Audiovisual Translation in the Age of Netflix: How "Netflixication" Has Impacted Subtitling Practices

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Abstract

This paper examines Netflix's most prominent transnational strategies and their impact on the AVT sector in general, and the work of subtitlers in particular. After a brief historical overview of the milestones that have led Netflix to become the most influential streaming platform, this paper explains how the company's main strategies and practices, namely its release model and its self-produced originals, may impact the work of AV practitioners and the quality of the subtitles. It then explores the apparent paradox pertaining to Netflix's localization practices, which seemingly serve its purpose of local integration – by allowing viewers to watch audiovisual content subtitled in their own language – while also conflicting with established national subtitling practices. More specifically, the discussion focuses on using the same template as a starting point to produce subtitles in multiple languages and Netflix Timed Text Style Guides.

Key words: Netflix, subtitling practices, transnational strategies, localization, standardization.

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, over-the-top (OTT) services like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu have played a significant role in reshaping the global media landscape by both influencing viewers' watching habits and prompting new production and distribution models for an ever-increasing number of films and TV shows. Among these platforms, Netflix is often presented as a trailblazing force: some authors talk about the "Netflix effect" (e.g., Matrix, 2014; McDonald & Smith-Rowsey, 2016), "Netflixication" (Nikolić & Bywood, 2021, p. 60), and the "Netflix era" (Orrego-Carmona, 2018, p. 328). Scholars such as Jenner (2018, p. 4) and Nikolić and Bywood (2021, pp. 60–61) even describe its approach as a pioneering model whose strategies have, to varying degrees, been adopted by other platforms.

This image of Netflix as a revolutionary force in television suits the company's own narrative, as it aims "to differentiate itself from its linear competitors" (Wayne, 2022, p. 194). However, without denying the influence of Netflix, which remains the global leader in the market of OTT services, other scholars (e.g., Lotz, 2007; Burroughs, 2018; Lobato, 2019) situate the company's expansion within the broader ecosystem of telecommunications and emphasize the similarities between its strategies and those of traditional networks. In fact, Netflix's tagline – "the world's leading Internet television network" – suggests that the streaming platform seeks the best of both worlds, presenting itself as a disruptor keen on challenging broadcasting conventions while simultaneously relying on some of linear television's longstanding models. As Burroughs (2018) observes, "the term 'Internet television' points to differing affordances and emergent industry logics – it is all television, but Netflix and streaming services want to be *your* television" (p. 3). Such positioning illustrates how Netflix acts both as a novel digital service and as a provider of familiar television-like experiences.

To gain and secure its leading position in the market, Netflix has adopted a user-centric approach (Osur, 2016) that relies on various strategies. By making bulk releases part of its publication model, for example, the platform has encouraged viewers to binge-watch content to the point that this consumption, i.e., binge-watching, is now commonly seen as a characteristic of the Netflix era (Orrego-Carmona, 2018, p. 328). This user-centric approach characterizes Netflix's "transnational" strategy. To paraphrase Jenner (2018, p. 187) and Ward (2016, p. 220), Netflix is a transnational actor in the sense that it is a US company that has developed strategies to also integrate into existing local television practices. Such global-local integration would not be possible without translation, which, as Jenner (2018) notes, has been central to Netflix's global expansion.

Arguably, this user-centric approach has contributed to Netflix being considered "the most important player in the industry" by academics and professionals in the AVT field alike. Consequently, some of its localization strategies and practices are "perceived to have a significant impact on the rest of the sector" (Nikolić & Bywood, 2021, pp. 60–61). This paper examines the various roles that Netflix takes on when it comes to language localization, especially subtitling, beginning with the repercussions of its release model and its high number of self-produced originals on the work of AV translators. After outlining the milestones that have led Netflix to become the streaming giant it is today, this paper

examines how the platform's tight turnaround requirements may impact subtitling workflows and compromise the quality of subtitles.

Drawing on anecdotal accounts, this paper then highlights the inconsistency characterizing some of Netflix's localization practices. It explains the apparent paradox pertaining to these practices, which seemingly serve Netflix's purpose of local integration by allowing viewers to watch audiovisual content in their own language, while also being at odds with national subtitling norms. Specifically, it focuses on the use of the same template as a starting point to produce subtitles in multiple languages and Netflix Timed Text Style Guides. These practices epitomize the tension between "national norms based on description and global norms based on prescription" (Pedersen, 2020, p. 430). Finally, while this paper primarily aims to provide a comprehensive overview of Netflix's effects on subtitling practices, it also outlines potential avenues for future research.

1. From DVDs to Global Streaming: The Evolution of Netflix's Business Model and International Expansion

Founded by Reed Hastings and Mark Randolph in 1997, Netflix was originally launched in the United States as a DVD-by-mail rental service in 1998 (Osur, 2016). It quickly adopted a monthly subscription model that allowed US customers to use the Internet to rent DVDs, which were delivered to their door together with prepaid return envelopes (Lehr et al., 2019, p. 14). Although its success was initially limited, the enterprise gradually attracted more clients and laid the groundwork for the streaming service that Netflix provides today. Notably, the DVD-by-mail rental service remained available only domestically and was never expanded overseas. However, this early experience taught Netflix's founders the importance of offering both a large video collection available online (Finn, 2017, p. 88) and a highly personalized and easy-to-use interface (Osur, 2016, pp. 21–22).

The company applied the same principles when it launched its online streaming service "as an add-on for its mail-order customers in 2007" (Jenner, 2021, p. 12). In those early days, Netflix executives quickly recognized emerging viewing preferences. More importantly, although the company was still operating exclusively in the United States at the time, its executives took an interest in the consumption habits of transnational viewers. While traditional broadcasters developed catch-up services to counter illegal streaming platforms, which allowed online viewers to bypass delayed international releases (Jenner, 2018, p. 225), Netflix recognized that global audiences wanted to watch nationally produced or broadcast content from anywhere in the world without long waits. It was in response to viewers' desire for immediacy that Netflix allowed its subscribers to "simultaneously access an entire season of [its own productions] across borders and time zones [on the same day]" (Bury, 2021, p. 42).

This early interest in transnational audiences and the service's success at home eventually led to the platform's official launch overseas. Netflix entered the Canadian market in 2010, expanded into Latin America in 2011, and reached Europe in 2012 (Lobato, 2019, p. 2). About fifteen years later, by the

fourth quarter of 2024[1], Netflix boasted more than 300 million paid members in 190 countries[2], making it the largest OTT streaming platform in the world. These figures place it ahead of Amazon Prime Video and Disney+, which had about 200 million[3] and 125 million[4] subscribers, respectively, at the end of 2024. To cater to its global audiences, the company now offers content in 30 original languages – Arabic, Bulgarian, Danish, Dutch, English, Filipino, Finnish, Flemish, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Malay, Malayalam, Mandarin, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Spanish, Swedish, Tamil, Telugu, Thai, Turkish, and Vietnamese. It also subtitles and dubs its originals into up to 37 and 34 languages, respectively (Neira et al., 2023, p. 5).

Alongside its international expansion, Netflix began producing originals in 2013 to curb licensing costs and "decrease dependency on international rights holders of content" (Jenner, 2018, p. 193). Self-produced originals, such as House of Cards and Orange Is the New Black, enable the platform to maintain a broad catalog while relying less on externally produced content (Jenner, 2018, p. 2; Kim, 2022, p. 406). Since then, Netflix has (co-)produced or acquired exclusive rights to content of a vast array of genres, from drama and its myriad of subgenres (e.g., 13 Reasons Why, The Lincoln Lawyer, The Night Agent, Ginny & Georgia, Stranger Things, Virgin River, Bridgerton) to comedy (e.g., Emily in Paris), documentary/docuseries (e.g., The Menendez Brothers), reality (e.g., Love on the Spectrum, Owning Manhattan), and anime (e.g., Seis Manos, Blood of Zeus).

Moreover, this shift towards self-produced originals later supported Netflix's local strategies, which were designed to offer nationally produced films and shows reflecting specific cultural expectations, while allowing the platform to market itself internationally (Jenner, 2018, p. 193). Thanks to this transnational focus, non-English productions such as Lupin (France), Dark (Germany), Who Killed Sara? (Mexico), Squid Game (Korea), Cable Girls (Spain), Elite (Spain), and Troll (Norway) have become some of the platform's most-watched titles, performing well beyond the borders of their home territories.

2. The Influence of Netflix's Transnational Strategies on the AVT Sector

The user-centric approach of Netflix's overall business model also characterizes the company's "transnational" strategies. The platform collects data about its global audiences' tastes and viewing habits using algorithms and makes strategic decisions about original programming, licensing, and marketing accordingly (Lobato, 2019, p. 14). However, before examining the particulars of these

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[1] https://www.statista.com/statistics/250934/quarterly-number-of-netflix-streaming-subscribers-worldwide/, accessed 2025, April 4.

[2] https://ir.netflix.net/ir-overview/profile/default.aspx#:~:text=Company%20Profile,variety%20of%20genres%20and%20languages, accessed 2023, October 27.

[3] https://flixpatrol.com/streaming-services/subscribers/, accessed 2025, April 4.

[4] https://www.statista.com/statistics/1095372/disney-plus-number-of-subscribers-us/, accessed 2025, April 4.

strategies, it is worth clarifying what is meant by "transnational," not only because this notion remains "elusive" (Chalaby, 2022, p. 224) but also because of the hybrid nature of Netflix. Lobato (2019) points out a lack of terminology in media theory to adequately describe "the geographical configurations characteristic of internet-distributed television" (p. 67) and highlights that Netflix can, in turn, be described as global/international, transnational, or national.

According to Iwabuchi (2002), compared to international actors, transnational ones are not "confined to the nation-state or to nationally institutionalized organizations" (p. 16). This applies well to Netflix, whose operations – from local production crews to online translation networks and region-specific marketing teams – involve numerous stakeholders across various national contexts who collaborate within larger, fluid networks. However, local context matters as well to transnational actors. Iwabuchi (2002) argues that "Transnational cultural flows neither fully displace nationally delineated boundaries, thoughts, and feelings, nor do they underestimate the salience of the nation-state in the process of globalization" (p. 17). Following Jenner (2018), Netflix is a transnational company because:

> While [it] is an American company, it is also a global actor that operates under different conditions and with different content in each national context it enters. Furthermore, media practices will differ from country to country. We cannot assume the United States is a centre for Netflix as [a] cultural object. One of Netflix's central markers is that it is decentred, [taking] television away from its national context [and appealing] to global audiences rather than national ones. Yet, at the same time, it also attempts to integrate itself into national television landscapes, offering indigenous content and producing Spanish, Japanese, or French, in-house content. Thus, Netflix integrates into national media practices while also acting as ([an] American) global actor. (p. 187)

In other words, Netflix acts as a transnational player insofar as it is a US company that has developed strategies to assimilate and integrate into existing local television ecosystems (Ward, 2016, p. 220). As Lobato notes (2019, p. 111), such assimilation is crucial for any national broadcaster seeking to appeal to global audiences. He (2019) also observes that negotiating cultural differences is as crucial as producing and distributing quality content and that "[w]hile Netflix initially struggled with this hard truth, it has fully absorbed this lesson over the course of its internationalization" (p. 114). Netflix's position as a transnational actor may therefore explain why some of its strategies, especially regarding AVT, seem inconsistent. The company has often oscillated, and in some respects still does, between the temptation to standardize its processes and the necessity to tailor its strategies and programming to the expectations of its worldwide audiences.

Netflix's local integration would not be feasible without translation. As Jenner (2018) points out, "translation is a central strategy that allows for the easy transport of cultural artefacts across borders and of the domestication of texts" (p. 232). For instance, in her case study of Netflix's launch in Mexico, Cornelio-Marí (2017) posits that translation was the obvious "first step of Netflix's adaptation process in Mexico" (p. 276). Likewise, the fact that "Netflix added a wide range of subtitles and dubbing options throughout 2017 (…) when it had already expanded into most countries in the

world" (Jenner, 2018, pp. 231–232) illustrates how translation has remained central to the company's strategy of retaining and further expanding its transnational audiences.

Even so, the AVT sector is not immune to Netflix's objectives of standardization and cost reduction. The launch of Hermes, a platform for "registration, testing and accreditation of translators", in 2017, was another attempt to "engineer efficiency [and standardization] into the 'cultural' business of translation" (Lobato, 2019, p. 121). Although Hermes (closed in 2018) was praised for offering translators a more direct route to Netflix projects, it also sparked criticism for prioritizing cost-effectiveness and rigid standardization over nuanced local practices.

Netflix's approach to translation and the high volume of content to translate have prompted many academics and AV practitioners to consider Netflix "the most important player in the industry," with some of its localization strategies and practices significantly influencing the rest of the sector (Nikolić & Bywood, 2021, pp. 60–61). The following sections examine the various repercussions of these strategies for AVT.

2.1. Netflix Non-English Self-Produced Originals

Netflix originals in foreign languages are the latest of the company's transnational strategies, with the potential to significantly affect the global AVT market (Díaz Cintas & Hayes, 2023). Seeking to cater to its international audiences' tastes–and to appear less of an invader overseas (Jenner, 2018, p. 188) – Netflix has begun (co-)producing its own content within the "countries where [it] was operational" (Díaz Cintas & Hayes, 2023, p. 3). Yet, as Díaz Cintas and Hayes (2023, p. 3) observe, "the initiative or incentive to produce content at a local level did not emanate from Netflix alone"; the volume of non-English content further expanded from 2018 onward, partly due to a European Parliament Directive requiring VOD platforms operating in EU member states to include at least 30% European content in their catalogs (Díaz Cintas & Hayes, 2023, pp. 3–4). Shortly after that decision and following the success of the Spanish TV show Money Heist, Netflix opened a production hub in Madrid and, by 2022, it had worked with 40 Spanish partners on 70 local productions (Neira et al., 2023, p. 10).

Netflix's partnerships with Spanish producers both meet the EU's 30% quota and expand its Spanish-language catalog. This undeniable asset enables the company to offer even more shows and films to Spanish-speaking audiences in Latin America as well (Neira et al., 2023, p. 5). In fact, although legal requirements are strong incentives, it is chiefly to appeal to broader global audiences that Netflix relies considerably on the production of non-English originals. Since 2018, local catalogs have grown steadily through foreign acquisitions and new commissions. In 2020 alone, in addition to the ones it produced in the United States, Netflix commissioned originals from 32 countries across five continents (Chalaby, 2022, p. 230). The streaming giant's decision to focus on certain regions is also motivated by viewership patterns: Japan, South Korea, Mexico, and Brazil prefer local or culturally/linguistically proximate content, whereas Canada, Australia, Germany, and the United

Kingdom favor US productions (Idiz et al., 2024, p. 11). These preferences are reflected in the growing global appetite for localized programming: Netflix reports that a third of its total viewing hours now come from non-English content[5].

Another way for the platform to attract and retain global viewers is to favor genres considered more transnationally appealing (Khazoom, 2025, p. 12). Analyzing the locality of Netflix originals, Idiz et al. (2024) found that drama (including the crime, action, and romance subgenres) and comedy are the most popular genres worldwide. These preferences help explain the global success of TV shows such as Money Heist, Dark, Lupin, or Squid Game. They may also influence Netflix's decisions regarding partnerships and productions. A case in point is the multi-million-dollar, five-year deal to adapt fourteen thrillers by US writer Harlan Coben[6]. Thanks to this fruitful partnership, Netflix has managed to appeal to global audiences' tastes on two levels: first, by signing a deal to produce a series of originals that belong to the popular crime genre, and second, by localizing adaptations of US novels. Of the eleven series released so far, three were produced in Poland (Just One Look, The Woods, and Hold Tight), one in Argentina (Caught), one in Spain (The Innocent), and one in France (Gone for Good). The remaining five (Fool Me Once, Missing You, Safe, The Stranger, and Stay Close) are in English but were produced in Great Britain, not the United States.

Finally, for further global reach, and likely "to maximise returns on its expenditure into [international] productions" – Netflix began to localize its non-English self-produced originals into other languages, including English (Díaz Cintas & Hayes, 2023, p. 4). This shift marks a move from a local-to-local offering to a local-to-global one (Brennan, 2018, cited in Díaz Cintas & Hayes, 2023, p. 4), thereby increasing the volume of localized content (Díaz Cintas & Hayes, 2023, p. 16). Ranzato and Zanotti (2019) argue that Netflix "now produces originals in a multitude of languages around the globe and streams them to English-speaking audiences with dubbing as the default option" (p. 3). While this paper focuses primarily on subtitling, it is worth noting that, as recent studies in dubbing show (Ranzato & Zanotti, 2019; Hayes, 2021, 2022, 2023; Sánchez-Mompeán, 2021; Hayes & Bolaños-García-Escribano, 2022; Díaz Cintas & Hayes, 2023; Savoldelli & Miggiani, 2023), Netflix's move towards a global offering also opens valuable new avenues for research in AVT.

2.2. The Netflix Release Model

The Netflix release model, which underpins its transnational strategy, has had several notable effects on the AVT sector. One of them is the considerable impact on AV translators' working conditions, which in turn has, to some extent, affected the quality of localized content. Massidda (2023) argues that the "binge model" described by Jenner (2018) – in which Netflix releases its originals globally on

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the same day – "poses a major challenge for the delivery of multiple versions of subtitled content in a tight turnaround time" (p. 456).

Nevertheless, data on specific turnaround times and budgets for Netflix productions are scarce, as the company does not publicly release detailed statistics on production schedules or on how viewers consume its content (e.g., whether content is subtitled or dubbed). Moreover, Netflix's deadlines are not necessarily more stringent than those of other subscription-video-on-demand (SVOD) competitors. In fact, stricter timelines have long been a reality for AV translators. As early as 2012, Georgakopoulou (2012) noted that "although the sheer volume of content to be made accessible, intralingually or interlingually, is increasing exponentially, the timeframes within which it has to be made accessible are decreasing, while the pressure to reduce production costs becomes greater" (p. 88).

Nonetheless, these market pressures have likely intensified over the past decade, fueled by what Massidda (2020, p. 190) refers to as the "explosion of OTT services." Díaz Cintas and Remael (2021) further confirm that deadlines have been shortened considerably due to OTT platforms' willingness "to keep up with audiences' impatience to watch their favourite programmes, whilst fighting piracy and bootlegging" (p. 57). With seven million run-time minutes subtitled and five million run-time minutes dubbed in 2021 (Marking, 2022, cited in Díaz Cintas, 2023), Netflix arguably leads this acceleration of work rhythms. Together, the platform's broad reach and large-scale dubbing/subtitling operations underscore how its "binge model" likely contributes to "having a huge impact (…) on the way the media localization of such high volume of content (…) in extremely tight turnaround times is performed" (Massidda, 2022, p. 24).

One consequence of these demanding working conditions is a potential decline in quality. Bowker and Corpas-Pastor (2015) describe the overall situation as follows:

> The demands of our fast-paced, globalized knowledge society have left translators struggling to keep pace with the increasing number of requests for high-quality translation into many languages on short deadlines. However, these two demands of high quality and fast turnaround are frequently at odds with one another. (p. 871)

Subtitlers themselves appear to confirm this assertion. A 2015 survey of their working conditions found that "the majority of respondents expressed the view that generous deadlines would help them improve the quality of their output" (Kuo, 2020, p. 446). Unsurprisingly, some professionals have warned that "the lower budgets, tighter deadlines and longer working hours imposed by juggernauts such as Netflix and Amazon have also been affecting the quality of the final products" (Bucaria, 2022, p. 327). For example, micro-tasking, the practice that consists in some localization vendors "employing various professionals to work on different sections of the same film or TV series" to meet tighter deadlines may result in a "lack of cohesion and coherence in the subtitles, as the risk exists that the same terms or expressions might have been translated in different ways by the various translators involved in the commission" (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 57).

3. Netflix's Localization Practices and AI Integration: Impacts on Subtitle Quality and Industry Standards in AVT

Given its importance to all stakeholders, the quality of subtitles is a crucial issue. Practitioners are not the only ones concerned; viewers also place high value on accurate, well-translated content. Szarkowska et al. (2020) have shown that while "appreciation [of quality] can easily vary depending on the different stakeholders" (p. 661), both viewers and subtitlers "agree that quality is important" (p. 673). This assertion is further compounded by the fact that viewers, now better equipped with social media and other online outlets, can publicly critique translation choices. This is especially true of content streamed on platforms such as Netflix because SVOD services allow audiences to "compare subtitled and dubbed versions to their source texts" (Bucaria, 2023, p. 333).

In recent years, Netflix has shown some willingness to address viewers' concerns about translation quality. For example, the company re-dubbed La casa de papel (Money Heist) in English following online complaints about the initial English dubbing of the first two seasons (Bucaria, 2023, p. 338). Similarly, Netflix "removed the Castilian subtitles from its viewing options" (Bucaria, 2023, p. 338) after its decision to subtitle the Mexican film *Roma* into Iberian Spanish sparked controversy online and prompted director Alfonso Cuarón "to decry Netflix's decision as 'parochial, ignorant and offensive to Spaniards themselves'" (Jones, 2019, quoted in Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 17).

These examples suggest that Netflix occasionally adjusts its course when poor localization choices trigger substantial backlash from subscribers. Nevertheless, these controversies arose despite the platform having dedicated content localization and quality control teams that adapt its product strategy to local audiences and collaborate with translators on key terms (Shattuc, 2020, p. 150; Bywood & Nikolić, 2024, p. 282). Hence, this dynamic may reflect what could be described as Netflix's paradoxical approach to AVT.

Although the company has occasionally adjusted its approach, other reports indicate that the streaming giant's stance on its localization practices remains largely inconsistent. In 2021, Netflix came under fire for inaccuracies in the subtitles of its Korean self-produced original Squid Game, described as "the most watched series of all time" (Groskop, 2021, quoted in Massidda, 2022, p. 27). The Spanish translators' association ATRAE (Asociación de Traducción y Adaptación Audiovisual de España) denounced Netflix "for allegedly using machine translation technologies to subtitle Squid Game" in Spanish (Massidda, 2022, p. 27). As Bywood (2020, pp. 409–410) notes, Netflix's first foray into post-editing processes for subtitling had been foreshadowed by a 2019 announcement at the Media for All Conference in Stockholm, stating that the company was "trialling the use of [machine translation technologies] in Latin American Spanish, with a view to rolling it out to other language combinations" (Rickard, 2019, quoted in Bywood, 2020, pp. 409–410).

While Netflix may have back-pedaled in a few instances, it is unlikely to forgo machine translation and other AI-based tools in its subtitling processes. Bywood and Nikolić (2024) observe that "it is common now for freelance subtitlers to receive a machine-translated first draft" and that "[s]ince

Bywood (2020) reported that [machine translation] was tentatively being considered by Netflix, this development has continued apace" (p. 285).

Arguably, these examples highlight Netflix's propensity to experiment with AI in AVT —although such methods risk compromising subtitle quality. These developments worry AV practitioners, who fear they may undermine the industry's sustainability (Bywood & Nikolić, 2024, p. 285). In response, given Netflix's reputation as "the driver of change in the AVT sector" (Bywood, 2020, p. 410), AVTE (Audiovisual Translators Europe – The European Federation of Audiovisual Translators) issued its Machine Translation Manifesto[7] in 2021, following the Squid Game controversy. The document offers "guidelines for the application of AI-powered human translation to the AVT sphere as a way to promote better working conditions for professionals" (Massidda, 2022, p. 27).

4. Transnational Versus Local Norms

As the previous controversies suggest, Netflix frequently faces criticism from AV translator associations. Acting as a transnational content provider, the platform "tends to apply the same or slightly adaptive, norms and guidelines on every market" (Pedersen, 2020, p. 430), primarily for economic efficiency. However, these norms, which are prescriptive by nature, often clash with descriptive local norms that have evolved over time. To counter the threat posed by transnational norms, AVT unions strive to reinforce traditional local standards (Pedersen, 2020, p. 430).

This tension is especially evident in France, where the Association des Traducteurs/Adaptateurs de l'Audiovisuel (ATAA)[8] has explicitly challenged some of Netflix's localization practices. Unsurprisingly, these practices remain controversial among professionals, partly because some translators feel that they reduce subtitle quality, and partly because they are at odds with the very conception that many French(-speaking) professional AV translators have of their craft. The uproar over the French subtitling of *Roma* is a case in point. ATAA published an editorial on its blog listing errors in the French subtitles of the Mexican film (Association des Traducteurs/Adaptateurs de l'Audiovisuel, 2019[9]). According to a later post on ATAA's Facebook page, Netflix corrected these inaccuracies but was still called upon by the Association demanding that Netflix adapt both its subtitling style and the subtitlers' remuneration to French standards as a next step[10]. This episode underscores the

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[7] Retrieved from https://avteurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Machine-Translation-Manifesto_ENG.pdf, accessed 2024, October 29.

[8] ATAA's actions must have produced some results. In a newsletter published in April 2023 (https://www.ataa.fr/blog/article/infolettre-davril-2023), ATAA mentioned regular meetings with Netflix, hinting at the opening of a constructive dialogue with the platform. Accessed 2024, October 29.

[9] https://www.ataa.fr/blog/article/le-sous-titrage-francais-de-roma. Accessed 2024, October 29.

[10] ATAA. (2019, March 4). Affaire Roma (suite). Donc Netflix a modifié les sous-titres incriminés dans notre note de blog. Très bien. Prochaine étape, refaire entièrement le sous-titrage, selon les standards français, à commencer par le repérage, et avec un tarif qui permet de vivre de ce métier - métier qui fait partie intégrante de la chaîne de fabrication d'un succès mondial. Merci. Facebook. Retrieved from

protective stance of French(-speaking) AV translators regarding their professional standards and their resistance to practices that deviate from long-established local norms.

According to ATAA's *Guide du sous-titrage et du doublage* (Association des Traducteurs/Adaptateurs de l'Audiovisuel, 2023), French(-speaking) AV translators view themselves as authors whose creative work makes films, TV shows, and documentaries accessible across borders. Moreover, they regard subtitling as an intellectual and even educational activity because the quality of the adaptations children watch affects their language proficiency, vocabulary, and reading skills. These perspectives echo Kuipers' (2015) findings. She (2015) argues that, in France, "language has strong symbolic significance, [a fact] reflected in French language policies, but also in the everyday practices of translation professionals." Seeing themselves as "mediators for the French audience and protectors of the French language," translators insist that "things have to be made 'French', rather than just 'understandable' to the French" (p. 1006).

Furthermore, Kuipers (2015) emphasizes the field's high degree of professionalization and regulation: "all translators (…) [she] met had specialized degrees, actors were unionized, and the translation process was highly standardized [at a national level]" (p. 999). In short, French(-speaking) subtitlers tend to consider AVT a craft that has more in common with literary translation than with technical translation (Association des Traducteurs/Adaptateurs de l'Audiovisuel, 2023).

In light of these considerations, it becomes easier to understand why Netflix's localization practices, which point to a high degree of standardization and homogenization at a transnational level, can face resistance from French(-speaking) translators who see them as diverging from established local norms. This trend towards greater standardization in subtitling, and its effects on the subtitlers' creative work, is further confirmed by Díaz Cintas and Remael (2021):

> As large multinationals dominate the market, more standardization is encroaching on subtitling practice and the subtitlers' freedom and creativity are curbed, with the use of templates being a case in point. Globalization has also brought about subtitling parameters that are decided outside the country where the programme is finally watched. A greater degree of standardization and homogenization can be observed in the conventions applied when subtitling the same programme into several languages for DVD or VOD distribution. Given that many subtitling tracks can be accessed by anyone anywhere, the tendency is to use the same or very similar conventions in all languages, even though in some cases they might be at odds with domestic practice and longstanding traditions. (pp. 53–54)

Applied to Netflix's strategies, these observations highlight two specific practices: the use of the same template as a starting point for subtitling in multiple languages and Netflix Timed Text Style Guides, which initially resembled a "one-size-fits-all system" (Pedersen, 2018, p. 97). Both are particularly problematic as they constrain translators' creative processes and disrupt local norms.

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from https://www.facebook.com/ataafrance/photos/pb.100068332636993.-2207520000/10157089820488454/?type=3, accessed November 16, 2023.

4.1. The Use of Templates

ATAA's Facebook post indirectly criticizes templates, noting that fixed in- and out-timecodes compel subtitlers to work from pre-spotted files. In other words, because of the trend towards micro-tasking, discussed earlier, subtitlers are no longer in charge of spotting, i.e., "the task that consists in determining the in and out times of each and every one of the subtitles in a production" (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 102). Templates also provide a verbatim transcript, along with notes on cultural references, wordplay, ambiguities, and dialect (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 39).

Also known as "dialogue lists" (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 39), templates gained widespread use in the AVT sector in the late 1990s, when international subtitling companies sought to meet the rising demand for subtitled content triggered by the boom in DVD sales. To "meet the requirements imposed on the market," many companies had to "produce subtitles in 40 or more languages simultaneously, at fast turnarounds" (Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 80). As Pedersen (2018) notes, this shift influenced "technical norms such as reading speeds, condensation rates, exposure times and line lengths" (p. 86), marking the onset of market-driven, international subtitling norms.

Although discussing the advantages and disadvantages of working with templates would fall outside of the scope of this paper, it is essential to recognize their pivotal role in centralizing subtitling workflows seeing as "large multinationals and streaming giants (…) rely on these documents to smooth the translation process" (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 40). This is especially true for Netflix, which "use[s] templates extensively" (Pedersen, 2020, p. 423) and requires its media partners to provide templates containing "frame-accurate timing, verbatim transcription of the dialogue[11] and any written text appearing on screen (…), as well as pertinent annotations" (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 42).

Because these templates are highly detailed, "ultimately, they tend to replace the audiovisual material as the source text of the translation" (Kapsaskis, 2011, p. 175). Since they include frame-accurate timecodes, verbatim dialogue, and annotations, some major language service providers view them as time-saving tools that make re-watching the AV content unnecessary. Yet, many subtitlers criticize this practice, arguing that it overlooks crucial nonverbal cues and undermines translation quality (Syndicat National des Auteurs et des Compositeurs, 2023). More importantly, Kapsaskis (2011) argues that "[t]o a significant extent, [templates] dictate specific or strategic choices that are often debatable as far as the target language is concerned" (p. 175). Georgakopoulou (2012, p. 81) further specifies that the introduction of templates has led to the establishment of international subtitling norms that, in some cases, conflict with local norms. This explains why "despite their predominance in today's market, templates are still relatively unpopular among some

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[11] Here, it is worth mentioning that Netflix *Timed Text Style Guide: Subtitle Templates* was overhauled in July 2020, and it now specifies that "Netflix does not expect subtitle templates to be verbatim". Retrieved from https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/219375728-Timed-Text-Style-Guide-Subtitle-Templates#h_01ENQYYY14HGE2N3Z67C6KPD1D, accessed 2024, October 29.

groups of professional subtitlers and unions" (Georgakopoulou, 2019, p. 154). In their view, this standardized approach ignores local norms that have been established over decades to meet audiences' cultural and linguistic expectations regarding subtitling style (Georgakopoulou, 2012, p. 81; Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 45).

4.2. Netflix Timed Text Style Guides (TTSGs)

Given subtitlers' strong reservations about templates – said "to contribute to the convergence of subtitling trends" (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 119) – it is not surprising that many also resist Netflix TTSGs. As mandatory guidelines for all subtitlers working with Netflix, these TTSGs are viewed by AV practitioners as norms "expressed prescriptively" (Pedersen, 2018, p. 87). Díaz-Cintas and Hayes (2023, p. 8) confirm that TTSGs prescribe both technical and linguistic parameters that subtitlers must follow. According to Pedersen (2018), "it can therefore be argued [that] the Netflix guidelines exert a great deal of pressure on the subtitlers' behavior and are thus expressions of strong norms" (p. 87).

Consequently, the fact that Netflix's early subtitling guidelines were more of a "one-size-fits-all system" (Pedersen, 2018, p. 97) may explain some subtitlers' reluctance towards Netflix TTSGs. When Netflix began its global expansion, it encountered a sudden and substantial demand for subtitles in numerous languages. To fulfill viewers' preferences for translation, "Netflix developed a set of prescriptive norms, which are still common to all guidelines" (Pedersen, 2018, p. 97), possibly because researching local norms would have been too time-consuming. Yet, as Díaz Cintas and Remael (2021) argue, "specific guidelines should be drafted for each language if not for linguistic variants, to better suit cultural and linguistic idiosyncrasies" (p. 119).

Guidelines tend to vary from one company to another and change over time, depending on AV content or target audiences, for example, and they are rarely made publicly available, which makes the comparison with long-established local norms complex (Nettelbeck, 2024, p. 2). Nevertheless, substantial differences can be noted regarding, among others, Netflix's no-censorship policy and its treatment of brand names. In particular, Alsharhan (2020) found that Arabic subtitlers working for Netflix still opted primarily for euphemisms and shifts in register to render taboo language, despite the platform's recommendations to translate expletives as faithfully as possible (Netflix, n.d.). Alsharhan (2020) further notes that the prevalence of these subtitling strategies could be explained by "the conservatism of the Arab culture and the enforced censorship policies in most Arab countries" (p. 21). Similarly, in France, AV practitioners may be instructed to sugarcoat vulgarity, but taboo language is not the only item subject to censorship. Mentioning brand names on French TV is usually prohibited, which might push translators to systematically use a generic term for the product, for example (Association des Traducteurs/Adaptateurs de l'Audiovisuel, 2014). On Netflix, by contrast, subtitlers may either keep the brand name, if it is widely known in the target territory, or provide an adapted version (Netflix, n.d.). Although more systematic and empirical research focusing on the comparison of guidelines is needed, these examples illustrate how Netflix's universal approach

can clash with long-established local norms and occasionally trigger reactions from professionals who see it as too standardized.

Since the early days of its expansion overseas, Netflix seems to have taken heed of the criticism towards its TTSGs and has gradually adapted them via periodic updates (Pedersen, 2018, p. 97). However, this is still a work in progress. For instance, since Pedersen's (2018) seminal study on Netflix's subtitling guidelines, references to Canadian French in the TTSG for French[12] have only gone from one to two, suggesting that most guidelines remain identical for both Canadian and French subtitlers.

Consequently, although subtitlers and subscribers can submit feedback on style, "by prescribing the use of the same [or very similar] norms across the board, (…) Netflix is basically rebooting subtitling norms" (Pedersen, 2018, p. 97). Díaz Cintas and Hayes (2023) add that, whether Netflix aligns with or diverges from existing subtitling conventions, its guides proliferate and become "the de facto industry standard" as major language service providers and many training programs adopt them (p. 8).

In sum, Netflix TTSGs not only tend to standardize subtitling practices on a global scale but also shape local AVT standards by influencing professional and educational norms. The guides, therefore, exemplify the platform's dual role as both a facilitator of globalized AVT practices and a disruptor of traditional, local approaches.

5. Conclusions

From the Netflix release model to its localization practices, attempts to integrate AI, and self-produced originals, this paper has examined how some of the company's strategies have contributed to reshaping subtitling workflows in the AVT sector. By positioning itself as a transnational actor, Netflix necessarily uses translation to integrate into local markets, yet its approach to AVT can sometimes appear inconsistent. Although the company has long recognized the need to consider cultural differences and meet global viewers' expectations regarding localization, it still leans towards greater homogenization to reduce costs and speed up translation processes. This trend towards standardization creates tensions between global prescriptive norms and local subtitling practices that have been established over time. By discussing the tensions that Netflix's transnational strategies create between standardized subtitling norms and local ones, this paper contributes to ongoing discussions on global standardization versus local adaptation in AVT.

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[12] Retrieved from https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/217351577-French-Timed-Text-Style-Guide, accessed 2023, November 19.

As shown above, the platform's binge model amplifies time pressures on subtitlers, while the use of a unique template (as a starting point for subtitling in multiple languages) and TTSGs favor streamlined, prescriptive norms. These localization tools still meet resistance from practitioners who view them as contradicting their very conception of AVT as a craft, and who fear that Netflix's influence on the market might ultimately erode professional standards. Although the company shares limited data on its subscribers' preferences and tight turnaround times, its broad viewership and the scale of its original productions make it a major player in the industry, one whose policies are potentially highly influential. As Lobato (2019) notes, "Netflix is [probably] translating more content into more languages than almost any other media service has done or could do [and] may well be the most multilingual television service that has ever existed" (p. 121).

The influence of Internet-based television on the AVT market is considerable, and the effects of streaming giants – Netflix in particular – on subtitling norms are likely to be long-lasting. Therefore, future research should focus on whether the localization strategies of different platforms diverge or converge. Promising avenues for research include empirical studies of subtitle reception and quality (involving both viewers and professionals), comparative analyses of AI-based versus human-crafted subtitles, and in-depth examinations of how dubbing versus subbing preferences affect both the evolving nature of AVT and the viewing experience.

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