Inclusive Subtitles for all: Developing Practices and Guidelines for Accessible Media Content in Newly Experimenting Territories

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ABSTRACT

This article provides a descriptive and analytical overview of the ongoing practical projects and action research intended to implement inclusive practices in the media sector in Malta. It also provides a transversal analysis of the findings across a series of applied and experimental studies investigating the practice of inclusive subtitles, a translation mode that targets a broad spectrum of viewers, providing linguistic, cultural, and sensory access. These studies adopt a user-centred approach. They engage in reception studies to identify the needs of the local audience while testing and shaping a set of proposed guidelines to be adopted by local practitioners and stakeholders. The main findings and insights are based on the observation of patterns and potential norms that emerged across the studies and corroborate, or otherwise, the specifications and recommendations in the said guidelines while identifying the need for further research focusing on specific aspects. This paper could provide a model for similar territories that are seeking to engage in inclusive practices applied to media content.

Keywords: inclusivity, audiovisual translation, accessibility, inclusive subtitles, media localisation, language access, cultural sensitivity, linguistic diversity.

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I. DEFINITIONS AND CONTEXT

Inclusive practices in the media refer to the application of modes, solutions, and techniques that ensure access to audiovisual productions by as many users as possible, considering different needs, preferences, and sensitivities. This article focuses on inclusivity *through* language, in other words, language and translation as a medium to provide access on a linguistic, cultural, and sensory level. That said, it also considers inclusivity *in* language, therefore awareness and mindfulness towards diversity and different sensitivities, be they cultural, religious, racial, ethnic, or related to disabilities, gender, sexual orientation, and mental health issues.

The more differences are considered, the harder it becomes to cater to each separate need, a challenge that calls for one homogenous or universal solution to meet as many diverse needs as possible. This *universalist* approach (Greco, 2018; 2019) may not always be considered ideal as it does not cater to individual needs (Romero-Fresco, 2021). However, in mainstream workflows, smaller territories, or low-budget settings, this may often be the optimal solution in terms of financial and practical feasibility based on the availability of infrastructures, and technical or human resources.

Media localisation and accessibility services address the abovementioned needs through practices that utilise language and translation to provide access to media content. In academic settings, the disciplines of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) and Media Accessibility (MA) contribute to these services and practices through research and didactic training.

AVT practices encompass captioning or revoicing modes and techniques aimed at providing linguistic and cultural access to the verbal information conveyed aurally and visually. This includes access to spoken elements that are heard and written elements that appear in the images.

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The primary captioning modalities include interlingual subtitling, while the primary revoicing modalities include dubbing, voice-over, and narration. Interlingual subtitling implies the addition of written text on screen that provides a translation of the original dialogue and other verbal information conveyed visually (e.g., chat messages) or aurally (e.g., songs) (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2021). On the other hand, the revoicing modes imply the provision of an oral translation via voice recording in the target language. The newly recorded tracks overlap the original voice tracks in the case of voice-over (Matamala, 2020), while they replace the original tracks in the case of narration or dubbing, the latter also ensuring lip-synching, that is, target language utterances that perfectly fit the lip movements visible on screen (Chaume, 2012; Spiteri Miggiani, 2019). The choice of mode depends on the type of product (whether it is fiction or non-fiction) and the customs of the country or territory.

MA caters to the non-verbal aural or visual elements through visual or aural verbal text. In this case, the primary captioning and revoicing modalities include subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), also called closed captioning; and audio description (AD) for the blind and partially sighted. SDH provides a written rendition of the sounds and speaker identification, over and above the spoken dialogue (Szarkowska, 2020) which is presented either in the same language (intralingual subtitles) or in translation (interlingual), the former being more widespread, while AD provides an oral verbal commentary of the visual information for those unable to perceive it (Fryer, 2016). The AD language needs to match that of the spoken dialogue, be it in the original or in other dubbed target languages. Therefore, MA, traditionally, has been associated with sensory access for the visually and aurally impaired. However, Greco (2019) describes a relatively recent shift in MA that incorporates linguistic access into this package of services and subsequently a further shift that introduces the universalist approach, therefore not limiting access to any specific group, product, or service. The latter promotes wider interdisciplinarity and inclusive design practices

based on user-centred rather than maker-centred approaches (Greco, 2019). Indeed, recent shifts in approach have also started to prioritise a more proactive approach to inclusion, going beyond the mere provision of access by also recognising the importance of involving the d/Deaf community in the decision-making process (Uzzo, 2023). The research-based guidelines (Spiteri Miggiani, 2021) discussed in this article, apply this user-centred approach whereby users contribute to shaping parameters and specifics.

In an age where streaming platforms produce and distribute so much content across territories while offering translation and accessibility services in the same user menu, it becomes challenging to view Audiovisual Translation and Media Accessibility as separate disciplines and practices, but rather "Accessibility is a form of translation and translation is a form of accessibility, uniting all population groups and ensuring that cultural events, in the broadest sense of the word, can be enjoyed by all" (Díaz-Cintas, Orero, & Remael, 2007, pp. 13-14). Indeed, this article highlights the development of inclusive practices in a specific territory, practices whereby the notions of 'access' or 'accessibility' align with the recent shifts described above, hence, a more comprehensive use of the term (Rizzo, 2019; 2020). The notion of access is not necessarily narrowed down to visual and aural impairments requiring sensory access but extends to language and cultural barriers, requiring translation and adaptation.

Inclusive subtitles can, therefore, be defined as a modality that provides interlingual captions while also ensuring sensory access for the aurally impaired. The term can also be extended to incorporate intralingual subtitles. This article discusses the development of inclusive subtitles in Malta, a European country where such services are relatively new. The practice of inclusive subtitles implies one version that combines translation and access to sound elements (the latter mainly benefiting aurally impaired users). This has obvious advantages from a budget perspective while offering various practical uses, such as the exportation of local productions; access to content by resident non-speakers of the local native language; access to foreign

productions in Maltese (rather than English) for language preservation purposes; language learning; and of course, sensory access. Similarly, access services and techniques are also extended to cultural spaces that host visual and performing arts or any form of cultural heritage that engages with the visual and aural channel and that may benefit from such verbal-written or verbal-aural linguistic *extensions* to the original content. Inclusive subtitles differ from intralingual or interlingual SDH because the target is not narrowed down to a sensory-impaired audience but rather seeks a balance that may satisfy a broader spectrum of viewers, irrespective of hearing impairments. Moreover, the term 'inclusive' is also intended to draw awareness and mindfulness towards sensitive content and language regarding gender identity, sexual orientation, mental health issues, disabilities, race and ethnicity, religion, and cultural sensitivities in general. Similar initiatives can also be encountered occasionally in other territories or regions, for instance, in Palermo, within the specific context of film festivals made accessible in the Italian language (Uzzo, 2023; 2024).

This article provides a descriptive overview of the ongoing practical projects and action research intended to develop inclusive practices in the media and cultural sectors in Malta. These initiatives are being implemented in a professional setting, though driven by academia, more specifically by the author with the support of students trained in the AVT postgraduate stream within the Department of Translation, Terminology and Interpreting Studies at the University of Malta. The article also provides a transversal analysis of the findings across a series of applied and experimental studies focusing on these practices. These studies aim to identify the needs of the local audience while testing a set of proposed guidelines for inclusive practices developed by the author. The main findings and insights drawn are based on the observation of patterns and potential norms that emerged across the studies and corroborate, or otherwise, these guidelines, while identifying the need for further research focusing on specific aspects.

The local ongoing pioneering projects also focus on creating *inclusive audio descriptive guides* for local heritage sites and museums in collaboration with national entities, such as Heritage Malta (heritagemalta.org), among others. Academic research efforts also support this initiative. However, this article focuses mainly on the implementation of captioning modes on the island and the related research. The development of inclusive revoicing modes to provide access to visual arts and cultural spaces will be tackled in a separate paper.

This paper may potentially serve as a model for similar territories that are seeking to engage in inclusive practices to provide linguistic, cultural, and sensory access to media content.

II. INCLUSIVE PRACTICES: STATE OF PLAY IN MALTA

The motivation to export local film productions in Maltese has led local filmmakers to find the means to provide English subtitles or partial subtitles for dialogue in Maltese, considering the challenge of having Maltese-language content translated overseas. With regards to local television broadcasts, there have only been random attempts at providing interlingual or intralingual subtitles in Maltese or English over the past decade, possibly due to lack of awareness of viewer needs and existing practices, as well as budget constraints. However, in both cases, the examples available do not cater to a non-hearing audience and do not rely on formally trained practitioners, therefore the outcome does not align with standard norms and conventions necessary for a pleasant, readable, understandable, and inclusive experience. The lack of an established subtitling professional practice, in general, has so far implied the exclusion of d/Deaf or hard-of-hearing users, as well as non-Maltese speakers living on the island, who would require English captions to access Maltese language content.

Constitutionally, Malta adopts English and Maltese as official languages. Therefore, native and foreign residents may either be bilingual or get by well with just one of the two languages,

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particularly foreign immigrants who settle on the island. To this end, providing either Maltese or English subtitles for local or imported content is the best way to ensure inclusivity on a linguistic level while at the same time catering to viewers with hearing loss. Different viewers may benefit from captions for other reasons (e.g., age-related issues or low proficiency in English or Maltese). Moreover, inclusive subtitles also provide opportunities for language learning, especially in Maltese. In the future, this practice could expand to incorporate live interlingual respeaking for live broadcast events or important national press conferences. A case in point is the live press conferences broadcast by the health authorities throughout the recent pandemic. Important health-related guidelines and restrictions were being issued live, in Maltese, therefore, excluding part of the population who had to wait for a translated written summary in English published in newspapers at a later stage.

The foundation of a specialisation stream in Audiovisual Translation within the Translation postgraduate course programme at the University of Malta is slowly changing the local scenario by promoting awareness around these services, encouraging stakeholders to invest in audiovisual translation modes, and more importantly training students and ensuring professionalism and quality standards. The availability of qualified translators and adapters in subtitling, subtitling for the d/Deaf and hard of hearing, voice-over, dubbing, audio description, and so on, ensures the necessary application of norms and conventions. Moreover, these resources are also trained specifically for local needs, implying awareness of issues and strategies suited to the Maltese language (as a new AVT language) and culture, as well as the necessary know-how for the implementation of *inclusive subtitles* as the best-suited modality for local purposes, a modality that, by default, encompasses sensory access.

The availability of trained resources has led to project-based collaborations between the AVT stream within the university translation department and local stakeholders, including film producers, filmmakers, and TV networks. A few of the very first examples include TV programmes (mainly documentaries), feature films, and local TV series such as *Culhat Al Belt* (PBS, 2019), *The Local Traveller* (Clare Agius, 2019-), *Merjen* (Take 2 Entertainment, 2020), *Miraklu* (Take 2 Entertainment, 2019), and several others. These productions consisted mainly of Maltese language content that required English language subtitles. These in turn triggered other projects whereby the department's students and alumni were engaged directly by the stakeholders, which was an important goal: the development of a professional practice in terms of job opportunities. Among these projects, some worth mentioning are *Avarù* (Brandon Terribile, 2021), a TV programme intended also for an autistic young audience. In this case, intralingual Maltese subtitles were offered; or *Blat: The Island Fortress* (MAVC 2022) which is worth mentioning because it is the first Maltese language opera film, and this was provided with Maltese intralingual subtitles and English interlingual subtitles. The content also included multilingual utterances.

The first projects triggered the need to develop a set of local guidelines (Spiteri Miggiani, 2021) that could be adopted by local subtitling teams, especially in the case of serial productions that require consistency. These guidelines refer to the linguistic and technical parameters of the captions. Moreover, because of these pilot projects, it became apparent that there was an urgent requirement to identify workflows tailored to the local scenario, especially considering the stakeholders' need for guidance in this new and unexplored sector. 'Educating' stakeholders is an integral part of the process and this requires trained resources who have the practical and theoretical know-how, acquired through formal education within a postgraduate course programme, ideally combined with some professional experience.

Another significant result triggered by the AVT specialisation stream is the collaboration among students and alumni who practice teamwork both throughout the course and after, when teams are set up for specific professional projects. This type of collaboration has also led to the foundation of a local association in Audiovisual Translation:

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Audiovisual Translators Malta Association, composed of the AVT stream alumni, therefore, members who are professionally qualified and trained in the field.

III. OVERALL RESEARCH-BASED FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section outlines the methodology and main overall findings of the applied and experimental studies aimed at 1) developing the practice of inclusive subtitling; and, 2) adopting and testing a set of proposed guidelines (Spiteri Miggiani, 2021) for the local context. The guidelines address both intralingual and interlingual inclusive subtitles in Maltese as well as English. That said, this research aims to analyse primarily Maltese, as a target language, (as opposed to the English language captions required in the broadcast projects mentioned in the previous section). Each study focuses on specific linguistic or technical issues to test and corroborate (or otherwise) the related specifics proposed in the local set of guidelines that are a continuous work in progress (see Appendix). This section describes the methodology and provides the main outcomes and insights based on a transversal descriptive analysis across the different studies.

3.1 Research Methodology Applied Across the Studies

The various studies were carried out as part of student postgraduate dissertation projects under the author's supervision, and form part of a larger research route map aimed at developing the practice of inclusive subtitles and research-based guidelines while adopting a user-centred approach. The research design and methodology of the individual projects was thoroughly vetted and the final dissertations were evaluated by the appointed examining boards. Each study consisted of an applied component requiring the creation of Maltese inclusive subtitles added to specific media content in different source languages. These are also among the first subtitling experiments in Maltese, enabling the public to experience Maltese subtitles as a novelty, the novel aspect deriving both from the language

and inclusive approach[1]. The media content was carefully selected focusing on various foreign source languages (rather than English) to increase the viewers' reliance on translation and subtitles to understand the dialogue. The second part of each research project engaged in a reception study to gauge the audience's response regarding readability, comprehension, enjoyment, and other factors that will be discussed further on. Preference was measured by using the Likert scale and other measurable rating systems. Readability, reading speeds, comprehension and the efficacy of sensory access elements were measured by testing the audience via specific questions focusing on plot details, character identification, dialogue (e.g., lexical choices) and attention to visuals.

This was done by collecting data directly from the viewers who experienced Maltese inclusive subtitling of a selection of media clips. The data was collected anonymously through a series of questions and tests shared via online survey tools incorporating the chosen subtitled media snippets. This online method, as opposed to recruiting small focus groups in person, allowed for a reasonably sized sample of participants from a wide range of demographic groups in terms of age, locality, level of education, gender, and language skills and proficiency. That said, online survey tools disributed through social media also present limitations, mainly the risk of underrepresentation of a specific demographic group, that is, viewers aged 60+. However, this limitation was addressed by resorting to direct outreach, distribution and assistance in completing the survey.

The subtitles applied the proposed set of guidelines that address the main technical and linguistic issues in subtitling, among these: character limitation, reading speed, duration, frame gap, position, text segmentation into subtitles, timing and shot changes, line breaks, italics, dual speakers, ellipsis and suspension dots, on-screen text, numbers and time (English and

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[1] There have also been some initiatives before the foundation of the AVT stream at the university and before the availability of guidelines and identification and application of norms and standards. These include Maltese subtitling projects supervised by Professor Anthony Aquilina.

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Maltese), units of measure and currency, abbreviations, quotes, sensory access, glossaries, target language specifics Maltese-English, target language specifics English-Maltese, sensitive language and content. The specifics and parameters adopted are bound to influence the audience's experience. Consequently, developing and shaping guidelines according to user demands and experience can be considered impact research since it has a direct effect on these newly emerging services offered to the public.

3.2 Identifying Local Language and Culture-Specific Needs

The Maltese context has its own linguistic and cultural demands that require tailormade approaches and parameters in creating subtitles, both in English and Maltese. One of the distinctive traits of the island is its bilingualism, which leads to an 'extra vulnerable' subtitling experience. Subtitles are considered a vulnerable form of translation (Díaz Cintas, 2003: 43) due to the possibility of comparing the original audio with the written captions in the case of spectators who are proficient (even partially) in the original language. English subtitles for Maltese content and Maltese subtitles for English content, therefore, produce an extra vulnerable scenario in a Maltese context. The bilingual characteristic of the population also implies different linguistic backgrounds that may have an impact on language preference (Maltese versus English subtitles) and on the subtitling display rate that viewers can handle. Local academic research has so far focused on how bilingualism impacts reading, written and spoken preferences or language learning abilities on the island (Vassallo and Sciriha, 2021; Vella and Gauci, 2022). Further research is necessary to investigate how this bilingualism affects subtitling preferences. One of the experimental studies outlined further on serves as an initial exploration into the topic.

Indeed, another distinctive trait to consider is non-habituation to subtitles, particularly Maltese subtitles, and this impacts the audience response and experience as well as their needs in terms of reading speed. Moreover, when translating from other foreign languages, Maltese tends to have a lower delivery speech rate compared to other languages, for instance, Spanish, which is considered among the fastest languages when it comes to spontaneous discourse, more precisely, adopting an average delivery rate of 7.82 syllables per second (Pellegrino et al., 2011). Therefore, it can be challenging for a Maltese audience that is not accustomed to Maltese subtitles to keep up with the pace and rhythm of certain languages. This may be less challenging with English subtitles since the locals have more exposure to them thanks to streaming platforms. Last but not least, another challenge lies in the universalist approach of the inclusive subtitles mode proposed. Apart from the fact that the Maltese audience is not accustomed to additional information indicating, say, sounds and speaker names in the subtitled translation of the dialogue, creating a 'one-size-fits-all' solution may not satisfy individual needs and preferences. Indeed, one of the main concerns was that hearing viewers may not be satisfied with the *inclusive-by-default* approach since they do not need the additional tags and information targeted at the d/Deaf and hard of hearing.

The studies sought to investigate the general reaction to the inclusive modality, and collected data on viewer preferences and demands, both linguistic and technical. The studies reveal that lack of exposure to Maltese subtitles and non-habituation prompt viewers to prefer English subtitles when directly asked about their subtitle language preference to access foreign content. However, their response changes once they have been exposed to Maltese subtitles. When asked which subtitling language they would prefer to watch the Spanish TV show *La Casa de Papel* (Alex Pina, 2017) in the research project carried out by Warren Taliana (2021), 33% of the respondents (164 in total) said that they would not opt for Maltese subtitles if they had the choice. After watching the pilot episode with Maltese inclusive subtitles, this percentage decreased to 20%, marking an increase in preference towards Maltese. In Taliana's research, 83% of the participants considered the Maltese inclusive subtitles a very positive experience.

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Similarly, the Maltese inclusive subtitles in a study carried out by Nigel Bugeja (2021) obtained a very positive rating from 73% of the respondents (661 in total). Both studies included hearing and hard-of-hearing viewers, 29 participants in Bugeja's study and 12 in Taliana's study. Arianna Mangion (2022) further emphasized the accessibility features when investigating viewer response towards the inclusive-by-default format. Out of 302 respondents including 25 hard-of-hearing viewers, 82% of the respondents reacted positively towards the overall experience. A total of 33% declared that the sound tags providing additional information did not make a difference, 28% found them very helpful, 23% did not find them useful, and only 16% found them distracting.

These three studies point towards a general positive response towards inclusive subtitles in Maltese as well as an improved perception and opinion after viewers are exposed to Maltese subtitles. Another recent study by Emily Hili (2024) provides mixed responses on subtitling language preference for foreign content. In this study, each media clip was presented to the respondents twice, once with English subtitles and another with Maltese subtitles to provide a comparison. This direct comparison combined with non-habituation towards Maltese subtitles led most participants to prefer the English subtitles or to like both versions equally. This result does not align with their responses about everyday language use since 75% of the respondents (111, in total) declared that they mostly speak Maltese, as opposed to 8% who said they use mostly English; the rest use both. It does however align with their reading preferences declared at the beginning of the questionnaire, whereby 53% of the participants stated that they prefer to read in English. In comparison, only 7% displayed a preference towards Maltese. In other words, the previous studies that presented only the Maltese version yielded a much more positive response. The selection of media clips in Hili's study includes a variety of French, Italian, Spanish, Turkish, and Korean snippets. In this instance, languages that are less familiar to the Maltese audience were included deliberately to

induce the viewers' reliance on the subtitles. The subtitles adopted direct and indirect translation workflows to investigate any related impact on viewer response. The results reveal no significant difference in preference that could depend on familiarity with the source language or the different translation workflows adopted. However, some participants noticed the use of pivot translation. Another interesting piece of data is that those participants who had already watched the series before participating in the study tended towards English subtitles, the same language used in their previous experience.

A common thread across all studies, irrespective of preference, is the viewers' awareness of the language learning and language and cultural preservation benefits of subtitling in Maltese, both for a Maltese-speaking audience or non-Maltese speakers residing on the island. Viewers seem to prioritise this over preference for entertainment purposes, which is an essential factor to consider when shaping guidelines and policies. Another aspect that emerges across all the reception studies is the importance of quality standards. Viewers declare that this can influence language preference and the decision to use subtitles in the first place.

3.3 Shaping Guidelines: Main Technical and Linguistic Outcomes

The applied and experimental studies led to significant findings that could help shape the guidelines and, in turn, impact the overall viewer experience. This section does not include all the specifics that were under scrutiny and does not engage in demographic considerations that may have influenced the study outcomes. Other publications focusing on the individual studies could make room for further detail, but this does not align with the scope of this article which aims to provide a comprehensive overview, identifying the main patterns. Therefore, only the main guiding parameters and outcomes are discussed.

Mainstream platforms prioritise standardised technical parameters across territories, but a newly experimenting territory may have different demands and challenges, or distinctive traits as

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outlined in the previous section. Moreover, the Maltese scenario can tailor specifications and guidelines according to its needs and preferences. This is perhaps one of the advantages of developing a new practice in virgin territory. In the absence of a tradition and consolidated practice, there is no obligation to mirror the exact specifications used in other regions. That said, the various guidelines are based on widespread global norms, research, and professional practice and are used as the foundations that could be further adapted according to the island's needs. One of the main differences between the locally researched practice and mainstream platforms is that the latter generally provide two separate subtitled versions, standard subtitles in translation and closed captions (mostly intralingual) to cater to hard-of-hearing viewers. While, as mentioned in the introduction, adopting one hybrid or combined version seems more efficient for a small island setting.

3.3.1 Technical Issues and Guidelines

One of the main technical parameters considered is the so-called *reading speed*, or more precisely, the subtitling display rate that impacts the viewers' reading speed and is typically measured in number of characters per second. Establishing the length and duration of subtitles is crucial to ensure a readable, understandable, and stress-free experience while ensuring that the viewers' attention to the images is not significantly compromised. It is not easy to reach this delicate balance, which can depend on several factors and can vary across languages and territories. Viewers who are not accustomed to subtitles in a specific language are likely to require more time to read and understand them. A Maltese audience may cope with higher reading speeds in English, if they are accustomed to mainstream streaming platforms, but their reading speed may be lower in Maltese. Bugeja's (2021) study adopted a methodology whereby the 661 respondents recruited were divided into two groups, Group A and Group B, whereby each group experienced a different version of Maltese subtitles applied to the same media clips drawn from the Italian Rai fiction series *Tutto può succedere* (RAI fiction, 2018). The participants were divided into two

groups to avoid any bias from watching the same videoclip twice. This way, each group watched each videoclip only once. Group A experienced a subtitling display rate of 15 characters per second (cps) applying the local guidelines proposal, while Group B experienced a display rate of 17 cps, which is the standard adopted by Netflix. In other words, Group B experienced faster subtitles. From a linguistic perspective, this implies longer subtitles as opposed to more condensation applied in the lower reading speed, as experienced by Group A. Respondents were asked to quantify the subtitles read and were also asked questions to test plot comprehension and attention to detail in the images. Bugeja's study reveals a preference for the lower reading speed (15 cps) as per the local guidelines. In Group A, 88% of the respondents managed to read all or most of the subtitles, 79% performed well in the comprehension test, and 83% considered the overall experience as very positive, even though the respondents hinted at reduced accuracy in translation. On the other hand, in Group B, on average, 81% of the respondents managed to read all or most of the subtitles. A breakdown of the data reveals that 19% considered the subtitles too fast and the number of participants who managed to read all the subtitles dropped by 25%, the comprehension score was 73% and the overall reception experience rated at 73%. The subtitles, however, were considered very accurate from a translation perspective. The difference in overall reception rating is more significant when the results from the hard-of-hearing viewers are isolated, that is, 29 respondents out of 661, therefore 4.3% of the participants. The hard-of-hearing participants in Group A gave a 57% rating to the higher reading speed of 17cps, while those in Group B gave an 80% rating to the version adopting a subtitling display rate of 15cps. The need for lower reading speeds may be due to different needs in terms of cognitive load and visual processing speeds given the reliance on the visual code. This confirms that for the time being the reading speed parameter proposed in the guidelines, aligns with local needs. Taliana's (2021), Mangion's (2022) and Hili's (2024) studies, also outlined in this paper, reveal consistent results related to the reading speed

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proposed by the guidelines even though, unlike Bugeja's study, only one reading speed was adopted throughout these other projects.

3.3.2 Linguistic Issues

Mangion (2022) tackled this parameter from a linguistic perspective by allowing the respondents to compare two subtitled versions of the same media clips drawn from the Spanish TV series *¿Quien matò a Sara?* (José Ignacio Valenzuela, 2021). Variant 1 provided subtitles that adopted extreme condensation to suit reading speed demands and provide a stress-free experience. Variant 2 applied no condensation, therefore verbally equivalent subtitles, despite condensation or reduction being one of the common strategies adopted in subtitling. Every time a new video clip was shown to the participants, the researcher changed the order of the two strategies proposed, to reduce the bias of watching the same videoclips twice. Variant 1 was the preferred choice by 60% of the participants (302, in total) despite 52% declaring that they could read all the subtitles in Variant 2. Also, 71% of the respondents declared that they could not identify any differences between the two versions, while 29% noticed that Variant 1 applied reduction and simplification strategies, as well as syntactical and lexical differences, and observed that the subtitles were longer and faster in Variant 2. This study further confirms that the preferred reading speed is the one proposed in the guidelines, at least for the time being, since the audience is bound to evolve, and its needs may change with habituation. Despite being able to read all or most of the subtitles in Variant 2, the participants preferred Variant 1 as an overall experience based on comfort.

Mangion's study also delves into other specifics such as using digits versus words for numbers between 1 to 10, with the majority (64%) showing a preference for the written form in words, in line with the guidelines. Another linguistic aspect investigated by Mangion (2022) is the subtitling language choice for song lyrics in English or foreign languages: whether to adopt 1) intralingual subtitles (e.g., original lyrics in Spanish in a Spanish original series or original

lyrics in English in a Spanish series); 2) interlingual subtitles (translation into Maltese); or, 3) provide the song title only. Even in this case, the respondents were given different versions for comparison. Overall, the intralingual version was preferred over the translated lyrics. In the case of English lyrics, 49% of the respondents (147 out of 302) preferred the intralingual version or no lyrics at all (37%, 111) over the interlingual translated lyrics (14%, 43). However, the latter percentage included participants with hearing loss who declared that they would need access to the verbal content. These findings align with the proposed guidelines that recommend that English song lyrics are not to be translated into Maltese. However, it may be necessary to incorporate the possibility of providing an intralingual transcription, especially if relevant to the plot, to enable access for non-hearing viewers. Regarding Spanish lyrics, the respondents also preferred the intralingual version (39%, 118) or no lyrics at all (32%, 98) over the translated lyrics. Only 29% (86) opted for the translated lyrics in Maltese, even though 62% of the respondents did not know the Spanish language. Despite not yielding the expected result, double the respondents opted for the translation in the case of Spanish lyrics when compared to the English lyrics, so a lack of familiarity with the source language affected the outcome. In a subsequent, more generic question in which respondents were asked whether it is vital to provide a translation for lyrics, a small percentage (12%) declared that translating the lyrics would be helpful to access the verbal content in the case of hearing loss. In comparison, 22% found that it does enhance the viewer experience when the source language is not known. The popularity of the Spanish song in question might also have influenced the results, and it would be worth investigating further and repeating the experiment with different songs and languages.

Another important linguistic aspect examined by Bugeja (2021) focuses on incorporating English loanwords in Maltese subtitles, and more specifically on the orthography to be used, whether a Maltese phonetic-oriented orthography or English orthography. Maltese grammar has

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specific rules that determine which to use, and the guidelines recommend applying them. Still, considering the immediacy of the subtitling experience, the expected outcome was that familiarity and ease of readiness might prevail from a viewer's perspective. This expectation was confirmed when the respondents were presented with subtitles that included loanwords. Group A was presented with the English orthography version and Group B with the Maltese orthography version. Both groups were asked to rate the solutions. Overall, there wasn't a significant difference in preference, though the number of respondents who preferred or did not mind English orthography was slightly higher, 64% versus 56% who rated Maltese orthography positively. That said, there was a minimal percentage difference between the respondents in Group A who found English orthography annoying (8%), and those in Group B who found Maltese orthography annoying or distracting (13%). Some examples adopted in the subtitled media clips included using the word *pipe*, *foul,* or *hello* versus *pajp*, *fawl* or ħelow, the latter solutions often adopted in everyday written language. When Maltese equivalents are available, the use of English loanwords can be debatable, and a language preservation attitude would tend to favour Maltese equivalents. That said, the subtitling modality cannot be compared to conventional written text. The functional and 'visual' nature of subtitles, combined with the speed and immediacy required (in terms of readability, recognition, and comprehension), usually favour solutions that are familiar to the public and that are simple and fast to understand, unless, of course, the subtitled product is meantto have a didactic function. To this end, the proposed guidelines recommend compliance with Maltese grammar rules whenever possible, while considering that the nature of the subtitling experience may call for the prioritisation of familiar and widespread terms based on language use (e.g., in the case of English loanwords). The guidelines also highlight the need for consistency in a given product or across episodes of serial productions. Other studies that tackled the loanword issue adopt other examples in the subtitled media clips. Mangion (2022)

incorporates the use of *please* in Maltese subtitles rather than *jekk jogħġbok* because it sounds more spontaneous and natural within the specific context. The same applies to taboo language, where the term *fucking* was incorporated in Maltese, for naturalness' sake, despite some respondents complaining about these choices (Mangion, 2022). Similarly, another study carried out by Kimberly Cutajar (2022) reports 75 out of 181 respondents in favour of retaining English vulgar terms in Maltese subtitles, when the source language is English, while 61 respondents prefer a Maltese rendering, and 45 respondents were indifferent to the matter.

3.3.3 Sensory Access

Some of the accessibility-related specifications in the guidelines were also tested. Mangion (2022) analysed viewer preference concerning the so-called sound tags and speaker identification. The sound tags are captions that provide information on the sounds produced by objects, nature, animals, or characters, or simply any form of sound effects added extra-dietetically, for example, *dog barking*, *door creaks*, *Sara sighs, gun shooting,* and so on (Zárate, 2021). Generally, plot-related sounds and reactions that are not immediately visible on-screen are given priority (Netflix, 2022). Speaker identification, on the other hand, refers to strategies that helpnon-hearing viewers identify who is speaking, when the speaker is off-screen, or when the source of the utterance may not be explicit (e.g., in crowded scenes, or over-the-shoulder shots).

As for the sound tags, Mangion provided the respondents with different versions of the same media clips, each providing a different grammatical form. The options provided were one-word sound tags, more specifically nouns, e.g., *żaqżiq* (creaking), *ragħad (thunder)* noun-based phrases, e.g., *tektik ta' minutiera* (ticking of a clock) or *biki ta' Sara* (Sara's weeping), or tags composed of a subject and verb; *minutiera ttektek* (clock ticking) or *Sara tibki* (Sara crying). The third option prevailed, suggesting a preference towards the use of verbs rather than nouns. The proposed guidelines recommend one-word sound tags be they verbs or nouns, so this guideline may

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need to be revised to prioritise the adoption of one-word tags composed of verbs or the subject-verb grammatical form.

Another feature intended to enhance sensory access is speaker identification. The options provided in Mangion's study (2022), drawn from various practices globally, are the use of colour coding (that is, a colour assigned to the subtitles spoken by a specific character), name tags (the name of the speaker or character within brackets at the beginning of a subtitle, whenever this is necessary), or the use of displacement (shifting the position of the subtitle to the left or right of the screen, as close as possible to the character who is speaking) (Zárate, 2021). The name tag system was the one that prevailed in the reception study, in terms of preference (60% out of 302 respondents). Moreover, participants managed to attribute utterances quickly and accurately, thus corroborating the recommendation in the local guidelines. The colour coding system was considered distracting by 46% of the respondents followed by displacement (44%). In conclusion, he incorporation of name tags appears to be the most effective and least distracting method.

It is easy to assume that habituation to mainstream subtitling in English may have possibly influenced some of the respondents in the various reception studies.

3.3.4 Sensitive Content and Inclusive Language

Finally, the issue of taboo or vulgar language was tested with the local audience. Taliana (2021) was the first to tap into this issue and the viewers' reaction to vulgar language in Maltese subtitles. The findings of this study hinted at a high acceptance attitude towards vulgar language in Maltese subtitles, except for blasphemy which was not considered acceptable. To this end, a more in-depth reception study focusing only on vulgar and sensitive language ensued (Cutajar, 2022), and considering the initial data collected in Taliana's study, the research sought to further corroborate (or otherwise) this high tolerance threshold as well as the rejection of any form of censorship. The general subtitling norm globally has traditionally been to tone down vulgar

utterances (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2021), particularly for specific media, such as television. The reason is the shift from the oral to the written mode, which impacts the perception of vulgar language. However, considering the development of a new practice in virgin territory, it can be assumed that, in building their norms and guidelines, the Maltese islands are not necessarily obliged to follow traditional standards and conventions.

Cutajar's findings (2022) challenge the initial expected outcome in that the respondents (a total of 181) indicated a clear preference for the attenuation of vulgar expressions when these were rendered in Maltese. Cutajar presented the respondents with two subtitled versions of each media clip, and therefore the audience was able to compare different levels of vulgarity including attenuated solutions, omission, equally vulgar solutions, or aggravated solutions, all strategies encountered in AVT in general. A broad spectrum of strategies was deliberately applied to elicit various reactions and the order of the chosen strategies adopted varied from one clip to another to reduce the bias of watching the same videoclip twice. The respondents opted for the attenuated solutions across all media clips irrespective of genre, context, plot, and characterisation. When the participants were asked to further motivate their responses, and their attention drawn towards contextualising the utterances being analysed and compared, they displayed a higher acceptance level. That said, first reactions matter the most since these align with the immediacy of the subtitling experience. Therefore, these have been considered in the formulation of the local guidelines, which currently recommend considering attenuation strategies depending on the medium, target audience, function, and context. Cutajar's study (2022) once again reveals zero tolerance for blasphemy. In such cases, the respondents preferred the omission strategies.

However, this study went beyond the investigation of taboo language and tapped into sensitive content, that is, potentially derogatory or offensive language concerning gender identity, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, disabilities, and mental health issues. Upon initial response,

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the audience showed a heightened level of acceptance for offensive language regarding mental health, while demonstrating a decreased tolerance for derogatory terms related to sexual orientation, and an even lower level of acceptance for racist language. However, these outcomes experienced significant changes when the respondents' focus was directed toward these sensitive topics, leading to more contemplative responses. Their position changed, displaying greater tolerance towards racist language if required by the context while preferring omission and toning down for offensive language related to mental health issues. Similarly, though to a lesser extent, results varied and became more nuanced when viewers were asked to ponder a policy regarding vulgar language in Maltese-inclusive subtitles.

IV. CONCLUSIONS: THE WAY FORWARD

The above sections outlined the main subtitling projects and research intended for the continued development of a new professional practice in Malta. The user-centered approach adopted aims to create an optimal enjoyable and inclusive experience. The research so far also enabled the necessary data collection to help shape a set of guidelines that can ensure quality standards and consistency, thus easing the process of viewer habituation in this newly experimenting territory. The universalist approach adopted caters to a broad spectrum of viewers, including both hearing and non-hearing persons. The vision behind this approach is the adoption of a translation modality that unifies viewers rather than divides them due to their different needs. This may entail a certain degree of tolerance and acceptance on the viewers' part, since it may imply compromises, maybe loss on the one hand, or unnecessary information, on the other, depending on the viewpoint adopted. The goal (and challenge) is to provide a balanced solution that includes and satisfies as many viewers as possible.

As a result of the findings outlined above, it can be concluded that most of the guidelines in question can be been confirmed as valid, for the time being, since they now have the backing of user-centred data. These include specifications relating to technical issues such as reading speed (characters per line and characters per second), linguistic issues such as loanwords, density of dialogue lines, taboo language and sensitive content, numbers, and sensory access issues such as sound tags and speaker identification and the use of the inclusive subtitles 'format' in the first place. The specifications that may require minor adjustments are those related to the grammatical form of sound tags and how song lyrics are handled.

The audience is continuously evolving and the local demands identified are bound to change due to increased exposure to inclusive subtitles and consequent habituation, which will in turn impact both technical and linguistic parameters. The guidelines were first published online in 2021. Further research is necessary to continue to monitor local demands and the guidelines will require review on a regular basis to align with research findings. There certainly is room for other studies focusing on specific groups, such as the d/Deaf and Hard of Hearing with respect to sensory access, children with respect to reading speeds and language learning, or immigrants with respect to language learning. Likewise, Maltese intralingual subtitles and related technical and linguistic parameters also require investigation.

Academia has the potential to implement and shape new inclusive practices through training, research, practical application and the creation of guidelines, thus creating social impact and contributing to the community. Moreover, moving forward requires additional concrete actions, such as implementing a national inclusive media content policy aligned with the EU directive for Audiovisual Services (EU Parliament and Council, 2018) that entices member states to actively pursue media accessibility for persons with disabilities, in particular with a visual or hearing impairment. Establishing a minimum quota for subtitled media content on local broadcast television could be a first step towards inclusive practices, that can be extended beyond sensory access to also incorporate linguistic and cultural inclusion.

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APPENDIX

The appendix presents the proposed guidelines discussed throughout the article for further reference. Since the article is written and published in English, the English version is presented hereunder. Both the English and Maltese version are available at https://www.localiseinmalta.com/guidelines.

Proposed guidelines for inclusive subtitles in a Maltese context (EN).

Compiled by Giselle Spiteri Miggiani, first published in January 2021, last updated in December 2022.

The following guidelines are to be considered work in progress. Further experimental studies

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are necessary to test and develop them further. Meanwhile, they are being used for didactic and educational purposes, applied research, and for local professional media localisation projects.

The parameters and specifications provided are intended for interlingual and intralingual subtitling both in English and Maltese (source languages: English, Maltese, or foreign languages). They are meant to guide audiovisual translators in a Maltese linguistic and cultural setting. They draw on widespread standards and conventions and their variations in use across TV networks, streaming platforms, and localisation companies globally, and have been adapted to suit Maltese-specific needs.

Inclusive subtitles are intended for a broad spectrum of viewers who may or may not have hearing loss, and who may or may not understand Maltese. The specifications and strategies proposed aim to create an inclusive enjoyable experience that can be shared by all alike. The aim is to seek a balance that ensures that no viewer is deprived of essential information (e.g., relevant sounds, or culture-specific terms and references) while trying to avoid overabundant or redundant information.

1. Character Limitation

- Characters per subtitle line for documentaries, TV programmes, interviews, or similar reality productions: 40 (spaces included)
- Characters per subtitle line for fiction productions (film & TV series): 38 (spaces included)

2. Reading Speed

- Adult programmes: max 15 cps (characters per second)
- Children's programmes: max 12 cps (characters per second)

3. Duration

- Minimum duration: ideally, 1 second. Minimum 20 frames in the case of one-word subtitles.
- Maximum duration: 6 seconds per subtitle event.

4. Frame Gap

- Minimum 2 frames between subtitles.

5. Position

- In general, subtitles should be centre justified and placed at the bottom of the screen, unless otherwise requested by the client.
- Subtitles can be aligned to the top throughout opening credits or if there is on-screen text in the video material. Maintain consistency at the top all throughout the opening credits instead of alternating between the top and bottom of the screen.
- Displacement to the left or right can be adopted in short dual dialogue scenes. Character tags are not necessary if displacement is used in such instances.
- Creative positioning and subtitle display options can be discussed with the client depending on the type of production at hand. Compatibility with the editors' program needs to be verified to ensure that any typeface formatting, alignment, or displacement are not lost.

6. Text Segmentation into Subtitles

- Maximum of 2 lines per subtitle.
- 3 lines can be used at the end for subtitling credits.
- Prioritise two-line subtitles in documentaries, informative videos, or similar genres.
- Use both two-line and one-line subtitles for fiction productions as necessary. Merge and separate lines according to the speech flow, rhythm and pauses to enhance the reading experience.
- Avoid segmenting text in such a way as to have to resort to the euphonic /i/ in MT at the beginning of the next subtitle. Resort to reformulation where necessary.

7. Timing and Shot Changes

- Ideally subtitles should match the duration of the utterance. If this is not possible and a longer duration is required, extend up to 12 frames max.
- Whenever possible, avoid subtitles that cross over shot changes (that is, subtitles that continue over a cut). Start or end the subtitle

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with the shot change when the cross-over duration before or after the shot change is 7 frames or less.

- Ideally, the time code of entry and exit should match the speech utterance. However, customised solutions are often necessary to suit local productions, particularly in the case of inconsistencies or broken speech in documentary interviews (e.g., false starts with pauses, a word repeated multiple times at the beginning of a line, and so on). It might be necessary to cue in a subtitle slightly later when the speech starts to flow, thus adopting a more customised synchronisation approach.

8. Line break

- When the text needs to be subdivided into 2 lines, prioritise the reading flow. Ideally, break the line before conjunctions, after punctuation marks, before prepositions, possibly obtaining a self-contained semantic unit on each line.
- Ideally, the line break should not separate a noun from an adjective or an article, a verb from the subject pronoun, a prepositional verb from its preposition, a verb from its auxiliary, reflexive pronoun or negation.
- Try not to separate names from surnames.
- When subtitling in MT do not separate hyphenated or prepositional articles from the noun (e.g., fix-xitwa, it-traduzzjoni).

9. Italics

- In fiction productions: voice-over speech, narration, or inner thoughts.
- In documentaries/TV programmes: italics may be avoided for narrators/speakers/presenters when the voice-over narration constitutes almost 50% of the spoken content in the programme. Name tags can be used to indicate voice-over narration (e.g., [host], [Clare], [narrator]).
- Only when the speaker is not in the narrative/diegetic space and not merely off camera.
- Dialogue heard over the phone, television, computer, or any electronic device that produces a voice effect.
- Song lyrics. Use quotation marks for song titles. A musical note can be added at the

beginning of each song lyric subtitle. The last lyric subtitle will have a musical note at the beginning and end to highlight the end of the song.

- Titles of books, newspapers, works of art, music albums, movies, TV shows.
- Unfamiliar foreign words and phrases. Names of food/dishes or other culture-specific elements.
- Do not italicise proper names such as MT or foreign locations or company names. Simply use upper case for the first letter.
- In EN subtitles, do not italicise MT words in general, such as intercalary words (e.g., mela, ejja) or familiar words in other languages (e.g., "ad hoc," "rendezvous") when retained in the target text.
- In MT subtitles, do not italicise EN words in general or familiar words in other languages.

10. Dual speakers

- Use a hyphen without a space to indicate two speakers in one subtitle. One line per speaker. The hyphen precedes any name tag.

Subtitle 1

- Where have you been?
- London.

Subtitle 1

- [Clare] Let's talk about it.
- [Joe] Yes, of course.

Subtitle 1

- [Joe laughs]
- I told you so!
- Use two hyphens when you have a sound caption or tag on one line coming from one source and a dialogue line on the next line coming from a different source.
- [phone rings]
- Hello?

11. Ellipsis and suspension dots

- Do not use ellipses (3 dots) or dashes when an ongoing sentence is split between two or more continuous subtitles.

Subtitle 1 We had asked you

Subtitle 2 to focus on your final exams.

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- Use ellipsis at the end of the first subtitle only if there is a long pause between subtitles. In this case, it is not necessary to use an ellipsis at the beginning of the second subtitle. If the pause is very long you can consider ellipsis also at the beginning of the second line to indicate that it is a continuation. Otherwise, when there are no pauses, do not use dots every time you split a sentence.

Subtitle 1   Had I known...

Subtitle 2   I wouldn't have called.

- To indicate a pause within the same subtitle use three dots without leaving a space.

Subtitle 1   Had I known...I wouldn't have called.

- Use suspension dots to indicate an incomplete sentence or an abrupt interruption.

Subtitle 1 Where the hell are yo...?

Subtitle 2 Shut your mouth!

- Use an ellipsis without a space to indicate that a subtitle is starting mid-sentence.

Subtitle 1   ...be going to school.

12. Written graphics/on-screen text

- When the main SL is MT, and the TL is EN, any MT or foreign-language on-screen text requires an EN translation unless 'covered' in the dialogue/speech or purposely added in the subtitled speech content (e.g., adding the title or designation of an interviewee in the subtitles).
- When the main SL is EN, and the TL is MT, it is not necessary to translate the English on-screen text.
- Use upper case letters for the whole text, except for written passages taken from books, letters, newspapers, or very long chat messages. If the characters are reading the on-screen text aloud use quotation marks.

Subtitle 1   NO TRESPASSING

- If a character/speaker reads the on-screen text, use inverted commas (and no upper case letters) to highlight that the text is being read. Use a name tag if the character/speaker is not on screen.

- Avoid graphical overlap with any onscreen text - position subtitle where it would be easier to read.
- Do not combine dialogue and narrative titles in the same subtitle.
- If a narrative title interrupts the dialogue, use ellipsis at the end of the subtitle and the beginning of the next one.

Subtitle 1   When I was young...

Subtitle 2   NO SMOKING

Subtitle 3   ...we were allowed to smoke anywhere.

- When translating and subtitling the title of a production use upper case for the whole text (e.g., CULHAT AL BELT, THE LOCAL TRAVELLER).

13a. Numbers and Time (English)

- From 1 to 10 - written out in words (e.g., wieħed, tnejn, tlieta).
- Above 10 - written numerically (e.g., 11, 12, 13, 135, 1,000) Use the written form (or a combination of numeric and written form) for larger numbers with several zeros, and the numeric form for numbers with a decimal point for ease of comprehension (e.g., one million, 12 million, 100 thousand, 2.5 million).
- Use word form when a number is at the beginning of a subtitle.
- Be consistent with points and commas (e.g., 5,000, 1.95 million inhabitants, 9.30 pm).
- Be consistent with dates and ordinal numbers (e.g., 5th May, May 5, or 5th of May). The first option is preferable.
- Use numerals for dates (even 1 to 10).
- Time: a) Use numerals (e.g., 11.30 am); b) Use lowercase am, and pm when specifying is necessary; c) Time expressions that do not include numbers need to be written in words (e.g., half past, quarter to, midnight, noon).

13b. Numbers and Time (Maltese)

- From 1 to 10 - written out in words (e.g., one, two, three, etc.).
- Above 10 - written numerically (e.g., 11, 12, 13, 135, 1,000 etc.).

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- A combined numeric and word form can be used for larger numbers (e.g., 70 elf).
- Use the numeric form for numbers with a decimal point (e.g., 2.5 miljun).
- Use word form when a number is at the beginning of a subtitle.
- Use word form for all morphological inflections (e.g., ħamest itfal, żewġ, mitt, 1,000, mitt elf, ħames miljuni, tlett irġiel).
- Use numerals for dates (5 ta' ġunju)
- Time: use numeric form and the 12-hour clock format (e.g., fid-9 am). *Nofsillejl* and *nofsinhar* can be written out in words, time and space permitting.

14. Units of measure and currency

- Translate but do not convert old units of measurement that are not in use today (e.g., in history documentaries).
- When the target audience is unknown it is recommended to translate and convert imperial measurements into the metric system (centimetres and metres rather than feet, inches, yards etc.).
- If the target audience is Australian or Maltese, imperial measurements can be taken into consideration. Adopt consistency throughout.
- When the TL is MT, convert units of measure according to MT usage.
- English abbreviations for measurements can be used in MT subtitles (e.g., cm, m, km).
- Whenever possible use currency in words (pounds, yen, krona) instead of the symbol. An exception can be made for the more commonly used € and $ in the case of time and space restrictions.
- The % symbol (no space) can be used, and fractions can resort to the numeric form (e.g., 1/3, 2/3).
- 'M' can be used for million or miljun.

15. Abbreviations

- Well-known abbreviations/shortenings/acronyms/contractions may be used. No full stops. Use upper case for abbreviations: FYI, ASAP, FBI, EU, MEPA, WWI, and a blend for contractions if needed (e.g., Dr, Mr, km, cm, m)

16. Quotes

- Double quotation marks are to be used for quoted words, phrases, and sentences; use single quotation marks for quotations within quotations.

Subtitle 1 She told me: "Lectures are cancelled."

- If the quote extends beyond more than one subtitle, use an open quote at the beginning of the first subtitle and an end quote at the end of the last subtitle.

Subtitle 1   "If you can fill the unforgiving minute

Subtitle 2   With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,

Subtitle 3   Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it."

- Periods and commas precede closing quotation marks, whether double or single.
- Colons and semicolons follow closing quotation marks.
- Question marks and exclamation marks follow quotation marks unless they belong within the quoted text:

Subtitle 1

Which poem contains the phrase:

"If you can fill the unforgiving minute…"?

Subtitle 2

"If" by Rudyard Kipling.

- Song titles should be enclosed in quotes. Italics are used for the lyrics and names of music albums.

17. Sensory access

- Providing sensory access to HOH viewers among the broader target audience is taken as a default approach unless otherwise specified by the client.
- Sounds and speaker identifiers: Use square brackets and lowercase letters (except for proper nouns) for captions describing sounds, music, as well as name tags (e.g., [Joe laughs], [whistling softly], [Joe] I knew it was her).
- Do not italicise even if the dialogue that follows is in voice-over etc.

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- Dialogue: In the case of intralingual subtitles include as much of the original content as possible – ideally verbatim. Omitting parts of the original dialogue should be a last resort when synchronisation and reading speed is an issue.
- Include name tags or sound effects only when the speaker or source of sound cannot be seen or clearly identified visually – that is, either off screen or on screen but not clearly visible.
- When the source of the sound is visible on-screen use sound captions only if necessary to qualify the type of sound (e.g., [door creaks], while [door opens] may not be necessary). Consider volume, intensity, duration, and other qualities of the sound.
- Describe generic ambience (e.g., [crowd murmur].
- Describe diegetic or extradiegetic music. Capture the mood of the music (e.g., spiritual, relaxing, ethereal). More specific descriptions can be used, too (piano ballad, cello solo, percussions). Distinguish between diegetic and extra-diegetic music (e.g., [upbeat music] for extradiegetic music; [Street violinist playing] for diegetic music if violinist is not seen. If the violinist is seen describe the style of music).
- Song lyrics: Subtitle song lyrics that are relevant and that do not interfere with dialogue. Where possible avoid alternating dialogue and song lyric excerpts. Use [song] at the beginning of the subtitle unless the musical note symbol is available in the subtitling software. Use only question marks and exclamation marks at the end of lines, no commas or full stops. Commas can be used within the lyric line if necessary.
- Add song/music titles when known before the start of a song (space and time permitting). The titles can replace the lyrics when these cannot be included. Place song titles in quotes and album titles in italics (e.g., ["Bohemian rhapsody" playing]).
- Use tags to specify that a foreign language is spoken (e.g., [bit-Taljan] or [in Italian] followed by the translated text when this is meant to be understood by the viewers).

Otherwise, include a tag and leave dialogue untranslated (e.g., [in foreign language])
- For MT captions use nouns when the source is generic or extended to several people and not specific to one character or person (e.g. [ċapċip] rather than [nies iċapċpu], [leħen baxx], [daħq], [xita], [ħoss tal-magna]. However, use [tibki], [jisgħol], [jonfoħ], [jidħqu], [Joe jidħaq] when the character/s and/or gender are specified).

18. Glossaries

- In the case of serial productions, create a shared consistency sheet or glossary with key names and phrases and/or specialised jargon. The consistency sheet can also contain specific notes, such as forms of address. This would need to be updated constantly.
- These specific key names and phrases can be decided upon by the translator in question when they first appear. The rest of the team will follow. Alternatively, the keywords in the original version can be identified and listed, and then discussed together with the team before submission.
- A consistency sheet may consist of various data including source language version, target language version, episode number, sound tags adopted, MT orthographic adaptation of EN loanwords (only if applicable, see 20).

19. TL-specific guidelines: EN (SL- MT)

- Adopt standard English.
- Adopt a standardised and neutralised speech register unless a distinct register is relevant to plot and characterisation. Avoid slang and colloquialisms where not necessary.
- When having to choose an English variety, adopt British English spelling, vocabulary, and spontaneous speech features (discourse markers, fillers, interjections, etc.) Avoid over-domestication. Avoid American vocabulary such as "elevator", "sidewalk", "pants", "purse", "hall" etc.
- Avoid lowering or over-formalising the general language register in documentaries or informative productions (e.g., opt for "poor" rather than "bad," "efficient" or "effective" rather than "good").

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- Retain -whenever possible- culture-specific terms and names in MT in order to ensure an MT flavour. Use italics to highlight culture-specific items (or, as a last resort, single inverted commas in the case of client software incompatibility with typeface formatting). Consistency would be necessary throughout. Discuss this translation strategy with the client, when appropriate, and consider the target audience (general web, Australian-Maltese, local residents (Maltese and local non-Maltese).
- Consistency would be required for names of streets and squares.
- Spell names consistently across episodes even when there are inconsistencies in the original text. Prioritise spelling visible in on-screen text.
- Monument names or other cultural sites and museums that are widely known and publicised among locals and tourists in EN may be translated in EN (e.g., St. John's Cathedral).
- Numbers: see 13a.
- Watch out for source language calques on a lexical and syntactical level. Avoid literal translation and prioritise the target text flow and comprehension.
- Tighten sentences by omitting redundancies, repetitions, hesitations, speech errors (e.g., when interviewees correct themselves), and simplify or sharpen sentences that sound too blurred. Comprehension and avoiding viewer distraction are a priority.
- Adopt reduction as a strategy where necessary but avoid lines that are way shorter than the original.
- Use up-to-date inclusive language to refer to ethnicity, race, age, mental health disorders, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, and so on. Refer to local associations to identify sensitive language and preferred terms and use of language in English among local communities (e.g., a viewer "has" a hearing impairment rather than "suffers from" a hearing impairment; the deaf and hard-of-hearing). This applies especially to non-fiction productions. Non-inclusive language can be considered in fictional

productions only if functional to the plot and characterisation and therefore contextualised.

20. TL-specific guidelines: MT (SL- EN)

- Use standard MT– neutralise any slang and dialects.
- In general, pick the more familiar term if a choice arises between an EN term widely used in spoken spontaneous language and its less used MT equivalent - unless the intention is didactic or to enhance the use of less common MT vocabulary (e.g., use "selfie" rather than "stessu", "flashcard" rather than "leħħa", "orange juice" rather than "sugu tal-lariġ").
- In fiction productions, use the MT equivalent of geographical names only when these are familiar and commonly used in everyday spoken language. In documentaries, speeches, TV programmes, and other formal contexts, use official MT equivalents when these are available. Refer to http://publications.europa. eu/code/mt/mt-5000500.htm.
- Toning down vulgar language depends on the medium, target audience, and individual dialogue context within the AV content –whether its function is relative to the plot, characters, or circumstance. In the case of free-to-air TV channels, vulgar language should always be toned down, and similar though less strong equivalents sought. More flexibility can be applied in the case of feature films in cinema theatres, pay platforms and services, and online platforms in general. MT direct equivalents may be stronger than their SL counterparts: due attention must be given to MT language norms.
- On-screen text in English can remain untranslated (e.g., newspaper headings, chat messages, slogans, billboards, etc.) (See 12).
- Any English language dialogue segments should be subtitled verbatim or edited slightly (hesitations, errors, repetitions can be filtered), thus making them accessible to the HOH.
- No italics for English borrowings (See 9).
- Avoid unnecessary contractions (e.g., haw', fej', ´habba).
- Avoid informal variants (e.g., iwa).

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- Adopt punctuation and upper case according to the MT language [e.g., Tlieta and tlieta to distinguish between the weekday and the number]
- Write foreign territory addresses in their original form (e.g., Gower Street, Londra, and not Triq-Gower). If an address that has both an EN and MT version is spoken by a character or narrator, subtitle it in the same language used by the narrator.
- Avoid coining new MT equivalents.
- Use up-to-date inclusive language to refer to ethnicity, race, age, mental health disorders, religion, sexual orientation, disabilities, and so on (e.g., persuni b'diżabilità, persuni neqsin mis-smigħ, persuna b'kundizzjoni ta' saħħa mentali, nies LGBTI, Rom, persuni gay, persuni omosesswali, persuni transgender, Indjan, Pakistan, Ċiniż, persuni anzjani). Refer to https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/35465/mt_inclusive-comm-gsc-28052 018.pdf Refer also to local associations and communities. This applies especially to non-fiction productions. Non-inclusive language can be considered in fictional productions only if functional to the plot and characterisation and therefore contextualised.
- In intralingual MT, standardise the language and keep condensation to a minimum (ideally, verbatim when possible). The text may be edited to omit hesitation, repetition, and to clean up broken or inconsistent speech – unless these have a function relevant to plot and characterisation.
- Use correct grammar despite any incorrect grammar in the original source text, unless the use of incorrect grammar has a specific function.
- In the case of wordplay, word puns, or rhyme that do not have an MT direct equivalent, the original wordplay can be retained when the SL is EN. Find corresponding or similar wordplay or pun or rhyme to convey the effect when the SL is a foreign language.
- Do not translate song lyrics if these are in EN.
- "OK" is acceptable in MT subtitles.
- When using EN loanwords, an initial epenthetic vowel is sometimes necessary following the article in MT (e.g., l-ispeaker).
- EN loanwords that end in ijiet in the MT plural form adopt MT orthography even in their singular form (e.g., brejk, brejkijiet, kejk kejkijiet).
- When EN loanwords are conjugated in MT, adopt MT orthography (e.g., chat, tiċċettja, save, tissejvja).
- EN words that end in /s/ in the plural form are retained in EN. In general, it is preferable to avoid orthographic adaptation for EN loanwords that do not require any morphological inflection when used in MT in both the singular and plural form (e.g., use "claim" and "claims" rather than "klejm" and "klejms", "shower" rather than "xawer", "fridge" rather than "friġġ", "technician" rather than "teknixin", "canteen" rather than "kentin" or "kantin", "manager" rather than "meniġer" or "maniġer"). This is especially the case when more than one MT variant exists.
- Exceptions to the above based on widely used MT orthography are acceptable. However, though due to the functional and visual/graphic nature of subtitling (that differs from written text on paper or on web), and, in the absence of an official list to refer to, subtitlers need to avoid choices based on subjective linguistic style, and require strict criteria to ensure consistency across serial productions. A possible solution could be to create a project-specific MT consistency sheet or glossary to be shared and integrated by the entire translation team across all AV content related to the same localisation project. In order to develop and enhance subtitling habituation, consistent standards across productions and media would be preferable.

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