In the survey responses, 133 participants answered that they did not think that their emotions affect their subtitling performance. Out of these participants, however, 72 described instances illustrating intense emotional impact, and, among those, 24 participants reported cases where their performance was shown to be affected (see Perdikaki and Georgiou, 2020).

The strongest evidence that has emerged from the current study highlights the fact that the subtitling process of most of the participants, (interchangeably termed as "performance," as explained in section 2), was indeed affected by the sensitive audiovisual material they translated. This is illustrated by examples provided by five of the six participants (QC1, I, FG1, FG2 and FG3), as reported in section

5. Specifically, these accounts include the following links between sensitive material and performance:

- an emotionally affected state spanning several days (FG1, QC1),
- severe distress during the subtitling task and interruptions to the subtitling process in an effort to regulate emotions (FG2),
- a complete halt in the subtitling process because of emotional overload and re-assignment of the audiovisual material to a colleague (FG3),
- a psychosomatic reaction to the material, i.e., crying (I, FG2),
- and, finally, a feeling of discomfort caused by the prospect of subtitling material that will elicit a similar emotional response and, by extension, unwillingness to continue working on said material (QC1, I).

Even in cases where the subtitler manages to produce subtitles of their usual quality, the techniques used to contain the emotional impact of the AV material necessarily come with their own set of consequences. The multimodality of AV texts necessitates the merging of images, sounds, dialogue and narration to create a uniform product in which content and form are as compact and intertwined as, one could argue, in a poem. This relation between the unit and the whole suggests that loss (or distortion) of image and/or sound may falsify meanings, obscure associations or, at the very least, slow down comprehension for the subtitler. This would in turn mean that the process is almost certainly prolonged, especially in cases where the emotionally affected subtitler may have to take breaks due to psychosomatic reactions to the material, as can be seen in FG2's first comment.

The more nuanced picture that emerges from the examination of the subtitlers' responses suggests that there are degrees of affect, of which the impact depends on a variety of factors. There is an indication that the number of years of subtitling, though not entirely irrelevant, seems to weigh less than subtitler personalities and individual preferences when it comes to AV material. This is a finding also encountered in research with interpreters and emotional impact (Doherty et al., 2010). Moreover, Hubscher-Davidson (2017, p. 199), echoing McCartney (2016), highlights the significance of individual dispositions when she recommends the use of personality trait tests and trait EI in conjunction with surveys or interviews with translators. The combined data from the survey, the interviews, and the focus group suggest that specialised training in translation and/or subtitling does not seem to influence considerably who is more affected by sensitive AV material. The level of the subtitler's education does not seem to be a substantial factor either, as all six participants are educated to a BA level and above, and they have all undergone varied training in translation and/or subtitling. This finding contrasts Hubscher-Davidson's observations (2017, p. 197) regarding the beneficial outcomes of higher education for emotional regulation in translators.

Beneficial outcomes seem to be connected to working in-house, as both the QC editors (QC1 and QC2), who work in-house, and the in-house subtitler (FG3) reported that some on-the-job pressures they experienced were alleviated as the need for support was immediately addressed by a colleague. The beneficial potential of collegiality is reflected in Ehrensberger-Dow et al. (2016), who state that

the in-house translators in their study tended to have more frequent social contacts with colleagues on the job. On their end, Courtney and Phelan (2019) observe that “freelance translation is generally an unpredictable profession” (p. 105). The findings of Kuo’s survey (2015), regarding subtitler working conditions, rates, and visibility, add to this sense of professional precarity, as the majority of their survey’s 429 participants tend to work on a freelance basis. Indeed, although the topic was not part of the project’s research agenda, the precarious nature of freelance subtitling was touched upon in both the focus group discussion and the face-to-face interviews.

Out of the 170 respondents who participated in our survey, 144 are freelance subtitlers (84%), 14 work in-house (8%) and 9 work in both capacities (8%).³ Both the QC editors (QC1 and QC2), who work in-house, and the in-house subtitler (FG3) who participated in the focus group reported fewer examples of emotional impact and all three respondents seemed to have a more positive outlook towards handling sensitive audiovisual material and regulating the triggered emotions. Accordingly, all three in-house respondents mentioned either seeking the immediate support of colleagues by sharing any negative emotions with them or by deferring their work to them. This strategy is part of what Hubscher-Davidson (2017) calls the “situation modification” approach (p 208), where the translator can adjust their work situation in order to reduce the negative emotional impact (e.g. by discussing with fellow translators).

Two more points need to be raised regarding the potential emotional impact on subtitlers. Firstly, the subtitler’s emotional responsiveness may very likely depend on their socio-cultural context, as it has been noted for translators by Hubscher-Davidson (2017, p. 121). Pavlenko (2008) observes that “speakers of different languages have somewhat different vantage points from which [they] evaluate and interpret their own and others’ emotional experiences” (p. 150). These observations are in line with an approach that gained considerable traction in the 1980s and 1990s in the “anthropology of emotion” (Beatty, 2005, p. 17). The approach suggests that emotions are culturally situated rather than shared human universals. This approach emphasises cultural diversity and its role in how humans perceive, internalise, and express emotions. More recent studies in experimental psychology also confirm that “language is an ‘ingredient’ in the creation of emotional perceptions and experiences” (Lindquist, 2017, p. 135).

Regarding the participants of this study, the three subtitlers of the focus group as well as the two QC editors have Greek as their L1, whereas the subtitler we interviewed (I) has Norwegian. All six participants translate or edit material from English, i.e., their L2 into their respective L1s. Pavlenko (2008) observes that “L2 emotion words are sometimes perceived by L1 users as disembodied or even ‘fake’” (p. 157). However, the multimodal nature of audiovisual material often relegates emotion words to the background, while other elements of the audiovisual text are foregrounded for the subtitler-as-viewer. In the case of the QC editor (QC2), it would seem that such differentiation

³ Pym, Grin, Sfreddo, & Chan note that “the average proportion of freelancers in Europe has been estimated at around 78%, leaving the proportion of in-house translators at 22%” (2012, pp. 88–89).

between the real and the fictional did occur, although it was more related to the editor's familiarity with the material, as QC2 explained, rather than the fact that the source text was viewed in the editor's L2 (English). This is a very interesting indication that would deserve further exploration in future studies.

The second point that requires attention is the fact that the field's notions of professionalism appear to play an important role in subtitlers' "emotional awareness" (Lane, 2000) and the extent to which subtitlers are expected to internalise (negative) job-related emotions (Pym, Grin, Sfreddo, & Chan, 2012; Dam & Zethsen, 2016). The field's current notion of professionalism often precludes the manifestation of on-the-job negative emotions and, we suspect, this notion also relates to the subtitlers' tendency to downplay emotions evoked during the subtitling process. This issue came up in all three interactions with the subtitlers and was particularly apparent in the subtitlers' reporting of such emotions during the interviews.

The findings suggest that the six participants are aware that "all acts of translation hold the possibility for the translator to be affected in ways he or she [*sic*] did not anticipate" (Maier, 2007, p. 264). The various coping mechanisms that the subtitlers have developed over their careers, summarised in the previous section, and the ready-made solutions they offered for potentially emotionally challenging situations suggest an arsenal of strategies which may be used as an emotional shield. Even the least emotionally affected participant (QC2) emphasised their reliance on a network of friends and peers as a technique to diffuse tension and alleviate work-related stress.

The subtitlers appear to have incorporated these coping strategies into their subtitling process almost unconsciously, while continuing their work routine. And while many of them offered testimonials of emotional turmoil, no one expressed dissatisfaction with their role as language mediators. All six subtitlers do in fact continue with their work not only out of necessity but because they derive satisfaction from it. This agrees with Dam and Zethsen's (2016) findings, who also report on the translators' overall job satisfaction, despite the often-sub-standard working conditions encountered.

From the above follows that subtitlers often find themselves in a constant struggle to devise solutions which assuage the pressures experienced while translating sensitive AV material, all the while without jeopardising the quality of their subtitles. This is a feat of professionalism that should be cherished and supported.

7. Concluding Thoughts and Further Research

In summary, the findings of this study add depth and nuance to the survey findings (Perdikaki & Georgiou, 2020), which demonstrated that subtitlers are frequently affected emotionally when translating sensitive audiovisual material. Hansen (2005) observes that "when applied to the situation of a translation process [...] a myriad of impulses in the form of images, experiences,

associations and emotions immediately and inevitably emerge and influence the process” (p. 516). This is also the case with the subtitlers who participated in this study.

Within the sample of participants in the study, no direct correlation could be traced between their level of education or number of years of experience and their (un)successful handling of sensitive AV texts. Instead, the in-house subtitlers appear to have more emotional resilience and/or better emotion regulation than their freelance counterparts. This may be because in-house subtitlers have steady networks of colleagues and peers ready to offer emotional support, whereas freelancers do not always have this opportunity. This last point leads very neatly to our contention that relevant training practices, either within institutionalised contexts or in professional environments, could prove immensely beneficial for subtitlers’ emotional awareness and the application of emotion regulation techniques. This training would ideally include the common coping mechanisms circulated among translation professionals mentioned above, also used as a temporary fix, in conjunction with longer-term solutions for emotion regulation.

Regarding further research, one very interesting avenue could explore the connection between job satisfaction and emotion regulation in subtitlers. Such research could also be seen in conjunction to potential differences in the mental and emotional health between in-house subtitlers and freelancers. An equally intriguing topic would involve further research into cultural diversity and its role in the internalisation and expression of emotions for subtitlers with different L1s.

Given that emotional impact can either hamper or improve subtitling performance, it seems necessary that subtitlers learn how to process and cope with the emotions caused so that they can control any potential emotional impact. Allowing space for the issue of emotions to be discussed requires expanding the existing discourse within the discipline. One way of achieving this could be by removing the stigma of unprofessionalism which often rears its unattractive head when practitioners admit to job-related vulnerability or feelings of inadequacy. A better understanding of the profession as it is currently experienced is very likely to lead to more insightful support for translation practitioners, better training techniques, and more sophisticated instructions for future translators. Disassociating emotional responses to given translation situations from issues of status and professionalism is key for a more inclusive, supportive, and rewarding professional practice for all translation professionals.

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