

-\$ub©ulture\$=-

Towards a Description of the Dutch Language Amateur Subtitling
Scene on the Internet.

17

00:02:26,669 --> 00:02:30,252

Sir Saito, we can train your subconscious to defend itself...

De heer Saito, kunnen wij train je onderbewustzijn om zichzelf te verdedigen.

18

00:02:30,352 --> 00:02:32,801

from even the most skilled extractor.

Zelfs tegen de meest bekwame afzuigkap.

From sub: Inception CAM XVID – Imagine.srt

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1 Introduction

Imagine the following situation: you downloaded a film and, computer literate as you are, you also managed to download a separate subtitle file to be able to watch the film together with your Dutch friends. Two minutes into the film and you noticed a couple of odd looks on your friends' faces. Two and a half minute into it and they are shaking with laughter. There must be something the matter with either the film, the subtitle, or your friends.

The lines on the front page of this thesis may well be classified as a 'blind idiot translation', a classification that got its name from the erroneous translation of the saying 'out of sight, out of mind'. These translated lines from "Inception", the film you chose to watch with your friends, will have many Dutch speakers raise eyebrows and cause disbelief over the obvious mistakes and the extremely poor quality of the subtitle. That, and a snigger. Because apart from being full of grammar mistakes, the subtitle also contains an absurd double entendre. The word 'extractor', used in the film to refer to a person skilled in extracting ideas from peoples' minds, has been translated with the Dutch word *afzuigkap* which means 'fume extractor'. To train someone's subconscious to protect itself from a fume extractor, even if it is a skilled one, is, of course, absurd, and that alone is worth a chuckle. But for Dutch speakers the verb *afzuigen* also means 'to blow'. So, that is why your Dutch friends ask you, in between wheezes of laughter, to pause the film and to please look for a better subtitle.

The story related above will not make sense to everybody. The phrase 'to download a film' is probably where many who are not familiar with computers will be at a bit of a loss, and the practice of 'downloading a separate subtitle file' might even be new for people who regard themselves to be advanced beginners. However, these options exist and many Internet users make use of them. The availability of fast Internet connections made downloading media content possible and the fact that most available media content is unregionalised has caused a 'pull' for amateur regionalisation, and as the Internet is the perfect environment for finding likeminded people, the ones that feel this pull have long before the time of writing found each other on websites and forums. These websites and forums, but more importantly their patronage, constitute what I would call the 'amateur subtitling community'.

This thesis aims to describe the phenomenon of Amateur Online Subtitling in Holland and Belgium. As this phenomenon has been left almost completely untouched by academic endeavour, the task of deciding what to include in a first description that was limited by the context of a Master's thesis, was extremely difficult. The result, however, of pondering this question was that I found it most useful to adopt a broad approach that provided on the one hand the necessary introduction to all the new issues in this field and on the other the groundwork for further study. At the same time I found it useful to choose an approach from among the theories of translation studies, so as to not to wander too far astray from the existing body of literature about translation in which, eventually, this thesis ought to find its own modest place.

This resulted in adopting Gideon Toury's theory of Norms in Translation in order to be able to describe translation behaviour in amateur subtitling in terms of the field of translation studies, but also in conducting my own survey in order to get the required data to do so and to shed light on what motivates the people who make up the amateur subtitling community. This last question is of interest especially when you consider that there are no financial gains involved in amateur subtitling.

2 Terms and Background

2.1 *What are subtitles?*

Generally, the word subtitles is used to refer to the complete set of typed messages that accompany a film or television program, in order to either transfer the meaning of the relevant linguistic data contained in the audio track to people who are in some way obstructed in hearing the audio (busy pub, hard of hearing, or deaf), or who do not (fully) understand the language of the material. This definition includes two rather different types of subtitles: ‘subtitles for the hard of hearing’ (in the U.S.A usually called captions) and ‘translation subtitles’. Although the first type may play a part in some contexts in this study, the greatest concern is with subtitles of the second type, and therefore, when the word subtitles is used, it should be assumed to mean ‘translation subtitles’.

Another definition will describe subtitles as separate lines or sets of lines (usually not more than two) that accompany one or several short utterances on the audio track, and together form the complete set mentioned in the first definition. This may cause some confusion, as it may not always be clear whether someone is talking about a ‘single subtitle’ or the whole set (especially as amateur subtitling often uses the shortened form sub (singular) to refer to the digital file that contains the typed linguistic data). In this study, care has been taken to avoid confusion and it should be clear from the context which meaning is being used. For clarity’s sake: subtitle (singular) should be generally taken to mean a single or double line of translated text (“The timing of that subtitle is off.”); subtitles (plural) should generally be taken to mean one or more complete sets (“I wrote the subtitles for the newest episode of The Simpsons.”); sub (singular) means a single complete set in the form of a digital .sub or .srt file (“I’ve only uploaded one sub so far.”) ; and subs (plural) means more than one set (“His subs are usually full of mistakes.”)

Subtitles in digital media on the Internet appear in different formats. An important distinction that can be made at the bat is the following: subs can be hard coded, i.e., inextricably linked to the visual image, or soft coded, i.e., stored in a file separate from the media. A hard coded sub can be regarded as a soft coded sub that has been “locked” inside the visual content. Hard coded subs cannot be removed or altered without losing

image data. They can be compared to subtitles etched in the actual film reel or to subtitles on a VHS tape. Hard coded subs, therefore, cannot be downloaded separately, but are always incorporated in the audiovisual data. Therefore, there is not much merit in regarding hard coded subs as separate entities: what is distributed is the audiovisual media, rather than the sub. This distribution always entails the transfer of large amounts of data, and the fact that subs cannot feasibly be changed once they have been added to the image data makes them unappealing for many who use and create subtitles alike, but for the same reasons they can also be appealing: the fact that they cannot be copied or changed preserves their form and also the credits of the subber who made them. Soft coded subs are simple text files that can be opened and altered using a standard word processor, such as Notepad, which is usually distributed with the computer's operating system. The subtitles found on a DVD or Blu-Ray edition are, strictly speaking, also soft coded subs, as they are stored separate from the image data. Using software such as the open source DirectVobSub filter the program that is used to play the media can 'project' the data from the sub file onto the visual image. Soft coded subs are small files, often not larger than a few hundred kilobytes that simply contain a time code and the text. The time code tells the media player software when and how long a title is displayed. In order to be loaded by the media player, subtitle files often need to have the same name as the media file with the difference that their file extension is either .srt or .sub. Being such small files soft coded subs are easily distributed. They can be produced and altered without extensive technical knowledge and they do not cause data loss in the original media file. One more aspect of soft coded subs is that they can be 'recoded' or 'resynced'. Recoding is the practice of adapting the timing of a subtitle in such a way that the titles in the sub correspond to the utterances on the audio track of other releases than the one they were written for. Sometimes, when a subtitle is taken, for instance, from a DVD-release the timing has to be adapted when the sub is used for a media file that has been compressed for easier distribution. The compressed file may have, for instance, a lower frame rate, which causes the titles to run late, or the intro sequence of a film has been cut off which causes the subtitles to run early. There are special programs for recoding, which make it a fairly simple and quick process. The key difference between hard and soft coded subs is

that soft coded subs can be distributed separately from the media, whereas hard coded subs are inextricably linked to the source material.

Another distinction that should be made early on is the distinction between official subs and amateur subs. As noted earlier, the subtitles on DVD and Blu-Ray discs are soft coded, which means they can be copied from the disc and made into a small file that can be distributed separately. Especially in the case of films that have seen their DVD premiere, these subtitles are often redistributed separately in the scene. Genuine amateur subtitles, as the name suggests, are produced by subbers and there is no official link between the sub and the makers of the media. The distinction, however, is not always easy to make. Official subs are sometimes presented as amateur subs either through the context in which they are published, or through slight alterations or additions in the text itself, such as the addition of a subber's nickname in an added subtitle, usually in the beginning or at the end of the file.

Apart from the distribution of translation subs there is also the distribution of the subs for the deaf or hard of hearing. These are often made professionally and they are distributed on DVD or Blu-Ray releases and as teletext in the case of TV-programs. From these sources they are digitalised and distributed through the same channels as the translation subs. In the Dutch/Belgian amateur subtitling scene, and almost certainly also in the amateur subtitling scenes of other languages, these subs play an important role as they are often used in the translation process. In fact, most subbers simply translate English subtitles, sometimes without even seeing the AV content, or without having knowledge of the source language when this language is another one as English. For many this is the easiest and fastest way of creating a subtitle, because they can simply use the timing of the English sub.

2.2 What else?

A key concept, or rather, *le raison d'être* of the amateur subtitling scene is the supply of source material. In order to translate something there has to be something to translate. A truism, it seems, but before the advent of the Internet, the distributed audiovisual content was almost always regionalised, which meant that subtitles were already included. With the exception of what was going on in the Anime scene in the late eighties and early nineties (see section 2.5.2, From Anime to Mainstream), there was no great body of non-

regionalised content. Nothing really needed subtitling. With the quickly growing storage capacity of personal computers and ever faster Internet connections, especially in the late nineties and the early years of the following decade it became technically possible and affordable for the average Internet user to transfer large amounts of data over the Internet. So, whereas before usually only small amounts of data were sent and received, such as web pages, e-mails, and pictures, now, larger data files, such as audio and audiovisual content were (and are still) easily copied and sent over the Internet. The practice of copying digitally stored audio or audiovisual content, as well as software, among private users is called file sharing, but because of the issues with copyright laws the term is politically laden. The practice of file sharing entails regional audiovisual content being available to a global audience. Whereas the conventional distribution of culture products still entails regionalisation by the producer or distributor, the content distributed through file sharing is often not regionalised at all. Regionalisation, however, does take place through other means and this is where amateur subtitlers step into the picture. The fact that there *is* a supply of content that has not been regionalised has to be recognised as a condition and a cause for the existence of the amateur subtitling scene, and it is therefore not very striking that the file sharing scene and the amateur subtitlers' scene show considerable interaction. At any rate, a subber needs to be able to download content, or at least have access to content made available through file sharing. So, some elaboration on how content is available on the Internet might be in order.

People who supply the file sharing scene with new material are generally called uploaders. Audiovisual content that is available through the file sharing channels are in most cases DVD- or Blu-ray *rips*, *screeners*, *cams* or *telesyncs*. These terms have to do with the origin of the data. Rips are copies of content released on DVD or Blu-ray discs. The ripper, who is often also the first uploader, simply takes an official DVD or Blu-ray release, cracks digital copy protection measures, copies the content onto a computer, and offers it, with or without data compression, to the scene. Uploaders who release rips often do not compete for being the first person to put a film or series episode on the net, as the DVD or Blu-Ray release is almost always later than a cinema or television première. Instead, their goal is usually to make available qualitatively good content. Still, being the first to upload a good rip will be rewarded with honour, as many downloaders wait for

these quality rips. Uploaders, however, in many cases manage to release a film much earlier than the official DVD or Blu-ray release. A screener, for instance, is usually also a copy from a disc, but in the case of a screener the content was not officially released yet: before a film sees its official première it is often distributed to critics, cinema companies, rental companies, film festival juries, etc. for promotional purposes, i.e., screening. Somewhere along the chain such a copy of the film can be “leaked” into the file sharing scene, and if that has been the case a film might be available on the Net even before it saw its final cut. A screener is often recognised by an on screen scrolling text called a ticker which tries to deter copying, usually with a message such as: “For screening purposes only, please do not distribute.” As these releases are usually not subtitled professionally in source or target language, they are interesting for some subbers because with these releases they have a chance to be the first to provide subtitles. Cams are versions of a film which were not copied digitally, but were recorded in a cinema with a digital camera or sometimes even a simple smart phone. Typically the video and sound quality of these files is poor, and it is not unusual to see other cinema goers walking in or out or hear laughter or talking from the audience. Also, these are sometimes in two parts, as the person taping the film needed to change the batteries or recording medium of their camera, or there is an intermission. As cams are sometimes the only content available for some time before there is a DVD rip they can also be a subber’s choice of source material for the same reasons a screener is. A telesync is the same as a cam with the only difference that the uploader’s camera was stationed in the cinema projector room and therefore of better quality (<http://www.vcdq.com/faq#scr> accessed 8-26-2010). Series offered through file sharing do not go by these labels except for rips which are copies of DVD releases which often appear after the series aired on television. Series are usually digitally recorded on a computer from the cable or satellite television signal and are sometimes distributed within only an hour of the television première. Captions for the hard of hearing are sometimes included in the releases, especially when the content origins from a DVD release.

There are two major channels through which file sharing operates, the so called news groups and peer to peer networks. News groups are decentralised computer networks on which anyone with an Internet connection may post or read messages. The

technology stems from the early eighties when the Usenet network was launched (Wikipedia: Usenet). In the first instance this network functioned as a message board for text messages, but later also data could be posted. Peer to peer networks facilitate data transfer between computers without the use of a third party. This means that data is directly transferred from someone that offers content to someone who downloads it. High download speeds are achieved, because special download software called a client can ask several uploaders at the same time for different bits of the content that is being downloaded, in this way it is possible to receive bits of data from over a hundred 'peers' at the same time. The data that is being downloaded may be uploaded to yet another peer the very next moment. The result is a highly efficient way of distributing data traffic and bandwidth. The information of what is stored where, is being kept on a third party server in a so called torrent file. These torrent files are indexed in databases, which can be queried and accessed through torrent websites, examples of which are ThePiratebay.org, Isohunt.com and Torrentportal.com to name but a few.

2.3 What are subbers, what is the subtitling community and who else plays a role?

The heading of this paragraph poses three questions, of which only the first and the last can get a straightforward, simple answer. A subber in this study is, broadly speaking, someone who writes and publishes subtitles for other than professional reasons. Furthermore, subbers may also fulfil other roles in the online subtitling scene, such as participation in forum discussions, moderating forums, ripping, recoding, correcting, and or hosting subs, or in a few cases creating or improving software used for the process of subtitling or recoding, but the key element for the definition is that they themselves produce subtitles.

With the inclusion of publishing in the definition above, subbers automatically become part of a scene, for publication is only possible through participation in an environment where means of communication exist. So, it seems obvious that we should regard the fansub scene as a community. The word community, however, can be problematic when it is used for the members of a group of people that only interact via the Internet. Wilson and Peterson, in the article "The Anthropology of Online Communities" say that ". . . community is a difficult focus for study, generally because it

seems to imply a false circumscription and coherence” (2002:455)”. They mean that in anthropology the word community has had the disadvantage of creating the wrong impression when it was used to refer to groups of Internet users with a shared passion. Wilson and Peterson paraphrase Appadurai (1991): “. . . [A]n analytic emphasis on a community’s boundedness and isolation usually masks significant interactions between the individuals of that community and others, as well as the heterogeneity of the community itself (2002:455).” Furthermore, communities, when taken to mean a tightly bound network of people and institutions inside a particular geographic area, hardly exist any longer in Western societies (Boomen, van den, 2000). It should therefore be stated early on that this study does not want the word community to infer that the members of the amateur subtitling community share much else than their interest in subbing. Instead, the word community should be taken with a narrower meaning, for instance, in the sense that van den Boomen does when she talks about virtual communities. Van den Boomen says that “. . . in order to speak of communities, a few elements suffice: it is about a group of people that share something publicly and that attach certain norms and rules to it (2000:43).” The definition of the online amateur subtitling community, therefore, can be made by spelling out what its members share and what norms and rules are most important and widely upheld. This being exactly what this thesis aims to do, the question what exactly constitutes the amateur subtitling community is therefore answered extensively in each following section.

So, who else plays a role? Subs are published on specialised websites called host sites from which they can be downloaded by anyone interested. These web sites consist of a database with all the subtitles uploaded by subbers. The database can usually be queried by any Internet user, but sometimes a simple, free registration is required. Normally, one would search for a subtitle using the exact title of a film or series as they were downloaded via file sharing: for each film release there is usually a corresponding subtitle release with the correct subtitle timing. An example of a successful query would be this string: *Robin Hood (2010) UNRATED DVDRip XviD-MAXSPEED*. ‘DVDRip’ ‘XviD’ and ‘MAXSPEED’ respectively give the downloader information about the origin, encoding and uploader of the film. The fact that there are usually several versions of, for instance, a Hollywood blockbuster in the file sharing scene, e.g., a cam, two

differently encoded DVD rips, an unencoded DVD rip, etc., means that the databases usually contain several subs for one film. Each sub has the correct timing for the corresponding release. Within the Dutch/Belgian community there are four major host sites with the amounts of subs, when available, in brackets¹: www.nfondertitles.com (14725), www.ondertitel.com, www.subtitlesnl.com (16034), and www.bierdopje.com which is specialised in series. These host sites are written in Dutch and only host Dutch or English language subtitles. International host sites, mainly written in English are websites that offer subs in any language. They are more numerous and much larger than the Dutch ones, with some claiming to have a database of over two million subs. The host sites have a central role in the community, as they also control the busiest forums on which interaction between subbers takes place. The host sites also function as a place where people who download subs can give feedback or place requests for subtitles. More on forums and the structure of host sites will be found in section 5.1.3 'Hostsites' and 5.1.4 'Network Analysis'.

Up till now, several groups have been discussed that either constitute the amateur subtitling scene or are directly or indirectly connected to it. All these groups have several things in common: they are all technology mediated communities that are not profit driven, and all are more or less involved in what are in many countries illegal, or at least controversial activities. In this sense, they can be compared to another scene on the Internet that is similar in many ways. This is the warez scene. The groups in this scene specialise in making official software releases available for downloading through the discussed file sharing channels. It involves 'cracking' or 'ripping' software: remove copy protection and distributing the software among the community. In the article "The Politics of Contraband (2004)" Alf Rehn describes this scene from a sociological/economic viewpoint, and her findings about the warez scene provide interesting parallels to the subtitling and file sharing scene. Many of the reasons for participating in the warez scene, for instance, also seem to apply for participation in the amateur subtitling scene. There are, however, also big differences between the two scenes. At this stage it will suffice to have mentioned the warez scene and the existence

¹ on 8-25-2010, the numbers were taken from the host sites' own statistics.

of analogues to the subtitling scene. In section 5.2.9 ‘Community Gains’ this will be discussed further.

2.4 Linguistic, formal, and style issues in subtitling.

Subtitling is a special mode of translation in which spatial and time limitations are important considerations for professional and amateur subtitlers alike. The following paragraph, in order to explain some of the terminology from the practice of subtitling, will summarise the most important aspects of subtitling as put forward by Cintas and Remael in their 2007 publication “Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling”, which can be taken as a standard work for this subject.

First of all, subtitlers are limited in space and time. It is generally accepted that, in order to maintain a comfortable reading speed, one second should contain no more than fifteen characters (Cintas and Remael, 2007:73). Additionally, the screen size usually allows for a maximum of 78 to 80 characters to be shown at once (*Ibid.*, 2007:84). This means that often, more often than not, dialogue needs to be shortened in order to fit. This process is generally referred to as text reduction (*Ibid.*, 2007:145). Text reduction is often accomplished though condensing information into a shorter alternative or through leaving out translations of information that can be understood without a subtitle such as ‘ers’ and ‘ahs’, question tags, names, etc.

Secondly, it is a widely regarded ‘rule’ in subtitling that the subtitle should not attract attention to itself, as this draws away attention from the screen and the sound track. This is a difficult task, the more because the source audio track allows those viewers who understand the source language to notice mistakes and omissions, which can be very distracting. In order to keep as much focus as possible on the screen subtitles are almost always located at the bottom of the screen, are set in a simple type, and contain no more than two lines at once. Connected to this keeping a low profile are the efforts taken in trying to achieve a high readability. This is done, for instance, by keeping semantic and/or grammatical units together as much as possible, trying to maintain a neutral style and sober punctuation, and trying to distribute the linguistic material in such a way that the eyes of the viewer do not have to travel unnecessarily (Cintas and Remael, 2007:87).

Almost as important as the linguistic rendering of the source material into the target language is the timing of a subtitle. If subtitles are early they may spoil the suspense

of a plot and if they are late they can cause confusion. This timing of subtitles is called ‘spotting’, ‘cueing’ or ‘syncing’.

2.5 History

2.5.1 From intertitles to the digital age

The first linguistic messages in film, not long after the invention of the medium, were in the form of what are now called intertitles: texts drawn or printed on paper that were filmed and inserted into the reel (Ivarsson, 2001). Back then intertitles, as well as early experiments with texts shown in the moving image were called subtitles (*ibid.*). In the times of intertitles translation hardly ever caused big problems, because the intertitles could easily be substituted with translations in the target language (*ibid.*). After all, these films had no audio track.

The showing of the *Jazz Singer* in 1927 marked the arrival of the “talky”, the first films with an audio track recorded on Warner Brothers’ Vitaphone (Wikipedia: Lemma Vitaphone). From then on the solutions for translation became much more expensive: the producers could make several language versions or the film could be dubbed (Ivarsson, 2001). Therefore, in smaller countries, the preferred method of translation was subtitling, which cost between one tenth and one twentieth of dubbing (*ibid.*).

The first subtitles as we know them were projected manually by the film operator by means of slides. Later, subtitles were printed onto the filmstrip itself, first by pressing heated type set plates against each frame to burn away the film emulsion, and later using a chemical process to achieve the same effect (*ibid.*). These processes, especially the chemical, are techniques that are used, in modernised forms, up till the present, but the main technique, invented in 1988, is to use a laser to burn the subtitles into the film strip. When films were shown on television, the first showing probably being in 1938 by the BBC, a problem arose due to the narrow contrast range of early television sets. The problem was solved by feeding a film strip containing the film and a film strip containing only the subtitles simultaneously through two film scanners which outputs were then electronically mixed. Through this technique the whiteness of the subtitles could be adjusted (*ibid.*). A cheaper method was to manually feed single frames with a photographed hand written or set subtitle into the film scanner while the film was

playing, but this method, called superimposition, relied on apt timing of the technician responsible (*ibid.*).

The first electronic means of getting a television program subtitled were caption generators. These machines became available in the seventies and they could key fonts and numerals into the video signal (Baron, 2008). However these machines were extremely expensive and difficult to operate (Ivarsson, 2001). Specialised subtitling equipment became available later, which made use of teletext technology, and later in the seventies, subtitles could be generated by computers, which had become less expensive and more versatile. For television, this technology is still used.

2.5.2 From Anime to mainstream

Amateur subtitling started midway through the eighties in the Anime scene. Fans of the Anime genre (Japanese animation series usually with an adult public) provided unlicensed copies of raw, untranslated episodes on video tapes (VCR) through an underground network, because relatively few titles were licensed for distribution outside of Japan (Wikipedia, Lemma: fansub 1-2-2011; Leonard, 2005:282). The Anime fansub is characterised by a very free form of subtitling including coloration, subtitle placing, annotation etc., as the picture below aptly illustrates.



Figure 2-1 (Taken from Cintas and Sánchez 2006)

Early translated copies of Japanese Anime were produced by fansub groups. These groups obtained a so-called raw, preferably on a laserdisc to maintain the highest quality, but also simply recorded from television, which they translated, synched and then, using a computer to generate the subtitles, copied onto a master tape. This master tape was then sent to distributor groups who made further copies for distribution (Wikipedia, Lemma: fansub 1-2-2011). According to Sean Leonard (2005):

“The very first known fansub . . . was a third-generation copy of a fourth- or fifth-generation copy of Lupin III . . . The washed-out tape represented the first faltering steps of a revolutionary leap: for the first time, a fan could watch an episode and fully understand what was going on. However, the Lupin III fansub turned out to be an anomaly. In 1986, the technology to fansub cost over \$4000 and the time commitment to produce a fansub stretched over 100 hours.”
(Leonard, 2005:291)

The reason for Anime’s popularity in an underground environment, according to Leonard, was a dearth of animated adult content in the mainstream channels. By 1982, repetitive attempts by Japanese animation studios to enter the American market had failed, so they decided to pull out of the market altogether. In the mid eighties there were already fan groups all over America and especially in the Japanese communities that traded American sci-fi tapes for Japanese Anime with overseas sci-fi fan groups. From the beginning fansubbers’ intentions were to open up Anime for a larger public and to increase the fan base. They were not to make profit. Frequently subtitles were added to fansubs that said ‘not for sale or rent’ and ‘stop distributing when licensed’. And many fansubbers really did stop distributing their fansub once a licensed version of the series appeared (*Ibid.*, 2005:294).

The Anime fansub scene is still very active, but a lot has changed since the distribution shifted from video tapes through the mail, to the Internet. The availability of the personal computer which introduced easy and affordable means of reproduction together with the possibilities of filesharing and community building offered by the advent of Internet, have made that the scene has grown considerably. This also meant that the community has become less identifiable than in the days of the fan groups, which

could be one of the reasons that messages that discourage free distribution are found less often.

In the Netherlands and Belgium a fansub scene that translates into Dutch is virtually non-existent. In March 2011 there was only one group of seven people that are dedicated to fansubbing from Japanese to Dutch. From forum discussions it becomes clear that most fans in the Dutch speaking Anime scene make do with English subtitles. The Dutch amateur subtitling scene and the Dutch fansub scene are therefore probably unrelated, in the sense that there is no connection between the agents that were or are at work in the development of the scenes.

The Dutch amateur subtitling scene has been active at least since 2002. The Internet domains for www.NLondertitels.com, www.ondertitel.com and www.subtitlesNL.com, three hostsites that are still active at the time of writing were all registered in 2004². www.ondertitels.nl, a former hostsite that halted its activity in 2004, was registered in April 2002³. The scene attracted attention through several articles in Dutch newspapers from March to October 2003⁴ that highlighted the ease with which films were copied, given a subtitle, and resold on the black market. Following these articles one of the first major legal actions against online subtitles was taken against the website www.Ondertitels.nl, which was taken down by Dutch copyright authorities FIOD on insistence of the Dutch foundation for the protection of media rights BREIN, on February 12, 2004. According to BREIN the site attracted on average 40000 hits per day and on www.ondertitels.nl it said that over 3,500,000 subtitles had been downloaded (Wijdeven, 2004). As a reaction to this, a cyber attack was launched against BREIN's website by anonymous Internetters, taking it off line (Het Parool, February 13, 2004). The latest legal threat against the amateur subtitling scene was against the DIVXNL-Team in August 2010. In reaction to this threat the website of the DIVXNL-Team shut down (www.Tweakers.net August 4, 2010).

In all cases where legal action was taken or threatened, the websites to which the threats were posed not only hosted subtitle files, but they also pointed to locations on the web where copyright protected audiovisual content could be downloaded. It seems that

² www.whois.net

³ www.sidn.nl

⁴ See Langerak, "Algemeen Dagblad" February 5, 2003 and Stil, "Het Parool" October 4, 2003.

host sites that solely host sub files are being left alone. In Belgium, however, a subber that uploaded more than 1.863 Dutch language subtitles, was charged with piracy and copyright infringement, but was acquitted because the court did not regard uploading subtitles as piracy (www.HBVL.be, 2010).

3 Theory

3.1 *What kind of study is this?*

In his 1975 essay 'The Name and Nature of Translation Studies' James S. Holmes, laying the fundamentals of the discipline, proposed a structure for the field of translation studies. In this structure he made the distinction between what he calls descriptive and theoretical translation studies (Holmes, 1977). Descriptive translation studies analyse the products, processes, and functions of the phenomenon of translation. Theoretical translation studies look into the findings of the descriptive studies and try to extract general rules and principles from this data. At first glance, Toury's theory of the nature and role of norms in translation could be fitted in both the descriptive and the theoretical translation studies. It could be called descriptive because it tries to describe the behaviour of individuals and groups, but it could also be called theoretical because it tries to describe this behaviour in terms of norms. The concept of norms comes from the field of sociology, which seeks to explain behaviour by building models of society that aim for general or at least a society-wide validity, so the concept of norms is in fact a theoretical construct. However, Toury uses this theoretical concept not to arrive at a general theory, but to describe actual social factors that shape the process and the product of translation. Therefore, even though the actual existence of norms remains theoretical, the study and discovery of norms is a way to describe reality, and thus should be placed in the descriptive translation studies.

Toury's way of describing the phenomenon of translation does not limit itself to either the process or the product. Instead he looks at both as it is the interplay between product and process that shapes them both. When Holmes described process oriented descriptive translation studies, he noted the problem that it is impossible to look into the mind of the translator: the so-called 'black box' problem (*Ibid.*, 1977). His tentative solution is that sophisticated techniques from the field of psychology, in those days a promising discipline, might shed light on these processes. What Toury did, however, was to take a step back from what goes on in the mind of the translator and instead look at what factors the translator is exposed to in the act of translating, thereby shifting the viewpoint from translation as an intellectual activity to translation as a social activity. With this approach Toury circumvents the problem of the 'black box' and at the same

time finds a broader area of study. Instead of studying the minds of individuals, he studies the general, societal factors that influence their behaviour. This area of study is broader than studies about the individual processes translators go through when they translate, because it also takes into account how translation behaviour itself shapes society. The question how societies accommodate translation and how translation finds a place in society is one of the questions that Even-Zohar also tried to answer. In his polysystem theory he puts forward that the reality of translation is best explained by looking at the systemic structure of society and the way in which cultures, i.e., (poly)systems, influence each other. Translation being on the frontline of this interaction, it is only logical that the analysis of this interaction provides insights for its description.

In Holmes's structure the present study takes the form of an anachronic, process oriented, descriptive study. The factors that Toury is after can make an elusive target for study, because they are naturally subject to constant systemic interaction. So only repeated synchronic studies may prompt an investigation into what goes on diachronically (Karamitroglou, 2000:59). Because, as far as I can see, this is the first study of its kind in this field, it can only be anachronic. Moreover, it is process oriented because it looks at mechanisms that determine translation behaviour.

3.2 How can this phenomenon be described? I.e. in what terms?

Neither Holmes, nor Toury, nor Even-Zohar might have foreseen the phenomenon of amateur subtitling. Yet, the field of translation studies seems to be able to provide the student of this phenomenon with an approach. As stated in the introduction, this descriptive study aims to prepare the ground for a proper investigation into amateur subtitling by describing the motivations and behaviour of the members of the amateur subtitling community. In order to make this exploration as useful for further research as the limitations of a Master's thesis permit, it is important that the link between existing theories in the field is strong. Seeing that it is mostly Toury that focuses directly on translation behaviour, it seems inappropriate to not use the tools that Toury honed and sharpened and laid out before us, and seeing that the theory of norms in translation and Polysystem theory make use of similar presumptions and definitions, it is difficult to discuss the one without mentioning the other. The following paragraphs seek to explain

how the phenomenon of amateur subtitling can be explained in terms of Toury's theory of norms.

One important presumption for Toury is that behaviour is regarded as being rule governed. From this presumption follows that behaviour shows regularities and, therefore, the identification of regularities, rules or norms, whatever they might be called, forms a description of a general nature. This presumption of generality awards findings with their validity. Toury, however, mainly speaks of 'translation proper' and this raises the question if his theory can also be applied to subtitling in general and amateur subtitling in particular. Simply put, the criterion on which to base a positive decision would be that subtitling and amateur subtitling need to be instances of rule-governed behaviour. Like many other instances of behaviour they can comfortably be regarded as such, and therefore the use of Toury's theory seems to be justified. This is, of course, not to say that all norm governed behaviour can or should be studied using Toury's theory. Toury specifically talks about translation, which makes his theory completely irrelevant if the subject under study would be, for instance, 'the teacher role in a classroom situation', but subtitling can feasibly be said to be a mode of translation (Karamitroglou, 2000:11) and as such, Toury's theory can provide the framework for study. Furthermore, it is Toury himself who invites researchers to study other modes of translation: "Finally, the claim that [translation] is basically a norm-governed type of behaviour applies to translation of all kinds . . . [and] similar things can even be said of *conference* interpreting (Toury, 1995:58)".

What Toury leaves untouched but what does strike the interest is the question why translators do what they do in the first place. With translation in general this question might not be very interesting, as the reasons for translation are considered to be common knowledge and translators' personal reasons to be of not much relevance, but with amateur subtitling the question does press itself on the researcher. Why would anyone put so much effort into creating their own subtitles if there are people who (are paid to) do it for them? To look for an answer to this question presents us with the same problem as Holmes noted for the research into the process oriented translation studies: motivation is something that hides, at least partially, in the impenetrable black box of the translator's mind. Research into the mind being something that firmly belongs to the realm of

psychology, it is not a feasible task for the present study to try and explain motivation in terms from this field, as my knowledge of this discipline consist of not much more than the layman's. One of the alternatives is to simply ask for someone's motivation in, for instance, a survey. The received answer, however, will always be highly subjective, and as such not very useful in an objective study. Still, I decided to use the simple approach to try and find at least some clues as to why subbers do what they do. In this study, therefore, motivations were *gauged* and not objectively *measured*. However, as has been said, what Toury aims to describe is not motivation but behaviour, which *is* something that can be observed and measured objectively. Therefore, the findings of this study will be presented in two parts: motivations and behaviour.

So, Toury's theory of norms in translation is the weapon of choice par excellence for a valid description of the process of translation in amateur subtitling, but for a complete and thorough answer to the question of what motivates subbers, translation studies, as yet, seems to have no ready tools. Answers to this question might be more readily found using the tools and terms from sociology, anthropology, psychology or all of the above. However, in order to shed at least some light on the motivation question, and in order to prepare the ground for an in depth study, subbers have simply been asked straightforwardly why they create subtitles and the results have been interesting to say the least.

3.3 Definition of norms

Toury's point of departure is that translation is subject to constraints of several types of varying degrees (Toury, 1995:55). Not only are there cognitive and linguistic constraints, such as the capacity of the translator, the source text or the language system, but there are also socio-cultural constraints. Socio-cultural constraints can vary in their potency from being strictly idiosyncratic to being hard and fast social rules (*Ibid.*, 1995:55). In between these extremes lie what Toury calls norms. Norms have been regarded as:

“the translation of general values or ideas shared by a community – as to what is right and wrong, adequate and inadequate – into performance instructions appropriate for and applicable to particular situations . . . (*Ibid.*, 1995:56)”.

So, behind every norm lies a concept in the form of a performance instruction. But the borders between these concepts are diffuse and relative (*Ibid.*, 1995:55). The

grading of norms, what Toury calls their potency, i.e., which norm prevails over others, is diffuse and relative too (*Ibid.*, 1995:55). The relativity in both instances is to the situation to which the norm applies. A norm can have much validity for one group, can be a minor consideration for another or might be completely irrelevant in still a different situation. The norm ‘be accurate in translating medical terms’, for instance, has much ‘potency’ in a situation where academic articles are translated, but less in a literary situation, and might be irrelevant in the translation of children’s literature where medical terms are hardly ever used.

Karamitroglou (2000:81-3), gives his view on how systems and norms are related to, or rather constitute one another. A sub- or micro-system can be regarded as being caused by a (set of) norm(s). A (poly)system is then an aggregate of these subsystems. He even goes so far as stating that “[i]t is not unreasonable to argue . . . that (poly)systems *are* actually the (sets of) norms that constitute them and that norms in turn reflect the (poly)system that hosts them (Karamitroglou, 2000:81-3).” This explains why over time norms may gain or lose validity: in the same way that (poly)systems are dynamic, so is the validity of norms determined by interaction and negotiation of cultural values. So, not unlike the dynamics between related systems as described by Eben-Zohar, norms are the competing regularities between *systems*, in the sense that norms may come into vogue or shift into the periphery as new generations or (translation) schools, or just individuals apply them (cf. Toury, 1995:62-3).

Important to mention is that Toury says that norms are speculative; even if they have general validity, they need not be followed, and as such, they do not have an empirical or actual status. They are at best recommendations, not directives. Furthermore, he says that “. . . there is no necessary identity between the norms themselves and any formulation of them in language (Toury 1995:56)”. What he means is that a formulation often takes the form of a directive statement, but this does not mean that norms are necessarily felt to be a directive. Often, if not always, the concept of a norm behind its label is much more complicated than the label can communicate.

3.4 Classification of norms

For translation behaviour Toury proposed a division into categories of the most commonly identified norms. Toury proposes that before anything in translation, there is a

basic choice, which he calls the *initial norm*. Choosing to subject to the source culture or source text requirements or norms results in adequate translation, whereas choosing to adhere to the requirements of the target culture results in an acceptable translation (Toury, 1995:56). Toury's definition of an adequate translation, which he adopts and translates from Eben-Zohar (1975:43) is: "An adequate translation is a translation which realizes in the target language the textual relationships of a source text with no breach of its own [basic] linguistic system. (Toury, 1995:56 footnote)" Subtitles in general, however, rarely realise the complete textual relations of the source text. On the contrary, it is typical of subtitles that they often omit and adapt large portions of the text due to functional constraints such as reading speed and space limitations. That would mean that there exists no such thing as an 'adequate subtitle' and, therefore, neither is it meaningful to speak of an 'acceptable' subtitle. After all, the terms 'adequacy' and 'acceptability' depend on each other for their meaning, so if the one must be regarded as irrelevant, so must be the other. Moreover, the source and the target products of subtitling can hardly be considered to be two separate things that can function on their own. The audiovisual content of a work is hardly ever changed when it is subtitled. It is merely added to and that which is added to it cannot be said to function on its own as a translation. The terms 'adequate' and 'acceptable' as two ends of a continuum are, therefore, not very useful to discuss subtitles. However, there is a basic choice in subtitling that *can* be taken as Toury's initial norm. This choice is discussed by Karamitoglou who, speaking about subtitles, also dismisses Toury's characterisation of texts as 'acceptable' or 'adequate'. He replaces the two terms with 'conformity' and 'deviation', calling 'conformity' 'any kind of abiding by target system normative regulation' and deviation 'any lack of compromise in favour of the same target system normative regulations' (2000:55). This distinction is based solely on the norms of the target culture, which seems to make much more sense when it comes to subtitling. One objection, however, that can be made against this initial classification is that it is less informative to speak about whether someone is going to be conforming to the existing norm or going to deviate from it, than it is to say that someone is going to conform to the set of norms that belongs to a source culture. Still, though less informative, it is useful to position the choice between conformity and deviation as the initial norm, especially because of the potential freedom that subbers

enjoy: subbers are their own publishing agents and at first sight there is nothing or no one that withholds a subber from publishing a strong deviation.

If we take conformity versus deviation to be the initial norm, we should heed Toury's warning that:

"The term 'initial norm' should not be overinterpreted [. . .]. Its initiality derives from its superordinance over particular norms which pertain to lower and therefore more specific levels. The kind of priority postulated here is basically logical, and need not coincide with any 'real', i.e., chronological order of application. (Toury 1995:58)"

The logical priority that Toury speaks about also applies to our initial norm: if a subber decides to not follow the general subtitling conventions, this decision will have a superordinate effect on subsequent decisions, but this decision can be made at any time and for any aspect in the translation process.

Next in Toury's order are the *preliminary norms* which consist of the categories that govern the two aspects of what material is being translated (translation policy) and of the directness of translation, i.e., to what extent are any mediating languages allowed in the translation process (Toury, 1995:59). The choice of what is being translated, on first glance, seems to be made by the subbers themselves, as many of them work on their own terms, and in their own time, and there is apparently no one that tells them what to do. Yet, what is being translated is not random either and the investigation into translation policy may prove to yield some interesting answers. Directness of translation, too, is an interesting topic in amateur subtitling: Many subbers do not create a subtitle from scratch, but they make use of a source language subtitle for the deaf or hard of hearing that already contains a time code for the entry and exit times of the separate subtitles. This source language subtitle is then simply translated into Dutch using the original time code. This even seems to be the norm rather than the exception. It is also not uncommon to find translations of translations.

A third category in Toury's approach is the category of *operational norms*. These are the norms that can be said to be 'directing the decisions made during the act of translation itself (Toury, 1995:59)'. Toury proposes two subcategories for the operational norms: *matricial norms* and *text-linguistic norms*. The matricial norms determine what is

translated, where it is translated, in what order it is translated, and what is added. Text-linguistic norms, according to Toury, determine the 'selection of material to formulate the text in' (*Ibid.*, 1995:60). Some interesting findings on the plain of text-linguistic norms can be made if there are some regular deviations from the professional subtitling industry. If, for instance, there is a clear deviation from accepted spelling, this spelling might be 'normal' in a subgroup of the subtitle community. Different styles in subtitling, too, may be counted to text-linguistic norms. The use of street language in a subtitle, for instance, would constitute a deviation from the professional conventions on the level of text-linguistic norms. Matricial norms in subtitling typically have to do with functional and formal aspects. Norms about the number of characters on one line, how many lines are allowed etc., form the matricial norms in subtitling, but also the common practice of text reduction and the norms that apply to it should be considered matricial norms.

3.5 The study of norms

In order to understand something as complex as translation behaviour an analysis of its parts is a good way to start. To identify the parts there must be criteria that determine when something can be called a separate part. These criteria can, for example, be based on the function that the parts fulfil, their origin, their 'weight' or importance for the whole, their size, etc. Each different way of grouping and identifying the parts will have merits for different purposes. Toury's purpose is to clarify which socio-cultural constraints (norms) shape the phenomenon of translation, but, because translation is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, a list of isolated norms cannot be an end in itself (Toury, 1995:66). According to Toury, it is the construction of a network of relations between norms that is the goal of a study. The thicker the network established in this way the better such a description is justified. So, his way of clarifying, i.e., identifying parts and their place in the whole, is to draw a map of where constraints are at work and which factors influence each other. In his own words '... the student's task can be characterized as an attempt to establish what *relations* there are between norms pertaining to various domains by correlating his/her individual findings and weighing them against each other" (*Ibid.*, 1995:67). On that same page he also speaks of 'establishing a network of relations' and creating a 'normative structure or model'. So, Toury's criterion by which the parts are identified is their place in the structure. Perhaps, for the sake of clarity, it should be

mentioned that the above classification of norms into the three categories of the initial norm, preliminary norms and operational norms, is not such a structure. It is merely a classification to recognise a certain norm when one finds one. The actual structure of socio-cultural constraints depends on how norms shape the actual situation.

Any investigation starts with observation. In this stage a loose structure can be discerned mapping the relations between human agents, publishing channels, institutions, neighbouring or overarching systems and so on and so forth. What this observation stage does, is map where translation behaviour takes place, who takes part in it, which factors are of influence, etc. From the picture thus formed can be seen where which norms might be found. In this stage of the investigation it is still too early to speak about norms, because what can be observed of translation behaviour are not norms themselves, but rather the results of norm-governed behaviour (*Ibid.*, 1995:65).

Norms can only be identified indirectly by reconstructing them from the observation of the product and the process of translation (*Ibid.*, 1995:65). Toury distinguishes two sources for this reconstruction: textual and extratextual sources. Textual sources are actual texts that result from translation behaviour, in the case of this study they would be actual subtitles; extratextual sources are theoretical or critical formulations of accepted or rejected behaviour (*Ibid.*, 1995:65), so websites, style guides, forum discussions and user comments may all be regarded as extratextual sources. Both sources have their merits and drawbacks. Toury stresses that from an analysis of textual sources many things can be discovered about translation behaviour, and the analysis, in fact, of the product provides the only objective data for such a study (*Ibid.*, 1995:65). But in order to distil regularities from textual sources one needs a representative body of texts that can be subjected to, for instance, contrastive analysis. Unfortunately, such a corpus is not always available, and for subtitles, let alone amateur subtitles, this is the case. To compile such a corpus would be an enormous task, far beyond the limitations of this thesis, and, moreover, the inclusion of the source audio and video data would result in tremendous amounts of data. Besides, it would not be very rewarding: the fleeting, unstable nature of Internet content together with the rapid rate of evolution and innovation in this area would give the corpus a very short 'use by' date. Extratextual sources have the drawback that they are removed from actual behaviour, which makes

them less reliable as a source for objective data. Toury calls them “. . . by-products of the existence and activity of norms (*Ibid.*, 1995:65).” They should be regarded with caution as they are “. . . likely to lean toward propaganda and persuasion (*Ibid.*, 1995:65).” However, the merit of studying extratextual sources is that they are readily available and, when not taken at face value but placed in the right context, they can be revealing for a description of translation behaviour. Especially in the beginning stages of research they may provide the handle needed to grasp what is going on in the field. For this reason the method of investigation has been to survey in order to get at actual subbers and to observe in order to harvest the necessary context.

Then, after a general observation, it is time to start discovering norms. The next step will be the justification of them. Karamitroglou (2000:88) puts forward that ‘each hypothetical existence of a norm constitutes a speculation’. Whether or not the speculated norm actually exists, becomes clear if the norm is seen to be operating in actuality (*Ibid.*, 2000:88). This way of discovering norms starts with the formulation of a hypothesis about the norm and ends with the verification or falsification of that hypothesis. In the process the hypothesis might be reformulated until it comfortably fits actually observed behaviour (*Ibid.*, 2000:89). The next step is to measure the breadth or potency of the norm, i.e., to which parts of the spectrum does the norm apply. This can be done by investigating if the norm applies to similar cases or higher order systems, such as, for instance, translation proper. If the norm is seen to be operating on a higher level, its formulation can be expanded. If it is not, the norm stays as it is.

This, in short, is the procedure for the discovery and justification of norms according to Toury (1995) and Karamitroglou (2000). The aim of this study, however, is not to go through all the steps of the procedure, as it is not the aim to provide an exhaustive description solely in terms of norms of the phenomenon of amateur subtitling. This would be biting off much more than one can chew, and, moreover, it has already been noted that the absence of a corpus prevents the analysis of textual sources. Instead, this thesis aims for a pioneering description of the phenomenon of amateur subtitling, and an investigation into the motivations of the members of the community. This is not to say that the findings of this study are not based on actual data, it is only that the data has to be treated carefully. This study, therefore, will stay in the speculative stage, tentatively

formulating norms where it can and describing the relations between the agents and institutions, to arrive at a map of the field of amateur subtitling.

4 Results

An online questionnaire was devised and an invitation to fill it out was posted on several forums. The Dutch questionnaire can be found as appendix A. The translated message of the invitation ran:

“Subject: Help needed for research

Message: Dear readers/subbers,

In order to finish my Masters degree in translation at Utrecht University I am writing and researching my thesis. In my thesis I want to present a description of the Dutch subtitling scene on the Internet. A central question I am trying to answer is this: Why do people put so much time and care in creating subtitles when it seems there is no reward?

If you yourself create or upload subtitles (even if up till now it were only a few) and you think it might be interesting, you can help me, because I made questionnaire in which I ask you about your opinions about the subtitle community, subtitles, and your own motivation for subtitling. Of course, your answers will stay anonymous (I will not be able to see who filled out the questionnaire) and in my thesis I will not mention nicknames or the like. Ofcourse, I will also treat the data objectively, because that will get me a higher mark.

The link is [link]

Thank you for your attention and hopefully for filling out the questionnaire as well.

*Sincerely,
Joris Kreb”*

This invitation was posted on the the following Dutch language forums on July 27, 2010:

www.nlt.ons-forum.nl, <http://divxondertitels.info>, www.bierdopje.com,

www.nlondertitels.com, www.ondertitels.nl, www.ondertitel.com. Between the start date

and November twelfth, 2010 the questionnaire was accessed about a hundred times, but

this did not always result in the completion of the questionnaire. After the clean up of

some ghost data in the result 54 completed questionnaires were kept for analysis. The

following paragraphs will discuss the issues related to research using Internet surveys and

the selection of the respondents.

4.1 Sampling Methods and Statistical Error.

Research in the form of a survey has to be conducted carefully and the results need to be analysed with a certain caution, for the context of data gathering can be highly influential on the quality of the data. Probably the most important question to answer here is if the respondents to the questionnaire can be held as representative for the whole scene. The answer is simply: ‘no, they cannot.’ Ronald Fricker, in *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods*, discusses several ways of sampling from a population. A distinction that has to be made early on is the distinction between a *probability-based sample* and a *non-probability-based sample*. A probability-based sample is a sample in which for every member of the population the probability of being included in the sample is known (Fricker, 2008:199). In *non-probability-based* samples these probabilities are unknown. In order to make statements about a whole population, only probability-based samples can be used. However, sometimes it is neither possible nor is it necessary to know these probabilities. The survey in this study has the purpose of gaining provisional insight into the mores and values of the amateur subtitling community in order to come up with several hypotheses that can be adjusted in further studies. To that purpose, the sampling method chosen for the research was a so called *Unrestricted self-selected survey*. This kind of survey is a survey for which an open invitation is simply posted on a website for Internet users to stumble upon. Anyone that wishes so can fill out such a survey. The key characteristics of it are that there are no restrictions on who can participate and participation is always voluntary (opt in) (*Ibid.*, 2008:205). Because of this, unrestricted self-selected surveys are a form of non-probability-based sampling. Even though the data gathered through such a sampling method cannot be taken to be representative for a whole community, they can be useful to reach small numbers and/or specific groups that are otherwise hard to reach. Fricker gives a nice example of a successfully used unrestricted self-selected survey:

“Coomber (1997) describes such a use of the web for fielding a survey to collect information from drug dealers about drug adulteration/dilution. By posting invitations to participate in a survey on various drug-related discussion groups, Coomber collected data from 80 survey respondents (that he deemed reliable) located in 14 countries on four different continents. The sample was certainly not generizable, but it also provided data that was unlikely to be collected in any

other way, and which Coomber found consistent with other research.” (Fricker, 2008:205).

Not wanting to infuse a connection between drug dealers and subbers, I would still like to point out the similarities between the two groups in terms of accessibility and subculture status. Amateur subtitlers, just like drug dealers hopefully are, are relatively few in number and they also operate in an environment in which following or breaking the law is often a matter of perspective. This makes them elusive targets for sampling or census surveying, and it makes them difficult to identify. Hence, the way to tap into this group was to leave participation voluntary and hope for enough response.

Yet, even though it must be taken for granted that the respondents to the questionnaire cannot be taken as a probability-based sample and inferences about a larger population are therefore problematic, it is necessary to shortly discuss what kinds of statistical errors we have to consider when dealing with online surveys in order to determine the validity of the research. Fricker (2008) presents four types of errors as defined by Groves (1989) that may influence the level of representation of a sample: errors of coverage, sampling, nonresponse, and measurement (Fricker, 2008:198). For errors of coverage Groves distinguishes three different populations: the *Population of inference* is the population the researcher ultimately wants to describe; the *target population* is the population of inference minus various groups that the researcher chose to disregard; and the *frame population* is the portion of the target population that could be reached by the survey. The *Coverage error* is then caused by the difference between the frame population and the population of inference (*Ibid.*, 2008:198). The population of inference being all the subbers that create and publish subtitles in Dutch, there could be a considerable coverage error, because in the frame population are only these subbers that could have noticed the invitation to fill out the questionnaire on the forums. To minimise the difference between the frame population and the population of inference the invitation was posted on almost all the active forums, even small ones. Yet, we have to consider the subbers that do not regularly visit the forums. However, because the amateur subtitling community exists only on the Internet, and the forums and host sites play a pivotal role, the chances that great numbers of subbers missed the invitation are slim, the more because the questionnaire was accessible for more than five months. *Sampling error*

arises from the fact that different random samples will yield different data. The bigger the sample, the smaller the sampling error (*Ibid.*, 2008:198). This kind of error is only relevant for probability-based samples, and will not be further discussed here.

Nonresponse error is an error that arises either because part of the sample did not respond (unit nonresponse), part of the survey was not responded to (item nonresponse), or respondents stopped answering before the survey was completed (roll off). A higher response rate is an indication of greater accuracy (*Ibid.*, 2008:198). Low response rates are a typical drawback for opt in surveys with response rates usually as low as 15 to 30 percent (*Ibid.*, 2008:203). Surveys that were relevant to the individual, however, had the highest response rates (*Ibid.*, 2008:203). It may be expected that response rates are slightly higher than the mentioned percentages, because, being posted on the hubs of the community, the people that did see the invitation were most likely interested in the subject. On the other hand, there might have been a reluctance to fill out the questionnaire because for many participants in the scene, privacy is an important value. Even though the invitation stressed that anonymity for the respondents was guaranteed, the active volunteering of information might have been a bridge too far for several potential respondents. Nonresponse error turns into nonresponse bias when the population that does not respond differs systematically from the population that does. Unfortunately there is no way of knowing if this is the case, since there is no information about the part that did not respond. *Measurement error* is when a survey response differs from a 'true' response. For instance, respondents do not answer sensitive questions honestly, questions might be vague or misinterpreted, etc. Good revision and testing reduces measurement errors (*Ibid.*, 2008:198).

Even though no hard claims can be made as to the rate of representation, the nature of the community makes it plausible that a substantial portion of the population of inference was reached. For the purpose of this thesis, at any rate, the response to the questionnaire has been such that it yielded ample data for discussion and guesses to the breadth and potency of several norms can at least be said to be educated guesses.

4.2 Survey Design

Another important issue that has to be addressed with regard to the survey is the design issue. The length and appearance of the questionnaire and the type of questions are all

factors that can influence the data. To realise how influential a researcher can be, one only needs to remember the research conducted by Loftus and Palmer in 1974 in which subjects viewed films of automobile accidents and then answered questions about events occurring in the films. The questions that the subjects received turned out to influence the answers that they gave dramatically, even to the point where subjects said they remembered to have seen broken glass when there was nothing of the kind in the film. With this realisation in mind it is up to the researcher to take care how a question should be phrased and analysed, and maybe even more importantly, how an answer is to be interpreted.

One advantage of Internet surveys is that they are relatively easy to construct, for there are many resources available on the Net that facilitate and host such surveys. The choice for the present questionnaire was Thesistools.com. This website offers free hosting and survey design options to simply create a questionnaire. The design options allow open questions and multiple choice questions in various formats such as drop down menus, radio buttons and answer boxes. The questionnaire made use of all of these different options according to the desires for each question.

Open questions have typically been used to elicit original information, such as, for instance, opinions or motivations. One of the drawbacks of open questions is that the answers to them will vary greatly among the different respondents and hence they are difficult to quantify. Another drawback is that they present the respondents with a considerable task compared to answering a multiple choice question, which can lead to roll off. For these reasons, open questions have been used only where considered necessary. Multiple choice questions have been used where data was required that could be quantified, in particular in the cases where a judgement was required about a certain (hypothetical) translation norm. Therefore, the questionnaire contained many statements to which the respondents were asked to respond by indicating to what extent they agreed or disagreed with that statement, by simply clicking on a five point scale. In this way the questionnaire could start to measure the various potencies of several hypothetical translation norms.

Although care was taken in the phrasing of the questions, several questions, in hindsight, had to be been disqualified for several reasons. Two reasons why this had to be

done were because they were leading questions with an obvious preferred response, or because the questions yielded data that were hard or impossible to interpret. These data have been left out of the discussion.

Before the questionnaire was put online it was tested among friends and relatives of the researcher to check for spelling mistakes, if the questions were clear, how long it took to fill it out, etc. The test panel said that they needed between fifteen and 25 minutes to fill out the questionnaire, which may be considered quite long for an online survey, because it can lead to roll off. If respondents feel that there is no end to the questionnaire they might give up answering. Therefore, the questionnaire stated on several occasions how far the respondents were in the process in order to keep up morale and because the content of the questionnaire was deemed interesting for the respondents the length of the questionnaire was kept around twenty minutes.

4.3 Selection of respondents

In order to get a dataset that could be analysed systematically the data needed to be cleaned up, for the answer sheet that was the result of the more than hundred times the questionnaire was visited contained several blanks, or partially filled out entries (See appendix B). The reason why this could have happened could be explained by roll-off or false starts. If respondents realised that the questionnaire was, for instance, less interesting, longer, or more intrusive than they thought, they could simply navigate away from it leaving a partially finished result. It was also possible to just 'click through' the questionnaire without answering any question, which might explain the entries that were completely blank. By a false start is meant that if respondents, for some reason, started over, their first try was still registered in the result sheet.

The procedure for selecting the respondents that have been analysed was to simply disregard the partially filled out entries on the basis that the completed entries would most likely consist of the most reliable data. It is imaginable that the respondents that were willing to commit their time on completing the questionnaire also provided the most serious responses. It is also imaginable that the respondents who did not finish the questionnaire could have given some bogus answers right before they stopped answering altogether in order to see what questions would have awaited them had they continued answering seriously. In four cases, there has been made an exception to the selection

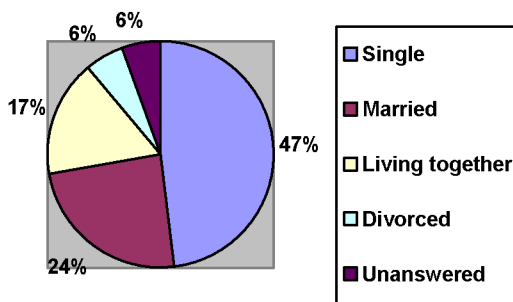
procedure. In these cases the respondents had answered over eighty percent of the questionnaire and their answers seemed not to have been given randomly.

From the hundred total entries, 39 were blank or the respondent had answered less than fifteen of the hundred fields. Another seven respondents had filled out less than half of the questionnaire. So, from the hundred entries 54 (almost complete) entries were selected (See appendix C). The answers that these respondents gave have been tallied and summarised below.

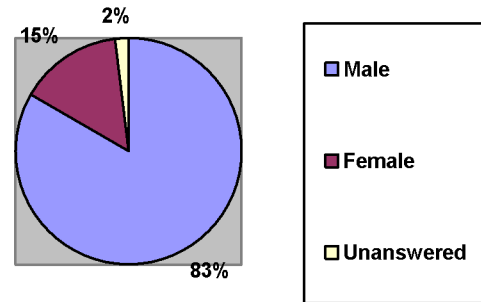
4.4 Results

Demographics

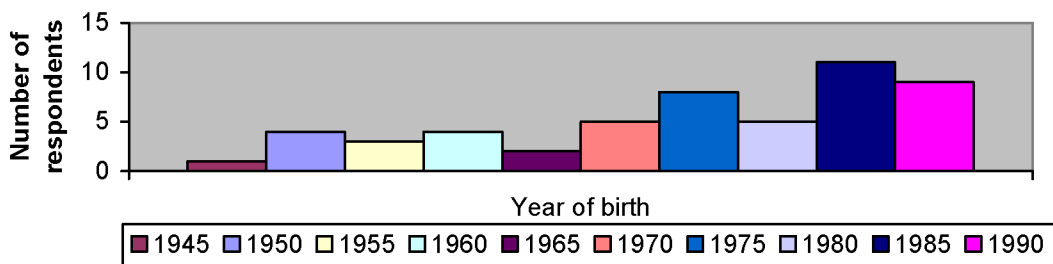
4.4.1 Marital Status



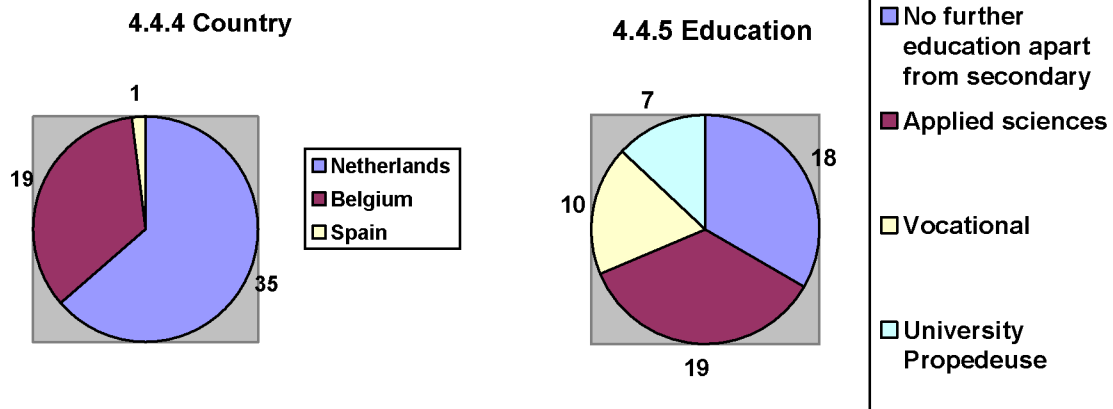
4.4.2 Gender



4.4.3 Age



Average: 33,7; Median: 41; Oldest: 1945/65; Youngest: 1993/17; Unanswered: 2



4.4.6 Occupation:

None of the respondents said they had an occupation that had to do with subtitling or translation. Eleven were studying, three were looking for a job or were unoccupied. That left 39 respondents of which listing all the different occupations has no merit for the matter in hand. What is worth noticing, however, is that a striking number of respondents had occupations or were following an education in the ICT-sector: eighteen.

4.4.7 Bilingual:

All respondents speak Dutch. Some:

Just Dutch: 45

Bilingual: 9

4.4.8 Which languages have you mastered?

I looked for straight positives, i.e., respondents who were hesitant about their comprehension skills of a language were not counted.

Dutch: 54

English: 54

German: 27

French: 18

Spanish: 3

Other: 3

Motivation

4.4.9 'Explain why you make subs'

This was an open question, so respondents could give more than one reason and some of them answered elaborately. The statements below are generalised summaries of the answers that the respondents gave. This was necessary in order to be able to tally the different aspects. One respondent, for instance, said: ‘This is a hobby of mine. I [translate] certain series and others do others, which makes for everybody to be happy.’ This answer was interpreted as counting in the category ‘I like the activity’/ ‘hobby’ and ‘I want to give something back’. The labels of the categories have been chosen in such a way as to represent as best as possible the range of answers that have been counted to them. So, actually several hundred differently phrased motivations were given by the respondents, but these have been generalised and clustered into a manageable 102, spread out over twelve categories.

‘I like the activity’/ ‘hobby’	26
‘I want to give something back, because I use subs made by others’	16
‘It helps me improve my language skills’	14
‘I enjoy giving something to others’	13
‘I enjoy the feedback’	6
‘I make them for my own (or family’s) use’	6
‘I started because I was prompted by a bad subtitle/ I can do much better than some of the subtitles you encounter’	6
‘To disclose foreign content/ I want other people to be able to watch the same serie that I enjoyed’	5
‘I enjoy the prestige that subbing brings me’	3
‘It helps me to understand/appreciate the original’	3
‘I like to see how many people download my sub’	2
‘It gives me satisfaction to have finished a sub’	2

4.4.10 If offered, would you accept a (paid) commissioned job from a subtitling company? If not, why not? This was an open question.

This was another open question. The answers to this question have been generalised, tallied and summarised in the same way as the question about motivation above (4.4.9). Again the different aspects given by one respondent have been counted separately, so the total mounts to more than the total number of respondents.

‘Yes’	20
‘maybe’	10
‘No I want to control my own time/it's a hobby’	13
‘No, I don't think I'm good enough’	4

'No, principal reasons'	4
'No, I Couldn't do it for a day job'	2
'No'	1

4.4.11 Would you accept payment for a subtitle?

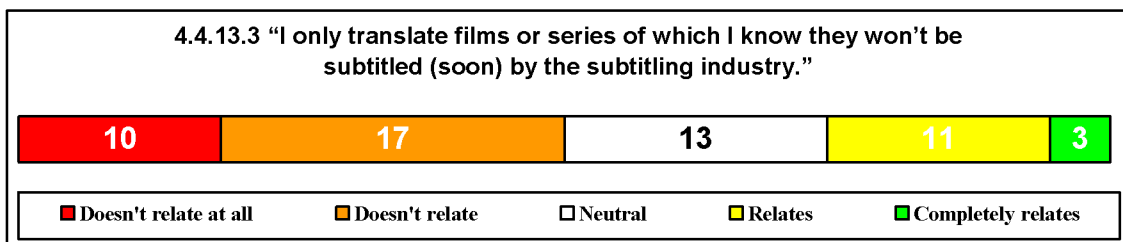
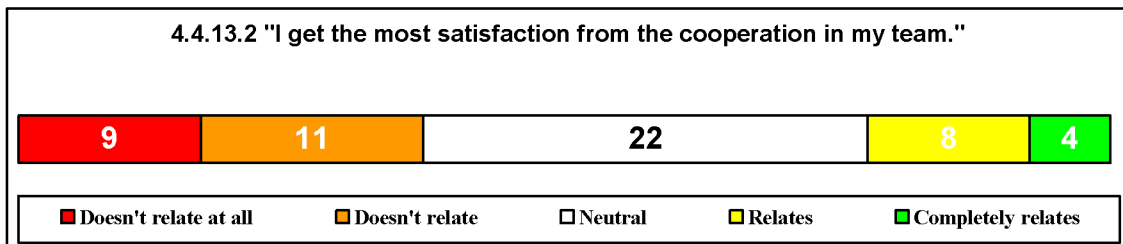
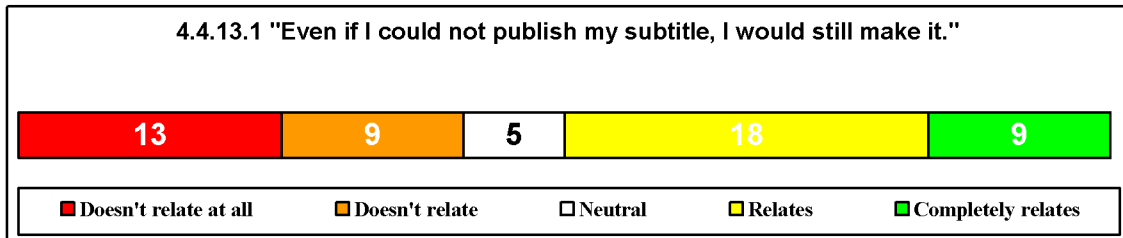
'Yes'	20
'Maybe'	11
'No'	21

4.4.12 Do you read many texts about subtitling such as guides, FAQ's, tips or forum discussions?

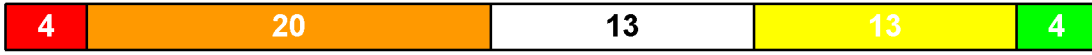
This was an open question. More than one answer was allowed.

'No'	16
'Just when I started'	17
'Yes'	8
'I check the forums'	13
'I consult others'	7

4.4.13 Indicate how you relate to the following statements:

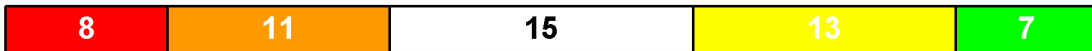


4.4.13.4 "When someone uploads a subtitle for the film I am translating, I instantly stop translating."



Doesn't relate at all
 Doesn't relate
 Neutral
 Relates
 Completely relates

4.4.13.5 "If I couldn't put my nickname to a subtitle, I would find subtitling a lot less interesting."



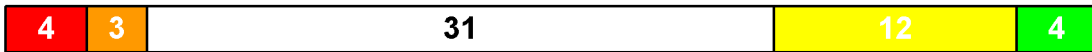
Doesn't relate at all
 Doesn't relate
 Neutral
 Relates
 Completely relates

4.4.13.6 "Fansubbing is a fun and at the same time useful way of learning a language of which my command is not yet perfect."



Doesn't relate at all
 Doesn't relate
 Neutral
 Relates
 Completely relates

4.4.13.7 "The thing I like the most is translating films with challenging subtitling problems."



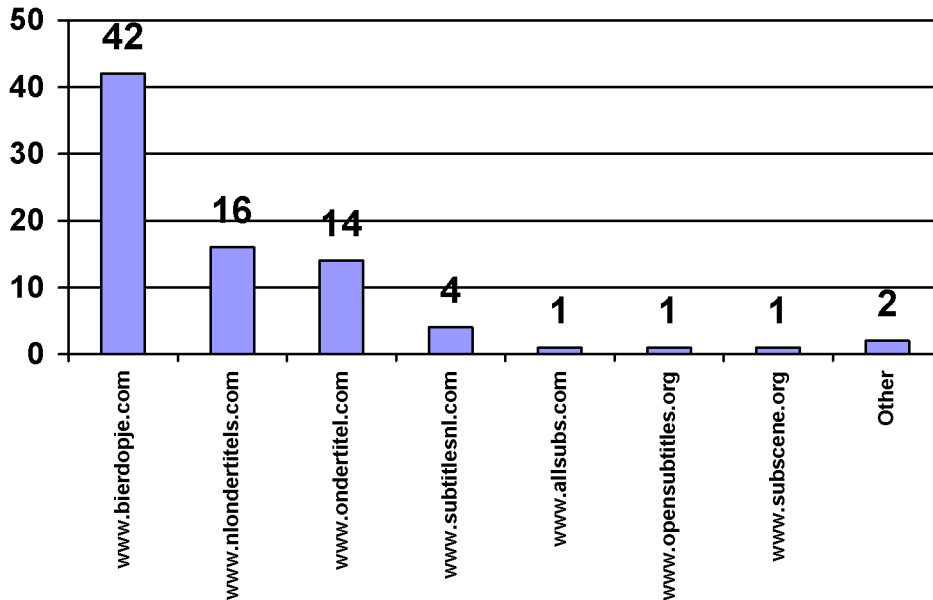
Doesn't relate at all
 Doesn't relate
 Neutral
 Relates
 Completely relates

4.4.13.8 "Fansubbing is something you do in the first place for the people who use the subtitle."

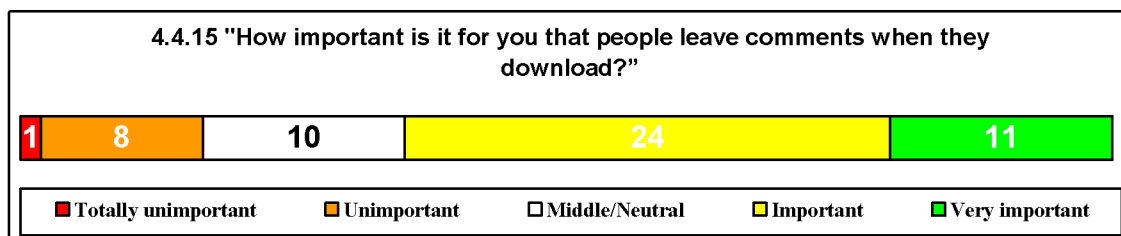


Doesn't relate at all
 Doesn't relate
 Neutral
 Relates
 Completely relates

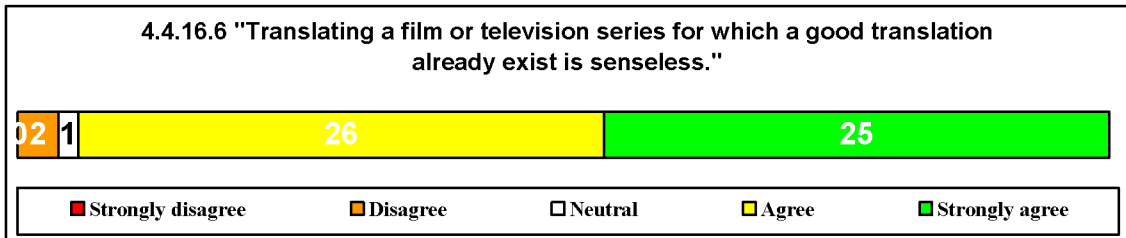
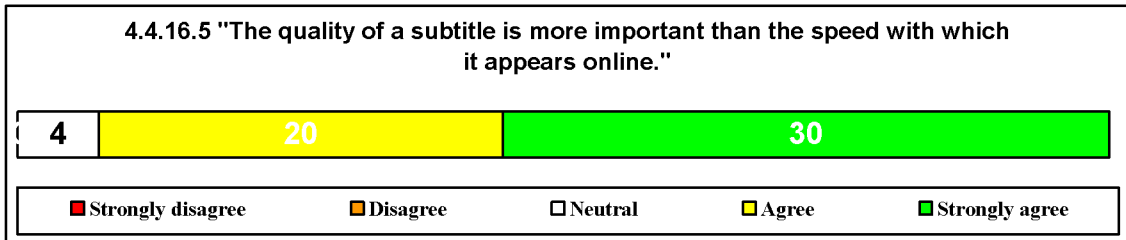
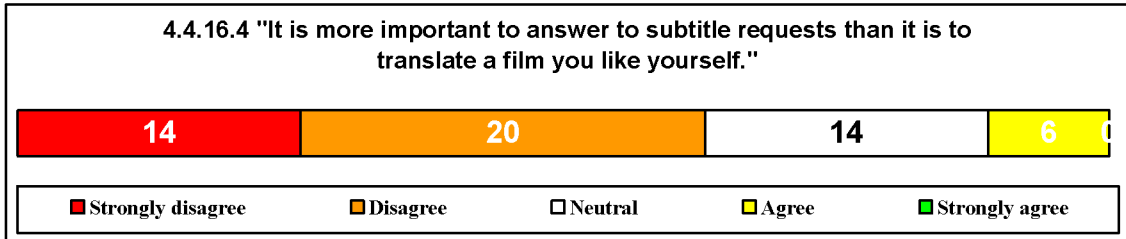
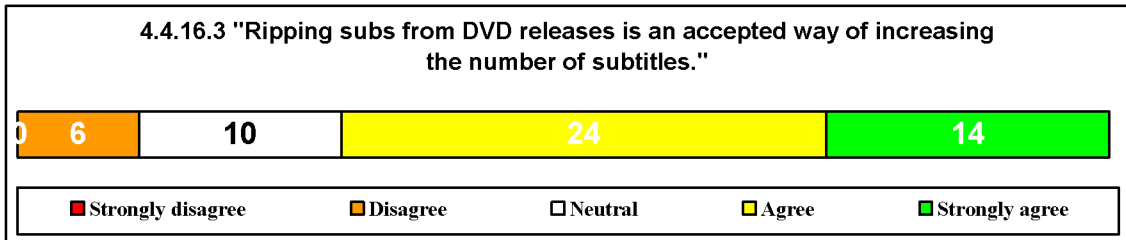
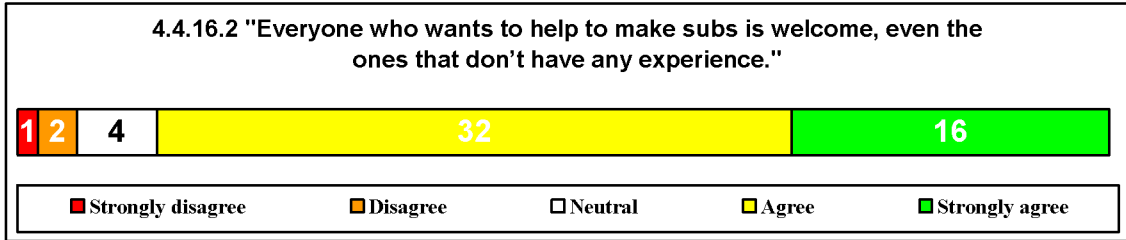
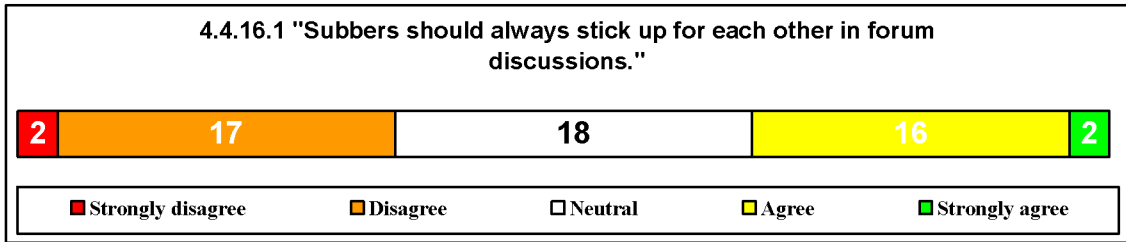
4.4.14 To which hostsites do you upload?

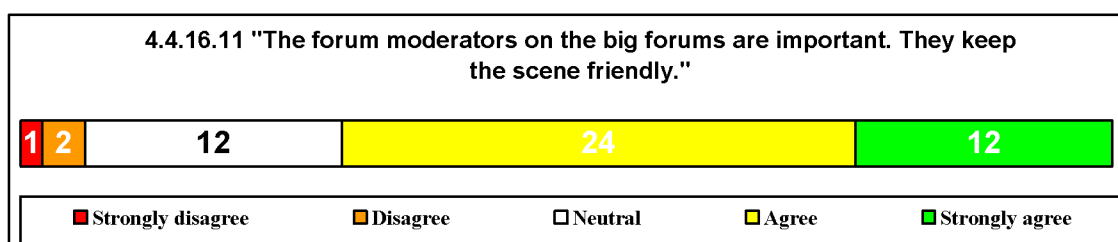
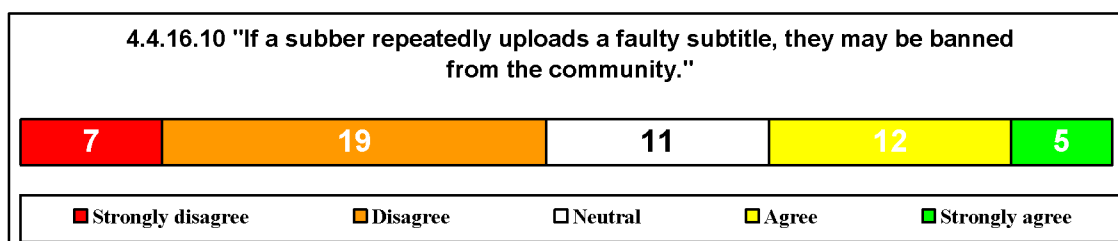
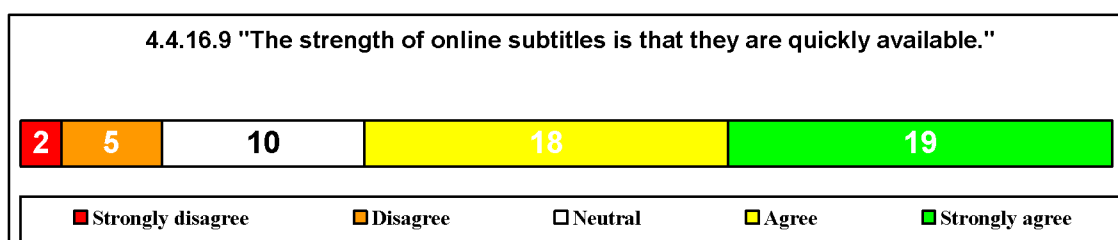
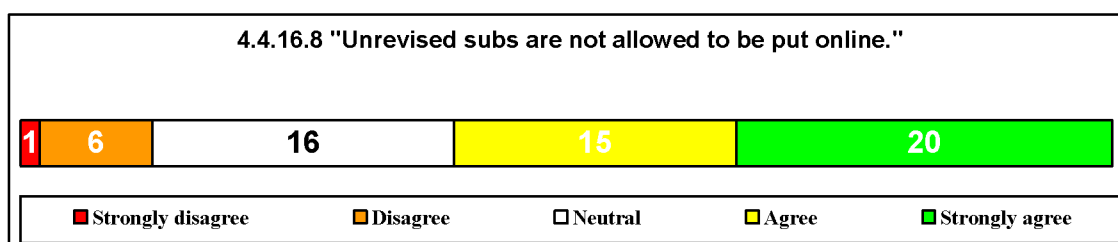
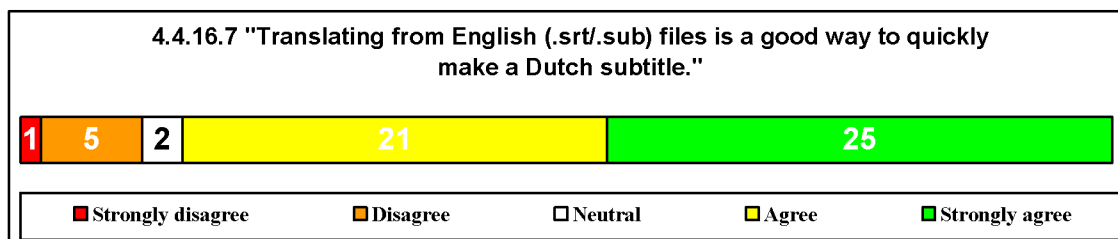


One respondent only published hard coded subs, 32 respondents uploaded their subs to just one host site (26 to bierdopje.com, two to nlondertitels.com, two to ondertitel.com), 14 uploaded to two (mostly bierdopje and another), and 7 uploaded to three websites.



4.4.16 Code of conduct.





4.4.17 I regard other subbers as (multiple answers allowed):

The option 'lesser beings' has been put in to keep the questionnaire light and interesting.

- Competition: 3
- Colleagues: 36
- Friends: 25
- Lesser beings: 1 (also as friends)
- None of the above: 10

Seventeen respondents who saw other subbers as colleagues also saw them as friends.

4.4.18 You are allowed to put your name in a sub when you:

Made your own translation by listening to the audiotrack:	51
Made your own translation by translating an English sub:	54
If you drastically improved a sub (translation errors, comprehension errors, grave grammatical mistakes:	37
If you fine tuned a sub (spelling mistakes, commas, full stops):	19
If you ripped it from DVD or Blu-Ray:	17
If you corrected the timing (resyncing):	27

4.4.19 How many nicknames do you use?

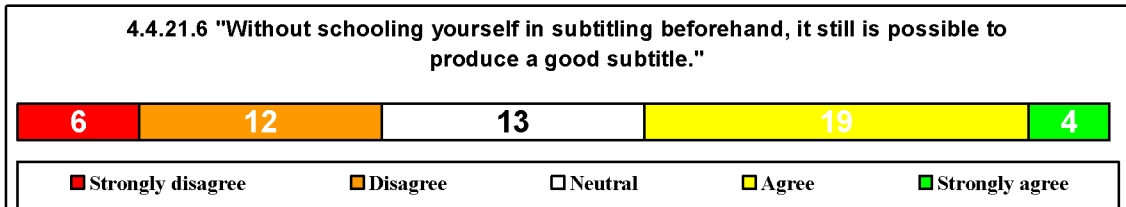
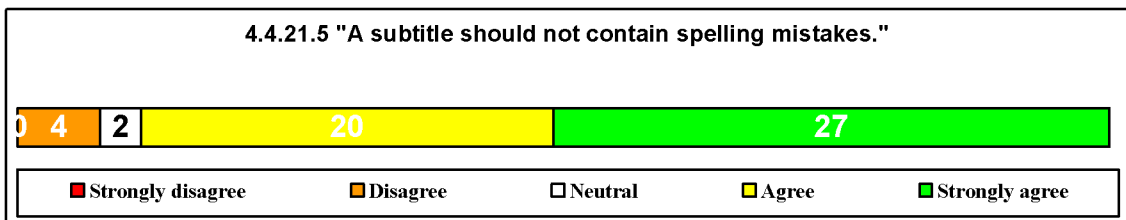
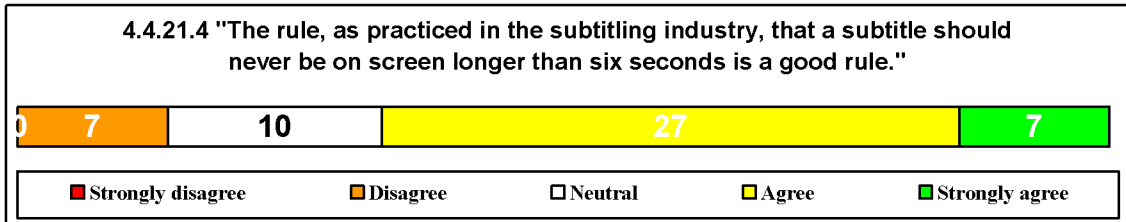
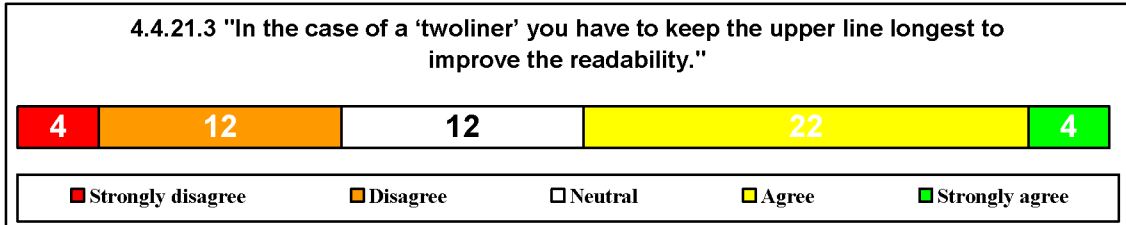
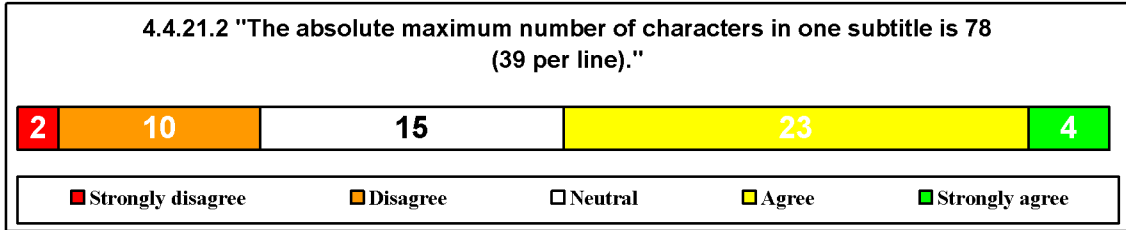
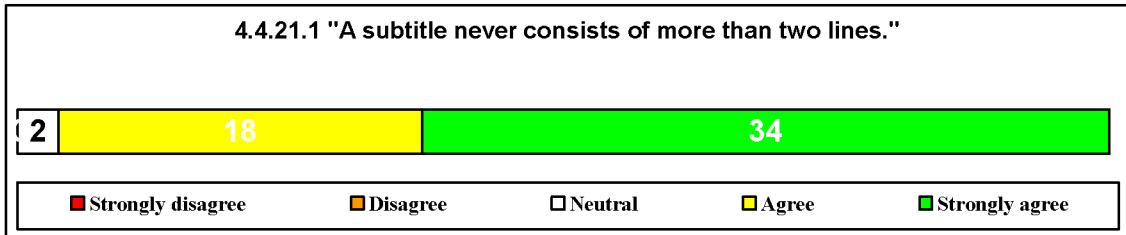
47 Respondents said they worked under just one nickname. Five used two, one used three and one used four nicknames.

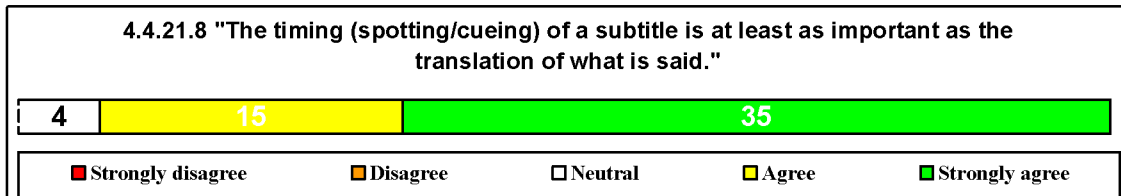
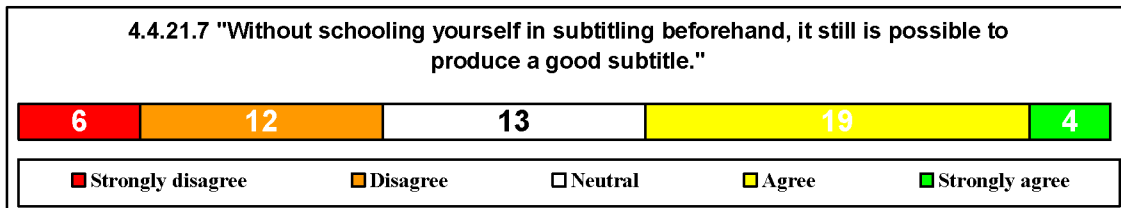
4.4.20 Do you belong to a team of translators? If so, why did you join?

This was an open question. Teams of translators typically work together to produce subtitles faster and their joint effort makes them more prolific. 43 respondents, however, said that they did not belong to a team of translators.

4.4.21 Norms about formal aspects of the subtitle.

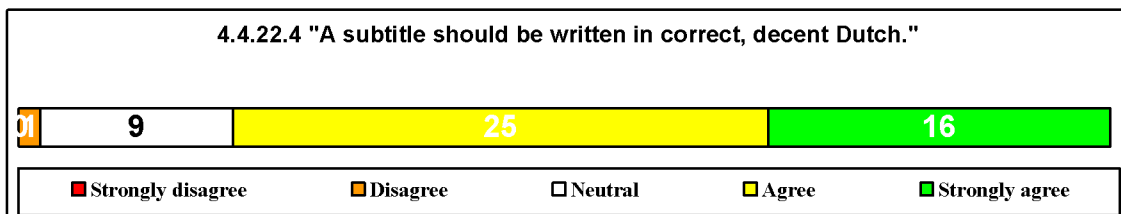
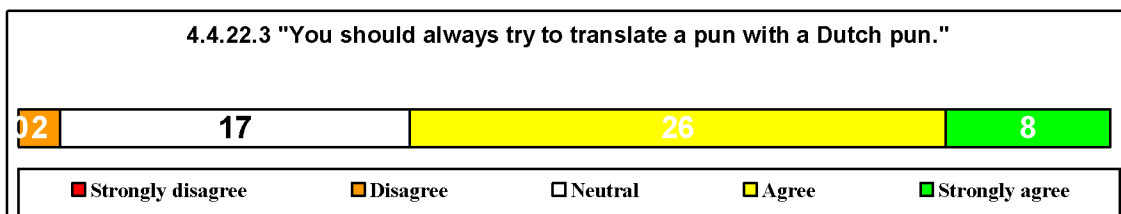
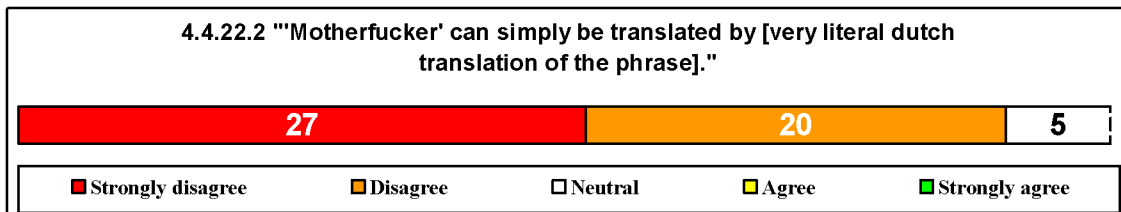
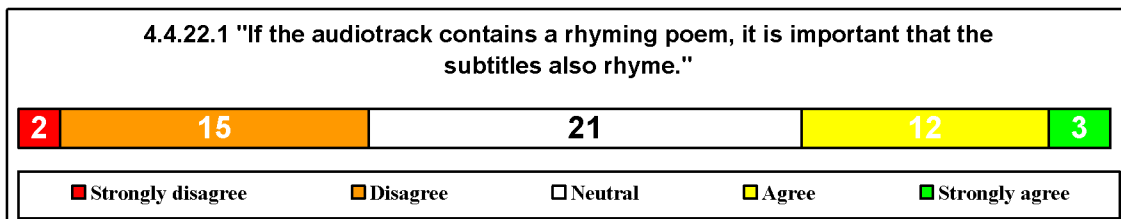
In order to gauge the subbers' poetics on what the product should look like, I put a section in the questionnaire with statements to which the respondents could agree or disagree. I took most of the statements from Díaz Cintas and Remael's *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling* (2007), because this extensive work seems to carry a lot of authority in the field at the moment. (Without doubt, more authority is carried by internal communications within subtitling companies, such as in house style guides, but for the present purpose it seems enough to take the generally valid standards of Cintas and Remael.

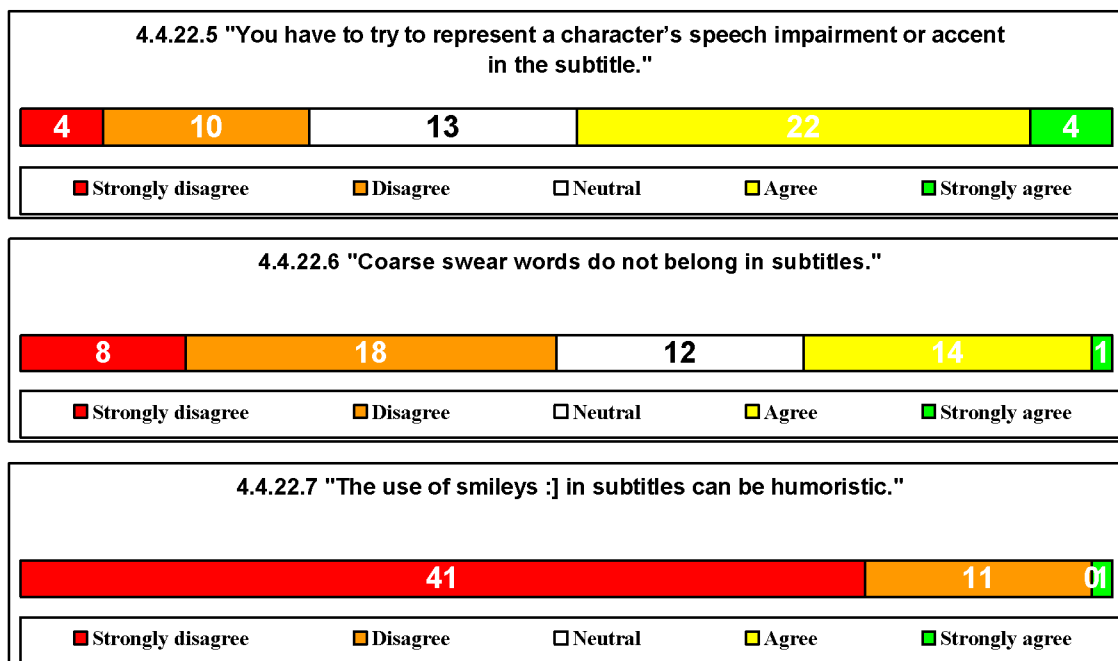




4.4.22 Norms about style aspects of subtitling.

(By this question, one respondent had stopped answering, so the total of respondents here was 53)





4.4.23 What software do you use?

By this question three more respondents had stopped answering, which puts the total on fifty.

Subtitle workshop: 38
 Notepad: 10
 Jubler: 3
 Submagic: 4
 Other: 13

4.4.24 How many hours, give or take, do you need for a 90 minute film with average text density?

I should have asked a more specific question, because of the several ways there are to translate a film. From an English .srt is usually much faster than from the audiotrack, moreover, because .srts do not have to be spotted. The data below could tentatively be taken to mean translations from English .srt files, as most respondents indicated that that is the way they do it most often, but this data should be treated with the utmost care.

1-5 hours: 10

5-10 hours: 13

10-15 hours: 10

15-20 hours: 8

20-25 hours: 0

Longer/other/unclear: One respondent said 60 hours. Eight respondents said it was hard to determine/dependent on the kind of film.

Average: 10,5 hours

Mean: 31,5

Highest: 60

Lowest: 3

4.4.25 For how long have you been making translations (Months/years)?

The answers have been rounded up e.g.: 3.5 year became 4 years.

Less than a year: 7

One year: 11

Two years: 9

Three years: 7

Four years: 9

Five years: 3

Longer/unclear: One respondent for 8 years and one respondent 10 years. Two respondents said they only made a few subtitles.

4.4.26 How many subs did you upload until now?

This was an open question, so some respondents just answered: 'many' or 'don't know'

The range of absolute numbers went from 2 to 500. One respondent said they uploaded 3000 subs, but this respondent said that they also recode subtitles and recoding being a process that can be automated this may explain the high number. It might also just have been a typo. The average number of uploaded subs, with the exclusion of the very prolific 3000 was 82. Something else that struck the interest was that fifteen respondents were quite specific, so that means that they kept count, which could possibly mean that the

count was also a motivation that had to do with status increase or the motivations of a collector.

4.4.27 Do you only translate or do you also do other things connected to fansubbing?

Translation:	49
Correcting:	27
Recoding:	24
Forum moderator:	1
Hosting:	1
Other:	Programming, Rips

4.4.28 From which genres do you translate?

Doesn't matter I translate anything:	9
Hollywood:	10
Cult:	4
Documentary:	6
Series:	40
Anime:	1
Other:	1 (sci-fi)

5 Discussion

5.1 Topography

For the purpose of mapping where translation behaviour takes place, who takes part in it, and which factors are of influence a discussion of the agents and institutions in the field is the first step. In a later stage, norms that may be discovered from looking at the answers to the questionnaire can then be regarded from the perspective of this topography.

5.1.1 Subbers

By definition, the lowest order system is composed of the (set of) norms of individuals. To get a grip on who these people are the questionnaire asked about some demographic information. Because of the aforementioned problems with the level of representation it is difficult to say anything about subbers in general, but about the respondents we can be certain: by far, most of them were male: 45 Out of the total 54, i.e., 83 percent. The average age of the respondents was 33.7 years, the youngest being seventeen, the oldest 65. 22 Of the respondents (41 percent) were married or were living together with a partner and compared to the total Dutch population between the age of fifteen and 64 (36 percent) this is neither a high nor a low percentage⁵.

Of the respondents, 35 said they lived in The Netherlands and nineteen in Belgium. Eighteen had no further education apart from a secondary education (or were still studying), ten respondents had finished a vocational education, nineteen finished an education in the applied sciences and seven had a university degree or finished the first year of university. Furthermore, all respondents said they had mastered Dutch and English, and 27 said they had mastered German as well.

When asked about the respondents' occupation, a range of occupations as widely apart as supermarket manager, bomb expert and housewife was the result. Three respondents said they were looking for a job or were jobless. What was striking, however, was that eighteen of the respondents had an occupation or were following an education in the ICT-sector, this is a percentage of 33. This might be explained by the fact that downloading films, ripping subtitles from DVD releases, recoding etc. are all to

⁵ <http://statline.cbs.nl/StatWeb/publication/?VW=T&DM=SLNL&PA=37312&D1=a&D2=a,!1-4,!6-7&HD=110404-1905&HDR=G1&STB=T>

a certain extent rather technological processes and thus might form a hurdle for anyone who is not familiar with computer technology.

Although the Dutch language amateur subtitling scene has existed for at least eight years in a noticeable size, most respondents (eleven) said they had been actively subtitling for about a year. Nine said they had been in the scene for two years, and twenty one had been active for longer than that.

5.1.2 Downloaders

Another group that has an important role are the people that download and use the subs from the amateur subtitling community. Although members of this group cannot comfortably be called part of the community, because they hardly contribute to the scene, they do play their part in the phenomenon. Mostly this is a passive role and one of the few influences that they have on what goes on in the scene is the fact that through their downloads the popularity of a certain sub or a certain subber may increase. Sometimes, however, they participate actively in the scene through posting on the forums or leaving comments on a particular subtitle. Sometimes their reaction consists of a simple 'thank you' but sometimes their reaction is negative and they can be rather vocal. The following example comes from the forum on www.ondertitels.info:

```
"Deze film [madagsacar] leek me ontzettend leuk, dus heb ik even
een ondertitel van nlondertitels.com gedownload en ik ben de film
gaan bekijken. De film valt echt tegen en duurt 1 uur en 10/15
minuutjes? 😊 Nu het blooper gedeelte :
```

```
Ik denk dat deze ondertitel door een neger is vertaald (no
offence)
Dit merk je aan de straattaal die gebruikt word
```

```
Er word heel veel gebruik gemaakt van "swa"
```

```
17
00:02:00,618 --> 00:02:02,831
Hee... bedankt, swa.
```

```
Hier weer zoiets...
```

```
40
00:02:53,557 --> 00:02:54,950
Je weet wel,
zorg dat het lauw is
```

Zorgen dat het lauw is? 😊

. . .

Om nog maar eens door te zeuren 😊

80
00:06:01,451 --> 00:06:04,378
De voorstelling is afgelopen.
Bedankt voor uw komst.

81
00:06:04,473 --> 00:06:06,862
Ik hoop dat u 't lauw vond!

(Ja we vonden het ontzettend lauw 😊)

Hier weer 1 :

210
00:13:38,580 --> 00:13:41,008
Straks krijg je een nachtdier om je oren, swa!

Verder staat de hele text, vol met spelfouten en met slecht vertaalde zinnen. Ook zie je de breezertaal vaak, zoals "Kom we gaan ze zoekuh" of iets in die richting

Ook dit soort fratsen :

1089
01:12:55,965 --> 01:12:58,883
I k b e n h e e l s l i m m e k o n i n g



Kortom de film was niet leuk, en de subtitle was frustrerend



This user voices a complaint about street lingo, spelling mistakes and ill-translated content in a way that is quite comical. What emerges from this post is the user's disappointment or frustration about a subtitle that was obviously not translated the way it was expected. The phrasing and wording of this post observed a respectful tone, but this is not always the case. Sometimes, user reactions to subtitles can be insulting and abusive, such as this reaction from the forum of www.ondertitel.com (accessed 4-8-2010):

“Volgens mij zijn er te veel foute van het Engels naar Nederlands

ik heb in 2 afleveringen van house M.D. minstens 10 vertaal fouten gezien

Als je LIVER (= lever) vertaalt als LONGEN is er iets mis met je Engels Nederlandse vertaling.. dat is meermaals gebeurd in 1 aflevering. maar er zijn zoveel meer aanwijzingen dat de persoon die het wild vertalen het niet aan kan! ALS JE GEEN ENGELS KUNT GA DAN SLAPEN EN PROBEER HET NIET!

ik probeer het niet omdat ik weet dat ik niet alle medische termen ken, maar ik weet wel dat LIVER = LEVER en niet LONGEN!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! als je dat niet eens kunt vertalen ga nog eens naar het 1ste kleuterklasje om te leren luisteren.

meer updates over foute vertalingen zullen wel volgen..

groeten een house M.D. fan”

Such reactions often provoke a polemic exchange between subber and downloader and anyone else that likes to get involved in these kinds of discussions. Just as in professional subtitling, subbers are often the target of criticism because this form of translation is so prone to it. With the original audio track always present with the subtitle every mistake is noticeable. The point here, is that the downloader is a factor that should always be taken into account in further studies into the phenomenon of amateur subtitling, because the users all have norm systems that interact with that of the subbers and via that way transpire into the scene. The amount of criticism that subbers sometimes have to endure can be expected to have an influence on their behaviour in that they might try to please the user.

5.1.3 Hostsites

As has been mentioned, the host sites form important, if not the most important hubs through which interaction in the amateur subtitling scene takes place. They are the first thing that anyone encounters when they come into contact with scene. Downloaders are easily directed to them by almost all search engines (to illustrate, the first ten hits for the search query ‘*ondertitel*’ (subtitle) on www.Google.nl are all links into the amateur subtitling scene and only later in the list of results do professional subtitling companies pop up⁶).

⁶ On April 12, 2011.

Host sites can be interesting entities to observe: by their appearance, maintenance and patronage they each acquire their own kind of identity, and around each one a different community can be said to exist. Because the host sites are so important for the functioning of the network and hence may be expected to have a major influence on the translational norms in the community, a description of the four most important, i.e., biggest host sites is useful. These descriptions, however, should be considered rough outlines of fuller descriptions that could be made in further studies. It will not be claimed that the description of each site is complete. In this thesis there is simply no room for a complete description of even one of the hostsites and its patronage, which alone could easily fill a thesis in itself.

All host sites consist of a database with subtitles and all have channels of communication either in the form of a forum, room for comments on specific subs, a chat service or all three. All host sites, furthermore, offer the possibility to become a member which enables users to post messages in the forums or upload subs. For downloading subtitles registration in this form is not required except in the case of Bierdopje.com. Often the host sites have a separate section for subtitle requests from users: if someone requires a subtitle for a certain film or series episode that is not in the database, they can post a request in this section and subbers can then decide if they want to translate it. In table 5-1 below an overview of the attributes of each host site is presented.

	Nlondertitels.com	Bierdopje.com	SubtitlesNL.com	Ondertitel.com
Database	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Forum	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Comments	No	No	Yes	No
Chat	No	Yes	No	No
Requests section	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Domain registered	09-mar-2004	21-apr-06	22-dec-2004	23-feb-04
Genre	Film and series	Series	Film and series	Film and series
Revenue from adds	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Translation manual	Yes, Forum discussion	Yes, lengthy forum discussion	No	Yes, 5 pages document
Number of users	65119 ⁷	71997 ⁸	11027 ⁷	78720 ⁷
Users with more than 500 posts	12 ⁷	36 ⁸	No forum	86 ⁷
Users with more than 100 posts	79 ⁷	162 ⁸	No forum	390 ⁷

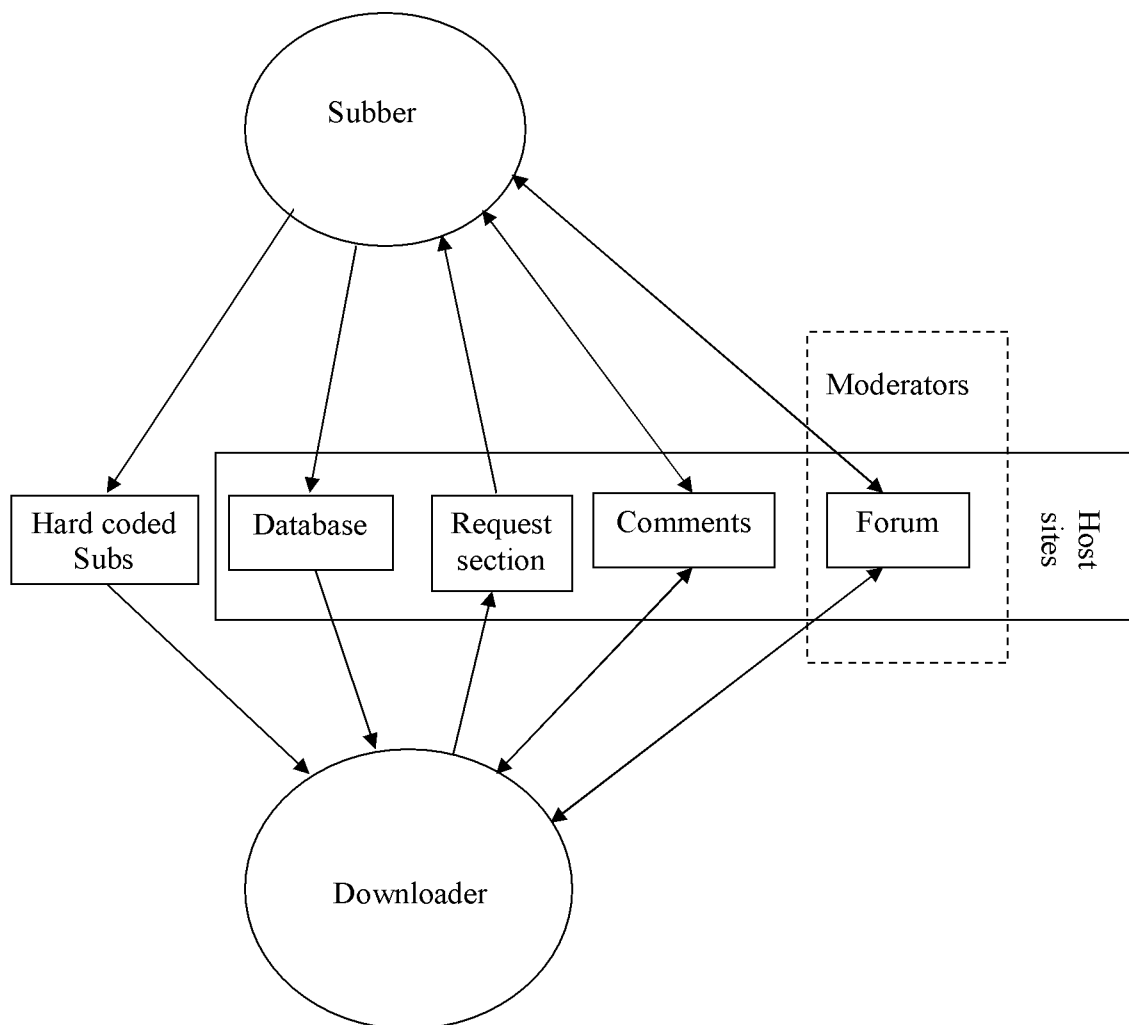
Table 5-1

5.1.4 Network Analysis

Now that the agents and institutions in the amateur subtitling scene have been described, it is time to have a look at the relations between them. Bernie Hogan in *The SAGE Handbook of Online Research Methods* (2008) says that “Online interaction is almost always social network-oriented. At its simplest, social networks refer to a series of nodes (such as people, organisations, or web pages) and the specific links between two of these nodes (Hogan, 2008:142).” The nodes being the described subbers, downloaders and hostsites, this leaves only the relations between them and their norm systems to be explained. The following scheme (5-1) represents the ways subbers are in contact with downloaders. The arrows represent directed data transfer in the form of a subtitle file or a textual message mediated through the hostsites.

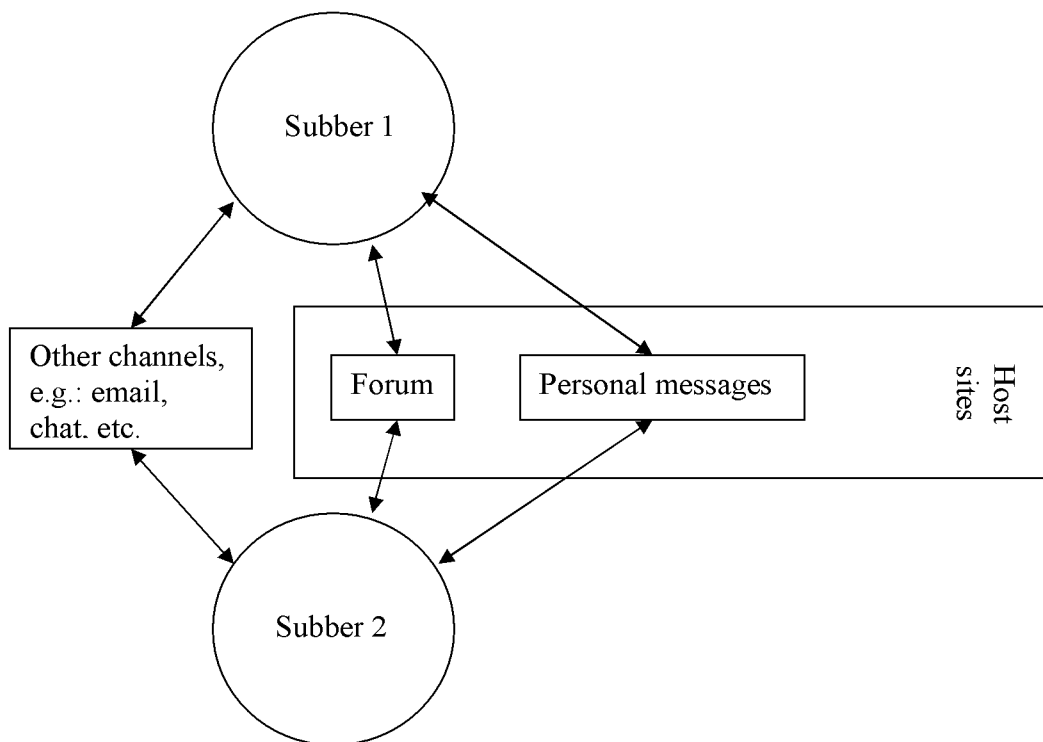
⁷ On February 2, 2011

⁸ On April 14, 2011



Scheme 5-1

The diagram clearly shows that the host sites take up a central position in almost all the communication between the downloader and the subber. Hogan (2008) highlights the consequence of such a situation as follows: ‘. . . If there is only one node connecting two groups that node is particularly important in information transfer – the node can even manipulate information as it passes from one side to the other’ (Burt, 1992 in Hogan 2008:143).’ This is especially the case with the forums, because here the communication is often filtered through the forum moderators. The ways in which subbers relate to each other in the network is not very different as the host sites again take up a central position:



Scheme 5-2

For team interaction it is likely that chat services are used and face to face interaction is of course also an option.

Not everybody that is involved in some way or another in online amateur subtitling belongs to the same community. That is to say, within the amateur subtitling community, several subcommunities with different sets of norms exist. This means that while interaction between subbers and downloaders is relatively simple, the interaction between different groups of subbers around the different hostsites is sometimes complicated. This is particularly so, because the ‘membership’ of a group is not exclusive nor is it very strong. A subber that usually posts only on the forum of Bierdopje.com might find himself creating a profile on www.NLondertitels.com for the single purpose of replying into one interesting debate, but leave it after that and return to Bierdopje.com. In such a debate the norms from Bierdopje.com interact with the norms at www.NLondertitels.com. What can be said in general about the interaction between groups of subbers is that the ones that mostly translate series are often not very active in the forums of the film oriented host sites and usually only post in Bierdopje.com.

Subbers, however, from the film community usually do post in more than one (film) forum. A further complication is that some subbers also have more than one nickname, which means that they can assume different web personalities, and it is possible that they use one nickname for the first forum, and another for the second. Of all the respondents five said they used more than one nickname.

5.1.5 How, when and where does translation behaviour take place.

Though the agents, institutions and the relations between them have been described, nothing has been said about the process of translation. There are several situations in the amateur subtitling scene that may prompt a translation. The way in which this happens is somewhat different in the film subscene than it is in the series subscene. In the film subscene an appearance of a film in the filesharing scene hardly ever goes by unnoticed. As soon as a film appears there, it will prompt subbers to translate it either of their own accord or because subtitle requests start to appear on the forums. With Hollywood blockbusters a translation may appear very shortly after the release into the filesharing scene, because the quick translation of a popular film is a good way to improve the status of an individual subber or a translation team. In these cases, when time is of the essence, a subtitle is usually made by listening to the audiotrack or sometimes a machine translation is published. When this subtitle is then uploaded it lies open to criticism from users and/or other subbers, who may be prompted to correct it if the sub contains many mistakes or recode it for another version in the filesharing scene. The following exchange from the forum of www.ondertitel.com is telling of how a subtitle may go through several subbers' hands and the original subber is not always known:

Post:

```
`ik zit net blood diamonds te kijken met subs van jou 'SubberX':  
worden vermengt H.I.F. ipv HIV  
voor de grap even de eerste 15 minuten:
```

```
Er woed een burgeroorlog  
anders krijg je er mee langs met mijn vishengel  
bekent staat  
nu gebeurd het weer  
Mr. Van Der Kaap, consequent met een R terwijl meerdere malen  
tijdens de film een logo van Van De Kaap in beeld is  
En je land niet eerder  
Hier is het spul wat je wild ?!
```

dus dan ben je het kijken al zat door de groep 3
basisschoolfouten..
weer een film verpest. als je geen nederlandse spelling beheerst,
ga dan geen films ondertitelen, zoek een andere hobby.”

Reply:

“‘UserX’ is precies wel een pietje precies, maar als hij de
credits van de door mij geuploade blood diamond zou lezen, zou
hij weten dat ik de vertaling niet heb gedaan, maar alleen de
synchronisatie ervan.

Mijn doel is gewoon de mensen zo snel mogelijk een sub af te
leveren na een nieuwe (scene) release... En daarbij is tijd heel
belangrijk (zo snel mogelijk). Ik heb zelf al een paar subs
volledig gemaakt, en dat heeft een hele tijd geduurd, en de
kwaliteit ervan is best redelijk.

. . .”

This exchange starts with a user complaint about spelling and grammar mistakes addressed at ‘SubberX’ and a reply from ‘SubberX’ who says that he was not responsible for the text of the sub, but only for the recoding/synchronising.

Because some subbers only translate from source language subs, a translation is prompted when an English language subtitle appears in an international subtitle database. Subtitles created in this way may undergo the same process of correction if they contain many mistakes and recoding if another version appears in the filesharing scene.

In the series subscene there are some notable differences. Here the host site, Bierdopje.com, plays a role, albeit a passive rather than active role, in designating particular series to particular subbers. Through its site architecture Bierdopje.com allows series to have their fixed translators, so that whenever a new episode airs, the same subber is expected to provide or edit the subtitles. Generally speaking, the community on Bierdopje.com is geared towards subtitling series in more or less the same way as Anime fansubbers are: they translate a series because they want this series to be able to be watched by a Dutch speaking audience, much more than that they want to make a name for themselves through being the first to upload a sub. This means that there is slightly less time pressure on the subber, because other subbers are unlikely to steal the honour of uploading a sub, but at the same time this pressure is substituted with another kind of time pressure caused by the anticipation of the subtitle users waiting for the translation.

The position of being a fixed translator for a certain series should be seen as a social contract, that if breached can cause a subber to slide down one or more steps on the virtual community ladder.

So, although user requests and criticism may prompt a translation, correction or recoding, the ultimate decision for translating a particular film is always taken by the subber. Hence, the preliminary norm of what is being translated is shaped in the first place by what the filesharing scene has to offer, secondly by the popularity of a film or series with subbers, and in the last place through user requests.

5.2 Norms

Now that the agents and institutions of the amateur subtitling scene have been discussed and a framework has been laid down that provides the context in which the translational norms that make up the behaviour of the members of the community should be seen, some speculation as to what these norms are can take place. Toury's classification into the categories of the initial norm, the preliminary norms and operational norms seems fit for this purpose, moreover, because this classification is used often in the existing literature.

5.2.1 The Initial Norm

As noted in section 3.4 the basic choice in subtitling can be regarded to be between conformity or deviation. This notion would suggest that a description in terms of norms should include a verdict towards the one or the other. The application, however, of either label to the behaviour of the members of the amateur subtitling community would be too gross a generalisation, especially in this observation stage of possible further research. There are, however, a few things that can be said about conformity and deviation based on different extratextual sources.

Whereas the Anime fansub scene is characterised by innovation, i.e., deviation in form and content from conventional subtitles (Cintas and Sánchez, 2006:47), the amateur subtitling scene seems more conventional in its norms. This becomes apparent from the translation manuals found on the host sites, forum discussions and from the answers to the questionnaire. Manuals or training in general, by the way, seem to be regarded necessary by a small majority of the respondents in order to make a good sub (43 percent, with a neutral percentage of 24) and 70 percent of the respondents said they sometimes consulted manuals, followed forum discussions or consulted others about subtitling, or have done so in the past. From the lengthy discussion in the forum of www.bierdopje.com about what a subtitle should look like comes the following telling statement, which, in various forms, can be found in most forum discussions and manuals for beginning subtitlers about the quality of subtitles:

*"Het is misschien een beetje sneu voor de vertaler, maar een goede ondertitel is er één die niet opvalt."*⁹

(It might not be a very welcome realisation for the translator, but a good subtitle is a subtitle that doesn't draw attention to itself.)

This statement is telling because it echoes the practices in the professional subtitling business as expressed by Cintas and Remael (2007) and because it also emphasises that subtitlers often assign themselves a self effacing role. Such a role is difficult to imagine when the initial norm would be leaning more towards deviation. Criticism voiced by users or fellow subtitlers also seems to be leaning towards the disposition that there already exists some sort of ideal subtitle, to wit, the subtitle that contains no grammatical mistakes, does not draw attention to itself, and that gives an adequate translation of what is said on the audio track. This, at the same time, would be a good candidate for a hypothetical norm that could be subjected to further testing. The notion of an ideal, of course, would be another strong indicator for conformity, but here Toury's warning that extratextual norms may lean towards propaganda should be observed with extra caution; the expression of such an ideal is far removed from the actual practice, in which machine translations, subs containing many spelling mistakes, or subs in which bad syncing makes the sub virtually useless are encountered.

Answers to the questionnaire seem to indicate that for the issues that the questionnaire addressed most respondents were also leaning more towards conformity than to deviation. When asked if the use of smileys could have a humoristic effect on a subtitle this statement was fiercely rejected by all but one of the respondents. In this respect it is interesting to look at Cintas and Sánchez (2006:51) who conclude that:

"[Anime fansubbing] 'by fans for fans' lies at the margins of market imperatives and is far less dogmatic and more creative and individualistic than that which has traditionally been done for other media like the television, the cinema or the DVD. (Cintas and Sánchez, 2006:51)"

They furthermore conclude that:

⁹ <http://www.bierdopje.com/forum/off-topic/topic/4510-Vertaaltips-voor-beginnende-vertalers/>
Accessed 12-4-2011

“we are witnessing a process of hybridisation where different subtitling approaches and strategies are competing . . . and only time will tell whether these fansub conventions are just a mere fleeting fashion or whether they will spread to other media and become the seed of a new type of subtitling for the digital era. (Cintas and Sánchez, 2006:51)”

One of the fields in which Cintas and Sánchez’ seeds could have found a fertile place to grow, undoubtedly, is the amateur subtitling scene, which has, after all, the same technical possibilities for formal innovation and which enjoys the same freedom from dogmatic institutions as fansubbing does. Yet, when considering the forum discussions, style guides and answers to the questionnaire, virtually none of the seeds have started to grow. Neither does one find any of the innovations that fansubbing experimented with in Dutch language amateur subtitles, the odd exception excluded.

The case of the strict rejection of the use of smileys points in this direction: that the amateur subtitling scene would rather be recognised as a place where ‘good,’ conventional subtitles are shared; not as a place where experiments are conducted. But then, the suggested use of smileys in subtitles might also just be considered to be a rather unhappy proposal.

5.2.2 Preliminary norms

5.2.2.1 Close Examination: Translating from Written Text and Pivot Languages
Earlier in this thesis, it has been stated that, as opposed to popular expectations, in the amateur subtitling scene translating from a source language subtitle rather than from the audio track seems to be the norm and not the exception. As a matter of fact, a similar situation exists in the professional subtitling business. Because big film companies, especially from the USA, realise the economic potential of their products abroad, they usually provide a detailed dialogue list that includes the so called ‘master subtitles’. Master subtitles are a transcription of the dialogue cut into chunks and stripped of irrelevant information and they sometimes also contain the spotting times. In such a case it is those lines that the subtitler translates (Cintas and Remael, 2007:77). Among the respondents translation from a source language subtitle seems accepted to a high degree as shows from the answers to the questionnaire. A full hundred percent of the respondents was of the opinion that it is an accepted practice to put your nickname to a

subtitle that you translated from an English .srt-file and 85 percent of the respondents agreed, of which 54 percent strongly agreed, with the statement that translating from English (.srt/.sub) files is a good way to quickly make a Dutch subtitle. One respondent even remarked that it did not even matter what the source language of the media was or if he spoke the language - as long as there was an English sub, he would translate it.

5.2.3 Operational norms: Formal norms

Due to, among other things, rapid innovation in the field of audiovisual media there is no strict universality in form in the professional subtitling business. Each subtitling studio usually has its own style guide and for different media (consider, for instance, different screen dimensions), different norms can be found. The cinema, for instance, usually has its lines centred at the bottom, whereas video and DVD often align them left. However, most differences, especially in the Western world, are subtle, and it often goes unnoticed to a viewer that one subtitle uses hyphens to denote a change of speaker, whereas another uses a new subtitle. Cintas and Remael (2007:81) note that for professional subtitlers formal aspects, such as the maximum number of characters per line or maximum number of lines are often determined by technicians or editors. But in amateur subtitling the subber is often also the technician and the editor. However, there are some external factors that influence the form of the subtitle.

The software with which subbers work is such a factor. Most respondents said they worked with SubtitleWorkshop, Submagic and Notepad. These programs do not explicitly warn the user when the industry maximum of 40 characters per line is hit and they allow, without effort, more than two lines, but SubtitleWorkshop and Submagic both have automatic functions to check for 'errors' which highlight those subtitles that exceed the maximum character or line limit. The default settings of these programs can thus be seen as strong suggestions for some of the formal aspects of the sub. Whether or not such a check is performed is up to the subber.

It is the media player software at the user end that renders the text from an .srt or .sub file onto the video image. This means that the placing, font type and size, and text color of the sub are all formal aspects that a subber has no control over. So, the only formal aspects that a subber controls are the number of characters per line the number of lines and punctuation. In hard-coded subs this is different. Here the subber does have

total control the image, but Dutch hard-coded amateur subs are very few when compared to soft-coded subs.

Looking at the results from the questionnaire, most amateur subtitlers, however, seem to agree along rough lines on what makes for a ‘good’ subtitle in terms of form. The questionnaire checked for opinions about several formal aspects by having the respondents rate statements on a five point scale from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. These formal statements were taken from Cintas and Remael’s standard work on subtitling and in this sense they can be taken to represent industry standards, although it should be mentioned that in actuality industry standards are almost always determined through in-house style guides and above all editors, rather than Cintas and Remael’s work which is of a more general nature. Cintas and Remael’s findings about formal aspects of the subtitle, however, provide at least some standard to which the opinions of amateur subtitles can be measured. Not one respondent disagreed on the statement that a subtitle should never contain more than two lines (4.4.21.1). Only two respondents were neutral and 34 (62 percent) strongly agreed to this norm. Also the statement that a subtitle should never be on screen longer than six seconds (4.4.21.4) yielded much agreement: 37 out of the 54 respondents agreed, 10 were neutral and 7 disagreed. Another statement that was agreed upon almost without exception, was, unsurprisingly, that a subtitle should not contain spelling mistakes(4.4.21.5). Those statements at which a spread occurred were all statements about subtle formal aspects: aspects about form that could hypothetically easily differ from country to country or from studio to studio. The statement (4.4.21.2) about the maximum number of characters on a line (39) had twelve respondents disagreeing with 27 others that did agree. Also the count of neutral votes was higher with this statement: fifteen. The fact that there is much disagreement on this statement points to the conclusion that the norm about the maximum number of characters per line is unclear, or differs among several groups. Together with a high neutral count, one also notices that to this statement the number of respondents that has a strong opinion about it is much lower than with the two previously discussed. Only two respondents strongly disagreed with the statement and only four strongly agreed. The statement at which the highest spread occurred was actually a trick. The questionnaire asked to respond to the following statement: “In the case of a ‘twoliner’ you have to keep the upper line longest

to improve the readability” (4.4.21.3). The trick was that in Cintas and Remael, and hence, supposedly in the industry, and thus, it should be imagined, in the subtitles on Belgian and Dutch television, the *lower* line is kept longest. This is done for the sake of readability and to keep the text as far away from the picture as possible (Cintas and Remaël, 2007:87). 26 respondents (48 percent) answered that they agreed with this ‘false’ statement and 16 (29 percent) disagreed, which would point in the direction of the following conclusion: apparently a majority thinks that keeping the upper line longest is good practice and the fact that this forms a juxtaposition to the professional industry, makes this a highly interesting hypothesis for further investigation. A jump to this conclusion, however, is not without peril. A more plausible explanation why the respondents should have ‘fallen into the trap’ is that the way the statement was formulated begged a certain response. Because of the phrasing of the question, the obvious preferred response to it was, indeed, ‘to keep the upper line longest to improve the readability’. The fact that there is a high spread on this statement together with the bias introduced by the leading element of the statement means that the data here should be regarded as inconclusive. Still, that in itself could be a reason for further investigation, but this time conducted in a proper way.

So regarding the reactions of the respondents to these ‘industry’ statements, and regarding the authority of the websites’ styleguides a preliminary conclusion, and hence a speculated hypothesis, could be that, when looking at formal aspects of the amateur subtitle, the norm in general tends to be to follow the industry standard of 40 characters per line with a maximum of two lines at once on the screen.

5.3 Motivation

There can be numerous different motivations for subtitling in even more numerous formulations and listing all these would certainly not result in a clear picture. Such a list could neither be exhaustive, nor could it be inclusive. However, with some classification, a framework can be set up to distinguish several different types of motivations. Here motivations have been classified on the basis of what areas there are in which something can be gained. A subber, for instance, could make a subtitle simply because they like the activity of translating. This would be an example of a personal gain. If a subber also writes subs in order to increase the number of available subtitles in the scene, this would be an example of a community gain. The following areas, in which there was something to be gained, were identified: personal, social, team related, community, cultural/artistic. It has to be noted that in actuality these different areas are never felt to exist separately, and that motivation for subbing will almost always be a blend of these. As mentioned before, this study does not aim for a precise measurement of motivation, if such a thing could be conceivable, but it tentatively gauges what reasons might be felt to be important for subbers themselves. By sorting the different motivations that became clear from the questionnaire under these headings, several insights might be gained into the reasons why the phenomenon exists.

5.3.1 Personal gains

Among personal gains were counted all motivations by which there was something to be gained by the subber personally. Such motivations are typically: the chance to improve language skills, the chance to engage in an intellectual activity, the chance to create something, the chance to closely watch the source content, anything, basically, that did not involve others or the community. Also the statement that subtitling is simply a hobby must be counted under personal gains, even though it is not a gain as such. What a hobby means for people will vary greatly, but one general aspect of a hobby is that it is a means to spend 'free' time. So, if people say that a certain activity is a hobby, they mean that they like to spend their free time on that activity. This, surely, must be a personal reason.

In the answers to the open question (4.4.9) about what motivates subbers, one or more of the above personal reasons was mentioned 41 times out of a total of 102

motivations. What can be regarded as striking is that not even half of the respondents (26) said that subbing is a hobby or that they liked the activity. Of course one needs to be careful when drawing conclusion from what was *not* said, but it could have been expected that more people would have indicated that they translate for ‘fun’, since everyone translates in their ‘own’ time. The number of people that indicated they do it because it improves their language skills explains this to a certain extent, but the number of respondents that said they do it to improve the language skills, but who did not express ‘like’ or ‘hobby’ was only four. So, that means that ‘fun’ or ‘language learning’ were mentioned by only 30 of the 54 respondents. The other personal reasons that could be distilled from the answers to this question were: ‘I make them for my own (or family’s) use’ (6); ‘It helps me to understand/appreciate the original’ (3) and; ‘It gives me satisfaction to have finished a sub’ (2). These personal motivations were elicited by an open question and can thus be regarded as original, but one other motivation cropped up from reactions to several statements about subbers’ motivations. To the statement “The thing I like the most is translating films with challenging subtitling problems” (4.4.13.7) 16 respondents answered positively, of which 4 indicated that this statement completely related to them. We could call this the puzzle element.

What makes these personal gains interesting is that even if the community of amateur subtitling had not existed, these motivations could still have prompted someone to create their own subtitle. Therefore it is interesting to compare the answers to the statements about motivation to the answers to the open question. In this question statements could be rated on a five point scale going from ‘doesn’t relate to me at all’ to ‘doesn’t relate’ to ‘neutral’ to ‘relates’ to ‘completely relates’. For the statement: “Even if I could not publish my subtitle, I would still make it” (4.4.13.1), 50 percent of the respondents answered that they related to it. So from these answers it would seem that about half the respondents find enough motivation to write subtitles purely within the activity. It should be noted again that we are talking about a hypothetical situation in which personal gains are taken in isolation, so a hard conclusion, at this stage or in the near future, should not be drawn.

When asked if respondents would accept a (paid) job offer for a subtitling company, twenty out of 54 answered ‘yes’, and ten answered ‘maybe’. When asked if

respondents would accept payment for a subtitle, almost the same number of respondents answered 'yes' or 'maybe': 20 'yes', eleven 'maybe'. So, for sixty percent of the respondents payment could be an extra personal motivation, but 40 percent would not accept it, which underlines that there are motivations besides financial and personal ones.

5.3.2 Social Gains

In "Leven op het net" (2000) Marianne van den Boomen stresses the fact that the Internet is not in the first place a network of computers, but that it is a network of people. It is the possibility of communication with other users that makes the Internet so interesting for so many people. Under social gains will be sorted the motivations that have to do with the interaction between the members of the sub community and the gains derived from it. Typical gains that can be derived from participating in the community are friendship, feedback, the thrill of publishing something, and climbing a social ladder within the community.

In order to determine the weight of these social gains we ought to look at the statements that the open question about motivation elicited. Whereas personal gains totalled 51 out of 104, social gains only counted up to eleven. What this means, however, is not so much that these social gains form a weak motivation for participating. It is only logical that these social gains are not mentioned in the first place when asked 'Why do you create subs'. So, the fact that these motivations cropped up in the open question could be called noteworthy, rather than that this low count could be called an indication that these motivations were not important. Six respondents mentioned that they enjoyed the feedback they received on their subtitles, and two mentioned that they liked to see how many people download their sub. To the multiple choice question about feedback on subtitles 24 respondents indicated that they regarded it as 'important' and eleven as 'very important' that downloaders left comments on their subs. Only nine respondents said this was unimportant for them. For twenty respondents the fact that they could put their nickname to a sub was an important consideration for writing subs at all. All these aspects have to do with a kind of social acknowledgement or recognition. It is about the thrill of publishing, seeing your nickname pop up in different databases when someone posted your sub somewhere else. This kind of 'fame' through amateur subtitling, though

it may not seem very rock and roll, should be regarded as a motivation of importance for an explanation why people spend sometimes sixteen hours on translating one film.

A more general motivation for participating in the community is a widely discussed phenomenon in Internet research: community building. In an open community one can find people with the same interests and discuss these. A community can provide friendship, a sense of being among peers, phatic conversation, a learning environment, feedback, and acknowledgement of the individual. About half of the respondents indicated that they saw their fellow subbers as friends. Seventeen of the respondents that indicated they saw other subbers as friends also saw them as colleagues. In total, 36 respondents indicated that they regarded other subbers as colleagues and only three respondents regarded others as competition. The hypothesis that most subbers regard their fellows positively, and that there is little animosity among subbers seems plausible, and if correct, this positive experience of the community might form a further motivation for participation.

5.3.3 Team gains/status:

Teams of subbers typically work together to produce subtitles faster and their joint effort makes them more prolific. 43 Respondents, however, said that they did not belong to a team of translators. Some oft given reasons why they do not belong to a team were: 'I want to control for myself what and when I translate': fourteen; 'I rather work alone': eight; 'I do not think that working on one subtitle together with someone else results in a good subtitle': four. Ten respondents said they worked in a team and some of the reasons they mentioned were that they could work faster, or they were asked to join a team to keep up with a series. When asked if they would still translate if they could not belong to a team, nine of them answered yes. It seems that among the respondents the possibility of working in a team is not a very strong motivation for amateur subtitling.

One (former) group in the Dutch subtitling/filesharing scene, however, deserves mention. This is the DIVXNL-Team. This team of rippers and subbers had the goal of releasing regionalised rips of films, series and software. Their way of doing this was to release film rips into the filesharing scene with hard coded Dutch subtitles. Their name would often feature prominently in the filename and sometimes in the subtitles or in accompanying files such as their logo:



Figure 5-1 *Brought to you by the DivXNL-Team.*

All this decorum indicates that at least one of the motivations of the DIVXNL-Team was to strive for fame within the filesharing scene, and they did achieve a name for themselves, even to the point that they had to take their website offline on October 18, 2010 after several warnings from BREIN.

5.3.4 Community gains:

Community gains can be understood to mean the advantages offered by being part of a collective. Such advantages naturally include the opportunity to download subtitles for free, but also to share the same goal with others, to compete against others, to be part of a joint effort to increase the number of subtitles in the databases, and to acquire status for the community as a whole can be motivations to participate in the amateur subtitling community.

When you take something you get the feeling that you have to give something back. This is the case with birthday presents and it is also the case with subtitles. This phenomenon has been described extensively in the literature of anthropology (Rehn, 2004:359) in which it is often described as a mechanism to maintain social cohesion. Gift giving as a kind of societal glue. Many of the respondents mentioned the possibility of ‘giving something back to the community’ as a motivation for being involved in subbing.

Sixteen out of the 104 answers to the open question about subbers' motivations could be classed as giving something back, while an additional thirteen could be classed as giving something in general or helping people, and it was mentioned six times that a respondent was prompted to start writing subtitles by encountering a low quality subtitle and thinking they could do better, which, in a way, is also a kind of gift giving: they render their services where they think they are needed. The community gains voiced in the open question total 35 instances in which giving, giving back, or improving the scene was mentioned as a motivation for subbing. When compared to the 54 times in which a personal gain was voiced, the community gains seem to form quite important motivations for people to participate. A clear picture is also given by the reactions to the statement: 'Subtitling is something you do in the first place for the people who use the subtitle.' 35 Of the 54 respondents indicated that they related to this statement. This would indicate that a majority writes subtitles with a target audience in mind, and not just for the activity alone.

In the light of these community gains, especially in that of the phenomenon of gift giving, it is interesting to look at a subculture that shows similarities to the amateur subtitling community. This is the warez scene. Alf Rehn (2004) discusses this scene from the perspective of a modern gift economy. Rehn describes the warez scene as consisting of '... enthusiasts who engage in a ritual form of economic rivalry' (*Ibid.*, 2004:362). The main drive in the warez scene is to be the first to supply the scene with pirated computer software, and the core concept, as noted by a participant of the scene in Rehn's data (*Ibid.*, 2004:363), is to 'keep the warez free'. In short, the participants who bring the scene the most and best 'gifts' are the ones most highly regarded. Participation in the warez scene is for many seen as a sport, a challenge. Similar motivations must also be recognised for amateur subtitlers, although the (friendly) animosity among members of the warez scene is often much more fierce than in the amateur subtitling. Especially in the subscene that creates subtitles for Hollywood blockbusters the race against other subbers might be recognised as a motivation through competition. In the subscene that creates subtitles for series, however, the competitive element with regard to speed is virtually nonexistent. Here, most polemic forum battles are fought over the quality of a subtitle.

Another reason for participation that ties in with the notion of a gift economy is the fact that participation in a community that has an economy not driven by traditional market exchange, may be attractive to people who are uncomfortable with the modern, Western economy. Participation for them can become an act of resistance against the status quo (especially because the legality of the warez scene and the amateur subtitling scene is questionable) or, instead, an act of ‘positive change from below’ by which the modern economy is shown an alternative.

The above taken into account, the status and the success of the scene might be a consideration for putting in extra effort. After all, if the star of the scene rises, so do the stars of the individual members. The survey asked for a couple of statements to be rated on a five point scale that gauged the opinions of the respondents about this issue. One way to help the scene is to increase the number of subs in the database. The following statement measured this. “When someone uploads a subtitle for the film I am translating, I instantly stop translating.” (4.4.13.4) Agreeing to this statement would imply that a service to the scene is more important than the personal experience of creating and uploading a sub. Thirteen respondents indicated that this statement related to them and four said it completely related to them. These respondents then, can be said to judge the expansion of the number of subs in the database more important than personal or social gains. This does not automatically mean that the respondents to which this statement did not relate, almost half, do not think that the expansion of the database is important. They might, for instance, feel that their subtitles were going to be superior and therefore the community would be served if both subtitles appeared in the database. The following statement received a fairly straightforward response that weakens the community gains with respect to the personal gains: “It is more important to answer to subtitle requests than it is to translate a film you like yourself” (4.4.16.4). Twenty respondents disagreed, fourteen strongly disagreed and 14 voted neutral, which means that only eleven percent thought that serving the user community was more important than subtitling what they themselves liked best. This low percentage ties in with the many remarks, expressed in the answers to the open question about motivation, about the fact that subbing is first and foremost a hobby.

5.3.5 Cultural/artistic gains:

The last category of motivation is the category of cultural gains. This category holds all the motivations that subbers might have that come from an appreciation for the product that they translate, or a sense that by their work they enrich the source culture. According to Sean Leonard (2005), these kinds of motivation have played a prominent role in the recent popularisation of the Anime scene. Leonard explains this popularisation by introducing the concept of a ‘cultural sink’, which he defines as: ‘. . . a void that forms in a culture as a result of intracultural or transcultural flows. Like physical black holes, cultural sinks have a tendency to attract foreign objects.’ (*Ibid.*, 2005:283-4). The void that Leonard talks about is the ‘dearth of sophisticated adult animated programming in America’ (*Ibid.*, 2005:284). This theory of a cultural sink assumes a pull for a certain genre caused by the absence of this genre in the receiving culture. Whether or not such a pull exists is an interesting question, but the point why Leonard’s theory is introduced here, is that some sort of void in the Dutch mainstream media is felt by a number of subbers. The open question that asked for the respondents’ general motivation yielded five remarks about American shows airing only years after their premiere, or not airing at all in The Netherlands or Belgium.

The reason for subbing these shows (or films) should be sought in a fandom that exists for them, which can also be observed in several discussions and forum games on the forum of Bierdopje.com where quizzes are held such as ‘guess the series’. From this fandom the wish to localise these shows and make them available for the receiving culture becomes clear. To the statement: “I only translate films or series of which I know they won’t be subtitled (soon) by the subtitling industry” (4.4.13.3), eleven out of 54 respondents answered that they related to it and three answered that this completely related to them. If these respondents answered truthfully, then this means that 26 percent of the respondents are motivated solely because they feel there is a gap in the media landscape. This is, of course, reminiscent of the sentiments in the Anime fansub scene, and in this respect the motivations of the Anime fansubbers and some of the amateur subtitlers may be called the same.

6 Conclusion.

In this study the norms and motivations of the participants of the amateur subtitling community have been described to a certain extent. On the one hand this extent reaches far enough to provide an interesting look into a phenomenon on the fringes of mainstream culture, but on the other hand the extent to which several aspects of this phenomenon have been described and verified begs further investigation. The question posed about the motivation of subbers to participate in the scene may be regarded answered if we are prepared to take the answers of the respondents at face value, and I see no good reason why we should not. The answer to the question of what is regarded to be a “normal” subtitle, however, is not so clear. The incongruities between what is preached and what is practiced by subtitlers have not been studied, because no actual product was analysed.

Involvement in the amateur subtitling scene for many is prompted by personal motivations, i.e., ‘liking the activity’. These personal motivations may be enough to prompt roughly fifty percent of the respondents to be write subtitles. The other half indicated that participation in the subtitling scene, providing subtitles for the linguistically needy and or the opportunity to publish subtitles were necessary factors to get involved.

Several norms about amateur subtitles have been discovered through analysis of the questionnaire, but in this respect this study must be regarded as a journey without a destination. Because of the arbitrary nature of the questions asked in the questionnaire, important norms may have been overlooked and neither have the hypothesised norms been tested against actual practice. This means that in this respect the results of this study must be seen in the light of its pilot status. Yet, the search for translational norms using Toury’s approach will always suffer, to a greater or lesser degree, from the problem of seeming to be unguided. Even in a study set up on a much larger scale and using much more rigorous research methods, there exists the chance of overlooking or misinterpreting a certain norm. In the case of this study it just means that in order to test the hypothesised norms need to be revisited at a later time in follow up studies that do make use of corpus analysis.

The use of an online questionnaire with an open invitation proved to be a successful method for gathering large amounts of data, but, the difficulties encountered in

estimating the level of representation make this method unfit for more rigorous investigations. However, for the exploratory purpose of the present study it turned out to be an adequate tool, which yielded precisely that original data to sketch an image for the description of this young and untouched phenomenon.

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