

RAISING THE BAR IN AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION

Developing a Subtitling Competence Framework

JORGE DÍAZ CINTAS¹, SERENELLA MASSIDDA²

¹UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON, ²UNIVERSITY OF CHIETI PESCARA

Abstract - Over the last decades, audiovisual consumption has been thriving thanks to the emergence of streaming platforms which have triggered the proliferation of media content and the need of large pools of qualified professionals capable of satisfying these new demands in multiple languages. While many scholars have developed translation competence frameworks in recent years, the body of literature focused on audiovisual translation (AVT) in general, and subtitling in particular, is very limited. Inspired by previous work on translation competence and skills, the present paper puts forward a set of core competences, the Subtitling Competence Framework (SCF), that can be used in academic environments and has been implemented in the design of a professional certification in subtitling launched in 2023. This project responds to a desire to raise the visibility of the work carried out by subtitlers, by addressing the lack of a professional framework of reference in the media localisation sector, and to safeguard the professionalism of a field that is expanding at an ever-increasing rate.

Keywords: Audiovisual Translation; Competences; Media Localisation; Skills, Subtitling.

1. Introduction¹

In the last few decades, a substantial number of academic studies have discussed specific competences, knowledge, and skills in relation to the knowhow and expertise that translators should master to be able to operate efficiently within the profession (Alves, Hurtado Albir 2009, 2017; Cao 1996; Hurtado Albir, Orozco 2002; Kelly 2005; Kiraly 1995, 2016; Neubert 1994; Nord 1992; PACTE 2000, 2003, 2005, 2015; Pym 2003; Tiselius, Hild 2017). Professional and institutional agencies have also developed their own translation competence frameworks that can be used to train and select high-profile candidates, such as the European Committee for Standardization (CEN), the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation, the British National Occupational Standards (NOS) for translation or the national standards and certifying authority for interpreters and translators in Australia (NAATI). More recently, the EFFORT project (2020-2023) embarked on the creation of a European framework of reference applied to translator training and professional translation.

In all these cases, the remit tends to be general, rather than focusing on a given translation practice, and they all, explicitly or implicitly, revolve around written, as opposed to audiovisual, translation. Given their generic nature, many of these models' premises and postulates can be easily extrapolated to the field of AVT, though they still need to be finetuned to be fully operational. In sharp contrast with this flurry of activity, very little research has been conducted on the topic of AVT competences (Cerezo-Merchán 2012, 2019; Lapini 2023), with most of the works centred on the teaching of the

¹ While both authors are responsible for the article's design and have co-revised the article, Jorge Díaz-Cintas is responsible for Sections 3, 3.1, 5 and Serenella Massidda for Sections 1, 2, 2.1 and 4.

various AVT practices, and, to date, no systematic skillset to be honed by professional subtitlers has been put forward.

In light of the above, this paper advances and discusses a set of subtitling competences that go beyond the linguistic and cultural knowledge of the source and target languages and integrate the technical knowhow and the related practical dimensions and personal attitudes typical of the subtitling profession. A specific skillset is proposed, the Subtitling Competence Framework (SCF), which has been inspired by the above-mentioned initiatives and academic projects and whose ultimate goal is to act as a theoretical scaffolding for the AVTpro Certification (<https://avtpro.oona.net>). The skillset, which has been designed, developed and implemented in this professional initiative, hinges on a series of tasks designed to test the proficiency of specialists working in the subtitling industry.

2. Context

Over the last years, audiovisual consumption has increased notably thanks to the emergence and popularity of streaming platforms. In turn, this transformation of the mediascape has accelerated the search of qualified professionals working in the AVT sector, capable of satisfying new demands in terms of agile workflows and high volumes of content to be localised. One of the triggers of the AVT boom can be tracked to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified the pace of technological advances already in place and fuelled the global demand and consumption of audiovisual works. Streaming platforms such as Amazon Prime, Disney+, HBO, Netflix and Tencent have increased their service provision dramatically by doubling up the production and broadcasting of content, traditional and brand new, that needs to be localised into numerous languages and in fast turnaround times (Massidda 2023). These groundbreaking transformations have forced language service providers (LSPs) to adjust and to expand their pools of professional translators. The search has been full of hurdles, including the so-called ‘talent crunch’ (Estopace 2017) or shortage of qualified practitioners, which reveals the precarious reality of a media localisation sector where low rates, tight deadlines and high levels of stress are forcing professionals to flee it.

2.1. *Certifications in Translation*

The translation service market has been traditionally characterised by a great deal of uncertainty, with LSPs lacking clear frameworks to systematically draw a line between qualified professionals and the rest of providers available in the translation market. Chan (2013, p. 211) argues that:

certifications and educational diplomas serve to reduce the resulting information asymmetry, but both suffer from potential drawbacks: translator training programs are currently oversupplying the market with graduates who may lack the specific skills needed in the market and no certification program enjoys universal recognition.

In the translation field, certifications can be provided by public authorities, as in the case of sworn translators certified by government agencies, or by private bodies. According to Washington and Ababouch (2011), the latter can be subcategorised as (1) first-party certifications, such as the SDL Certification Program; (2) second-party certifications represented by well-established professional translator associations, such as the Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL, www.ciol.org.uk) and the Institute of Translation and

Interpreting (ITI, www.iti.org.uk) in the UK, and the American Translators Association (ATA, www.atanet.org) in the USA; and (3) third-party certifications representing independent bodies, such as the AVTpro Certification. The *European Language Industry Survey 23* (ELIS Research 2023) reports that both the ISO 9001 and the 17100 certifications are approaching their potential maximum among language companies, while the growth of other types of certifications still remains modest, as illustrated in Figure 1:

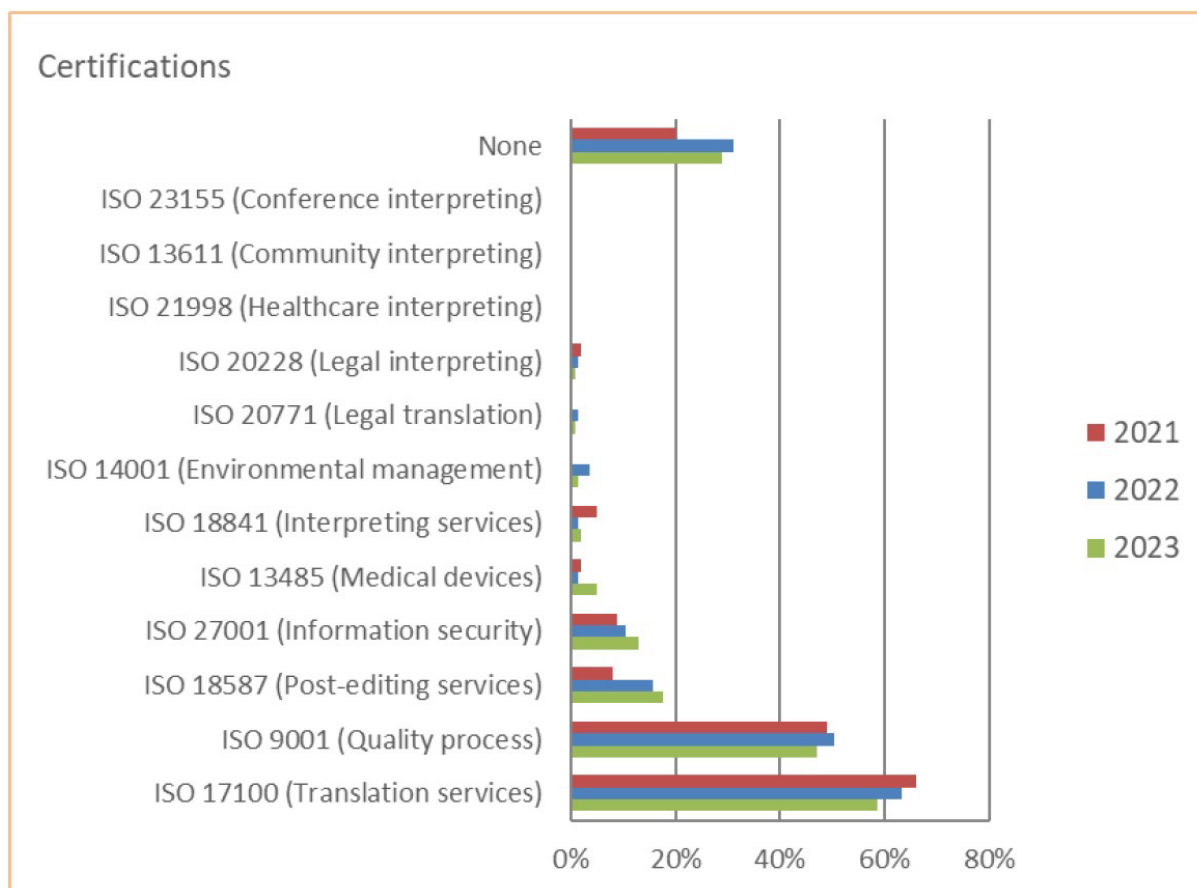


Figure 1
ELIS Research on certifications (2023, 11).

The AVT Pro Certification is inspired by other existing certifications and arises from the need for an internationally recognised professional qualification for audiovisual translators. As has been already established, AVT practices in general, and subtitling in particular, require not only a linguistic and cultural knowledge of both operational languages at work in the mediation process, but also specialised skills pertaining to the more technical dimension of the various AVT practices. Although certifications, in the form of a third-party qualification of an individual's level of knowledge or proficiency in a certain profession, are very common, no professional certification addressing the specialised area of subtitling exists to date.

Among the main official bodies providing certifications in translation, the British CIOL proposes the *Diploma in Translation (DipTrans) Level 7*, as well as two other interpreting certificates, namely the *Diploma in Public Services Interpreting (DPSI) Level 6* and the *Diploma in Police Interpreting (DPI) Level 6*. To obtain the *DipTrans*, candidates have to translate a general text and two specialised ones to be chosen among

the following fields: technology, business, literature, science, social science, and law. None of the AVT practices is included in the list of subfields. To set and maintain high standards in the translation sector, the ITI provides a qualification in translation for their members as well as continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities in the form of translation seminars and webinars. Yet, once again, no certification for AVT professionals is contemplated. The German Bundesverband der Dolmetscher und Übersetzer (BDÜ, <https://bdue.de/der-bdue>) offers an exam for professionals to become sworn translators in the business field, but no AVT pathway is available. In the US, the ATA provides a specialised diploma in legal translation open to everyone, as well as CPD for their members, but nothing for audiovisual translators, despite having their own Audiovisual Division (www.ata-divisions.org/AVD).

The AVTpro Certification draws inspiration from precedents such as the National Occupational Standards for translation (Skills CFA 2007/2012); the European Quality Standard for Translation Service Providers, EN-15038, by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN 2006, <http://qualitystandard.bs.en-15038.com>), later updated as ISO 17100; the EMT Competence Framework (European Commission 2022) created by the Directorate-General for Translation; the EFFORT project (2020-2023); and the GALMA project (2017-2021) and its proposal of a certification for respeakers.² It is also influenced by the Netflix Hermes Project (Netflix TechBlog 2017, online), ‘the first online subtitling and translation test and indexing system by a major content creator’, whose ultimate goal was to provide ‘top-notch translations for their new global audiences’ (Massidda 2023, p. 5). It represented the first online subtitling test aimed at measuring professionals subtitling competence ‘where no standard test was available [...] providing metrics on professionals on a global scale’ (Massidda 2023). The test consisted of sets of timed, randomised questions to assess the professionals’ comprehension of the English language, their translation skills, their ability to spot errors in a series of subtitles and to translate the pre-timed subtitles of a selected clip, from English into the target language. Successful candidates were issued a H-Number and included in a database that was shared with selected LSPs. The Hermes test was shut down after a year from its launch due to the impracticality of having to manage such a large number of candidates, as explained by the Program Manager, Allison Smith (in Bond 2018, online):

Netflix aimed to own the full process from subtitler recruitment through to working in our tools, and this started with Hermes. While we learned a lot and did get value from the test, after introspection and analysing our core competencies, we decided vendors were better suited to use their core competencies and add value to the content localisation ecosystem by owning the recruiting, training and onboarding processes.

In summary, the current outlook in relation to translation certifications available internationally points to a significant gap in the AVT field and a lack of acknowledgment of the subtitling profession overall, a field that requires highly specialised linguistic, cultural and technical competences.

2.2. A Certification in Audiovisual Translation

Very porous and highly competitive, the translation market has traditionally welcomed practitioners with or without a degree in translation. As highlighted by Chan (2009, p. iii), ‘both buyers and sellers frequently enter and exit the translation market because

² <https://galmaobservatory.webs.uvigo.es/projects/galician-observatory-for-media-accessibility-galma>.

translation is generally an unregulated ‘profession’ and translators are an “ambiguous group”. In such a scenario, a professional certification in AVT can bring about numerous benefits not only for professional translators but also for LSPs and ultimately the audience, who would enjoy high-quality subtitles. To reach its full potential, the certification should have the backing and recognition of all stakeholders, including translators, associations, academics, LSPs, and content owners.

At present, LSPs working in a myriad of languages find it challenging to know how professionally driven the various existing academic degrees might be and their answer is to rely on an internal recruitment process that tests candidates in order to assess their skills and suitability. This internal onboarding process, aside from being time-consuming and costly, can also run the risk of being ineffective as some of the tests are often created by non-experts and are not updated with the required frequency. By recognising an external accreditation system, a company’s recruitment process could become more straightforward and could help LSPs to reduce the amount of time and resources devoted to activities like onboarding, testing and the provision of any initial training. Additional benefits could materialise in the reduction of staff turnover and the retention of talent once the company recognises that certified professionals can be trusted.

The details of professionals who have obtained the certification can be included in an online directory in an attempt to facilitate communication between LSPs and professionals: a user-friendly search engine would make the process swift and straightforward. Such a database would also avoid professional encroachment as companies will have the guarantee that the directory only contains those individuals who have obtained the certification and, therefore, are experts in the linguistic and technical knowhow required to perform the job.

The advantages for certified translators can also be manifold. Staff retention would be a plus for professionals too and could translate into contracts that better reflect the appreciation of talent and their value, with rates above the average because of the principle of scarcity, provided only certified professionals are hired (Chan 2010). Being certified builds trust in clients and employers and, as argued by Hlavac (2013), can lead to securing jobs ahead of competitors. It can also enhance professionals’ leverage in rate negotiations, the possibility of being discerning with clients, better prospects of long-term career development, recognition from peers and increased self-esteem, which can be personally and professionally rewarding. As a formal validation of a subtitler’s skills and knowledge, it can be particularly important for those who are self-taught or come from non-traditional backgrounds.

Most importantly, certified translators operating in the media localisation sector would ultimately boost the image of the AVT profession, consolidating a practice that has historically been treated as an afterthought in the media industry. In this respect, the implementation of a certification system can be understood not only as a way for professionals to prove that they master highly specialised knowledge and skills in a given field and that they fulfil the requirements of the market (Mikkelsen 2013), but also as a catalyst to enhance and promote that field, in our case AVT, by professionalising it.

A robust certification, with the potential to standardise the requirements of the subtitling profession, must be articulated around a comprehensive and realistic set of skills and competences, so that the award can be recognised and trusted at international level by all the principal stakeholders.

3. Translation Competences

As already discussed, a considerable number of publications has been devoted to the competences, knowledge, and skills that professional translators should master. The didactics of subtitling within higher education is another area that has attracted the interest of scholars such as Díaz-Cintas (2008), Bolaños García-Escribano and Díaz-Cintas (2019) and Bolaños García-Escribano *et al.* (2021a, 2021b), but very little knowledge is available in the area of competences *per se* (Cerezo Merchán 2012, 2019), and, to date, no skillset to be mastered by professional subtitlers has been put forward in a systematic manner (Lapini 2023). The following paragraphs provide an overview of the translation competence standards discussed in academics circles.

Göpferich (2009) carried out a study on translation competence called TransComp. She proposed a model based on a longitudinal study in which 12 translation students completed translation tasks over a period of 3 years, with their performance then compared with that of 10 professional translators. In her model, there is an umbrella strategic competence under which five different subcategories can be discerned: communicative, domain, tools and research, translation routine activation, and psychomotor.

After a series of workshops with translation students and teachers from five different continents, Kiraly (2013) devised a model that showcases the complexity of translator competence and reinforces the need for collaborative learning within translator education. Adopting a constructivist approach, he identifies three main areas – i.e., translation, personal and social – and proposes a dynamic understanding of how competences are achieved by rejecting the expression ‘translation competence acquisition’ and advocating a more evolving ‘emergence of translator competence’. In the scholar’s own words: ‘such competence is not built up bit by bit through the accretion of knowledge, but creates itself through the translator’s embodied involvement (*habitus*) in actual translation experiences’ (Kiraly 2013, p. 203). From this perspective, competence is recast as a self-perpetuating and recursive process rather than a linear developmental process.

Since 1998, PACTE, a research group based at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, has been involved in the study of translation competence, acquisition and assessment from an empirical perspective. Their main goal is to ‘understand the nature of translation competence, the way in which it is acquired, and then to use this knowledge to improve curricular design and assessment’ (Lapini 2023, p. 91). Defining translation competence as the system of essential knowledge, abilities, and attitudes needed in order to be able to translate (Hurtado Albir 2017), PACTE’s translation competence model includes the following five sub-competences: bilingual, extralinguistic, knowledge of translation, instrumental and strategic. The group’s experimental research led to the proposal of a global scale for level descriptors (A1, A2, B1, B2 and C) that could be the basis for a common European framework of reference for translation (PACTE 2018). This initiative was taken forward as part of the European EFFORT project (2020-2023, www.effortproject.eu) led by the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona with a consortium of nine academic institutions, namely, Aarhus University, University Alexandru Ioan Cuza, University of Eastern Finland, University of Geneva, University of Granada, University of Ljubljana, University of Utrecht, University of Westminster and University of Wrocław. Inspired by the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR, www.coe.int/en/web/common-european-framework-reference-languages/home) used for language learning, EFFORT focuses on written translation and is intended for both the academic and professional arenas. Its main goal was to produce a European framework of reference that

can be applied to translator training and professional translation by developing a set of descriptors for three levels of competence (Hurtado Albir *et al.* 2023). The researchers behind the project have indicated their intention to expand the proposal to include AVT as one of its future objectives.

The EMT competence framework, first published in 2009 and substantially revised in 2022 (European Commission 2022), identifies a common set of learning outcomes based on a KSC (knowledge, skills, competences) typology for EMT master's degree programmes. It is a practice-oriented model combining knowledge and applicable skills in the same way as the CEFR does for language learning, which looks at competence as 'the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and personal, social and/or methodological abilities, in work or study situations and in professional and personal development' (European Commission 2022, p. 3). It is divided into five main areas:

- language and culture (transcultural and sociolinguistic awareness and communicative skills);
- translation (strategic, methodological, and thematic competence);
- technology (knowledge of tools and applications);
- personal and interpersonal (soft skills); and
- service provision (language service skills in the professional field).

The inclusion of the latter category represents an original aspect of the framework which contains a total of 36 learning outcomes: 14 for translation competence, 6 for technology, 6 for personal and interpersonal competence, and 10 for service provision. The distribution of the learning outcomes seems to suggest that translation competence and service provision represent the bulk of the EMT framework. The language and culture competence is the driving force behind all the other competences and 'encompasses all the general or language-specific linguistic, sociolinguistic, cultural and transcultural knowledge and skills that constitute the basis for advanced translation competence' (*ibid.*, 6).

The European Quality Standard for Translation Service Providers, known as EN-15038 and issued by the European Committee for Standardization (CEN) in 2006, covers the core translation process along with service provision and quality assurance, and provides a set of six competences. In 2015, the framework was superseded by the ISO 17100 (<https://iso17100.com>) as a European standard. Its most outstanding features are its definition of the translation process, making mandatory the revision of the output by a person other than the translator, and its specification of the professional competences of each of the participants in the translation process, namely, translators, reviewers, revisers and proofreaders. The professional competences that translators should master, as per the updated standards, are: (1) translation competence, (2) linguistic and textual competence in the source and the target language, (3) competence in research, information acquisition, and processing, (4) cultural competence, (5) technical competence, and (6) domain competence (BSI 2015, p. 6).

The British National Occupational Standards for translation (Skills CFA 2007/2012), originally issued in 2001, describe the knowledge and knowhow required for the profession. Additionally, drawing on the code of ethics from professional bodies such as the ITI, these standards also identify thirteen knowledge and skills categories, as well as eleven units with differing levels of expertise. The highest level, i.e., the advanced professional unit, refers to those individuals able to handle complex subject matters in both working languages, who also act as mentors to trainee or colleague translators. The unit focuses on two main areas of interest: translators' self-evaluation of their own performance and their engagement in continuing professional development. Figure 2

displays a summary of the performance criteria as well as the knowledge and skills (KS) applied to the advanced professional translator:



Unit APTra4 Develop your performance as an advanced professional translator

Element APTra4.1 Evaluate your performance as an advanced professional translator

Performance Criteria

- 1 you create your own criteria to evaluate your work and justify why you chose them
- 2 you use these criteria to evaluate aspects of your work, such as:
 - how well you met the client brief
 - to what extent the translation was fit for purpose and fitted the context in which it was to be used
 - any unusual aspects, such as technical difficulty or challenging technological, localisation or formatting requirements
 - domain-specific requirements
 - the effectiveness of any advice which you gave to the client on language or translation aspects
- 3 you make use of feedback from others, for example, clients, colleagues, your manager, external reviewers and professionals who have expertise in the domain area
- 4 you produce an accurate and justifiable analysis of your strengths and weaknesses as a translator
- 5 you demonstrate self-awareness of your professional and personal skills
- 6 you take a holistic as well as a detailed approach to evaluation
- 7 you identify areas for improvement

Knowledge and Skills

- K1 a wide range of concepts and strategies used to analyse translated texts
- K2 methods to review and assess your preparation for assignments
- K3 methods to review your management of translation assignments
- K4 methods to check that your analysis of strengths and weaknesses is realistic and justifiable

Figure 2
Unit APTra4 (Skills CFA 2007/2012, 26).

On a similar vein, and for the purpose of their own certification, the NAATI (n.d.) has issued a set of eight competences that outline the expected minimum standard of performance that translators must display in professional practice, depending on whether candidates want to be accredited as ‘recognised practising’, ‘certified’ or ‘certified advanced’ translators. The competences, which are graded according to the three different certifications, cover the following areas: (1) transfer, (2) language, (3) intercultural, (4) thematic, (5) ethical, (6) research, (7) service provision and (8) technological. Interestingly, they assess a wide range of domains and document types but none of them relates to AVT. In the case of the American Translators Association (ATA 2024, online), information on competences is rather limited as they only proclaim that their exam ‘assesses the language skills of a professional translator: comprehension of the source-language text, translation techniques, and writing in the target language’. Once more, their certification only concentrates on written texts. In a more pragmatic manner, some companies also list the skills that they expect from their professional translators, such as PacTranz (2024), which groups them as follows: seven core competence translator skills,

eight key personal translator qualities, four crucial freelance translator business skills and five ‘nice-to-have’ translator abilities.

3.1. Audiovisual Translation Competences

As previously mentioned, the field of AVT lacks the scholarly attention and extensive research studies reserved to translation competence. Scholars have discussed general training and competences in AVT (Bolaños García-Escribano, Díaz-Cintas 2019; Cerezo Merchán 2012, 2019; Díaz-Cintas 2008; Gambier 2000, 2013; Gummerus, Paro 2001) as well as in specific practices such as subtitling (Capitani 2016; Carroll 1998; Díaz-Cintas, Orero 2003; Imre 2015; James 1998; James *et al.* 1995; Kovačič 1998; Morettini 2018; Skuggevik 2008) and accessibility (Díaz-Cintas 2006, 2007; Neves 2008; Pöchhacker, Remael 2019; Sanz-Moreno 2018). On the whole, the analyses carried out come across as a miscellaneous collection of literature, focusing on didactic approaches rather than specifically providing studies on AVT competences. The contributions discussed in the next paragraphs go beyond the pedagogical framework, to include a more practical, personal, and interpersonal dimension of the competences required in the subtitling profession.

Carroll (1998) distinguishes between two types of competences – attitudinal components and personal attributes – and argues that professional subtitlers should master their native and target languages, have superb creative writing skills, and a keen interest in TV and cinema. In addition to the basic skills expected of any translator, i.e., translation and language skills, information mining competence and ability to work under pressure, Gambier (2013, p. 55) identifies the following, general competences:

- ability to analyse the needs of the intended audience, to match the verbal to the visual;
- ability to comply with deadlines, commitments, interpersonal cooperation, team organization;
- ability to express oneself concisely and to write with a sense of rhythm (in order to provide an accurate translation one must understand the rhythm of the actor’s speech, the rhythm of the images as defined by the shot changes, and the audience reading rhythm);
- ability to adapt to and familiarize oneself with new tools;
- ability to self-evaluate in order to revise and assess the quality of the output.

Similarly, Imre’s (2015) approach comes across as being rather practical and personal in nature, with the scholar listing the following set of six skills required from professional subtitlers: (1) linguistic and cultural, (2) translation, (3) technical, (4) research, (5) self-management (negotiation and business skills), and (6) psychological skills (resilience in the freelance profession). Drawing primarily on Hurtado Albir’s (2015) translation competence model, Cerezo Merchán (2019) offers a detailed table of competences specific to the AVT profession in general:

1. contrastive competences, encompassing exhaustive knowledge of the target language and mastery of the source language;
2. extralinguistic competences, including good knowledge of the cultures involved, exhaustive knowledge of the target audience, film and theatre knowledge, familiarity with the language of film and visual semiotics as well as with features of different audiovisual texts and genres;

3. methodological and strategic competences, such as theoretical knowledge of the various AVT practices, knowledge of software localisation, mastery of voicing techniques, mastery of sign language, mastery of techniques to visualise text and image simultaneously, capacity of synthesis, capacity to use creative language resources, capacity to analyse audiovisual genres and reproduce their discursive features, mastery of synchronisation techniques with the use of notations and timecodes for dubbing and voiceover, and mastery of synchronisation and spotting techniques for subtitling;
4. instrumental competences, which involve mastery of AVT software, mastery of applications to digitise and manipulate audiovisual files, mastery of speech recognition programs, and mastery to retrieve information and use other resources;
5. translation problem solving competences, including knowledge of translation strategies to deal with different audiovisual genres and capacity to manage AVT projects.

The scholar's classification is very comprehensive and represents one of the most important studies on the topic. However, by bringing together all the various AVT practices, the proposal becomes too broad for its direct application to a professional certification that is focused on subtitling, and some alterations are needed to make it operational.

Overall, what the literature on translation and AVT competences shows is that to be systematic one must formulate a comprehensive description of what subtitling is (a process made of tasks) and what it requires (a range of skills, tools and *savoir faire*) to be performed at professional level. The AVTpro Certification initiative, which addresses each and every aspect of the subtitling process in different stages, is an ideal platform for the drafting, testing and validation of a set of professional core competences. Conceived to test a professional's capacity to perform successfully and efficiently, the various subtitling competences are identifiable in each of the tasks that make up the certification, covering areas of knowledge, which come to fruition in a set of specialised skills.

4. A Subtitling Competence Framework

As already discussed, most attempts to map translation competence have evaded the field of AVT. In the few cases where specific attention has been paid to this field, the proposals tend to be rather generic, bringing together all the various AVT practices despite their acute differences. For instance, lip synchronisation is not a skill required in subtitling, while respecting shot changes does not bear any impact on dubbing or audio description. The objective in these pages is to propose a systematic and comprehensive competence framework that focuses solely on interlingual subtitling, as opposed to the type of intralingual transfer that takes place in captioning or subtitling for people who are d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing.

To articulate the framework, three concepts are pivotal:

- a. **competence**, understood as the proven ability to use knowledge and skills to perform a task successfully and efficiently;
- b. **knowledge**, as the theoretical and factual cognitive understanding of a subject pertaining to a specific competence; and
- c. **skills**, as the effective application of cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and applied (involving manual dexterity and the use of

methods, materials, tools and instruments) knowledge.

In line with Kiraly (2013), the Subtitling Competence Framework positions the nine competences as the main nucleus of the framework made up of nine specific areas of knowledge that come to fruition and manifest themselves in the form of specialised skills, both external (work-related) and internal (inter/personal), which are applied to facts, tasks and phases of the subtitling process. In this sense, there cannot be competence without knowledge and cannot be knowledge without applied skills, due to their intertwined and interdependent nature in a network of relations.

Although the various competences are defined separately, the confines of some of them are very pervasive and, on occasions, could be interpreted as overlapping. Nevertheless, the nine areas are to be understood as complementary and equally important in providing the subtitling service, which is the ultimate goal of the subtitling process. As the framework is built upon numerous constituents, testing all of them in one single procedure might prove elusive and difficult to ascertain in a testing environment. Such an evaluation may be better carried out across a substantial number of tasks completed over an extensive period of time under close monitoring of the candidates. In this proposal, the various components of this framework can be tested punctually, e.g., through a professional certification, and progressively, e.g., during an educational training programme that spans over a substantial period of time. As discussed further in section 4.1, this framework is at the core of the AVTpro Certification and the greyed rows in Table 1 are the skills that cannot be realistically assessed with any of the tasks that make up the certification:

Subtitling Competence Framework (SCF)	
Competence	Knowledge > Skills – The candidate has/shows a(n):
1. Encyclopaedic Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough understanding of general world knowledge in multiple interdisciplinary fields and specialist topics and subjects, contexts, and past/current events pertaining to universal culture.
2. Intercultural Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep understanding of both source and target cultures, of how culture and language interact, including visual manifestations. • Ability to identify (extra)linguistic culture referents as well as intertextual connections in the SL and TL.
3. Research competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to select and process complex information from research using a variety of methods and tools, including specialist resources. • Ability to evaluate the relevance and reliability of information sources.
4. Linguistic Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Full understanding of the explicit and implicit meanings of the ST. • Understanding of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and pragmatics of the SL and TL. • Ability to identify general and specific features of language in the SL and TL. • Ability to synthesise information while retaining the nuances of the original message. • Ability to implement the style guides and conventions relevant to a subtitling project.
5. Theoretical Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep understanding of the language of film and the semiotic relationships that get established between images, audio and written text. • Extensive knowledge of the features that characterise the various audiovisual texts and genres. • Thorough understanding of the specificity of subtitling in terms of adaptation and conciseness. • Excellent knowledge of the norms and conventions that regulate the subtitling profession. • Deep understanding of the concepts that articulate professional practice, such as reading speeds, snap to shot, shot changes, sound waves, chained subtitles, minimum gap...
6. Translation Competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness of the complexity of transposing content from SL to TL considering the meaning and function of the ST and the prospective target audience. • Ability to match the verbal to the visual. • Ability to produce grammatically correct and fluent subtitles, accurately mediating the transfer from the SL into the TL. • Capacity to come up with creative language solutions. • Successful application of subtitling strategies to deal with different audiovisual genres. • Ability to implement subtitling quality control strategies, using appropriate tools and techniques. • Ability to post-edit MT output using the appropriate resources to maintain quality standards in MT subtitling projects. • Understanding of how pivot translation operates in subtitling.

7. Instrumental competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent command of commonly used office programs. • Ability to operate specialist subtitling software for managing the linguistic aspect of subtitling (e.g., line breaks, maximum number of characters per line, reading speeds) as well as the technical dimension (e.g., setting safe area, spotting, subtitles file conversion, video encoding), in desktop and cloud-based ecosystems.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding of the basics of AI and MT systems and their impact on the subtitling process. • Mastery of applications to digitise and manipulate audiovisual files. • Willingness to familiarise oneself with new tools in media localisation.
8. Service provision competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to abide to the subtitling guidelines and style sheets provided by the client. • Efficient time management to optimise the subtitling process and deliver on time. • Ability to self-evaluate the subtitling output. • Ability to critically assess and work within the ethical principles (such as confidentiality, fair competition, impartiality) defined in codes of ethics and guides of good practice.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to network and use social media to enhance professional visibility and status. • Ability to monitor and take account of new audiovisual industry demands, market requirements and emerging job profiles. • Ability to communicate with existing clients and to find new ones through prospecting and marketing strategies. • Ability to interact at all stages with the client (negotiate deadlines, rates/invoicing, working conditions, access to information, contracts, rights, responsibilities, language service specifications, tender specifications, offer feedback etc.).
9. Inter/personal competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soft skills, including problem solving, attention to detail, good organisational skills, reliability, integrity.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork, stress management, conflict management, self-motivation, adaptability, assertiveness, curiosity.

Table 1
Subtitling Competence Framework.

When applied in a professional context, as in the case of a certification, this framework is understood to operate at the highest level. To operationalise it in an educational setting, the various components can be assessed according to three levels of mastery, i.e., basic, advanced and proficient, similarly to the Common European Framework of Reference used for language learning.

To take this framework a step further, beyond the theoretical realm, it has been used as the foundation for the professional AVTpro certification.

4.1. Application of the Subtitling Competence Framework

The AVTpro certification has been designed, developed and implemented in collaboration with professional translators, associations, academics and LSPs, after fruitful discussions about the content, methodology and goals, general features, and specific structure. During the design phase, special attention was paid to the level of difficulty of the certification in an attempt to strike the right balance since, as Chan (2013, p. 218) observes:

if a certification is too easy or even [solely] automatic, its value will be unclear, and buyers will seek other signaling methods. On the other hand, if it is too difficult or uncommon, it will not be recognized as an effective signaling device. The trick will lie in finding an acceptable balance that allows certification to avoid conflict (signal jamming) with other economic signals.

The various tasks have been calibrated and attuned to the specific standards that characterise the subtitling profession, and they test the competences listed above, with the proviso already mentioned. In a nutshell, candidates are required to translate into their mother tongue or first language, must prove their mastery of English as well as their theoretical and applied knowledge of subtitling, and are expected to submit subtitles of a

professional standard within a given timeframe. The certification is hosted online to facilitate the rendering of multimedia content, which can be easily integrated and streamed by applicants within the online ecosystem.

To be able to sit the actual certification, candidates must first pass an initial block of four tasks, the AVTpro Subtitling Basics exam, designed to test applicants' knowledge of subtitling theory (Task 1) and practice (Task 4) as well as their linguistic and cultural knowledge of the English source language (Tasks 2) and their translation skills from English into the selected target language (Task 3). Made of multiple-choice questions, the four tasks are assessed automatically. Successfully passing this part is a prerequisite to gain access to any of the two different qualifications that make up the AVTpro Certification, namely, the Subtitle Translation and the Subtitle Creation certifications.

Available in 13 language combinations, the Subtitle Translation certification is designed as a single exam that assesses the linguistic and cultural knowledge in a specific working language pair when subtitling a set of video clips of various genres with a pre-timed template containing the English dialogue (EMT). Working on an easy to operate subtitling platform, developed for the purposes of this initiative, candidates are expected to produce subtitles of a professional quality that accurately convey the meaning of the original dialogue while adhering to a style guide provided to them that contains all specific technical requirements.

The Subtitle Creation certification is designed to assess the competences, knowledge, and abilities required to create subtitles from scratch, from English into the selected target language. Candidates, who are expected to be familiar with the various phases of the subtitling process, are asked to produce the spotting – the technical component – and the translation – the linguistic component – of short scenes from various audiovisual genres, while carefully following a style guide provided to them. To perform the task, applicants can utilise the subtitling editor of their own choice. As in the case of the Subtitle Translation, the applicants' output is assessed by seasoned subtitlers with many years of professional experience.

Table 2 offers a synoptic overview of the various tasks that make up the certification, together with the competences targeted by each of the tasks. Research, service provision and (inter)personal competences are deemed to permeate all the tasks:

#	Task	Task load	Time	Targeted competences
1	Theory of subtitling	10 multiple-choice questions	10 min.	Theoretical
2	Knowledge of English	20 multiple-choice questions	15 min	Intercultural, linguistic, theoretical
3	Knowledge of translation	20 multiple-choice questions	15 min.	Intercultural, linguistic, theoretical, translation
4	Knowledge of subtitling	10 videos	15 min.	Theoretical, instrumental
5	Subtitle Translation	90 to 100 subtitles	36 hours	Encyclopaedic, intercultural, linguistic, translation, instrumental
6	Subtitle Creation	90 to 100 subtitles	48 hours	Encyclopaedic, intercultural, linguistic, translation, instrumental

Table 2
AVTpro Certification structure.

5. Conclusions

Scholarly endeavours have been, and will continue to be, crucial in order to finetune and improve the teaching of a particular discipline to would-be professionals, and, ultimately, guarantee the sustainability of any profession, including subtitling, into the future (Díaz-Cintas, Remael 2021). To reach such a goal, the drafting of a robust framework of the competences that subtitlers are expected to possess is imperative, so that training is aligned with the current and future needs of the industry, and employers can recruit newcomers with the right skills. The proposed subtitling competence framework is a step in this direction, with the added value that it can be operationalised in academic settings as well as in professionally oriented initiatives such as industry-recognised certifications. Outcomes of this nature have the potential to bring closer together academic and industry interests, while at the same time instigating the necessary innovative and transformational changes that will help secure the well-being of the subtitling profession, and professionals, in the years to come.

Bionotes: Jorge Díaz Cintas is a Professor of Translation and founding director of the Centre for Translation Studies (CenTraS) at University College London. He is the author of numerous publications on audiovisual translation, including *Subtitling: Concepts and Practices* (with Aline Remael, 2021). Jorge has trained translators-to-be across six continents and has offered consultancy services to the European Parliament, European Commission, OONA, Deluxe and Netflix, among others. He is the Chief Editor of the Peter Lang series *New Trends in Translation Studies*, the recipient of the Jan Ivarsson Award (ESIST, 2014) and the Xènia Martínez Award (ATRAE, 2015) for invaluable services to the field of audiovisual translation. Serenella Massidda is Senior Researcher at the University of Chieti Pescara and Honorary Research Fellow at University College London. She holds a PhD in Audiovisual Translation (AVT). She is the author of *Audiovisual Translation in the Digital Age, the Italian Fansubbing*, and has published widely on AVT and subtitling. Serenella is Media for All Conference member of Scientific Committee, and Editorial Board Member of *Linguistica Antverpiensa*. She has carried out international research projects and academic consultancies on subtitling quality, technologies and professional development such as the Netflix Hermes, the Isub Project (2020–22) and the AVT Pro Subtitling Certification Project (2022–).

Authors' addresses: j.diaz-cintas@ucl.ac.uk, serenella.massidda@unich.it

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