Beyond the Screen: A Systematic Review of Perception/Reception Studies in Interlingual Dubbing and Subtitling

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide a systematic review of English-language journal articles and book chapters that consider the audience perception/reception perspective in interlingual dubbing and subtitling, with the goal of describing the evolution of this type of empirical research over the last two decades. After establishing exclusion and inclusion criteria, the authors used four databases – Scopus, BITRA, TSB, and Web of Science – to retrieve 93 relevant publications in the time frame 1990–2024. The results showed that the number of publications on reception/perception in interlingual dubbing and subtitling has increased – especially since 2017–18 – but that it remains a fraction of the overall research published in AVT. Moreover, relatively small case studies and non-randomized sampling remain the prevalent methodologies implemented by scholars. The final section of the paper explores potential reasons for and consequences of these methodological choices.

Key words: audiovisual translation, dubbing, subtitling, perception, reception, audience, interlingual.

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Introduction

The academic study of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) has seen an exponential increase in the last few decades. After its beginning as an academic field of study in the early 1990s, scholarly interest in the cross-cultural adaptation of audiovisual products has covered areas as diverse as culture-specific references, humor, taboo language, diastratic and diatopic varieties, and multilingualism, among others. Scholars have adopted both qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches to the investigation of various modes of AVT and media accessibility, such as dubbing, subtitling, voice over, simil-sync, surtitling, respeaking, danmu, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SHD), audiosubtitling, and audio description for the blind. However, on a methodological level, one of the most relevant developments in the last two decades has been the shift from the almost exclusive focus on either the product or process of AVT to the inclusion of the end-user perspective. This approach, focused on the audience perception/reception of translated audiovisual products, acknowledges the key role that viewers have, both as active participants in the communication process of which the audiovisual text is part and as consumers of audiovisual products that are commercially distributed beyond national borders. In fact, on the one hand, the importance of ensuring that all audiences are offered access to accurate and enjoyable localized audiovisual texts should be acknowledged – for example, by analyzing the impact of factors such as reading speed and line breaks in subtitling. However, on the other hand, it should not be forgotten that viewers are also consumers of commercially distributed audiovisual products and that their attitudes towards and understanding of key elements such as culture-specific references or humor can be important factors affecting the profitability of a series or film. With streaming services having recently increased the availability and global distribution of localized audiovisual content for diverse audience segments, scholarly investigation into how different audiences perceive these products has become increasingly crucial. Additionally, the experimental use of machine translation in audiovisual localization is a further variable that has recently entered AVT practice and has the potential to affect how international audiences perceive audiovisual products adapted using these technologies.

While the earliest quantitative, experimental studies aimed at investigating viewers' opinions of dubbing and subtitling were published in the early to mid-2000s, more recent years have seen an increase in quantitative research including the audience perspective. Some of these studies take a more "macro" approach by investigating opinions, attitudes, and preferences towards different AVT modes or viewing habits, while others focus on the "micro" (textual) level, i.e., on viewers' reactions to specific translated items and/or phenomena by measuring viewers' reactions to specific video excerpts (for example by using eye-tracking devices). Different experimental designs, sampling techniques, and sample sizes have been employed over the years. Furthermore, a certain confusion persists in the use of the terms "perception" and "reception" in AVT research, with the two terms being used interchangeably in some publications and selectively in others. As the methodological approaches have been so diverse over the years, a systematic review appears to be a useful tool for better understanding research and publication trends in this fragmented landscape.

This paper aims to provide a systematic review of English-language publications that consider the audience perception/reception perspective in interlingual dubbing and subtitling, to describe the evolution of this type of research over the last two decades. The decision to focus solely on two modes of AVT was determined not only by considerations of space but also by the fact that the first perception studies in AVT specifically concerned dubbing and subtitling, thereby making it a particularly useful starting point for a diachronic analysis. Furthermore, following suggestions from one of the most recent systematic reviews of experimental research in audiovisual translation (Wu & Chen, 2021, p. 10), the present review seeks to fill some existing gaps by including more databases not strictly related to Translation Studies – this way feasibly covering additional results in adjacent disciplines such as audience studies and global media studies – and by expanding the search to publication types beyond journal articles.

After providing a description of the existing literature in the field of perception and reception, as well as of existing systematic reviews in AVT in Section 1, Section 2 will outline the methodology and research questions. The paper will then present the results (Section 3) of the systematic review conducted across four databases: Bibliography of Interpreting and Translation (BITRA), Translation Studies Bibliography (TSB), Web of Science (WoS), and SCOPUS. Section 4 will present a discussion of the results and possible explanations for the observed trends.

1. Perception/Reception Studies in AVT

The evolution of AVT research over the past two decades reflects the field's dynamic growth and expansion into interdisciplinary methodologies. In the early 1990s, AVT studies primarily focused on subtitling and dubbing as modes of language transfer, emphasizing linguistic strategies and translation accuracy (Chaume, 2018). However, by the early 2000s, the field began to expand in both theoretical scope and methodological rigor, increasingly addressing broader sociocultural and cognitive dimensions in translation (Wu & Chen, 2021). The 2010s marked a significant turning point, driven by technological advances and the rise of experimental research that borrowed tools from cognitive science, psychology, and media studies. In line with Gambier's invitation to scholars to pursue this kind of audience research (2003), during this period, AVT research diversified to include reception studies and physiological measures, such as eye-tracking and EEG, which enhanced understanding of cognitive load and audience engagement (Orero et al., 2018; Chaume, 2020). Wang and Jalalian Daghigh (2024) identify a distinct shift in AVT research from focusing on products to prioritizing end-user experiences, with emerging research foci such as media accessibility and amateur subtitling. This shift reflects AVT's interdisciplinary expansion and increased global academic attention, particularly in response to the need to account for audience diversity in audiovisual content (Di Giovanni, 2020; Szarkowska et al., 2017). In recent years, AVT research has continued to grow in both volume and complexity. Wang and Jalalian Daghigh's (2024) analysis of 1,424 AVT studies illustrates an upward trend and sophistication in AVT methodologies, showing that experimental approaches and interdisciplinary collaborations increasingly address the needs of diverse global audiences. Moreover, the focus on user-centered research aligns with the calls for

methodological consistency to enhance the replicability and impact of AVT studies (Pérez-González, 2019; Wu & Chen, 2021).

Moving beyond product- and process-focused research, this user-oriented approach explores audience engagement and satisfaction from a variety of different perspectives and thematic foci – such as culture-specific references, humor, and translational routines (see, among others, Antonini, 2005, 2008; Antonini & Chiaro, 2009; Bucaria, 2005; Bucaria & Chiaro, 2007; Božović, 2019; Wu & Chen, 2021), and highlights end-user engagement and accessibility as key measures of AVT's effectiveness (e.g., Romero-Fresco, 2018; Szarkowska et al., 2016; Wang & Jalalian Daghigh, 2024). This emphasis on the end user aligns with AVT's interdisciplinarity, which led to the adoption of experimental methodologies aimed at measuring the cognitive load and emotional responses of end users to formats such as subtitling and dubbing. The recent empirical turn in AVT studies also resulted in the adoption of techniques borrowed from cognitive and reception studies, such as questionnaire-based surveys, interviews, focus groups, eye-tracking, EEG, and self-reported measures for the purpose of audience comprehension, engagement, and preferences, marking a shift towards data-driven assessments of AVT's impact on end users (Orero et al., 2018; Doherty & Kruger, 2018).

Another relevant issue is linked to the meaning associated with the terms "perception" and "reception" in extant literature on AVT. A comprehensive and critical review of the various definitions of perception and reception used by scholars is beyond the scope of this review. However, it is worth noting that in AVT research their meanings often tend to overlap, leading to conceptual ambiguities. This terminological confusion is determined by two main factors: the absence of an (operational) definition and varying definitions across disciplines (Gambier, 2018). Despite their frequent use in scholarly discourse, the two terms are rarely defined and often used interchangeably, thus disregarding the nuances that distinguish these terms and creating challenges in theoretical clarity and methodological rigor (see §3.2 and §4).

A general definition of the two terms (as found in dictionaries) denotes, on the one hand, perception as the belief or opinion held by many people, i.e, "a belief or opinion, often held by many people and based on how things seem," but also "an awareness of things through the physical senses" (Cambridge Dictionary online[1]). Conversely, reception is defined as "the way in which people react to something or someone" (Cambridge Dictionary online[2]). Nonetheless, as will be discussed in §3.2, in the literature, either no operational definition of the term(s) is provided or perception is often merged with reception.

The confusion arises because in the literature they are often used as synonyms, and discussions often merge perception with reception, conflating sensory interpretation with broader frameworks of understanding. However, while both perception and reception focus on meaning-making, they operate at different levels of analysis. While both are concerned with how audiences interact with

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[1] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/perception
[2] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/reception

audiovisual content, the distinction between them becomes less clear, particularly when moving from individual sensory experiences (perception) to broader cultural interpretations (reception). Hence, the interaction between these processes often blurs the boundaries, resulting in their use becoming interchangeable or vague. Consequently, in this review, (i) perception and (ii) reception are defined respectively as:

i)   the way in which the process of translating audiovisual materials is understood, interpreted, and evaluated by their end users (following Łabendowicz, 2018);

ii)   the response and/or reaction by and/or repercussion on the end users of AVT modes and products (following Gambier, 2018).

1.1. Systematic Reviews of AVT Studies

Systematic reviews are rigorous and structured approaches to synthesizing existing research evidence on a specific topic or question. Their aim is to provide a comprehensive and unbiased overview of the literature by following a predetermined methodology, which includes defining research questions, selecting studies based on explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, and employing systematic data extraction and analysis techniques (Liberati et al., 2009). This methodology not only enhances the reliability and validity of the findings but also allows researchers to identify gaps in the existing literature, assess the quality of the evidence, and make informed recommendations for practice and future research (Borenstein et al., 2011; Johnson & Hennessy, 2019).

To date, only a handful of systematic reviews have focused on AVT. For example, Wu and Chen (2021) synthesized 61 experimental AVT studies on subtitling and dubbing published in journals between 1992 and 2020, examining trends, methodologies, and analysis techniques. They categorized the research into three main themes: product (audience reception), process (translation creation), and pedagogy (language and translation skill development), with subtitling emerging as the dominant area of experimental research, followed by dubbing and audio description. Wu and Chen's review highlights inconsistencies in experimental methods, such as variations in sample sizes and inconsistent reporting of statistical metrics, including effect sizes. While inferential statistical methods (e.g., ANOVA) are commonly used, the study emphasizes the need for more diverse participant groups, as many studies rely predominantly on university students (as noted by Di Giovanni, 2020). Therefore, the authors advocate for greater methodological consistency and the use of innovative research tools, such as eye-tracking and cognitive load measures.

Yonamine (2022) explores the balance between domestication (adjusting translations for the target audience) and foreignization (maintaining the source language's characteristics) in interlingual subtitling. This systematic review, which analyzes 33 studies from 2004 to 2020, identifies five main themes: theoretical debates, translation strategies, linguistic features, audience reception, and research gaps. The study highlights the pressures of industry constraints, such as tight deadlines and limited budgets, which often influence subtitlers' choices. Domestication is commonly preferred to

ensure audience fluency, though it risks losing cultural authenticity. On the other hand, excessive foreignization may confuse audiences unfamiliar with the source culture. Yonamine advocates for more empirical studies on audience perceptions and responses to subtitled content. However, the study's focus on English-Portuguese translations and its exclusion of other AVT forms, such as dubbing or audio description, limit its generalizability. Nonetheless, its focus on cultural mediation significantly enriches the discussion on translation strategies.

Wang and Jalalian Daghigh's (2024) bibliometric study, which covers 1,424 AVT journal articles published between 2002 and 2022, highlights significant growth across subfields (as observed also by Orero et al., 2018). However, it notes a scarcity of AVT-focused bibliometric reviews before their work. They categorize AVT research into three phases: a nascent phase (2002–2011), an exploration phase (2012–2016), and a period of rapid development (2017–2022). Their analysis identifies key research areas, including subtitling, dubbing, media accessibility, and reception studies, with significant contributions from Europe and Iran. Wang and Jalalian Daghigh's review emphasizes AVT's interdisciplinary nature, spanning linguistics, cognitive science, and media studies. The study's broad scope identifies established and emerging AVT research areas, however, its macro-level approach may overlook regional nuances or underrepresented research topics such as fansubbing or game localization.

Other, non-systematic reviews, such as those by Orero et al. (2018) and Di Giovanni (2020), have described reception studies and adopt a prescriptive approach to guide future research directions. Following the call for systematic reviews to consolidate AVT methodologies and trends (Di Giovanni & Gambier, 2018; Orero et al., 2018), which aim to bridge a gap in research, this review focuses on the perception and reception of both interlingual dubbing and subtitling. Consequently, studies involving other modes of AVT, such as intralingual subtitling and audio description, will not be covered.

The primary objective of this review is to demonstrate how research on the perception/reception of interlingual dubbing and subtitling within AVT studies has evolved both diachronically and methodologically.

2. Methodology

AVT has experienced significant growth as a field of study, with subtitling and dubbing emerging as two of the most prominent modalities. Researchers have explored these AVT methods using a variety of empirical approaches to understand their perception/reception, effectiveness, and audience preferences. Empirical methods, such as questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, interviews, and, more recently, the analysis of social media posts, offer valuable insights into audiences' perception and reception, as well as their cognitive processing of dubbed and subtitled content. This systematic review synthesizes findings from empirical studies published in journals and book chapters that

utilize empirical methods to examine the perception/reception of interlingual dubbing and subtitling. The objective of this study is thus to:

i)   assess how the field has developed diachronically;
ii)   examine how different research methods have contributed to the literature on the perception and reception of dubbing and subtitling.

To do so, the authors formulated the following two research questions exploring audiences' perception and reception of dubbing and subtitling:

RQ1: How have perception/reception studies of interlingual dubbing and subtitling evolved in the last two decades?

RQ2: What empirical methodologies have been most frequently applied to study audience reception and perception of interlingual dubbing and subtitling, and what are their strengths and limitations?

2.1. Inclusion Criteria, Data Extraction, and Categorization

For the purposes of data retrieval, this study relied on four open-access databases: Web of Science (WoS), Scopus, Bibliography of Interpreting and Translation (BITRA), and Translation Studies Bibliography (TSB). While BITRA and TSB specialize in translation and interpreting studies, providing exhaustive, field-specific resources crucial for AVT literature, WoS and Scopus offer a wider interdisciplinary breadth and high-quality indexing, covering AVT's broader academic influences, from linguistics to media studies. Together, these databases ensure comprehensive coverage, mitigate bias, and support high-quality, reproducible research by encompassing both specialized AVT studies and related interdisciplinary findings essential to understanding AVT's diverse applications.

The inclusion criteria included: year of publication, study types, key words. The selection took into consideration articles and chapters published between 1990 and October 2024. The studies included in the selection are peer-reviewed journal articles and chapters in edited volumes that discuss empirical research focused on audience perception or reception of interlingual dubbing and subtitling, as well as archival research (analysis of user-generated comments and/or posts on social media).

The search in the databases was conducted using a single set of key words (in titles and/or abstracts), which included any of the following five words: audiovisual, dubbing, subtitling, reception, and perception, in any of their spelling variations. The search strategy used the Boolean operators OR/AND to identify relevant works: dubbing OR subtitling OR (in BITRA only) audiovisual AND perception OR reception. After the first search, another term, "OR audience", was added to account for studies that did not directly reference perception or reception.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the initial search yielded 1,522 items: 277 from BITRA, 305 from Scopus, 217 from TSB, and 723 from WoS. To exclude irrelevant data, the 1,522 items retrieved were subjected to a four-stage exclusion process. After the first screening of titles and abstracts, 167 items were retained by relying on the following exclusion criteria: (i) the study was not a peer-reviewed journal article or chapter in an edited volume; (ii) the research design (i.e. sampling and/or methodology and/or analysis) was not described; (iii) they were not studies of interlingual AVT. The second screening focused on the elimination of duplicates, which led to a total count of 99 items, which were then submitted to a third screening that led to the exclusion of 5 more items based on the exclusion criterion that the language of publication was not English, and to a final selection of 94 publications that were then inserted in an Excel extraction sheet. In the final stage, the full-text analysis of the remaining 94 studies led to the omission of one more publication because it was not accessible. Therefore, the final selection comprised 93 publications (Figure 1).

Figure 1
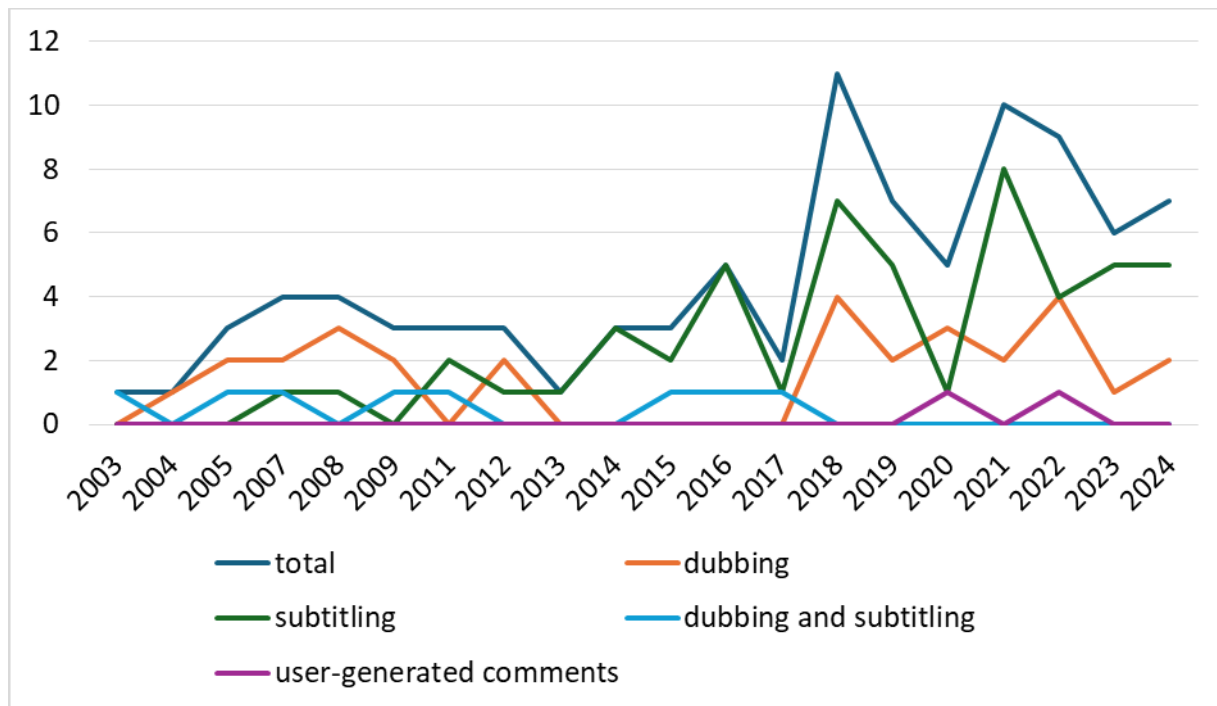
Data Retrieval Process
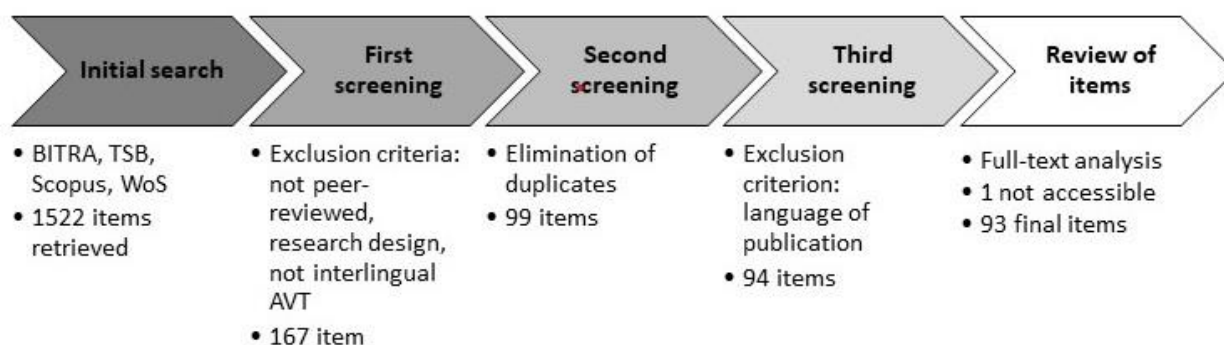
3. Results

3.1. The Diachronic Evolution of Perception/Reception Research in Dubbing and Subtitling

As shown in Figure 2, research on the perception/reception of dubbing and subtitling gained momentum only very recently, with a marked increase in publications starting from 2018. Before that, there was an average of 2.8 articles and chapters published per annum. Between 2018 and 2024 the average increased to 8.1.

Figure 2

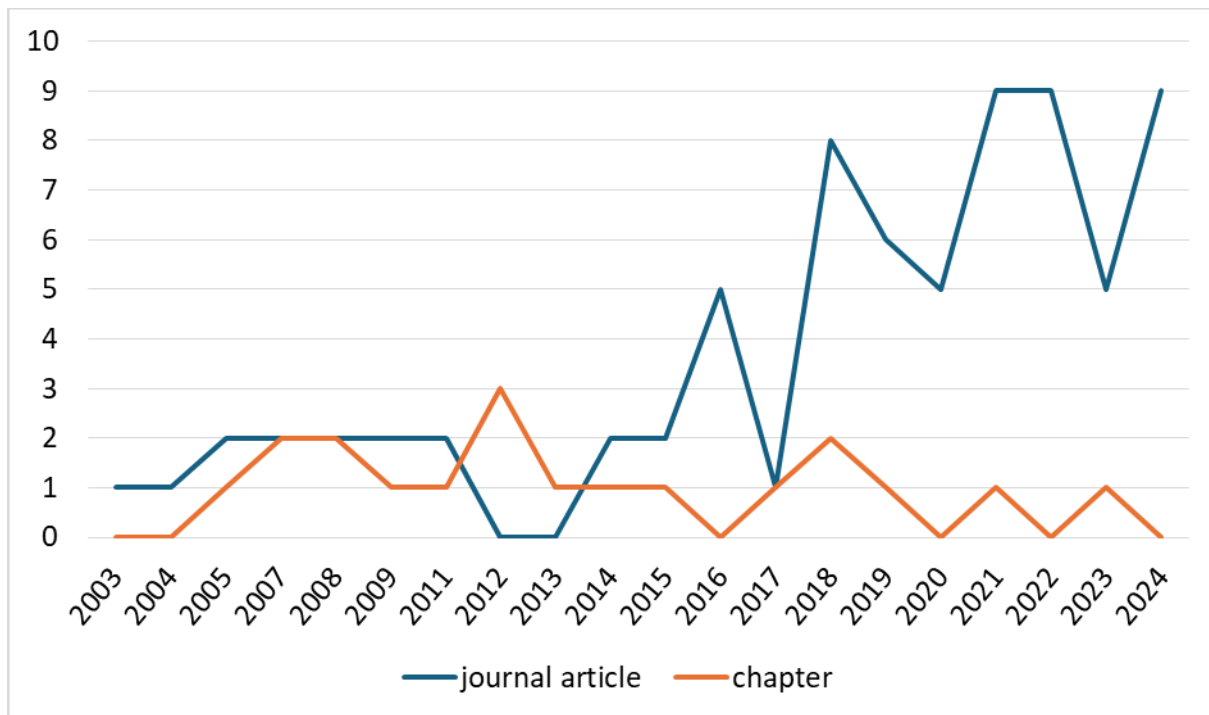*Diachronic Evolution of Perception/Reception Research of Dubbing and Subtitling*

This diachronic evolution of research on the perception/reception of interlingual dubbing and subtitling does not mirror the growth trend described by Orero et al. (2018) for AVT studies, which identified the 1991–2000 period as a turning point in AVT research followed by exponential growth in productivity in the subsequent decades. The turning point for perception/reception research in dubbing and subtitling occurred in 2018, followed by a fluctuating pattern of productivity in the subsequent six years. The proportion of publications in this specific area of study indicates that it remains a niche area of research, accounting for only a fraction of the total academic production in AVT reported by Orero et al. (2018). What is also worth noting is that most of these publications deal with the perception/reception of subtitling, with just a smattering of items focusing on dubbing and user-generated comments and posts.

Another relevant feature is linked to the type of publication, which, during the 2003–2024 timeframe, yields more journal articles (73) than chapters in volumes (19), plus one monographic volume (Figure 3).
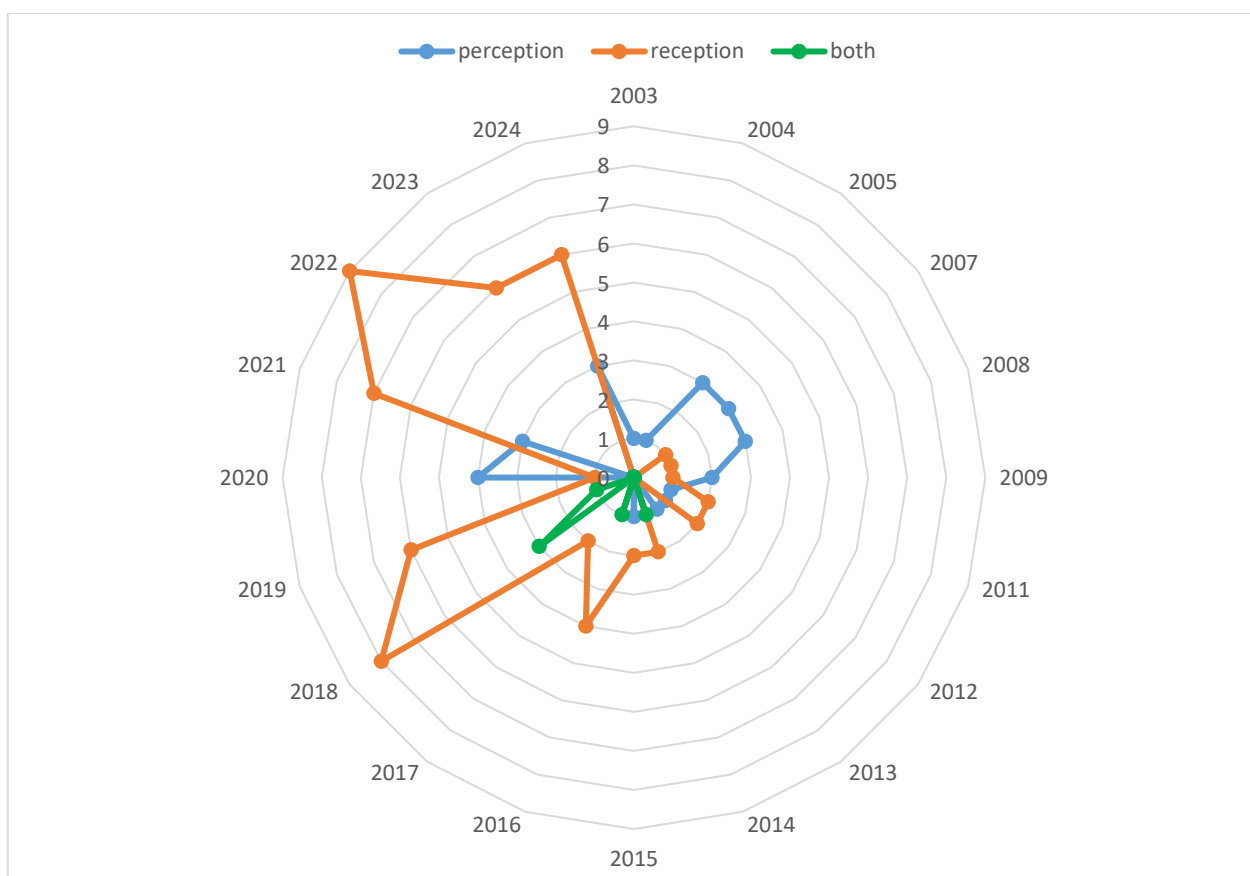
Figure 3

Diachronic Evolution of Publication Type

3.2. Diachronic Evolution of the Use of the Terms Perception and Reception

The analysis of the diachronic evolution of the use of the terms "perception" and "reception" in the selected publications shows that, while in the earlier stages of research (2003–2009) the term "perception" was the one that had wider currency, in the subsequent 15 years, the term "reception" gained prevalence, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Diachronic Evolution of the Use of "Perception" and "Reception" in Research

Of the 93 selected items, 27 are identified as perception studies of dubbing and/or subtitling, 60 as reception studies, and 6 encompass both perspectives. As the graph in Figure 3 shows, the use of the term "perception" was prevalent between 2005 and 2008, and then again in 2020 and 2021. In contrast, starting from 2016, the term "reception" began to gain traction and became prevalent.

It was also interesting to observe that in 35 instances, neither term was included in the title of the contribution, and in 13 of these, perception/reception was not included in the abstract either. This is a relevant issue because the inclusion of key words in the title and abstract is crucial for making an article/chapter more accessible, relevant, and discoverable by the right audience, which can lead to higher visibility, engagement, and citation impact. This has important implications for similar searches, particularly in the absence of the main text in searchable databases or a lack of open access. Moreover, as discussed in §4, it may also impact search results for both systematic and narrative reviews.

Another interesting issue that emerged from the analysis is that only 15 out of the 93 selected articles/chapters offer a definition of perception or reception. Moreover, these definitions often

offer different perspectives and present conflicting interpretations, further blurring the distinction between them. Łabendowicz (2018, p. 261) offers an insightful comparison between perception and reception by defining them, respectively, as "the effect of internalized information filtered through previous experiences and preferences," and "the act of internalizing the content and the data (visual, audial) during the act of watching audiovisuals." In relation to dubbing, Bucaria and Chiaro (2007) define audiences' perception of dubbed programs as the extent to which they understand the culture-specific aspects frequently presented in these programs, and their awareness that the language used in dubbing differs, to some degree, from naturally occurring Italian. Likewise, Perego et al. (2016) define the perception (of a subtitled film) as "the way it is understood, remembered and appreciated by the viewer" (pp. 255–256). Conversely, Di Giovanni (2018, p. 161) describes perception as "what is impressed on the eyes when watching media," emphasizing that it involves no form of interpretation. On the other hand, and again diverging from other definitions (e.g., Gambier, 2018; Łabendowicz, 2018), she defines reception as "the ways in which individuals and groups interact with media content, including how a text is interpreted, appreciated, and remembered."

3.3. Research Design

The analysis of the 93 selected studies relied on frequencies to explore the following aspects of research on the perception/reception of interlingual dubbing and subtitling from 2003 to 2024: sampling approach and techniques, the evolution of methodological tools in the selected timeframe, methodological tools used to collect data, and the type of data analysis.

The analysis of the sampling approach and techniques highlighted a few problematic areas. Sample sizes across the selection range from as few as 4 participants to 877, with a mean value of 103. All samples are based on subjective purposive sampling, which involves the non-random selection of participants chosen according to specific criteria or characteristics, rather than being selected randomly (Stratton, 2024). For instance, 31 of the 87 studies that described their sample included only students, which clearly impacts the representativeness of the data (as noted by Di Giovanni, 2020). While this strategy may reflect the need to target a specific group of people who are either most relevant to that specific research or more readily accessible to the researcher, it poses some important limitations. One key issue is the lack of generalizability, as the study findings are not transferable to the broader population. An important bias is also introduced by the researcher's subjective judgment in selecting participants, which can introduce personal biases in participant selection, affecting the objectivity of the sample.

Figure 5 illustrates the evolution of methodological tools used in research on the perception/reception of interlingual dubbing and subtitling from 2003 to 2024, categorizing methods into five types: questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, experimental methods (e.g., eye-tracking and MRI), and user comments/posts.

Figure 5

The Evolution of the Use of Methodological Tools
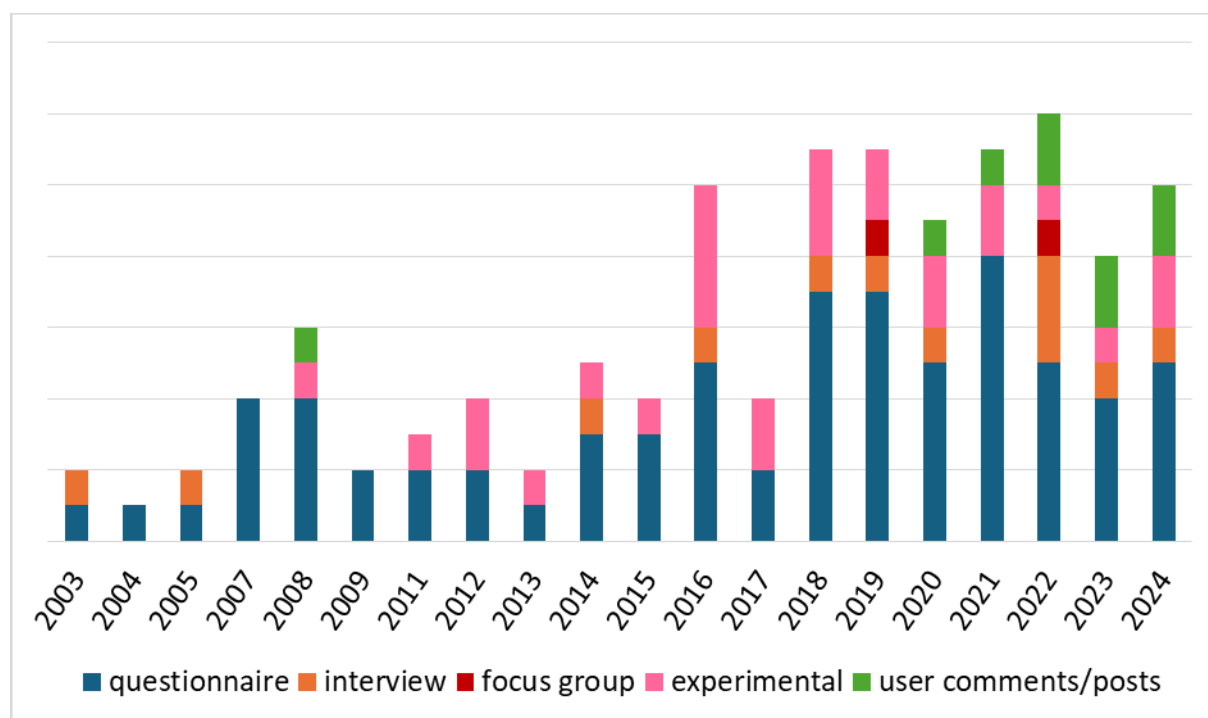
Throughout the timeline, questionnaires consistently dominate as the most frequently used tool, with their use increasing significantly after 2016 and reaching their highest levels between 2019 and 2024. Interviews and focus groups are moderately used, with slight increases over time, particularly after 2018. Experimental methods and user comments/posts are introduced later, with experimental approaches appearing in 2018 and showing steady use thereafter. User comments and posts, depicted in green, emerge prominently around 2021 and gain significant traction, indicating a shift toward digital or user-generated content as a research resource. Moreover, 36 studies employ a multi-method approach, combining the tools listed above, with a notable increase particularly after 2016.

The data reveal a clear trend toward diversification in methodological approaches. Traditional tools like questionnaires continue to play a significant role, but newer methods, especially those leveraging user comments/posts, signal the adoption of innovative techniques in modern research practices (see Ameri & Khoshsaligheh's, 2020, on netnography in AVT). This shift suggests a move towards more varied and innovative data collection techniques in contemporary research, such as the integration of digital and participatory data sources.

Another factor worth mentioning is that all studies are stand-alone projects that did not include a follow-up stage, and there are no longitudinal studies.

Out of the 93 studies in the selection, 20 used purely qualitative methods and 17 purely quantitative methods. The largest group is made up of mixed-methods research, with 56 instances. The

predominance of mixed-methods research (56 compared to 20 and 17) reflects a growing trend in research to integrate both qualitative and quantitative methods, leveraging the strengths of each to provide a more holistic view of the perception/reception of dubbing and subtitling, as also observed by Wu and Chen (2021).

The majority of studies rely on descriptive analyses of the data, which include frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Only four studies out of the 93 selected for this review performed an inferential statistical analysis of the data (Fuentes Luque, 2003; Perego et al., 2015; Orrego-Carmona, 2016; Khoshsaligheh et al., 2019).

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The results of the analysis described above allowed us to answer and comment on the research questions formulated in Section 2.

> RQ1: How have perception/reception studies of interlingual dubbing and subtitling evolved in the last two decades?

> RQ2: What empirical methodologies have been most frequently applied to study audience reception and perception of interlingual dubbing and subtitling, and what are their strengths and limitations?

Regarding RQ1, this systematic analysis has identified several trends in the diachronic evolution of perception/reception studies in interlingual dubbing and subtitling over the last two decades. The first trend shows that despite a recent increase in perception/reception studies of interlingual dubbing and subtitling, this remains a niche within AVT studies. With the first studies in chronological order dating back to 2003 and the last ones in October 2024, the analysis (see Figure 2) has shown that there has been an increase in empirical research on reception/perception since 2018 (see Section 4.1). In the seven-year interval 2018–2024, 56 articles and chapters were published out of the 93 in the total sample. However, this remains a relatively small number compared to the dozens of publications on AVT in general (including accessibility modes) that are shared annually in edited collections, special issues, and academic journals.[3] Possible reasons for this relatively small number might be attributed to several different factors, first and foremost, the fact that empirical research based on methodological tools such as questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups is more costly and time-consuming if compared to the purely textual, contrastive analyses of source and target texts. It also requires competences – such as experimental design and statistical analysis skills – that are sometimes outside the methodological toolbox of scholars in the humanities, and interdisciplinary collaborations with scholars from different disciplines are not always easy to seek

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[3] As a reference, Orero et al. (2018, p. 117) note that in the period between 2011 and mid-2016 their search found 937 publications on AVT. We can reasonably presume this number to have increased in the intervening years.

out and/or put into practice. Also, it should be noted that the focus of this systematic review is exclusively on research on subtitling and dubbing; these AVT modes might have taken a back seat compared to the more recent focus on forms of accessibility – such as subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH) and audio description – which embodies today's ever-present emphasis on the practical and societal repercussions of contemporary academic research in virtually all disciplines. As crucial as inclusivity and practical applications are, it may be the case that, in more recent years, scholars have preferred to focus their attention on accessibility modes, for which awareness and desirability in terms of funding opportunities have recently skyrocketed, rather than on more "traditional" AVT modes. Further research may want to compare the recent number of empirical studies in the subfield of accessibility with the amount of reception/perception research on dubbing and subtitling for the general population.

The results of this systematic review highlight additional factors that may aid in interpreting reception/perception research from a diachronic perspective. Especially after 2017, our results show a predominance of studies on subtitling rather than dubbing or studies on users' posts and comments, with a smaller portion of publications focusing on both dubbing and subtitling (Figure 2). This seems to confirm what Wu and Chen observed in 2021, i.e. that "the past decade has witnessed increased scholarly interest in experimental interlingual AVT research" (p. 285) and, more specifically, Wang and Jalalian Daghigh's statement that "the total number of publications from 2017 to 2022 tripled from 66 to 197, signifying that the research on AVT has entered the rapid development phase" (2024, p. 4). Although more research would be needed to confirm or explain this upward trend, it could perhaps be hypothesized – as Wang and Jalalian Daghigh (2024) do about AVT research in general – that the significant global expansion of streaming platforms that started in the second half of the 2010s might have facilitated the surge of academic interest in subtitling. While subtitling was by no means a new AVT mode, the new distribution system implemented by streaming platforms has made it easier to access both new and library content with subtitles, even for products that had not been previously subtitled, and in a variety of different language combinations. Although it is difficult to generalize beyond specific lingua-cultural contexts and viewing communities, the increased availability of subtitles on streaming services may also be said to have contributed to a shift in viewing habits and attitudes toward subtitling. In turn, this significant shift in the delivery mechanisms for localized audiovisual products might have provided momentum for new experimental research on the reception/perception of subtitling and subtitled products.

Another publication trend that emerged from the analysis was that the number of journal articles was higher than that of book chapters (Figure 3). The ratio between the two types of publication shows a constant upward trend after 2018, with peaks in 2018, 2021–22, and 2024. While it was not possible to find recent, diachronically comparable data on trends for journal articles and book chapters, the overall prevalence of journal articles over book chapters seems to contradict the preference towards the latter highlighted by Orero et al. (2018) when discussing the literature on AVT. The higher frequency of journal articles and their surge in the last seven years might be attributed at least in part to the ever-increasing impact of the bibliometric perspective in the assessment of academic research. While disciplines in the humanities remain resistant to the use of

bibliometric parameters for assessing academic output, countries such as Italy and Spain are increasingly using the type of publication as a benchmark, with articles – especially those in high-impact journals – being assessed more favorably than book chapters. Coupled with the emphasis on openly accessible research, which is becoming the gold standard in many academic disciplines, this might have encouraged more scholars to publish their research in journals rather than edited volumes, in an attempt to increase visibility and secure higher citation indices.

Our second research question aimed to report on the empirical methodologies most frequently applied to study audience reception and perception of interlingual dubbing and subtitling, as well as to report on the strengths and limitations of these studies. As reported in Section 3, the results of this systematic review show that relatively small, self-contained case studies have been largely prioritized over larger, longitudinal, and follow-up studies, with little variation over time.

In particular, as already discussed in Section 3, a small sample size and non-randomized sample selection are problematic in terms of the possibility of generalizing a study's results to the broader population. Some small-scale studies may indeed be useful for piloting and illustrating an innovative experimental design or methodology. However, even when methodologically irreprehensible, small-scale studies or those based on non-randomized sampling may limit generalizability. Also, on a methodological note, another problematic aspect concerns the fact that most studies rely on descriptive analyses (mean, standard deviation, percentages, and frequencies), and only a handful performed an inferential statistical analysis of the data. While valid interpretive tools that provide in-depth observations and a holistic view of the subject, descriptive analyses often stop at the "what" without delving into the "why" or "how," which limits their analytical depth. They typically focus on specific groups or settings, making it challenging to generalize the findings to broader populations. Additionally, they do not provide evidence of cause-and-effect relationships, as their scope is confined to observation rather than explanation. Moreover, descriptive studies rely heavily on the observer's interpretation, which can introduce subjectivity and potential bias into the analysis.

One of the most evident methodological issues that this review highlighted was the lack of a clear definition of the concepts of reception and/or perception in all but 15 out of the 93 publications. The absence of clear definitions for perception and reception in such a high number of publications can be attributed to multiple factors. One possible reason is the assumption that these terms are commonly understood within the academic community; hence, researchers may feel no need to define them explicitly. Additionally, many studies in this field are more empirical in nature, focusing on data collection and practical findings rather than theoretical discussions. Researchers may also prefer to allow more terminological flexibility to accommodate the diversity of perspectives across different disciplines, such as media studies, translation studies, and psychology, where the meanings of terms like "perception" and "reception" can vary. In some cases, scholars may choose not to define these terms due to the context-dependent nature of how audiences engage with dubbing and subtitling, which can vary based on factors such as culture, language, and technology. While these choices may work within specific contexts, they may also limit the overall theoretical development of perception/reception in AVT.

Furthermore, failing to provide a definition may result in a variety of outcomes that affect the precision, transparency, and relevance of research on the perception and reception of dubbing and subtitling, leading to an ambiguous research focus, inconsistency in comparisons, difficulty in replication, risk of overgeneralization, and limited practical relevance. By offering clear and precise definitions of these terms, researchers ensure that their studies are methodologically sound, that their findings can be compared and applied across different contexts, and that they contribute meaningfully to both theoretical development and practical applications in the field of dubbing and subtitling.

It is not easy to determine whether or not scholars are aware of these methodological pitfalls. What seems clear, however, is that some underlying reasons exist for these methodological choices that are attributable to the inherent advantages of conducting experimental studies on a smaller scale. For example, it should be noted that experimental designs involving larger samples can be costly – especially when participants are rewarded with incentives – and funding is not always readily available to researchers outside of nationally or internationally funded projects. Furthermore, to make a more general and practical point, small, self-contained studies based on a single phenomenon, translation strategy, mode, audiovisual product, or involving a smaller sample of participants can be managed much more conveniently than larger studies. Therefore, scholars might be more prone to opt for this kind of research to satisfy the publishing demands and benchmarking of today's academic world instead of designing more all-encompassing, diachronic, or follow-up studies, which take much longer to come to fruition and, consequently, to produce data ready for publication. Also related to the time-consuming nature and methodological complexity of empirical research on reception/perception is the fact that for many scholars working in academia today, the time that can be devoted exclusively to research is shrinking, which implies the not easy task of reconciling research with other teaching and administrative responsibilities. In this context, it is perhaps not surprising that more scholars choose to engage with the issue of reception/perception in AVT through smaller-scale studies.

In closing, a few words should be spent on the inevitable limitations of this review. By adding book chapters to the inclusion criteria, the authors incorporated Wu and Chen's (2021) suggestion to include a broader range of publications in addition to journal articles. Furthermore, a larger number of databases were searched in order to widen the representativeness of the selection. As a result, this systematic review casts a wider net in comparison to both Wu and Chen's (2021) and Wang and Jalalian Daghigh's (2024) reviews, which consider only TSB and BITRA, and WoS and Scopus, respectively. However, we are aware that some existing publications on reception/perception in interlingual dubbing and subtitling might not have been returned by our database searches. One reason for this might be linked to the types of keywords used in the search, which specifically included "reception" and "perception". The problem might be that, as mentioned in section 4, publications effectively focusing on this kind of empirical research in AVT, particularly – albeit not exclusively – from other disciplines, might not have the same terminological focus. For example, research published in the broader frameworks of global media studies or audience/consumer studies might have been excluded due to our keyword selection. In this respect, future reviews might want to

expand the terminological search by including more general keywords. Moreover, especially for older publications, abstracts and/or keywords might not be present. Combined with the lack of specific terms such as "reception" or "perception", this may make it impossible to retrieve existing publications. In one case, for example, a journal article by these authors on the perception of subtitling, published in 2003 and lacking an abstract or keywords, was not retrieved by the keyword search. While we have direct knowledge of the existence of this study, we acknowledge that other similar cases might have "slipped through the cracks". Finally, similarly to Wang and Jalalian Daghigh (2024), this review considered only English-language publications, although studies on all language pairs were included. Expanding the selection to publications in languages other than English might be a useful inclusion criterium in order to cover research that has been particularly relevant for specific national or local communities but that, for a number of reasons, might not have achieved international resonance.

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