



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

Guidelines on Remuneration and Working Conditions of Subtitlers 2023

Based on 'The Ethical Demands of Translating Gender-Based Violence', a research project led by Dr Charlotte Bosseaux

This second set of guidelines should be read in conjunction with our **'Experimental Guidelines for Translating Emotional Content in Documentaries'**.

Our guidelines rest on the understanding that **translation is part of the filmmaking process**. This means that subtitlers working with our guidelines need to **take initiative and check their choices with filmmakers**. Consequently, **this involvement should be reflected in their pay**. Moreover, there is a need to emphasise subtitlers' **wellbeing** and offer sustained support.

Subtitlers working on *Surviving Translation* have reported that translating challenging and emotional material is more impactful in the AVT context, as opposed to written documents for instance, because they have access to images and sound, and they need to watch the material over and over again. This **exposure increases the negative impact of the material** on subtitlers and we need to make sure they are fully supported in their work.

Recommendations

Collaboration with a charity/organisation: whoever commissions the subtitling work should ideally **collaborate with a charity** or an organisation which can help support subtitlers in case there are issues during the project.

Training: **provide training in the areas related to the film topic** (e.g. trauma) with emphasis on the importance of using the correct terminologies in different languages and understanding the cultural differences. This should happen before the work has started.

Longer time to subtitle: rather than a "as fast as possible" approach, try and **provide additional days in the timeline before starting** for the subtitler to become familiar with the topic and after they have finished for discussions and revision.

Price: **paying a wage that matches the role of the subtitler**. Rates will vary across languages, but in general should be priced per minute of film and should be at least **10%-20% over what is customary**, to account for the additional time needed to process films of this nature as well as implementing the above guidelines.

Proofreaders should receive at least half the rate per minute that the original subtitler receives. Any discussions or meetings about the subtitles between subtitler and proofreaders, or directors and linguists, etc. should be paid at an hourly rate comparable to that of professionals of the film industry with a similar degree of experience.

Communication: make sure **project managers inform subtitlers about the exact content of the material** they are asked to translate as they contact them, so that subtitlers can make an informed decision. This is because some subtitlers might have suffered from the issues raised in the material and there is a **duty of care from agencies** to make sure subtitlers are well informed before making their decision and supported as they perform the work.

Support: organise **discussions at the start** of the project to make sure subtitlers are well and have all the information they need to start. Then organise **regular check-ins** during the translation and afterwards (a week or so after the translation is completely finished for instance) to make sure **mental health is prioritised**.

Choosing subtitlers

Our documentary dealt with Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and trauma and it was important to **give a choice of either a male or female subtitler** to make sure film participants felt safe and fully represented. We therefore encourage **asking participants for their preference** when working with sensitive topics.

We also recommend **prioritising subtitlers who specialise in the themes or topics of the documentary**, e.g. in our case, GBV and trauma. If you cannot find subtitlers with this specific experience, do make sure they have **experience with subtitling emotional material** or material that dealt with difficult situations. Additionally, when working with GBV, do choose subtitlers with an **interest in gender** and who are willing to engage with the issues raised in the material.

To ensure confidentiality, **subtitlers should not have any relationship with the film interviewees**. Hence, ensure that subtitlers do not know the people they are translating, understand confidentiality and have signed an **NDA** which emphasises confidentiality and safety. This is because communities can be small and you do not want what is being discussed in the interviews going back to communities.

Finding subtitlers with exact language pairs needed might be challenging, particularly if you are working with localised language varieties. In our case, we could not find an Iraqi Kurdish subtitler with English as a native language, for instance. We recommend **collaborative teamwork** based on the following to allow capturing nuances of the native language and to obtain a fluent rendering in English:

- a **native speaker** of the source language who can subtitle into English,
- a **native English subtitler**, who ideally also understands the source language, to review the subs.
- Allowing the two to communicate either verbally or through email using Excel sheets with comments on their work to discuss any doubts or options.

Mental Health Support

We recommend asking your freelancers for an **emergency contact number**. This person/number would only be contacted if a freelancer unexpectedly ceases to engage so that you can check that they are well, even if they are not in direct contact with you, and provide links/info related to mental health support if needed.

Here are examples of associations and organisations you can direct subtitlers to for mental health support:

- <https://health-in-mind.org.uk/#>
- <https://www.womensaid.org.uk/>
- <https://www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/help-helpline>
- <https://victimsupport.scot/information-support/get-support/other-organisations-that-can-help/>
- <https://ithriveedinburgh.org.uk/find-a-service/#>
- <https://www.saheliya.co.uk/>
- <https://www.samh.org.uk/>
- <https://www.penumbra.org.uk/services/>
- <https://www.spititoutproject.com/>