



The silent speaker: same language subtitles

An historical, semiotic, and didactic investigation of subtitles

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Spring 2017
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Abstract

The field of subtitling is certainly one of the underrated and underexplored areas in the academic world. This project intends to outline the lengthy evolution of subtitles as it was being shaped throughout the last century by experimenting with its different forms and uses. The historical perspective sheds light on the field of subtitling and looks at its functions, technology, and usages, tracing its change from the origin to its present-day form.

The intention of covering the historical side of the field is to familiarize the reader with the profession and its practices before stepping into a more detailed observation, covering linguistic and semiotic elements of subtitling.

As a medium of communication, it is a field that can reach countless viewers. It can be used as a tool for educating the illiterate, deaf and the hard of hearing, students of second language, enriching vocabulary, maintaining language skills for the elderly, not to mention its capability of translating information to a non-native-speaker audience for the purpose of exchanging cultural wealth.

Problem definition & research questions

To what extent can subtitling be utilized as a tool for eradicating illiteracy?

Research questions:

- How did the practice of subtitling come to be in its current form and what are the historical origins of subtitles?
- How and to what extent can subtitles improve language learning/acquisition and can they be seen as a language learning tool?
- What are the benefits of subtitling the greater part of media outlets as seen from the mass perspective?

Dimensions: Text & Sign, History & Culture, Subjectivity & Learning

Introduction

Assuming that the viewers of films in general rarely consider how subtitles are made and how much work goes into making them, the following pages will attempt to acquaint the reader with the numerous details that goes into creating quality subtitles that viewers of films, television, or other multimedia products enjoy daily. In today's world, having so much advanced technology can make one easily think that speech-recognition technology can, in fact, generate the perfect subtitles, however, as the following pages will explain, this is not the case yet. The project will briefly touch upon the challenges of modern subtitling and attempt to answer as to why in this age of towering technology does the field still requires human intervention.

Within the dimensions of multimedia communications, this project is concerned with subtitling only and it's partaking in adding readability to a media product. As the differences in types of subtitling will be discussed in detail in the following chapters, the reader should be reminded that the paper focuses on the intralingual version of subtitles, that is, same language subtitles (but not exclusively).

This project is aimed at supporting the idea that the presence of subtitles in films, public and commercial TV channels, DVDs and other sources of multimedia communication to a certain degree allows the public to develop motivation for language learning. It promotes the idea that even being passively exposed to textual form of a second language can make it easier for people to develop foreign languages: "... as students raise their level of foreign-language knowledge and become more familiar with subtitles, the importance of exposure to foreign-language subtitles in the same language as the audio looms as a necessary horizon to aim for." (Gambier et. al., 2015:117)

Numerous benefits of watching subtitled films will be listed and discussed, however, it is important to note that this method of learning is for the purpose of enhancing or supporting the language acquisition and I do not claim that solely watching subtitled films can be used as a tool for learning a foreign language from scratch.

Before the paper will address the learning dimensions of the subject, technical aspects of the subtitling field will be explored in attempt to acquaint the reader with subtitling on a deeper level. Certain technical words are highlighted in **bold** to indicate their presence in the glossary section, where the reader can find their full definitions.

The beginning chapter will explore the history related to speech-to-text technologies tracing change over time up to the latest subtitling techniques of our day. The second chapter covers technicalities, methods and the preferences exercised in the contemporary creation of subtitles. The third chapter is for the purpose of acquainting the reader with today's different uses of the translation/transcription tool. The fourth chapter turns away from the technical aspects of the field and delves into the semiotic and

linguistic aspects found in subtitles. The fifth chapter is dedicated to examining how subtitles can be used as a tool for learning languages, enhancing literacy, and democratizing the media through its use of subtitles for the deaf and hard of hearing. Finally, the discussion chapter will conclude the paper by highlighting the benefits of subtitles, its significance for the development of literacy and future prospects.

A brief history of subtitles

“Motion picture technology has three roots that go back for centuries. The *chemistry* of film has its roots in still photography. The other two roots are *projection*, which had its origin in the magic lantern, and *stills-in-motion*, which began as toys that depended on *persistence of vision*.” (Fang, 2015:185)

This chapter will guide through the major stages of subtitling seen as one of the important elements in the field of information and communication technologies, or ICTs, from its origins to its present-day state.

Not long after the invention of film, efforts were made to convey dialogue through written text. At first, what we now call **intertitles** were used. These were texts drawn or printed on paper and inserted between the frames of silent films in the slapstick era. The purpose of intertitles was to show what the film characters were saying or thinking and are considered to be the first form of subtitles, believed to be invented by the cartoonist and a filmmaker J. Stuart Blackton (Ivarsson, 2004). Cinema was usually a form of entertainment also for the illiterate in the society and the cinema hall usually would have an interpreter present, who would entertain the audience by telling them what was written on the screen. In addition, silent films weren't necessarily 'silent' as such, since most films would be accompanied by live music, orchestrating the surroundings to heighten the emotional impact. Aside from intertitles, further presence of text was seen in films, for example, ushers would often hand out “short program descriptions that outlined the plot and explained any complex relationships between characters.” (Karamitroglou, 2000, as cited in Downey, 2010:19).

The year 1927 saw the invention of sound film. It was the Warner Bros. that took the leap into creating the first feature-length motion picture with synchronized dialogue sequences, *The Jazz Singer* (Ibid.). Also known as 'talking pictures' or 'talkies', the release of sound films heralded their commercial ascendance whereafter the necessity of intertitles gradually disappeared and the decline of the silent film era was observed. However, bringing audible dialogues into the film industry brought in the need for

exploring new technicalities as the viewing experience took on new dimensions. In other words, the birth of 'talkies' necessitated the subsequent birth of a film-centered subtitling industry. This was due to the fact that silent films had one universal visual language beforehand (aside from the sporadic intertitles, which uncomplicatedly could be translated and reinstalled into the picture) while with sound film the footage was in most cases bound to a single language, inaccessible by those who didn't understand it.

Solutions were presented and dubbing and voice-over (which will be explained in further detail in the 'Technical details and design' chapter) were some of the more popular methods deployed to transfer the films into another language. They were, however, expensive methods of translation, especially the multi-language versions or MLVs, which were used mainly during 1929-1933. The process of MLVs involved the re-shooting the entire film with different actors fluent in the relevant language.

Technically referred to as 'lip-synchronized revoicing', more commonly known as dubbing, was a less expensive method invented few years after. Although cheaper than the MLVs, there were numerous downsides. It was technically challenging and nonetheless still on the expensive side as it required hiring numerous voice actors. Furthermore, it had also the aesthetic and ideological constraints (some deeming it as 'polluted translation' (Li, 2012:77)) and was not making the film and television accessible to the deaf and hard of hearing audiences.

Finally, subtitling emerged as a cost-effective method for solving the language barrier issue, which involved the translated text being added to the original film, without requiring making much changes to the original film. This was a much cheaper solution which allowed to make Hollywood films available in other countries and expand their presence in foreign audiences. It "was a practice carefully designed by its practitioners to meet the cultural needs of language translation, the economic needs of commodity distribution, and the artistic needs of cinematic integrity." (Downey, 2010:18). The invention of subtitling was promising, but at least in the beginning it involved a substantial division of labor.

First of all, a team of professionals had to watch the entire film, transcribe all the dialogues manually, translate the source content into the target language, preserving the meaning of the original subject matter, place the subtitles in sync with the original audio dialogues, finally edit and proofread and hand out the final product to the production (Ibid.:29). Much of this process remains or at least is involved in today's subtitling, however, the big difference in the present is the state of the art technology used in the industry that fulfils the task of subtitling much more effectively. The cost, manpower, and time it takes for the creation of subtitles today compared to the early 20th century has been radically reduced (Ibid.). The more recent analysis of the quality of subtitles show that it is not enough to simply translate or transcribe the audio dialogues to effectively deliver subtitles. Nowadays, the field of subtitling requires more expertise on behalf of the professionals, including linguistic competence,

sociocultural knowledge, being savvy in communication technologies along with the capability to quickly adapt to new subtitling softwares and technicalities as the tools for subtitling become more refined (Cintas & Remael, 2014:72). More details on the technicalities of the profession will be discussed in the following chapters.

The time and inventions it took to refine subtitling took up almost a century. Over the years, the versions, preferences, and methods of subtitling ranged from country to country, and the 1970's and 1980's saw the agreement of roughly the same customs when experts in the field (Jan Ivarsson and Georg-Michael Luyken in particular) started to involve the field of work in the academic context (the current agreed standards of subtitling will be further discussed in the following chapters) (Downey, 2010:29). The difference between subtitling and dubbing was the fact that subtitling in theory could be performed by a single professional, whereas dubbing, at least in its most finest form, requires the coverage of all voices (unless we count the cases where only one voice is heard). In this sense, it was and is cost-effective to recruit one individual for the work as opposed to financing several voice actors when choosing between subtitling and dubbing. Due to the cost factors, Downey writes that "audiences in smaller and/or less affluent language communities have been trained to rely on less-expensive subtitling, especially Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, and Sweden" (Ibid.:33). Regarding this, some film critics argue that "in a country where sub-titling is applied on a large scale, the quality of dubbing will be relatively low, and vice versa." (Vöge, 1977, as cited in Downey, 2010:33).

This viewpoint allows the safe assumption that the tendency of practicing subtitling more than dubbing, at least in some of the above-listed countries, resulted in the further development of the field itself. According to Cintas and Remael's book on subtitling, the late 1970's saw the commercial availability of the first subtitling equipment (2014:70). The advent of technology and computers have had a direct impact on how subtitles are made and have been effective in easing the process of creating them. During this period, the field of subtitling soon revealed another nationwide use which was the computer-aided realtime translation (CART). This became widely used for the immediate translation of live events such as news reporting and was widely adopted as the means to educate and lecture the deaf in classrooms (Downey, 2010:167). While a decade before that time the process of translating information for the deaf and hard of hearing would be a lengthy and costly process, the 1970's computer advancement made it possible to employ a fast typist with a computer hooked up to a screen who would transfer the spoken words onto a television screen to the whole classroom (Ibid.). This technique was revolutionizing and played a large role in advancing the education for the D/HOH (deaf/hard-of-hearing) students. CART also aided court reporters to move into the captioning of court cases to transcribe and translate the proceedings held at court (also as an assistive tool for the D/HOH). For example, by the mid-1990's, United States already had about two dozen courtrooms that were computer-integrated (Ibid.:186). This practice of recording led to

far less error and granted the realtime reporters a clear occupational advantage by the late years of the same decade.

Regardless, audiovisual translation was still an emerging field in the 1980's (Gambier et. al., 2015:41), as Danan writes: "Because in 1989 the field was still in its infancy, I think I was able to read almost all that was published on both dubbing and subtitling from a pedagogical, cultural and historical perspective" (Ibid.:43). The decade after, however, saw major technological advances. The automatic speech-recognition technology (which will be further discussed in the following chapters) made it possible to produce instantaneous transcriptions or translations of live events more effectively.

It was said earlier that since its first phases subtitling has become much easier and faster to create with the advanced technology, however, new advances invite new complications and skills to be learned. Even though the technology of automatic speech-recognition has been around since the 90's, automatically generated subtitles to this day are still far from perfection. There are a number of spelling, grammar and word mistakes on behalf of the computer which requires human interference for making these corrections. The following chapter will discuss the technical and aesthetic sides of contemporary subtitling.

Technical details and design

In the stylistic sense, presently, subtitles tend to come in white color. Occasionally, yellow is used with black and white films for the purpose of showing more contrast between the image and the text (Cintas & Remael, 2014:84). Simpler, sans serif fonts are favored due to their easier readability and the font size varies from film to film (Ibid.). Since having a white background can make the subtitles disappear if they are white as well (white on white), it is common in the industry to use **shadowing** or **contouring** as the solution, where the white letters are accompanied by a shadow or are surrounded by black contour. It is important to maintain balance in the size of subtitles as having smaller font would allow more characters on screen but render them difficult to read for the viewer, and thus hinder the comprehension. On the other hand, having large letters on screen would allow for easy readability but the downside of it would be more visual imagery covered up by the text.

The maximum number of symbols per line depends on the alphabet as the sizes of letters and words vary "and it is normal to allow 35 for Cyrillic languages like Bulgarian, Macedonian and Russian, 34 to 36 for Greek and Arabic, 12 to 14 for Japanese and Korean and between 14 and 16 for Chinese." (Ibid.:85). On average, for the Roman alphabet, the number of characters per line generally range from 33 to 43, depending on the format, occasion, and the preferences of clients. Counting the size of text by individual

characters may be misleading, since some letters occupy larger space than others in certain fonts. This is why the industry of subtitling is quickly moving on to employing pixels as the universal spatial measuring tool for text (Ibid.:84).

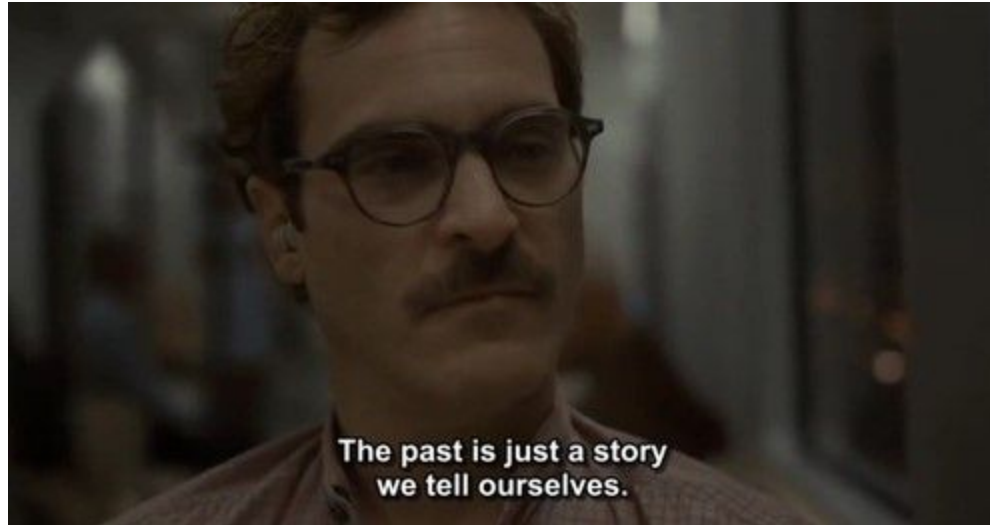
It is common to deploy two lines of subtitles per sequence for quicker readability and comprehension. However, there is a lot of argument about the ideal or universally best setup of the number of lines of subtitles and the effectiveness of two-liners. Some argue for a single line subtitle for its minimal on-screen intrusion; they advocate the idea that the less text there is the faster it is absorbed by the viewer and the absence of a second line removes the need to move the eyes back to the beginning of a line. However, Ivarsson and Carroll (Ivarsson & Carroll in Cintas & Remael, 2014:93) argue that the more text there is on the screen, the less time viewers spend on each word, meaning that the less the text, the more time the viewer will spend on reading each word. Authors on the subject such as Lomheim (Cintas & Remael, 2014:93) oppose this view, concluding that in fact, one-line subtitles are easier to read than two-liners. In their experiment, Perego et. al. tested the effect of good and bad syntactical segmentation of two-line subtitles (2010). Their hypothesis stated that badly segmented sentences would be disruptive for the viewer (see figure 1) and that it mattered where a line of subtitle would get cut for uninterrupted film experience.



Figure 1. “Example frame showing high-quality segmentation of subtitles (left panel) and low-quality segmentation of subtitles (right panel). In this example, a Noun C Adjective NP is well-segmented (left) and ill-segmented (right)” (Perego et. al., 2010:253).

Their paper also includes a detailed study of the eye-movement conducted by d'Ydewalle and De Bruycker (Ibid.:246) which found a more regular pattern in reading the standard two-line subtitles as opposed to one-line subtitles. Additionally, this study concluded that the two-liner subtitles are more likely to be fully processed by the viewer (Ibid.).

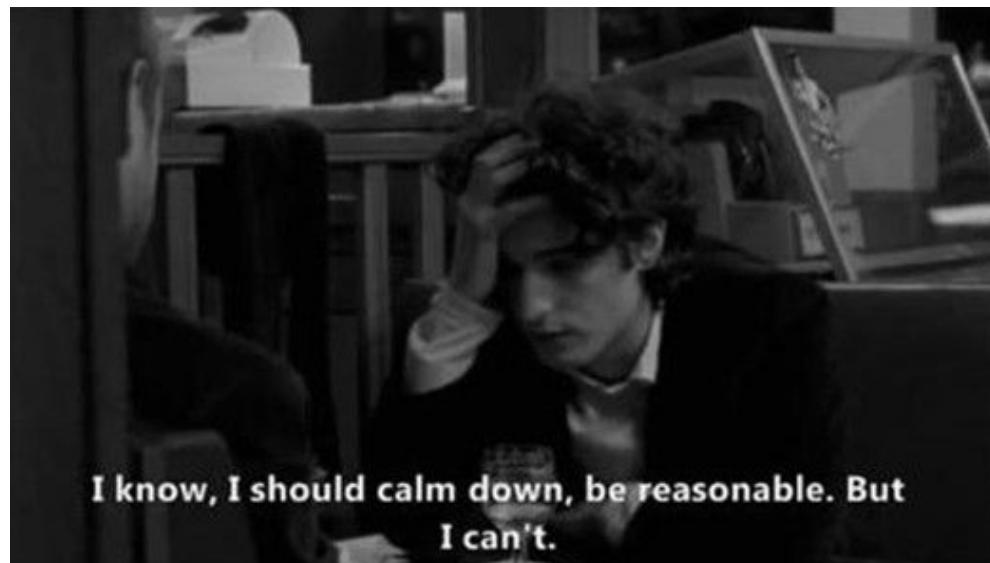
There is also a debate whether two short lines should be of the equal length or if it is better to have one shorter than the other. These are simply opinions and they vary among people's perception of what the best setup is in linguistic, aesthetic, and practical aspects. In any case, however, respecting the syntactic and semantic rules promotes readability and cohesion and should be taken in considerations no matter the opinions of style. Extremely large lines of subtitles requires the eye to travel from one end to the other which can be disruptive, this can be especially straining to the mind when watching films on large cinema screens for example. Thus, it is evident why there is no one particular universal format of subtitling in regards to length, line count, and positioning, since screen's size can range. Additionally, aspect ratio of an image can influence the design of the subtitles. Compare the two images below, where the first image provides a wide angle aspect ratio, enabling to position subtitles directly in the middle, requiring minimal movement for the eye, whereas the second image shows the opposite:



The past is just a story
we tell ourselves.

Figure 2

Credits to www.fuckyeahsubtitles.tumblr.com



I know, I should calm down, be reasonable. But
I can't.

Figure 3

Credits to www.dealspwn.com

The timing of subtitles is one of the most important elements to consider. For a full watching experience, the information delivered from the screen via visual, aural, and semiotic channels to the viewer must be a fused activity. In order for this to happen harmoniously, the subtitles need to be presented with the right rhythm. The activity of determining the appearance and disappearance of inserts is known as timing or cueing and is responsible for observing many details in the media. First and foremost, the presence of subtitles needs to mirror the audio dialogue of the film. Additionally, it is also important to consider the prosodic elements encountered in the media product, which can include pauses and interruptions (Ibid.:88).

Another aspect of timing is the length of presentation of the subtitles, or in other words, how long the text will remain on-screen before disappearing. As a general rule, the amount of time a subtitle will remain on-screen depends on the original dialogue and the assumed reading of the target audience (Ibid.: 95). This balance of subtitle exposure is important as from one side, having them on for too long can cause the viewer to read them again, positioning the multimedia product into a more text-based information transfer. On the other hand, it can be both frustrating and stressful not to be able to keep up with reading the captions, while not having the time to enjoy the visual feed.

According to Cintas and Remael, studies show that “when a subtitle remains on screen longer than the time the viewer actually needs to read it, there is a tendency to read it again.” (2014:89). This is a disruptive behaviour and in order to remove the possibility of it happening, professionals in the industry agree on the maximum amount of time of 6 seconds for allowing the subtitles to remain on-screen. The six-second rule is actually widely accepted in the film industry and according to the rule the average viewer is capable of comfortably reading two lines of subtitles.

From the perspective of available time for preparation, there are different methods of processing subtitles and Cintas and Remael provide the following classifications for each of these:

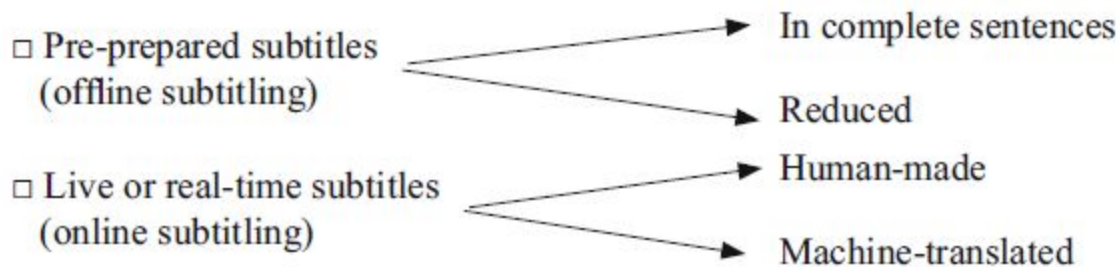


Figure 4. classification of subtitling methods as conditioned by time available for preparation (2014:19).

While the online subtitling is processed at the same time as the original programme is broadcasted, the offline subtitling is created after the programme is finished, giving translators or subtitlers time to prepare the text. Live subtitling (also known as online subtitling or **simultaneous subtitling**) requires much more expertise as there isn't any time to think about the words that need to be dictated or translated. Elements such as punctuality, resilience, and outstanding language skills are a necessity to expect a successful performance. Automatic recognition of re-spoken speech by computer software is a widely used method today for simultaneous intralingual subtitling. This is a process of subtitling where the subtitler first hears the live feed through their headphones, dictates it to the computer software in a 'computer-friendly manner'(i.e. clearly and

monotonously, emphasising each word) which then outputs subtitles that are broadcast (see figure 5).

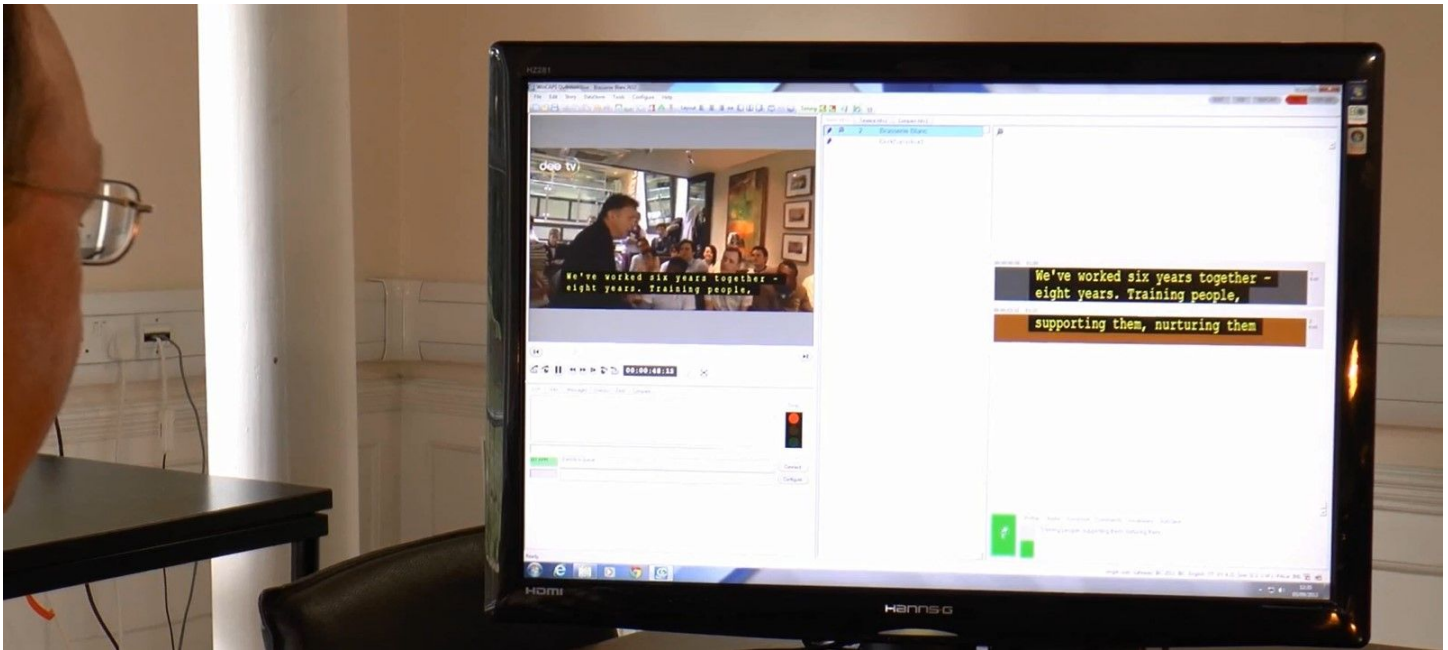


Figure 5. Simultaneous subtitler seen to dictate the dialogue onto the right side of the computer screen, which is then broadcasted live as seen on the left side of the screen.
Credits to YouTube

As a subtitler there is only a limited amount of characters per line to work with, and the characters include punctuation marks as well. Managing these important details requires a strong control over language, both technically and creatively. This task is primarily done by **adaptors**, a specific group of subtitlers whose task is to edit the given text so that it fits the screen minimizing discomfort and is easily readable by the average viewer. There are two other sub-specifications of subtitlers: **translator** and **spotter**. Translators as intuitively guessed are the ones responsible for the language transfer from one to the other and are expected to have strong command over both of the languages. Their task is primarily focused within the translation realm, making sure the meaning gets across from one language to the other. While knowledge of a language may provide the essentials of translation, it is also an imperative for the translators to know the cultures of the languages, for the purpose of translating idioms for instance; as well as be intelligible towards the cultural idiosyncrasies of the languages to better comprehend the meanings of original film. Lastly, the spotter covers perhaps the most technical side of subtitling process. The spotters are in charge of deciding the timing of subtitles and are expected to work on the synchronization of the voice and the text. Their task consists of regulating the subtitle's instant of on-screen appearance and disappearance.

In most cases, subtitles are presented in a modified or simplified state to serve technical constraints in the process of subtitling. These include “the screen space available, the duration of the subtitle, the speed of the original dialogue, and the average viewer's reading speed, which tends to range between 150 and 180 words per minute.” (Caimi, 2006: 88). In this manner, most subtitles tend to omit interjections (oh, aha, hmm) music, laughter, and background noise and in some cases shorten sentences as well:

“I want to write about things that matter, like politics and the environment
(subtitle)

I want to write about things that matter, like politics, the environment and
foreign affairs. (original dialogue)
[foreign affairs is the phrase omitted in the subtitle]” (Ibid.)

However, in subtitling, condensation and reduction is not just a matter of technical convenience on behalf of subtitlers but plays a large role in comprehension for the viewer as well. Condensation can be seen as summarizing because the viewers cannot read as fast as they can hear. This process involves capturing the language in fewer words without losing the nuances of tone and idiom.

An ample amount of people hold a rather unfavorable attitude towards the quality of subtitles. One of the major factors responsible for this is the frequent “non-appearance in the subtitles of recognizable lexical items audible in the soundtrack...” (Cintas & Remael, 2014:55-56). By many, these absent words are believed to be ‘forgotten’ to be inserted by the subtitler, which speak of their unprofessionalism. However, in truth, as mention above, there are technical constraints that limit the amount of freedom subtitler has to fully transcribe the soundtrack. Contrary to the popular negative belief, since reduction and deletion are often used in subtitling, the subtitler must be aware of the screenplay so as not to leave out any trace of information that are required for connecting events (Ibid.:48). So in this regard, subtitlers are, in fact, familiar with the dialogue, and in most cases, more than most people.

According to Ivarsson, subtitlers “have the same copyright under the Berne and World Conventions as writers and therefore have the right to see their names on works that are published” (Ivarsson in Cintas & Remael, 2014: 39). However, not every media product credits the subtitlers by mentioning their names. Oddly enough, the best subtitles are considered those that go unnoticed by the viewer and according to Caimi, viewers accustomed with subtitles “absorb the information conveyed by written dialogues subconsciously” (Caimi, 2006:88).

These circumstances make the viewer less likely to ponder about the subtitler’s presence. Just as good makeup is integrated on the face of an actor in a way that it becomes a part

of the viewing experience as a whole, so are good subtitles merged onto the visual image. “Subtitling, when it is done to high standards of excellence, includes so many of the elements essential to art and above all demands so much skill, imagination and creative talent that it is indeed an art.” (Ivarsson, 1992, as cited in Downey, 2010:30). On the whole, the invisibility tends to affect the subtitlers’ social recognition and keeps their presence anonymous. In this manner, subtitlers are far from basking in the glow of fame.

In order not to overload this paper with technicalities, further professional details will be excluded. However, it is relevant to elaborate on the functions of subtitles and the next chapter will discuss its uses in different contexts.

Species of subtitling

“Perhaps some day it may be that a reporter will be able to sit at a machine, dictate his turn, and have another machine grind out the finished transcript.

John D. Rhodes, court reporter, 1921”
(Downey, 2010:1)

There are numerous subgroups under subtitles and the list can be extensive, thus, this chapter will only cover and provide definitions for the more mainstream varieties of subtitles. First of all, it is important to distinguish the differences between several types of translation methods that multimedia products use and these include subtitling, captioning, dubbing, and voice-over. The difference between dubbing and voice-over is that in dubbing the content is recorded by a cast of professional voice actors, replacing the original audio track with the new dubbed version. In this process, the word choice and length of sentences is essential since the dubbed content must be in sync with the lip movement of the actors on screen. Whereas in voice-over, the voice is recorded on top of the original, where the original voices can still be heard.

Without a doubt, subtitling is a less expensive method of translating a media product than dubbing and voice-over and this accounts for its frequent use (Perego et. al., 2010:244). Granting, we must keep in mind that subtitling is in no way a replacement of the auditory dialogue, as watching a film with subtitles while sound is off would take some guessing on behalf of the viewer to interpret events on the screen.

Although the two terms (subtitles and captions) can be used interchangeably in general discussion, there are distinct means of characterising the two. Subtitles primarily refer to the translated visual text that viewers of other languages can enjoy. Captions, on the other hand, more commonly refer to the service used for aiding the deaf and hard of hearing (Accredited Language Services, 2017). Captions can be further classified into **open** and **closed** captions. Open captions are always in the view and cannot be turned off as they are 'glued' onto the original film (often found in old movies); closed captions can be turned on and off by the viewer (these can be encountered in more recent media channels such as Ted Talks, YouTube, or Netflix movies)(Cintas & Remael, 2014: 21).

As gathered from the '*History*' chapter, intertitles are the oldest relatives of subtitles, also known as 'title cards', and are pieces of printed text that appears between the scenes. In the early 20th century, these were widely used in silent films, with the function of delivering a piece of dialogue or a narrative related to the visual images shown. Lastly, there are **surtitles** (also known as supratitles or supertitles), which are captions projected onto a screen above the stage in an opera to present the translation/transcription of the text that is being sung. These are close relatives of the ordinary subtitles since they follow almost the same technical and functional conventions and are simply differentiated by the context they are used in (Ibid.:25).

This chapter finalizes the technical, professional, and occupational details for the field of subtitling and invites the reader to the next chapter which will look at subtitling from a more analytical perspective, considering subtitled text as a sign in the saussurean sense and as a medium for communication.

The semiotics of subtitling

“...whereas literature and poetry evoke, films represent and actualize a particular reality based on specific images that have been put together by a director.” (Cintas & Remael, 2014:9).

Thus, unlike pure text which involves the use of our imagination for constructing images, subtitles need to represent the reality designed by the film; they cannot contradict or evoke new imagery in the viewer's mind, and thus need to match with the original purpose of the visual product.

Additionally, timing is important, as it may have an altering effect of the experience if the audio and the text are out of sync, they can come across as if the words do not belong to the speaker. And this wholeness of experience is precisely the point this paper would like to pay a close attention to. The subtitles are integrated so that the actors and text merge as one. Reading the subtitles and watching the visual imagery must be a fused activity, what we may call a semiotic cohesion, integrated like the sound and the

image. This is important since if this harmony of cohesion is violated, the experience of watching a film can become tedious.

From the perspective of semiotics, a study of signs and symbols and their interpretation (Oxford English Dictionary), there are three components in the subtitled media: visual image, spoken word and the subtitles. The partnership of these elements is what makes the product readable to the viewer. Thus, film as a text is a semiotically complex phenomenon as these three components need to be interpreted together as one. Still, most of the popular films are presented in an easily absorbable form and one does not need to be a movie expert to understand the work of carefully arranged elements.

Jakobson offers us three ways of interpreting a verbal sign and labels them in the following manner:

- “1) Intralingual translation or *rewording* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language.
- 2) Interlingual translation or *translation proper* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language.
- 3) Intersemiotic translation or *transmutation* is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems.” (Jakobson, 1959: 233)

As mentioned above, the focus of this project is intralingual subtitling, a shift from oral to written form within the same language. Also referred to as monolingual subtitling, it distinguishes itself from interlingual subtitling by excluding the element of translation proper (Williams & Thorne, 1999:219).

Intralingual subtitling can be broadly divided into two categories, one being SDH (subtitles for the deaf and hard) which ensures that programmes have a greater democratic access and increase of visibility to a wider audience; while “the other is used as a didactic aid for those who are not familiar with the language spoken in the audiovisual text.” (Caimi, 2006:86). Although these two general distinctions summarize the overall functionalities of intralingual subtitling, Cintas and Remael offer 5 linguistic classifications in their textbook:

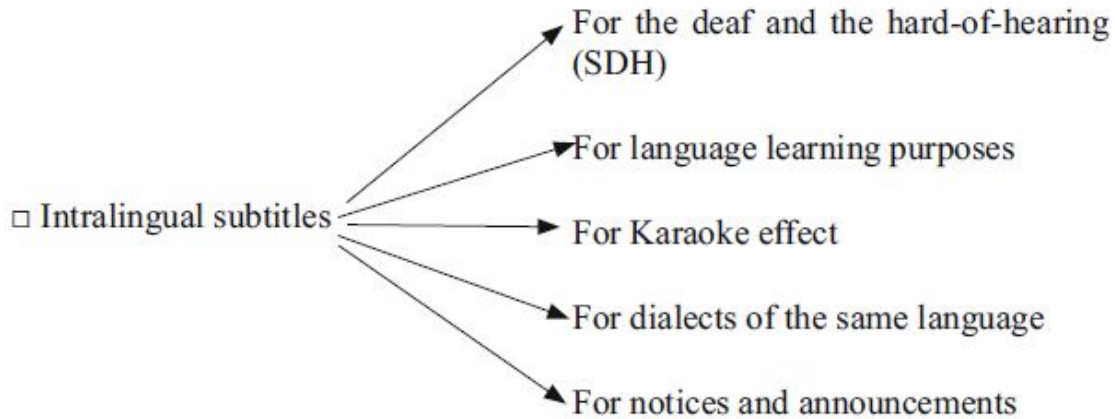


Figure 6. Linguistic classifications of intralingual subtitles (2014:14).

The reason I include these classifications in this chapter and not the technical parts of the paper is to demonstrate how one using the same sign conventions (in this case intralingual subtitles) in different contexts can change its functionality and choose the audience it will go to. The first two classifications have already been explained in the previous chapters, and the rest are self-explanatory, however, the following paragraph will deliver brief descriptions of the remaining types.

Subtitling for the Karaoke is the captioning lyrics of the song for entertainment purposes. It is interesting to point out that in several movies such as *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Trainspotting* (1996) and *Snatch* (2000) actors carry such strong accents that the movies had to be subtitled intralingually for dialectical purposes. Lastly, subtitling for notices and announcements most commonly is used by the world of advertising. We can often see this mode of communication in public spaces where information is transmitted to the crowd on a purely visual level as not to intrude or cause inconvenience with audio advertising.

To further delve into the elements of communication of audiovisual material, following is a list from Dirk Delabastita (Delabastita, 1988:199), a professor in literary theory and translation sciences who distinguishes four broad categories of signs of film:

1. visual presentation - verbal signs
2. visual presentation - non-verbal signs
3. acoustic presentation - verbal signs
4. acoustic presentation - non-verbal signs

Cintas and Remael give a brief and simplified explanation of these: “[v]isually transmitted verbal signs (1) are, for example, credit titles, street names, letters, newspapers and other written documents that appear on the screen. Visually transmitted non-verbal signs (2) cover the film’s photography. Acoustically transmitted verbal signs

(3) are basically songs and the dialogue exchanges, and acoustically transmitted non-verbal sounds (4) are instrumental music and background noises” (2014:47). The semiotic perspective of subtitles gives insight into its functionalities as communicative devices meant for different purposes. This is important to note since the following chapter will discuss one of the prominent functions that subtitles as signs have, specifically for language learning purposes

Subtitles and Language Learning

“Perhaps, in time, an invention will be perfected that will enable the deaf to hear the “talkies,” or an invention which will throw the words spoken directly under the screen as well as being spoken at the same time

Emil S. Ladner Jr., a deaf high school student, writing in the American Annals of the Deaf, 1931”
(Downey, 2010:1)

This chapter explains the role and importance of same language subtitles (but does not exclude the usage of interlingual subtitles) as a means to enhancing one’s foreign language skills. Academics in the field have been investigating the effects of subtitles on language learning for more than two decades (Gambier et. al., 2015:83). TV programmes, movies, and other multimedia products fundamentally have the function of entertaining the viewer. However, when adding unilingual subtitles to these same audiovisual materials, apart from maintaining their primary function, they acquire the added benefit of enhancing the viewer’s second language learning.

“monolingual subtitling used for learning purposes represents one of the many ways through which second language learners are helped to overcome the challenges of listening comprehension. It is a way of reinforcing foreign language understanding through the support of the written reproduction of the oral text during a recreational activity.” (Caimi, 2006:88).

Caimi writes further that “[p]eople who regularly watch captioned TV have an opportunity to improve their vocabulary and oral reading fluency. Children, who on average spend over thirty hours a week watching TV, can also improve their reading as well as their language and vocabulary skills significantly.” (Caimi, 2006:89-90). She also writes, however, that some students who were being tested on the cognitive effects of being exposed to subtitled products were stressed because they could not combine viewing, listening, and reading at the same time. The study concluded that people with low experience with

subtitles tend to give priority to one of the communication channels they feel more familiar with (i.e. visual, aural, or the text) in order to follow the storyline (Ibid.:95). On the other hand, “people who have a degree of experience with subtitles seem to read them in a rather effortless way” (Perego et. al., 2010:245) and even though the process of reading in general requires the active usage of complex perceptual and cognitive skills, once it has been learned, readers seem to perform this activity without much effort. In fact, d’Ydewalle and Gielen state that “When people watch television, the distribution of attention between different channels of information turns out to be an effortless process. Viewers seem to have developed a strategy that allows them to process these channels without problems and in which reading the subtitles occupies a major place” (d’Ydewalle & Gielen in Perego et. al., 2010:247). This is due to the fact that the activity of reading after certain amount of experience becomes partially automatized and various components that take up the brain-power to process the information at first, becomes second nature and effortless (Ibid.:246).

Moving on, Williams and Thorne’s study of teletext subtitling as a medium for language learning confirms the effectiveness of using intralingual subtitles as a language-learning tool (Williams & Thorne, 1999:219). Subtitling is of great educational value for children acquiring language skills; for immigrants learning the language of their new country; and for the elderly, who can keep up their language by watching television. A study on word learning conducted by Bird and Williams explored the effects of using what they called single-modality (sound or text) and bimodal (sound and text) presentation for learning (Bird & Williams, 2002:509). Their experiments measured improvements in spoken word recognition and recognition memory (Ibid.). These were built upon Vanderplank’s idea that learners of English would progress their comprehension of video programmes if the addition of intralingual subtitles was administered. Bird and Williams (2002) tried testing what exactly it was that students learn in this type of learning environment. One of their experiments concluded that “bimodal input boosted the implicit learning of nonwords compared to sound only.” (Ibid.:527). In other words, when comparing the efficiency of learning from sound and text versus learning from sound only, it appears that having both information channels present allows learners for more progress in the acquisition of new words.

Zabalbeascoa et. al. describe a study of subtitle language learning (SLL) that they conducted in two Spanish secondary schools for testing the integration of English subtitles in their language class. Their project was “an extremely rewarding experience both for students and teachers” and they have confirmed that “subtitled materials constitute a powerful and versatile pedagogical tool.” (Gambier et. al., 2015:116). Their project encourages foreign language teachers to include the exposure of subtitled audiovisuals in their teaching activities and course programmes. Conclusively they write a list of benefits that their study found (Ibid.:117):

- The audiovisual materials are multipurpose, and can be straightforwardly adapted to different learning styles
- The SLL experience develops audiovisual literacy (Zabalbeascoa, Sokoli, Torres 2012)
- Makes lessons enjoyable and enhances motivation
- Increases exposure to the target language (Pérez-Cañado 2009)
- Links the EFL classroom with what is beyond its confines
- Promotes intercultural awareness
- Encourages autonomous learning
- Facilitates classroom management
- Improves students' engagement
- Facilitates collaborative learning

Additionally to these benefits, Caimi writes how the process of simultaneously listening and reading (of subtitles) aids in linking the aural and the written forms of words as well as supports the formation of correct pronunciation (Caimi, 2006:94).

Bird and Williams' paper also refers to several studies that describe the specific ways subtitles benefit the viewers learning experience. One of their studies conclude the same as Caimi, stating that a viewer of monolingually subtitled film or TV programme may learn better how to associate "aural and written forms of words more easily and quickly than video without subtitles." (Borras & Lafayette in Bird & Williams, 2002:510). Their results additionally suggest "that phonological information derived from both text and sound contributes to improvements in the processing of spoken words" (Ibid.:527). In his paper *'Captioning and Subtitling: Undervalued Language Learning Strategies'*, Danan states that "captioning seems to improve the actual language processing ability of second-language learners" (Danan, 2004:70). Essentially, by broadcasting programmes with subtitles, electronic media can play a key role in increasing literacy in countries (Suzanne & Tiokou, 2015:65). Several countries engage in projects to eradicate illiteracy. In United Kingdom, "monolingual subtitling covers around 100% of BBC1 and BBC2 programming. Smaller BBC channels, such as BBC3, BBC4, and BBC News 24 are also among the leaders in subtitling with about 50% of their programming." (Caimi, 2006:88). According to Bartho Kriek, a professor of subtitling at ITV-hogeschool Utrecht and with more than 20 years of experience in the field, this trend is common in several countries and he gives an example of how India provides TV shows and films in people's own local languages for promoting literacy in the country (Kriek, 2013). This practice introduces illiterate people to their own alphabets on a large scale and in some cases represents the first step towards learning to read and write.

It is important to stress, however, that the above-mentioned results occur only if the quality of the subtitles are proper (i.e. timing of the text and the audio is synced; the content of the subtitles is linguistically correct and doesn't contradict the information)(Caimi, 2006:91). In other words, "when the subtitled product is in keeping

with its optimal requisites. Such requisites demand the professional ability of the audiovisual translator, who has to transfer the relevant verbal dialogues into the written representation of the same language.” (Ibid.:92). And, “of course, no method can be a panacea for success if learners do not first have a deep desire to learn foreign languages, at the very least for perceived socio-economic gains.” (Gambier et. al., 2015:58).

However, conclusively, there is no doubt that subtitling as a tool for learning is effective and plays a large role in teaching and learning. As Danan confirms in her book ‘*Subtitling and Language Learning*’ that “[s]ince the early days of audiovisual translation research in the 1980s, ample empirical evidence and studies have demonstrated that subtitles can actively engage learners and greatly enhance language learning.” (Ibid.:57). As the last chapter of the project, the following paragraphs will be aimed on discussing the main points taken out from the whole research, with a more prominent focus on current chapter’s content.

Discussion

This research attempts to shed light on the valuable uses of same language subtitles, or subtitles in general, in order to make a wider awareness of the benefits of subtitling to a greater population. This is important to note, since making use of such tools available today can make a positive contribution not only to individuals with interest in learning, but also for the wider audience who is unaware of subtitling’s ability of cultivating literacy. This would require more involvement of governments, private and public companies, especially those who deal with communicating with the general public through communication technologies, and other parties and organizations that use media. Therefore, aside from raising awareness of the subtitles’ learning benefits within individuals, organizations who are capable of utilizing subtitles in their affairs have the capability to initiate and advance the use of subtitling to promote socio-cultural advancement. Although most of the advanced countries with high literacy percentage already employ this technology daily through their mass communication channels as seen through the example of BBC in the UK, the developing and 3rd world countries do not and are missing out from largely benefitting by this movement. Needless to say that this process also contributes to globalization on a certain scale, specifically allowing the cultural exchange between different countries around the world. Additionally, it encourages and boosts the motivation for language learning as seen through Zabalbeascoa et. al.’s study of exposing subtitles in English language class to Spanish secondary school students (Gambier et. al., 2015:117). Finally, according to Kriek, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing is becoming a major growth market since some Western countries already require by law for all the TV programs to have SDH as mentioned in previous example of the UK’s BBC programming (Kriek, 2013).

However, the mass integration of subtitling all or most audiovisual media is a lengthy process involving cooperative engagement on behalf of numerous parties within the society. As Danan writes, “The broader acceptance of innovative uses of subtitling for language acquisition purposes would require a profound paradigm shift in the construction of social identities, i.e., the formation of societies where the centrality of foreign languages is recognized and valued by the majority of their citizens.” (Gambier et. al., 2015:52).

Furthermore, it would require investment in technology in order to supply companies with the right tools to create subtitles, as well as allowing the access to television and computers to the wider public by various means; it would also be crucial to make changes in regulations concerning the distribution of mass information, requiring media outlets to have subtitles for their programmes. Danan argues that European leaders have attempted to sow the desire in people to learn languages through subtitled media, “sponsoring research on the use of subtitling for language acquisition...” (Ibid.58). Apparently, these efforts have contributed to the spreading of the English language, since it was generally perceived as “the most desirable foreign language to acquire.” (Ibid.). The positive aspect of learning this way is that most of these subtitled media products can be consumed as entertainment, and while rendering language-learning lesson as entertainment, viewers are far less likely to become bored and demotivated.

Glossary

AVT - audiovisual translation

D/HOH - deaf and/or the hard of hearing

SDH - subtitles for deaf and hard (of hearing)

SLL - subtitling for language learning

adaptor - a type of subtitler who is an expert in media limitations, can constrain subtitling and is familiar with condensation and reduction strategies in the target language.

closed captions - can be turned on and off by the viewer

contour - dark, typically black contour around the alphabetical symbols

inserts - text on screen; visual presentation of verbal signs; subtitles.

open captions - always in the view and cannot be turned off

shadow - a black shadow accompanied to individual characters of a text.

simultaneous subtitling - live subtitling, where subtitler is translating or transcribing at the same time as the original production is broadcasted.

spotter - a technician responsible for deciding the in and out times of subtitles.

surtitles - a caption projected on a screen above the stage in an opera, translating the text being sung.

translator - a professional with control over two languages for the purpose of transferring the meaning from one language to another.

unilingual/intralingual/monolingual subtitles - same language subtitles

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