The Translator

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rtrn20

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To cite this article: Tiina Tuominen & Hannah Silvester (21 Jan 2025): Investigating academic-practitioner collaboration in Audiovisual Translation Studies, The Translator, DOI: 10.1080/13556509.2024.2445887

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2024.2445887

Published online: 21 Jan 2025.

THE TRANSLATOR
https://doi.org/10.1080/13556509.2024.2445887

Routledge
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RESEARCH ARTICLE

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Investigating academic-practitioner collaboration in Audiovisual Translation Studies

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ABSTRACT

In audiovisual translation (AVT), there has been an increase in academic research that engages with practitioners, but there is still room for more progress. In this article, we explore the findings of a study involving focus group discussions with two groups of participants; AVT academics and AVT practitioners. Through these discussions, we examined their experiences of collaborative research across the academia-practice divide, and their hopes for this kind of collaborative, engaged research in the future. The findings are examined here in relation to the concept of 'public Translation Studies', through which researchers are encouraged to actively engage with publics outside of academia in a dialogic fashion, in order to have an impact on the field. The findings suggest that while collaborative activities are underway between academics and practitioners, these are not always dialogic and mutually beneficial. On the other hand, among our small groups of participants, there was enthusiasm for more collaborative research, and plenty of ideas for how to make this work best. The article concludes with these important factors for successful collaboration, including the need for open communication and an equal status for those involved.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 25 July 2024
Accepted 15 December 2024

KEYWORDS
Audiovisual translation; collaboration; public Translation Studies; focus groups; engaged research

Introduction

In the field of Audiovisual Translation Studies (AVT), research has often been focused on various aspects of the profession, regularly examining the 'product, the workflows and the agents of translation' (Díaz-Cintas 2019, 216). Though more recent research has examined AVT in various industry contexts (Caseres 2023; Zajdel, Schrijver, and Jankowska 2024), and in academia, we often aim to prepare students for work in the industry, research projects in which academics and practitioners work alongside one another remain relatively rare, and miscommunications abound. In 2010, Kaisa Koskinen highlighted that as a discipline, Translation Studies could further engage with other areas of academia, and beyond. She called this sub-field 'Public Translation Studies' (PTS), and suggested this could be a way for academics to make a difference in the field. What collaborative

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research is already taking place between academics and practitioners in AVT, and does it align with PTS? Can the situation be improved?

Following the launch of the PTS initiative *SubComm* (see Silvester and Tuominen 2021),[1] we have sought ways in which to support the discipline in advancing research that brings together academics and practitioners, and that involves practitioners in research projects. Since SubComm has seen some interest from subtitling practitioners, but comparatively less from academics, there was evidently a need to explore existing practices and propose steps through which PTS could be enhanced in AVT. We thus embarked upon the present study, to speak with both academics and practitioners about their experiences of collaborating across the research/practice boundary. In this article, the findings from focus group sessions with practitioners and academics will be discussed, followed by an exploration of both barriers and positive experiences related to collaborative research. In the first instance, the concept of public Translation Studies and its relationship to AVT research will be introduced. Then, we will present our study design and discuss our findings, considering whether they indicate there is potential for public AVT Studies, and how the success of such initiatives might be ensured.

Public Translation Studies and audiovisual translation

In her 2010 article, Kaisa Koskinen draws on a presidential address given by Michael Burawoy to the American Sociological Association in 2004. In that address, Burawoy considers the field of Sociology, describing four sub-fields within it based on each of their respective combinations of audience and type of knowledge. Koskinen (2010) maps this onto Translation Studies, identifying the following four areas:

Professional (scientific) Translation Studies: instrumental knowledge for an academic audience
Critical Translation Studies: reflexive knowledge for an academic audience
Policy (or pragmatic) Translation Studies: instrumental knowledge for an extra-academic audience
Public Translation Studies: reflexive knowledge for an extra-academic audience

Koskinen (2010, 21) notes that the first two subfields, those for primarily academic audiences, are 'alive and well'. However, in the same paper (Koskinen 2010, 16), she considers whether Translation Studies is succeeding in sharing its findings and interests outside of the discipline or even beyond academia, to professionals:

> Is the discipline too narrowly focused? Does it have blind spots that need to be covered? What matters to Translation Studies as a discipline? Does it, or should it, care about the practitioners? Does it support and defend translator training? Do we reach out from our own academic niche? Are we willing and able to take social responsibility?

Of particular interest in this project is PTS for an extra-academic audience. Since Koskinen wrote this article, the discipline has seen a shift in this direction, and there have been a number of research projects that either take on social responsibility (e.g. Cronin 2017), seek to defend translator training (e.g. Massey, Piotrowska, and Marczak 2023), and/or

involve academics and practitioners working closely together, such as in the 2024 conference 'Ethics and Self-Care in Translation and Other Professions: What can we learn from each other?'[2] There has been work involving academics and practitioners collaborating in Translation Studies in general, and AVT specifically, but there is still progress to be made. In particular, further work should be done in terms of 'backtranslation' (Koskinen 2010, 17) regarding feeding the findings of academic research back to the public. For instance, a survey of legal interpreters recently indicated that professionals were often not aware of existing research on relevant topics, or they did not have access to it and therefore could not engage with it (Martínez-Gómez and Wallace 2024, 119). There are also other challenges that present themselves when developing collaborative research projects, such as reaching the right people, or ensuring they have the resources (time or financial) to participate.

Where PTS is concerned, Koskinen (2012, 5) suggests that this kind of research involves translation practitioners at grassroots level, and through it, the researcher engages with the activities of the community. Some possible approaches she mentions include workplace studies, action research, and direct engagement with the field (Koskinen 2012, 6). Indeed, given precarious working conditions (AVTE 2023) and the introduction of artificial intelligence and machine translation into the Translation and Interpreting industries, action research, which seeks to change 'practitioners' practices, their understandings of their practices, and the conditions in which they practice' (Kemmis 2009, 463) could certainly have its place, and even represent a means for academics to help make a difference in the professional field. In fact, Basil Hatim (2013, 201) has specifically proposed action research as an approach for Translation Studies to empower practitioners to engage in research and to improve the performance of translators, students and translator educators alike. He envisions action research to lead to meaningful outcomes 'by linking knowledge and expertise available "out there" with the practical experience which researchers bring to the task'. This kind of research can be seen as a dialogic and activist mode of engaging in conversation with communities outside of academia and of co-creating new knowledge or designing social interventions together with these communities. Koskinen (2010, 24) emphasises the fact that highlighting the above-mentioned four areas of the discipline can also lend visibility to 'those aspects of the academic division of labour that tend to be easily obscured or labelled as non-academic or extracurricular'. Public Audiovisual Translation Studies, then, might involve academics providing support for the profession, helping translators fight for better working conditions, or meet new challenges such as the introduction of new technology.

Research in which academics engage with communities outside of academia, and seek to view these research partners as co-creators of knowledge, or co-researchers, is also described as engaged research, or engaged scholarship. Van de Ven (2007, 289) notes that 'Research undertaken with practitioners implies a collaborative relationship among equals whose differences are complementary in reaching a goal [. . .] to understand a problem or issue that is too complex for any party to study alone'. In other words, everyone involved recognises and values the unique perspectives of other partners. This is just as important when it comes to selecting research topics and research questions; collaborators are equal partners regardless of academic credentials. Though this approach to research has many advantages, there are nonetheless questions of power that must be addressed, as well as systems in which all parties are working, that do not necessarily value this kind of work.

For instance, in many contexts, academics need to publish peer-reviewed papers in order to progress in their careers and receive funding for their research. At the same time, freelance translators do not always have the time or resources to participate in research activities. These are all topics we sought to examine in this study.

As stated above, there have been research topics and activities in which researchers and practitioners collaborate on audiovisual translation work. There are a good many 'practisearchers' in AVT; academics who also carry out professional translation activities, and translators who are undertaking research alongside their work. Some professional organisations such as Subtle in the UK have academic liaisons, and many organisations welcome both academics and practitioners to join, including ESIST (The European Association for Studies in Screen Translation), for instance. In fact, ESIST and Subtle have recently signed a memorandum of understanding indicating their commitment to working together towards shared goals (Albarino 2024). The major longstanding conferences in AVT, Languages and the Media, and Media for All, welcome people from all areas of the industry and academia, providing spaces in which academics and practitioners can come together and share common interests.

Where research projects specifically are concerned, though, there are fewer examples to draw upon, especially considering the above-mentioned principles of PTS, and the interactive, collaborative engagement of equal partners. Even projects which seek to do so, such as SubComm, may suffer from a power imbalance whereby not everyone involved feels they are on equal footing. As Jean M Bartunek (2007, 1328) points out, when practitioners engage in research-related activities, they enter an academic context, and academia thus sets the terms. Therefore, it is important to seek a more equal footing by building connections that extend beyond the immediate research context. There are some encouraging examples of work which does succeed in valuing academic and industry knowledge equally. For instance, Charlotte Bosseaux's practice-based *Ethical Translation Project* (see Bosseaux forthcoming), in which an AVT service provider, *Screen Media*, has been consulting throughout, involved a number of project partners collaboratively developing and translating a documentary about gender-based violence in order to investigate the ethical demands of translating such sensitive content. Bosseaux (2023) continues to seek feedback from audiovisual translators on the guidelines developed, in order to produce something of tangible value for the professional AVT community. Another example of what seems to have been a successful collaboration between academics and practitioners is The European Federation of Audiovisual Translators' (AVTE) survey on Audiovisual Translators' Working Conditions (AVTE 2023). This was a collaboration between AVTE and Dr Kristijan Nikoliç, allowing for the combination of academic research expertise and access to a large number of respondents. In addition, the *SubComm* project has sought to improve the dissemination of research to practitioners by publishing guest blog posts about research projects and findings that might be of interest to practitioners who often do not have time for, or access to, academic articles.

In line with Bartunek's (2007, 1328) suggestion, developing constructive relationships between academia and practitioners, and enabling PTS may be better served by broader community-building rather than narrowly defined and brief research collaborations. That has been the objective of *SubComm*, and this study aims to explore further how such communities could be designed to satisfy all parties and produce beneficial results. In Translation Studies, the concept of a community of practice has been previously used to

describe groupings that 'share a common interest, concern, or activity, interact with each other frequently as a result, and develop skills, competences, and knowledge through these interactions' (Cadwell, Federici, and O'Brien 2022, 2). This concept has been useful in demonstrating how individuals with a shared interest can come together to share knowledge. However, it may not fully account for the kind of dynamic and equitable production of new knowledge that would ideally take place between academics and practitioners in a PTS scenario. We are therefore adopting the concept of innovative knowledge community (Hakkarainen et al. 2004, 145) as an aspirational frame of reference for collaboration.

In the definition of Hakkarainen et al. (2004, 145), the fundamental objective of innovative knowledge communities is '[p]rogressive problem solving for supporting knowledge creation', whereas communities of practice would focus more on reducing problems and creating practices that support existing functions of the community. This creation of knowledge is 'systematic and deliberate', and it relies on the varied competences of all participants in a non-hierarchical way, rather than expecting senior members to pass on knowledge unidirectionally to others (ibid.). Furthermore, the community makes 'intentional efforts to ensure and facilitate the development of each participant's knowledge and competencies' (Hakkarainen et al. 2004, 146). An innovative knowledge community would adapt dynamically to evolving circumstances and set increasingly ambitious objectives as knowledge increases both within the group and around it. The ties between its members are strong, and they reach out to others purposefully to support the objectives of the community. An innovative knowledge community is a long-term undertaking, and it is '[d]eliberately designed to facilitate knowledge creation, innovations and the development of expertise' (Hakkarainen et al. 2004). These characteristics reflect the objectives of PTS and engaged research, and they foreground the importance of an equitable group dynamic where practitioners and academics are genuine partners in the creation of knowledge and in contributing their expertise. The model is therefore a useful template for the kinds of collaborative knowledge-building undertakings PTS envisions.

Methods

Bearing in mind the slow but steady progress that has been made in Translation Studies in terms of engaged research and PTS, this project set out to examine the current situation, and how it could be improved upon, in the case of AVT specifically. To do so, we needed to hear the views of academics and practitioners working in the field. The research questions were as follows:

(1) How do practitioners and academics feel about current and previous collaboration between the two parties?
(2) What are the barriers to effective communication and exchange between practitioners and academics?
(3) What steps can be taken to bring together both parties in an effective, reciprocal, ongoing dialogue?

A focus group discussion was conducted, first with representatives of practitioner associations, and then with academics. Participants were provided with written information

about the study, and signed a consent form prior to the discussions. Following these discussions, we presented our preliminary findings to the participants at a debriefing session. Focus groups can be time-consuming, and it can be challenging to find people willing to spend the required time participating in such a discussion, hence group sizes are often small (Saldanha and O'Brien 2014, 169). With such sample sizes, findings are also less likely to be representative of the whole population (Saldanha and O'Brien 2014). For this reason, the participants in the first focus group were five elected representatives of AVT practitioners, who were approached due to their role in European audiovisual translators' associations. It was considered that they had, therefore, been chosen to speak on behalf of practitioners more generally. Audiovisual translation associations were contacted via their presidents, and invited to participate based on their active participation in networking. Participation in networking was taken as a sign that they are a currently active association, and potentially interested in collaborative activities. Potential European participants were identified from the members' list of the European umbrella association, AVTE, and a broad geographical net was cast when seeking participants. Where it was not possible to identify the president of a given association, the association in general was contacted, either via email or through contact forms on association websites. Not all representatives or associations responded. We contacted participants spread across Europe, but we were unfortunately unable to make contact with representatives of associations based elsewhere. These participants, given their freelance status, were compensated €70 for their time.[3]

The participants in the second focus group were five self-identifying AVT researchers who responded to a call put out via academic mailing lists. Seven participants were selected at random from the regions represented among those who expressed an interest in joining the focus group. The selection was carried out by inputting the volunteers' details into an excel spreadsheet sorted by continent, and using a random number generator to firstly select one participant from each continent, with the exception of South America, from which we received interest from only one volunteer and thus selected that person to the focus group. Secondly, we filled the rest of the places by selecting two more candidates from a list of all remaining volunteers with the random number generator. Two of the selected participants were unable to join the focus group, but it was not possible to replace them within the timeframe. In the end, the focus group consisted of participants based in South America, North America, Europe and Asia.

Following the initial two focus group conversations, which took place on Teams and were recorded and then transcribed, we organised the debriefing session, also on Teams. Here, preliminary findings were shared and participants were invited to stay on for an optional recorded conversation during which we asked for their views on our findings and interpretations, and our proposal for the future. It should of course be acknowledged that focus groups are a means of gathering information about what participants *say* they think about a given topic, but that the focus group setting itself could lead to biases or even changes of opinion on the part of participants (Saldanha and O'Brien 2014, 170). Furthermore, the nature of participant selection here, and the information provided about the study in advance, means that those participating had a clear interest in collaboration between academics and practitioners, and this would have an impact on the topics discussed and the views expressed.

The chosen methods align with the principles of PTS, in that this was an iterative study design in which we kept returning to participants to ask for their views during the process and will continue to do so as the study progresses. The study design evolved during the research process; the decision to hold an additional discussion at the debriefing session was a later addition requiring extra consent forms. However, in light of the findings, we would have made further changes to this study design based on the outcomes of the data analysis. We might have considered, for instance, including a practitioner consultant in the planning and design of the study, as such expertise could have led to a study design that explored themes of interest to practitioners as well as academics. It might also have been useful to include a separate focus group of practisearchers to acknowledge the fluid roles of both practitioners and academics in our field. The study received ethical approval from the Social Research Ethics Committee (SREC) at University College Cork.[4]

The transcripts were coded using NVivo to allow for thematic analysis. Some areas of interest were identified prior to the analysis, but were continually reviewed throughout (Braun and Clarke 2006, 82). Themes for coding were developed through an inductive approach, meaning they came from the data collected, rather than being imposed upon the data (83). The themes identified from the data are discussed here with specific reference to PTS, and under four broad categories: experiences of collaborations (successes, changes over time, attitudes, effects of context), barriers (access, communication, financial issues, other barriers), hopeful signs, and hopes and recommendations for the future. We will explore the findings in relation to the concept of innovative knowledge communities (Hakkarainen et al. 2004) to see how the realities in the AVT context might accommodate the development of such communities.

Academics' and practitioners' reflections on collaboration

The next section will examine participants' previous experiences with collaborations between academics and practitioners. It will be followed by a discussion of the disconnects and barriers they expressed as standing in the way of collaboration, and hopeful signs of potentially productive collaborations. Finally, we will consider some ideas for future initiatives.

Existing collaborations and views on collaborative research

There were some participants in both focus groups who had previous experiences of collaborations between academia and practice. However, it was notable that for both groups, the most prominent examples of collaboration did not concern individual practitioners working on research with academic partners, which would be the most logical arrangement for PTS. Instead, for practitioners, the most frequently mentioned aspect of collaboration was in an educational context, most typically practitioners visiting universities to talk about their work. Rather than PTS, this seems more one-sided; it comes from the industry, and is about practitioners offering something to academia, instead of a reciprocal dialogic collaboration. This activity does not resemble an innovative knowledge community, as it focuses on delivering existing information rather than building new knowledge together. On the academic side, the attention focused largely on collaborations between academics and industry partners, such as media localisation

companies or content producers, which may be more akin to policy/pragmatic Translation Studies (Koskinen 2010, 22). While both of these approaches are relevant for the present discussion, they may demonstrate a fundamental challenge for initiatives foregrounding PTS: practitioners contribute their experiences and expertise to teaching but do not receive noticeable reciprocity or involvement in the field from academia, and academics work with the industry but may not engage with practitioners at a grassroots level, and therefore potentially miss out on opportunities for dialogue with the professional community (Koskinen 2012, 2). Thus, the descriptions of existing collaborations highlight a potential disconnect that may hinder the emergence of innovative knowledge communities. Furthermore, the academics' comments may not fully reflect their views on working with individual practitioners, and further research in that area would be beneficial.

Comments in both focus groups indicate that collaborations have often been based on personal relationships and rapport. For academics, initiating meaningful collaborations with the industry may require having known someone for a long time, so that they are willing to support research as a favour. As one participant describes it, 'it has nearly always come down to me begging them for a personal favour [. . .] on the basis of trust, a relationship of trust, I can only approach people I've been working with [. . .] for donkey's years'. Similarly, personal relationships and long-term contact were mentioned in the practitioners' group. The practitioners described positive experiences with some individuals, while others were more difficult to approach or find common ground with, and they discussed needing to invest time and effort in building personal rapport. For example, one participant mentioned working to persuade an academic institution to include the practitioners' perspective in teaching: 'I've been, you know, pushy [. . .], trying to get all kinds of academics to, [. . .] it was a very slow start trying to persuade [an academic] to have somebody talk to the students'. Long-term relationship building may indeed be a beneficial element for a well-functioning innovative knowledge community. However, these relationships come across as somewhat arbitrary, whereas innovative knowledge communities would benefit from deliberate planning. As such, existing long-term relationships in the AVT field may be conducive to working towards innovative knowledge communities, but additional, systematic efforts would be needed.

The descriptions of existing collaborations reflected a variety of attitudes towards research and collaboration. Some practitioners expressed negative feelings due to unsuccessful interactions with academics, with one participant even mentioning becoming 'persona non grata' among some academics due to advocating for practitioners' interests. However, there was broad interest in research and motivation towards collaboration. As can be expected, practitioners expressed interest in research results that have practical applications and take their experiences into account. Some participants expressed scepticism towards some kinds of research, largely research that might fall into the professional and, in particular, critical Translation Studies quadrants in Koskinen's (2010) categorisation. For example, research that practitioners feel confirms what they already know based on their experience is not particularly convincing. One practitioner commented: '[. . .] you're just like we've been there. We already know this. [. . .] It feels like it's studying for studying's sake'. These comments reflect a familiar mismatch between practitioners' desire for prescriptive research that would advise them on how they should work, and academics' preference for descriptive research that observes practices rather than affects them. This contrast is on display, for example, in the dialogue between Andrew

Chesterman and Emma Wagner, in which Wagner (Chesterman and Wagner 2002, 4) states that most translators 'would be happy to have some concrete advice and guidelines, even doctrines', while Chesterman (2) calls the prescriptive approach old-fashioned and unscientific and recommends that researchers 'should seek to be descriptive, to describe, explain and understand what translators actually do, not stipulate what they ought to do'. The focus groups thus provided additional evidence of this long-standing tension.

Some suspicion was also expressed over 'theoretical' research that explores matters such as machine translation in isolation, without considering the working context of practitioners. One practitioner suggested that 'to most academics, working condition [sic] never matters', while another comment maintained that 'some academics have proven to be a little bit in bed with corporations'. These two comments indicate negative impressions of a 'servile' kind of policy/pragmatic TS that aligns with the interests of the industry (Koskinen 2010, 22). It was even suggested that 'the knowledge rests squarely with the practitioners in our field'. Such statements reflect misgivings over whether academics and practitioners have shared interests, and they leave an opening for PTS, which would, by definition, overcome these criticisms by being closely involved with practitioners and their experiences. However, in order for a PTS-aligned innovative knowledge community to emerge, the objectives of practitioners and academics would need to be coordinated so that a shared understanding of the purpose of research and collaboration could be formed.

In the academics' group, attitudes towards collaboration were largely positive, if somewhat pessimistic about opportunities to collaborate. Some of the academics' comments regarding collaborating with industry partners suggested that those partners may not always understand the nature of audiovisual translation or translation research and may therefore be dismissive of potential research projects. One academic described attitudes among people who create audiovisual content in the following way: 'sometimes they require subtitling, and they consider it as just a byproduct [. . .] they focus too much on spending their time on producing that [. . .] and after that was going on then it's not their business anymore'. This lack of knowledge may have repercussions on research, and academics may need to raise awareness among industry partners of the purpose and significance of Translation Studies research. In one example, a focus group participant described an experience with filmmakers who 'don't see the point, but after I was able to collect some data and come back to them and say this is the point, then they've realised'. As this example demonstrates, building research relationships, and building innovative knowledge communities, can require considerable work even before initiating an individual project. Ensuring that all parties are speaking the same language and able to establish shared goals can set things off to a positive start.

Disconnects and barriers

As the above section showed, the discussions about previous experiences brought forward potential barriers and disconnects which may hinder collaboration. Some barriers appear to be caused by lack of personal relationships and the fact that research collaborations may be secondary to educational initiatives or involve the industry more than individual practitioners. Furthermore, it may be difficult to gain access to relevant partners

both on the academics' and practitioners' side, given the importance of long-term relationships. In other words, a key barrier to collaboration is a sense of personal and practical disconnection, which can be difficult and time-consuming to bridge. Another impediment arises from negative attitudes where practitioners or industry representatives may feel sceptical about research, while academics may come across as reluctant to work with practitioners, or may not be articulating the practical value of their research in the right way.

Participants also named some practical factors as potential causes for difficulties in collaborative research. Two crucial ones are time and money. It may be challenging to involve freelancers in research projects if they are not being paid, as participation in research would take time away from paid work. Therefore, even individuals who are enthusiastic about collaborating may face practical barriers that limit research activities, because 'time is money', as one academic pointed out. Time may be a challenge in multiple ways. Both practitioners and academics may be pressed for time, and may assume the other side to be busy as well. In addition, practitioners and academics may have different constraints on their time and different expectations in terms of timelines. For academics, schedules are affected by the pacing of the academic year or funding and publication timelines, while practitioners may have unpredictable and sporadic work schedules; it is possible that their timelines or expectations may not match. Furthermore, as we saw above, building relationships may take time, which means that considerable amounts of time may pass without tangible outputs, and that may be concerning for both sides. Indeed, some of the practitioners' comments suggested a sense of frustration at how slowly research yields results.

Collaborations may also be hindered by mismatches in objectives. In addition to appreciating findings that are directly applicable to their work, or, as one participant said, 'practical, useful and usable results', practitioners look for research that can support their arguments regarding their working conditions and practices, such as critical views on machine translation – in other words, academic activism in the spirit of PTS. As was seen in the previous section, they may question the purpose of otherwise academically sound research if it does not meet their objectives and falls more under professional or critical Translation Studies. Research that appears too closely aligned with the interests of technology developers or large corporations can appear suspicious and be deemed as biased.

Academics, on the other hand, may have a broader range of objectives for wanting to collaborate with practitioners or the industry. One participant expressed a strong motivation to associate research with practice in almost any situation: 'I truly believe that most of the research [. . .], even if at a theoretical level, needs to be done in collaboration with the industry to ensure its impact, but also applicability'. Thus, academics may look for collaborations even for studies that may not immediately interest practitioners, and the challenge lies with academics to motivate participation. For example, one participant in the practitioners' group mentioned that practitioners are reluctant to spend their time responding to surveys, unless the survey is very obviously useful to them. This comment demonstrates the necessity of making participation convenient to practitioners, and of making the case for how they benefit from participating in research.

Perhaps the most overarching challenge that has been observed in the data set is communication. Communication issues came across in both focus groups, and it is

evident that carefully considered, reciprocal, sustained communication is crucial in enabling collaboration. A participant in the practitioner focus group also remarked on the importance of (and shortcomings in) communicating outcomes to practitioners after the project is concluded, reflecting Koskinen's (2010, 217) recommendations concerning backtranslation of research findings to the public. Many disconnects are, fundamentally, issues of communication, and of potentially misinterpreting each other. In the academics' focus group, one participant confessed that 'I really find that it's difficult to maintain a conversation when we really speak different languages'. The participant referred primarily to partners in the film industry who have limited understanding of AVT, but the comment is emblematic of the challenge of finding a shared language between partners coming from different backgrounds. Occasionally, communication troubles can cause offence and break down collaboration altogether. For example, one practitioner mentioned reaching out to academia and 'their response was that we should keep to our lanes because we are just practitioners and we don't know anything about academia'. The practitioner's description of the interaction indicates such deep frustration that a breakdown of communication is inevitable, and the comments suggest it may even have consequences for other interactions.

It is important to keep in mind that in addition to the small number of participants, both focus groups revealed numerous local and individual differences in practices and experiences. Therefore, participants' comments are not generalisable, and some impediments may not be applicable everywhere. Indeed, many described different experiences depending on location and context. However, the comments bring to the fore potential problems that may stand in the way of productive collaborations. They demonstrate that disconnects may develop easily, and transparent communication is always needed. Systematic planning, equitable participation and an underlying assumption that each participant has valuable contributions to make to the construction of new knowledge, as well as the impetus to keep educating all group members on the topic at hand, could all alleviate the existing problems by improving the flow of information and developing innovative knowledge communities.

Hopeful signs

One optimistic aspect of both discussions was speculation over generational differences in attitudes. Practitioners repeatedly suggested that earlier career academics tend to be more positively predisposed towards working with practitioners than some more experienced academics. This was taken as a positive sign for the future. There were also suggestions that attitudes in general appeared to be shifting towards more openness between academia and practice. In the academics' group, a similar sense of shift in attitudes was expressed in terms of the industry's openness to research partnerships. One academic made the following comment: '10 years ago companies were a lot more suspicious of what our intentions could be, but also sometimes also very much with that idea that we were in our ivory towers[. . .], but also seeing that our perspective would be [. . .] to go and check and judge. [. . .]I do find a very different attitude these days'. Although this comment relates to industry rather than individual practitioners, it may reflect a broader sense of barriers between academia and practice being reduced.

Another positive sign arose from multiple examples of successful collaborations and good experiences shared by both academics and practitioners. As an example, the practitioners mentioned the recent European survey on audiovisual translators' working conditions, which was conducted in collaboration between academics and AVTE (2023). They also mentioned having developed positive relationships with individual academics and working together, for example, on visiting universities to talk to students. In the academics' group, successes arose from cultivating personal relationships and educating industry representatives about the potential of translation research, as discussed above. In addition, one participant mentioned a study conducted in collaboration with both practitioners and industry representatives, where approaching them both enabled an ambitious project, because practitioners had the support of their company for participation. These positive comments show that personal relationships, open communication and consideration for the interests of all parties can facilitate good experiences, and some seeds of innovative knowledge communities and PTS are perhaps being sown. Participants' willingness to share these stories also indicates their openness to engaging in PTS.

Ideas for the future

When asked for suggestions for future projects, both groups were quite animated, providing numerous ideas for collaborations. The ideas from the practitioners' group included replicating or broadening past projects, such as AVTE's (2023) survey on working conditions, and the creation of further national AVT guidelines where this has not already been done. In addition, practitioners expressed interest in reception studies and studies investigating working conditions from various perspectives, such as connections between working conditions and mental health or translation quality. Furthermore, they discussed the benefits of academics observing their entire translation process and basing research on that detailed, situated knowledge. The academics' group shared the practitioners' interest in audience reception, as well as the hope of being able to explore the translation process as a whole. They also wanted to explore the field of audiovisual translation and accessibility more broadly instead of focusing on a single mode such as subtitling. Both practitioners and academics discussed the importance of sound and ambitious methodology and wide-ranging studies that would include, for example, multiple languages or large numbers of audience members representing a variety of backgrounds. Practitioners in particular criticised some previous studies with small sample sizes or students as test participants and hoped for more representative and generalisable study designs. Furthermore, the debriefing conversation emphasised the need to plan research projects carefully with all stakeholders and negotiate their terms transparently such as would be expected in an innovative knowledge community. These comments echo the call by Martínez-Gómez and Wallace (2024, 120) for collaborative projects where 'practitioners contribute insights based on their professional experiences and researchers contribute their epistemological and methodological expertise'. The discussions also provided suggestions for aspects to consider when planning a collaborative project. The conversations reflected support for the idea of involving practitioners as co-researchers rather than research subjects. The practitioners also suggested that research projects could benefit

from involving a practitioner as a consultant to ensure a realistic view of the industry and to safeguard practitioners' interests.

It was evident from the discussions that, regardless of shared interests and motivation for collaboration, practitioners and academics view research from different perspectives, and their objectives and practical challenges are not always aligned. Therefore, being aware of one's own viewpoint and potential biases is crucial. Academics may not know all the practical challenges of freelance work or current industry practices, and may end up aligning themselves more with the views of the industry than with freelancers, which may cause tension. On the other hand, practitioners may not be fully aware of the constraints of the academic context, which could affect their expectations for research. One example of such misalignment of perspectives was seen in the debriefing discussion, where a practitioner spoke strongly in favour of practical experience as a foundation for academic research. The comment was in response to a remark about the requirements the academic context puts on curriculum design, and the challenges of training students both for practice and for an academic career. In this case, there was no substantive disagreement between the individuals engaged in the exchange, but they were talking about different things, and therefore failed to reach common conversational ground, as they spoke from diverging personal experience. This demonstrates some potential pitfalls of miscommunication and misunderstanding. Transparent communication is needed, as well as a level of trust that allows both sides to accept the other's concerns and learn about the differences in perspectives. This, again, highlights the ideals of innovative knowledge communities, where the 'collective responsibility for cognitive growth' (Hakkarainen et al. 2004, 146) could be seen as a means of educating each other and creating a cohesive understanding of the topic being addressed. Building trust and understanding is, of course, a long-term endeavour, which may explain why many successful projects are based on existing relationships and shared histories, and why innovative knowledge communities take time to develop.

Finally, another crucial aspect in communication is consistency and ensuring that good communication practices are sustained throughout an individual project and even after it, to close the loop and communicate outcomes and possible future developments to each other. As one member of the practitioners' group put it:

> A successful collaboration is just fluent communication where, whenever is needed. Dissemination of the research is never done to the practitioners [. . .] this is not the professors' or the researchers' fault, this is how the system is designed. [. . .]. So we need to try and build a way in which dissemination is done also towards the people who were interested in most, so that we can either collaborate or even react when a reaction is needed so that there is like a two-way communication.

A natural way to facilitate this type of communication and backtranslation would be to maintain a community where different stakeholders have an existing connection to each other and can support effective dissemination to both academia and practitioners.

Conclusion

The main points presented above were communicated to focus group members in the debriefing session, and they confirmed that our interpretations of the discussions

matched their views. In the debriefing session, the participants deepened some of the ideas presented in the focus group discussions and presented further research ideas. This iterative approach proved to be a good way of involving the participants more deeply in the research and making the most of the focus group data.

The analysis revealed that communication challenges can represent a significant barrier to collaborative research between academics and practitioners, in addition to the somewhat unsurprising influence of factors such as time and money. The discussion of existing collaborative activities revealed a gap in terms of research taking place between academics and individual practitioners, in particular the kind of grassroots, academic activism advocated for by Koskinen. Despite extensive discussions on barriers and frustrations, many hopeful signs of potential for collaboration and enthusiasm towards PTS-style initiatives also emerged from the focus groups. Both practitioners and academics expressed motivation towards collaboration and willingness to overcome the barriers they have perceived.

Many of the barriers pointed out in the discussions suggest that the focus group participants have not experienced the kind of systematic collaboration that characterises innovative knowledge communities, although there were some signs of progress towards that kind of community-building, such as cultivation of long-term relationships and recognition of each other's expertise. Systematic efforts could therefore be made to further adopt characteristics of innovative knowledge communities in any plans for collaborative PTS initiatives. For example, more concerted steps could be taken towards relevant education of and communication between all participants, and more attention could be paid to setting ambitious objectives that encourage the development of new knowledge to solve mutually identified challenges, instead of merely sharing existing information.

The focus groups consisted of pre-selected groups of individuals who were willing to discuss the topic of collaborative research, so they may have been predisposed towards positive feelings about collaborations. In addition, the discussion will undoubtedly have been influenced by the fact that we were able to contact those practitioner representatives who were more engaged in networking, and mainly from European associations, in contrast to the academics' group, which included participants from multiple continents and with more varied backgrounds. The nature of this kind of work means that the practitioner representatives willing to commit to participation were those with whom the researchers already had some reputation and therefore many of them already knew us to some degree. Focus group participants are in a vulnerable position, and this, along with the fact that the participants already had a relationship with the researchers, could have limited the views they were willing to share during the discussion. A wider selection of both academics and practitioners might express different views, and this study should be complemented with a larger-scale survey to gauge the views of broader populations of academics, practitioners and practisearchers. The participant selection process and the focus group discussions revealed significant overlaps between academics and researchers, and there is no clear-cut division into two populations, as many people have experience of both contexts. Future research could therefore take participants' various personal circumstances into account even more effectively. Further research on this topic could also involve case studies of research projects involving academic-practitioner collaboration, with in-depth interviews of participants in the projects.

The focus group discussions revealed that it is not easy to conduct public Audiovisual Translation Studies, or to foster innovative knowledge communities, but it is possible and can be rewarding. They provided a rationale for genuine engaged research, and guidance on how to do it. Some of the views expressed in relation to practitioners supporting AVT training also revealed a broader purpose for collaborative initiatives, such as the following comment from the academic focus group: 'How can I cater to what the industry needs and how can I prepare these students to not just do what they are told, but also be able to get in and maybe change things from the inside?' This demonstrated that although we are advocating for public Translation Studies, the value in academic-practitioner collaboration lies not only in research giving something to practice, and practice giving something to research, but also in all parties being better informed, and supporting one another as we ensure the future sustainability of the profession, the discipline, and the livelihoods of those we are training to continue this valuable work.

Notes

1. www.subcomm.co.uk.
2. https://conferences.ncl.ac.uk/ethicsandselfcareintranslation/.
3. We would like to thank the Centre for Advanced Studies in Languages, Literatures and Cultures at University College Cork for funding this part of the project.
4. Log no. 2023–049.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank all of the practitioners, academics, and practisearchers who have contributed their time and expertise to this project so far. We would also like to thank the SubComm community for helping us to see the value in this work, and motivating us to keep going.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the Centre for AdvancedStudies in Languages, Literatures and Cultures (CASiLaC) atUniversity College Cork.

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