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From inconspicuousness to flow: The CIA model of subtitle quality

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From inconspicuousness to flow –
the CIA model of subtitle quality[1]

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Abstract: Professional subtitlers' perceptions of quality were studied in an online survey conducted in three German-speaking countries. Fifty-nine subtitlers filled in a questionnaire that contained items on quality parameters and quality assurance measures. The respondents' quality statements were categorized into three overall quality dimensions – correspondence between original and subtitles, intelligibility, and linguistic authenticity – each with its own subset of quality parameters. This was the basis for the construction of the CIA model of interlingual subtitle quality. It is hypothesized that if the model's quality dimensions and parameters are met, subtitle reception will lead to a flow experience. Suggestions for future directions concern time-lag studies to investigate how quality perceptions evolve over time, research into subtitling competence, and testing of the validity of the model by having professional subtitlers assess a set of subtitles while thinking aloud.

Key words: quality, flow, interlingual subtitles, professional subtitlers, online survey.

1. Introduction

Quality is one of the most widely debated concepts in translation studies. Quality has been an issue in audiovisual translation studies and interlingual subtitling too, although to a much lesser extent than one might expect, at least judging by the number of publications dealing specifically with this topic as revealed by literature searches in Translation Studies Bibliography (TSB) for example. Thus, while the search term "subtitl*" for the period 2009-2019 yields no less than 562 hits, only 11 of these actually deal with the quality of professional interlingual subtitles (last accessed: December 10, 2019). Moreover, studies of interlingual subtitle quality are often anecdotal, approaching quality with respect to a specific translation phenomenon rather than providing a general descriptive framework that reflects the complexity of the issue.

In an attempt to understand quality perceptions in subtitling from both a product and process perspective, I conducted an online survey among professional subtitlers working in Germany, Austria and Switzerland (Künzli, 2017). The questionnaire contained items on a variety of quality-related issues, from a product, production process and reception point of view. The focus of this paper will be on the analysis of questionnaire items dealing with subtitle quality from a product perspective. The present study differs from other attempts at modelling subtitle quality (e.g., Klaus, 2015;

Pedersen, 2017) in that quality is described from the point of view of professional subtitlers – not researchers.

Even if the data were collected from subtitlers working in German-speaking countries, one may hypothesize that the expressed quality criteria are (to a large extent) language and culture independent. However, it cannot be ruled out that the weighting of the individual quality parameters varies between cultures. Also, it must be stressed that the terms 'subtitles' and 'subtitling' in this article are restricted to prepared interlingual subtitles for a hearing audience – for example, the German subtitles of an American motion picture shown in movie theatres in Zurich, Vienna or Berlin. Thus, I will not deal with the large body of research published on intralingual subtitles for the hearing impaired, often produced (semi-live) via respeaking (a good overview of this subtitling practice can be found in Romero-Fresco, 2011).

In what follows, I will first evaluate the existing research literature on subtitle quality. I will then present the methodological framework of my study, key data and analyses, and will finish with a set of proposals for future directions in empirical research into subtitle quality.

2. Background

More than a decade ago, Gambier (2008) criticised the lack of a best practice that would guarantee the legibility, information content and accuracy of subtitles. He concluded that although translation quality assessment had become an oft-debated topic of applied research, this had not yet resulted in much research output. Not so much seems to have changed; as already mentioned, the quality of subtitles is still not one of the issues most frequently dealt with in audiovisual translation – and when it is, it is often addressed with respect to a specific type of subtitling, i.e., intralingual (semi-)live subtitling for the hearing impaired.

Let us look at what has been investigated so far in the field of interlingual subtitle quality. Ivarsson and Carroll (1998), to whom many works refer, deal only indirectly with subtitle quality. Their focus is clearly on parameters that guarantee maximum readability. As regards the translation part, i.e., the transfer of a message from the polysemiotic source text to the subtitles, we find only the rather general statement: "Translations simply *must* be correct, and omissions as few as possible within the constraints of the inexorable 'time limits'" (p. 107; italics in the original). Since then, several authors have tried to better define subtitle quality. Díaz Cintas (2001) proposed three categories: (1) technical constraints (synchronisation, reduction, reading time), (2) working conditions, and (3) linguistic transfer. One might argue that this taxonomy mixes quality from both a product and a process perspective and, moreover, that the parameters dealing with quality from a product perspective would benefit from further differentiation. Bogucki (2013, pp. 37-39) too proposes a quality classification based on three criteria, but with the advantage of focussing clearly on the product: (1) technical aspects (subtitle length), (2) semantic aspects (mistranslations), and (3) stylistic aspects (inadequate register). He also mentions the role of contextual parameters such as the use of tools

and templates on subtitle quality, but clearly separates them from the issue of quality in the end-result of the subtitling process.

Klaus (2015, pp. 71-86) offers an even more fine-grained classification distinguishing (1) technical issues, subdivided into (a) presentation (font, number of lines, position, alignment, line length, colour, background), and (b) reading speed (subtitle speed, rhythm, pauses between subtitles), the focus being on the legibility of subtitles; and (2) translational issues, related to semantic and syntactic accuracy. As regards this latter category, Klaus further distinguishes between (a) language (simple wording and phrasing, correct spelling and punctuation, line breaks that respect logical or syntactic units); and (b) content (shortening and fidelity, i.e., coherence between the polysemiotic source text and the subtitle), with the emphasis being placed on comprehensibility. This classification represents clear added value in the literature on subtitling. The author does indeed try to approach the complex question of subtitle quality more systematically, integrating insights from different theoretical approaches and openly discussing categorisation problems. It is noteworthy, however, that legibility, intelligibility and inconspicuousness are mentioned concurrently with the mentioned quality criteria, when, in fact, they are not on the same level: legibility, readability and thus intelligibility are the result of subtitles meeting the various quality dimensions. Moreover, they are not clearly defined – something which, however, can be observed in other publications too.

The most recent attempt at defining subtitle quality comes from Pedersen (2017). He proposes three categories (the "FAR model"): (1) functional equivalence, comprising an assessment of both semantic and stylistic aspects; (2) acceptability, which concerns the question of how well subtitles adhere to target-language norms and which looks at grammar, spelling, and idiomaticity; and (3) readability, i.e., technical aspects related to the question of how easy subtitles are to process, with the sub-categories (a) segmentation and spotting, (b) punctuation and graphics, and (c) reading speed and line length. Interestingly, although the issue of the viewers' needs and expectations is given quite some consideration, no attempt is made at linking up subtitling research with intelligibility research. One of the added values of this FAR model is, however, its potential for use in didactic contexts, since the author proposes a framework for numerically measuring subtitle quality.

The observations of the above-mentioned studies on subtitle quality are based on the personal standpoint of the researchers (although often as a result of the analysis of a subtitle corpus); in other words, they do not take into account the opinions of professional subtitlers. This was done in Robert and Remael's (2016) survey of quality parameters and quality assurance practices in the subtitling industry. The authors distinguish two overall quality dimensions: translation quality parameters (content, grammar, readability, and appropriateness) on the one hand; and technological parameters (style guide, speed, spotting, and formatting) on the other. These parameters were identified via a literature survey on translation revision and supplemented with relevant criteria from the Code of Good Subtitling Practice (Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998, pp. 157-159). Robert and Remael's categorisation raises some interesting theoretical questions: (1) Are the identified quality parameters really situated on the same level? Style guides certainly have a bearing on what subtitles look like. However, one

could also see them as a guiding feature of subtitle production, influencing the way the spotting and formatting is done, rather than as a quality parameter per se; and (2) To what extent are the proposed parameters mutually exclusive? Is readability not linked to speed? Can speed and spotting be neatly distinguished? These kinds of differentiation problems arise of course in any attempt at defining quality. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile analysing them, not only for theoretical, but also applied reasons such as the drafting of style guides.

Although quite some progress has been made in recent years in research on subtitle quality, there is room for development. The present study therefore looks at the issue of subtitle quality not from the point of view of the author himself, as most studies do, but from that of professional subtitlers asked to identify essential features of high-quality subtitles. Unlike the study by Robert and Remael (2016), the questions investigating quality parameters in my survey were open-ended, allowing a more comprehensive and naturalistic collection of the opinions of subtitlers. The next section describes how the study was conducted.

3. Method

Data on a series of aspects related to subtitling practice were collected in an online questionnaire using LimeSurvey among professional subtitlers in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland. The link to the questionnaire was published on forums and websites of professional translators' and subtitlers' associations. The questionnaire contained items on a variety of quality-related aspects from different perspectives (subtitle quality, quality assurance in subtitling projects, acceptance of subtitles). There were both closed and open-ended questions, many of them with rating scale answer options.

The questionnaire was answered (in full, nearly in full or partially) by 82 subtitlers, and 59 questionnaires completed in full or nearly in full were used for the data analysis. Most respondents were female subtitlers aged 30-39 who had completed translator training and produced subtitles mainly for the German market. Statistical analyses on closed questions were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20. Answers to open-ended questions were submitted to qualitative content analysis and coded at two levels (initial coding and second-level coding, see Dörnyei, 2007, chap. 10.2.2). Thus, the subtitle quality statement "Adequate rendering of the soundtrack, taking into account readability. Subtitles must not be too overloaded, otherwise the viewer will turn off." (my translation) was first coded with the two general labels *correspondence* and *intelligibility* (see Section 4 below), before being hierarchised as specific aspects of these two quality parameters, i.e., as denotation and simplicity.

46 survey participants answered the open-ended question on quality parameters that will be analysed in this article. A more comprehensive overview of the data collection and data analysis methods as well as the questionnaire can be found in Künzli (2017). The data and analyses presented in this article have not previously been published.

4. The CIA model of subtitle quality

I would like to start with quotes from five different survey participants. The quotes have been extracted from the responses to the question about essential aspects of subtitle quality. The statements can be categorized into different quality criteria. I have translated them from German into English.

> Quote 1: The atmosphere, the language, the style are conveyed as far as possible.

> Quote 2: Condensation should not be perceived as too disruptive by people who have a knowledge of the language of the original soundtrack.

> Quote 3: Short, easy-to-read subtitles that only convey the most important elements, but keep the story going on for the viewer.

> Quote 4: Smooth reading of subtitles, pleasant appearance, accurate timing and alignment of subtitles.

> Quote 5: The language must sound idiomatic and like ordinary speech. It must strike a balance between spoken and written language.

Quote 1 is about adequate transfer from source to target text. This subtitler expects subtitles to provide the viewer with an accurate picture of both the form and atmospheric quality of the original. Correspondence (see Section 4.1. below) between the polysemiotic source text and the subtitles is thus the first quality dimension of the model.

Quote 2 still deals with correspondence, but addresses the special reception situation of subtitles. In contrast to most instances of translation proper, subtitles present the original and the translation simultaneously. Many viewers of subtitled audiovisual productions have a knowledge of the source language and react negatively to deviations from the original soundtrack. The necessity to shorten the text, to which this subtitler refers, may result in such deviations. We are again dealing with the quality dimension of *correspondence*, but have moved towards another essential aspect of subtitle quality, that of subtitle intelligibility.

Intelligibility (see Section 4.2. below) is central in Quote 3. In order for subtitles to be comprehensible, they are expected to be concise as regards both content and language. This can be achieved by reducing the message to the minimum of information necessary for the subtitles to fulfil their communicative function, and with the minimum of signs possible. Even if not mentioned explicitly by this subtitler, the specific reception context of subtitles shines through in this statement. Subtitles are expected to be short and easy-to-read because the audience does not always get the chance to

reread them. This makes coherence a major issue. Intelligibility is thus considered the second overall quality dimension of the model.

Quote 4 illustrates a further quality criterion that I would like to subsume under intelligibility. However, whereas Quote 3 primarily raises the question of the subtitles' readability, i.e., lexical and syntactic simplicity, we are dealing here with legibility. This subtitler considers legibility in terms of rhythm, typography and positioning an essential feature of high-quality subtitles. *Legibility* as the physical presentation of subtitles and the degree to which they can be perceived is a prerequisite for *readable* subtitles. The quality dimension *intelligibility* in my model thus consists of two main quality parameters: legibility (perceptibility) and readability.

Quote 5 deals with a target language aspect that can be addressed independently of the translation or transfer process. It concerns the linguistic authenticity of subtitles (see Section 4.3. below). Although language in motion pictures – which are a genre frequently referred to by the survey participants – only partly reflects spontaneous speech, subtitles are expected to simulate orality to a certain degree. If they do not, viewers will only be partly able to immerse themselves in the plot.

Based on the quality statements of the professional subtitlers participating in the study, I propose a subtitle quality model consisting of three overall subtitle quality dimensions: Correspondence, Intelligibility, Authenticity – hence the CIA model of subtitle quality. Each quality dimension consists of a subset of more specific quality parameters. To categorize the data as systematically as possible and represent them in the form of a model, insights from translation studies, linguistics, and – most notably – intelligibility research were used as further input, as will be shown in the next sections.
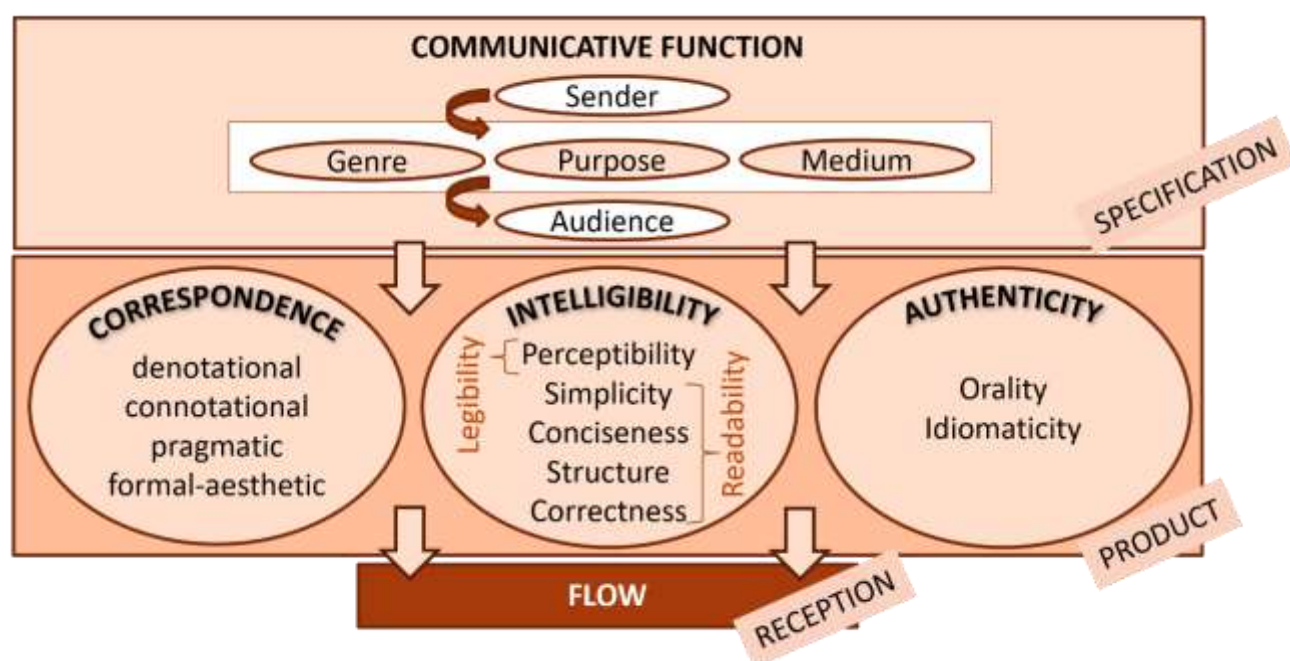
Figure 1.   The CIA Model of Subtitle Quality

Some general remarks at the outset. First, the model is text-focused – it provides only a minimal text-external frame of reference (called "specification"). Second, it illustrates subtitling practice aimed principally at hearing people, not those with a hearing impairment. Third, the model makes no claim on theoretical exhaustiveness, as only the quality parameters expressed by the survey respondents are represented.

4.1. Correspondence

Let us look at the quality dimensions and parameters in more detail. The first dimension – correspondence – is essential from a translation theory perspective. It refers to the degree of necessary similarity between the original and the subtitles – 'necessary' as defined by the subtitler on the basis of the specification received from the client. Correspondence regards the transfer of the original's semantic value, atmosphere, emotions, language and individual aesthetic properties to the subtitles. Since an exact reproduction of all facets of the polysemiotic original text is impossible – especially so in subtitling, given the often elusive mode of reception – subtitlers will establish a hierarchy of invariance requirements. In some productions, form will be primary, for example rhyme in musicals. In others, subtitlers will predominantly try to preserve meaning, e.g., in documentaries. In still other productions, text-external pragmatic factors (e.g., making the audience laugh) is judged crucial.

The survey participants' quality statements can be categorized into the following quality parameters related to the dimension of correspondence: (1) denotational (the semantic value conveyed by a message, taking into account the image); (2) connotational (the message's secondary meaning, e.g., regarding the social or geographical identity of a character in the movie to be subtitled); (3) formal-aesthetic (the original's individual stylistic character); and (4) pragmatic (the effect a scene is supposed to have on the audience). It can be observed that the quality parameters mentioned by the survey participants reflect equivalence relations frequently found in translation studies literature quite well (e.g., Koller, 2011, part II, chap. 3). A specificity in subtitling as opposed to translating may, however, be the frequent mention of atmosphere and emotions (which I regard as aspects of connotational correspondence) as variables to be taken into consideration when defining subtitle quality. It may be argued that these criteria would not appear to the same degree in a similar survey on quality perceptions by professional translators. The term *correspondence* was chosen because the subtitlers use expressions like *angepasst, passend zu* or *entsprechen* "correspond" and *Entsprechungen* "correspondence" rather than *Äquivalenz* "equivalence" or *Ähnlichkeit* "similarity" in their statements. The choice of the label *correspondence* is thus data-driven. It is not used in the sense of Nida's (2000) principles of correspondence, for example.

4.2. Intelligibility

Most quality statements concern *intelligibility*, which refers to the degree to which subtitles are comprehensible in terms of both their physical presentation and the way in which the message is formulated. Intelligibility is an issue in translation proper too. However, if – again – one were to

conduct a comparative study of the quality perceptions of subtitlers vs. translators, it is unlikely that translators would mention parameters related to making a text understandable to the same degree as the subtitlers in my survey did. The CIA model distinguishes five intelligibility parameters – perceptibility, simplicity, conciseness, structure and correctness – and covers two important aspects of subtitle quality, i.e., legibility (perceptibility) and readability (simplicity, conciseness, structure and correctness). These parameters are based on Göpferich's (2009) Karlsruhe comprehensibility concept, which in turn is based on Langer, Schulz von Thun, & Tausch (2015) and has been adapted by me to subtitling. Let us look at them more closely.

Perceptibility, according to Göpferich (2009, p. 48), "covers those features which determine the ease with which texts can be perceived with our senses and thus be made accessible to our cognitive systems for further processing". I suggest subsuming under this parameter the survey respondents' quality statements on rhythm (subtitle speed), typography (fonts), and arrangement (position).

The four other quality parameters related to intelligibility – simplicity, conciseness, structure, and correctness – concern *readability*, i.e., dimensions that make subtitles easy to understand once they have been perceived. *Simplicity* refers to clarity of expression. Examples of quality criteria mentioned by the survey respondents are lexical and grammatical simplicity (Are the words used familiar to the target audience? Has sentence complexity been reduced without violating the original's communicative function?) Many quality statements also deal with *conciseness*. Subtitles are expected to be ideally concise in terms of both the amount of information given and the number of signs used to express this information, in order to minimise the effort the audience has to make in reading them. *Structure* refers to content structure (and not layout, which is dealt with under the quality parameter *perceptibility*). Cohesion within and between subtitles as well as segmentation are essential in this regard. Structure expresses itself at the micro level (within subtitles) and at the macro level (between subtitles). In some instances, this could also imply that subtitles reproduce the order in which the information is given in the original soundtrack, so as to avoid a clash between image, soundtrack, and subtitles. *Correctness*, finally, is a quality parameter that many intelligibility models do not take into account, as Göpferich (2009, p. 42) rightly points out. It is, however, frequently mentioned by the professional subtitlers participating in my study. Linguistic errors hamper intelligibility – especially so in subtitling, where rereading is not always possible. The term intelligibility was chosen because it covers both the aspect of a text that is perceivable by our senses and understandable by our cognitive system, whereas "comprehensibility" focuses on the second aspect.

4.3. Authenticity

Let us now come to the third overall quality dimension, *authenticity,* which looks at the target text in itself, i.e., independently from the original soundtrack. It can be defined as the subtitles' potential to reflect natural language use and speech, not least due to the co-presence of the original soundtrack with the subtitles. To be sure, subtitlers must ask themselves to what extent they can violate written language norms without making the text incomprehensible. Moreover, *orality* in audiovisual

productions differs from spontaneous speech and subtitles are realised in the graphic code. Still, for the professional subtitlers participating in my study, high-quality subtitles are subtitles that reflect some degree of spontaneous-sounding conversation. Authenticity in terms of orality can be expected at different linguistic levels: morphological, syntactical, semantic-lexical, and textual-pragmatic (see Henjum, 2004, for a rigorous and still up-to-date overview of orality as a translation problem). From a theoretical point of view, orality could also be treated under the quality criterion *connotational correspondence*. After all, it refers to the positive/negative association an expression carries and the rendering of a word or turn marked as oral in writing. However, since subtitles are expected to show some degree of orality independently of the original, the model views orality and hence linguistic authenticity as a separate quality dimension.

A second feature of linguistic authenticity often mentioned as a quality parameter by the subtitlers participating in the study is *idiomaticity*. It refers to the expectation that subtitles sound natural and are appropriate in the given context. Although idiomaticity presents some similarity with the quality parameter *correctness*, the two criteria do not overlap. Whereas correctness is related to correct use of grammar (punctuation, morphology, syntax), idiomaticity concerns also formulaic language, of which idiomatic expressions and proverbs, mentioned by the subtitlers, are some examples. A recent overview of the role played by formulaic language in audiovisual translation can be found in Pavesi (2018).

4.4. Specification

Subtitling does not occur in a vacuum, of course, but within specific contextual constraints. However, the nature of the CIA model is comparative rather than causal. It aims to describe subtitles and their relation to the polysemiotic original text and to target-language norms rather than explaining why subtitles look the way they do. Therefore, it takes into account the general production framework only, distinguishing five main variables that have a bearing on the end-result of the subtitling process, i.e., the subtitles: (1) the sender (the person or company in whose name the audiovisual content is distributed); (2) the audiovisual genre (musicals, documentaries, news programs, etc.); (3) the purpose (to entertain, inform, persuade the audience); (4) the medium via which the content is distributed and received and which may have an influence on permitted subtitle length (e.g., cinema vs. internet); and (5) the audience (age, cultural background, level of education, sensory impairments, etc.). Taken together, these specification variables define the communicative function of subtitles. The frame of reference also illustrates why there always is a trade-off between the three quality dimensions. Depending on the purpose and/or the audience, intelligibility may be more or less of an issue than, for example, linguistic authenticity.

4.5. Flow

It is hypothesized that if the different quality dimensions are met, subtitle reception will lead to a flow experience. The flow concept was introduced in psychology by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (for a recent overview of his work, see 2014) and defined in the following way:

Flow is a subjective state that people report when they are completely involved in something to the point of forgetting time, fatigue, and everything else but the activity itself. It is what we feel when we read a well-crafted novel or play a good game of squash, or take part in a stimulating conversation. The defining feature of flow is intense experiential involvement in moment-to-moment activity. Attention is fully invested in the task at hand, and the person functions at his or her fullest capacity. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 191)

The flow concept can be applied to subtitle reception. The degree to which a person is able to become absorbed by a plot, focusing attention on eliminating all distractions and lose track of time – in other words, to experience flow while watching audiovisual content with subtitles – will depend on the degree to which the above mentioned subtitle quality dimensions and parameters are met. Consider the following example: A person selects a movie to watch with subtitles. As s/he begins watching it, s/he senses that his/her abilities are not up to the task, that the subtitles disappear too quickly or are too long to be processed effortlessly. As a result of this mismatch between perceived challenges and perceived skills, s/he will experience frustration and opt for another movie – or the same movie with dubbing. If, however, the subtitles meet the above-mentioned quality criteria, the same person will be able to digest the subtitles, find the reception situation involving and interesting, and experience flow.

There are a series of quality statements in the survey participants' answers that can be interpreted in the light of the flow concept. What the subtitlers describe in their following statements is a state in which the audience is concentrated on what is going on on the screen, can cope with the subtitles, and forgets everything but the action itself:

Quote 6: The subtitles disappear. They are so perfectly integrated with the footage that you hardly notice them.

Quote 7: Good subtitles are almost imperceptible, because they follow the rhythm of the film without imposing themselves.

Quote 8: All roles or characters in the film are presented so convincingly, even with the limited means of subtitling, that the viewer can identify with them.

Film producers strive to create plots that allow viewers to become absorbed by them. If subtitles take away only a minimal amount of resources and attention from the visual and aural input of the original, the audience will experience the activity of watching a movie with subtitles as intrinsically rewarding and thus be able to experience flow.

I would like to claim that the flow concept is better suited to address the issue of high-quality subtitles and a rewarding reception experience than that of inconspicuousness, which has been used in the literature on subtitling for many years (e.g., Ivarsson & Carroll, 1998; Georgakopoulou, 2009) but

lacks a solid theoretical foundation. Inconspicuous subtitles are considered to be subtitles that go unnoticed and that do not draw attention to themselves. The exact linguistic dimensions to which this inconspicuousness refers are generally not detailed (semantic, formal, pragmatic?).

The concept of *inconspicuousness* could be reinterpreted in the light of the flow theory. Inconspicuous subtitles are subtitles that enable the audience to enter into a flow experience while watching an audiovisual production. Viewers are "in flow" when they sense that they are engaging challenges at a level appropriate to their listening, viewing, and reading capacities and can deal with the situation because the perceived challenges and skills are well matched. In other words, they experience the situation as absorbing and interesting, because the subtitles render the original message well, are intelligible, and sound authentic, the epitome of which is flow.

The flow concept is related to that of psychological immersion, which has been applied to the study of media usage. Wissmath and Weibel (2012) have proposed looking at psychological immersion from three perspectives: (1) presence (i.e., the feeling that one is located within the mediated scenery); (2) transportation (cognitive, affective and imagery involvement); and (3) flow. They stress that the emphasis in flow lies on active reception (rather than, for example, spatial immersion in a mediated environment) and that media usage often results in intense concentration and focus, which are indicators of flow. This clearly suggests the usefulness of the flow concept for the study of the reception of subtitled fictional contents. Rheinberg *et al.* (2003) have developed a self-reporting rating scale to measure different flow sub-dimensions that could be adapted to assess flow while watching subtitled movies and, more specifically, to investigate which subtitle dimensions (correspondence with the original soundtrack, intelligibility, linguistic authenticity) enhance or hamper the experience of flow. More recently, Kruger *et al.* (2016) have measured psychological immersion in an experimental setting, testing the impact of subtitled vs. non-subtitled content. The results revealed that the group watching a movie with subtitles reported significantly higher results for transportation and character identification. The authors concluded that this was the result of improved comprehension of the dialogue and verbal nuances. The subtitles were, however, displayed in the same language as the original soundtrack. More research is therefore needed to investigate psychological immersion, and hence, flow experience, in the context of interlingual subtitles.

5. Conclusions

This paper has investigated subtitle quality from the point of view of professional subtitlers. On the basis of the quality statements expressed by subtitlers in an online survey, I developed the CIA model of subtitle quality, consisting of the three quality dimensions *Correspondence, Intelligibility,* and *Authenticity*. I also hypothesized that if the model's quality dimensions and parameters are met, the reception of a subtitled audiovisual production will lead to a flow experience. This assumption, however, has yet to be tested in a reception study.

The model fills a gap in the literature, as it integrates relevant quality parameters from different typologies and disciplines. Subtitle quality, at least as understood in this paper, i.e., prepared interlingual subtitles for an audience without hearing impairment, has not received much attention. Moreover, hardly any attempts at modelling quality in the strict sense have been made. This is quite surprising in light of the fact that the translation industry is becoming ever more standardized and, concurrently, the issue of quality – both from a product and process perspective – is gaining in importance. The model also has didactic potential. Depending on the genre, the sender's or the audience's profile, trainers could attribute a different number of maximum points to each of the three quality dimensions, subtract a penalty point for each error and convert the final score (i.e., the number of remaining points once all the penalty points have been subtracted) into a grade according to the grading system in operation in each country. Since the model is both sufficiently differentiating and of manageable complexity, trainee subtitlers will find it fairly straightforward to understand not only what quality dimension and parameters they have to focus their attention on, but also which criteria they are (already) doing a good job in.

Let us take a look at possible future directions. First, it would be interesting to investigate how quality expectations, subtitling practice, and the status and working conditions of subtitlers evolve over time. Longitudinal studies are an underutilized method not only in subtitle research, but in translation studies more generally. Researchers following the same group of subtitlers over a longer period would be able to tap fluctuations in opinions regarding the development of the subtitling industry more accurately than if different individuals were to be tracked at each measuring point. In the present case, data collection was anonymous, which eliminates a longitudinal design as an option. However, since I collected sociodemographic variables of the survey participants, changes in quality perceptions could still be measured in a time-lag study.

Second, written surveys leave little room for nuances in the formulation of answers and restrict the freedom of respondents. However, they have the advantage that they can be analysed cost-effectively. In a follow-up study, certain questions that could not be conclusively dealt with could be addressed in depth in interviews. It would be interesting to present the quality model to professional subtitlers for comment or to test its validity by having a group of professional subtitlers evaluate a set of subtitles. This could be done by asking them to think aloud while watching an excerpt of an audiovisual production and comment on the subtitles' quality.

Last but not least, although the study provides insights into the functioning of the subtitling culture in a specific language area, the German one, this area represents only a part of the global subtitling market. What the situation looks like in other parts of the world remains to be explored.

Bio note

Alexander Künzli is Professor of Translation Studies at the Faculty of Translation and Interpreting of the University of Geneva. He is also Head of the German Unit and President of the Faculty's Ethics

Committee. He teaches translation theory, research methodology, and audiovisual translation. Alexander Künzli holds an MA in Translation and Psychology from the University of Geneva, and a PhD in French Linguistics from the University of Stockholm. His research interests are as diverse as subtitling, translation revision and the collaboration between the Swedish writer August Strindberg and his translators and language revisers. He publishes in four different languages (English, German, French and Swedish) and is Editor-in-Chief of the translation studies journal Parallèles. Among his most recent publications is a monograph that investigates professional subtitling culture, the status of subtitlers, the workflow of subtitling projects, and the collaboration between the different stakeholders involved in such projects.

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