




Subtitling revisers as agents of change in audiovisual workflows

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Abstract: This study explores the pivotal role of subtitling revisers in audiovisual workflows, focusing on how their subjective decisions influence textual quality, cultural relevance, and collaborative dynamics among subtitlers, project managers, clients, and audiences. Grounded in data collected from an experiment involving nine Portuguese professional subtitling revisers, the research provides unique insights into their practices and attitudes. The findings reveal that subtitling revisers navigate complex decisions shaped by their professional expertise, emotional responses, and lived experiences. Their interventions often balance technical precision with creative interpretation, addressing linguistic, cultural, and technical challenges. While these decisions can lead to significant enhancements in subtitle quality and viewer experience, they also highlight the variability in practices and the potential for unintended consequences, such as overlooked errors or changes that disrupt collaborative dynamics. In an era of increasing automation, this research highlights the indispensable role of human intervention in producing subtitling that is both linguistically and culturally appropriate, as well as technically accurate. Subtitling revisers emerge as key agents of change, bridging linguistic and cultural divides while responding to the evolving demands of global audiovisual localisation. Their interventions – whether positive or negative – can significantly influence the quality of the final product, with far-reaching implications for audience reception and for workflows shaped by automation. These decisions not only shape the quality and accessibility of the translated audiovisual content, but also impact key stakeholders – particularly the subtitler, whose work is subject to alteration, and the audience, whose experience of the content depends on the effectiveness of those revision.

Keywords: subtitling revision; stakeholders; decision-making; agents of change.

1. Introduction

The worldwide circulation of audiovisual content usually relies on translation to achieve its global communicative purposes—see, for example, Georgakopoulou (2019) on how this video surge is being made accessible to wider audiences—. The dissemination and consumption of these cultural



artifacts depend on a complex workflow that involves not only a translator or subtitler but also a reviser, a project manager, a client, and an audience, among other agents—for different discussions on the participants in this workflow see, for example, Díaz Cintas & Remael (2021), Hagström & Pedersen (2022), Nikolić (2021) and Robert & Remael (2016)—. These contributors form an interconnected network, where each role is vital in delivering a polished final product that meets diverse linguistic and cultural needs.

Professionals in the AVT industry face constant pressures to adapt to technological advancements, manage constrained financial and human resources, and uphold rigorous quality standards. Among these professionals, subtitling revisers stand out as important figures in navigating these challenges. These dynamics underline the value of subtitling revisers as human-in-the-loop agents who bring expertise, creativity, and cultural sensitivity to workflows increasingly dominated by automated systems. This stage of the workflow demands a nuanced understanding of language, culture, and technical specifications. Subtitling revisers act as gatekeepers of quality, ensuring that subtitled content adheres to predetermined sets of rules and maintains readability and accessibility for diverse audiences.

Subtitling workflows are inherently complex, shaped by the interplay of various stakeholders and technological tools. As Díaz Cintas and Remael (2021, p. 33) put it, subtitling “[...] is the result of a team effort” and technology “[...] has come to be an omnipresent reality” (Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2021, p. 37). As audiovisual content continues to circulate on a global scale, the subtitling reviser’s role remains vital in bridging linguistic and cultural divides and in ensuring that stories resonate with audiences worldwide. Each decision made by a subtitling reviser can have far-reaching implications, influencing not only the final audiovisual product but also the confidence and trust among stakeholders. On this matter, Szarkowska et al. (2020) indicate that professional subtitlers and viewers perceive subtitling quality differently, employing distinct criteria to assess it. Subtitling revisers’ decisions are often subjective, informed by their professional expertise, lived experiences, and emotional responses. Such subjectivity introduces both opportunities and challenges, as subtitling revisers must balance technical precision with creative interpretation, cultural adaptation, and ethical considerations.

Previous research in subtitling revision has underscored the pivotal role of revisers in ensuring subtitle quality, yet several areas remain underexplored. Studies have highlighted that revisers’ interventions influence the final product, affecting both linguistic accuracy and audience reception. However, there is a lack of consensus on standardised revision practices, leading to variability in quality outcomes. Despite these insights, empirical studies examining the cognitive processes of subtitling revisers and the impact of their decisions on different stakeholder groups are scarce. This gap calls for more comprehensive investigations into the subtitling revision process to develop best practices that balance efficiency with quality. This study aims to examine how subtitling revisers’ decisions impact both textual quality and stakeholder relationships, identifying best practices and challenges within the process. More specifically, it seeks to understand how the subtitling reviser functions as an agent of change in subtitling workflows, considering that their actions can have both positive and negative effects. The findings reveal both best practices and usual challenges, emphasizing the necessity of integrating human expertise with technological tools to achieve localization outcomes that are both efficient and culturally resonant.



2. Theoretical and conceptual framework

Subtitling is a multifaceted process that skilfully integrates words into a cinematic experience, creating an immersive and enriching journey for the audience. A crucial part of this process is revision – a meticulous task that involves thoroughly reviewing subtitles to identify issues and making strategic decisions to address them. Given that quality is a central concern in AVT practice (Robert & Remael, 2016), it is expected that subtitling revision encompasses a comprehensive analysis and the implementation of precise amendments to ensure the final product meets the highest quality standards. As Kruger (2008) warns, errors in subtitling are inexcusable, not only because of the high visibility and isolation of words on the screen but also because a single mistake can overshadow the excellence of the remaining subtitles. According to Flower et al. (1986, p. 18), revision is “[...] a strategic adaptive process”, a notion further emphasised by Martin (2007, p. 58), who observes that “[...] idiosyncrasies will always prevail”.

The concepts of revision and quality are intrinsically linked, yet their interpretation is often shaped by individual perspectives. Revision, as defined in standards ASTM F2575–14 (ASTM, 2014) and ISO 17100–2015 (ISO, 2015), is a quality control procedure conducted after the translation process by a different professional. The procedures in subtitling workflows are similar, with the revision being carried out by someone other than the subtitler—but most of the times is also a subtitler. This ensures an independent assessment of the work before it is delivered to the client (cf. Mossop, 2020; Robert & Remael, 2016). Quality control is inherently reactive, focusing on detecting and resolving issues (Menezes, 2024). It tends to prioritise the target text and the expectations of clients, ensuring that the translation aligns with their specific requirements (James, 2001; Mossop, 2020). This highlights subtitling revision as a key step in meeting quality standards and delivering a polished final product.

Schäffner (1998, p. 4) notes that “[...] quality is not ‘objectively’ given”, highlighting the inherently subjective nature of this concept. In subtitling, quality emerges from the collaborative work of various actors within production contexts, as well as from numerous extrinsic factors related to production, process, and social dimensions (Artegiani, 2021). Therefore, the quality of subtitles depends on a complex network of interrelations involving different contributors. As Abdallah (2012) argues, the more clearly defined the scope and boundaries of responsibility for each actor in this network, the greater the potential for improved quality.

Subtitling revisers are widely expected to objectively amend subtitles to enhance their quality. As Horguelin and Pharand (2009) and Nikolić (2021) explain, mere suggestions and subjective amendments are generally not well received by translators or subtitlers, particularly when they do not have the final say. While subtitling revisers are tasked with making objective decisions—such as correcting spelling errors or ensuring synchronisation with on-screen dialogue—many of their decisions are inherently subjective. Although not desirable, subjective decisions are to be expected—otherwise, they would not be included as a category in classifications of revision and subtitling revision interventions (see, for instance, the following proposals: Arthern, 1983, 1987; Künzli, 2006, 2007; Menezes, 2024; Robert, 2012; Robin, 2018; van Rensburg, 2017). These subjective choices stem from individual interpretations of linguistic, cultural, and stylistic norms, which can differ significantly among professionals. For instance, when encountering a culturally



specific reference, a subtitling reviser must evaluate the audiovisual content and the subtitler's choice and determine whether to retain a literal translation, adapt it to a more culturally relatable reference, or omit it altogether. Each approach influences the audience's comprehension and engagement, with the subtitling reviser's final decision, shaped by their assessment of the target audience's expectations, also affecting the subtitler's work and confidence.

The subtitling reviser's subjective decisions often result in changes—or their absence—that directly influence the final audiovisual product. Once the revised content reaches the audience, it typically reflects a combination of amendments, all of which, ideally, contribute to enhancing the audience's viewing experience. At the same time, these revisions can impact subtitler's confidence, project managers' trust, and clients' financial outcomes, highlighting the ripple effects of such decisions. Consequently, the reviser's role can be examined not only from a textual perspective but also through a sociological lens.

Díaz Cintas and Remael (2021) explain that QCers—referred in the present text under the umbrella term 'revisers'—are supposed to check and curate other colleagues work “paying attention to the linguistic, translational, and technical dimensions involved in subtitling” (p. 37). Drawing on this, it can be inferred that subtitling revision encompasses several key forms of mediation, each addressing specific aspects of the subtitles to make sure they meet quality standards. These include linguistic mediation, which involve correcting grammatical errors, refining syntax, and improving word choices for clarity and fluency; cultural mediation, which adapt content to align with the cultural norms and expectations of the target audience; technical mediation, which ensures synchronization with audiovisual content and adherence to specifications such as reading speed, character limits, and display time; and content mediation, which modifies or omits elements to maintain relevance, appropriateness, and accessibility.

Acting as a mediator, a subtitling reviser intervenes in a way that reflects task complexity, with each intervention shaped by underlying factors that influence the subtitling reviser's strategic decisions. As proposed by Menezes (2024), subtitling revision interventions can be categorised based on their necessity, object, and motivation. In terms of necessity, interventions are either needed or not, and are classified as necessary revision (when amending an error), hyper-revision (a preferential adjustment), over-revision (when an error is introduced), and under-revision (when an intervention is needed but absent); these last three are neither necessary to improve quality nor desirable. The object of revision, that is, what is revised, is the subtitle text, the subtitle timing, or both. Finally, the motivation behind these interventions may stem from language rules, general subtitling rules (typically language language-specific and widely available and accepted), client-specific rules (which must be shared beforehand with those involved in a project), or remain unknown (often due to norms or idiosyncrasies). As Menezes (2024) emphasises, this approach to subtitling revision acknowledges that the process is not merely a mechanical task but a complex interpretative exercise, requiring subtitling revisers to make decisions informed by their understanding of the source text, the target audience, project-specific constraints, and all the sets of rules they are obliged to.

Ideally, subtitling revisers, building on the subtitler's work, enhance the audience's experience by ensuring that the content is clear, engaging, culturally appropriate, and relevant. While subtitlers lay the foundation, subtitling revisers serve as a crucial link between the original material and diverse global audiences, mediating linguistic and cultural nuances to deliver a polished and impactful final



product. This alludes to the subtitling revision expectancy norms, mentioned by Menezes (2024) as well as to the relevance of revision as a central feature in the production of translations, as highlighted by Mellinger (2018) and to subtitling revision as a form of validation of translation decisions, as observed by Menezes (2022).

Through the sociological lens, the subtitling reviser is best understood as an agent whose actions influence and are influenced by the network in which they operate. Drawing on Latour's (2005) Actor-Network Theory (ANT), agency is viewed as distributed across both human and non-human actors, where interactions are shaped by constant negotiation and transformation. Latour (2005, p. 46) explains that "[...] [a]ction is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated", emphasising that agency is not limited to individuals but is shared among various elements of the network. As such, subtitling revisers embody a dynamic role. In addition to human actors, non-human ones, for example, subtitling software or client-specific rules, play a significant role in shaping the subtitling reviser's decisions.

The subtitling reviser's role extends beyond textual adjustments; it also influences trust and collaboration within the production network. Abdallah (2012) identifies trust as a critical factor in AVT networks, noting that "trust-building among the actors in production networks seems to present a challenge", particularly concerning matters of quality and ethics. Revisers, by ensuring high-quality output, contribute to building confidence among stakeholders. However, this role is not without its challenges. The balancing act of respecting the source text, adhering to client demands, and meeting audience needs highlights the complexity of the reviser's position within the network.

Ultimately, subtitling revisers exemplify the interconnected nature of agency in AVT networks. They exert a multifaceted agency that impacts not only the subtitles as a text but also the various agents involved in the subtitling process. At the same time, the reviser's interventions can have profound effects on the subtitler in particular, a professional whose work is evaluated and altered, sometimes significantly (see, for example, Nikolić, 2021). Subtitling revisers' actions may reinforce or undermine the subtitler's confidence and sense of professional autonomy. By mediating between institutional demands, client expectations, and the subtitler's initial output, revisers navigate a complex network of relationships, where their decisions not only ensure textual quality but also influence the perception of trust within the network. This dual impact underscores the critical and sensitive nature of the reviser's agency within audiovisual translation.

3. Methodology

An experiment was conducted to gain deeper insights into the practice, attitudes and behaviours of subtitling revisers. It sought to explore how revisers engage with a set of subtitles created by a professional and make decisions that impact the final audiovisual product. To achieve this, a multi-method approach was adopted, combining textual and extra-textual data collection techniques. This combination allowed for a comprehensive analysis of both the revisers' actions and their underlying thought processes.



3.1 Participants

Nine Portuguese professional subtitling revisers participated in the experiment. These revisers were selected based on their professional experience in audiovisual translation and revision, ensuring a diverse pool in terms of background and expertise. They were experienced subtitling revisers with an average of eight years of professional experience. Although relatively young (age range: 26 – 46 years old; average: 39 years old; mode: 41 years old; SD 7.09), they display a mature and professional approach, reflecting their accumulated experience in the field. All participants hold higher education degrees; their areas of training include languages (six), translation (two), and other field (one); seven of them have undertaken continuing professional development (CPD) in audiovisual translation or subtitling. Much of their expertise was gained through professional practice, both as subtitling revisers and subtitlers working collaboratively with other subtitling revisers. Most participants are freelancers with small but diverse client portfolios, providing them with exposure to different workflows. While their experience in subtitling revision was understandably limited early in their careers, they had acquired sufficient hands-on expertise to be recognised as experienced professionals.

Subtitling revision is not their primary professional activity, as they also engage in subtitling, subtitling post-editing, subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), and technical translation. Despite their varied professional activities, most participants express genuine enjoyment in performing subtitling revision. Their work primarily involves revising translation of subtitles or revising both translation and timing, with much of this focused on projects for paid streaming platforms using templates. The audiovisual genres they work on include films, series, reality shows, comedy, animation, documentaries, and trailers.

Participants occasionally receive a briefing when assigned subtitling revision tasks, but this is not always guaranteed. Hence, it can be assumed that, in the absence of detailed instructions, participants are accustomed to relying on their experience and professional judgement to determine whether changes are necessary. This highlights their ability to navigate the subtitling process independently, drawing on their knowledge to ensure the subtitles meet the required quality standards. Their reliance on best judgement emphasises the critical role of revisers as decision-makers who adapt to varied project demands and contribute significantly to the overall quality of audiovisual content.

3.2 Research design

The material chosen for the experiment was a 4-minute excerpt from an American sitcom (English audio)¹, featuring authentic subtitles in European Portuguese. This excerpt had 84 subtitles with 49 errors in subtitles text, 78 errors in subtitles timing and 48 errors in subtitles reading speed (a total of 175 errors, with 79 subtitles presenting these errors); these errors—already present on the file—were identified and subsequently classified by the researcher and validated by two experts in subtitling. Participants were instructed to follow Netflix guidelines as client rules; these ‘client

¹ Owing to a confidentiality agreement, the name of this sitcom cannot be disclosed. This excerpt is taken from an episode first aired internationally in 2018.

rules' were mentioned in the instructions and explanations provided to participants prior to the experiment, and a copy of these rules was also shared with them. The selection of a sitcom was deliberate, as this genre often poses challenges related to humour, cultural references, and rapid dialogue, all of which require careful consideration during revision.

To ensure a certain degree of consistency across the participants while performing the task, each subtitling reviser was provided with the same excerpt and was instructed to use the same professional software, simulating a professional workflow. However, they were free to work at a place and schedule of their choice, with no time limit for the task. For this reason, participants worked without the researcher's presence. Their participation was pro bono, yet professionals were told to proceed as if it was a paid subtitling revision project. They received the explanation of the task, along with instructions on how to access the online subtitling software and how to access and install the screen recording software, which was also used for recording their voice. These instructions and explanations were provided in carefully prepared guides that participants were required to read before beginning the task. They were encouraged to speak freely about their thought processes while they proceeded with the task, ensuring that their natural workflow was not overly disrupted. Considering they were working alone, they did not receive any reminders to verbalize their thoughts.

3.3 Data collection

The multi-method approach allowed for the collection of both textual and extra-textual data, providing a robust set of data for analysing the revisers' decisions and behaviours from multiple perspectives:

a) Textual Analysis. The revised subtitles were subject to detailed textual analysis to identify interventions and patterns of intervention. This analysis focused on linguistic and technical aspects while also adhering to client-specific guidelines. The textual data allowed for a systematic evaluation of the changes made. The amendments were categorised based on the necessity of the interventions (necessary, hyper-, over-, and under-revision), the object of the interventions (text, timing or both) and the motivation behind interventions (language rules, general subtitling rules, and client's rules). Patterns of consistency and divergence among the participants were noted, providing insights into individual and collective approaches to revision.

b) Screen Recording. Screen recording software captured the subtitling revisers' on-screen activities during the task. This data provided valuable insights into the revision procedures, the time spent on specific segments, and the subtitling revisers' interactions with subtitling software. By observing the screen recordings, it was possible to trace the sequence of actions and decisions taken by the subtitling revisers. The recordings were analysed to identify trends in workflow efficiency, use of tools, and common behaviours, such as, frequent rewinding or pausing to assess timing accuracy.

c) Think-Aloud Protocol. Subtitling revisers were asked to verbalise their thoughts while revising the subtitles. This method offered a direct window into their cognitive processes, revealing the reasoning behind their decisions and the challenges they encountered. The think-aloud protocols were crucial for understanding subjective aspects of subtitling revision, such as the interpretation of



subtitled decisions and the prioritisation of interventions. Verbalised thoughts were transcribed and thematically analysed to uncover recurring themes, decision-making strategies, and challenges faced by the subtitling revisers. The qualitative analysis shed light on the cognitive processes underpinning subtitling revision tasks. Even though studies have shown that using think-aloud protocols while performing another task can affect cognitive processing (e.g. Sun et al., 2020), the subtitling revisers consistently followed a specific procedure—visualize, detect, resolve. Through screen recording data, it became evident that, during the assessment (visualize) phase, they did not engage in think-aloud verbalisation. It is therefore assumed that the TAP might have not influenced their cognitive processing during revision.

d) Questionnaire². After completing the subtitling revision task, participants filled out a questionnaire designed to capture their attitudes, preferences, and reflections on the process. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions, covering topics such as satisfaction with their subtitling revisions, and views on the role of subtitling revision in the broader context of audiovisual translation. The data from the questionnaires was summarised and analysed to identify overarching attitudes and perceptions, as well as individual differences among the participants. Quantitative responses provided a general overview, while qualitative answers enriched the findings with personal insights. The questionnaire allowed participants to reflect on their experience and share their views on subtitling revision.

3.4 Data analysis

To guarantee that the data collected was reliable enough for analysis, a mixed-method approach was adopted. This enabled data triangulation and provided a more comprehensive picture of the dataset. It also allowed for a more reliable presentation of the results and helped to address any potential gaps in the data. All collected data were qualitatively and quantitatively analysed.

The data collected was analysed within a descriptive framework. A descriptive analysis allowed for the exploration of patterns and trends in the behaviours and decisions of subtitling revisers, providing detailed insights into the types of interventions performed and the strategies employed. This approach was crucial in identifying the interconnections between textual and extra-textual data, offering a comprehensive picture of the subtitling revision process. Furthermore, the descriptive analysis highlighted the nuances in the revisers' choices, underscoring the complexity of their decisions within professional subtitling contexts.

In analysing the subtitling revision interventions, the typology proposed by Menezes (2024) is applied; it considers three criteria: the necessity of subtitling revision interventions and their impact on quality, the object of the intervention, and the potential motivation behind it.

3.5 Ethical concerns

The study adhered to ethical research practices. Participants provided an informed consent before participating and were assured of the confidentiality of their data. The experiment was

² This questionnaire is included as an appendix in Menezes' Ph.D. dissertation (2024), which is publicly available in the University of Lisbon repository.

designed to minimise stress and replicate a realistic professional environment, ensuring that participants felt comfortable and supported throughout the process. To ensure their anonymity, participants were given pseudonyms.

4. Results and discussion

The findings offer valuable insights into the cognitive and practical dimensions of subtitling revision. Moreover, this comprehensive analysis underscores the subtitling reviser’s pivotal role as an agent of change within the subtitling network. Their interventions not only refine and enhance the textual product but also reshape the collaborative dynamics of audiovisual translation, influencing the workflows, decisions, and outcomes of other actors involved in the process.

4.1 Subtitling revision interventions

The triangulation of textual and extra-textual data within a descriptive framework facilitates a detailed identification and classification of the changes – or their absence – implemented by each subtitling reviser. Broadly speaking, changes can involve the transformation, deletion, or introduction of elements. Even minor changes can have significant effects: positive changes, such as constructive feedback or praise, can boost a subtitler’s morale, while negative actions, such as harsh comments left on a file, may harm the collaborative spirit and undermine trust within the workflow.

Table I provides a detailed overview of the frequency and distribution of the four types of interventions, summarising all amendments made by the nine participants during the subtitling revision experiment. In a total of 1504 interventions, 669 are considered necessary, 62 are hyper-revisions (preferential), 33 are over-revisions (errors introduced) and 740 are under-revisions (errors left unamended).

Table I: Frequency and distribution of interventions

Necessary	%	Hyper-revision	%	Over-revision	%	Under-revision	%	Σ
669	44.5	62	4.1	33	2.2	740	49.2	1504
language rules 86		language rules 15		language rules 17		language rules 111		
subtitling rules (text) 48		client rules (timing) 47		subtitling rules (text) 2		subtitling rules (text) 15		
client rules (text) 94				client rules (text) 1		client rules (text) 20		
client rules (RS) 186				client rules (RS) 13		client rules (RS) 262		
client rules (timing) 255						client rules (timing) 332		
RS = reading speed								

Source: Author (2025)

Although subtitling revisers detected and corrected many errors, the textual analysis of the data shows a significant number of undetected and uncorrected issues. Under-revision interventions are the most frequent, totalling 740 and accounting for 49.2% of all interventions, while necessary interventions account for 669, representing 44.5%. Hyper-revision (4.1%) and over-revision (2.2%) are less frequent, suggesting that subtitling revisers perform considerably fewer preferential or incorrect interventions compared to necessary ones. However, the high number of under-revision

cases highlights the challenges subtitling revisers face in identifying all errors, as unnoticed problems cannot be corrected. As already mentioned, these professionals followed a highly specific and repetitive revision procedure – visualize, detect, resolve. During the assessment phase, no verbalisation was observed. For this reason, it is assumed that their cognitive load did not increase substantially, and that any impact on attention shifting and decision-making was minimal. Under-revision therefore does not appear to be associated with an increased cognitive load caused by the use of think-aloud protocols.

Regarding the motivation behind these amendments, think-aloud protocols and screen recordings provided valuable insights. Motivations were categorised into those driven by language rules, general subtitling rules, client-specific subtitling rules, or those that remained unknown (residual in this experiment). Most of the times, participants, through their words or reactions, clearly represented the problem that motivated their intervention; other times, this problem was not mentioned and motivation was inferred by the researcher based on each participant's previous rationales, on the screen recordings and on the textual analysis.

Necessary interventions are most often motivated by client-specific subtitling rules (535 out of 669), addressing textual issues (94 cases), reading speed violations (186 cases), and timing problems (255 cases). In contrast, fewer necessary interventions are driven by general language rules (86 out of 669) or general subtitling rules in Portugal (48 out of 669). This distribution reflects the high number of issues present in the excerpt provided to subtitling revisers, many of which were directly related to client guidelines. While these changes are essential for ensuring quality, the high volume of necessary corrections might have a demotivating effect on subtitlers.

Under-revision interventions follow a similar pattern. A significant number of these unperformed but necessary interventions would have been motivated by client-specific guidelines (537 out of 740), with most addressing reading speed (262 cases) and timing (332 cases). In comparison, 111 under-revision cases related to general language rules and 20 to textual issues. The high frequency of sub-revisions—that is, cases where no changes are made—can negatively impact both the subtitler's and the subtitling reviser's reputation. This is because the audience may notice these unresolved issues and raise complaints about quality, or other internal quality control procedures might catch them downstream in the process.

Hyper-revision interventions are mostly motivated by client-specific subtitling rules (47 out of 62), particularly in relation to timing. Fewer hyper-revision cases are linked to general language rules (15 out of 62), potentially reflecting overinterpretation or misapplication of these rules. These preferential changes, while less frequent, can strain relationships among stakeholders if perceived as unnecessary or subjective.

Over-revision interventions, though minimal, are primarily driven by general language rules (17 out of 33), followed by client-specific rules (14 out of 33), with only 2 cases linked to general subtitling rules. These findings suggest that over-revision often stems from a misjudgement of rules, potentially indicating overconfidence or misinterpretation by revisers. Such changes, which introduce errors, carry the same risk of harming professional relationships and eroding trust among stakeholders.

While necessary interventions are expected, hyper-, over-, and under-revision interventions are not. These cater for the subjectivity associated with subtitling revision, since preferential, erroneous and missed interventions reflect varying degrees of uncertainty.

4.2 Self-perception and attitudes towards subtitling revision

The answers to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire provided valuable insights into participants' self-perception and attitudes towards subtitling revision. Regarding self-perception, they express clear views on the essence of subtitling revision, which they believe should focus on improvements and corrections while respecting both the audience and the translator/subtitler. Respect for the subtitler is evident in the relatively low number of hyper-revision and over-revision interventions, suggesting a deliberate effort to avoid excessive or unnecessary changes, which is confirmed in the questionnaire. In their answers, participants emphasise the collaborative and supportive nature of subtitling revision. For instance, one participant notes that good revision “questions the translator’s choices—not because the reviser doubts the translator, but because the reviser doubts themselves” (Afonso). Another explains that the subtitling reviser “improves and harmonises the [subtitler’s] work” (Constança), while others stress the importance of correcting only what is necessary, such as “typos, semantics, translation errors, or parameters” (Isabel), and ensuring “no new errors are introduced” (Mafalda). Respect for the subtitler is further reflected in the principle of non-interference, “[The reviser] does not interfere with the translator’s style” (Constança) and strives not to distort the subtitler’s work. Similarly, respect for the audience was articulated as helping subtitles “provide a good viewing experience” (Leonor) and contributing to making the text “invisible and natural” (Dinis).

When it comes to participants’ attitudes towards revision tasks, they admit that their knowledge and expertise significantly influence their interventions. However, opinions are divided regarding the variability of their interventions depending on the time allocated for subtitling revision. Participants also note that other factors – such as remuneration, the translator, the subtitling agency, the client, and the distribution channel – can affect their decisions, with older participants more openly admitting to this variability. These responses suggest that subtitling revision is often shaped by subjective considerations, including individual experience and contextual pressures, rather than by purely objective criteria. Additionally, participants state that they rarely or never justify their interventions, which they attribute to client-specific procedures. This practice may also contribute to a lack of transparency and objectivity in revision decisions. Finally, most participants claim to consistently or frequently pay attention to functional equivalence, acceptability, and readability parameters (cf. Pedersen, 2017) when assessing the quality of subtitles. However, data from the subtitling revision experiment revealed discrepancies between these stated intentions and their actual practices, for example, when looking at the high number of under-revision interventions. These discrepancies further illustrate the tension between subjective decision-making and the application of objective quality standards in revision workflows.

4.3 Subtitling revisers habitus

The way subtitling revisers intervene in the text and timing of subtitles appears to be closely tied to their attitudes towards subtitling revision tasks. Deeply ingrained habits and practices often shape the reviser's approach to their work, influencing their decisions and methods. Curiously, data reveals that greater experience in subtitling tasks does not necessarily guarantee more effective error detection: a moderate strong negative correlation (-0.704 , $p < 0.05$, Kendall's Tau test) between necessary interventions and subtitling experience is found.

What accounts for such a wide variety of changes observed during this subtitling revision experiment? One explanation lies in the habitus of subtitling revisers, as their interventions are shaped by their background and professional practices. Each subtitling reviser's unique profile contributes to this diversity: varied educational backgrounds; some professionals have undergone specialised training or participated in continuous professional development activities, while others have not. Their years of experience, the breadth of their client portfolios, and the nature of the projects they engage in are equally varied. This individuality introduces an inherent level of inconsistency in subtitling revision practices.

Additionally, revisers may have different interpretations of the scope of their tasks, work under diverse conditions, and demonstrate varying levels of linguistic, cultural, and translation competencies. These differences highlight the complex interplay between a subtitling reviser's personal and professional identity and the outcomes of their work. Ultimately, the individuality of each subtitling reviser must be considered as a significant factor contributing to the variability in subtitling revision practices and the diverse range of changes observed in the subtitling process.

All this underscores the lack of uniformity in subtitling revision practices, paving the way for the coexistence of competing norms that are applied simultaneously under similar conditions, which necessarily imply different sets of changes and varied consequences to different stakeholders. Table 2 illustrates, among other issues, an example of how the nine participants approached the same critical point: the interjection "Oh, my God" ("Meu Deus") and the punctuation used by the subtitler. Three subtitling revisers replaced the full stop with an exclamation mark, four retained the original full stop used by the subtitler, and two sacrificed the interjection altogether to ensure a reading speed within the limits stipulated by the client's subtitling rules. The three revisers who altered the punctuation justified their decision by relying on the general rules of the Portuguese language and/or an "implicit rule" (which might actually represent a subtitling norm) advocating for the use of exclamation marks with interjections. Conversely, the four revisers who retained the original punctuation may have done so because their multimodal analysis determined that the intonation, as perceived through the audio-verbal channel, was sufficient to convey the intended emphasis. The fact that they might not have noticed or might not have considered it an issue must also be considered. Finally, the two subtitling revisers who omitted the interjection entirely prioritised adherence to client-specific timing constraints over linguistic and stylistic considerations. This divergence in approaches not only underscores the complexity of subtitling revision but also reflects the interplay between individual judgement, professional rules, and overarching norms within the field.



Table 2: Punctuation used with the interjection “My God”

Audio	Oh, my God. Why are you still here?		
Original PT subtitle	Meu Deus.	characters per second: 19.4	
text	Porque ainda estão aqui?	[per clients rules, maximum 17]	
	My God.		
Back transation	Why are you [plural form] still here?		
ID	Revised subtitle text	Back transation	Think-aloud protocol
Afonso	Porque ainda estao aqui?	Why are you [plural form] still here?	<i>This is unnecessary. It will sacrifice reading speed for nothing.</i>
Beatriz	Meu Deus. Que fazem ainda cá?	My God. What are you [plural form] still doing here?	<i>What are you [plural form] still doing here?</i>
Constança	—	—	<i>There's not much time for reading.</i>
Dinis	Meu Deus! Porque estão ainda aqui?	My God! Why are you [plural form] still here?	<i>Let's add here an exclamation mark. This 'my God' has an exclamatory funccion.</i>
Isabel	Céus. O que ainda fazem aqui?	Heavens. What are you [plural form] still doing here?	<i>Here I wouldn't use... It's too literal. And we need to summarize this.</i>
Leonor	Meu Deus. Porque ainda estão aqui?	My God. What are you [plural form] still doing here?	<i>Line Break.</i>
Mafalda	Meu Deus. Porque ainda estás aqui?	My God. What are you [singular form] still doing here?	—
Pedro	Meu Deus! Porque ainda estão aqui?	My God! Why are you [plural form] still here?	<i>My God', exclamation mark, another implicit Netflix rule.</i>
Sancho	Meu Deus! Porque ainda estão aqui?	My God! Why are you [plural form] still here?	<i>Incorrect, interjection.</i>

Source: Author (2025)

4.4 The role of emotions

As Lehr (2021) observes, cognitive evaluations during the translation process trigger emotional episodes, resulting in changes to emotional states and adaptations influenced by the translator's subjective perception of circumstances. A similar phenomenon occurs in subtitling revision, where professionals articulate their emotional responses through their reactions to the subtitles they revise. The think-aloud protocols provided valuable insights into the role of emotion in subtitling revision, shedding light on several key aspects of the process. Through the linguistic and paralinguistic elements expressed by participants, it became possible to better understand critical dimensions of their work: communication, conflict resolution, decision-making, and empathy.

First, in terms of communication, the protocols suggest how would subtitling revisers interpret and resolve issues related to message comprehension in an actual professional setting. For example, subtitling revisers often verbalise their reasoning when deciding how to balance complete and readable subtitles with high reading speed, showcasing their efforts to ensure the audience fully grasps the intended meaning. Statements such as “I'll omit these two [adverbs] because they add nothing to comprehension and are very big words that make the reading unnecessarily difficult” (Afonso) or “Due to reading speed we might remove ‘father’. OK, now it's at 17, not that high” (Mafalda) reveal a careful attention paid to reading speed. There were also examples on how to give feedback; here Leonor amends the file and immediately explains how she would proceed: “This

would be an objective [error]... and then I would write a comment explaining why I thought this was not correct”.

Second, regarding conflict resolution, the protocols demonstrate subtitling revisers’ ability to find mutually beneficial solutions. A recurring pattern involves striking a balance between client rules and subtitler preferences. For instance, Dinis remarks, “Unfortunately rules here are not very clear in what concerns the usage of two different punctuation marks [...] The problem is many people don’t know how to use them. [...] To make things easier, I’ll remove one of the punctuation marks”, highlighting a nuanced approach to resolving conflicts between stakeholders. Sancho mentions “Let’s merge these two subtitles. There are no gains here. Wait... Actually, there are!”, what denotes an effort to maintain subtitler’s option in terms of translation while attending to client’s reading speed rule.

Third, in decision-making, the protocols capture how subtitling revisers combined rationality with fact-based choices. Participants often refer to established rules, such as client-specific rules or language rules, to justify their actions. For example, Beatriz noted, “He starts talking here. Until here, there are more than 12 [frames]. According to Netflix rules, we can only pull this back if there are more than 12 [frames]. [...] It makes sense setting this to when he starts talking”, demonstrating a deliberate and informed decision-making process based on client’s timing rules. Sancho was shocked with the usage of ‘bué’ in a subtitle, a slang word that means ‘very, a lot’, he was willing to change it but he did some research that helped him validate subtitler’s choice of words, “Very cool [‘bué de fixe’]? I’m not sure I approve this. [...] If I were revising this... This is nothing! I’m not sure if this is acceptable now. [...] [consults online dictionary Infopédia] Actually it is in the dictionary. What an absurd! Including this in the dictionary. But who am I, right? If it is on Infopédia... I’ll approve this”. Pedro resorts to a multimodal analysis to decide on how to amend a literal translation, “‘Let me see that.’ Through the image, we can see that she wants to see what’s in the bags”.

Finally, the protocols highlight the role of empathy in shaping relationships among stakeholders in the subtitling workflow. Subtitling revisers frequently express an understanding of their limits, for example “I will not intervene here. It’s very difficult for me to intervene on others’ work. When I think it is barely acceptable, I do not intervene” (Constança), which is revealing of the interpersonal aspect of subtitling revision and its broader sociological impact. At the same time, protocols also allow the registration of moments where empathy is very difficult to achieve: “This is a nightmare”, said Afonso referring to several consecutive timing issues to amend; “These things are a little bit time-consuming”, mentioned Leonor referring to amending timing issues; “I do not know what I am supposed to do with this”, Mafalda reacted when faced with a subtitle with multiple issues; “I hate this. Therefore, too bad”, Dinis said when disagreeing with the subtitler’s and amending their decision.

Beyond the technical responsibilities of subtitling revision, revisers also take on roles as communicators, ensuring the audience fully understands the intended message; negotiators, balancing the often competing priorities of clients and subtitlers; decision-makers, selecting the most appropriate approach based on guidelines and contextual demands; and empathetic collaborators, respecting the subtitler’s creative input and enhancing the audience’s viewing experience.



4.5 The effects of changes

Equally important are the effects of subtitling revisers' objective and subjective decisions. These decisions not only shape the quality and accessibility of the translated audiovisual content but also influence key stakeholders, particularly the subtitler and the audience, highlighting the subtitling reviser's pivotal position in the audiovisual translation process.

This experiment revealed that subtitling revisers influence both the textual and sociological dimensions of the revision process. Each textual change inherently carries a sociological impact, as the actions of subtitling revisers have consequences—both positive and negative—within the network in which they operate. Textual changes occur when revisers address specific elements within the audiovisual text, such as correcting reading speed violations, amending punctuation errors, or revising mistranslations. Sociological changes, on the other hand, emerge from the ways revisers interact with and influence other agents within the subtitling network with their interventions on a file. For example, revisers contribute to improving work procedures and incorporating feedback, all of which have broader implications for collaboration and workflow dynamics.

Additionally, changes are not only implemented by subtitling revisers but also acquired and perpetuated through their practices. Their behaviour is also guided by norms validated by their peers, which they, in turn, validate. Insights from the questionnaire responses of participants in this experiment further illustrate this. Two participants highlight that their learning as subtitling revisers stemmed from their experience as subtitlers, indicating that subtitling revision norms were internalised through interactions within the subtitling workflow, particularly via feedback mechanisms. Leonor stated: “[I learned] through experience and through revisions made to my work”. Sancho shared: “[I] think my greatest learning came from making mistakes and learning from the revisers”. Both Leonor and Sancho claim they learned with the amendments of seasoned professionals. These reflections underscore how intersubjective knowledge, shaped by shared experiences and collaborative feedback, plays a pivotal role in the development and implementation of subtitling revision practices.

From the data, it can be inferred that the subtitling revision interventions on a file and the resulting changes have both positive and negative impacts. These impacts are observed at various levels, affecting subtitling practices, professional relationships, and the quality of the audiovisual product.

4.5.1 Changes with a positive impact

Contribution to good practices. Subtitling revisers positively influence industry practices when they are involved in providing assessment and informal/indirect training to fellow subtitlers/subtitling revisers. This contribution tends to promote consistency in subtitling practices, helps codify subtitling norms into explicit rules, and ultimately enhances the viewer's experience. For example, Constança explains how she would inform subtitler about a potentially necessary amendment and let them decide on implementing it or not: “Here, [...] in a Word document, I would



include this as a suggestion with the sentence in English so that translator could confront these and then accept or not”.

Fair Assessment of Subtitlers. When revisers assess subtitlers fairly and positively, their evaluations can bolster subtitlers’ careers, incomes, and reputations. Fair assessments also positively impact the client’s reputation and strengthen the sense of community among subtitlers and subtitling revisers. This also includes leaving constructive feedback or mentoring subtitlers, which fosters professional growth. At the same time, it is possible to assess subtitler fairly and negatively (in the case of a less than acceptable file), having a positive impact on client’s reputation. Examples from the data include several comments concerning necessary interventions. For instance Pedro amends a line treatment issue and quickly explains the reasoning behind it: “There’s no need having two lines, according to Netflix guidelines”.

Exhibiting Subtitling Revision Competences. Revisers who display interpersonal and strategic competences, such as respecting others’ work and leaving thoughtful comments explaining their decisions, contribute positively to the well-being and confidence of both themselves and their colleagues. For example, Beatriz acknowledged her dislike for a subtitler’s choice but refrained from changing it, showing respect for the subtitler’s work and maintaining trust: “I don’t like it, but I will leave it like this. I am not the translator”.

Necessary Interventions. Necessary corrections directly improve the quality of the audiovisual text. These changes have a positive impact on the viewer’s experience by ensuring accuracy, readability, and coherence. As an example, Isabel corrected a grammar issue in a subtitle, thus respecting language rules: “Here before ‘but’ [‘mas’] a comma”.

4.5.2 Changes with a negative impact

Unfair Assessment of Subtitlers. Unfair assessments, such as those motivated by competition or bias, can harm subtitlers’ career, reputation, and income. This behaviour damages trust within the professional community and undermines collaborative efforts. In the following example retrieved from the questionnaire, Dinis explains how he would amend a file as he pleases, shall he deem quality as bellow pair: “I am the second line to make sure translator and I will continue receiving work. If I consider the translation puts that into stake, I will amend it with no regrets”.

Exhibiting Impaired Subtitling Revision Competences. When subtitling revisers fail to exhibit interpersonal and strategic competences, such as providing constructive feedback or maintaining respect for the subtitler’s work, their actions negatively affect the well-being and confidence of all parties involved. For example, Isabel commented one of her amendments saying, “I don’t like doing this but sometimes.”..., confirming she is not happy with her action.

Introducing Preferential Changes (Hyper-revision). These changes have a negative impact as they do not improve subtitle quality, but instead waste time and frustrate subtitlers. In Table 3, Pedro conducts minimal research and introduces a minor change that adds no value, reflecting a disregard for efficiency and trust. Contrasting with Pedro, Beatriz demonstrated respect by choosing not to make a change she ended up deeming unnecessary.



Table 3: Example of hyper-revision

ID	Audio	Original PT subtitle text	Revised subtitle text	Think-aloud protocol
Pedro	<i>Look, I'm sorry I sold you out back there.</i>	Desculpa ter-te tirado o tapete há pouco.	Desculpa não te ter apoiado há pouco.	Removing the rug' ['Tirado o tapete'] is kind of idiomatic (...) 'not supporting you'.
	Back translation	[I am sorry I pulled the rug out from under you just a short while ago.]	[I am sorry I did not support you just a short while ago.]	
Beatriz	<i>Look, I'm sorry I sold you out back there.</i>	Desculpa ter-te tirado o tapete há pouco.	—	Removing the rug' ['ter-te tirado o tapete'] for 'sold you out'... I would say 'snitch' ['delatado']. I don't like it, but I will leave it like this. I am not the translator.
	Back translation	[I am sorry I pulled the rug out from under you just a short while ago.]		

Source: Author (2025)

Introducing Errors (Over-revision). When revisers introduce errors during their interventions, they harm the subtitler's reputation (as their name appears on the screen), degrade subtitle quality, and negatively affect the viewer's experience. The example in Table 4 shows how the amendment caused an error because, although it creates a subtitle structure that makes reading easier, it breaks the sentence in a position that impairs the reading flow.

Table 4: Example of over-revision

ID	Audio	Original PT subtitle text	Revised subtitle text	Think-aloud protocol
Dinis	<i>You think yelling at a bus feels good?</i>	Achas que gritar com um autocarro sabe bem.	Achas que gritar com um autocarro sabe bem?	Let's split here to avoid the two words hanging down here.
	Back translation	Do you think yelling at a bus feels good?	Do you think yelling at a bus feels good?	

Source: Author (2025)

Failure to Correct Errors (Under-revision). Not amending errors leaves mistakes in the subtitles, negatively impacting the subtitler's reputation, text quality, and viewer experience. For example, in Table 5, Sancho did some reflection and concluded the translation of 'scholar' is correct. However, its translation depends on the context and it is not correct in this case, as Constança points out. Sancho missed the opportunity to correct the error.

Table 5: Example of under-revision

ID	Audio	Original PT subtitle text	Revised subtitle text	Think-aloud protocol
Sancho	<i>Ray is a brilliant scholar.</i>	O Ray é um académico brilhante.		It is not wrong.
	Back translation	[Ray is a brilliant scholar.]		
Constança	<i>Ray is a brilliant scholar.</i>	O Ray é um académico brilhante.	O Ray é um estudante brilhante.	Ray is the boy. But call him an academic... Academic, yes, but in this case is more adequate... pupil? Student?
	Back translation	[Ray is a brilliant scholar.]	[Ray is a brilliant student.]	

Source: Author (2025)

This study demonstrates the complexity and multi-layered nature of subtitling revision. Subtitling revisers play a pivotal role in shaping both textual and sociological dimensions of audiovisual translation, balancing client requirements, audience expectations, and subtitler contributions. The data reveals how their decisions, whether objective or subjective, affect the quality of the final product, the workflow dynamics, and professional relationships. While many changes have a positive impact, such as, improving subtitle quality, fostering professional growth, and

enhancing collaboration, others carry negative repercussions, such as undermining trust or introducing errors.

The findings highlight the importance of nuanced decision-making. Subtitling revisers act not only as technical agents, but also as communicators and collaborators. Their ability to navigate competing demands while adhering to established rules underscores their relevance.

5. Conclusion

Too simplistically, one could say that “[...] revision is essential because every translator makes mistakes” (Mossop, 2020, p. xii). However, revision is more than just identifying and correcting errors. It is a transformative process that encompasses rereading, restructuring, reconceptualizing and, to some extent, recreating. Subtitling revisers act as agents of change within audiovisual workflows, wielding significant power to influence not only the textual quality of subtitles, but also the broader network of stakeholders involved in the production process.

This role, marked by subjectivity and complexity, demands continuous reflection and adaptation. Subjectivity is central to understanding the work of subtitling revisers. Their lived experiences, intellectual journeys, and emotional responses profoundly shape their decision-making processes. These decisions, in turn, have ripple effects across the subtitling network, influencing other stakeholders, including subtitlers, project managers, clients, and audiences. The embodied nature of their subjectivity highlights how their personal and professional realities intersect to shape their practices. By navigating this interplay, subtitling revisers introduce changes in texts that can have both positive and negative impacts on workflows, collaboration, and the final audiovisual product.

Emotions play a pivotal role in the subtitling revision process. As revisers engage with content, they articulate cognitive evaluations intertwined with emotional responses. These emotional dimensions influence how they interpret subtitlers’ choices, prioritize interventions, and balance competing demands from stakeholders. By respecting subtitlers’ creative voices and fostering collaboration, revisers contribute to building trust and enhancing the collective effort within audiovisual translation. This trust, however, can be fragile, underscoring the importance of thoughtful and respectful decision-making.

The influence of stakeholders on subtitling revisers’ work cannot be overstated. Stakeholders’ expectations, rules, and feedback shape present and future strategies and interventions of subtitling revisers. In this intricate network, revisers navigate client-specific requirements, audience expectations, and the subtitlers’ initial output. Each decision reflects a negotiation of these competing priorities, highlighting the reviser’s role as a mediator and their capacity to enact meaningful change. These subjective decisions are not confined to the textual dimension; they also affect the sociological dynamics within the workflow, impacting on professional relationships and perception of quality.

The findings of this study underscore the need to view subtitling revision as an intricate and dynamic process. Subtitling revisers are not merely correctors of errors; they are creators, negotiators, and collaborators whose decisions shape both the text and the network in which they operate. This research offers deeper insights into their habitus and agency, revealing how their



subjectivities influence their practices and outcomes. While their decisions can lead to significant improvements in subtitle quality and workflow efficiency, they can also have unintended consequences, underscoring the delicate balance inherent in their role.

While the multi-method approach provided a comprehensive dataset, certain limitations should be acknowledged. The small sample size of nine participants, while sufficient for generating insights, might compromise the generalisability of the findings. Additionally, the think-aloud protocol may have influenced participants' natural workflows, despite their freedom to set up a relaxed environment. Finally, the use of a single sitcom excerpt, while appropriate for this study's objectives, represents only a narrow slice of the diverse challenges encountered in subtitling revision.

To conclude, subtitling revisers embody the dual forces of transformation and continuity within audiovisual translation. Their agency, marked by subjectivity and shaped by experience, is both a source of strength and a potential challenge. As agents of change, subtitling revisers must be supported through targeted training and professional recognition to maximize their positive impact on the industry. By fostering an environment that values their contributions and addresses the evolving demands of the field, stakeholders can ensure that subtitling revisers continue to play a pivotal role in shaping high-quality, accessible audiovisual content for diverse audiences.

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Data analysis: R. Menezes

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Conflicts of interest

Not applicable.

Data availability statement

The data from this research, which are not included in this work, may be made available by the author upon request.

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