TIINA TUOMINEN

The Art of Accidental Reading and Incidental Listening

An empirical study on the viewing of subtitled films

ACADEMIC DISSERTATION
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Tiivistelmä


Aineiston analyysi osoitti, että tekstityksellä on jonkinlainen rooli kaikkien informanttien katseluprosessissa, vaikka eri ihmiset hyödyntävätkin tekstitystä eri tavoin. Informantit kuvasivat keskusteluissa neljää eri vastaanottostrategiaa: seurataan vain lähtötekstiä, seurataan vain tekstitystä, seurataan ensisijaisesti lähtötekstiä ja tekstitystä sen tukena tai seurataan ensisijaisesti tekstitystä ja lähtötekstiä sen tukena. Keskustelut osoittivat kuitenkin, ettei kukaan informanteista
ollut pystynyt seuraamaan yksinomaan puhetta tai tekstitystä, vaan esimerkiksi ne, jotka sanoivat seuraavansa vain englanninkielistä puhetta, siteerasivatkin keskustelussa tekstitystä. Tosiäisaassa vastaanottostrategia vaikuttaa siis aina olevan yhdistelmä sekä tekstityksen että puheen seuraamista, mutta on yksilöllistä, kumpi näistä on ensisijaisessa roolissa. Toissijaisessa roolissa olevaa tekstiä käytetään tukena esimerkiksi silloin, jos ensisijainen teksti on tullut niin nopeasti, ettei sitä ole pystytty seuraamaan hyvin, tai jos ensisijainen informaatio on ollut vaikeaselkoista esimerkiksi vieraan sanaston tai vaikeataajuksen kielen vuoksi.


Ongelmallisimpina tekstitysten piirteinä fokusryhmäkeskusteluissa tulivat esiin sellaiset elementit, jotka syystä tai toisesta keskeyttävät normaalinpäätöksen katselua- ja lukuprosessin ja vetävät katsojan huomiota liikaa tekstityksen. Tällaisia ovat esimerkiksi kömpelöt tai epäidiomaattiset virkerakenteet tai vieraat sanat. Tällöin kyse ei välttämättä ole virheestä vaan vain kielellisestä elementistä, joka vaatii katsojaalta tavallista enemmän huomiota. Informantit kuvasivat tekstitysten lukemista ”automaattiseksi”, ikään kuin vahingossa tapahtuvalksi prosessiksi, jossa tekstiä ei lueta syventyn vaan pintapuolisesti silmällen. Tällaisessa prosessissa häiriötekijäksi voi muodostua mikä tahansa asia, joka vaatii niin paljon huomiota, että normaalit, silmäilevät lakeminen keskeyty. Voitaisiin siis sanoa, että tekstityksen laatu on katsojille tärkeää, mutta yksittäisiä käännyövirheitä
ollaisempaa on tekstityksen sujuvuus, konventioiden mukaisuus ja audiovisuaaliseen kokonaisuuteen sopivuus.

Tutkimus osoitti myös, että kvalitatiivinen, etnografisesti suuntautunut fokusryhmätutkimus on toimiva menetelmä, kun halutaan tarkastella tekstitetyjen ohjelmien vastaanottoa ja erityisesti luoda kokonaiskuva vastaanottoprosessista. Fokusryhmäkeskustelut olivat aktiivisia ja monipuolisia, ja ne tuottivat runsaasti tietoa informanttien suhteesta tekstityksiin. Tällainen menetelmä ei välttämättä kerro tekstitysten yksityiskohtien synnyttämistä reaktioista tai yksittäisistä tulkinnoina, mutta se on hyvä tapa selvittää katsojien vastaanottotuloksista ja suhtautumista tekstityksiin sekä tarkastella tekstitysten toimivuutta informaation välittämisen keinona. Fokusryhmätutkimuksen avulla pystytään myös löytämään vastaanottoprosesseista sellaisia elementtejä, joita kannattaa tutkia tarkemmin. Esimerkiksi tämä tutkimus toi esiin lukemisprosessin pintapuolisuuden, jota varmasti kannattaisi tutkia lisää myös toisenlaisin menetelmin.

Avainsanat: audiovisuaalinen kääntäminen, tekstitys, vastaanottotutkimus, yleisöetnografia, fokusryhmätutkimus
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Tiina Tuominen
1. Introduction

Texts are created to be read, and they are translated to be read by a new audience in a different language and cultural context. Without their audience, texts have little significance. That is the fundamental reason why a systematic effort to learn more about audience reception is important. If we want to produce translations that function well in their intended context, we need to know more about these contexts, about how actual people make use of translations. We must also investigate how all this can be studied, because charting people’s behaviour and trying to make sense of it always presents a great challenge.

The above constitute the fundamental impetus for this study. Its focus will be the reception of subtitled films. This study will look into how actual viewers use subtitles in a realistic viewing context and how they discuss this reception experience. In addition, this study will investigate how audiences can be studied empirically, and what methodological challenges are present in a reception study.

Any study examining human behaviour is bound to present challenges, because human beings are unpredictable, unreliable and inconsistent. As Pertti Alasuutari (2004: 2) points out, “incompatible contradictions and anomalies belong to human reality.” In addition, reception itself is tied to individual points of view as well as the particular reception situation, and no two readings are ever the same. Maria Tymoczko (2007: 285) has made this point fittingly:

It goes without saying that authors and translators cannot ever fully anticipate or control readers’ responses, and thus it follows that authors and translators cannot circumscribe the meaning of their own textual production. Nor does a text mean the same thing to author and translator or to any two readers. A text elicits different responses depending on the individual reader’s (or hearer’s) experience, situated knowledge, and affective life, and the meaning of the text is configured differently as a result.

Therefore, reception research must be based on a methodology which will accommodate and utilise this variability and unpredictability. In this study, I will apply qualitative, ethnographically-oriented methods, the purpose of which is to
uncover the richness of human experience. Such a study of reception will not provide final, exhaustive answers to what reception is. Rather, it can provide material for further, refined questions, and ideas for what aspects of reception could be significant from the point of view of translation. This material and this methodological framework will be one contribution to an area of inquiry where further research has been repeatedly called for.¹ My intention is to fill a methodological gap that exists within translation studies and to see what kind of light the methodological design of this study can shed on the process of reception.

The present study has its roots in a pilot study on the reception of translated literary texts which I conducted for my master’s thesis (Tuominen, 2002). That study provided information on the practicalities of reception research and assisted in finding and formulating the most useful kinds of questions to pose to informants. As well, it revealed information on potential audience attitudes to serve as a beginning point for this research. As such, it has been an important basis from which this study has evolved.

1.1 Contexts, Processes and Actual Audiences

This study concentrates on the reception of subtitled films. That wording – subtitled films rather than film subtitles – is chosen deliberately because this study reflects on a realistic viewing situation, translation in its actual context, as part of a foreign-language film being viewed in the cinema. What is under examination is the reception of the entire audiovisual product; subtitles are only one part of this experience. The experiences in an authentic viewing situation cannot be fathomed through an analysis of subtitles on their own, or by analysing audience reactions to just the verbal, translated text. As Henrik Gottlieb (1994: 106) states:

Severed from the audiovisual context, neither subtitles nor dialog will render the full meaning of the film. So in judging the quality of subtitles, one must examine the degree to which the subtitled version as a whole manages to convey the semantic gestalt of the original.

This statement applies, of course, as much to audience perceptions as to expert evaluation of quality. Only by considering the subtitled programme as a whole and in its context can one attempt to construct a reliable picture of reception.

The core of this study, then, lies in investigating the processes and contexts of reception. More specifically, these processes are constructed upon viewers’ personal reception strategies and the attitudes which guide their viewing behaviour. The contexts, on the other hand, consist of both the immediate social situation of viewing a subtitled film and of the wider cultural context of subtitle reading in general. Although several interesting studies have reported on the reception of translations and of audiovisual translations in particular in recent years, adequate emphasis has not yet been placed on the kind of holistic perspective which is adopted in this study. Much reception research within translation studies has concentrated on studying individual, rather decontextualised aspects of translations, without an overall look at the reception process. The current study will attempt to address this shortcoming by investigating reception from a more qualitative, macro-level perspective. This will be accomplished by investigating a viewing situation that is as close to a realistic one as possible, and by giving voice to actual audience members and allowing them, in their own words, to describe their experiences watching a subtitled film and the reception strategies they use in attempting to make sense of it. Furthermore, this viewing situation will be put in context by looking at the factors surrounding the viewing experience, analysing the social dimensions of reception, and comparing the empirical reception data gained from this reception context to other ways of investigating reception. The central research questions of this study then are:

- What kinds of attitudes do viewers evince towards subtitles and subtitled programmes?
- How are interpretations constructed in a social context? How do viewers discuss subtitles?
- What, in essence, occurs during the reception process of subtitled films, and how significant is the role of subtitles in it?
- What kinds of methodological approaches have been applied in translation-related reception research, and what kind of information have these approaches uncovered?
• In what manner can the entire reception experience of subtitled films be studied?

The comprehensive, contextualised approach and the audiovisual material of the study are also apparent in the terminology employed. Most importantly, the word ‘text’ is not used to signify verbal material only, but an entire meaning-carrying set of signs, which can include both verbal and visual as well as auditive material.2 Thus, what viewers watch in the cinema is, in the terminology used in this study, a multimodal or audiovisual text, where “nonverbal items [are considered] as part of a text rather than part of its context” (Zabalbeascoa, 2008: 37). In the case of a subtitled film, the subtitles become a part of this text. When it is necessary to discuss verbal material in particular, I will use the term ‘verbal text’ to distinguish it from the entire multimodal text.

In addition, the term ‘reception strategy’ perhaps requires a more explicit definition. Ien Ang (1996b: 58) uses the word tactical in relation to how audiences have come to consume television programming. Television viewers are faced with a multitude of choices due to the increase in programming and technical advances which make it easier to be selective in what they view and how they do this. These viewing choices can be called tactical. In a similar manner, the reception of subtitled programmes could be seen as tactical, because it involves making decisions on how to view the programme and incorporate subtitles into the viewing experience. Thus, what I call reception strategies are the conscious and semi-conscious, learned and automatically occurring tactical approaches which viewers adopt when watching a subtitled film. These strategies involve choosing how to focus attention and prioritize information. This can mean, for example, the choice between reading or not reading subtitles. It can also mean something more subtle and more difficult to define in concrete terms, such as the different ways in which viewers choose to deal with material they do not understand, and how receptive to or suspicious they are of a translator’s solutions. An investigation into such strategies and their role as the guiding force behind the reception process is at the heart of this study.

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2Cf. Oittinen (2007: 45–49) for discussion on the definition of text.
1.2 Research Objectives and Hypothetical Considerations

One significant objective of this study is to test empirical research methodology in a translation studies context by conducting a qualitative, ethnographically-oriented study, relying on viewers’ subjective comments and interaction. The outcomes of the analysis can be compared and contrasted with more quantitative studies on comparable topics, in order to see what relation the findings have, and how well these methodologies could complement each other. The empirical research tradition of media and cultural studies serves as methodological background for this study. Even though this study is not fully ethnographic in its approach, it has been strongly influenced by the audience ethnographic style of participant research. Many prominent audience studies within media studies have, in fact, looked at the reception of translated material. These studies constitute an interesting comparison point to a translation-oriented study, because, despite the fact that their material heavily relies on translation, few of them discuss translation and the role it plays in the reception process. Within translation studies, on the other hand, this style of qualitative audience research has been very rare, if not non-existent. Because this approach to research is novel in translation studies, this study attempts to elucidate what place it could occupy in translation studies, and what kind of information could be uncovered by adopting this approach.

The particular method of data gathering used in this study is focus group research: three groups of viewers first watched a subtitled film and immediately afterwards discussed their viewing experience. I acted as moderator in the discussions, which were audio-taped and transcribed. Thus, the social aspect of viewers discussing their experiences and opinions in a group is an important dimension of the study, and the role of the social context in the reception experience will be investigated in the course of the analysis.

The ethnographic research style does not lend itself easily to the application of specific hypotheses. Rather, this approach to research reveals rich material with unanticipated perspectives, and through these perspectives the researcher can arrive at specific premises that can, in turn, be explored through further research. This kind of research proceeds by allowing informants to talk freely and then performing deep, contextualised analysis, which means that the analysis will not produce
simplistic, straightforward, quantifiable results. Instead, its purpose is to look at human activity in all its complexity and allow for the variety of behaviours and responses to come across in the analysis, with the expectation that the data will contain inspiring surprises, due to the natural nebulousness of authentic human communication. Even in this kind of study, however, articulating a set of preliminary research propositions can be helpful for the discussion of its outcomes. For the current study, these propositions fall into two categories. First of all, as one purpose of the study is to test the research methodology, some propositions are related to this methodological investigation. Second, there are some tentative propositions related to what kind of information the study itself might produce.

The central methodological premise of the study is a simple one: that methodology adapted from the ethnographic tradition of cultural studies can provide valuable information on the reception processes of translated audiovisual material. A related proposition is the assumption that viewers are able to talk substantively about subtitles and are willing to express their opinions. This idea is based on the casual observation that people often make comments about subtitles, whether in Internet discussion forums, classroom situations, letters to the editor or informal chats with friends. Thus, the expectation is that the focus groups will produce rich material for analysis. In addition, I surmise that the focus group as a social situation will foster a stimulating dimension for analysis. As each of the three focus groups was slightly different from the other two, I anticipate that each group’s discussion will have its own unique peculiarities, partly due to the different background of each group’s members, but partly due to the fact that each social situation is different. On the other hand, I also expect to observe some similarities between these three groups, because they all shared a common task and common material, and the differences in their backgrounds were not overwhelming. In addition, my earlier reception study (Tuominen, 2002) suggests that some similarities in interpretations arise fairly easily, and it is therefore realistic to expect such similarities in this study.

In the second group of research propositions, the most general one is that subtitles do, in fact, play a role in the reception process – despite viewers’ occasional claims to the contrary. Given the generally critical and negative tone of discussions surrounding subtitles, another expectation is that subtitle use will be understated in discussions. Such negative tones can be observed in much of casual subtitle-related conversation by viewers, where comments tend to revolve around
perceived shortcomings and errors in subtitles. In fact, collecting subtitling blunders appears to be almost a hobby for some people, and an entire website has been devoted to listing amusing mistranslations found in Finnish subtitles.\(^3\) I expect that when group members are given the opportunity to express their opinions, these opinions will be largely negative. I suspect that viewers’ relationship to subtitles is somewhat ambivalent: they read subtitles, yet they want to feel that they do not need them, they gain a great deal of information from subtitles, yet they only tend to remember mistranslations and misunderstandings. Of course, this is quite human and as such, understandable, but it also possibly exposes the subservient status of subtitles to the film itself. Naturally, it may also be noteworthy to discover examples of more positive attitudes, which I believe do exist, as well. For instance, it can be quite revealing to observe whether the informants quote the English spoken text or the Finnish subtitles when referring to the film.

I have provided some general premises here, which serve the objectives of the style of research employed in my study: Focus group discussions produce various types of data, which in turn can be analysed from a multitude of perspectives, unlike quantitative studies where the questions asked already anticipate their data. It is in the nature of a free-flowing focus group discussion that my study will provide material that cannot be anticipated at all, and this unanticipatable element should play a central role in the analysis. Thus, the very nature of these propositions reflects the multilayered analysis style which will be followed in this study.

### 1.3 Research Material

The reception explored in this study is that of the subtitled comedy *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004), more specifically the version screened in Finnish cinemas. The film, which is a sequel to the blockbuster *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001), is a romantic comedy, aimed chiefly at a female audience, and it tells the story of a thirty-something single woman, Bridget Jones, and her attempts to find success and satisfaction in both her professional and her personal life. The film aims

\(^3\)The website (http://www.jounipaakkinen.fi/kaannos.html) is maintained by Jouni Paakkinen, who has also published two books of subtitling blunders (Paakkinen, 2003 and Paakkinen, 2005).
at mass appeal, and it is therefore a suitable target for a reception study, as it is easy to find potential informants who fit the film’s target audience. In addition, the film is easy to approach for ordinary viewers. Selecting light entertainment rather than something serious or more intellectually demanding can facilitate the preparations of my empirical study: it is relatively easy to find willing – even enthusiastic – informants, who enjoy Bridget Jones and are ready engage to conversation on this topic. This choice also has potential to foster more open and productive discussions, as the informants do not have to worry about misunderstanding or interpreting the film “correctly”. All they have to do is offer their opinions on a piece of easily digestible, mass-market entertainment.

Since the main focus of the study is viewers and reception, the film itself or its subtitles will not be analysed in detail. Instead, the main object of analysis will be the discussion data gathered from the focus groups. The focus group conversations constitute the central part of the research data in this study, and they will be analysed from several viewpoints in order to create a full picture of the reception situation and the experiences of the informants, and to analyse the social manifestations of these experiences. The analysis will proceed in a narrative style: the informants’ experiences will be presented in coherent narratives, which describe their realities of the reception process in a concrete manner.

In addition to these focus group discussions, a variety of other kinds of discussions on subtitles will be investigated to provide contrast to the focus group data. These include subtitle-related discussions on the Internet as well as other anecdotal data from different contexts in which viewer opinions on subtitles have been brought up. The opinions and attitudes expressed in these various contexts are contrasted with the focus group data to show how the focus group situation might differ from other situations in which subtitles are discussed. This comparison is significant, as it offers an opportunity to discuss the nature of the focus group data and its credibility as a reflection of the reception process.
1.4 The Researcher’s Subjectivity: A Personal Introduction

In a qualitative study where the analysis is largely based on interpretation and reflection, one challenging question is the position of the researcher. No research can be truly objective, because every researcher is a subject with his or her own position as an agent in the research process. This is an unavoidable trait in research rather than an undesirable one, and is worthy of recognition as such. As suggested by Maria Tymoczko (2007: 11–12), one aspect of anthropology and ethnography that would be useful for translation studies to adopt is the principle of beginning any study by making explicit the researcher’s backgrounds, opinions and ideological affinities. Therefore, I will address my positioning here, in order to clarify the perspective from which I have conducted my study. In addition, I will return to self-reflection throughout the study, whenever relevant.

The most important aspect of this subjectivity derives from my multiple points of view. I am not only a researcher, but also a film viewer, translator, focus group participant, and a member of the Bridget Jones audience. Thus, my loyalties and affiliations extend to many directions, and I am not far removed from my object of study. I investigate the reception processes of members of my own culture, whose personal backgrounds are close to my own. This allows me to speak with my informants on a personal level, with the knowledge that we understand each other. It does, however, also mean that my subjectivity can occasionally become visible, and in those situations it will be accounted for in the analysis.

In particular, research on subtitle reception possesses personal significance for me from three distinct perspectives: as a lifelong viewer of subtitled programmes, as a professional translator who often finds it difficult to assess which solutions would be best from the audience’s point of view, and as a researcher who has found a challenging and rewarding object of study. I must start charting my personal background from the very beginning, when I was a reader of translations, a television and film viewer who, since childhood, had become accustomed to consuming subtitled programmes, and accustomed to the subtitling traditions and conventions seen in the film used for this study. As a viewer, my relationship to subtitles has probably been quite typical for a Finn: I have watched and enjoyed subtitled programmes without much thought as to how I processed the information,
except for the occasional mistranslation I began to notice as I learnt more English. Subtitles have always been a constituent part of my experiences with popular culture, and reading them is an automatic part of my enjoying films and television programmes. I expect this to be the same for many of this study’s informants.

My second position of subjectivity is that of a subtitler. I have worked as a subtitler for several years, and through this work I have gained an understanding of the challenges of subtitling, as well as a personal stake in wanting to find answers for some of the many perplexing questions concerning subtitle reception. Because of this professional background, I have become interested in subtitling from the point of view of research: the field of audiovisual translation is rife with unanswered questions, and many of them have practical implications for subtitlers.

My third position is that of the researcher who has selected the approach used in this study. As the researcher, I am a participant in the empirical research process. Furthermore, I did take part in the focus group discussions, but as moderator, not informant. While I held a position of authority over the informants by controlling the discussions and having initiated them in the first place, I also took part in the conversation by guiding the discussion, asking questions and even occasionally answering questions or making comments of my own. This kind of moderator influence must be analysed carefully, as a constituent part of the analysis of the research data, since it can have an effect on the substance of the focus group discussions and the informants’ comments.

Finally, because my thoughts on the film the informants watched can colour the way I have constructed this study, I will also venture a few comments on my relationship to Bridget Jones. First of all, I would not describe myself as an obsessive fan, but the research did arise from my interest in the Bridget Jones novels and films. As I was planning my master’s thesis (Tuominen, 2002) on the reception of allusions in literary translations, I happened to read Bridget Jones’s Diary, and I found I enjoyed the novel not only as entertainment but also because of its

4 I use the term subtitler throughout this study interchangeably with the term translator, both of them referring to the individual who translates audiovisual text and formulates it into subtitles. In some contexts, the duties of a translator and a subtitler can be distinct; a translator translates and a subtitler constructs and timecues subtitles. However, my focus in this study is the subtitling culture in Finland, where it is typical that both duties are performed by the same individual.

5 For more discussion on the set-up of the focus groups and the moderator’s role, see Chapter 6.1.
intertextual connections, particularly its allusions to Jane Austen’s novels. The novel even managed to be thought-provoking in its portrayal of single women at the turn of the millennium, and the multiple interpretations which the intertextual connections invited. I realised that the Bridget Jones novels would be useful research material, since the intertextual ties could be very challenging for a translator and the translation’s audience, as they were often closely bound to the source culture. Later, as my master’s thesis had proved that this material was well suited for this type of research, I decided to continue with Bridget Jones in the current study. This time, I chose the films, as I wanted to look at audiovisual translations, and, in particular, Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason, because conveniently it had just been released when I was planning my research. Some level of personal interest in the books and films made it easier for me to lead the focus group discussions. I suspect my interest in the material comes through occasionally in the discussions, and my interpretations have inspired some questions and thus some of the elements in the focus group discussions. In this sense, again, my position and my background have come to influence the form and substance of this study.

1.5 Study Structure

This study consists of two primary sections: methodological discussion and empirical analysis. The purpose of the methodological discussion is to investigate how this type of qualitative research could enrich reception research within translation studies, while the empirical sections will provide an example of a qualitative reception study. I start in Chapter 2 by describing subtitling as a method of communication and translation, and the challenges it poses to both translators and audiences. In Chapter 3 I discuss the theoretical background of reception and audience research both within translation studies and in the area of media studies. In Chapter 4 I expand upon the methodological framework on which the empirical study is built and, again, refer to both media studies and translation studies and explain how focus group research serves for data collection. In Chapter 5 I briefly introduce the film Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason. I delve into an analysis of the aspects of the film most relevant to this study, i.e. its genre as a “chick flick” and the
challenges of its translation and reception. Then, in Chapter 6, I proceed to the empirical part of the study and first describe the practices of conducting a focus group study. I then analyse the focus group material by constructing various levels of reception narratives. Chapter 7 is devoted to discussing the significance of the reception narratives and drawing tentative conclusions on what they reveal about reception, as well as giving them a wider situational context. In addition, I reflect critically on my role and position in the study and reflect on some of the challenges this kind of research poses. The final chapter, Chapter 8, will offer some final conclusions and implications for possible further research.
2. The Challenges and Illusions of Subtitling

2.1 The Practice of Subtitling Defined

Subtitling is a form of audiovisual translation which, according to Jorge Díaz Cintas and Aline Remael (2007: 8),

may be defined as a translation practice that consists of presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, that endeavours to recount the original dialogue of the speakers, as well as the discursive elements that appear in the image (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards, and the like), and the information that is contained on the soundtrack (songs, voices off).

Thus, fundamentally, subtitling means transforming any relevant verbal information from a source-language audiovisual message into the target language and into written form. In addition to this straightforward technical definition, however, the specific contextual challenges of subtitling must also be taken into account when discussing subtitling as a method of translation and form of communication. Subtitles are not merely words on screen: they must function as a part of the audiovisual text and adhere to the limitations this context poses, such as the size of the screen and the timing of the programme (including scene changes, editing, camera movement, pace of the dialogue, as well as any other factors which have a temporal dimension). It is important to keep in mind that subtitles are an audiovisual mode of communication, governed by more than their written, verbal dimension: subtitled programmes consist of visual information, auditive information, spoken words and subtitles, and these elements together form the audiovisual text. Díaz Cintas and Remael (ibid.: 9) summarise the central demands of the audiovisual medium in the following way: “Subtitles must appear in synchrony with the image and dialogue, provide a semantically adequate account of the SL dialogue, and remain displayed on screen long enough for the viewers to be able to read them.” This list of characteristics demonstrates just how many elements are at play in the
process of subtitling. In addition to the challenges translation always poses, subtitling has its own set of demands, which have to do with time, space, pace, visuality and auditivity. It is not enough to put together a translation; the translation must also be timecued and divided into individual subtitles carefully so that they follow both the visual pace of the programme and the rhythm of the speech and make sense as individual units of text.⁶

Furthermore, due to the limitations of space and time, subtitles present the challenge of condensation. Each subtitle can take up a maximum of two lines, most often with 37 characters on each line, and a full two-line subtitle must usually remain on screen for approximately five to six seconds so that viewers have enough time to read it comfortably (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007: 82–84, 96–97). In Finland, subtitles appearing on the television channels of YLE, the national public broadcasting company, are allowed a maximum of approximately 33 characters per line, and a full two-line subtitle must remain on screen for four to five seconds (Vertanen, 2007b: 151). These strict limitations mean that the subtitler must find ways to distill the message down to its most essential parts. The visual information accompanying the verbal text can help the viewer understand the subtitles, but it is also a significant expressive element which requires part of the viewer’s attention. Therefore, subtitles must be presented clearly enough to be easily understandable on the first reading so that the viewer can also concentrate on the accompanying visual and auditive information. In addition, easy readability is important, because the continuously advancing flow of the programme means that, unlike with print materials, the viewer does not usually have the option of going backwards to re-read the subtitles.

The presentation format and related limitations mean that subtitles cannot be considered a purely transparent, faithful translation of the original text. They do not reproduce the elements of the source text as closely as most other methods of translation do. Instead, they represent the subtitler’s view of what was most relevant

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⁶The practical processes of subtitling vary from one country, company and commissioner to another. For example, timecueing is sometimes performed by the translator, and at other times by someone else, either before or after the translation process. However, irrespective of who is responsible for timecueing, it is an additional phase of the subtitling process, and one which does not exist in other types of translation.
in the source text, condensed and presented in compliance with the technical restrictions and conventions governing subtitling. Therefore, while any translation is a representation of the translator’s interpretations and choices, this fact is particularly prominent in subtitles: the subtitler must adhere to certain general rules and make decisions on the basis of contextual constraints, but the final decisions represent the subtitler’s personal vision. For example, the translator must decide how much text a viewer will be able to read at a particular moment, and choose which elements of the information to foreground and which to leave out. The resulting translation is both an independent representation of the source text and a subordinate product very closely tied with the audiovisual text of which it is part. Dionysis Kapsaskis (2008: 47) uses the term “formal foreignness” to describe this conflicting state of faithfulness to and detachment from the original programme. This is a very apt description for how the various demands of the audiovisual product mean that subtitles can neither become a fully integrated part of the programme nor exist as an independent text type. In Kapsaskis’s (ibid.: 47) words, “subtitles belong properly neither to the text nor to the image; they occupy a hybrid and intermittent site that is never fully their own.” He explains this (ibid.: 47), stating that “subtitling conventions and rules [...] result in a specific type of strongly edited and heteronomous text which departs from established linguistic norms.”

Subtitles are a peculiar text type that is dependent on its context. They cannot be read as a fully understandable text independent of their integral audiovisual product. One further special characteristic of subtitles is the fact that they transfer verbal text from spoken into written form. In Roman Jakobson’s (1959/2003: 114) terms, this means that subtitling could be seen as both interlingual and intersemiotic translation, as it does not only take place between two languages but also between two different sign systems. Henrik Gottlieb (1994: 104) therefore calls subtitling “diagonal translation”: in addition to the transfer from one language to another, the message is transferred from speech to writing, while in ordinary written translation messages are transferred only “horizontally”, from one language into another. This means that the prosodic features of spoken language must either be compensated by the means of written language or lost altogether in the subtitles. These features can, of course, be heard in the spoken language accompanying the subtitles, and this can give the viewer some impression of their significance for the programme’s overall tone and content, but many messages conveyed through these features, particularly
when they are culture or language-specific, will not be readily apparent to a target-language viewer. Furthermore, the subtitler must adjust the style of the verbal text to one that is fluent and readable as written text. This again takes subtitles one step further away from a close, word-for-word translation. Many elements of spoken language, such as hesitation, repetition, and features of slang and dialect, are difficult to read, even if they sound natural and are understandable when spoken. Therefore, these elements must be modified into a more easily readable style that can be absorbed in the few seconds that a subtitle is visible on screen. However, the translator must also keep in mind that, even though written, subtitles represent speech and cannot appear too “written” in their style. The aim is to create the illusion of spoken language. Finding the optimal balance between written and spoken style, constructing the illusion of speech, is another specialised challenge of subtitling.

This illusion of spoken language is one of a number of illusions that characterise subtitles and subtitling. For example, becoming a part of the programme flow is a matter of illusion for the written text that is added to the picture after production. Indeed, perfect auditive and visual synchronicity is also only an illusion. Subtitles appear on screen in small fractions which remain static for a few seconds on screen. Thus, they do not present a constantly scrolling, uninterrupted flow of text that matches the pace of the programme. Furthermore, skilfully constructed subtitles are intended to give the viewers the illusion of having read a full translation of the entire source text, or even the illusion of having understood the source text itself, instead of having read the significantly condensed translation. All of these illusions make subtitles a form of translation hidden in plain sight: a translated text attempting to blend into the original programme, but never able to fully replace the original words and take their place as an unmarked part of the audiovisual text. This conflict between the technical reality of how visibly subtitles appear on screen and the aim of fluent transparency creates a considerable challenge for the subtitler, who

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7 This same illusion of spokenness often appears in literary texts and literary translations, but in that case both the source text and the translation appear in written form. Therefore the illusion of speech is similar in both source text and translation. In subtitling, on the other hand, it is the translator’s responsibility to construct this illusion based on a spoken source text. Hence, while the challenges of creating this illusion are similar in subtitling and literary translation, the subtitler must construct this illusion more autonomously than the literary translator.
undertakes to construct these illusions, balance the contradictory demands of the various dimensions, and tolerate the paradox of attempting to become invisible through tricks of illusion while all the while being extremely, obviously visible.

Another challenge faced by subtitlers is again connected to the visibility of their work. This challenge is their susceptibility to criticism. Consistent with Juliane House’s terminology, Henrik Gottlieb (1994: 102) calls subtitling “overt translation” and points out that the fact that the source text is present along with subtitles means that subtitling is “laying itself bare to criticism from everybody with the slightest knowledge of the source language.” Similarly, Diaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 57) call subtitling “vulnerable translation” due to this openness to criticism and questioning. This openness can increase the challenge of subtitling, because it means that in addition to adhering to the conventions set by the profession, the translator must keep in mind viewers’ possible opinions about what they might consider an acceptable translation. Thus, the subtitler’s role as an illusionist also includes the need to seek balance between the occasionally contradictory ideals and expectations of the viewers and the profession itself.

The preceding long list of demands, challenges and conflicts could perhaps be condensed in a quote from Luyken et al. (1991: 39), who, referring to all forms of audiovisual translation, state that this type of translation is “a meeting-point of science, art, technology, linguistics, drama and aesthetics. The quality of the end product results directly from the harmonious fusion of these parts.” This comment appropriately summarises the nature of audiovisual translation and the demands placed on audiovisual translators. It is clear that audiovisual translation is not merely translation; it is “a balancing act” (ibid.: 39) and a multi-dimensional puzzle which consists of many inter-related elements, all of which must be juggled both when translating and when investigating audiovisual translation.

2.2 The Challenges of Viewing Subtitled Material

As noted above, subtitling is a complex process of challenges, illusions and contradictions, a puzzle that will always remain somewhat imperfect and open to, indeed even vulnerable to, debate. For these same reasons, viewing subtitled material will be a challenge for the audience, and assembling the audiovisual
message from the parts that constitute it can be quite an observational puzzle, too. The challenges related to time, space, pace, visuality and auditivity determine not only the subtitler’s challenges but the conditions under which subtitled material is received and interpreted. It is not clear how well viewers are aware of the conflicts of intrusions and illusions involved in subtitles, and how aware they are of the role of subtitles in the viewing experience. This is a question worth examining to help subtitlers as they take on the role of the illusionist and work to construct subtitles that do justice to the programme while also serving the viewers’ needs. While the multimodal context can help the viewer make sense of the messages contained in subtitles, the flow of information through several channels simultaneously also presents the viewer with a reception situation where focusing one’s attention can be quite difficult. As Ali Hajmohammadi (2004) suggests, despite the traditionally low prestige of subtitle-reading in comparison to literary texts, it could be argued that making sense of subtitled programmes is more demanding than reading literary translations. How is it then possible to understand subtitled material in one viewing, and how can a viewer become immersed in the world of the programme with the defamiliarising intrusion of subtitles standing in the way? What are the challenges that subtitles present to the viewer, and how can they be overcome?

Luyken et al. (1991: 56, 155) suggest that when translating audiovisual material, particularly for television, the translator must take the expected target audience’s skills and expectations carefully into account. According to their argument, taking the audience into account is more important in this context than with any other form of translation, because the audience of audiovisual translations tends to be quite varied, consisting of individuals with very different abilities and sets of background knowledge. While this is particularly true for television broadcasts, and especially public service television, the same argument applies to cinema and DVD translations, since they attract large and varied audiences. Thus, due to the multiple challenges of this medium, the translator must make every effort to render the material easily accessible, so as not to “overtax” (ibid.: 56) the viewer.

Especially in the case of subtitling, the viewing experience can, indeed, become overtaxing, if its constituent elements are in conflict with each other or demand excessive attention. On the other hand, in an ideal situation, skilfully crafted subtitles flow easily within the multimodal text and support the viewing experience by providing necessary information at a suitable pace. Creating such an ideal
situation is the challenge of a subtitler, but being able to make sense of subtitles and to incorporate them into the viewing experience is the challenge of the viewer. A fundamental element in this is the fact that the viewer must be able to follow a message both in its original audiovisual form and in the added, written form simultaneously. The programme flow is unstoppable and irreversible, and the viewer must therefore follow the programme and the translation at the pace set by the programme. The viewer must be able to weave fragmentary individual subtitles together into a coherent message and merge this verbal information with the programme’s other means of expression, such as sound and picture. As Hajmohammadi (2004) puts it: “Subtitled films thus require a greater effort to harmonize a variety of cognitive activities and grasp the underlying idea.”

Hajmohammadi’s contention of the processing effort required while watching subtitled material can be further specified by distinguishing a set of processes that occur simultaneously while viewing subtitled programmes. According to Hajmohammadi (2004), these processes are: “reading the subtitles”, “decoding the subtitles”, “watching the image flow”, “deciphering the visual information”, “connecting each segment of the image flow to the underlying story”, “listening to (or just hearing) the sound”, “guessing what is about to happen”, and “remembering what has already happened to make fresh deductions during following sequences.” This rather exhaustive list serves as a reminder of how each different aspect of a subtitled audiovisual product demands attention and therefore they must all be considered when analysing the situation of subtitling and its reception. Christopher Taylor (2003: 194–196) makes the same point in his model for a multimodal analysis of subtitled programmes: his model divides subtitled material into four elements – visual image, kinesic action, soundtrack and subtitle – and then analyses how meaning is constructed through the interplay of these four complimentary elements. Due to this potentially overtaxing multiplicity of information channels, both Taylor (2003: 203) and Hajmohammadi (2004) advocate for a rather reduced style of subtitling, where the other elements of a film are allowed to carry some of the meaning and subtitles are significantly condensed. Hajmohammadi (ibid.) even points out that “watching a subtitled film is not a speed-reading competition.” This is an important consideration in investigating the reception of subtitled films: subtitles are not the primary objective of the viewing experience but a facilitator for
understanding, and if they demand too much of the viewer’s attention, they can have a detrimental effect on the entire experience.

Hajmohammadi (2004) suggests that, because of their subordinate position, subtitles should be concise: subtitlers should “provide viewers with the shortest possible subtitles and spare them unnecessary shades of meaning that hinder the process of image reading.” This argument is derived from compelling facts concerning the viewing experience, and it is supported by an experiment reported by Taylor (2003: 203–204), where viewers demonstrated a preference for significantly condensed subtitles. However, Hajmohammadi’s conclusion is rather extreme and perhaps reflects local subtitling conventions rather than overall ideals. It is true that subtitles cannot assume a central position in the audiovisual product, and their power of expression is limited, but can they fulfil their objectives if they do not contain any “unnecessary shades of meaning”? Esko Vertanen (2007b: 150, 153), a prominent Finnish audiovisual translator and trainer of subtitlers, sees the role of subtitles differently. He states that a subtitler should convey the style and atmosphere of the source text as well as possible, and that, because subtitles always represent someone’s speech, they should not be “stripped too bare”. Of course, this view can be due in part to the Finnish subtitling culture, where the tradition is to use complete sentences and correct, varied language even when condensation is necessary.

Hajmohammadi’s (2004) and Vertanen’s (2007b) somewhat conflicting positions demonstrate different views of the role and function of subtitles: whereas Vertanen sees the stylistic features of the source text as another element which the subtitles must convey, Hajmohammadi implies that subtitles should merely provide the viewer with basic information on the essential meaning of the source text. It is impossible to speculate on which stance better corresponds to viewers’ needs and preferences. Furthermore, it should be kept in mind that these opinions are to some extent bound to the cultures from which they originate, as subtitling conventions vary from culture to culture and thus the ideals and prescriptions offered by experts can be different from each other but equally valid in their local contexts.

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8 See section 3.1.5.2 for a more detailed discussion of Taylor’s study.

9 This description of the Finnish subtitling culture is based on my personal experience as a subtitler, as well as discussions with colleagues.
Nevertheless, the discrepancy between the two tendencies is not mere cultural diversity but an indication of a different conception of the audience’s needs. The two views demonstrate the need for in-depth audience research that could shed light on the roles subtitles play for viewers. What is clear from these two opinions is that the expressive force of subtitles is strongly tied with the entire audiovisual text. Whether a viewer employs subtitles merely for a programme’s general sense or to also deduce the style and atmosphere of the programme, subtitles are always read as an integral part of the programme. The challenge for the subtitler is to decide, which stylistic, technical and strategic choices will best incorporate them into the flow of the programme.

In addition to being able to perform the fairly complex cognitive process of viewing a programme with subtitles, the viewer must tolerate the presence of both the source and the target language, nor must the viewer be distracted by their simultaneous appearance. It is, of course, a logical assumption that the source text would be unintelligible to viewers. However, it is typical to understand at least part of the source text, particularly if it is in a global language such as English; even a less familiar language can contain some recognisable elements. Consequently, the viewer must negotiate a suitable viewing strategy between the poles of either absorbing information from both subtitles and the original speech or focusing on just one of them. In other words, the viewer is faced with an audiovisual text to which another verbal layer is added, and while the subtitler typically attempts to create subtitles which blend easily into the programme, the end result is always defamiliarising to some extent, and it is ultimately the viewer’s task to navigate this defamiliarisation. The viewer is not just watching a translated audiovisual product; an original audiovisual product and its translation are presented, and the viewer knows that both are present, and has to decide which of them takes precedence in the viewing experience.

Much of this viewing process is, of course, a matter of habit and a learned skill. That is probably why, for example, the preference for either dubbing or subtitling tends to follow prevalent national trends, so that viewers in subtitling countries do not usually want to adopt dubbing and viewers in dubbing countries are averse to subtitling (Luyken et al, 1991: 38). Viewers prefer to watch in the manner to which they are accustomed. Furthermore, the viewing process is guided by conventions and internalised behaviours, often to a perfunctory extent, so that the viewer does
not pay much attention to how he/she makes sense of the programme, nor what role subtitles play in this. It is, therefore, the objective of reception research to investigate these complex, subconscious, automatic and conventionalised processes in order to find out how the subtitle reading process truly functions, how viewers understand subtitles, and what role subtitles play in the entire viewing experience. Because of these many dimensions, the researcher may study the viewing experience from many viewpoints and by applying various methodologies. These methodological questions will be taken up in greater detail in Chapters 3 and 4.

2.3 Subtitling within the Field of Translation: Towards Status and Visibility

Thus far, subtitling has been described as a form of translation without problematising its status. However, such acceptance has not always been the case. In fact, many have even argued that because the audiovisual medium sets such strict parameters for subtitling, it does not constitute translation proper. Some scholars have even queried whether subtitles are worthy of attention within translation studies (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007: 9). Although this discussion is still ongoing to a limited extent, subtitling is now widely recognised as translation and its status as an object of academic research is secured (ibid.: 10–11). According to Díaz Cintas (2008: 1), audiovisual translation has been formerly “ignored by academics and teachers alike”, but it has gained visibility and become an active area of research in recent years, as can be seen, for example, in the number of recent publications and conferences. It is still a young field of research with many unexplored areas, but its position within translation studies is not in question. Quite the opposite, its special characteristics can contribute significantly to the discipline. At this juncture, it is appropriate to consider the position of subtitling within translation studies and in relation to the over-arching concept of translation. How does subtitling compare to other forms of translation and the stereotypical notion of translation?

Lawrence Venuti (1995: 17) describes translation, very simply, as a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation.
Although this definition is presented in the context of literary translation, it is appropriate and general enough for any genre of translation, and thus a suitable starting point for reflection on the nature of translation. Nevertheless, this straightforward definition does not apply fully to subtitling, because the source-language text in subtitling is not replaced but left as it is, with the addition of a written target-language text appearing alongside the original. In fact, a significant proportion of the original signifiers, namely the pictures and sounds, will remain a part of the subtitled message, and even some elements of the source-language verbal text will inevitably be a part of the experience of the subtitled audiovisual text. As Henrik Gottlieb (1994: 102) puts it: “The audience has to turn to the original acoustic and visual clues in trying to grasp the meaning behind the words of the subtitles.” Thus, the concept of replacing text does not apply to subtitling. The mere presence of the source text means that it plays some role in the target-language entity, and the accompanying sounds and pictures certainly are a significant part of the target-language message.

Another aspect of Venuti’s definition, however, does apply very well to subtitling: the fact that the subtitler, even more so than many other translators, produces the translation on the strength of an interpretation. Because of the limitations of time and space, the subtitler must decide how to condense the message of the source text, what to omit and what to phrase differently. Thus, the subtitler’s interpretation of the source text and decisions on which elements of the text must take priority play a central role in the translation process. To be sure, translators of other types of texts face similar challenges and constraints, and some modicum of editing and modifying is always part of the translation process, but in subtitling this is a heightened, prominent aspect of the translation process.

Interpreting and decision-making are central in subtitling, and their role offers translation studies another compelling framework with which to conceptualise subtitling. Enter Maria Tymoczko’s idea of translation as metonymy. Metonymy “is a figure of speech in which an attribute or an aspect of an entity substitutes for the entity or in which a part substitutes for the whole” (Tymoczko, 1999: 42). Tymoczko applies this notion to translation in stating that a translation is always a partial representation of the source text, “a form of representation in which parts or aspects of the source text come to stand for the whole.” (ibid.: 55) In Tymoczko’s
(ibid.: 55) view, translation is always a decision-making process, where translators “highlight and preserve” and “prioritize and privilege” certain aspects of the source text while leaving others out or bringing them into the translation only partially. This is particularly true of subtitling for two reasons: subtitling involves challenging decision-making and subtitles can represent only a part of the entire audiovisual text. Tymoczko’s notion of metonymy is therefore a helpful model in explaining the nature of subtitling: Tymoczko’s concept of translation allows for the inclusion of subtitling, whereas Venuti’s definition problematises its status.

Because of the problematic relationship that subtitling has with definitions of translation, Yves Gambier (2003: 178) also makes the point that subtitling is not quite synonymous with translation in the traditional sense. Gambier describes subtitling as “a kind of written simultaneous interpreting”, as both subtitling and simultaneous interpreting are challenged by temporal constraints, dense information content, the relationship between written and spoken text, and “special issues of reception”. In Gambier’s view, subtitling is at the crossroads of translation and interpreting, and faces challenges from both directions. Gambier (ibid.: 178) does, however, state that subtitling can be considered translating “if translation is not viewed as purely word-for-word transfer but as encompassing a set of strategies that might include summarizing, paraphrasing, etc.” He suggests that a new term, “transadaptation” might be beneficial for covering the different nature of various types of audiovisual translation.

Perhaps all this ambiguity of definition means that even as an activity, subtitling is something of an illusion: it creates the illusion of a translation, when, in fact, it is a creative and metonymic rewriting of certain aspects of the original. However, this does not mean that subtitling is not translation or that it is inferior to “translation proper”. It is for this reason that I find that Gambier’s suggestion of a new term is not altogether necessary; what is more constructive is a flexible, inclusive view of translation. Subtitling does not fit easily into a narrow definition of translation, but it cannot be performed satisfactorily without a translator’s ability to communicate beyond language and culture barriers. Therefore, I believe, as do, e.g., Díaz Cintas and Remael (2007: 11) and Irena Kovacic (1998: 75), that a workable definition of

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10Tymoczko’s notion of translation as metonymy has been applied to subtitling in Kokkola (2003).
translation should be flexible enough to accommodate the special characteristics of subtitling. In fact, Maria Tymoczko (1999: 282) points out that the idea of substituting one language with another has become somewhat obsolete along with the diminishing status of the concept of equivalence: “translation is seen as less a metaphoric process of substitution than as a metonymic process of connection, a process of creating contiguities and contextures”. Again, this idea of connection and contextualisation illustrates well why metonymy is a fitting description for subtitling, where the purpose is to create a contextualised text that is connected to the surrounding auditory and visual elements. Subtitles are highly condensed and context-bound, and they only function fully when considered in relation to the larger textual and cultural entities which they metonymically represent.

However, even though subtitling can be admitted into the definition of translation, its special characteristics do occasionally make particular demands on the practices of translation research. Therefore, Yves Gambier (2009: 19–20) suggests that “[c]ertain concepts in Translation Studies should be revised, extended and rethought when they are applied to AVT [audiovisual translation].” In his view, concepts such as text, authorship or translation strategy cannot be restricted to their traditional meanings when used in the context of audiovisual translation. He also states that this means that audiovisual translation can “disturb” translation studies. This disturbance could be quite welcome and beneficial for the future of translation studies. As seen above, narrow definitions of translation cannot fully accommodate subtitling, and therefore a more flexible, encompassing definition has been sought. Expanding and bringing the definition up to date is positive; it ensures that the concept and practice of translation advances more easily alongside technology and communication practices. The same must be true for translation research: a disturbance which encourages the discipline to better accommodate various forms of communication and expression widens the field of inquiry and provides opportunities for examining translation critically and constructively.

One example of this potential for disturbing translation studies can be detected in Gambier’s (2009: 17) comment on the traditional areas of inquiry within translation studies, and research on audiovisual translation in particular. Gambier states that most studies have centred on questions concerning language and culture, thus largely disregarding the other modes involved in audiovisual communication, despite their relevance for communication and translation. Research concentrating
on those aspects of audiovisual translation would be most welcome, and, to some extent, such research is already being carried out.\textsuperscript{11} This kind of research can enrich translation studies and provide methodological inspiration for research beyond audiovisual translation. Thus, a “disturbance” caused by audiovisual translation could provide novel perspectives for the entire discipline.

2.4 Subtitling in Finland

2.4.1 Traditions, Conventions and Future Prospects

Finland is a “subtitling country”: subtitling rather than dubbing is the prevalent form of audiovisual translation. The practice of subtitling is well established, and subtitling also appears to be preferred by Finnish audiences.\textsuperscript{12} As the more cost-effective option, subtitling has easily maintained its role as the primary form of audiovisual translation, and typically only children’s programmes are dubbed, while the narration texts in documentaries are sometimes translated into a Finnish spoken narration. Furthermore, it is quite likely that the role of subtitling in audiovisual communication will continue to increase: there is significant need for more subtitling, as the number of television channels, different modes of audiovisual expression and numbers of audiovisual releases keep rising (Vertanen, 2007a: \textit{passim}). While it may be true that in this era of global communication, much unsubtitled material will come to Finland through various means (such as international television channels and film downloads from the Internet), it is unlikely that subtitles will lose their significance in the Finnish media.

It is slightly ironic that, although subtitles as a text type are prevalent and resilient, their production process is not entirely unproblematic. One contentious issue in the current subtitling landscape is the dual question of subtitlers’ working conditions and subtitle quality. The question is by no means uniquely Finnish; it is a challenge of global proportions, as part of it appears to be linked to the globalization

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\textsuperscript{11}See, for example, Taylor (2003, 2004) and Kokkola (forthcoming).
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\textsuperscript{12}See, for example, Sarkoja (2004) for an analysis of audience responses concerning a dubbing experiment on Finnish television.
of the subtitling industry. In short, multinational translation and subtitling agencies hire subtitlers mostly as subcontractors, and as competition for translation contracts is fierce, pricing for translations has been driven down, resulting in low pay for the subcontracted translators.

As a result of this situation, subtitlers have also encountered demanding, erratic schedules, restricted and incomplete information concerning many aspects of the subtitling process, uncertainty about future work opportunities, and even outright intimidation. Because the professional field has been fragmented, subtitlers have not had the benefit of supportive collegial networks. Unfortunately, these problems have led to a lack of continuity: subtitling is not necessarily seen as a lifetime career, but rather an entry into the field of professional translation. Subtitlers tend to move on to different jobs (either in translation or elsewhere) relatively quickly. Consequently, a large proportion of the translation agencies’ subtitlers are fairly young and inexperienced. Subtitlers constantly suffer from tight scheduling, inconsistency in their assignments, and incomplete information access. Technical constraints resulting from the global nature of the agencies’ working procedures are yet another problem. Pre-set timecueing is an example of this global reality, since these settings cannot be changed to fit local conventions and linguistic peculiarities. Poor pay forces the translators to work quickly, and collectively these working realities certainly diminish motivation. Taken together, all of these factors mean that subtitle quality can suffer from the shortcomings of the work process.

The question posed by Delia Chiaro (2008: 248) is quite apt for the Finnish situation: “In such an uncontrolled marketplace how can quality be assured?” In subtitles produced under such conditions, quality can easily suffer. While individual

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13 The Finnish public service broadcasting company YLE employs most of its subtitlers directly, without translation agencies as an intermediary. A negotiated contract guarantees subtitlers a more secure and financially viable working environment than the translation agencies. Until recently, the same was true of the commercial channel MTV3, but in October 2012 they outsourced their subtitling business to a translation agency. The rest of the television networks and other related companies operating in Finland have long procured their subtitles through translation agencies and are thus, to varying extents, part of this subcontracting landscape. 14 Issues of quality, working conditions and production networks within the field of translation, including subtitling, have been extensively investigated by Kristiina Abdallah. For further discussion of problems and issues within the production networks, see, for example, Abdallah (2012).
channels and translation agencies can have rigorous systems of quality control, the systems and quality demands are inconsistent with each other, and they are not transparent to the outside observer. Therefore, the quality operations of subtitle providers can lack credibility. In addition, some operators in the field do not conduct systematic quality control and are willing to provide what Chiaro (ibid.: 246) calls “a quick and dirty translation” for a very low price, thus risking the quality of the end product. These troubles with quality can, in turn, affect subtitle reception. Outright errors in subtitles are naturally problematic, and unsuitable time cueing, for example, can mean that the pacing does not allow the viewer enough time to read the entire subtitle or that the synchronicity of the programme and the subtitles is not ideal. The effects of quality problems on reception can, to some extent, be detected in viewer responses to subtitles, which are often fairly negative, even disparaging towards translators. Thus, while the relationship between quality and reception is somewhat speculative, the effects of quality problems cannot be dismissed.

Despite the problematic situation in the field, the future prospects of Finnish subtitling are not entirely bleak. As mentioned above, it is likely that the amount of subtitling will increase, and quality issues are increasingly investigated in academic research, which can be beneficial for subtitlers. In addition, the subtitler-subcontractors have begun to organise themselves and bargain collectively, and negotiations for more stable working conditions are being conducted. The field is, thus, going through many changes, but the status of subtitling as a significant form of communication has not been put in question. It must also be noted that, while discussions on subtitling blunders do occasionally lead viewers to question subtitle quality, no evidence suggests that viewers reject subtitles as a general rule. Rather, subtitles are an elemental part of television and film viewing in Finland, and questions of quality and working conditions arise more among translation professionals and researchers.

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15 For information on the Finnish audiovisual translators’ efforts towards improved working conditions, see the translators’ website http://www.av-kaantajat.fi.
2.4.2 Cinema Subtitling as a Special Sub-Genre

Watching television and going to the cinema are two entirely different experiences. Even though the film itself may be the same, the viewing situation in a dark, quiet cinema with a large screen does not much resemble the circumstances of watching television in one’s living room, where it is common to talk with friends or family, do many things at once, switch from one channel to another or be distracted for a number of other reasons, and where the screen is smaller and less commanding than in the cinema. These situational factors have a significant effect on reception: for example, the viewer’s attention is concentrated differently, and the social elements of the situations are very different. These differences have implications for the viewer’s relationship with subtitles, because the attention directed towards subtitles is different in different situations. In addition, there are some differences in the characteristics of the subtitles themselves, and these can also influence the viewing experience. It is therefore relevant to this study to consider the specific factors related to cinema subtitles, because the empirical data was collected from viewers who watched a subtitled film in the cinema.

The most fundamental difference in the subtitles themselves is that, most often, Finnish cinema subtitles are made specifically for the cinema version of a film and are not the same subtitles as the ones shown on television or on DVD. The most noticeable difference between Finnish subtitles made for cinema and Finnish television subtitles is the fact that cinema subtitles are bilingual. Finland is an officially bilingual country, and subtitles in the cinema are offered simultaneously in both Finnish and Swedish. Television subtitles, on the other hand, are usually monolingual. The cinema subtitles consist of two lines: the upper line is the Finnish translation and the bottom one is the same segment translated into Swedish. The cinema lines are 40 characters long, or occasionally even slightly longer, which means that a single line has room for a few more characters than a single line on television, but even with the longer lines the cinema subtitler cannot use as many characters as the television subtitler, who is able to use two lines (Hartama, 2007: 192). The bilingualism of the subtitles therefore constitutes yet another challenge for subtitlers, because the subtitles in both languages must proceed in the same rhythm, and neither language can take up more than one line at a time. Because Finnish and Swedish are structurally quite different, the requirement of synchronicity can cause
significant problems for subtitlers. It also presents the challenge of fitting together two translators’ work, because typically each language is translated by a different person (Hartama, 2007: 188–189).

In addition to the presentation of two languages at once, there are some other differences between the technical requirements and practices of Finnish television and cinema subtitling. For example, cinema translators often have less access to the film than television translators and must work largely from the script or dialogue list. It is also worth mentioning that cinema subtitles are often made under extremely demanding time constraints, as Finnish premieres are set ever closer to films’ world premieres, or even occur on the same day (Hartama, 2007: 198). In addition, the spotting or timecueing is set by a separate individual, and reading times are different from television translations (ibid.: passim.). From the viewers’ point of view, the differences in reading times are an interesting question to consider. According to Hartama (ibid.: 193), cinema subtitles are thought to need a shorter reading time than television subtitles due to the larger size of the subtitles and the ideal viewing circumstances in the cinema, which lead to the viewer paying greater attention to the screen. Put together, these special circumstances demonstrate that cinema subtitling is certainly a challenge in its own right, and a different process from television or DVD subtitling. Hartama (ibid.: 200) also makes a good point when observing that the cinema subtitler carries great responsibility. Viewers have, after all, paid the price of the ticket for the privilege of watching this film, and they are entitled to expect a satisfactory experience that is facilitated by the subtitles. In addition, production companies invest significantly in the film release process, and the subtitler plays an important, even if not widely recognised, role in this process.

All the reasons which make cinema subtitling a speciality in its own right, as well as the challenges of subtitling in general, all the unanswered questions, conflicts and paradoxes surrounding subtitles as a form of expression, make subtitled cinema material a compelling object for reception research. Audiences are faced with an audiovisual product whose several dimensions, meaning potentials and interpretive options mean that viewer reactions, attitudes and reception strategies are difficult to predict. Furthermore, while reception research within both media studies and audiovisual translation studies has largely concentrated on television viewing, it is interesting to collect data and analyse cinema experiences as well. Investigating the peculiarities of film viewing in a cinema context can provide information not only
on subtitle reception in general but also on how to construct subtitles for the specific context of the cinema, on how this might be different from television viewing and on how well the specific characteristics of cinema subtitles are received by the audience. In the following chapter, I will present an overview of a selection of audience and reception studies from translation studies and media studies, and I will discuss how they relate to the objectives of the current study. I will then outline the methodological framework employed in the current study in order to delineate a new stance on research on the reception of subtitled material.
3. Dimensions of Audience Research

In this chapter, I will present an overview of previous research that is relevant to the current study. As this chapter will attempt to make clear, research on reading, reception, perception, audiences, and related concepts, can truly take many forms and approach the topic from various directions. The approaches taken within translation studies, particularly in the area of audiovisual translation, will be introduced first. That will be followed by a selective look at some relevant examples of qualitative reception research within media studies. The account of reception research within translation studies will provide an overall picture of what kinds of research have been previously conducted in this area, what questions have arisen and what tentative answers have been proposed. The look at media studies research will be used as background for applying similar methodology in a translation-related context. It will become clear in the overview of reception research within translation studies that such qualitative research has been quite scarce, and the application of this methodology therefore requires some background on media studies.

3.1 The Reception of Audiovisual Translations: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives

Over the past few decades, translation studies has been largely characterised by a focus on target audiences and their abilities and expectations. A prominent, early example of this is Eugene A. Nida, who introduced target orientation into translation studies particularly through his concept of dynamic equivalence, which contains analysis of the translation’s effects on its audience (Munday, 2012: 67–68). Target orientation is also inherent in the functional theories of translation, including the skopos theory, which focus on the function or purpose of translation and thus must take the target situation and target audience into account (ibid.: 110–111; 122–
123). The situational context for which a text is to be translated has thus been a significant consideration and an additional object of analysis beyond the linguistic dimension of translations. However, even though this means that readers and reception are often at least implicitly present in research, empirical research on reception has not been a systematic presence within translation studies. A great deal of the reader-orientation within translation studies has concentrated on the imagined addressee constructed within texts or on other abstract images of readers, instead of actual recipients and real reading situations. These theoretical viewpoints provide a sound basis for many theories and are valuable for translators as an aid in the targeting of their texts. However, this manner of speculation is removed from the concrete, situation-bound realities of reading translations and therefore cannot tell the entire story of reception. The situation has changed slightly in recent years, as interest in empirical reception research has increased, but many areas and approaches are still unexplored. This study is one way of enlarging the field of empirical research and searching for new ways to make sense of how people use translations. However, before the new methodological applications can be elaborated, it is necessary to see what has already been done in the area of reception research within translation studies.

In this section, I will outline the key areas of reception-related research within translation studies. No single method could answer all relevant questions on reception; rather, each methodology has its strengths and its shortcomings, and an overall picture of the field can be useful in determining what kinds of questions can be asked and answered through each of these approaches. Because much of reception-related discussion has been theoretical rather than empirical in nature, I will begin this overview by introducing some theoretical approaches. Then, I will introduce various areas of empirical research. I will concentrate on those studies which investigate the reception of audiovisual translations, but I will also mention a few relevant studies from other areas of translation.

16See Suojanen et al. (2012) for a more detailed discussion of the end-user orientation within translation studies.
3.1.1 Abstract Reader Positions: The Implied Reader, the Intended Reader, the Addressee

When discussing reception and the readers of translations, it is important to make a distinction between the abstract conception of a reader and an actual reader. The line between the two can easily be blurred by talking simply about readers without explicitly stating, whether the word is used to refer to a real-life individual who reads translations, or an abstract, analytical construct. In fact, Alexandra Assis Rosa (2006: 101) lists three reader types which stem from literary studies: the actual reader, the “ideally competent” ideal reader, and the implied reader “corresponding to the writer’s expectations of his/her addressed readership”. She (ibid.: 102) states that translation studies does not tend to utilise the concept of the ideal reader, which is the most distant of the three from the real translation context and any interaction related to it. On the other hand (ibid.: 102–103), both the implied and actual reader have a significant presence in translation studies. Assis Rosa (ibid.: 103–104) suggests that, of the two, the implied reader may even be the more central concept for translation studies, as it is a reflection of the translator’s expectations of the target audience and therefore has a significant effect on the translator’s choices and ultimately even on the norms of translation. Thus, much of the target-orientation in translation studies consists of textual analysis and the investigation of reader positions inserted in texts, rather than investigation of actual reading events. However, Assis Rosa does find importance in the role of actual readers as well. She (ibid.: 104–105) comments that “no profile of an implied TT reader [...] may be drawn independently of the virtual contemporary real readers and their textual and literary competence”. In other words, only empirical information on actual readers can help researchers and translators formulate abstract reader constructs, such as the implied reader.

As Assis Rosa’s (2006: 101) classification makes clear, the implied reader is an intratextual phenomenon, a textual feature imagined by the translator – or the researcher. One interesting example of how the concept of implied reader can be employed in translation research is in Christiane Nord’s article “What Do We Know About the Target-Text Receiver?”, where Nord (2000: 196) uses the term addressee to describe an abstract, intratextual reader construction:

The addressee (or target audience) of any text or translation is not a real person but a concept, an abstraction gained from the sum total of
our communicative experience, that is, from the vast number of characteristics of receivers we have observed in previous communicative occurrences [sic] that bear some analogy with the one we are confronted with in a particular situation.

Thus, despite the slightly deceptive “receiver” of the article’s title, Nord makes it clear that the “reader” is the idea of a reader, constructed through previous experiences and observations. This construct can, of course, be assembled even without much conscious analysis, as a routine element in the translation process. Nord (ibid.: 203–204) suggests that a more accurate picture of the addressee could, however, be formulated by using an “intersubjective reference system”, i.e. a parallel text corpus of a specific text type, containing original texts from two cultures and texts translated between these two cultures. This corpus could then be used to gain information on how language is used in the two cultures in specific communicative contexts, which could facilitate the assessment of reader expectations. This suggestion demonstrates how strongly intratextual the concept of addressee or implied reader is: if it can be investigated through the means of a text corpus, it certainly is far removed from actual reading experiences. Nord’s suggestion of assessing reader expectations through the use of a corpus is, however, an interesting one. This method of textual analysis could certainly provide insight into how readers are taken into account in texts. Thus, the addressee and the reader position built into each text could be uncovered, and this could be used as information on cultural and communicational conventions, which would allow translators to communicate to target-culture readers in a way the readers are used to encountering. Therefore, Nord’s idea has practical merit, and is an interesting example of the presence of the implied reader in translation research.

Another example of an examination of the implied reader in translations is an article by Cristina Sousa (2002). Sousa investigates the translation of children’s literature and the differences in cultural knowledge between source text and target text audiences. According to Sousa (ibid.: 21), “[i]t is crucial […] to evaluate the relevance of the reader’s cultural knowledge in the reading of the text, as this can help to anticipate reader-responses to the text and, consequently, to its translation.” A translator might use this evaluation as a justification for certain changes in the text, because the cultural knowledge of the target-text reader is typically more or less remote from the source culture, and thus the reader’s “perceived level of
receptivity” differs from that of the source-culture reader (ibid.: 22). This means that, according to Sousa, the translation and the source text have different implied readers, and this can affect translation strategies. She further comments (ibid.: 27) that “the translator needs to assess the TL reader’s receptivity to the TT beforehand and address it as he builds the TT from the ST.” However, unlike Nord, Sousa does not offer specific tools for this assessment. Instead, she relies on the translator’s knowledge of the target audience as an indicator of the audience’s receptivity. This is a fairly typical way of discussing the implied reader as an intratextual entity: it is, in effect, a method for textual and cultural analysis, and a justification for either the translator’s or the researcher’s views on translation strategies and solutions. It is a useful construct as an aid in analysis, but one must keep in mind that what is discussed here is not the reality of reading, but the reality of constructing texts.

Brian Mossop (2007: 203) makes this distinction of the two reader positions very clear, stating in his article that he does not investigate actual reader reactions but expected reactions, as assessed through the concept of the intended reader, which he refers to as the point of view of production:

Reader reaction to translation can be considered from two points of view: from the point of view of reception, there is the actual reaction of the reader; from the point of view of production, there is the reaction imagined in the mind of the translator.

Thus, Mossop points out, much like Assis Rosa, that this approach looks at reception through the text itself. Like Sousa, Mossop bases his analysis solely on personal observations and experiences, which is evident in the level of uncertainty in his conclusions, for example in the following comments: “Translation 3 may annoy some readers […], though other readers may take it as paralleling the name of Quebec’s legislature […]” (Mossop, 2007: 210). Therefore, he (ibid.: 210) also points out that empirical research on actual reader reactions would be extremely interesting, thus again confirming that abstract reader conceptions alone are not adequate. The concept of the implied reader cannot provide an exhaustive picture of reading and of audience preferences and attitudes. What is perhaps the most significant difference between this abstraction and the actuality of reception, is the context-boundedness of reception, and the effect of individual circumstances and backgrounds. As pointed out by Sousa (2002: 18):

When performing the act of reading, the real reader does not abstract himself totally from his own set of preconceptions, ideas and
knowledge. In fact, the activity will involve his whole experience as a living being that is part of a given historical, cultural, social and language group, interacting, where necessary, with other language groups via some kind of mediation.

This is why abstract reader constructions are always tentative and cannot explain the multitude of dimensions related to the real act of reception. However, this is also why abstract reader constructions are useful: they are a method of generalising the idea of reception by creating a homogenous, easily conceivable abstraction of what an “average” reader is thought to be like. Actual readers, with their multitude of contexts, opinions and ideas, cannot be utilised in this way, because each actual reader would bring forward a different idea of reception. Instead, the realities of actual readers are abstracted and generalised into something that does not quite resemble the real readers but is close enough in order to be a useful tool for the translator or the researcher.

3.1.2 The Problems of an Implied Reader and Subjective Textual Analysis

Even though the concept of an implied reader can be a useful analytical tool, the use of such an abstract construct can be problematic, if the conclusions drawn on its basis extend too far and if it is confused with actual readers and reception situations. The implied reader can never fully explain the complexities and realities of actual reception, and attempts to use it that way tend to lack credibility. Nevertheless, numerous studies analyse the knowledge and the expectations of readers only by using anecdotal evidence or the researcher’s subjective assumptions. Such a reader construct, which is ultimately based on the researcher’s educated guess, can still be useful, particularly as a reminder of reader-orientation when the analysis is largely focused on the text itself, but when the assumptions are excessive or made with the appearance of authoritative finality, the concept becomes problematic.

One example of such a problematic assumption can be found in Juliane House’s (1997) investigation of translation quality. In a section of her book, House (ibid.: 71) describes a previous analysis of translating commercial texts from English into German and explains her view that such texts should not be changed drastically in translation, because “[i]t […] seemed to me reasonable to assume that the
contemporary Western European and North American middle class speakers of the respective standard language [...] did not differ in relevant ways concerning, for instance, their reception of [...] a commercial circular letter.” The phrase “seemed reasonable to assume” makes it clear that the situational analysis is based on House’s subjective views, and these views have been used to formulate a pronouncement on what constitutes good translation quality. House (ibid.: 71) further suggests that significant changes should only be made if empirical research proves that there are such great differences between the source and target cultures that necessitate adjustments in the text. In this way, House advocates for empirical research, even while making a fairly strong assumption based on her subjective analysis. She then describes some empirical studies relevant to her analysis and concludes that these studies contradict her assumptions (ibid.: 84). House thus admits that the subjective analysis method cannot provide all answers, and she becomes, in fact, a powerful voice in favour of empirical research.

This kind of subjective, off-hand referencing of readers’ preferences is, of course, quite common. Because translation research is often target-oriented, readers are mentioned frequently, even when they are not the focus of research and extensive empirical studies are not therefore warranted. Examples of such reader positions in translation studies are easy to find. Keith Harvey’s (2003) article on translating American gay literature into French is one such example. In the course of the general analysis of the translations, Harvey repeatedly mentions the assumed reactions and interpretations of French readers. He states, for example: “[...] it is likely to activate in the French reader existing knowledge of the controversies and debates [...]” (ibid.: 55), and “The mention of ‘l’Amérique’ will probably help to explain the provenance of the title word to the French reader and will confirm to him or her that we have here something explosive from that strange and vast country across the Atlantic” (ibid.: 57). As can be seen from these examples, Harvey’s statements contain a level of uncertainty and only refer to possible or likely reactions by French readers. When qualified this way, subjective assumptions can offer an additional point of view to a textual analysis, even though they cannot provide reliable information on actual readers.

This willingness to estimate audience reactions through personal opinions is not unique to translation studies. Ien Ang (1991a: 20) has commented on a similar tendency among American producers of television programmes, who tend to speak
of what “the audience” wants, even though these comments are not supported by statistical or factual evidence. According to Ang, “these images and perceptions serve as true knowledge for the producers because they empower them to reduce the extreme complexity of the process which the making of a programme entails”. Thus, talking of “the audience” without specific information about what this term means and who these people are, is what Ang calls a “discursive tool”, something to help the makers of programmes talk about television-viewing without confusing the situation with too much real-life information, which is bound to be fuzzy and conflicting. Translators’ and translation researchers’ tendency to talk of what the readers want could be seen as a similar discursive tool, which is a helpful aid in thinking and constructing arguments, but can reduce the variety and multiplicity of actual reception into something of an unrealistic stereotype. “Discursive tools” alone cannot provide credible, solid information on the individuals who actually read translations in real life. As Gideon Toury (1995: 16–17) puts it: “While one is always free to speculate and/or indulge in introspection, it is only through studies into actual behaviour that hypotheses can be put to a real test.” This actual behaviour is what empirical reception studies aim to investigate, and it is the focus of the current study.

3.1.3 From the Implied Reader to the Imagined Audience of Audiovisual Translations – Quality and Reception

The above examples of intratexual reader positions in translation studies have examined either literary or documentary translation rather than audiovisual translation. One reason for this could be the term itself, as ‘reader’ is not the most suitable way of describing the individuals who encounter the multimodal communication inherent in translated audiovisual products. Therefore, a more suitable term would perhaps be ‘audience’. Indeed, the audience or the viewer as a “discursive tool” (Ang, 1991a: 20) has been present in studies on audiovisual translation. One example of this is in the discussion on quality, for quality is usually related to reception in some way, and thus discussion of the audience is quite unavoidable in that context. This point has been made, for example, by Eivor Gummerus and Catrine Paro (2001: 138), who describe a practical model for quality assurance and state that translation quality is often approached through a focus on
the viewer: “When our team talks about translation quality, we tend to take the view that quality refers to the total viewer experience and the translation’s role in or contribution to it.” Similarly, in another practically oriented article, Heulwen James (2001: 152) emphasises viewers’ satisfaction as the most important determinant of quality by stating that “[o]f all the clients, viewers and their expectations are the most important.” This is a fairly straightforward approach to quality, and as such a typical one. In discussions on quality, viewers tend to be a rather abstract presence, the potential audience with its presumed needs and likely preferences, and they thus hold a fairly similar position as is the case in Ang’s previously mentioned comments on audience as a discursive tool. Reception is considered a central criterion of quality for audiovisual translations, but the discussion typically involves only audience expectations on this speculative level.

An additional example of the audience’s role in quality discussions is Delia Chiaro’s (2008) article “Issues of quality in screen translation: Problems and solutions”. In her article Chiaro advocates for a more systematic practice of quality management in screen translation, stating that “[e]nd users should not be enduring mere adequacy but have the right to expect top quality translations on TV just as they would expect tip top services in any other walk of life” (ibid.: 250). However, Chiaro (ibid.: 248) goes further than merely using the end users as a discursive tool and suggests several potential models of quality management whereby viewers’ opinions can be taken into account empirically. This shows that discussions on quality, however abstract their starting points may be, can eventually lead to models of empirical reception research, as Chiaro (ibid.: 252–254) also proposes in her article. Quality can be a thorny issue in any area of translation, and quality considerations can be particularly challenging in audiovisual translation, where the audience encounters a multitude of messages simultaneously and where new technologies constantly change the circumstances. Therefore, it is no wonder that questions of quality are brought up in various contexts and that the audience is used as one focal point in this discussion.

This reasoning can also be used conversely, so that improving quality becomes one of the reasons for conducting empirical audience research, and the role of

17 For further examples of the presence of an abstract reader position in quality discussions, see e.g. Chaume Varela (2005) and Pedersen (2008).
quality in reception is a constant research topic. Thus, the theme of quality is a powerful bridge between theoretical and empirical investigations on reception: while questions of quality can be discussed through the use of the audience as a discursive tool, data from actual audiences is needed for the formulation and refinement of this discursive tool, and questions concerning quality seek their answers in actual, realistic reception contexts. This kind of discussion is, of course, not unique to audiovisual translation, but in such a challenging area where research is still fairly young and conventions still being developed, the question is particularly relevant. This will become clear in the ensuing discussion on empirical reception studies within audiovisual translation. In addition, the issue of quality and the effects of subtitle quality on the reception process have been one motivating factor in the planning of the current empirical study. In the next section, I will begin charting the various research approaches through which actual audiences can be reached and analysed and which can have an effect on how we formulate our abstract conceptions of readers and audiences.

3.1.4 Institutional and Statistical Reception

The study of institutional reception is defined here as the kind of reception-related investigation where the object of analysis does not consist of the so-called “ordinary” readers, or viewers, but of more influential recipients who are in the position of gatekeeper, such as critics and individuals responsible for the distribution of translated materials. The reactions of such institutional actors can sometimes be considered representative of how a translation has been generally received and whether it has been successful. Reception statistics, on the other hand, include viewing numbers for translated programmes, statistics on reading habits and sales statistics for translated literature. These numbers can provide information which will help in forming general impressions of the consumption and the consumers of translated material, perhaps to be used as background information when formulating abstract audience constructions. These statistics themselves are always something of an abstraction from actual reception situations, because they do not reveal individual readings but construct a general picture of averages and overall numbers. Thus, statistics and institutions provide a means for looking at the realities
of reception from a distance; they are a method of investigating actual reception through generalities that are more homogenous and therefore more easily accessible than individual reception experiences.

Both institutional and statistical views of reception can be used as complementary methods in a textually oriented analysis or an empirical reception study. One example of this is a very short, off-hand remark by Gideon Toury (1995: 112): “To judge from critical reviews of the translation, the intended impact on the reader was indeed achieved.” This statement is presented after a textual analysis, as confirmation of its conclusions. Thus, even such small remarks can occasionally be used to bring a different kind of audience perspective into a study. The assumption here is that the opinions of the critics are accurate representations of the general audience’s experiences and as such are sufficient proof of actual reception and its relation to the textual analysis.

It is, of course, also possible to build the majority of an analysis around such statistical and institutional data. Within the field of audiovisual translation, this is the case in Anne Jäckel’s (2001) study on the reception of the French film *La Haine* in the United Kingdom and United States. In her study, Jäckel analyses the film’s English subtitles and compares the film’s reception in the United States and Great Britain through reviews in the press and box office numbers (*ibid.*: 231–232). Jäckel’s conclusion on the basis of this comparison (*ibid.*: 234) is that the reception was more positive in Great Britain than in the United States, and she suggests that this can be explained by the significant cultural differences between France and the United States. In this way, Jäckel uses a textual analysis of the subtitles and institutional and statistical impressions of the two reception situations to draw conclusions on the two audiences’ interpretations and on the effects of cultural differences on these interpretations. This kind of analysis has some connection with the concrete reality of reception contexts, because even though no individual viewers were asked for their opinions, the opinions presented in journalistic texts along with statistical information and intratextual analysis form a fairly uniform picture of the reception context. This method is, thus, an interesting way of constructing an overall picture of reception and investigating how the viewing audience in a particular country may have reacted to the film. However, the conclusions can only be speculative, because viewer opinions and motivations cannot be reliably deduced from statistical data and reviews, and because such
research cannot account for the large number of other variables always involved in both the distribution and reception process.

Another study of reception which could be characterised as institutional and which falls within the scope of audiovisual translation is Friederike von Schwerin-High’s (2004: 9) study on the reception of Shakespeare’s plays in Germany and Japan, which combines textual and contextual analysis of German and Japanese translations of Shakespeare in general and *The Tempest* in particular with an investigation of institutional and statistical reception. Because the scope of the study is historical, an empirical audience survey would not have been possible, and therefore the only possible method of gathering data about reception is to look at contemporary public commentary. This is, again, a well-founded approach to investigating public discourse concerning the translations and thus finding out about how the translations were accepted into the target cultures, as expressed by some authoritative voices on the topic.

These two studies demonstrate how – and why – statistical data and institutional discussions can be used to investigate certain aspects of reception. While this kind of research alone cannot shed light on actual viewers’ individual opinions or interpretations or take into account different background factors which can affect reception, the data can create general impressions of the kind of role translations play in a target culture and in the lives of their recipients. This contributes to the overall picture of the cultural role of translations and their relationship with their target audiences. Statistical and institutional information on reception creates a picture of the public side of reception, while the more private and individual aspects of reception are investigated through other empirical means. Next, I will turn to the kind of empirical research which looks into the interpretations, reactions, and opinions of individual audience members.

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18For further examples of institutional and statistical approaches to reception, see, for example, Karamitroglou (2000) on audiovisual translations, and Mäkisalo (2006), Vihonen and Salmi (2007), Salmi (2010) and Kovala (1992), which concern both audiovisual and other translated material.
3.1.5 Empirical Reception Research and the Demand for Reception Studies on Audiovisual Translation

Even in recent years, it has been suggested that there are hardly any empirical reception studies on translation, and on audiovisual translation in particular. Colm Caffrey (2008: 168), for example, states that “[t]here has been little research into audience perception of dubbing and subtitling”, and Yves Gambier (2008: 11) similarly maintains that “[f]ew systematic studies have examined the production and reception or the cultural and linguistic impact of audiovisual translation”. To be sure, it is true that there are few wide-ranging empirical reception studies, but, in spite of the lack of a systematic body of work, actual recipients of translations have already been investigated in many ways, and the studies have provided interesting perspectives on the reception process and its various micro-level elements. However, even more research is undoubtedly needed, and I agree with Gambier’s (ibid.: 30) comment that “[m]uch work remains to be done in this area, in order to ensure that technological progress can best satisfy users’ demands and expectations.” One important argument in support of further reception research is the fact that audiovisual translations reach a large number of people and have a very varied audience. Rachele Antonini (2005: 210) makes this point very emphatically: “Considering the huge number of recipients of audiovisual products, why has audience perception of both dubbing and subtitling been so patently ignored?”

Reception is such a vast area of research that the studies so far completed cannot provide exhaustive answers for all its central questions. In the current situation, it is important to take note of what has already been attempted and accomplished and reflect on how those studies and the data they provide could be complemented by different materials, methodologies and analytical perspectives.

Empirical research has been conducted within a wide range of differing approaches, both thematic and methodological. Reception can be investigated through various micro-level instances of understanding and interpretation, or through a macro-level perspective on the reception situation as a whole. It can be studied either through viewers’ conscious opinions and direct comments, or through unconscious, physiological reactions. These different approaches can all be considered studies of reception, but the questions they attempt to answer are very different. Therefore, it is important to construct a clear picture of what kinds of
approaches have been used and what has been discovered through these approaches. The following sections thus describe various empirical reception studies within the field of audiovisual translation in order to clarify the different ways in which the topic can be approached. One should, however, keep in mind that what follows is not a mutually exclusive classification of reception research. In reality, many studies contain several different approaches. Each of the following sections describes some significant element of reception research, but the different elements may be combined in a single study in many ways.  

3.1.5.1 Themes and topics in micro-level research

One common type of reception research is a study which concentrates on the reception of some micro-level element of audiovisual translations. In these studies, a specific factor of the translated texts, such as certain linguistic or stylistic choices, humour, or culture-bound elements, is taken and the target audience’s interpretations and preferences concerning this element are investigated through various test set-ups. These studies tend to concentrate on the reception of this single element and pay less attention to the translated product and its reception as a whole, or to the audience’s expectations and attitudes. It is also typical that the test subjects are only provided with small extracts of the translated text, because searching for responses to a specific detail could be difficult if the test subjects first had to take in the entire text. Thus, the focus of these studies is specific and narrowly definable.

One of the most popular themes in such research has been humour. Humour is a challenging aspect of translations, not only for the translator but also for the audience, when the translator’s choices cannot always optimally convey the original text’s humorous meanings. This is particularly true when the humour is language-based, i.e. so-called “verbally expressed humour”, and when it appears in an

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19 For the sake of simplicity, I use the term ‘reception’ to refer to all varieties of audience or reader research. Individual researchers and studies have their own ways of describing their object of study, and, particularly in micro-level studies of understanding and response, the term ‘perception’ is often used. In this overview, however, the difference between these descriptive terms is not relevant, and it is much more significant to emphasise that while the methodology and research questions are different, all of these different approaches share an interest in what the recipients of audiovisual translations do with those translations, and I have chosen to call that act, in its broad sense, reception.
audiovisual context where the constraints of screen translation apply (Chiaro, 2006).

Delia Chiaro has been one of the foremost researchers in investigating humour and its reception in audiovisual translations. She (ibid.) poses two fundamental questions about humour and reception: “Do culturally different audiences laugh in the same places? And if they do not, how far will this depend upon culture-specific presuppositions and how far on the quality of translation?”20 These questions characterise research on the reception of translated humour rather well. It is interesting to see whether audiences in different cultures react to humour differently, but that alone does not provide sufficient information about the entire situation; in addition, the significance of the translation in causing these differences is an important question. Chiaro herself has conducted empirical research related to these questions. For example, she has (2007) compared how British viewers of an English source text and Italian viewers of its dubbed version respond to its humorous elements. This study showed that the British viewers tended to react to the humour more strongly than the Italian viewers (ibid.: 145). However, Chiaro finds that the difference is quite small when compared to a previous study (Chiaro, 2004), in which 75% of the test subjects missed the humour of translated programme extracts. Therefore, Chiaro (2007: 150) concludes that, as the quality of the translations in the previous study had been quite poor, “translation is indeed a significant factor in the success of a screen product and not simply an invisible process within a larger whole.” Thus, Chiaro hypothesises that the greater disparity between the source and target language audiences could be due to poor translation quality, and excellent translations can have a noticeable positive effect on humour reception.

While Chiaro’s study concentrates on dubbed humour, Rachele Antonini (2005) reports on another Italian study where the focus is on subtitled humour. In this case, too, the results indicate that target-language and target-culture viewers find the humour less funny and have more trouble in understanding it than source-language viewers (ibid.: 222). However, Antonini also reports (ibid.: 222–223) that some viewers were able to find the subtitled programme humorous through “personal

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20 These questions are reminiscent of Eugene A. Nida’s concept of functional equivalence. This is a useful reminder of the fact that receiver orientation has been a part of translation research for a long time, and recent empirical research is attempting to answer questions posed by earlier theories. For a discussion on Nida’s pioneering role in user-oriented translation, see Suojanen et al. (2012).
reinterpretation”, i.e. by using their creativity to find a different humorous interpretation than the one intended by the source text. However, it should be noted that the subtitles used in this study were, according to Antonini (ibid.: 216), of a poor quality, and this may have influenced the viewers’ reactions and made it more difficult, if not impossible, to understand the humour. Thus, this study appears to confirm Chiaro’s conclusion that poor translation quality can affect reception. These findings also raise the question of what kind of material is useful for a study of reception. If the objective is to investigate responses to humour, poor translation quality might eliminate enough of the humour to make the responses of the target-language automatically very different from the original audience’s reactions. Therefore, extremely poor subtitles might not be useful, as they cannot conclusively demonstrate how a specific element is received. However, it is interesting and important to look at the general effect quality has on reception, and, as was discussed above, quality questions are significant motivators for reception studies.

The reception of humour has also been investigated by Adrián Fuentes Luque (2000, 2003), who has looked at both subtitled and dubbed humour. He studied the reception of humour in the film Duck Soup in its original version with an English-speaking audience, and with Spanish subtitles and Spanish dubbing with a Spanish audience. Fuentes’s study employs several methods: he investigates the reception of the film through empirical observation, a questionnaire and an interview (2003: 296). The results of his study are quite similar to Chiaro’s results: again, the viewers of the two translated versions react less to humour than the English-speaking viewers of the original film (ibid.: 298). Fuentes also compares reactions between the dubbed and subtitled versions and finds that the dubbed version is more successful in relaying humour and is the preferred method for the viewers themselves. Fuentes thus suggests that dubbing is a better translation method for humour than subtitling (ibid.: 301–302). This finding raises an interesting question regarding the generalisability of such studies: Fuentes’s study was conducted in Spain, which is a dubbing country, and it is therefore unsurprising that viewers would express a preference for dubbing. However, if the same question was asked in a subtitling country such as Finland, the answer – as well as perhaps the comparable

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21For a similar finding on Finnish readers of literary translations and their interpretations of translated allusions, see Tuominen (2002).
reactions to humour—might be different. Therefore, Fuentes’s study cannot be automatically taken to indicate that dubbing is universally a more successful method for humour transfer than subtitling, rather that this is the case in the Spanish context and with this particular set of subtitles. Reception studies are always to some extent context-bound, and this must be kept in mind when discussing their overall significance. Fuentes (ibid.: 298) further points out that these subtitles are extremely literal and therefore probably not as fluent as a high-quality translation would be. Therefore, Fuentes’s (ibid.: 304) conclusion is that this literalness is what causes problems in reception, again mirroring both Chiaro’s and Antonini’s findings on the effects of quality on reception, as well as demonstrating the problems of using poor-quality subtitles as research material.

In addition to humour, Chiaro’s, Antonini’s as well as Fuentes’s studies mention another element of audiovisual translations which can be challenging to both translators and viewers and which is a popular topic of reception research. This is the cultural dimension of texts, which manifests itself in various allusions and other culture-bound elements. Several reception studies of audiovisual translations have these cultural references as their main focus and investigate viewers’ ability to understand these references and interpret the translated audiovisual product accordingly. An interesting example of such a study can be seen in Rachele Antonini’s (2007, 2008, 2009) three articles, which evaluate Italian television viewers’ ability to understand references related to the source culture in dubbed television programmes. The articles are based on a fairly extensive reception study on the quality of dubbing in Italy. In the study, 253 respondents viewed dubbed video clips and then filled in an online questionnaire testing their appreciation and understanding of the clips (Antonini, 2007: 157–158). In addition to the cultural references, the study also investigated viewer reactions to “dubbese”, the somewhat artificial-sounding, conventionalised language variant heard in Italian dubbed audiovisual products (Antonini, 2008: 136). On the question of cultural references, Antonini (2007: 165) finds that “there is a remarkable discrepancy between what the viewers declared they had understood and what they actually did understand.” This would indicate that even though viewers may claim that they have understood a cultural reference, in reality they rarely understand these references, and thus their understanding of the entire translated programme must be different from the source-language audience’s interpretations. This finding also suggests that test subjects’
subjective evaluations of their ability to interpret texts cannot be fully trusted, and this could be an important consideration in analysing empirical reception data.

The question of quality is, again, brought up, as Antonini (2007: 165) finds that “the quality of screen translation is fundamental both for these users’ appreciation of the film, series or cartoon they choose to watch and, possibly, for the success of these products.” Furthermore, Antonini points out that, while screen translation certainly operates under strict constraints, recent technological developments could perhaps be used in aid of the viewers, to provide information on a programme’s cultural background for the viewers to access (Antonini, 2009). This can be seen as another dimension of the quality debate: Should the broadcasters of translated programmes be expected to provide a product which consists not only of the translation itself but any support material that is deemed necessary for its enjoyment? Should the availability of such material be considered another criterion for a translation’s quality? The suggestion of providing background information for the audience is an intriguing thought which certainly deserves further consideration in the context of discussions on quality and accessibility of information.

While the study described by Antonini concentrates on dubbed material, another Italian study, by Flavia Cavaliere (2008), investigates the reception of culture-bound elements in Italian-language material subtitled in English. Cavaliere’s results are quite similar to Antonini’s: she concludes that culture-bound references can be challenging to understand, and comments that her study “tried to demonstrate that the poor translation, or the absence of translation, of culture-specific elements strongly affects the appreciation, and in some cases also the understanding, of the subtitled text by the TL audience.” Her analysis also adds to the discussion of humour reception, as she states that the humorous effect of cultural elements was particularly strongly affected by an inadequate translation, concurring with both Chiaro’s, Antonini’s and Fuentes’s findings discussed above (Cavaliere, 2008: 179). Thus, the question of translation quality is once more raised as an essential factor in reception. Based on these examples, it seems that the problematics of reception are inescapably linked with the question of quality. The debate on quality is, of course, much more diverse and includes more dimensions than can be feasibly considered here, but the similar conclusions drawn in each study certainly make for a
compelling case for both further research in the area and stronger argumentation in support of enhanced quality considerations in audiovisual translation.\(^22\)

The final theme considered here is the linguistic and stylistic dimension of translations. One example of research into the reception of that element is the investigation of audience reactions to dubbese. As mentioned above, this theme is present in the study described by Antonini (2007, 2008, 2009), along with the investigation of culture-bound elements. In addition, another Italian study on the reception of dubbese and cultural elements has been conducted by Chiara Bucaria (2008). The study contained three groups of test subjects: “the general audience”, “experts in the field of TV and cinema, journalists and linguists/translation scholars”, and “professionals from the dubbing and subtitling industries” (ibid.: 153). On the question of dubbese, Bucaria discovered that it is indeed considered stylistically unnatural by the respondents. However, some discrepancies were found between the three different test subject groups, as the professionals deemed some of the samples even more unnatural than the regular television viewers. Bucaria considers this result at odds with the reality of dubbing, where these unnatural elements are regularly used by professionals. This conflicting finding has led Bucaria (ibid.: 163) to surmise that “the language used in dubbed products is considered completely separate from spoken Italian, and that no attempt is made to bring the two closer together.” A similar finding is reported by Antonini and Chiaro (2009: 111–112), who conclude that their respondents, aware of the fact that they were listening to television speech, deemed it “acceptable as such even if it was somewhat removed from the reality of everyday speech.” They state that viewers understand that some expressions used in dubbing are not natural Italian but are still acceptable to them as “dubbese”. Antonini and Chiaro describe this attitude as “linguistic bipolarity”: viewers accept the expressions on screen but would not use them in their own communication. Thus, dubbese appears truly to be seen as its own language variant with its own conventions. In textual analysis, the unnaturalness of dubbese might be considered a quality problem, but the fact that it appears to be an

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\(^22\)The reception of cultural references in audiovisual translation has also been investigated by Desilla (2009). In the field of literary translation, Leppihalme (1997) offers an interesting approach to investigating the understanding of allusions, and the results of her study closely resemble the results described here, as do the conclusions in Tuominen (2002).
established and accepted style of translation can make it fairly firmly embedded in
the communicational culture. This conflicting situation certainly deserves more
attention, as would the reception of subtitling conventions, which can raise similar
questions of naturalness and fluency.23

Outside the area of audiovisual translation, questions of naturalness and fluency
have been investigated by, among others, Inkeri Vehmas-Lehto (1989). Her study
focuses on the quality of journalistic texts translated from Russian into Finnish and
compares their fluency and readability to journalistic texts originally written in
Finnish (Vehmas-Lehto, 1989: 1–3). The study investigates readers’ attitudes
towards the texts as well as feelings evoked by the texts. The results indicate that
readers were able to distinguish translations from original Finnish texts relatively
often (ibid.: 78), and their attitudes towards translations, both on the level of entire
texts and on the level of individual words, were often negative (ibid.: 82, 104).
Vehmas-Lehto also finds that the readability of translated texts is inferior to the
original Finnish texts (ibid.: 129). In discussing the problems with translation
quality, Vehmas-Lehto employs the concept of covert error. While an overt error
would be an obvious mistranslation, covert error refers to such textual problems that
“do not distort the message, but they hamper its communication” (ibid.: 2). Thus,
covert errors could, for example, result from stylistic elements which make the
translated text lack fluency and credibility, or structural factors which diminish the
text’s readability. This makes the concept comparable in its meaning to the
previously described concept of dubbese, and, as such, is a useful way of describing
a translation that is not factually incorrect but nevertheless does not appear to be
quite fluent and acceptable as a target-language text. As Vehmas-Lehto finds, such
covert errors can easily affect readers’ opinions of the translated text, which makes
them a relevant factor in reception research. It is interesting to compare Vehmas-
Lehto’s findings to those of the dubbing studies where dubbese did not appear to
cause significant problems in reception and was accepted as a language variant,
even though it is exclusive to dubbed audiovisual products. This suggests that covert

23 Another study on dubbing and its stylistic and linguistic factors, this time in relation to the
audience’s perception of a film’s cultural background, can be found in González Ruiz and Cruz
García (2007).
errors are not always a problem for reception, but further research would be needed to determine how and when covert errors encourage significant negative reactions.

The examples above show that while there has been increasing activity in reception research in recent years, the focus is still fairly narrowly placed in humour and cultural references, as well as some investigations of style and language. These are, of course, central and challenging areas in audiovisual translation, but there are certainly other elements which would also merit closer investigation. In addition, as Italy has seemed to develop into a centre for reception research, a majority of the studies involve dubbing, or a comparative investigation of dubbing and subtitling, leaving the reception of subtitled materials more under-researched than dubbing. The findings of the above studies raise interesting questions in relation to subtitling, and similar questions could certainly be asked in connection with subtitled material. In all, the micro-level of reception research is beginning to accumulate interesting data and varied methodological practices, but more questions still remain. Furthermore, a connection between these decontextualised micro-level elements and the macro-level of general attitudes and strategies related to reception has not been very often attempted. This study moves in that direction, as it would be important to ascertain what implications these micro-level responses may have for the reception of the translated programme as a whole, and, conversely, how general attitudes and expectations might translate themselves into specific interpretations. Of course, the current study does not approach all of these questions, but the methodology explored here is one attempt to provide tools for furthering this aspect of reception research.

3.1.5.2 Attitudes, expectations, reactions and the macro level

The section above explored several themes through which reception has been approached on the level of individual textual elements. On the other hand, a number of studies take a more general approach, looking at reception as a whole and investigating viewers’ attitudes. These investigations tend to consist of questionnaires or interviews charting viewers’ opinions instead of interpretations. One example of a questionnaire providing an overview of subtitle reading behaviour is Maria José Alves Veiga’s (2006) study on subtitle reading practices among
Portuguese secondary school students. This study is an excellent example of how the macro-level focus differs from the micro-level one: in the studies described above, the object of study was always a specific element of a specific translated text or a set of texts. In Alves Veiga’s study, on the other hand, the objective is to chart reading practices, i.e. investigate subtitle reading in general, without reference to specific programmes or specific aspects of translations. Thus, reception is looked at on a different level of generality, and the research questions are different from the thematic questions considered in previously mentioned empirical studies. Alves Veiga’s study reveals that young Portuguese viewers prefer subtitled to dubbed programmes and that their opinions of the quality of subtitles are quite positive: 62.4% of the 293 respondents rated the quality of subtitles as “good” and 29.7% as “very good” (ibid.: 161; 164–165). However, Alves Veiga also discovered that a significant number of respondents in the study, 36.8%, claimed not to pay any attention to translations, and only 1.7% of the respondents stated that they remember a translator or translators by name (ibid.: 165–166). This provides an interesting overall picture of subtitle-reading in Portugal: subtitles are read and appreciated, but they are not given much conscious thought or notice. Thus, if Alves Veiga’s results are to be believed, perhaps subtitles truly function as translation hidden in plain sight, as was suggested in Chapter 2.

Another overview of viewer attitudes can be found in Brigitte Widler’s (2004: 98) study, where 100 Austrian cinema viewers of 19 subtitled films were interviewed briefly in order to collect background data on viewers, their reasons for choosing a subtitled rather than dubbed film, and their opinions concerning the quality of subtitles. Much like Alves Veiga, Widler (ibid.: 99–100) finds that viewers are fairly satisfied with the quality of subtitles and happy to watch subtitled films. Thus, these two examples of small-scale studies indicate that viewers’ attitudes towards subtitles can be quite positive – even in countries where dubbing is the prominent form of audiovisual translation, such as Austria. However, much more data and more extensive studies are certainly needed, before anything more conclusive can be said about viewer attitudes, and such small studies could be
considered preliminary pilot studies which can be complemented by studies using other methods or larger-scale survey studies.\textsuperscript{24}

While the two studies above are general in nature and concentrate on the overall act of reading subtitles, it is possible to take a macro-level approach in reception research while also looking at a more specific target and with specifically chosen material. This is what has been done in a fairly early example of reception research, reported by Henrik Gottlieb (1995). This study concentrates on investigating viewers’ understanding of various subtitled programme fragments, looking at the viewers’ perception of subtitles in relation to their perception of the subtitled programme as a whole (\textit{ibid.}: 389). Thus, the purpose of this study is to analyse the significance of subtitles in understanding a subtitled programme instead of concentrating on a specific textual aspect and its understanding. In addition, the study attempted to find out what aspects of subtitles evoke negative reactions in viewers: the test subjects were asked to press a button whenever they found something objectionable in the subtitles (\textit{ibid.}: 390). The study found that visual information is easier to take in and remember than the verbal information in the subtitles, which could perhaps indicate that the visual is received before the verbal. On the topic of objecting to the subtitles, the data showed that viewers express difficulty with subtitles surprisingly rarely, and in several cases the contexts which prompt protests are either ordinary practices of subtitling, such as condensation, or other aspects of the programme which the subtitler could not affect. Intentionally added faulty subtitles, on the other hand, did not provoke a significant reaction (\textit{ibid.}: 409). This relative lack of responses to problems in subtitles is an interesting finding, particularly because viewers’ casual discussions about subtitles often concentrate on subtitling errors, thus making it seem as if discontent is the major attitude towards subtitles. This empirical study, however, suggests the opposite. This approach appears to be a useful one for investigating both attitudes and understanding, and a more extensive similar study could perhaps produce very interesting results.

\textsuperscript{24}Another study charting overall attitudes towards subtitling is Maria Bernschütz’s (2010) quantitative and qualitative investigation of Hungarian readers of subtitles, which includes a qualitative comparative element with Finnish subtitle viewers.
In another study, reported by Dominique Bairstow (2011: 212), questionnaires were used to chart viewers’ cognitive processing of subtitled and non-subtitled film material. French-speaking test subjects with little English skills and English-speaking test subjects who were fluent in French watched an English-language film both without subtitles and with French subtitles and answered questions investigating their understanding of the film’s visual, verbal and situational information. The study concludes that the French-speakers gain considerable help for understanding from the subtitles, while the English-speakers’ answer scores are better when watching the non-subtitled version. This indicates that those viewers who do not need subtitles can be severely distracted by the presence of subtitles. Interestingly, the French-speakers’ comprehension scores are better with the subtitled version even on the visual aspects of the film, which might suggest that subtitle use supports the overall viewing experience, not simply the reception of linguistic information (ibid.: 216–217). The results of the study point out how helpful subtitles are for the reception of a foreign-language film, but, on the other hand, how much they can hinder reception if they are superfluous. From a Finnish point of view, the study does not answer the particularly interesting question of what role the subtitles might have when viewers are native speakers of the subtitles’ language but also have a relatively good command of the source language. This is typically the case in Finland, where English is the prevalent source language of subtitled programmes and a majority of Finns know at least some English. Would subtitles be distracting in such a situation, or would they be as helpful as they are for the French viewers who understand little English? Bairstow’s study offers many opportunities for further investigation in varying linguistic frameworks.

Finally, Christopher Taylor (2003: 203–204) has reported on a study investigating whether viewers preferred significantly condensed subtitles or more extensive subtitles. In this study, two groups of test subjects, one with non-English speakers and another with speakers of English as their second language, explained via a questionnaire their preferences on condensation after viewing a short, subtitled English-language cartoon. The study found that significant majorities in both groups preferred the more condensed version, as “the disturbance caused by having to concentrate on the maximum titles outweighed the benefits of the extra information” (ibid.: 203–204). In addition, the respondents suggested that the audiovisual context provided assistance in understanding the programme, which diminished the need for
detailed subtitles (*ibid.*: 204). Thus, Taylor’s study confirms the potential of subtitles for causing distraction and shows that this distracting effect can be detected even by those viewers who do not know the source language at all. On the other hand, Taylor’s respondents emphasised the way in which contextual, multimodal clues can support in understanding minimal subtitles, while Bairstow’s (2011) study demonstrated the opposite, i.e., how subtitles can help a viewer understand the programme’s multimodal elements. Both of these observations confirm the close link which subtitles have with their immediate multimodal context and demonstrate the need to view subtitles as a part of this context, rather than consider them as independent, verbal text.

These macro-level investigations can be useful in forming an overview of attitudes towards audiovisual translations and finding out more about how translations are used as part of the reception process. In the current study, one of the methodological objectives is to apply this macro-level thinking slightly differently, in order to navigate something of a middle course between a very general approach and more focused methodology. The purpose is to gather information about the overall reception of a specific film, i.e. investigate viewer opinions that are not tied to a single element of the translated programme. The intention is to gain a more detailed picture of viewer expectations, attitudes and reception practices, a way to bring the general surveys to a more concrete, contextualised viewing situation and, by doing this, to find new ways of describing how subtitles become a part of the viewing experience. Because the focus of the study is on the reception of a single film, this film’s specific features will necessarily be a part of the investigation, but no individual element is given primary focus, as is the case in the thematic, micro-level studies. Henrik Gottlieb’s (1995) study, which was described above, is similar in outlook, as it also concentrates on the viewing of subtitled material in general and viewer strategies and attitudes. However, even that study is slightly more generalised, as it does not focus on an individual programme, but looks at the reception of pre-selected programme fragments, and therefore takes the subtitled material and its reception out of its natural context. My study, on the other hand, emphasises the importance of the context for reception and looks at the reception of subtitled material from the perspective of an ordinary viewing situation. Thus, this study is one way of bridging the gap between the general and the specific, constructing a picture of reception practices by looking at both individual details
and macro-level attitudes and putting them together in a contextualised narrative of viewing subtitled material.

3.1.5.3 Technical and physiological aspects of perception: Eye tracking

One speciality of subtitle reception research is the use of eye tracking to investigate the physiological dimension of subtitle reading and thus investigating those viewer reactions of which viewers themselves may not be aware. Eye tracking is a technical method which records eye movements and the direction of the gaze. It is very useful in determining how subtitles are read, or whether they are read at all. One of the pioneers of this area of research is the psychologist Géry d’Ydewalle, who, along with several other researchers, has studied, for example, whether the viewing context has an effect on how much subtitles are read, discovering that reading subtitles is almost unavoidable (d’Ydewalle et al., 1991). d’Ydewalle et al. (1991: 652) call subtitle reading “obligatory”, meaning that whenever subtitles appear on screen, they are read, whether it is necessary for the understanding of the programme or not. They have also found that even viewers who are not used to reading subtitles tend to spend a significant amount of time reading them, and subtitles are read even when they are in the same language as the spoken text. This has led d’Ydewalle et al. (ibid.: 660) to conclude that “[w]hen there is a choice between the speech and text channels, the subjects read the subtitles”. They do, however, also remind us that this does not rule out the possibility that viewers simultaneously listen to speech and read subtitles (ibid.: 661).

These findings emphasise the importance of subtitles as part of the viewing experience: subtitles are almost always read, viewers pay attention to them, and subtitles appear to be preferred over the auditory mode of presenting information. These findings can perhaps also explain why Dominique Bairstow’s (2011) study found that subtitles can be distracting to those who do not need them: if subtitles appear on screen, viewers read them, and this takes their attention away from other aspects of the programme. While these conclusions do not shed light on how well subtitles are understood or what viewers think of them, this is an important step in understanding the role of subtitles in the viewing experience. There are, of course, many further and more detailed questions on subtitle reading, and in recent years,
many researchers have investigated various questions related to subtitle reading through eye tracking. The technology has been used, for example, to study the effect of coherence-enhancing elements on reading (Moran, 2008) and connections between line breaks and readability (Perego and del Missier, 2008).

In Finland, Jukka Mäkisalo (2012) has directed a study in which eye tracking was utilised to investigate subtitle-reading and the effects of subtitle quality problems on the reading process. The study found that errors in the content of subtitles are a less serious problem for the viewing process than problems in timecueing. In other words, mistranslations can be overlooked by viewers if the subtitle remains coherent with the audiovisual context, whereas subtitles which appear on screen too late or remain on screen for too long can have noticeable effects on the way viewers look at the screen and read the subtitles. Thus, the results of this study agree with both Vehmas-Lehto’s (1989) conclusions on the consequences of covert errors and with Gottlieb’s (1995) findings that viewers do not protest faulty subtitles particularly frequently. All three studies suggest that the general fluency, readability and credibility of a translation affects reception more than occasional mistranslations. In the case of subtitles, this fluency is achieved through synchrony with the spoken text and harmony with the entire audiovisual context.

In some cases, eye movement studies are accompanied by questionnaires, through which viewers’ conscious opinions can be charted along with their eye movements. One such study, where subtitle reading is investigated through both eye movement research and a questionnaire, is Colm Caffrey’s (2009) doctoral dissertation on watching subtitled anime programmes. In the study, Caffrey experiments with the use of pupillometry, which can be used, for example, to investigate the fixation of the eyes to certain areas of the screen. He concentrates on finding out how viewers process the “pop-up” glosses which are occasionally used in subtitled anime DVDs to provide extra information on source culture-bound elements of the programmes. Caffrey’s objective is to find out “what effect the use of pop-up gloss has on viewer perception of TV anime in terms of positive cognitive effects (PCEs) and processing effort.” The positive cognitive effects were studied through questionnaires and the processing effort with both questionnaires and pupillometry (ibid.: x). Thus, the methodology used by Caffrey increases the possible uses of eye tracking and widens the scope of possible questions. When used in combination with, for example, viewer surveys, this kind of information can be
useful in determining subtitle reading behaviour and its implications on the entire process of watching subtitled programmes.

3.1.5.4 Combining empirical and non-empirical methodology: Empirical studies as confirmation or contradiction

Many of the previously mentioned studies employ several methods in approaching their research objectives. The same group of test subjects can, for example, perform an identification or interpretation task and express their opinions in a questionnaire or interview, or an eye tracking study can be supplemented with a questionnaire. It is also quite common to combine reception research with textual analysis, which can, for example, shed light on intratextual reader positions. Conversely, a theoretical analysis of reception can be amended with a small empirical study of the same question in order to include the reality of reception in the study in some way. In this way, actual readers can be taken into account without engaging in the difficulties and uncertainties of an extensive empirical study.

One example of a study where passing mention is made of an empirical study to complement textually focused analysis is John Denton’s (2007) article “Audience Reception of Translated Audiovisual Texts and the Problem of Visual and Verbal Shared/Unshared Knowledge”. The majority of the article concentrates on estimating the current state of research into audiovisual translation and particularly reception, advocating for more interdisciplinary and varied approaches (ibid.: 27–28). The article ends with small case studies which concretise Denton’s arguments. The analyses in the case studies consist largely of Denton’s subjective assessments, and the audience construction is fairly abstract. However, this is complemented by a short remark appended to the end of one case (ibid.: 31): “The above, rather intuitive remarks are, to some extent, supported by a rather rough and ready survey among a group of students […] , who watched the first thirty minutes or so of the Italian dubbed version of the film […].” This slightly vague comment is all Denton says concerning the survey, but even this small remark demonstrates how an
empirical viewpoint can be used to enhance the arguments and conclusions being drawn.\textsuperscript{25}

Another article where a survey of actual viewers is used to bring an added dimension to an otherwise textual investigation is Jun Tang’s (2008) article on the reception of the film \textit{Mulan} in China in its subtitled version. In the article, Tang analyses both the film and its Chinese subtitles, particularly in reference to the Chinese culture and the way it is presented in this Disney product and the translation. This analysis is accompanied by a survey of Chinese students who express their opinions on the film and the subtitles. Being only one part of the article, the reception study and its analysis are not extensive, but Tang brings up interesting questions on how the test subjects’ individual backgrounds may have influenced their opinions on, for example, the quality of the film itself or on the use of subtitles \textit{(ibid.}: 156). Thus, Tang \textit{(ibid.}: 160) concludes that viewers who understand English well focus their attention on the cultural aspects of the film rather than the subtitles, while the reactions of those viewers who need the Chinese subtitles for their understanding of the film are affected by the individuals’ demographic background factors. Tang’s article is a fitting example of a study where textual analysis and reception research are given equal attention, and it provides several viewpoints into an interesting cultural situation of a Chinese story being retold by Disney and then brought into the Chinese market and translated for the local audience. However, as Tang states, the findings of the reception study are of a “limited scale”, and the textual analysis “brief” \textit{(ibid.}: 160). Thus, while this approach is interesting and provides a fairly balanced picture of the translation in its context, this attempt to include both elements in one study can mean that neither will be dealt with comprehensively.

3.1.5.5 The question of accessibility: Empirical research on the reception of \textit{intra-lingual} subtitling

Intra-lingual subtitling, audio description and other means of providing access to audiovisual products for special needs audiences share many of their characteristics

\textsuperscript{25}On the other hand, an empirical component can also provide information that is contradictory to the textual analysis; this is the case in Leppihalme (2000), where the topic is literary translation.
with audiovisual translation. Therefore, research into them is also relevant in the case of audiovisual translation, and there are some reception studies which can be interesting from a translational point of view. One of the foremost researchers of the reading of closed captions for the deaf and hard of hearing is Carl J. Jensema, who has conducted several extensive studies on, for example, reading speed (Jensema 1998), eye movements when watching captioned programmes (Jensema et al., 2000a) and caption reading times (Jensema et al., 2000b). Zoë de Linde and Neil Kay (1999a: 55) have also conducted a fairly extensive study on the comparative viewing behaviours of deaf and hearing television viewers in relation to five significant subtitle features: “subtitle display rate; lead time (time at which subtitles appear after the onset of speech); shot changes occurring during a subtitle; degree of editing of the source utterance; visibility of speaker (whether a speaker is on- or off-screen)”. Aline Remael et al. (2008) also report on “a large-scale survey into the needs and wishes of Flemish viewers with regard to intralingual subtitling on television”. In addition, Eliana P. C. Franco and Vera Lucia Santiago Araújo (2003) have investigated deaf people’s reactions to and understanding of different types of intralingual subtitles.

Within the scope of this study, it is impossible to offer a detailed account of such studies; Their relevance to a study of interlingual subtitling is also limited, as the reception situations are quite different: the spoken source-language material is unavailable to many readers of intralingual subtitles due to hearing impediments, and the multimodal context is therefore different from an average situation in which interlingual subtitles are used. In addition, the fact that these subtitles are not translated means that the aspect of translation itself is not discussed in these studies. However, the findings of these studies concerning processes of reading and understanding can contribute to the study of translated subtitles, and some of their methodological approaches could benefit the research on translated subtitles, as the studies have employed a variety of methods from eye tracking to various kinds of viewer surveys.
3.2 Media Studies and Qualitative Audience Research

As can be seen from the above overview of reception research on audiovisual translations, a significant proportion of the studies share a fairly similar approach, where the primary goal is to find answers to closely specified questions and operate in a somewhat atomistic, decontextualised research set-up. Many studies also tend to be quantitative in their main approach, as viewer reactions and opinions are analysed through numbers and statistics rather than detailed analyses of verbalised experiences. Thus, predominantly qualitative research such as many of the classical audience studies within media studies, is nearly absent from considerations of translation reception. The current study is an attempt to begin filling that void by applying some of the media studies methodology to a translation-related context. Therefore, the following overview of some relevant qualitative audience studies is intended as an introduction into how media studies has approached audiences and into the kind of thinking that is at the background of the current study.

3.2.1 Classics of Qualitative Audience Research

Audience research within media studies has a long tradition that includes multiple methodologies and approaches. What is of interest from the point of view of this study is the qualitative research tradition. One of the classics of qualitative audience research is the work of Ien Ang. Ang’s *Watching Dallas: Soap opera and the melodramatic imagination* (1991b) is a good example of how the human and social aspects of the viewing experience can be studied by allowing individuals to express their opinions in their own words and by looking at what people find appealing in a television show. Ang performed the study by placing an advertisement in a Dutch women’s magazine and asking readers to send letters sharing why they like or dislike *Dallas*. Ang received 42 letters, and her study consists of the analysis of those letters. Ang (*ibid.*: 10) emphasises, however, that the letters should not be taken to represent either the entire audience’s or a certain social category’s experience of *Dallas*. Rather, she (*ibid.*: 11) states, “the central question is how these letter-writers experience *Dallas*, what it means when they say they experience pleasure or even displeasure, how they relate to the way in which *Dallas* is presented to the public.” Thus, Ang makes the qualitative and interpretive approach
of the study very clear and emphasises the fact that the data is not intended to be representative of general tendencies but a contextualised look at the role of the programme in these viewers’ lives. The interpretive drive becomes even more evident when Ang notes that the texts of the letters themselves cannot be seen as a direct indication of the writers’ feelings and attitudes, because the letter-writers themselves cannot be conscious of all of the processes related to viewing and experiencing the programme. Therefore, Ang states that the letters “should be read ‘symptomatically’: we must search for what is behind the explicitly written, for the presuppositions and accepted attitudes concealed within them” (ibid.: 11). She then proceeds to analyse the letters in this symptomatic fashion, looking at them against the social and ideological backdrop from which they have emerged.

Ang’s study is a good example of how a fairly small sample of viewer reactions can be analysed thoroughly and with interesting conclusions. Viewing Dallas constructs a picture of both the pleasures and the discomforts of watching a soap opera and speculates on reasons for its popularity. Thus, it is an analytical look at how audiences experience the programme, and the analysis is not limited to narrowly defined questions but incorporates the viewing experience as a whole. Ang (1996b: 70–71) herself calls the qualitative style of audience research “methodological situationalism”, which means “underscoring the thoroughly situated, always context-bound ways in which people encounter, use, interpret, enjoy, think and talk about television and other media in everyday life.” According to Ang (ibid.: 71), this style of research is geared towards “interpretive particularization over explanatory generalization, historical and local concreteness rather than formal abstraction, ‘thick’ description of details rather than extensive but ‘thin’ survey.” Thus, Ang makes a forceful case for a contextualised, thorough analysis, which does not necessarily lend itself to generalisation but allows the researcher to understand an individual situation and its concrete dimensions. This profound understanding of one situational context can then lead to a more general understanding of what reception can be like and what parameters it entails.

Another influential reception study on Dallas was conducted by the Israeli researchers Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1993: 22–23), who studied the programme’s reception within various ethnic groups in Israel, as well as among the American audience and in Japan. The focus of their study was, therefore, on how this American programme has been received in different cultures, and what
differences may be detected in the interpretations and viewing experiences between members of different cultures. Liebes and Katz (1993: 32) state that their intention with the study was to answer “basic questions” of the cross-cultural viewing of *Dallas*, including: “Do they understand the story at all? What story do they understand? [...] Do all groups perceive the story in the same way? What critical categories do they employ?” The study consisted of focus group discussions, where small, ethnically homogenous groups of people who knew each other in advance discussed one *Dallas* episode immediately after watching it together (*ibid.*: 24). In the analysis, Liebes and Katz found that the various ethnic groups do indeed view the programme differently. A central distinguishing factor between different readings for Liebes and Katz is a division of the readings into “referential” and “critical”. Liebes and Katz describe (*ibid.*: 32) these two types in the following way:

Referential framings treat the characters as if they were real, suspending disbelief so that attention is redirected to the viewers’ lives or to the lives of other real people [...] Critical framings, on the other hand, discuss the program as an aesthetic project, comparable to other projects and programs within the same or different genres.

In the analysis, Liebes and Katz find that the discussions of different ethnic groups contain varying amounts of critical discussion: “The most critical utterances (relative to the referential) were made by the Russians, followed by Americans and kibbutzniks, followed by Moroccan Jews and Arabs” (*ibid.*: 101). This finding suggests that viewers from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds can view television programmes differently and interpret them through a different frame of reference. Such analysis also demonstrates how the focus group method can be usefully applied in investigations of specific viewing situations and viewer attitudes, and how this kind of deep, qualitatively oriented analysis can be used to uncover information on tendencies of reception and interpretation.

A third case of pioneering qualitative audience research is work carried out by David Morley in the United Kingdom. He studied the audience of the news programme *Nationwide*, investigated through group interviews. He examined how members of different social groups viewed the programme and either accepted or rejected its messages (Moores, 1993: 20). Morley’s research is one of the earliest examples of qualitative investigations of audiences, and Shaun Moores (*ibid.*: 22) calls it “an important turning point at which attention began to be switched from the narrow examination of textual forms towards an empirical exploration of audience
engagement with texts.” For the purposes of this study, however, even more significant is Morley’s later work *Family Television* (1990), in which he investigates television viewing in its normal, family context through family interviews. Morley *(ibid.: 17)* explains that the objective of his analysis is to study “viewing behaviour,” and how and why television is viewed in a family context where social relationships and other surrounding factors affect the process of viewing. Morley *(ibid.: 13)* points out that the study has a dual objective, investigating “on the one hand, how television is used within different families and, on the other hand, how television material is interpreted by its audience.” According to Morley, these two questions have traditionally belonged to different research traditions and have not been investigated in a single study. His study, on the other hand, is an attempt to provide a more holistic research approach which covers both viewpoints. Morley’s study thus offers another example of looking at reception situations as a whole, and attempting to understand how these situations work, instead of isolating certain elements of audiovisual material for the purpose of research. Morley emphasises the importance of studying everyday viewing situations and habits and the role television viewing has in the audience members’ lives.²⁶ This viewpoint is also important in my study, and something that has not been a part of translation-related reception research.

As already mentioned, all of these studies hold particular significance in the context of this study as models for both methodology and research questions. Of course, as this study is primarily interested in the reception of subtitles as part of the audiovisual text, the questions I ask and the methods I employ must be slightly adjusted from what have been seen in the above studies. None the less, many aspects of these studies are very relevant to a translation-oriented, qualitative reception study. For example, Ien Ang’s “symptomatic” readings of the research material and the idea of methodological situationalism, Liebes and Katz’s focus on intercultural reception and the use of focus groups, and Morley’s holistic focus on both the uses and interpretations of television are all central building blocks for this

²⁶Janice Radway’s *Reading the Romance* (1987) similarly investigates the reading of romance novels in an everyday context and as a social event. Radway’s ethnographic methodology offers a compelling approach to studying the use of literature, but as my focus here is on the reception of audiovisual material, I will not comment further on Radway’s study.
study. In addition, these researchers have provided examples of contextualised, local investigation of everyday media use, which is an approach my empirical study builds on in order to study the reception event as a whole. I will return to these methodological considerations in greater detail in the following chapter.

3.2.2 Media Studies and Intercultural Research Topics: Do Translations Matter?

How intriguing that many influential and groundbreaking audience research projects within media studies have in fact been studies on translated material! Ien Ang investigated the reception of Dallas in the Netherlands, Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz compared Dallas audiences in the USA, Japan and Israel, and numerous other studies have investigated the reception of Dallas in different parts of the world and in comparison to local programmes. In addition, there have been studies on the cross-cultural audiences of other soap operas such as Dynasty, and various Disney products, among others. One prevalent theme has been the question of “cultural imperialism,” the effect American popular culture may be having on local cultures and viewers around the world. Yet, in all these studies, the aspect of translation is rarely mentioned and has not been considered as a potential factor in the construction of meaning. Why is that? Does translation affect reception, or is it simply a transparent, fully equivalent target-language representation of the original text? Does the choice of either dubbing or subtitling not have an effect on reception? The simplest answer to why translations have not been taken into account in these audience studies is that translation-related questions are not at the heart of media studies. However, from the point of view of translation studies it is self-evident that the process of translation produces a new text with its own characteristics and, as

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27 For example, Silj (1988) surveys the reception of Dallas in several European countries.
28 For example, Gripsrud (1995).
29 For example, Wasko et al. (2001) investigate the role of Disney products in several countries worldwide.
30 See also Biltereyst (1991) for a comparison on the reception of an American and a domestic sitcom in Belgium.
such, should not be ruled out as a factor in the reception process. It is therefore pertinent to look at media studies research through a translation-specific lens and see what role translation has had – and could have – in such research.

In many studies, the translation aspect is simply ignored or only mentioned in passing, when describing the characteristics of the audiovisual product being studied. In Ang’s *Dallas* study, for example, translation is not discussed at all. In fact, Ang’s analysis occasionally even manages to create the impression of *Dallas* as an audiovisual product offered directly to its viewers around the world without any intermediaries (see, for example, Ang, 1991b: 19–20). The same is true of Alessandro Silj’s (1988) comparative study, where the reception of *Dallas* is compared to the reception of similar domestic programmes in several European countries. It is particularly surprising that the translation aspect is not approached in this study, even though the comparative approach already foregrounds the difference in languages, and the comparison between different European countries brings into the picture the differences between dubbing and subtitling countries, both of which are represented in the study. Thus, the comparative analysis lacks relevant information on what exactly the *Dallas* audiences are receiving and in what ways this is different from domestic audiovisual products.

Jostein Gripsrud’s (1995) study on the reception of *Dynasty* in Norway is another fascinating example of how media studies has skirted the issue of translation. Gripsrud (*ibid.*: 133) does mention translations, but only very briefly, emphasising the fact that subtitles have no effect on the programme text and its reception and only constitute “a minimal divergence from the original”. He (*ibid.*: 133) also states that both subtitling and dubbing are “so precise and so ‘natural’ for the audiences, that they can hardly be thought of as making, for instance, *Dynasty* something other than *Dynasty.*” Thus, Gripsrud’s remarks concentrate on viewers’ ability to follow the translation, and he does not comment on the act of translation itself, the content of the translations, or the intrusion of a translation either on the soundtrack or the picture. From the point of view of translation studies, this statement is quite questionable in its very assumption and insistence that all translations are equally “precise” and “natural”. For example, Gripsrud ignores the potential of different translation strategies to foreground features of the source culture differently, and the need in both subtitles and dubbing to edit the text due to the constraints of the medium. In addition, Gripsrud even states (*ibid.*: 133) that “the programme-text will
remain the same in the two settings [USA and Norway],” implying that the translation is not a new element of the text but the same text in a new situational context.

Interestingly, elsewhere Gripsrud (1995: 110–111) happens to present a much more sceptical view of translation, when explaining the relationship between theory and data: “A possible analogy could be that of translation between languages, which as we know always has an element of ‘treason’ to it.” Here, of course, Gripsrud is not talking directly of translation itself but using the concept to explain his views on the application of theory to the collection of data. However, he presents the view of translation as “treason” as an obvious, commonly held truism, even though his discussion of the translation of Dynasty betrays no such questioning. How, then, can Gripsrud both state that translation is always “treason” and assert that the original text and the translated text of Dynasty are the same? The obvious difference between the two statements is that the first is an off-hand remark on translation in general, while the second is a specific pronouncement on a particular programme and its translation. Thus, while it is easy to say that translation is always treason, when speaking of an actual translated text such a statement would have to lead to an analysis of the translation’s role in the communicative event and therefore demands much more of any person making this claim. It is, of course, understandable that researchers who do not specialise in translation might want to avoid becoming embroiled in translation analysis, but this avoidance of deliberating translation clearly highlights the need for a more translation-centred discussion of reception where this factor could be taken into account.

One study where the aspect of translation is discussed slightly more than in the above cases is Liebes and Katz’s (1993) Dallas study. Unlike Gripsrud, Liebes and Katz remind the reader on several occasions that the Israeli focus group members watched a subtitled programme and thus allow for the possibility that subtitles had a role in the reception process. For example, they (ibid.: 151) comment: “The story depends on words, and in Israel, for example, these words are subtitled in two languages, Hebrew and Arabic.” Liebes and Katz even bring subtitles up in the context of their research as an element potentially affecting understanding, by stating that one purpose of a part of their study was to show “the extent to which people in various cultures, who depended more or less on subtitles, understood the basic plot” (ibid.: 49). In an analysis of one focus group’s discussion they (ibid.: 35)
mention that the group members had understood the programme’s plot “unimpeded by subtitles and cultural differences”. In addition, Liebes and Katz (ibid.: 3) even criticise in passing those who assume that all viewers in different cultural contexts understand programmes in a similar way: “It is equally plausible that a program so essentially American as Dallas might not be understood at all, especially after dubbing or with subtitles.”

Despite these passing comments which do demonstrate some consideration for the role of translations, even in this study translations are not included in the analysis in any significant way. There are indeed some occasions in the analysis where it would be tempting to consider the focus group conversations from a translation-related point of view. An example from one focus group discussion (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 37) illustrates that subtitles are brought up in the discussion, as the interviewer asks whether the group members understand the speech or read subtitles. In the same exchange, one of the informants states that she enjoyed the viewing experience more when she saw one episode in French (in France). In this context, this comment would appear to imply that the informant preferred the French dubbing to the Hebrew and Arabic subtitles. This would allow the researchers to reflect on the role of different translations or different methods of translation, but this is not discussed. In another example, Liebes and Katz (ibid.: 83) explain that the focus group can together negotiate the meanings of certain elements of the programme and help those group members “who happen to be out of the story for one reason or another or who have trouble following the story, often because of the speed or difficulty of the subtitles.” Then they (ibid.: 83–84) provide examples of this, mentioning how a husband helps his wife overcome language difficulties and how the group “assists in translating alien concepts into language familiar to members of the group.” From a translation studies point of view, these comments could be interpreted as signs of shortcomings in the subtitles or in the subtitle reception process. Thus, again the potential for translation-related analysis exists, but the opportunity is not exploited.

Liebes and Katz do, however, provide an explanation for why they exclude translations from their analysis. Describing their research design, Liebes and Katz (1993: 25) mention that the Japanese focus group members watched a dubbed version of the programme and that the Israeli viewers watched a version subtitled in Hebrew and Arabic. They (ibid.: 25) rightly call subtitling and dubbing a
“methodological problem that complicated the making of comparisons between American and foreign viewers” and raise questions of whether it is more difficult to follow the story when it must be read (through the subtitles) or whether even dubbing might “miss” something and mislead viewers. They (ibid.: 25–26) also bring up an important point about how subtitles and dubbing might distance the viewer from the viewing experience: “one might wonder if the immediacy of the viewing experience is not compromised by the intermediacy of subtitling and dubbing: surely, dissonance must be created between the familiarity of the speech and the unfamiliarity of the pictures.” Thus, Liebes and Katz demonstrate their awareness of several challenges caused by a layer of translation and imply that this might be a factor in understanding and interpreting the programme. This echoes Dionysis Kapsaskis’s (2008: 47) view of subtitles as a defamiliarising factor in the viewing experience and is a perceptive suggestion regarding the possible effects of viewing translated material. However, Liebes and Katz (1993: 26) continue by referring to a study which has shown that Israeli subtitles are typically reliable and by stating that both the Japanese and the Israeli focus group members appear to have understood the programme. These comments are intended to demonstrate that the translations are not a relevant factor in this particular reception process. Liebes and Katz (ibid.: 26) state that “intergroup differences cannot be attributed to subtitling” and only allow any significance to subtitles in the cases where some viewers are not as literate as others and therefore have trouble reading the subtitles.

Liebes and Katz have noted some challenges inherent in viewing subtitled or dubbed material quite aptly. Notwithstanding, even after this methodological discussion of the problems of translations, they eventually abandon the thought of subtitles and dubbing affecting reception. While accurate representation of the factual contents of the source text, with which Liebes and Katz justify their lack of attention to translations, is naturally one of the most important aspects of a translation, it is not its only defining characteristic. Stylistic choices, different methods of omission or condensation as well as different translation strategies all have an effect on the viewing and reading experience. These factors are not noted in Liebes and Katz’s analysis and are thus implicitly dismissed, and not scrutinized as potential sources for meaning-construction. From a translation-studies point of view, this is a significant omission; even if the groups viewing a programme in its different linguistic incarnations (dubbed, subtitled or original) may well understand
the gist of the plot similarly, other nuances will certainly be affected by the translator’s choices. It would also have been useful to draw a clearer distinction between dubbing and subtitling, as they are perceived and processed quite differently by viewers.

As can be perceived from the above examples, media studies has often handled its research material as if it was not translated at all or as if the translation did not make any difference in the product. What does this attitude mean for the implications of such research? Does this constitute a significant omission which may have an effect on the conclusions or the usefulness of the research? From a translation-studies perspective, this certainly is the case, because it is impossible to think of translations as transparent and interchangeable with the source text, but for a media studies researcher, this may simply mean a difference in focus. One way of contemplating the difference between a media-studies and a translation-studies approach would be to compare different studies which investigate the same material. One opportunity for such a comparison is presented by Disney products, which have been studied within both media and translation studies. Within media studies, in a survey of twelve different countries, Janet Wasko et al. (2001) looked at how Disney products are distributed and received in different parts of the world. Even though this study is international and cross-cultural in nature, here, too, questions of translation were largely overlooked. Translation was mentioned only in passing and in reference to a few countries, always implying that the translation is a transparent layer of communication with little effect on either the product itself or its reception. In the article concerning Denmark, Kirsten Drotner (ibid.: 115) even went so far as to state that “Disney products are what may be termed ‘textually unmarked’ by their origins”, and even though Drotner went on to mention a few examples of visual clues of the source culture, she appeared to imply that the verbal dimension of Disney texts is so neutral that it would present no specific challenge in translation.

Within translation studies on the other hand, Elena di Giovanni (2003) offers an interesting contrasting example of approaching Disney products from a translation-specific perspective. She has studied expressions of cultural otherness and their translations in Disney films, and although her study does not include an empirical look at reception, her analysis of the Disney texts and their translations is quite enlightening. Di Giovanni (ibid.: 222) contends that the concept of culture “so strongly permeates language use and translation that any attempt at disregarding it is
doomed to failure” and emphasises the importance of translation “in defining
cultural relationships as well as identities, not in purely linguistic terms but on a
wider scale, where verbal language interacts with other codes and is in turn
determined by sociocultural factors.” Thus, di Giovanni paints a picture of the role
of translations that is very different from the audience survey above. According to di
Giovanni, translations carry meanings, reflect culture and act together with other
elements in the films in a way that cannot be overlooked or considered “unmarked.”
American audiovisual products, including Disney films, which are popular the
world over, may sometimes be seen as “culture-free” (Biltereyst, 1991: 476) and
therefore easy to export, but, according to di Giovanni (2003: 217), this is not the
case, because these products must always be processed through the means of
another language, and “the process of translation necessarily implies adaptation of
all the contextual references and implications which the original language conveys.”
This means that the process of translation creates something new and different,
adapted to the new cultural and linguistic context.

In addition, Di Giovanni (2003: 222) points out that in Disney movies depicting
exotic settings, such as Aladdin, the translation is faced with the challenge of
“adapting the narrating rather than the narrated culture.” This means that, while the
films obviously contain cultural elements depicting the “exotic” storyline, they also
reflect the American source culture of the films, and the challenge of the translation
is to make these culture-specific elements understandable and enjoyable to the
target-culture audience. Therefore, the translated product is certainly not identical
with the original: while the original film mixes local culture with an exotic one, the
translation deals with a mix of two foreign cultures rendered in the target language.
This finding calls into question the claim that translations are transparent and offers
some explanations as to why the reception of the same film might be different in
different cultural and linguistic surroundings: the product is never identical.

Based on this example, it would appear that the manner in which ‘culture’ is
conceptualised is slightly different in media studies and translation studies. Whereas
it is typical in translation studies to perceive language as a significant carrier of
culturally bound implications, media studies might often see language, particularly
in the case of translations, in a more limited, instrumental role, as portraying
meanings without subjectivity. Thus, the perspectives of the two disciplines on the
cross-cultural reception of audiovisual products are necessarily different. However,
and perhaps ironically, it is also interesting to note that these different perspectives can lead to similar conclusions. For example, in Daniel Biltereyst’s (1991) comparative study of the reception of a local, Belgian sitcom and a similar American sitcom, Biltereyst finds that even though the viewers appeared to have stronger feelings towards the American programme in every other attribute that was measured, the domestic one scored higher in comedic value (ibid.: 482–483). This conclusion is similar to the results of several studies on the reception of translated humour, such as Fuentes Luque (2000), Antonini (2005) or Chiaro (2004, 2007). As has been mentioned above, these studies have found that humour does not travel well in translation, and viewer reactions to translated humour tend to be milder than the reactions of the source-language viewers. Such instances of potential convergence show that different perspectives could be fruitfully applied to study the same object and perhaps complement or confirm each other’s conclusions.

I contend that the tendency by media studies research to overlook translations while simultaneously placing emphasis on cultural differences is a clear indication that translation-oriented qualitative research is needed. Even though language is undoubtedly a significant presence in media studies and its audience analysis, all the studies introduced here have lacked a critical approach to translated language as a distinct factor in constructing meanings. John Denton (2007: 27–28) has also noted this omission within media studies, and as he advocates for more empirical reception research on audiovisual translations, he states that “one would expect there to be countless opportunities for inter-disciplinary cross-fertilization.” In my view, Denton is correct, and both translation studies and media studies would benefit from interdisciplinary efforts to understand reception across cultures. It is a given within contemporary translation studies that no translation is a value-free, transparent representation of the source text. This is particularly true for subtitles. When attempting to understand cross-cultural reception, it is crucial to investigate how translations affect the viewing process. In fact, this is all the more important in an age of a globalised communications culture, where cross-cultural reception is an everyday phenomenon. In the following chapter, I will investigate the methodology of both translation studies and media studies in more detail in order to construct a suitable methodological framework for a study which will include both the translation-studies and media-studies dimensions of reception research.
4. A Methodological Framework for a Qualitative Reception Study

In this study, I investigate the reception of subtitled films by applying the qualitative audience research methodology of media studies to a translation-related context. As was discussed in the previous chapter, qualitative methods have not often been used for this kind of purpose. It is therefore one central objective of this study to test how these methods can be applied in a translation-studies context and what kinds of conclusions can be drawn from them. I believe that the reception of audiovisual translations can be usefully studied in a qualitative way, by not thinking of the audience as a monolithic whole that can be explained by quantifying and categorising it, but seeing it for its inconsistencies, contradictions and uncertainties as well as for its moments of cohesion and predictability. The information gained through this type of study could be useful as it would present a realistic look at the way an audience works, at how translated texts become a part of their users’ lives. However, before approaching this new methodological direction, some general methodological outlines must first be described. Audiovisual translation, and subtitling in particular, presents very specific circumstances and challenges which form a part of the general framework for this study, and they thus define the way the media studies methodology can be applied. In the following sections, I will first locate this type of research within a classification of translation-studies reception research. The purpose of this is to explicate the relationship of this study to previous reception research and discuss what this means in terms of methodological questions. Then, I will discuss the methodological models in media studies which are relevant to this study. I will present the ways in which media studies methodology can be applied and what kinds of explanatory models I will employ in the analysis of my research data. Lastly, I will provide an overview of focus group research as a data collection method.
4.1 Locating the Study: Levels and Types of Reception Research on Audiovisual Translations

As discussed in the previous chapter, many of the existing empirical studies on audiovisual translation are more quantitative than qualitative in nature and tend to concentrate on individual themes or technical details of perception. The information gained through these methods has been both interesting and practical, but this kind of focus means that the translation as a whole, and the contextualised reception process as a whole, the readers’ overall attitudes and reception strategies, are put aside. Nevertheless, this macro-level approach to reception is extremely significant. Yves Gambier (2003: 186) has noted that “what is certain is that the reception of AV output is not only about cultural assumptions, allusions or proper names – but also about expectations.” This remark is a reminder that reception is conditioned by more than the elements of the text itself or its cultural or linguistic peculiarities; reception is also influenced by its context, of which viewer expectations form a significant part. Viewers are not only decoding individual elements of subtitled programmes; they are watching an audiovisual product in a specific situational context, bringing to it their attitudes, viewing strategies and their expectations. Looking at these macro-level questions of reception is the focus of the current study. Therefore, the questions for which this study seeks answers are slightly different from the questions investigated in the majority of previous research, and its methodology is also different.

Yves Gambier (2009: 22) offers a useful classification distinguishing three elements or levels contained in the reception process, and thus divides the types of reception research into these three categories. These levels are response, reaction and repercussion. According to Gambier, response is “perceptual decoding”, which includes matters such as directing one’s attention and reading speed. Reaction is “the psycho-cognitive issue”, and it consists of questions relating to the viewers’ processing of subtitles. Repercussion is both the “attitudinal issue” and the “sociocultural dimension” associated with viewing translated material, i.e. the larger context of viewing as well as individual attitudes towards translated programmes. In this division, a majority of previous research would be classified as research on
either response or reaction, which focuses on the micro-level issues of reception\(^{32}\). For example, studies utilising eye tracking technology concentrate on the level of response, while thematic studies on topics such as the understanding of culturally bound concepts or humour could be classified as studies of reaction. The current study, on the other hand, would most logically be situated in the third category, repercussion, because, even though some micro-level issues of processing and understanding are present, the purpose is to arrive at a macro-level context for the analysis and investigate viewers’ attitudes, expectations and experiences, as well as the social dimensions of reception and the reception context. Consequently, in a study such as the current one, some concerns of the two other reception levels cannot be addressed. These include detailed questions on individual responses, specific information on reading times, concentration of attention at any given moment, and so on. Those questions are outside the framework of the current study, which adopts a more “wide-angle lens” look at the entire situation of reception, using individual details of reception as components of the larger, contextualised picture rather than as focal points of research.

Andrew Chesterman (2000: 20) presents a slightly different model for three levels of reception as a part of his causal model for translation studies. He talks of the causes and effects related to the act of translation, and the effects aspect could logically be seen as associated with reception. Thus, the three levels of effects in Chesterman’s causal model can be compared to Gambier’s three reception types. Chesterman’s three levels of translation effects are *cognitive effects*, *behavioural effects* and *socio-cultural effects*. Of these three, cognitive effects appear to correspond roughly to Gambier’s *reaction*, and most previous studies of subtitle reception have concentrated on that level. Behavioural and socio-cultural effects, on the other hand, both appear to parallel Gambier’s third category of *repercussion*, where my study is situated. I would classify the current study as dealing more with behavioural effects rather than socio-cultural effects, because the level of investigation is individuals’ and small groups’ feelings regarding subtitles and their ability to process subtitled material. Socio-cultural effects, on the other hand, would

\(^{32}\)Some exceptions to this would be Anne Jäckel’s (2001) and Friedrike von Schwerin-High’s (2004) studies mentioned above, as well as the surveys by Maria José Alves Veiga (2006) and Brigitte Widler (2004), which are clearly studies of the socio-cultural dimension.
be, for example, the effects subtitles have on the Finnish language or culture as a whole, and while some of this study’s discussion, especially the aspect of contextualising the reception experience, extends towards the socio-cultural level of effects, the macro-level mentioned above does not refer to society as a whole, but the macro-level of the particular reception experience and its context.

Prior to accepting Chesterman’s classification as a foundation for this study, however, it is appropriate to consider whether the term effects is, in fact, suitable here. Since the purpose of this study is to investigate reception in the sense of reception strategies, feelings and attitudes, the directly observable effects of a translation are not the primary concern. Thus, the concept of reception cannot be fully equated with effects, and while Chesterman’s model is useful in the way it categorises different levels of effects, the term itself does not necessarily cover all aspects of reception. Furthermore, in the context of audiovisual material in particular, the term ‘effects’ is reminiscent of the somewhat outdated media studies school of effects research, which has tended to see audiences as passively manipulated by the media, rather than the more current view of active audiences negotiating the meanings of media products (Moores, 1993: 5–7). For the purposes of this study, this notion of effects is therefore rather inefficient, as my central purpose is to investigate viewers’ active pursuit of meanings and personal, strategic decisions concerning reception and viewing. It is, however, useful to keep in mind Chesterman’s division between behavioural and socio-cultural effects as a further distinction of the macro level of reception research.

From the more concrete viewpoint of research practice, de Linde and Kay (1999b: 35) make a related distinction, classifying the research on “the effectiveness of subtitles” into three different types: “eliciting viewers’ responses to questions about their experience of subtitled television,” “looking at viewers’ responses to different sets of pre-categorized subtitles,” and “[applying] control to both medium and viewer in order to gain precise behavioural information about how particular subtitle characteristics are received.” The first of these three research types is what de Linde and Kay (ibid.: 35) call the survey method, and its purpose is “to collect general information about viewers’ reactions to subtitled television”. De Linde and Kay go on to remark that this method does not investigate viewers’ opinions or behaviour. The second research type is called (ibid.: 36) the semi-controlled experiment, and it investigates the effects of specific subtitle features on viewers by
controlling all variables connected with the subtitled material. The third type (ibid.: 37), the controlled experiment, is used to chart “motor behaviour”, i.e. the act of reading rather than viewers’ reactions. As de Linde and Kay point out (ibid.: 35), these three types of research appear to encompass almost all of the research conducted on the viewing of subtitled material. However, none of them would include the methodology of the current study. The controlled and semi-controlled experiments clearly tend towards the more quantitative and microscopic end of the spectrum, and the survey method, even though intended to elicit information on reactions, explicitly does not study viewer behaviour or explain opinions. Thus, it clearly does not cover a study such as this one, where the central objectives include analysing the viewing situation and the ways subtitles are used. This absence of a category for a more generalised, qualitative research type again indicates that this approach has been largely absent from audiovisual translation research. It is, however, a significant dimension of reception, and therefore deserves attention. In order to be able to discuss the more detailed aspects of responses, reactions, motor behaviour and so on, we must form a full picture of the viewing experience itself.

Even though this study does not fall easily into any of the above classifications, such qualitative research would most naturally be situated at Gambier’s level of repercussion and Chesterman’s behavioural effects, as has already been specified. It is on those levels that the discussion and analysis focus on the reception process as a whole and in context, while the other levels deal more directly with matters of processing and understanding. Thus, a study with a qualitative orientation, on the level of repercussion or behavioural effects, naturally has its own challenges, which cannot be directly compared with the methodological issues encountered in previous reception research of other levels. How, then, can reception be studied effectively on this specific level and in a qualitative manner? A number of factors must be taken into account, and even then, some uncertainty and variability must be tolerated, because actual people and their experiences never fit easily into stereotypical moulds. The choice of informants is therefore a particular challenge. Should they be chosen randomly, or based on a specific background factor or a set of factors (Tuominen, 2007: 301–302)? A qualitative study does not strive for statistical representativeness or generalisability, which means that the choice of informants is not as exclusionary as in quantitative studies, but, on the other hand, qualitative studies tend to carry the implication of studying “ordinary” or “average”
individuals, and the choice of informants could therefore be considered in some way even more significant than in quantitative studies. In addition, the choice of the data collection method must be made with the purpose of the study in mind, because this choice eliminates the possibility of asking some questions while reinforcing others (ibid.: 303). This study employs the focus group method in order to enhance its contextualising objective, but, on the other hand, this means that many details of individual reception and interpretation will not be investigated. Finally, the peculiarities and challenges of viewing subtitled material must be remembered, so that the expectations of what the informants will be able to discuss will not be misplaced. For example, the fleeting nature of both the subtitles and the programme itself means that the informants cannot be expected to recall minute details of the text. We must also keep in mind and accept that some parts of the message will be accessed through the visual and auditive channels instead of the subtitles (ibid.: 300). Consequently, this study concentrates on the viewing experience as a whole, not on focusing discussion on small details of the verbal text or the subtitles.

This concentration on the level of repercussion requires the application of methods which have not been widely used in translation-related reception research. Therefore, the work done in audience research within media studies will provide suitable models which can be modified for the needs of translation-related research. In addition, qualitative approaches have been usefully employed in other areas of translation research, and some of those approaches can be useful for this study. In the following, I will first construct an audience research model imported from media studies and then proceed to discuss the qualitative analytical tools I will adopt from other areas of translation research. Together, these approaches form the framework of my methodological approach, which I will utilise in the analysis of the empirical material.

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33I will return to the question of informant selection as well as other practical considerations of my empirical study in section 6.1.
4.2 Media Studies Methodology for the Study of Translation Audiences

4.2.1 The Significance of Qualitative Research in Media Studies: Ethnography and Audience Research

As was seen in Chapter 3, qualitative audience research typically consists of interpretive, contextualised and holistic analysis. How could this style of research apply in the case of translations? How can one devise a study that investigates the repercussions of subtitles and the reception process in an open, qualitative way? As was pointed out above, classifications within translation studies do not easily accommodate a qualitative, open-ended research style. Therefore, it is helpful to look outside translation studies for suitable methodological models. In media studies, this approach to research has been commonplace, and the media studies methods, as well as the debate around them, will provide useful tools.

One should note, as Pertti Alasuutari (1999: 32) points out, that the labels ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ can be misleading, because it is normal practice to include different approaches in a single study and because all the different research styles would be better described as a continuum rather than as being divided into two camps. However, Alasuutari (ibid.: 32) also states that it is possible to distinguish two ideal models of conducting research: the scientific experimental method vs the solving of a riddle. Of the two, much of previous translation-studies reception research appears to aspire to the scientific method and is thus situated towards the quantitative end of the continuum, whereas my study and a great deal of audience research within media studies are more qualitative, geared towards riddle solving, as well as towards what Alasuutari (ibid.: 55) calls “local explanation”, i.e. making a historically and culturally conditioned phenomenon understandable. Similarly, Ien Ang (1991a: 184) links the qualitative methods of media studies with localised understanding, stating that quantitative methods can discern “general, structural patterns”, but qualitative methods are needed “for understanding forms of cultural meaning and practical consciousness that are hidden behind large-scale patterns.” This means that the impressions formed by quantitative research risk being too abstract and removed from everyday reality, unless they are supported by qualitative research which can provide a more concrete, “personal” view of
reception through describing the experiences of actual viewers without hiding them behind generalisation. Thus, while qualitative research can mean many things and is elusive as a specific term, what is meant by it here is the kind of localised, explanatory riddle-solving where statistical analysis is not the driving force of the investigation and where the core motivation is rather to explain and understand a given phenomenon in a certain context.

One commonly applied qualitative research practice in media studies is audience ethnography, and this ethnographic research tradition is very relevant to the methodological framework of this study. Ethnographic research has been defined as “types of media investigation that focus on media uses as part of people’s everyday lives and that apply the researcher’s observation of and informal interaction with his and her informants as a major methodological tool” (Schröder et al., 2003: 58). The purpose of such research is to move beyond the abstract, generalised audience images provided by more quantitative research, to look at reception as it happens in individual situational and social contexts, to study “the media’s varied uses and meanings for particular social subjects in particular cultural contexts” (Moores, 1993: 1). In this kind of research, media use is thought of as “lived experience” (ibid.: 3) instead of individual reactions, effects and interpretations. Thus, the research focuses on deep analysis and description of the reception processes and situations. Because of the holistic nature of this interpretive analysis, the research data tends to be fairly focused. The holistic approach is attained through applying multiple viewpoints or methods to this material (Schröder et al., 2003: 74).

One leading voice on ethnographic methodology in media studies has been Ien Ang. She has made the case for the significance of this approach to research in several contexts and applied it in her own Dallas study (Ang, 1991b), which was discussed in the previous chapter. Ang (1996b: 45) describes this qualitative, ethnographic approach as a style of research that is “on the side” of the audience”, as opposed to research where the audience is the “object of study” (ibid.: 4). In this type of context-bound research, the presence of the researcher is undeniably visible. This means that the subjectivity of the researcher is a self-evident aspect of ethnographic research, and must be taken into account in the analysis. In fact, this kind of research is very much a discursive construct. As Ang (1996a: 257) puts it, what “audience” comes to mean is “invented by audience researchers, in the sense that it is only in and through the descriptions conjured within the discourses
produced by researchers that certain profiles of certain audiences take shape – profiles that do not exist outside or beyond those descriptions but are created by them.” Thus, while ethnographic research emphasises its embeddedness in everyday reality, it also admits that each study is the result of both the researcher’s positioning and situated interpretations. This emphasis on subjectivity and interpretation creates a research context that is very different from quantitative approaches and has both different objectives and different criteria of success.

Klaus Bruhn Jensen (1996: 64) contrasts qualitative and quantitative analysis by counterposing the tendency of qualitative analysis “to focus on the occurrence of its analytical objects in a particular context” with the quantitative interest in “the recurrence of formally similar elements in different contexts”. In addition, he juxtaposes the qualitative drive towards an internal, immersing approach to culture with the quantitative position that is external and detached, and he notes that qualitative analysis tends to deal with unique experiences while quantitative research is concerned with measurable experiments. Each of these comparisons is very appropriate both for conceptualising audience ethnography and for describing the current study. These contrasts quite accurately describe the relationship this study has with previous reception research on audiovisual translations: keywords to describe this study are occurrence, internality and experience, whereas a majority of notable previous studies have rather tended towards recurrence, externality and experiments. Schröder et al. (2003: 85) describe the focus of qualitative research, and ethnography in particular, very fittingly:

Through media ethnography, we may trace the meanderings of contemporary mediated meaning-making in their depth and richness, but we cannot hope to simultaneously chart the full breadth of these processes – let alone predict how they will proceed.

As noted in Bruhn Jensen’s juxtapositions, the breadth of the processes – or recurrence – is what falls more naturally into the area of quantitative research.

In addition, Bruhn Jensen (1996: 64) points out the significant distinction that “whereas quantitative analysis will focus on the concrete, stable products of the media’s meaning production, qualitative approaches examine meaning production as a process that is inextricably related to the wider social and cultural context.” Qualitative analysis does not expect to discover set meanings which can be catalogued comprehensively. Instead, it concentrates on analysing how these
processes construct meaning in a specific time and place. This means that qualitative analysis is inherently more “messy”, less easily contained and less susceptible to straightforward generalisations than quantitative research. However, while widespread generalisations are not a part of qualitative research, the implications of the analysis do not have to limit themselves to the single instance of the analysed situation:

[C]ontext-specific practices of culture are not simply isolated fragments, they are, rather, systemic. By this we mean that they are concrete instances of a system in practice, and through their systematicity we can generalize out, not to specific groups of people, nor to their social acts, but to the structural forces that shape the social order (Fiske and Dawson, 1996: 314–315).

Thus, in the current study, the analysis of the focus group discussions is not intended to reveal facts about how subtitles or certain elements in them are interpreted by film-viewers in general. Instead, the analysis will concentrate on the local processes whose presence can be detected in the focus group discussions, such as questions on how viewers discuss subtitled material, how they tend to watch subtitled material, and what the underlying structures of trust34 and habit are. These are all questions of systems or processes, and they come quite close to the types of questions investigated within media studies through the ethnographic method.

We must, however, keep in mind that the concept of audience ethnography is not clear-cut, and there has been no facile agreement on what this term means and what kinds of studies fall within this category. The traditional meaning of ethnography, originating from anthropological research, most commonly refers to long-term participant observation among a culture entirely foreign to the researcher with the purpose of investigating this culture as a whole. In some interpretations this kind of continuous, intensive involvement is seen as a prerequisite for audience ethnography as well. Thomas A. Schwandt (2007: 11), for example, states simply that audience ethnography “is a form of ethnography that explores how audiences produce meaning from media discourses such as television news,” which equates audience ethnography with other kinds of ethnography. Furthermore, Schröder et al. (2003: 125–126) draw a distinct line between media ethnography and reception research:

34 See section 4.4.4.2 for a discussion on the meaning of ‘trust’ in the context of this study and on how the concept is used in the analysis.
The term ‘reception research’ is [...] being reserved for the interview-based study of how people make sense of specific media products [...]. ‘Media ethnography’ [...] is now usually reserved for studies defined both, methodologically, by their use of participant observation as the main approach, supplemented by interviews, and by taking their point of departure in the practices of everyday life in which people use the media.

They emphasise that in ethnographic research, the researcher investigates media use in certain social groups from an outsider’s point of view, observing the informants’ actions and behaviour (ibid.: 58). This, according to them, requires “[t]he researcher’s sustained presence in the field” (ibid.: 79). Under the criteria specified by Schröder et al. and implied in Schwandt’s definition, many studies which are commonly called ethnography do not appear to meet the term’s definition entirely. Rather, they would fall under the category of reception research. Schröder et al. do allow for the existence of borderline cases between these two different styles of qualitative research (ibid.: 126), thus acknowledging that ethnographic methodology is often used in ways that do not fully adhere to the traditional view of ethnography.

However, many researchers have adopted a less strict definition of audience ethnography, seeing it as a modified version of traditional ethnographic research, an applied approach where researchers use ethnographic methods while investigating a culture or a subculture very close to their own. Andrea L. Press (1996: 119–120), for example, distinguishes what she calls “an ethnography of the audience” from “classical ethnography” and, while her vision of audience ethnography is quite well aligned with ethnographic traditions, she makes the case for the need of a redefinition that would accommodate the circumstances of audience research. Shaun Moores (1993: 4) is even more permissive, admitting that audience ethnography lacks the long periods of fieldwork and participant observation which characterise classical ethnography but remarking that the “general intentions” of traditional ethnographies and audience research are similar: “If the means of investigation are not always identical, then the aims of the inquiry can be.” Thus, Moores sees ethnography as a guiding model for research objectives, an ideological framework for what he calls “critical” inquiry into culture, rather than a strict methodological apparatus. The same point is made by Seiter et al. (1992: 227). They point out that audience studies rarely contain extended periods of observation and that they investigate only one element of a culture, instead of a culture as a whole. However,
they (ibid.: 227) go on to state, in agreement with Moores, that the intentions of ethnography and audience research are very similar: “Ethnographic audience studies share […] ethnography’s basic interest in an empirical investigation of cultural practices as lived experiences.” A similar point is, in fact, made by Schwandt (2007: 97), who remarks that ethnographic methods can be utilised in various kinds of qualitative research that do not fall under the category of ethnography itself. This characterisation covers much of the ethnographic audience research which does not fulfil all criteria of ethnography proper, and it clarifies the relationship between ethnographic audience research and ethnography. It should be noted that audience ethnography does not necessarily claim to be ethnography proper; rather, it could be considered ethnographic research that has adopted some of the methods of ethnography and shares much of its aims and interests.

In the current study, this contrast between ethnography and ethnographic research must be emphasised. This study is not ethnography in a pure, traditional form, and it is even slightly removed from the ethnographic audience research of media studies. The methodology behind this study is influenced by ethnographic sensibilities, and this study is similarly qualitative, descriptive and geared towards contextualisation and subjective realities as ethnographic research. Thus, it is ethnographic in style, and some elements in the focus group discussions and the following analysis could be likened to participant observation, but the long-term, participative element of ethnography is not attempted. What is ethnographic here is the focus on real individuals and their subjective realities and lived experiences, as well as the attempt to put into words and analyse closely one specific context through multiple viewpoints, thus hoping to find some overall relevance in what this one context reveals. This study could perhaps be seen as one example of what Schroeder et al. call borderline cases, where the ideas of ethnographic research are influential but where the practices of research are reminiscent of qualitative reception research.

As was noted in Chapter 3, the ethnographically oriented audience studies often investigate translated material, and intercultural reception has been a key research theme. For example, Ien Ang has repeatedly made the case for culturally specific reception studies, i.e. studies on the reception of translated television programmes. According to Ang (1996b: 80), it is necessary to relate audience studies in an international context, because nowadays the media function on a global scale. She states: “The media are increasingly everywhere, but not everywhere in the same
way.” This explains why it is important to study the reception of translated materials: different audiences in different cultural and linguistic contexts see programmes differently. Furthermore, as I have suggested in Chapter 3, I believe that translations play a significant role in this communicative process and are worthy of examination, as they are an obvious example of messages taking different forms when travelling to different parts of the world. In the following section, I will further link ethnographically oriented audience research with qualitative approaches within translation studies. Although audience ethnography has not been practised within translation studies, qualitative methods have been discussed fairly extensively, and qualitative research styles in areas other than reception can offer valuable methodological support for audience research.

4.2.2 Towards Ethnography in Translation Studies

Michaela Wolf (2002: 181) has discussed the application of ethnographic methodology in translation research, describing this approach as “a view which tries to transcend the analysis of specific cultural items (i.e. the lexical level) and is geared instead to an analysis that operates on the level of discourse and social context.” This description of an ethnographic research approach demonstrates well that there is definitely a place for it within translation studies, particularly in association with the sociology of translation. Wolf’s description is also appropriate for this study, even though the focus of attention here is not on translations or translating. Here, too, the analysis moves beyond specific items, such as the reception of individual textual elements, towards the social context of reception. Thus, the fundamental ideas of ethnography remain well suited for reception and audience research within translation studies, and applying media studies methodology can be instrumental in widening the scope of translation-related ethnographic research.

However, an empirical study of reception cannot usually concentrate solely on the macro-level of discourse and social context. When looking at the reception of a translated text, the investigation must also account for some details of the empirical reception-related data, where individual facts about the reception experience are made explicit, and piece its individual elements together into a coherent whole
which can then be placed in the larger context. In this, Maria Tymoczko’s (2002) call for a connection between the microscopic and macroscopic orders of research is quite appropriate. According to Tymoczko (2002: 11), contemporary translation studies contains two “infinite orders”: the ever more detailed study of smaller and smaller linguistic units, and the more expansive layers of context constructed around individual texts. She suggests (ibid.: 17) that research could usefully combine these two contrasting viewpoints and look at both the big picture and the details, “so that one’s data from the macroscopic level are complemented and confirmed by data from the microscopic level.”

The analysis in my study is based on a similar idea: while much of the discussion will concentrate on the macroscopic level of the reception process and the general circumstances of reception, this level is achieved by starting with details of the focus group discussions and other observations, by moving from individual utterances towards the macroscopic. Thus, while Wolf’s remark about ethnography’s place on the macroscopic level is fitting for this study, an initial investigation of the microscopic level is also needed. In this study, unlike in Tymoczko’s description, the microscopic level does not consist of the language of a translation, but of reception-related data emerging from the focus groups.

Tymoczko (2002: 19) poses a model question: “[W]hat do these small-scale textual elements signify in terms of large-scale ideological or cultural positioning?” This could be reformulated for this context as follows: How do small-scale elements of focus group discussions belie viewers’ attitudes and strategies? These discoveries will be reinforced by the macroscopic view, which puts them into context. This provides the opportunity to draw tentative macro-level conclusions which can contribute to our understanding of reception processes.

Another significant aspect of the ethnographic research approach – its subjective, interpretive focus and rejection of the notion of final truths – has also been taken up in translation studies. One example of this is an ethnographic study of institutional translation in the European Union by Kaisa Koskinen (2008). This study demonstrates that the ethnographic approach can be usefully applied in the study of translation and related social processes. In line with the media studies views on ethnography, Koskinen (ibid.: 38) draws our attention to the situation-bound, interpretive drive of this approach:
The researcher’s ethnographic stance entails a commitment to an open-ended research process; it aims at understanding a social phenomenon by making sense of it through engaged observation and interpretation. Ethnography aims to be a dialogic combination of different viewpoints, those of the observer and those of the observed, and a combination of different kinds of data, those elicited or provoked and those occurring naturally.

This definition of ethnography emphasises its openness and inclusiveness, allowing the story to be told through multiple voices and aiming at an open process of research and positioned interpretations.

Similarly, Maria Tymoczko (2007: 22–24) has argued that research within translation studies should abandon the old, often disputed stance and criteria of positivism and “recognize that there are multiple perspectives on the natural and social worlds, that such perspectives need to be explicitly recognized and acknowledged”. According to Tymoczko (ibid.: 37), as even natural sciences have abandoned positivism and accepted the principle of uncertainty as a fundamental part of science, a similar move towards embracing uncertainty and open-endedness would be appropriate for translation studies. One important methodological starting point in this is an emphasis on questions: as pointed out by Gideon Toury (2006: 64–65), empirical research should strive to avoid unwarranted presuppositions and, instead, formulate its grounding ideas as questions to be investigated. As situations and contexts differ, it is worthwhile to question some of the fundamental assumptions made concerning translation and its related processes. The same would apply for reception, and in this study, my intention is to allow for the open-ended convergence of numerous voices and viewpoints which are not bound by strict presuppositions. This is where a qualitative approach is very productive, as it is based more on what informants want to share than on how the researcher has decided to construct the study. At the end of the analysis, I do not expect to arrive at clear-cut answers; a more likely outcome is a set of new, more informed questions which can be investigated further.

Both Koskinen’s descriptions of ethnography and Tymoczko’s call for the abandonment of positivism are useful for a qualitative study of reception. In my study, the focus of interpretative understanding is on the informants and their conversations, supplemented by other observations connected with the research context. This data is placed in the wider cultural context of viewership and weighed
against other pieces of evidence describing the reception process. Thus, multiple viewpoints and types of data are present in this study. In addition, when dealing with individuals and their opinions, the process is always open-ended. There would be an unending variety of further avenues to investigate, and the challenge is to find a suitable manner to construct a coherent picture of the reception situation even if the research process will always continually evolve.

Koskinen has solved this challenge of multiple viewpoints and open-ended analysis by approaching her object of study through what she calls “net-weaving”. She says that in this method, “the researcher/weaver puts the object of study as the nexus and makes use of all kinds of material to grasp all the relevant connecting lines that form the net around it” (Koskinen, 2008: 1–2). This is a useful concept for this study. While a majority of the research material consists of the focus group discussions, the use of other types of supportive materials will be helpful in grasping the idea of subtitle reception more fully. In addition, the focus group material is so large and varied that it allows for various approaches and allows us glimpses into many aspects of reception. This multitude of viewpoints, materials and methods must then be woven together into a coherent whole. Importantly, Koskinen (ibid.: 2) points out that, due to its situated and contextualising nature, ethnographic research allows for this multitude and “accommodates complexity and contradictory evidence.” In this, Koskinen (ibid.: 10) comments, the aim is “to respect the complexity and richness of real life, to adopt a logic of both/and rather than submitting to choices of either/or.” As ethnographic research looks at the processes of everyday experiences, contradictions are unavoidable, and the analysis will allow for their inclusion. Unlike quantitative research, where the purpose is to abstract evidence into neat categories, in ethnographic research such an objective does not exist, even though some tentative categorisations may naturally arise from analysis.\textsuperscript{35} In reception research, where the responses of individual viewers can be varied, situation-dependent and contradictory, this research approach can be a valuable counterpoint to more quantitative methodologies where this multiplicity is not visible. Qualitative reception research can offer avenues to understand how quantitative research results fit into, and can perhaps be explained by, messy real-life situations.

\textsuperscript{35}See also Bruhn Jensen (1996) and section 4.2.1 in this chapter.
The inherent complexity of ethnography, as Koskinen (2008: 6–7) points out, unavoidably makes this kind of research susceptible to criticism. It is impossible to look at this kind of material from all possible angles and integrate all relevant questions, voices and methods into one study. In addition, the naturally occurring contradictions and complications will remain visible and can raise questions. It is the researcher’s challenge, therefore, to draw the elements of the study together into “a meaningful and manageable entity” (ibid.: 7). Even though this entity will never be complete, it can be coherent, and it can present its object of study clearly, offering one possible glimpse into human reality. In order to achieve this, the researcher must openly explain and justify the criteria of inclusion and exclusion in the study and thus justify the direction of the analysis. In this study, such questions also arise and are taken into account. This means that it will be necessary to go into some detail concerning many of the choices in the research design, in order to make clear why those particular choices have been made and how they help to formulate a coherent research picture. I will begin laying out the research framework at the end of this chapter and continue making it explicit throughout the analysis itself.

4.3 In Search of a Macro-Level Understanding: Narratives and Contextualisation

The previous sections have explained some of the methodological background and framework into which this study falls. In this section, I will explain the more practical points of the methodology applied in this study: I will describe how the analysis of the focus group discussions will proceed and what kinds of conclusions can be expected to arise from it. Furthermore, I will examine some challenges and potential pitfalls of this methodology and propose how they might be addressed.

4.3.1 Narrative as an Analytical Tool: Viewer and Group Profiles

In qualitative audience research, where the results of the research are largely constructed through language and interpretation, the selected style of analysis is significant in determining the direction of the study. When attempting to make sense of the unruly and conflicting facts of real-life viewing experiences and formulating
these in coherent analytical constructs, the concept of narrative can be quite useful. Maria Tymoczko (2007: 318), in a discussion on the ethics of translating, mentions consistency as one important component of ethical consideration. She suggests that a good tool to help a translator analyse one’s ethical consistency is a narrative: “What ‘story’ does a translator tell about the self and the world?” Andrew Chesterman (2008: 373–374) introduces a similar idea with regard to explanations within translation research, calling it “unification”, a type of explanation where the matter under investigation is put into a larger context. He further states that one method of unification is using narratives, which “make sense of complex phenomena by linking them together into ‘stories’” (ibid.: 374). Thus, narratives are one way of putting together a coherent explanatory analysis and contextualising it.

This concept of the story or narrative suggests an interesting methodological possibility for dealing with the varied, extensive material generated by the focus group discussions of this study. Here, too, coherence and contextualisation are significant questions, as it sometimes seems that the comments of the test subjects are in conflict, and it may be difficult to immediately see their relations to larger contextual structures. Therefore, one way of attempting to make sense of the sometimes overwhelmingly complex material could be by constructing explanatory narratives on different levels. Narratives can be constructed for each informant and focus group based on the comments made during the discussions, and these stories can be placed in a larger context, thus showing how details of individual comments can possess larger relevance when seen as parts of a whole. Indeed, as the informants’ comments are often made in the manner of storytelling, it makes sense to formulate them as such. This technique could yield a useful perspective on the comments, and the objective of creating a story could show how the comments are, despite some elements that at first glance seem inconsistent, remarkably logical and form a coherent whole which makes sense of viewers’ reception experiences.

Mona Baker (2006) has applied the concept of the narrative extensively in the context of translations in Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account. Although Baker’s use of narratives is chiefly directed at translations and translators and is explicitly political in nature, some of the basic outlines of her approach are useful for the objectives of this study. In Baker’s (ibid.: 3) definition, narratives are “the everyday stories we live by”, the meaning given to the world from particular perspectives. Narratives can be used almost universally to make sense of the world
and our experiences: “everything can be told as a story” (ibid.: 9). In fact, narrative constructions are a necessary prerequisite for human understanding: “[I]t is impossible for the human mind to make sense of isolated events or of a patchwork of events that are not constituted as a narrative” (ibid.: 61). These stories are dynamic and multiple and overlapping. Narrative theory, in Baker’s approach (ibid.: 4), “encourages us to look beyond the immediate, local narrative as elaborated in a given text or utterance to assess its contribution to elaborating wider narratives in society.” In addition, the theory allows for narratives to be pieced together from fragments in several sources, even non-verbal ones, and weaved together through analysis. We construct narratives, and the fact that individual narratives can be related to more wide-ranging ones makes this a possible method for incorporating individual experiences into a wider social context, for fitting one story into a group of related ones. In Baker’s words (ibid.: 10), narrative “categorizes the world” and “systematizes experience by ordering events in relation to each other”. All of these attributes can be useful when analysing the focus group material of this study and attempting to make sense of the informants’ reception experiences. While Baker’s political view of narrative theory means that she sees narratives as ways of organising the world into ideological constructions and as both a philosophical and a moral issue, the use of narratives here is much more tied to the practices of the analysis. Some of the narratives constructed by the analysis may well reveal ideological underpinnings to reception processes and to the ways in which they are verbalised. However, I suggest that narratives can equally be seen as vehicles of expressing personal experiences, categorising and systematising the everyday reality. This reality is tied to ideological currents and power structures, but in a study such as this where the focus is on how subtitled material is used, ideology is less urgent than the concrete, immediate experience of reception.

In her study, Baker identifies four types of narrative: ontological, public, conceptual and meta-narratives. Ontological narratives are defined as “personal stories that we tell ourselves about our place in the world and our own personal history” (Baker, 2006: 28), which means that an ontological narrative is an individual’s autobiographical telling of his or her own, personal experiences and perspectives, and of his or her relation to the world. Public narratives are narratives of a more social nature, “stories elaborated by and circulating among social and institutional formations larger than the individual” (ibid.: 33). These narratives can
consist of, for example, generally accepted and understood ways of making sense of historical events or shared cultural concepts. Conceptual narratives, on the other hand, are defined as “the stories and explanations that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves and others about their object of inquiry” (ibid.: 39). Finally, meta-narratives are the most macro-level stories of all, historical and societal movements, ideologies and other significant frames of reference (ibid.: 44–45).

Of these four narrative types, the ones most relevant to this study are the ontological, public and conceptual narratives, as those are the three levels at which the analysis is situated. The comments made by the informants in the focus group discussions could be considered ontological narratives, as those are all expressions of personal experiences, opinions and actions. One objective of the analysis will be to weave these individual statements into narratives. Then, when taken together, these ontological narratives will form an overall narrative of the reception situation. This overall narrative could represent the concept of public narrative, as it is a story put together by a social formation. The concept of “narrative accrual” used by Baker (ibid.: 101) can explain how individual stories can be brought together to build a larger narrative. Baker (ibid.: 101) defines narrative accrual as “the outcome of repeated exposure to a set of related narratives, ultimately leading to the shaping of a culture, tradition, or history.” Thus, through narrative accrual, these related narratives shape, if not an entire culture, tradition or history, at least a public narrative that defines the “local culture” of this reception situation and the reception processes of these social groups. Furthermore, once the analysis is complete, the result of putting together these ontological and public narratives will be a tentative conceptual narrative of the reception of subtitled films. Thus, different levels of narrative correspond to different stages of the analysis, as different narratives provide different ways of looking at the data and perceiving the comments. Taken together, these narratives form a picture of this particular context and provide insight into how audiences work.

Narratives cannot, of course, be put together in any random way as suits the researcher’s interests. Narratives are constructed and they represent a subjective point of view, and “two people may agree on a set of ‘facts’ or events but disagree strongly on how to interpret them in relation to each other” (Baker, 2006: 67), but this principle must not be used as an excuse to justify narratives which do not adhere to logical, observable facts. The narratives produced as a result of the analysis must
be coherent and put together thoughtfully and carefully to reflect the views presented in the focus groups. Baker (ibid.: 143) presents three criteria with which the quality of a narrative can be assessed. These are its internal coherence; external coherence with other related narratives; and characterological coherence, i.e., “its believability in terms of the consistency and reliability of the characters involved”. Internal coherence means that a narrative is expected to be consistent and well-reasoned as well as structurally sound (ibid.: 144). External coherence, which Baker calls “material coherence”, brings up the question of “how a narrative relates to other narratives that have a bearing on the same issue and with which we are familiar” (ibid.: 146). Thus, the material coherence of a narrative can be threatened if it does not sufficiently account for related narratives and does not fit in with this narrative context credibly. Finally, the “characterological coherence” of a narrative evaluates the credibility and trustworthiness of the characters involved in the construction of a narrative (ibid.: 148).

In the analysis of the focus group discussions, I will take into account each of the categories of coherence in order to evaluate the credibility of the narratives. Internal coherence will be created by a careful reading of the focus group material and its meticulous construction into both ontological and public narratives that are clearly based on what was said in the focus group discussions and that are put together in a thematically coherent way. Material coherence will be dependent on placing the narratives of this one situation next to each other and seeing their correlations with each other, and on placing these narratives in a larger context, contrasting them with other reception-related narratives. These reception-related narratives would include other instances of viewer comment as well as previous reception research. Comparing the narratives of this study to such former reception narratives will provide an opportunity to see how the conclusions drawn here differ from or agree with previous conclusions and will lead to an investigation of the status of this study’s results. Finally, characterological coherence can be evaluated by considering the participants of the narratives, i.e. my role as the researcher and the informants’ roles in relating their experiences. I will admit that, as Baker (2006: 129) points out, “[t]he narrator cannot stand outside the narrative”, and I must make my role in the construction of the narratives as clear as possible by both the initial account of my background in Chapter 1, as well as through continued critical self-reflection. The credibility of the informants, on the other hand, can be estimated through a
description of their background and of how they were chosen for this study. I will attempt to justify the view that these individuals – and the social groups they form – are fairly typical examples of Finnish viewers of the film *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*, and as such are credible and productive informants.

In conclusion, it could be said that my purpose in using the narrative method is to bring coherence and context to the research material. By applying the categories and concepts used by Baker, I am not adding a political or ideological layer to the study but providing a logical structure for the analysis, and finding criteria with which the coherence and consistency of the narratives can be evaluated. In practice, I will apply the narrative method by constructing what I call *profiles* of both the focus groups and individual informants. The group profiles consist of a brief preliminary group profile, which describes the general characteristics of each group, and a comprehensive group profile, which is a detailed analysis of the focus group discussion. The individual informants’ viewer profiles complement this picture by detailing each informant’s participation and role. After analysing the groups from both an individual and a collective perspective of ontological narrative, I will present concluding group profiles which draw together the central findings of the collective and individual profiles and act as each group’s public narratives. Then, to conclude the analysis, I will provide a final profile which combines all three groups into a narrative for the entire research undertaking. In this way, each informant will be able to tell his or her own story or ontological narrative, as well as participate in the narrative constructed by each group and the eventual collective public narrative of all three groups. This provides the opportunity to treat the informants as individuals within the boundaries allowed by the focus group situation, and as social groups which construct their collective narratives and meanings. Thus, a narrative style will provide a framework for analysis of the focus group discussions.

4.3.2 From Profiles to Concentric Contexts

As has been pointed out in previous sections, one of the most important aspects of the qualitative approach of this study, as well as of the narrative analysis style, is the emphasis on context and contextualisation. This means that the data is not analysed as independent from the surrounding world but as a part of a specific situation.
When conducting reception research and attempting to find generalisable tendencies, it is all too easy to forget that receiving and processing popular culture products and deriving pleasure from them never happens in a vacuum. This is a significant factor of reception. As Ien Ang (1991b: 19) points out: “Any form of pleasure is constructed and functions in a specific social and historical context.” Thus, it would be impossible to analyse the findings of an empirical, qualitative study of reception without taking the social context into consideration. What we see around us, what we experience every day, what we discuss with our friends, what we hear and read, will inevitably influence the way we deal with new experiences. It is also possible to consider social contexts on a smaller scale, by looking at, for example, the people we associate with at a given moment and our relationships with them. Thus, our thoughts and opinions are not influenced by our general experiences of the world only, but also by the specific group of people we are in contact with and the situation in which reception happens. Furthermore, on an even more concrete level, ethnographic research often views context in an explicitly material way and “focuses on the mundane physical settings” (Koskinen, 2008: 72). This means that one aspect of contextualisation will be examining the actual, observable elements of the context, such as the circumstances and conditions of the viewing situation, as well as the informants’ behaviour during the focus group discussion.

All of the elements mentioned above must be incorporated into the focus group analysis in order to construct a full picture where contextualisation works on the level of the situation itself, but also on the wider level of placing these narratives into a cultural and societal context. With regard to the macro-level of contextualisation, Ang (1996b: 4) makes a compelling point when she says that “studying media audiences is not interesting or meaningful in its own right, but becomes so only when it points towards a broader critical understanding of the peculiarities of contemporary culture.” This is what this study aims to do, in a translation studies context. By looking at the reception of subtitled films through a framework of media studies-inspired methodology, it attempts to look at the process as a part of the larger cultural context, not only as individual, decontextualised cases, which is what research on the reception of translations has often been. This study is one small example of a specific reception situation, but by placing it in the larger context of how media and translations are perceived in culture and society, it can find its larger significance, its cultural context. In addition, as was discussed in
the previous section, contextualisation, or placing the reception narratives of this study next to other similar narratives, is also a way of investigating the credibility and coherence of these narratives. Thus, contextualisation is not only a way of tying this study into the realities of everyday reception experiences, but it is also a way of validating the analysis and any conclusions that may be drawn from it.

This long list of various elements and levels of contextualisation may seem quite complex. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind that, as Ang (1996a: 253) warns, “[a] project that would strive to take into consideration the whole contextual horizon in which heterogeneous instances of media consumption acquire particular shape, significance and effectivity would be quite unwieldy and exhausting indeed, if not over-ambitiously megalomaniac.” She talks of “contextualization gone mad” (ibid.: 254), which threatens to derail any ethnographic research attempt. To resolve this dilemma, she, too, suggests that the narrative approach can provide a suitable way for the researcher to position him- or herself and limit the multiplicity of potential contexts: “By admitting that the ethnographer cannot be ‘everywhere’ but must always speak and write from ‘somewhere,’ we can leave the remnants of logico-scientific thinking [...] for what it is in favor of narrative modes of reasoning and representation” (ibid.: 254). By choosing and explicating the researcher’s position, it is possible to relinquish the unrealistic objective of presenting every imaginable context and concentrate on the ones relevant to one’s aims. I will not be able to relate my focus group material to every background factor the informants possess or to every variant connected with film viewing or subtitle reading; I will choose those elements which in this situation come to the foreground and most appropriately describe the circumstances and challenges of reception in this case. These choices can, of course, be made in many different ways, and the ones chosen in this study are only one example. Further research will perhaps be able to approach the kaleidoscopic multiplicity of contextualisation in some other way.

My attempt to make sense of the contextual dimensions of the research situation is to conceptualise them as ever-widening, concentric circles of context which will be investigated one at a time. Thus, the most immediate and concrete contexts of the reception experiences come first, along with the ontological narratives of the informants. Then, as these narratives are incorporated into something of a public narrative, this narrative is placed in the overall context of the viewing situation at large. After that, as this particular viewing occasion is contrasted with other
reception narratives from translation and media studies and general discussions on subtitled programmes, it is placed in the more general context of subtitle reception in Finland on the one hand and research on the other hand. Thus, the analysis begins with the close situational context of one viewing occasion and proceeds by placing these experiences in more and more general contexts, where they can be discussed in relation to other ways of looking at reception. This will provide a variety of viewpoints and a set of contexts which all focus on the same original viewing situation and eventually place it in a larger cultural and social picture. This can offer new perspectives and understandings of both how reception can be investigated and what everyday reception experiences can be like.

4.3.3 The Reliability of the Data: Can We Trust the Viewers, and Can We Trust the Researcher?

As was mentioned in section 4.2.2, this kind of qualitative research is very open to criticism. One criticism of a study conducted in such a qualitative, interpretive fashion, with so much emphasis put on informants’ own words, is its fundamental reliability. Can we trust the informants to share something objectively factual and reliable about their viewing experience, and can we trust the researcher to interpret the material in a reasonable, credible way? These are some of the most significant challenges in a study of this type. The admissions of subjectivity, constructedness and situational embeddedness bring with them a number of questions which must be considered and addressed.

The first matter to be kept in mind is that audience and reception research, no matter what its methodology, will never provide a complete and perfect picture of reception. Individuals will always have their own ways of reading media texts and reacting to them, and each situational context will provide a new framework for the reception experience. Qualitative reception research can, however, serve an important role in “creating space for discussion and argument” (Swanson, 1996: 60). Rather than answers, it offers understanding: “The result will not be a grand, master theory of the audience but perhaps a closer dialogue among conflicting views and a somewhat clearer understanding of how concepts developed in one view may contribute to other views” (ibid.: 60). This is why it is important to emphasise the contextualised nature of this research: what is being investigated is a certain
situation, and while it can provide understanding and material for continued discussion, the conclusions are not universal. Thus, the key words in discussing the uses of qualitative audience research are ‘understanding’ and ‘insight’. This understanding and insight can have wider significance, if it, for example, contradicts some generally held ideas and assumptions of reception (Schrøder et al., 2003: 148). This is why it is important to place the study in context and compare it with other findings and comments. This can help in determining what the insights of a particular study are and encourage its dialogue with others.

Because qualitative audience studies tend to be small in scale, and the number of informants fairly low, significant attention is understandably paid to those who have been selected as informants. Who are they, why were they chosen, why are their views worthy of attention, and can we trust them? It is reasonable to question a few individuals’ ability to represent a reception situation and to describe their feelings accurately and reliably. However, particularly for an ethnographically oriented study, this kind of trust is one of its fundamental grounding characteristics. Koskinen (2008: 9) states that ethnographic research is a way of “understanding the field one is studying from the perspective of those who inhabit it”. The implications of this statement are that ethnographic research must consist of listening to the informants’ voices and their points of view, and trusting that what they say is worthy of investigation. This trust does not, however, mean taking everything the informants say as pure fact at face value, and ending the analysis there. As stated by Schrøder et al. (2003: 58):

This perspective implies searching for and trusting media users’ own actions, interpretations and world views, a trust that should not be mistaken for acceptance or truth. Rather, a media ethnographer is in search of how and why particular actions and articulations come to attain social meaning and significance as valid, relevant and truthful.

Ien Ang (1991b: 11) describes this kind of search for the significance of the articulations as reading the informants’ statements “symptomatically”, looking for “what is behind the explicitly written, for the presuppositions and accepted attitudes concealed within them.” Thus, the researcher allows the informants to recount their feelings and opinions, but does not expect that these statements alone paint the entire picture of reception. They are the raw material used in the analysis and are always useful for this purpose, as long as they will be processed by the researcher’s symptomatic reading. Similarly, David Morley (1990: 157–158) points out that even
when informants’ comments are intentionally false, the fact that the informants would choose to state falsehoods is in itself an interesting fact to be investigated and offers a glimpse into the informants’ feelings. Falsehoods can be detected, for example, by comparing the informants’ statements to other data related to reception and looking for inconsistencies which might tell a story of their own. In addition, even the fact of bringing something up in a discussion can be an interesting object of analysis, as it tells something of the informants’ interests and thought processes. A thorough and critical analysis will account for the informants’ feelings and opinions not only by considering what they have said but also by analysing how this was said, what situational factors may have induced the comments and what can be read between the lines of the comments.

Morley (1992: 25) makes a further interesting point comparing qualitative studies where the material consists of informants’ comments to studies where the material is gathered by outside observation of reactions. While observations, of course, can detect subconscious behavioural patterns and reactions of which the viewers themselves may not be aware, they cannot reveal anything of interpretations, opinions or motivations that bring meaning to these reactions. Furthermore, Morley points out that even if the informant makes false statements, the verbal responses will allow “some access to the kind of language, the criteria of distinction and the types of categorizations, through which [the viewer constructs his or her] (conscious) world.” These subjective characteristics of the viewing and interpreting processes are unavailable through any external observation procedure, which means that such observation can never reach a comprehensive understanding of reception and that it functions mainly through the researcher’s categorisations, thus relying on the researcher’s preconceived conceptions. Therefore, Morley (ibid.: 25) concludes:

> The interview method then is to be defended, in my view, not simply for the access it gives to the researcher to the respondents’ conscious opinions and statements but also for the access that it gives to the linguistic terms and categories [...] through which respondents construct their worlds and their own understanding of their activities.

The qualitative audience research method deserves critical attention and assessment in order to be credible and productive, but its ability to address certain questions more effectively than more quantitative methods must also be recognised.

This is also where the characterological coherence mentioned by Mona Baker enters into discussion: by uncovering informants’ characteristics and background
factors in the narratives, the informants are rendered concrete, visible individuals and can be judged on that basis. When these individuals come across as real and coherent, the resulting analysis of both the informants’ statements and of the underlying categorisations and tendencies is trustworthy. The question of characterological coherence, of course, also includes the researcher who is narrating the viewers’ stories and piecing them together in a larger narrative. Therefore, the researcher’s self-reflection and acknowledgement of positioning are equally important in maintaining a credible research framework. A self-aware, critical look at the overall study will ensure that the conclusions are not far-fetched and, on the other hand, highlight where the study may have uncovered larger implications. The following remark by Schröder et al. (2003: 20) is therefore fitting advice for qualitative audience research: “[T]he knowledge produced by audience research [...] should be presented in a spirit of modesty and humility, but also with confidence in the insights that audience research is capable of providing.”

4.4 Focus Groups: Methodological and Practical Considerations

The method of data collection in this study is the focus group. The focus group is a research method that “involves engaging a small number of people [...] in an informal group discussion ‘focused’ around a particular topic or set of issues.” The discussion is facilitated by a moderator, often the researcher himself or herself, who asks questions on the topic and directs and facilitates the discussion (Wilkinson, 2006: 50). Thus, the focus group is quite close to the group interview as a method but distinguishes itself in that the focus group is constructed more predominantly around the informants’ discussion than structured sets of questions and answers. The questions and their approximate order can be planned in advance, but the structure and content of the discussion will usually rely more on the conversational dynamics of the group than on a prestructured set of questions. Sue Wilkinson (ibid.: 52) separates focus groups from group interviews because “the moderator does not ask questions of each participant in turn, but, rather, seeks to facilitate group discussion, actively encouraging group members to interact with each other.” The central
objective of focus group discussions is therefore to encourage informants to talk with each other, and the moderator encourages discussion rather than directs it.

This method is well suited for qualitative research, because it is fairly unstructured and allows the informants to express their opinions in their own words, yet at the same time allows the moderator to guide conversation when necessary. The focus group method fulfils the objectives of ethnographically influenced, participatory research by listening to the informants express their feelings rather than observing their reactions from a distance or influencing the direction of the answers through structured questioning or testing apparatus. In addition, the purpose of the focus groups is to observe the social aspects of reception and to see how viewers discuss translated audiovisual material. Such discussions can provide valuable information, because talking in groups is a natural element of reception: “Part of the pleasure of popular culture is talking about it; part of its meaning is this talk, talk which is run though [sic] with value judgments” (Frith, 1996: 4). Because the significance of popular culture often arises in conversation, a research method which is built on free discussion can be a good way of searching for these significances. In the following sections, I will provide an overview of focus groups as a research method and describe how this method will be implemented and its results analysed in this study.

4.4.1 The Challenges and Characteristics of Focus Groups

The benefits of the focus group method are that it can provide information on “the meanings that lie behind [...] group assessments”, “the uncertainties, ambiguities and group processes that lead to and underlie group assessments,” and on “the normative understandings that groups draw upon to reach their collective judgements” (Bloor et al., 2001: 4). What is notable is that the emphasis is on the social construction of meanings and on group processes as opposed to individual opinions and viewpoints. Because the method is dependent on group discussions and the informants’ joint participation, it is an inherently social way of garnering information. It elicits information on how individuals function and communicate in groups, and how the social situation affects individuals’ expressed opinions and attitudes. Therefore, focus groups are an appropriate way of investigating the social
aspects of reception. It has consequently been used in reception research quite extensively. In the context of this study, the characteristics of the focus group method mean that it can be employed to investigate, for example, how subtitles enter into discussions on reception, and how the social situation and underlying normative presuppositions determine the ways subtitles and their reception are discussed. The normative presuppositions could lead, for example, to certain descriptions of reception strategies with regard to how much subtitles are read and trusted, or to specific approaches towards dealing with textual and cultural material that is unfamiliar or difficult to decipher. I will discuss these potential normative presuppositions further in the course of my analysis.

The focus group is capable of producing data on group processes and normative understandings not only because it involves groups of people but also because of the nature of such discussion. In group situations, individuals are likely to search for common understanding by articulating and attempting to make sense of presuppositions and given truths that underlie individual experiences. It is typically not necessary to verbalise these notions in other kinds of situations where the focus is on individual response, because they are taken for granted unless someone questions them or seeks clarification. Such norms and understandings would even be difficult to elicit in long-term participant observation, because an occasion where such negotiation is needed might not occur naturally (Bloor et al., 2001: 5–6).

In addition, the focus group can be a very creative method of research, as it allows considerable space for informants’ own voices and thoughts instead of the researcher’s presuppositions. Informants will be able to direct the discussion from their own perspectives, and each comment foster give further ideas and openings for moving the conversation in new directions. Even marginal views will receive attention, and immediate group feedback can be used to evaluate the validity of such opinions. This creative aspect of the focus group means that it is a particularly useful method when studying topics on which there is little previous knowledge (Kytömäki and Savinen, 1993: 1). This applies quite well to the study of subtitle reception. Although the reception of individual items or specific aspects of texts has been studied, the general attitudes towards subtitle reception and their reception

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strategies are topics on which previous research has produced little concrete information. Therefore, the focus group situation might be able to serve as a productive starting point for investigating such attitudinal and normative macro-level issues and formulating further research on the topic. One interesting aspect of this creative potential is that the focus group, unlike an interview or survey situation, can bring up and answer questions which the researcher did not even think of asking. As such, it will not only provide information on the matters under investigation but also bring new, relevant questions to the researcher’s attention.

4.4.2 Planning a Focus Group Study

Although focus groups are a fairly unstructured and open-ended research method where much of the power is given to the informants, they require careful advance planning to be successful. One of the central factors in the planning of a focus group study is the composition of the groups. The characteristics of the group members must be considered in advance so that they will adhere to the objectives of the study and allow for relevant topics to be discussed. The first, fundamental question is whether the group members are to know each other in advance. A traditional practice, particularly in market research, has been to compose groups of strangers, but in academic research the use of so called “pre-existing” groups has been quite common.\(^\text{37}\) The advantage of pre-existing groups is that their discussion may be more natural and relaxed than discussions amongst strangers, and therefore they provide an opportunity to observe something that comes close to an ordinary social situation. In addition, a shared background can improve the quality of the data: “Research participants who belong to pre-existing social groups may bring to the interaction comments about shared experiences and events and may challenge any discrepancies between expressed beliefs and actual behaviour and generally promote discussion and debate” (Bloor et al., 2001: 22). Pre-existing groups can be willing to talk about even difficult issues and to challenge each other when statements lack credibility. On the other hand, groups of strangers may verbalise presupposed notions and matters generally taken for granted, as they must explain themselves to

\(^{37}\)In the area of media audience research, e.g. Liebes & Katz (1993) and Morley (1990) used pre-existing groups, and Koskinen’s (2008) study on EU translation also employed pre-existing groups.
each other because they have no previous knowledge of each others’ views and backgrounds. In addition, in some cases, informants may be more willing to speak openly in a group of strangers whom they would not be likely to encounter in their normal life (ibid.: 22–24). Ultimately, it is impossible to know for certain, whether a pre-existing or newly formed group would generate more appropriate data, as both types have potential risks and benefits. In many cases, practical considerations such as ease of recruitment and issues of logistics determine the way groups are composed. In this study, I decided to use pre-existing groups both for the practical reason that they were easy to recruit through personal social networks and that I anticipated their discussion to be more open and relaxed and in less need of prompting than a group of strangers.  

Although focus groups typically are not a statistically representative sample of any population due to their small numbers, it is important to consider, in addition to informants’ mutual familiarity, their demographic background features and personal attributes. Group members should be somewhat diverse so as to include a variety of viewpoints and to ensure active discussion, but not so diverse that they cause severe conflicts within the group. Differences in individuals’ power and status can result in a discussion where some dominate excessively and others’ views are silenced. In addition, the demographic factors most commonly taken into account include age, gender, ethnic background and religion. However, the fundamental unpredictability of individuals and group interactions must again be accepted, and even careful planning cannot always preclude difficult situations or inequitable conversations from arising. The researcher must therefore be prepared to face surprises (Bloor et al., 2001: 20–21). All background variables are, of course, situation-bound, and in individual cases some are more significant than others. In a Finnish context, for example, questions of religion and ethnicity arise far less frequently than in other, more diverse societies. On the other hand, in some contexts, the important background variables may additionally include, for example, educational background, occupation, family status, mother tongue, place of residence and so on. Careful advance planning will allow the researcher to devise questions and discussion tactics in accordance with the characteristics of the group members.

38 I will return to the composition of the focus groups and the reasoning behind my particular choices in greater detail in the beginning of Chapter 6.
The size of the focus groups must also be considered. If a group is too small, the discussion may not be active and the views represented not sufficiently diverse, whereas a very large group may become chaotic and prevent some informants from voicing their opinions, as time is limited and more dominant members of the group may monopolise the discussion. The best size for a group is determined by the characteristics and objectives of the study. A common size recommendation is six to eight group members, but even slightly smaller or larger groups can be feasible in some situations. For example, smaller groups may be beneficial in studies where the topic is sensitive or complex (Bloor et al., 2001: 26–28). Furthermore, in addition to the group size, the number of focus groups in a study should be carefully considered. Because focus group research requires a significant amount of work both in its execution and in its analysis, the group number tends to be quite low but, again, the number will depend on the objectives of the study (ibid.: 28). Practical matters can also have an effect on the choices concerning group size and number of groups. With pre-existing groups, for example, both the size and the number of the groups may be predetermined and difficult to alter.

Another central factor in the management of the focus group situation is the role of the moderator. The moderator’s role is to facilitate discussion by encouraging comments and attempting to maintain a balance in the discussions so that all group members will have an opportunity to express their views (Bloor et al., 2001: 50–52). The moderator should not influence the discussion excessively by expressing personal opinions or preferences (Gibbs, 1997). Moderator interference can be problematic, because it may contaminate the research situation and lead to statements which do not reliably reflect the informants’ true feelings or natural group dynamics. One interesting question in this regard is the moderator’s familiarity with the informants. Typically, a researcher would not tend to be very familiar with the test subjects, but some sense of closeness may in fact be beneficial in a focus group situation. As stated by Koskinen (2008: 86): “Whatever the professional background of the facilitator, it is important that the group can accept and relate to him or her. A peer facilitator may find it easier to establish rapport, gain acceptability and credibility, and may also speak the same language [...] as the participants.” If the focus group members can relate to the moderator, it may be easier to maintain a relaxed, open atmosphere and allow the informants to speak freely. In fact, Schröder et al. (2003: 143) go so far as to encourage interviewers to
offer personal comments and ask leading questions in order to make an interview situation appear as natural and informal as possible. Even though they refer to interviews, the same point would apply equally, in fact perhaps even more, to focus groups, whose success and credibility is built on their ability to simulate natural conversation. Therefore, even though moderator interference can be a problem, some participation in the discussions and even volunteering personal comments is likely to be a positive influence, as this kind of “humanising” of the researcher/moderator can be encouraging for the informants.

Each focus group situation is, of course, different, and some variation must be expected. The focus group method is very productive in creating a rich variety of information for analysis, and a number of different issues can be investigated by using focus groups. However, it is also important to emphasise that the focus group method cannot answer all kinds of questions, and some matters are more appropriately investigated through other methods. Individual views and experiences cannot be thoroughly studied through focus group research, where emphasis is on group interaction and social processes. The analysis must also be able to separate shared opinions and processes from individual, idiosyncratic views which can occasionally receive disproportionate attention in focus groups (Kytömäki and Savinen, 1993: 6). One must also keep in mind that the focus group is a specific context which may not accurately reflect everyday behaviour. As Simon Frith (1996: 48) points out, “focus groups are not the usual settings in which judgments are made […]; they don’t tell us much about the everyday process of appreciation, the pleasures of popular discrimination itself.” Thus, while the focus group is a way of observing how people talk about certain topics and emulating everyday conversations, these conversations cannot be taken for a perfect equivalent of participant observation in naturally occurring situations. In addition, the focus group situation and the questions one will ask should be planned with these issues in mind, so that the method is not used to seek answers to questions which it cannot address.

The fact that focus groups provide collective, social meaning-construction instead of individual opinions has significant implications for the analysis contained in this study. Because focus groups are inherently social, the individual ontological narratives described above in section 4.3.1 will not tell the full story of the focus group situation, nor will they tell the full story of an individual’s opinions and experiences. They are reflections of one person’s role and contributions in the focus
group and are thus narratives of a specific social situation where a reception experience was discussed. The purpose of isolating one person’s statements and piecing each of them together is to see the internal coherence and evolution of a person’s comments and thus to understand each person’s contribution to the discussion and group profile, as well as each person’s idiosyncrasies and non-conformities to the group in general. This is one of the varieties of viewpoints which are employed to construct a full picture of the reception situation. By looking only at the group as a whole, the development of an individual’s opinions as well as each informant's role in the group would not be visible. The group voice is not the focus group’s only contribution; the individual voices, as conditioned by the focus group context, also tell part of the story.

4.4.3 Selection of Discussion Topics

Even though focus group discussions are open and unstructured, the moderator’s questions and comments are important in steering the discussion and keeping it on topic. The moderator’s participation ensures a dual discussion: on the one hand, the informants have the opportunity to discuss whatever they want, and on the other hand, the moderator will be able to ask questions which are directly related to the objectives of the study and make sure that the discussion does not veer too far off topic. The idea of free discussion accompanied by the moderator’s occasional thematic questions is also behind the focus group setup of this study. The questions and their order were planned in advance so that they would lead the informants to talk about their viewing experience yet would not be too leading or revealing. In this section, I will explain how the questions and their order were planned and what themes are taken up. This discussion will concentrate on the general outlines of how the focus group discussions were planned, and the concrete description of the groups’ practical implementation will take place in chapter 6.1.

4.4.3.1 From general to specific

The structure of the focus group discussions was designed so that the discussion would proceed from general questions towards more specific ones. In so doing, the
first, general questions act as an ice-breaker and allow the informants to relax slightly by answering easy questions on a familiar topic, before moving towards more detailed, translation-related topics. By beginning the discussion with general, even vague questions, the informants are also given an opportunity to bring up any point concerning the film or its subtitles on their own without the moderator’s prompting. Then, if all the relevant topics are not addressed by the informants on their own, the moderator can pose more detailed questions in order to elicit more specifically targeted answers to the topics under investigation. This order allows the informants to show by their choice of comments what they remember and consider important in the reception experience, before the moderator reveals the objectives of the study by asking specific questions. This order thus minimises the risk of the moderator’s comments affecting the informants’ statements excessively – priming the informants – and it also allows for a comparison between prompted and unprompted comments.

The questions are divided into three categories: first, general questions about the film, then general questions about the subtitles, and finally more detailed questions about the subtitles and particularly the translations of certain intertextual elements in the film.\(^{39}\) The questions are designed to be similar to topics which are often brought up in everyday conversations on popular culture, in order to facilitate a relaxed and normal discussion atmosphere. We must, however, remember that because the study is a focus group discussion rather than a structured group interview, the pre-planned questions only indicate the general themes and overall objectives of the discussions. The informants are free to bring up any relevant topic at any point during the discussion, and that can lead the conversation into directions not covered by these questions, or it can change the order of the discussion topics. The questions simply constitute a preliminary plan for moving the conversation forward whenever necessary and act as a reminder of the topics which should be covered, as well as an outline for a logical discussion structure. Therefore, the order and structure of each of the three discussions is slightly different, but the same themes are covered in all.

\(^{39}\) The questions will be described in more detail in Chapter 6.1.
4.4.3.2 Genre considerations

One important factor in planning the focus group discussions has been the genre of the film. *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* is widely recognised as a romantic comedy aimed at female audiences, and this fact affected both the selection of the focus group members and the content of the questions. The informants were chosen to represent the film’s typical target audience in both age and gender, which means that the informants are in their twenties and thirties, and all but two are female. With regard to questions, the genre is evident in an emphasis on discussing the comedic elements of the film. Because the film is a comedy, the reception and interpretation of its comedic elements is a significant factor in its general success and understandability to the target-language audience. In addition, previous research has found that humour is a very challenging element for the audience of translated texts to interpret,\(^{40}\) and therefore prompting the focus groups to discuss humour can be expected to produce interesting data on the audience’s attitudes and expectations as well as their sense-making processes. The choice of a comedy for a reception study is one way of attempting to produce material where the processes and strategies of reception are verbalised in discussions through the challenges the material presents.

In addition to humour, the film also creates challenges for its audience through intertextuality. Intertextual references are, in fact, often used in comedies to generate humour, and the challenges of humour and intertextuality are therefore intertwined. Intertextuality is, however, even more culture-bound than humour. As pointed out by Maria Tymoczko (1999: 41), all texts are multi-layered constructs built on the basis of other texts: “There are not only text and context, but a fabric of intertextuality that links texts to other literary works, both textual predecessors and contemporaries.” This intertextual fabric is typically linked to the cultural background of the text, and can therefore be difficult to convey in translations in a way that would carry its meanings and implications to the target audience:

In cases where there is disparity of cultural context between the subject matter and the audience, it is rarely sufficient for an author just to transpose cultural material, […] because the audience is likely to be ignorant of the cultural assumptions in the resulting text […]. Translation in most situations must contend with these issues. (Tymoczko, 2007: 228)

\(^{40}\) See section 3.1.5.1 for examples on reception studies concerning the reception of humour.
Consequently, because intertextuality can be a problematic issue for both the translator and the receiving audience, investigating reception through it can be quite enlightening. Humour as an aspect of reception is part of the genre-related considerations of this study and therefore prominently present in the focus group conversation topics. Intertextuality, on the other hand, is approached on the level of details, as one example of a culture-bound source of humour.

Even though the challenges created by this genre for its viewers were one reason for choosing this film, another quite different reason was its approachability and popularity. Even though humour and intertextuality can be difficult to interpret in translated films, the romantic comedy is an extremely popular genre, and this film in particular is part of a well-known popular cultural phenomenon, and as such, interests a wide section of the audience. When organising a focus group study, it is helpful in the recruitment of informants if the film is something that potential informants want to see and represents a familiar genre which is easy to watch and understand. A more culturally prestigious film may have been less motivating for some informants and would very likely have been a more intimidating topic of discussion. Therefore, one way of attempting to create a relaxing and open atmosphere in the focus groups was by choosing this film and the genre it represents. Thus, the genre and the film were chosen for this study both for the challenges they present and for the popularity and accessibility they provide for audiences used to consuming popular culture.

4.4.4 Focal Points of the Analysis

As the data collected from the focus group discussions is very extensive, some decisions have to be taken so that it is processed as meaningfully as possible. It is impossible to analyse such rich material closely in its entirety, and therefore one of the first challenges in the analysis is to find the most important aspects of the discussions and focus the analysis on these aspects. Even though the qualitative method calls for thick description 41, the scope of one study prevents the

41 ‘Thick description’ is a concept used in some areas of qualitative research to refer to an analysis style which is not only extremely detailed but whose objective is “to interpret [social action]
consideration of every detail. Only the most relevant features of the discussions can receive full attention, and the rest will be analysed chiefly as contextual, support data in a less detailed manner. As mentioned above, the analysis of the focus group discussions will consist of a “symptomatic” reading of the material. A symptomatic reading means that what is discussed is not only the somewhat unreliable surface level of the informants’ comments, but what these explicit comments reveal of underlying processes and attitudes. The surface-level comments are, of course, one interesting indicator of the informants’ attitudes, and they can tell us quite a lot about the social aspects of what the informants consider acceptable to say in a discussion on subtitles. Therefore, these comments will naturally be included in the analysis, and any prevalent themes arising from these overt comments will be discussed. However, in order to construct a full picture of this reception context, these remarks must be supported by observations on those discussion elements which are provided less consciously and less explicitly. In this section, I will discuss some elements of the focus group material that will be paid special attention in the analysis and explain the significance of these elements. This discussion will concentrate on describing the general approaches taken in the analysis, and a more concrete description of the practical analysis procedure will take place in Chapter 6 in the context of the analysis itself.

4.4.4.1 Social processes and individual processes

The focus group analysis will concentrate predominantly on those parts of the discussions that explicitly mention the translations, language or cultural issues, and where the discussion builds on certain factors of the translation. In addition, I will look closely at the answers to those specific questions which I asked in each group. I will focus my analysis on these parts of the discussions, so that the translation does not get lost in the process of a lively discussion on popular culture in general, and so that my analysis will not concentrate solely on those aspects of reception already covered by media studies audience research. As general background information, by recording the circumstances, meanings, intentions, strategies, motivations, and so on that characterize a particular episode” (Schwandt, 2007: 296). Such interpretive immersion into a particular context is a fitting description for the analytical framework of this study.
other parts of the discussions will be useful and relevant, but the main emphasis will be on discussion clearly related to translation.

The analysis will proceed with two general objectives in mind. The first objective of the analysis is to examine the social processes evident in a focus group discussion, and the second one is to analyse the substance of what these discussions reveal about the reception process. Thus, for the first objective, I will look at **how the group speaks**, and for the second objective, I will examine **what the individuals are saying**. Both aspects are important in describing the dynamics of the reception process. The first objective – investigating the social processes of the focus group discussion – is the primary driving force of focus group research. One of the specific strengths of the focus group method is the fact that it can generate data on social interaction and the way groups negotiate meanings and normative structures. As these kinds of social processes are an important factor in reception, this is an important aspect of the focus group discussions to be analysed. The discussions will provide information on how the groups work jointly to produce interpretations and understandings, how they verbalise norms, practices and conventions underlying the reception of subtitled films, and how they express both agreement and disagreement. The social element in reception processes comes across in the focus groups particularly clearly through the free discussion in which informants talk to each other instead of simply answering the moderator’s questions. Therefore, these moments of free discussion will be given specific attention.

It is in the nature of free discussion that individuals do not participate equally. It is usual in any social situation that some individuals are more dominant than others, and these kinds of group dynamics can also appear in the focus group context. An individual’s role in the group is one of the pieces of information through which this person’s ontological narrative of the reception experience can be formed, and the dynamics of the entire group are an important factor in the group’s narrative of the reception process and a significant contextual factor concerning reception. The roles and relationships of the focus group members are thus a central part of the analysis. However, in addition to these social processes, I feel that it is also important to incorporate the second objective of what individuals are saying into the analysis. This aspect of the focus group discussions can be more overtly translation-specific than the social dynamics of the focus groups. The focus group material is rich and specific enough to produce a great deal of such information, and it will complement
the findings concerning the first objective of the analysis. If the analysis were limited only to the social construction of meanings, the study could inadvertently move too far from looking at the role of the subtitles and lose its intended focus. However, it is important to emphasise that the second objective of the analysis does not mean simply collecting viewer responses or treating the informants’ comments as unquestionable facts of reception. The purpose here is to weigh what the responses can symptomatically reveal about the ways in which people tend to deal with subtitled material, as well as their attitudes and strategies, while remembering that these statements are produced in a social situation. Although generalisations will be impossible to make, my objective is to analyse the material so that it reveals something of systems and processes, not just their outcomes in this single case.

4.4.4.2 Strategies and clues to subtitle use: Quoting and trusting, prompted and unprompted comments

One of the focal points in investigating what subtitles mean to viewers is the idea of reception strategy, of how viewers use subtitles in order to understand the subtitled programme. Some indications of these strategies can be detected in the focus group discussions, both as direct statements and as comments made in passing on other themes. Thus, one of the central objectives of the analysis will be to detect and discuss these strategies and their various dimensions in the focus group data. In addition to explicit comments on reception strategies, some indications of strategies can be observed through a symptomatic reading of the focus group data, between the lines of explicit statements. Some clues to subtitle reception strategies can be found in the informants’ patterns of quoting and trusting. Quoting refers to the informants’ practice of repeating lines from the film. In the analysis, I will look at whether quotes are taken from the English source text or the Finnish (or Swedish) subtitles. Because the majority of Finnish young adults understand English to some extent, the informants of the study have access to the source text and can quote it if they choose. Quoting the English text could then be taken as an indication that they receive at least some substantive information from the source text. On the other hand, remembering and quoting the subtitles would indicate that the subtitles have been read fairly attentively and that some information has been gained through the
subtitles. Consequently, seeing whether quotations are made in Finnish or in English can shed light on the informants’ reception strategies and their tendencies to either listen to the source text or read the translation. It can also indicate how much and how carefully the subtitles are read, and how much of them the viewer remembers.

Quoting patterns can also indicate whether the viewer accepts subtitles as the real text of the film or quotes the English text when wanting to express what was really said on screen. In this sense, quoting the actual subtitles’ words can be seen as a sign of trust, a sign of willingness to take the translation as the authentic words of the film and to see them as authoritative. In addition to the quotes themselves, this trust can be indicated by how those quotes are framed. For example, if an informant repeats the words of the subtitles, prefacing them with a phrase such as “the line is translated as...” or “according to the subtitles, it says...”, the informant does not afford the subtitles equal status with the source text. However, if the quote is preceded by a statement such as “the character says that...”, the informant implies trust in the subtitles by putting them in the position of authentic words in the film. Furthermore, there are other ways of expressing trust, such as by not questioning the translator’s choices or paying attention to problematic solutions in the subtitles. On the other hand, putting the translator in the foreground by commenting on the solutions or searching for alternative translations may be an indicator of mistrust. In my opinion, the question of trust (or mistrust) is an important one when analysing viewer attitudes and strategies. Trust implies a natural, somewhat automatic attitude towards subtitles, while mistrust means that the attitude is more sceptical, as the viewer is more aware of the vulnerabilities inherent in subtitles.

Another way of analysing the informants’ attitudes and strategies is by looking at what they spontaneously bring into the discussion. This can be done by distinguishing unprompted comments from the ones prompted by the moderator’s questions. Unprompted comments are those remarks which are not preceded by the moderator’s explicit reference to this same matter. This category naturally contains all entirely spontaneous comments, but some unprompted comments may also be preceded by the moderator’s question, if the question is so open-ended that the responses require active recollection and selection of discussion topic by the respondents. For example, if an informant replies to a general question on the understandability of the subtitles by pointing out a specific problematic part, the remark is considered an unprompted comment on this particular part of the subtitles.
However, if the moderator mentions this specific part and asks the informants what they think about it, the following comments are a result of explicit prompting and do not therefore reflect the informants’ active recollection of that instance. Of course, the lines between prompted and unprompted comments are not entirely clear-cut, and some remarks might be difficult to place unambiguously in one category. In the above example, for instance, the moderator’s general question could be seen as prompting towards comments on understandability, thus leading the informants to present their examples. My decision is, however, to treat such comments as unprompted, because the moderator has not explicitly mentioned the example presented by the informant, which means that the informant must have independently recalled the example and chosen to mention it. In other words, comments are considered unprompted if their substance is first mentioned by the informant, even if the general theme is introduced by the moderator.

By analysing spontaneous, unprompted comments, it is possible to uncover those elements of the film and its translation which are particularly important and memorable to the viewers. Furthermore, a comparison between prompted and unprompted comments will provide an opportunity for comparing more and less memorable elements and discussing what these differences might reveal of the reception process and the informants’ attitudes and preferences. A comparison between the unprompted comments made in each of the three groups will offer the additional possibility of discussing whether the unprompted discussion topics appear to be idiosyncratic or whether the same patterns of active remembrance are repeated in more than one group. However, even though the emphasis placed on unprompted comments may suggest that comments made after the moderator’s prompting are less important, this is not necessarily the case. As spontaneous remarks tell us something about the most memorable aspects of the viewing experience, prompted comments can reveal how informants relate to those elements of the film and the subtitles which have been less memorable to them, and prompting can generate interesting discussion on why those elements would appear to be less memorable, thus offering even more insight into reception processes.
5. *Bridget Jones*: The Voice of a Generation / Gender / Genre?

The primary research material and object of analysis in this study consists of the discussions held in the three focus groups, and the film that was watched by the informants was simply a vehicle for producing the discussion data. However, it is worthwhile to discuss briefly what the film itself is about and what its generic and narrative constraints are. As some themes in the discussions are directly related to the characteristics of the film and not simply to the act of viewing subtitled material, a brief overview of the film is necessary for understanding the themes on which the informants base their ideas and interpretations. The two themes which are especially relevant to the nature of the discussions and the challenges of cross-cultural reception are the genre to which the film belongs and the intertextual layers and networks which are a part of the film. I do not intend to give a full analysis of either the film or the subtitles, but simply present some key factors and concepts which are significant for understanding the focus group discussions.

5.1 Who is *Bridget Jones*?

*Bridget Jones*, which became something of a popular cultural phenomenon in the United Kingdom and many other parts of the world at the turn of the millennium, was first conceived of as a newspaper column in the UK newspaper *The Independent*. It was written by Helen Fielding, who later adapted the columns into a novel, *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (1996). The novel became a bestseller in many countries, including Finland, and has been translated into at least 33 languages (Séllei, 2006: 173). It was followed by a sequel, *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (1999), and both books were later adapted into movies, first *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001), directed by Sharon Maguire, and then the sequel *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* (2004) directed by Beeban Kidron. The screenplay for the first film was
written by Helen Fielding, Andrew Davies and Richard Curtis, and for the second film by Helen Fielding, Andrew Davies, Richard Curtis and Adam Brooks.

The novels, written in diary form, chronicle the life of a single, thirty-something woman who lives in London, struggles with her career, relationships and appearance and has an occasionally strained relationship with her parents. The novels describe her life of attempting to lose weight and quit smoking, enhance her career, and find the right man for a mature relationship. In times of difficulty, Bridget seeks support from a circle of close friends who are very much like her. The novels have been so successful that they were a significant factor in initiating a new literary phenomenon, so-called “chick lit”. *Bridget Jones’s Diary* has even been called the “urtext” of chick lit, the novel which single-handedly ushered in the genre: “The entire chick-lit phenomenon is invariably traced back to this single novel” (Ferriss and Young, 2006: 4).

The film adaptations of the two novels follow the plots of the novels fairly closely. In the first film – just as in the first novel – Bridget eventually finds a fulfilling relationship with Mark Darcy, whom she had initially dismissed in favour of the charming but ultimately unreliable Daniel Cleaver. She also takes charge of her career by leaving a job at a publishing house (working for Cleaver) and becoming a television journalist. The sequel, on the other hand, tells the story of what happens to a couple after the “happily ever after”, and how various doubts and miscommunications work to drive Bridget and Mark apart. However, as is fitting for this genre, a happy and romantic ending is guaranteed in both the first film and the sequel. Both films are extremely humorous, and occasionally even escalate towards slapstick, thus negating the seeming attempt at realistic description of the contemporary woman’s life in favour of comic effect.

5.2 Chick Lit and Chick Flicks – Genres for a “New Woman”?

While the methodological and theoretical framework of this study is not feminist in nature, it is worthwhile to contemplate the role of gender in determining the target audience and the potential for the reception of the *Bridget Jones* novels and films. If the genre is called “chick lit” or “chick flicks”, it is clear that gender plays a central
role in how these cultural products are perceived, marketed and received. Is it, therefore, realistic or reasonable to assume that these popular cultural products are aimed at and enjoyed by only women? Furthermore, does being a women’s genre mean that these texts are routinely perceived as something inferior, something not to be taken seriously, something to be criticised in discussion with one’s peers?

5.2.1 The Anxieties and Attractions of Chick Lit

Caroline J. Smith (2008: 2) defines the genre of chick lit in a fairly general fashion as “heroine-centered narratives that focus on the trials and tribulations of their individual protagonists.” She points out that the original definition was more narrow, limiting the scope of the protagonists to “young, single, white, heterosexual, British and American women in their late twenties and early thirties, living in metropolitan areas.” According to Smith, these protagonists reflect both the authors of these novels and the women who read them. Thus, the looser definition is due to the fact that this popular genre has expanded over the years to cover a much wider protagonist demographic that attracts a wider cross-section of readers. However, at the time the Bridget Jones novels were published, chick lit was still taking its first ‘baby’ steps within the confines of the narrower definition. In other words, the Bridget Jones novels are an excellent example of this chick lit, popular novels aimed at young women and dealing with the anxieties and challenges of contemporary, young women, particularly in finding a mate and building a career.

In addition to the unavoidable romantic themes of these books, humour is another key element in a great deal of chick lit, and something that sets it apart from traditional forms of romance writing: “Although the Harlequin romance may contain scenes of playful banter, chick lit deliberately aims for a humorous effect: Bridget Jones’s popularity stems in part from her ability to laugh at her self-improvement quests” (Harzewski, 2006: 38). Thus, chick lit tends to be constructed in a way that allows the reader to laugh at situations and characters which seem reminiscent of her own experiences. In fact, an important attraction in chick lit is the fact that readers often easily identify with the less-than-perfect characters of the novels and find humour in this: “The typical chick-lit protagonist is […] not perfect but flawed, eliciting readers’ compassion and identification simultaneously.
Heroines deploy self-deprecating humor that not only entertains but also leads readers to believe they are fallible – like them” (Ferriss and Young, 2006: 3–4). Chick lit cannot therefore be equated with traditional romance novels and their idealized protagonists: “Supporters claim that, unlike traditional, convention-bound romance, chick lit jettisons the heterosexual hero to offer a more realistic portrait of single life, dating, and the dissolution of romantic ideals” (ibid.: 3). Whereas romance novels portray situations and stories which offer the reader an escape from everyday realities, chick lit presents the target audience’s perceived everyday reality in a humorous, sympathetic light and allows the reader to identify with the story.

The *Bridget Jones* novels appear to be a perfect example of this, and the matter of readers’ identifying with Bridget Jones comes up repeatedly, not only in ordinary readers’ comments on the books but also in book reviews, such as Jeyapalan’s (2000) comments on *Bridget Jones’s Diary*: “Helen Fielding tapped into the working girl’s zeitgeist [...] [*Bridget Jones’s Diary*] made female Singletons of the Western world sit up and say ‘Hey! This is me!’”

The identifiable nature of the chick lit protagonists offers an explanation for the genre’s popularity among twenty- and thirty-something women, but, among critics, it also creates a sense of anxiety and unease over the merits of these novels. While some have praised chick lit for being able to “tap into the zeitgeist”, others have criticised it, for example, for being merely “trivial fiction” (Ferriss and Young 2006: 2) or even “literary junk food” (Benstock, 2006: 255), as well as for blatant commercialism (Harzewski 2006: 35) and undermining feminist ideals (Ferriss and Young 2006: 9). Angela McRobbie (2007: 67) describes *Bridget Jones* as an example of what she calls “post-feminism” and expresses much of the conflict inherent in the discussions on chick lit and feminism:

[Bridget Jones] is the product of modernity in that she has benefited from those institutions that have loosened the ties of tradition and community for women […] However, this also gives rise to new anxieties. There is the fear of loneliness for example, the stigma of remaining single and the risks and uncertainties of not finding the right partner to be a father to children, as well as a husband.

Thus, the post-feminism of *Bridget Jones*, and chick lit in general, can in some ways be interpreted as an abandonment of feminist values in this new context of liberated women. Chick lit can be seen to exemplify the way younger generations of women have almost forgotten the battles women have fought for their rights and
recognition, enjoyed the fruits of these victories but then succumbed to the same patriarchal traps that held back previous generations of women.

While the success of the genre is undeniable, these negative perceptions have caused some critics to dismiss its value, particularly its literary value, in quite straightforward terms. Juliette Wells (2006: 49), for example, makes a clear distinction between earlier (and current) examples of “women’s literature” and chick lit as only “women’s writing”, stating that “chick lit positions itself firmly as entertaining rather than thought provoking, as fiction rather than literature.” She (ibid.: 61) even makes a case for distancing the genre from the idea of the novel altogether: “In its great interest in how beauty is created and maintained, chick lit allies itself to the genre not of the novel but of women’s magazines.” These comments demonstrate how easily chick lit – as any other form of commercial, popular culture – can be relegated to an inferior literary and cultural status, and how its commercial success can work against it, generating a poor reputation of superficial, ephemeral, marketing-oriented “writing” instead of “literature”. Despite the postmodernist tendency towards abolishing the lines between high and popular culture and dismissing “objective” estimates of quality or value, there is a clear unease about the role and status of chick lit. Chick lit is, of course, a popular genre of mass market novels, and there is no reason to see it otherwise or to think of it as high art, but it is surprising that, as can be seen from some of the above comments, the discussion on chick lit is often geared towards value judgements rather than analysis.

This atmosphere, of course, also has implications for the perceived readership of these novels and the level of sophistication presupposed. If chick lit is seen as superficial entertainment, its audiences cannot be seen as particularly discerning, and the entertainment factor easily rules out anything profoundly thought-provoking as far as audience expectations and reactions are concerned. However, this critical position is not the only one, and the relationship of literary criticism to the genre of chick lit is slightly conflicted. The questions posed by Ferriss and Young (2006: 9) are quite apt: “Is chick lit advancing the cause of feminism by appealing to female audiences and featuring empowered, professional women? Or does it rehearse the same patriarchal narrative of romance and performance of femininity that feminists once rejected?” Both the negative and the positive viewpoint find their supporters, and both are easy to justify through a multitude of chick lit examples. It is this
dichotomy that creates the uneasy relationship between chick lit and criticism: while some dismiss it as little more than trivial magazine writing, others see it as the next step in women’s battle for equality and empowerment. Both views have significant implications for how chick lit is discussed, and both exemplify the ways in which readers receive and interpret chick lit.

5.2.2 From Chick Lit to Chick Flicks – Gendered Audience and Gendered Reception?

As the Bridget Jones novels initiated the genre of chick lit, so their film adaptations are perfect examples of the parallel film genre of chick flicks, films aimed at women and describing women’s experiences. Chick flicks are similar to chick lit in their style and appeal, and attitudes towards them have been similarly dichotomous and conflicted. A. Rochelle Mabry (2006: 192) equates the genres of chick lit and chick flicks quite closely, stating that they both “are women’s genres, not only in their focus on female voice and narrative point of view but also in their direct marketing and specific appeal to female consumers.” Thus, Mabry again makes the point that the commercial aspect is very significant in these women’s popular, contemporary genres. However, in a more positive vein, she also points out that Bridget Jones’s Diary, as an example of a chick flick, rejects the clichés and conservative themes of earlier women’s films by using them as a source of humour, thus questioning the validity of those messages for contemporary (young) women (ibid.: 198). Mabry’s commentary therefore presents both sides of the argument concerning these women’s genres. She (ibid.: 205) draws the following conclusion:

[C]hick lit, movies, and television programs can be just as conservative as older works like the woman’s film and the romance novel in their portrayals of women’s concerns. […] Still, these contemporary works provide important new visions of women’s voices, communities, and experiences as sexual beings [...], suggesting possibilities for women outside the role of girlfriend, wife, or mother.

In other words, Mabry sees in chick lit and chick flicks both conservative, patriarchal tendencies and a newer, more liberated type of woman who laughs at old conventions and expectations. This is a fairly fitting description of these genres: they present a contemporary female heroine who would reject certain earlier notions
of womanhood, but, at the same time, some age-old themes are present and still relevant to the audiences of these novels and films.

One example of a fairly positive view of gender within chick flicks comes from Madelyn M. Ritrosky-Winslow (2004), who discusses the Bridget Jones films, particularly the sequel Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason. In her view, the themes of the films cannot be boiled down simply to Bridget’s desire to find a mate:

They are more complicated in their gender dynamics than this. For instance, Firth and Grant bring non-traditional masculinity (with considerable sex appeal) to these films, while Zellweger as Bridget is an atypical leading lady (more “real” in many ways than most).

Ritrosky-Winslow goes on to point out that the films do not offer “conventional representations of masculinity or femininity,” but “the sometimes uncertain and contradictory desires of real women (of everyone really), as well as men who defy easy categorization” She also mentions the often-repeated idea of the characters in the books and films – particularly Bridget herself – being easy to identify with and therefore pleasurable for viewers (ibid.). Ritrosky-Winslow’s viewpoint might even seem overly positive regarding a genre that is, after all, quite superficial and commercial, as she ascribes to it the value of undermining traditional gender stereotypes and allowing women to liberate themselves while being allowed to view the male protagonists as somewhat submissive objects of desire. However, this goes to show how different points of view can accommodate different significances and values to both chick lit and chick flicks. The genres inspire various interpretations, and their general themes and messages are by no means as straightforward as they might initially appear. The discussion of their merits and shortcomings will undoubtedly continue, and both positive and negative views will have their effects on reception.

As both chick lit and chick flicks are decidedly women’s genres, it is clear that their intended – and often actual – audience is gender-based. Thus, audience expectations could be considered through this ‘gender’ lens. If women are the primary audience, it must be women’s interests that determine the way these films and novels are created. Men, on the other hand, are a peripheral, accidental audience, and not the decisive factor in what and how to put in these cultural products. Men do, however, occasionally watch or read these films and novels, and whether their readings are shaped by the fact that they are a secondary audience
segment is an interesting question. Is it possible for men to enjoy chick lit or chick flicks? That is not a central question in my study, but as one of the focus groups consists of both men and women, it is significant to keep in mind that men, by not being the intended audience, gain a perspective from which they can easily criticise a film that was not even intended for their enjoyment. However, the perceived inferior status of the genre in general can also induce women to criticise such a film due to preconceived notions of superficiality, commerciality and even anti-feminist tendencies. Thus, when conducting a reception study, it is beneficial to keep in mind that despite the popularity and seeming accessibility of the genre, significant portions of the potential audience may be predisposed to dislike what they see and express this in a social situation. Furthermore, even though this study concentrates on translation and its reception, it is possible for this negative outset to remain present throughout the entire discussion. However, it should also be kept in mind that the popularity of the genre and of Bridget Jones in particular means that there must also be plenty of potential viewers who are positively predisposed and whose preconceived notions are therefore a complete opposite. Thus, even the hypothesis-building and planning of a reception study must take into account the dichotomous and contradictory responses the genre generates in both audiences and critics.

5.3 Bridget Jones and Cultural Literacy

5.3.1 Intertextuality in the Bridget Jones Novels and Films

While both the Bridget Jones novels and the films can be seen as straightforward, mass-market entertainment and examples of the popular culture of their time, there is a further dimension and an additional meaning potential to them. They are quite rich in intertextuality, and the intertextual connections construct a multi-layered network of intermingling themes and ideas, recognisable characters, and, importantly, an additional source of humour. An initial intertextual connection is formed with the newspaper columns on which the novels are based, and then

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42For a more thorough analysis of intertextuality in the Bridget Jones novels, see Tuominen (2002).
between the films and the novels. However, the most significant thematic connections are in their numerous links to the works of Jane Austen: the plot of Bridget Jones’s Diary is a rewriting of Pride and Prejudice, and Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason is based on Persuasion (Salber, 2001). The connection to Austen is made evident by, for example, a few characters who share their names with Austen’s characters, explicit references to Austen’s text, and overall plots that are strongly reminiscent of Austen’s. As stated by Ferriss and Young (2006: 5), “Bridget Jones is a direct literary descendant of Austen’s Elizabeth Bennet.”

The Bridget Jones novels go to unusual lengths in their intertextual constructions, as can be seen in their use of intertextuality as a tool of self-referential playfulness. Again, connections to Jane Austen provide an excellent example. The Bridget Jones novels not only refer to Austen’s novels, they also make numerous references to Bridget and her friends watching the BBC adaptation of Pride and Prejudice and professing their admiration for its leading male character, Mr. Darcy. In fact, Suzanne Ferriss (2006: 71) argues that the BBC version of Pride and Prejudice has been as much a subtext and inspiration for the novel Bridget Jones’s Diary as the novel Pride and Prejudice has. This intertextual link then culminates in the Bridget Jones films in the casting of Colin Firth, who played Mr. Darcy in BBC’s Pride and Prejudice, in the role of Mark Darcy. This casting choice is a clear demonstration of the fact that the intertextual web around Bridget Jones and Jane Austen is intentionally multi-layered and multimodal. In addition, this shows that the macro-level Jane Austen allusions are a significant element both in the novels and in the films. These allusions are readily discernible to those who are familiar with Austen’s works and their recent incarnations, and they weave an intertextual network that is, in its back-and-forth references and playful construction of potential meanings and themes, something of a maze right below the surface of the primary story. Salber (2001) calls the Bridget Jones novels “palimpsests upon which both Fielding’s texts and Austen’s co-exist,” and sees their value in their ability to import Austen and her themes into the contemporary world. In this way, the connections between Bridget Jones and Jane Austen can provoke reactions and interpretations which the Bridget Jones novels and films alone would not invite, and inspire readings which go beyond the most superficial level of entertaining chick lit and chick flicks.
In addition to the connections to Jane Austen, the books and films also contain a number of other allusions to both literary classics such as Dickens and Shakespeare, and contemporary popular culture, including references to celebrities, politicians, television shows, movies, books and music. All these references further layer the intertextual web. Most commonly these references are used for humorous effect or for emphasising characterisation or other descriptive elements. Even though the links to Austen are the most prominent, these micro-level allusions are also worth remembering, because through them the films and novels maintain intertextual contact with the contemporary culture, as well as with literary history. Thus, these allusions work together with the Austen allusions to construct a specific cultural and intertextual position for the films and novels.

As the focus of this study is the reception of Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason, its intertextuality is of particular interest. The dual nature of Bridget Jones's intertextuality is evident in this film: on the one hand, there are mentions of highly valued cultural products, such as Oedipus or the novel Mrs Dalloway, and on the other hand there are numerous references to current popular culture, such as the television series Sex and the City and the music of Madonna. The film’s intertextuality is also enhanced by typical cinematic elements, such as background music, scenes reminiscent of other films or television programmes, and generic conventions and even clichés, which are used in a playful, occasionally over-exaggerated way to emphasise the comedic, even slightly parodic style of the film. One example of this is an allusion to The Sound of Music in the beginning of the film. Initially, the allusion is not overtly verbal, rather the song The Sound of Music, playing in the background, creates the illusion as Bridget and Mark run towards each other on a grassy hill. This is a visual reference to a scene in The Sound of Music, where the heroine is dancing in similar surroundings. Then, as the verbal narration starts, Bridget’s voice is heard mentioning Maria and Captain Von Trapp, thus reinforcing the allusion verbally. The reference to The Sound of Music is comedic shorthand for an excessively romantic scene, while other similarly stereotypical scenes evoke James Bond, travel shows, depictions of drug use, physical fights between two men who compete for a woman’s attentions, and so on. Together, these genre references and individual allusions construct a cultural network of well-known classics, current popular culture and cinematic and
televisual conventions that creates meanings and emphasises the comedic nature of the film.

Admittedly this tendency towards intertextuality is not unique to *Bridget Jones*. In fact, according to Caroline J. Smith (2008: 2), the dual links to current culture and nineteenth-century literature are a typical feature of the chick lit genre, and an attempt “to unite readers across genre lines”. As one of the earliest chick lit texts, the *Bridget Jones* novels may have been a significant factor in initiating this trend. However, although these intertextual links can be seen as an enriching factor, some critics have also found fault with such use of intertextuality, perhaps as a simplistic application of this form of literary expression. Juliette Wells (2006: 57), for example, sees these connections as somewhat disingenuous:

> [W]hen a chick-lit writer claims kinship with prominent women novelists of previous centuries, she is trying to have it both ways: profiting from the literary associations of her predecessors without acknowledging her own financially driven compromises and evasions.

Thus, in Wells’s view, the purpose of the intertextuality is marketing-oriented rather than a genuine attempt at literary expression. She also suggests that the use of such intertextual links can be a calculated attempt at falsely raising the status and literary value of chick lit, a way to “case the genre as the descendant of literary, not popular, fiction” (*ibid.* 64). Consequently, intertextuality is another area where the dichotomous attitudes towards chick lit become evident. However, as Wells’s comments also demonstrate, intertextuality is the source of a multitude of different layered readings in addition to the story itself. Intertextuality is certainly a significant theme in *Bridget Jones*, and it encourages a variety of interpretations, thus affecting the reception of both the novels and the films.

The central role of intertextuality therefore means that, in order to understand and interpret the novels and films, the audiences must be able to sort their way through this intertextual maze. Of course, it is not necessary to recognise all the references to understand the story, and even if one understands none of them, the surface level of the plot is quite accessible. This would, however, mean a loss of both humour and narrative and thematic interpretive opportunities, and make the reading or viewing a considerably different experience. Thus, a certain amount of what can be called “cultural literacy,” an awareness of the intertextual background on which the texts are built, would be useful in processing the texts. For the audiences who are native
to the texts’ source culture, this is not a high demand. The intertextual references are
to cultural products and concepts which are well-known, even canonical, after all, and as such are either timeless classics or well-known contemporary cultural expressions. While this does not guarantee that each audience member recognises each allusion, it does offer a shared cultural basis which allows the writer to trust the audience’s ability to process the texts. When the texts are translated and transferred
to different cultural surroundings, however, the requirement becomes one of cross-cultural literacy, and the matter is considerably more complicated.

As was seen in Chapter 3, numerous studies have investigated audience perceptions and interpretations of culture-bound elements in translations, and shown that the readers of a translation tend to have difficulties in understanding source culture-bound references. The topic of Bridget Jones in particular was discussed in my master’s thesis, where I investigated the reception of allusions in the translated Bridget Jones novels (Tuominen, 2002), and concluded that many of the cultural references were difficult to interpret for a Finnish audience. Furthermore, my study revealed a slight tendency in the test subjects to feel more negative towards the entire text if they were unable to process the allusions. Although this result is quite tentative due to the small number of informants, it raises an important issue: even individual, micro-level allusions can influence both overall interpretations and attitudes towards the text. It is also clear that the intertextual network contained in Bridget Jones can present challenges for its Finnish audience, and it demands a level of cross-cultural literacy which a majority of the Finnish audience does not appear to possess. The translator can, of course, utilise a number of translation strategies to take the target audience’s level of cultural literacy into account (see, for example, Leppihalme, 1997: 78–79, 84 and Pedersen, 2008: 102–104). However, it can be difficult for the translator to determine the audience’s abilities and expectations, which is why intertextuality is an important theme in reception studies. Even though the current study does not focus exclusively on the reception of intertextual elements, questions of intertextuality will none the less be discussed in the analysis, as they are a significant element in the audience’s experience of Bridget Jones.

43 In addition, Minna Ruokonen’s (2010) doctoral dissertation discusses the topic of translating allusions and interpreting translated allusions through a more textually oriented analysis.
5.3.2 The Text(s) and Context(s) of *Bridget Jones*

As was mentioned in Chapter 1, the definition of ‘text’ used in this study includes the visual and auditive as well as verbal elements of the audiovisual product. However, in light of the complicated intertextual network in which the film *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* exists, it is necessary to re-examine this definition from the point of view of this specific product. What constitutes the text of this film? In Jostein Gripsrud’s (1995) study of *Dynasty* and its reception in Norway, he emphasises the need to consider the texts surrounding the programme itself, the “event” of *Dynasty*, when looking at reception. According to Gripsrud (1995: 125) “the interesting issue is how all of the metatextual material affects the meanings and pleasures audiences derive from the programme text”. The points Gripsrud makes are noteworthy. It is true that the texts and metatexts surrounding a cultural product must have an effect on how it is perceived. Gripsrud (*ibid.*: 126–127) is, however, also correct in pointing out that even though these texts are closely related to the product, they are not a part of it. Thus, while a review of *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* can influence a viewer’s reading of the film, the review is not a part of the film. It is a part of the context in which the film exists, of the textual universe surrounding the film. It is important to make this distinction, because the objective of contextualisation is central in this study. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, what is meant by the *Bridget Jones* text is the multimodal product which viewers encounter in the cinema. Any texts beyond the one seen on screen are outside the immediate reception experience, but they do affect the experience and must therefore be kept in mind when analysing the focus group discussions. These surrounding texts constitute one element of the context in which the reception process takes place. It is also important to keep in mind that here subtitles are considered an inseparable part of the multimodal text, instead of a surrounding, contextual element. Conversely, the audiovisual entity is also seen as a unified text to be taken together with the subtitles, rather than as the subtitles’ context. This brings us to the full definition of the *Bridget Jones* text: it includes the film, as it was seen in the cinema, with its Finnish and Swedish cinema subtitles.

What, then, can be counted as contextual texts which construct the event of *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason*? The easy definition is that any text related to the film would be a part of its context. More specifically, these texts include reviews
or actor interviews in the media, as well as any discussion of the film, whether in newspapers, magazines, television, the internet or in person. These texts would also include promotional material, such as advertisements, press releases and film websites. Furthermore, contextual texts can include any other texts which a viewer encounters in the immediate vicinity of the film itself, such as the advertisements at the beginning of the screening, or perhaps the previous film an individual has seen in the cinema. These texts vary greatly from one viewer to the next and therefore it is impossible to speculate on them, unless an informant happens to mention them in the course of the focus group discussion. It is, however, important to keep in mind that the context is constructed not only of commonly related texts but many individual background factors, as well as pure coincidence. Another important category of context-creating texts is constituted by the intertextual subtexts that lie beneath the surface of this film, as has been seen in this section. These include, first and foremost, the first Bridget Jones film, both Bridget Jones novels, and the original Bridget Jones newspaper columns. In addition, the intertextual context contains all the aforementioned cultural products, such as the Jane Austen novels and the BBC version of Pride and Prejudice, other works of literature, television shows, films and other cultural products to which the film alludes. Furthermore, any other texts in the same genre or in the genres which are referenced in the film can be considered contextual texts.

These examples demonstrate what constitutes the film’s textual context. The film, however, also resides in a wider cultural context, which includes the linguistic, cultural and social surroundings in which the film is viewed. The textual universe surrounding the film, as well as other contextual factors, will be discussed in more detail in the course of the focus group analysis in Chapter 6, whenever the empirical data indicates that they have been of significance.

5.4 Bridget Jones in Translation

There are several Finnish translations of Bridget Jones. First of all, the two novels have both been translated by Sari Karhulahti. The two Bridget Jones films, on the

44For an analysis of these translations, see Tuominen (2002).
other hand, have been translated into Finnish more than once. In addition to the bilingual cinema translation, there is a different translation for the DVD release and different versions for television broadcasts. Although the same set of subtitles can in some cases be used in several media (in both the DVD release and on a television channel, for example), the same subtitles must nevertheless be adjusted to some extent in order to conform to the constraints and conventions of the different medium. I will not chart here the entire translation history of *Bridget Jones*; this would be beside the point. My only target of interest is the one set of subtitles seen by the informants of the current study, which is the cinema version of the *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* subtitles.

The Finnish cinema translation was made by Tarja Dibaja and the Swedish translation by Saliven Gustafsson. My general impression of the Finnish subtitles45 is that they were quite adequate and typical Finnish subtitles, where certain solutions could certainly arouse differing opinions but which were internally fairly consistent. Only one obvious mistranslation was noticeable in the subtitles: the word ‘proposition’ had been translated as ‘kosinta’, which means a proposal of marriage, even though no such event had occurred in the scene in question. This was a significant word choice in terms of plot development, because shortly after this line a proposal of marriage was actually discussed, and thus this mistranslation had the potential to cause confusion by changing the order of events on screen. Otherwise the subtitles contained occasional struggles with translating allusions and wordplay, as is typical for any subtitles of such a film, but nothing that would have appeared severely problematic to my eye as a film viewer, researcher and translator. I will not analyse the subtitles any further, as my intention is to allow all interpretations and judgements to come through the informants’ comments. However, a few observations on the particular challenges in the translation of *Bridget Jones* are appropriate here in order to set the stage for an analysis of the three focus group discussions.

45The following comments will only refer to the Finnish subtitles, not the Swedish ones, as the reception study concentrates primarily on the Finnish subtitles due to the fact that the informants are all native Finnish-speakers. In addition, I have not had access to the cinema subtitles during the writing of this dissertation, and the impressions presented here are based on notes made during the four times I viewed the film in the cinema (once by myself in preparation for the focus groups, and three times subsequently with each of the three groups).
As has been made clear above, one of the most notable challenges in the translation of *Bridget Jones*, both on page and on screen, is its intertextuality. The translator’s challenge is to find suitable translation strategies which make these source-culture-bound texts accessible to new audiences in different cultures. The balancing act is by no means simple, because too many omissions or overly explicit explanations can dilute the humour and make the descriptive power of the allusions less sharp, but a strategy of not modifying the allusions in any way can cause confusion and even irritation, if it means that members of the target audience cannot understand the references at all.

In the Finnish novel translations and subtitles, the translators have attempted to balance between several strategies, leaving some allusions unchanged while modifying or explaining others. Thus, the Finnish translations (both subtitles and novel translations) appear to have some slight domesticating elements to them, even though the overall sense is that many of the source cultural elements have been left intact. My previously mentioned reception study on the Bridget Jones novels (Tuominen, 2002) concluded that this kind of strategy appears to be familiar and easily readable to Finnish readers, even though many allusions will be unfamiliar to the informants. The unfamiliarity was, however, tolerated fairly well, and the informants were able to render interpretations even without specific knowledge of the allusions. Thus, the challenge for the translator is to find a suitable balance between explanations and allowing the readers to draw conclusions on their own, and to base this strategy on a perception of the intended audience for the translation.

The *Bridget Jones* films and novels do, of course, present other kinds of challenges for the translator as well. For example, the diary style of incomplete sentences and various types of shorthand, used to comic effect in the novels and occasionally even in the films, can be quite difficult to produce in another language. The films’ play with genre conventions and clichés can also have its effects on the verbal elements of the films and thus become a challenge for the translator. The overall playful and humorous tone of the films and novels is by no means simple to translate, and careful consideration of audience characteristics and expectations can be helpful for the translator in making strategic decisions. According to Nieves Jiménez Carra (2009: 141), the humour in *Bridget Jones’s Diary* — and therefore perhaps to some extent also in *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* — consists of three elements: “the creation of an expectation in the audience that is not eventually
fulfilled”; the use of voiceover narration to depict Bridget’s diary and other written texts, as well as Bridget’s thoughts, which are often in humorous conflict with other information on screen; and Bridget’s clumsy, inartful behaviour. In addition, Jiménez Carra specifically mentions humour based on sexual references (ibid.: 138), taboo expressions (ibid.: 140), and “jokes embedded in cultural references” (ibid.: 139). All of these categories are also present in Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason. Thus, the humour in the Bridget Jones films consists of multiple factors, which often have to do with not only situational humour but also with the use of language and culture, and a creation of surprise and contradiction. These are all challenging elements for the translator, and can require significant processing effort from the target-language audience.

Another interesting aspect to keep in mind when discussing the translations of the films in particular is that the films are, in fact, already translations in themselves: translations of the original novels into a new form. In Roman Jakobson’s (1959/2003: 114) terms, the film adaptations could be considered intersemiotic translations, i.e. translations of verbal text into another, audiovisual sign system. Thinking of the films as translations can bring the challenges of translation into clearer focus. As can be seen in the film adaptations, some aspects of the novels are impossible to reproduce in a different context. Some types of intertextuality, humour or narration simply do not work in a film, and they must be reworked in some way to fit the new circumstances. They can either be constructed in a different way or left out, and the loss that thus occurs can perhaps be compensated for by adding some other, better-functioning elements. The same is true for translations: some things simply cannot be expressed equally effectively in a different language for a different audience, and therefore adaptations must be made in accordance with the perceived translation task. The translator is a decision-maker who picks and chooses the elements of the source text which come to represent it in the new context. Thus, the audience watching and reading the subtitled film Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason, is actually watching a translation and simultaneously reading the translation of a translation. How, then, do they process this text which has layers and connections and is a twofold recreation (of the novel, which actually is itself something of a translation or a reworking of the original newspaper columns)? What role do the subtitles play in this process of understanding and disentangling of the
various layers? How do viewers feel about watching a subtitled film? That is what the following analysis of the focus group discussions will investigate.
6. “If I Can Talk about the Translation Now...”

This chapter will present a comprehensive description and analysis of the three focus group discussions and begin charting the ways in which this research method can shed light on the reception of subtitled materials. The chapter begins with a general description of the focus group situations and the practical considerations involved in their planning (section 6.1). Then, in sections 6.2, 6.3 and 6.4, each focus group is analysed separately, in a series of individual and collective profiles. In each section, I will first outline an initial group profile (subsections 6.2.1, 6.3.1 and 6.4.1), which is a preliminary description of each group’s general characteristics. Then, in a comprehensive group profile (subsections 6.2.2, 6.3.2 and 6.4.2), I will describe each focus group discussion in detail, concentrating on the most relevant, translation-related elements. Each group’s analysis will focus on those themes that arise from that discussion, but some general themes will be discussed with all three groups. These themes include the informants’ direct comments on subtitles, reception strategies, and quoting from the film and the subtitles. After the group profiles, I will investigate each group member’s role in the discussions by presenting individual viewer profiles (subsections 6.2.3, 6.3.3 and 6.4.3), which constitute the informants’ individual ontological narratives. Finally, the group and viewer profiles of each focus group will be drawn together into a concluding group profile (sections 6.2.4, 6.3.4 and 6.4.4), which could be considered the elementary level of a public narrative. In the following chapter, the concluding group profiles will be drawn into a single focus group narrative and put in a more comprehensive cultural and social context. Thus, the present chapter will be largely descriptive, while the overall analysis and conclusions will be provided in the following chapter. One should also note that the descriptions and analysis will be thematic rather than chronological. By this I mean that I will not describe the progression of each discussion from beginning to end; rather, I will take up important themes of the discussions and go through each of them individually.
6.1 Practical Preparations for Focus Group Discussions and Analysis

6.1.1 The Focus Group Setting

The informants watched the film *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* in the cinema, during a regular showing of the film with the normal film-viewing audience. I paid for the informants’ tickets, so that they did not have to spend money to participate in the study. All focus groups watched the film during its first week in Finnish cinemas: the film was released in Finland on 3 December 2004, and Group 1 watched it on 7 December, Group 2 on 9 December and Group 3 on 10 December. Thus, the informants had little previous information of the film except that of any advertisements, reviews or other publicity they may have encountered in connection with the film’s premiere. None of them had seen the film in advance.

Immediately after the film ended, each group discussed the film for roughly an hour. The location of the focus group discussions was dictated by the film-viewing situation: because the film was watched in the cinema, the discussion had to be arranged within a convenient distance from the theatre so that the groups were able to begin the discussions immediately after the film. Therefore, even though a familiar, comfortable location may have been preferrable as another way of creating a relaxed atmosphere, the discussions had to be held in a classroom in a nearby building of a university of applied sciences. Because the discussions took place in the evening, the building was empty and the discussions were able to proceed without outside interruptions.

I acted as moderator in all three discussions. In addition, one outside person, who was familiar with both focus group research and translation studies, was present at the discussions of Group 1 and 3, acting as an observer to assist me in noting all relevant factors of the situation for the purposes of the analysis. I did not use an observer for Group 2, which was the smallest, because in such a small group I was able to observe the situation adequately without assistance. The discussions were audiotaped and later transcribed. I decided to audiotape rather than videotape the discussions, because a video camera in the room might have been intrusive and caused more distraction to the informants than an easily forgettable audio recorder. In addition, videotaping would have been technically more demanding and required
more adjustments at the beginning of the discussion, as it would have been
necessary to find the best angles to fit all participants in the frame. These
adjustments would also have been disrupting for the start of the discussion, whereas
the audio recorder was easy to switch on with minimal attention. Furthermore, even
though visual material from the situation might have provided interesting additional
information, I considered the verbal and auditive information to be sufficient for the
study, because the situation was rather static. After the discussions the informants
completed a short questionnaire with some background data and a few simple
questions on subtitles. The purpose of the questionnaire was to provide basic
demographic information on each informant, ascertain their familiarity with Bridget
Jones in case that did not come up in the discussion, and offer a general impression
of their self-stated subtitle-reading habits as a comparison to the information yielded
by the discussions.

The focus group situations proceeded smoothly, and the arrangements brought
about no significant difficulties or surprises. The atmosphere in the discussions,
while slightly awkward at moments, remained relaxed enough for an informal
discussion to take place. All three discussions contained joking and genuine
laughter, which can be taken as an indication of a successful focus group setting.
The awkwardness, which is unavoidable in an unfamiliar research situation, mostly
presented itself as momentary pauses in the discussions or some repetition, as well
as an initial phase where the informants were still adjusting to the situation and
attempting to find a suitable tone for the discussion. Whenever these moments
became noticeable, I inserted myself into the discussion and either asked a question
or made some other comment in order to advance the discussion. I attempted to
make my comments as informal and even as humorous as possible in order to
maintain a relaxed atmosphere and avoid the appearance of an examination, which
the school-like surroundings might have reinforced. Thus, despite the occasional

46The questionnaire is included in Appendix 3 and its English translation in Appendix 4.
47In my previous pilot study on the reception of translated allusions (Tuominen, 2002), some
respondents commented that the questionnaire used in the study felt too much like a literature exam
and created negative feelings. Therefore, I attempted to avoid such associations as much as possible
in this study. Even the use of focus groups as a method is in part justified by the fact that informants
might consider filling in questionnaires too laborious and school-like, whereas talking with friends is
much less taxing.
awkward pauses, the focus group situations were, in general, positive and generated productive, substantial discussion which stayed largely on topic. Each group, of course, had its own idiosyncrasies, and I will describe these in detail in the course of the analysis.

6.1.2 Selection of Informants

As the research methods in this study are qualitative, it was necessary to keep the number of informants and groups fairly low to make thorough analysis possible. The total number of informants is 18, divided into three focus groups of slightly different sizes: eight persons in Group 1, four persons in Group 2, and six persons in Group 3. An overview of the composition of each group is given in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Number of informants</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6 females, 2 males</td>
<td>22–24</td>
<td>University, scientific-technical field (non-expert)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>All-female</td>
<td>23–28</td>
<td>University, English philology or translation (near-expert)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>All-female</td>
<td>26–30</td>
<td>University, university of applied sciences or high-level vocational training (non-expert)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Composition and background characteristics of the focus groups

The make-up of each group was slightly different, but the common factor for all groups was that they were examples of a typical Finnish viewership of the Bridget Jones films. If some informants had been very different from the imagined average viewers of the film, they might have, for example, had trouble understanding some elements in the films or the translations just because the genre and its conventions were not familiar. Thus, their discussions might have revolved around themes and viewpoints that are not relevant to those viewers who would most often choose to see the film and at whom the subtitles are targeted. For the purposes of this study it was most important to concentrate on viewers who would be as realistic a representation as possible of the people who choose to watch this film. Because this is something of a pilot experiment in the use of qualitative methodology, an overly complex comparative framework would not have been feasible to execute and
analyse. Therefore, most background factors were kept fairly uniform. The most significant factors here are age, gender and, to some extent, educational and linguistic background.

The suitable age of the informants was determined to be between 20 and 35 years, in accordance with the general perceptions of typical chick flick audiences. A large majority of the informants is female, because this is predominantly a women’s genre. However, men were not excluded entirely, as men do form a minority of the audience. Thus, one group (Group 1) included two male informants of the appropriate age. The inclusion of males in one group also provided the opportunity to compare the dynamics of the discussions in all-female and mixed groups. The third background factor, education, is not a straightforward characteristic of the perceived audience of chick flicks. Therefore, it was not used as a strict criterion in selecting the informants. However, the informants do represent a fairly uniform group, who have attained a high level of education: all informants have studied at either a university or a university of applied sciences, with the exception of one individual in Group 3, yet even this individual’s educational background is in high-level, specialised vocational training.

It is, however, important to note that one of the groups, Group 2, has a very specific educational background which differentiates it from the other two groups: the informants in Group 2 are students of English and translation studies, which means that they are close in their background to the research topic, whereas other informants had no previous education related to translation. Given this fact, I label the informants in Group 2 near-experts. By this I mean that their education affords them the ability to approach the topic almost from a professional translator’s point of view, which might mean that their perspectives are different from ordinary viewers, represented by the other two groups. Their role in the study is to provide information on the differences between ordinary viewers and those who have specific knowledge of translation. This comparison can be a useful indicator of differences in perception, attitude and conversation style between audiences and translators and thus reveal potential differences in the ways translation professionals view subtitled programmes in comparison to their audience. The differences could shed light on some challenges translators face when trying to relate to their target

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48See chapter 5.2.1 for reflections on the chick flick and chick lit audiences.
audiences and find optimal translation strategies in terms of both understandability and acceptability. In addition, this comparison can be useful from a methodological point of view: it can be tempting to use students as test subjects in various experiments, and this comparative design can highlight whether students of the area in question can be useful informants. Students are an easily available group of potential study participants, but one must consider how their comments compare to other viewers’ comments and, thus, whether they could represent the reception experience of average viewers.

The fourth background factor, language skills, differs from the other three in that the informants’ language skills were not known to me in advance, and some heterogeneity was therefore present with regard to this factor. The only advance expectation was that the informants be native speakers of Finnish. The informants’ knowledge of the other languages they would encounter in the film, English and Swedish, was not known in advance. This choice was conscious, and it was made for two reasons. On a practical level, it can be difficult to evaluate individuals’ linguistic skills, especially if the only source of information is the informant’s own self-evaluation. Therefore, choosing to exclude this factor facilitated the selection of informants and allowed the pre-existing social groups to be kept intact, as individuals with differing language skills did not have to be separated from each other. In addition, this was a fairly natural approach to the language question. In Finland, practically all young adults have studied English at school and have some knowledge of it. Therefore, it is almost always a factor in the reception of subtitled English-language programmes, and an ordinary audience consists of individuals who understand some of the source text. Thus, if the intention is to look at ordinary viewing situations, the informants should have some English skills, and selecting informants with no or very little knowledge of English would have created an unnatural situation. On the other hand, by not scrutinising the informants’ English skills, I allow them to represent a fairly random set of young Finnish adults with a varying knowledge of English. In my view, this is a normal situation in a social reception context, where one can expect that all Finns know some English but some know the language better than others, and differing familiarity with the source language then becomes one aspect of the conversation. Strict selection on the basis of the informants’ English skills would have eliminated this normal variation and likely also made the informants more self-conscious of their English skills, while
not necessarily creating a homogenous group, especially if the informants’ subjective evaluations of their language skills are not accurate.

Consideration of these four background factors shows that the choice of informants creates certain comparative opportunities, such as comparisons between experts and non-experts, and between all-female and mixed groups. I will return to these comparisons, as well as more detailed descriptions of each group’s background, in the course of the analysis. In other ways, however, the informants are quite similar, and this similarity makes it possible to compare across the three focus groups, not only as examples of opposed traits, but also as a largely cohesive collection of people whose discussions can be investigated for indications of similar strategies and attitudes.

Finding willing focus group participants proved to be quite easy. As mentioned in section 4.4.2, I decided to use pre-existing groups in order to create a relaxed atmosphere in the discussions. Therefore, each group consisted of individuals who already knew each other. This also explains why some exceptions were made in terms of background factors mentioned above: one close group of friends included two males as well as six females, while another contained one informant with a lower level of education than others, and the groups were also slightly different in size. These variations were allowed in order to keep the pre-existing groups intact. In addition, I chose to recruit the focus groups through personal social networks, and therefore some of the group members had met me before and knew me to some extent. However, none of the group members were closely familiar with my research, and I would describe them as acquaintances or friends of friends rather than personal friends.\textsuperscript{49} I made this choice, again, in order to facilitate relaxed conversation. Thus, although I did not want to choose informants who would be familiar with my research, I felt that it was easier to get the discussion going when the group members could feel that they were not in this situation with a complete stranger and that at least one of them could “vouch for” the researcher’s reliability and approachability. The main aim was to create an atmosphere where the informants could feel that they were allowed to say anything they wanted without fear of losing face, and that they would not have to censor themselves.

\textsuperscript{49}The only exception to this is one informant in Group 1, with whom I have a fairly close personal relationship. I will discuss this informant’s situation in more detail during the analysis.
6.1.3 Questions and Moderator Involvement

One challenge in the focus group setting and in analysing the focus group discussions is the role of the moderator and the informants’ reactions to the moderator. I acted as the moderator myself, and, when necessary, steered the discussions in the relevant direction by asking questions and making comments. This, of course, raises the question of objectivity and of whether the moderator’s participation has influenced the outcome of the discussions. In addition, the mere presence of a moderator may affect the focus group situation and, for example, cause the informants to discuss the topic more politely and cautiously than they otherwise would. It is necessary to have a moderator to keep the discussions on track and to keep them going, but it is also important to make sure that the informants are given enough space to conduct a free-flowing discussion where they do not feel restricted by the moderator’s presence. In this study, I had a set of questions that I was to ask the groups in a specifically planned order whenever spontaneous discussion stopped, and this worked quite well. Each group was asked the same questions, although framed in slightly different ways depending on the flow of the conversation, and each group also had their moments of spontaneous discussion. I must acknowledge that the questions and my role as a moderator inevitably influenced the discussions, but, through planning in advance, I tried to ensure that my questions and comments would not be too leading or restrictive. One part of the following analysis will consist of looking critically at my role as a moderator and evaluating how my presence and behaviour during the discussions might have affected them.

It must be pointed out that my role as a moderator in this study ended up being fairly conspicuous, something more than a distant facilitator of discussion. Therefore, the method I adopted might be considered straddling between a focus group and a group interview in that my questions structured the conversation to a considerable extent, but the informants were allowed to discuss matters freely whenever they wanted to. The reason for this is the fact that the conversations, while quite engaged when answering questions, tended to slow down after a while and did

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50 This is a phenomenon known as ‘politeness bias’ (see, e.g., Iarossi, 2006: 35–36).
51 I will describe my role as the moderator in more detail in chapter 7.2.
not proceed for very long without prompting. For this practical reason I, as moderator, entered the discussions actively posing questions and making comments. This does not decrease the value of the discussions; it simply means that my role in eliciting comments was slightly more visible than had been originally envisioned.

As mentioned in section 4.4.3, the structure of the questions was planned so that they would proceed from the general, even slightly vague, towards more detailed and specific, from the film in general towards questions on the subtitles in particular. The questions were roughly divided into three groups: general questions on the film, general questions on the subtitle-reading experience, and specific questions on the subtitles and intertextuality in the film. In the first group, the first question was simply a request for the informants to describe what they thought about the movie. Following that, the informants were asked whether they thought the film was funny, and then they were asked to describe some particularly memorable scene. These three questions were all very general and my expectation was that they would be easy to answer, and these questions also follow the patterns of what people often discuss when talking about a film they have just seen.

The second group of questions, again, began with a general question, asking whether the informants remembered anything in particular about the subtitles, thus allowing the informants to make either positive, negative or value-neutral comments about any aspect of the subtitles. This was followed by questions on whether the informants had trouble understanding any parts of the film, whether they had enough time to read all subtitles, whether they thought anything was missing from the subtitles and whether they thought that the subtitles differed considerably from the English source text at any point. Thus, the questions were designed to encourage the kinds of comments and criticisms which subtitles often evoke and to allow the informants to describe their reception strategies through these fairly common conversation topics. The intent was not to steer the discussion solely in a negative direction but to take up themes which are prevalent in every-day conversations and to encourage active discussion.

Finally, the third group of questions investigated more detailed elements related to the reading and understanding of subtitles through the theme of intertextuality. Again, the first two questions were the most general and allowed the informants to mention any specifics they were able to recall actively. The first question asked the informants whether the film or the subtitles reminded the informants of the Bridget
Jones novel, and the second one asked the informants whether they noticed any other intertextual connections. After that, the final set of questions consisted of a few examples of intertextuality that I mentioned, asking for the informants’ interpretations and recollections. The allusions mentioned here were references to the television show *Sex and the City*, the novel *Mrs Dalloway*, the anti-drug slogan *Just Say No* and Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* as well as its BBC adaptation. Even though this final group of questions was originally intended to be an integral part of the focus group analysis, my final decision is to concentrate chiefly on the other two sets of questions and discuss the intertextuality theme only when it is relevant in the context of the other themes of analysis. This decision was made because, with such rich material, a detailed discussion of intertextuality would be beyond the scope of the study. The questions concerning intertextuality also operate on a different level of specificity in comparison to the other themes and would, therefore, distract from the general macro-level approach of the study. Thus, even though these specific questions were asked in all three focus groups, their ultimate role in the analysis will eventually be smaller than the role of the other questions.

I must emphasise that even though I present the questions here in a straightforward, linear fashion, this does not mean that they were asked in a similarly structured way in the focus group discussions. This set of questions worked only as an outline of themes and their procession, and they were framed slightly differently in each discussion to suit the flow of the discussion appropriately. It was extremely important not to impede spontaneous discussion by interrupting it with questions, nor did I want to change the natural rhythm of the conversation. Therefore, some themes were taken up in each group in different ways, and the order and presentation of conversation topics were not exactly the same in the groups. However, all themes were discussed in each group and the overall logic of the discussions, proceeding from general to specific and saving the very detailed questions for last, was indeed the same in each group. I will point out the relevant differences between the groups in the course of the following analysis.
6.1.4 Ethical Considerations

In a study where humans are used as test subjects, ethical questions must always be considered in the design of the study. As this study relies heavily on personal remarks by the informants, it is particularly important to keep the informants’ interest in mind and to do justice to their contributions. In the beginning of the focus group discussions, all informants were made aware of the nature of the study and of their role in it. At this stage, anyone objecting to these terms was free to leave, and therefore those who stayed and participated in the focus group discussions were aware of what they were participating in and gave their informed consent for the use of the focus group material in this study.

The most significant safeguard for the informants’ rights is anonymity. I will not use the informants’ names in any part of the study. Instead, I will refer to each informant with a single letter, assigning letters to each focus group in alphabetical order such that the members of Group 1 have letters from A to H, the members of Group 2 have letters from J\textsuperscript{52} to M and the members of Group 3 letters from N to S. The letters are not assigned to the informants in any particular order, and they give no indication of the identity or any characteristic of any informant. Furthermore, I will not reveal any unnecessary background information on the informants in my analysis. In group 2, it was necessary to mention the informants’ field of study in order to explain their near-expert status, but as for the other groups, I will not describe the informants’ occupations or fields of study in any detail, because that information could risk compromising the anonymity of the informants. I will also refrain from describing exactly what previous connection any of the informants may have had to me. I will attempt to express their level of mutual familiarity and their familiarity to me insofar as it is significant for the study, but any specific details will not be revealed. Therefore, I will also not quote any extracts from the discussions where the informants’ personal information is discussed, and I will edit out any mention of the informants’ names if used in the discussions. This also means that I will not include full transcripts of the focus group discussions in this dissertation, as some parts of the discussion are personal and must not be made public.

\textsuperscript{52}I will not use the letter ‘I’ to refer to any informant, in order to avoid the risk of confusing an informant’s comments with the first-person singular pronoun ‘I’.
I recognise my responsibility as a researcher and will make every effort to represent the informants’ views fairly and accurately. Due to the nature of the discussions, the analysis will, of course, involve a strong interpretative element, but I will present the relevant passages from the discussions as proof for my readings and do my best to justify my interpretations thoroughly in order not to put words in the informants’ mouths but to use the discussions as a tool to elicit further, underlying information on their reception processes. The informants and their contributions in the focus group discussions are the most important element in this study and deserve to be treated with respect and discretion. I will attempt to act accordingly throughout the analysis.

6.1.5 Transcription and Translation

As the research material is rich and varied and consists chiefly of spoken text, it is challenging to present the material the clearest manner suitable for the purposes of the analysis. Thus, I decided to transcribe the verbal content of the focus group discussions but refrain from a close, phonetic transcription which would have required an extensive effort. Such transcription was not necessary for the purposes of this study, because the analysis is not intended to focus on micro-level technical details of the exchanges. My analysis will concentrate on what was said and the manner in which the group members talked to each other, and the detailed structure of their comments is less important. Thus, quotes from the discussions will be presented in a fairly normal textual format rather than a phonetic transcript. I do, however, take note of laughter, repetition, interruptions, turn-taking and other such elements of the discussions, as these features can be meaningful when discussing the joint effort of creating interpretations in a social context. I will include them whenever relevant to the analysis. The transcription itself is only a tool for examining the conversations, and therefore it is reasonable to include only those aspects of the discussions that are relevant in the analysis.

In quoting the transcripts, I will quote the discussions at lengths that will accurately portray the particular situation or exchange. As Sue Wilkinson (2006: 52–53) has pointed out, focus group analysis often overlooks the interactional elements of the discussions, concentrating predominantly on individual statements.
This can distort the analysis, and it ignores the particular strength of the focus group method, which is its ability to bring forward elements of interaction and the social construction of meaning. I will avoid this problem by including both interactional elements and the substance of the comments in my analysis. Therefore, I will occasionally quote quite extensively from the focus group discussions, in order to reveal the interactional features of the discussion instead of only quoting individual comments taken out of their context.

The discussions were held in Finnish, and all discussion extracts examined in this analysis will be translated into English. I will quote the extracts first in the original Finnish, and then offer an English translation. Both the extracts and their translations will be italicised. In addition, any words or phrases which were originally said in English by the informants will be underlined. All translations of the focus group material are mine. I recognise my power and responsibility as a translator and therefore want to clarify my translation strategies here. While I cannot entirely avoid the involvement of my personal interpretations in the translation process, I will do my best to refrain from injecting my own opinions into the translations. My translation strategy is an attempt to reflect the free, informal and colloquial style of the discussions, all the while ensuring that the meaning is clear and unambiguous (insofar as that was the case in the original Finnish). Thus, I will not translate the extracts word for word but into a fluent, idiomatic English. In a very close translation the meaning of the quotations could be difficult to understand, and the main purpose of the translation here is to present factual substance instead of exact phrasing. Consequently, while the translations will employ a fairly informal style that reflects the rhythm of the spoken language, they are no doubt closer to standard English than the original conversations are to standard Finnish: I will attempt to render the comments in clear, unambiguous English which none the less still retains some features of spoken language – much like the typical translation strategy in subtitles, where spoken language is transformed into written language which imitates speech. This will be done in the interests of intelligibility and readability. The shifts in translation will not, however, concern the substance of the text, such as any Finnish cultural references or conversational strategies. Rather, they will be elements related to the spoken nature of the text, such as repetition, hesitation or syntactical inconsistency. These features will, of course, be taken into account whenever they are relevant to the analysis.
I shall endeavour not to take liberties in my interpretations of the original statements, but I do realise that my choices and readings do play a role in shaping the translations. My strategy is to read the comments in their context, both with regard to the rest of the focus group’s participants as well as that particular informant’s other comments, and make the most informed interpretation possible based on contextual clues. Then, I will translate them in a way that in my opinion conveys that message most efficiently. I approach the translation task with a great deal of respect for the informants who have allowed me to cite and analyse their thoughts and opinions. Invariably, there will be some instances of severe ambiguity in the informants’ original statements. To ensure that my interpretations do not stray too far afield, I shall make certain to highlight such instances, including accommodation of alternative interpretations.

6.2 Group 1

6.2.1 Preliminary Group Profile: Mixed Group of Science Students

Group 1 is the largest focus group in this study. It consists of eight informants, two men and six women. All group members are university students, and their area of study is the natural sciences. In other words, their educational background is fairly far removed from culture, language and translation, and they are a good example of a non-expert audience who have no specific insights into translation. The group members knew each other well beforehand, and they could be described as a fairly tightly knit group of friends. Most of them know each other through their studies; all but one have studied together and had started their university studies at the same time. The only exception to this is one of the male group members, E, who is the boyfriend of another group member. However, he is also a member of the social group in the sense that he knows all the others and spends time with the group outside the study setting. His educational background is also similar to the others, as he is also a university student in the scientific-technical field. The group members are very close to each other in age, ranging from 22 to 24 years. The participants were somewhat familiar with me in advance, but most of them did not know me
personally and knew nothing of the study, except for the fact that it is concerned with translating. One group member, D, through whom the group was invited to join the study, is considerably more familiar with me and had some knowledge of my research interests. However, even D was not aware of the specific objectives of the focus group discussion and had no idea of the questions to be covered. Therefore, she would not have been able to form any preconceived ideas for the discussion or formulate comments in advance.

The group seemed cohesive, the informants talked with each other openly, and they clearly had a shared background that was a basis for inside jokes and remarks during the discussion. None the less, the atmosphere of the focus group situation was slightly nervous and occasionally needed prompting, but the group members’ familiarity with each other eased this nervousness and allowed the informants to make substantive comments. The group members appeared to express their opinions freely, even disagreeing with each other, but they also influenced each other and were keen to find common ground through compromises. One source of disagreement was the fact that some group members expressed views that were quite negative and critical of the film, while others made more positive evaluations. Even though the discussion required some prompting, the group was reasonably active in the discussion and willing to discuss both subtitles and reception strategies. The group was particularly active in sharing their reception strategies, which were brought up on several occasions and discussed at considerable length. This suggests that the reservations in the focus group situation do not reflect unwillingness or indifference in the group with regard to the discussion. Rather, the need for prompting appeared to be largely due to the fact that the informants were not used to the situation and were more comfortable answering the moderator’s questions than maintaining the discussion on their own under the moderator’s observation.

6.2.2 Comprehensive Group Profile

6.2.2.1 Explicit comments on subtitles

In Group 1, explicit comments and exchanges on subtitles reflected both positive and negative or even slightly confused feelings, with an overall tone of cautious
politeness, where criticisms were tempered with understanding commentary. Even though the group was not, in general, very active in making unprompted comments, the first mention of the subtitles was spontaneous. In the very early stages of the discussion, when asked for general comments on the film, H said in an apologetic tone: “No jos saa tähän käännökkeen nyt mainita niin...” [“Well if I can talk about the translation now...”]. This created the impression that the group was quite eager to discuss the subtitles, as other informants actively joined in the exchange. This first comment concerned the use of a fairly uncommon Finnish word, ‘lomanen’, as a translation for ‘mini-break’. ‘Lomanen’ is a diminutive form of the word ‘loma’ [‘holiday’, ‘vacation’], and as such a logical formation, but it is not in widespread use. It does not, for example, appear in the most authoritative and comprehensive Finnish dictionary (MOT Kielitoimiston sanakirja 2.0, 2008). This unfamiliarity clearly made the word slightly difficult to understand for some informants, but despite these difficulties, the general attitude appeared positive rather than critical:

H: Mä opin uuden tai siis mä en o hirveesti törmänny semmoseen sanaan kun lomanen ja tarkottaa pidennettyä viikonloppua et se olí niinku ... sen mä bongasin. [myöntelyä ja kommentointia yhteen ääneen]
G: Mä en niinku ymmärtäny sitä.
F: Lomanen.
D: Pikku lomanen.
B: Ne meni pikku lomaselle.
G: Mulle niinku lomanen tarkottaa siis niinku lyhyempää lomaa ku pidennetty viikonloppu.
A: Nii mut siis ei... Mun mielest... Mä en koskaan oo törmänny sellaseen ku lomanen.
E: Mä kuuntelin englanniks vaan. [puhutaan päällekkään]
H: Mut ei se vältämättä ollu paha asia siis.
B: Se oli aika hauska keksintö.

H: I learnt a new, or I mean I haven’t seen the word lomanen very often, and it means an extended weekend break, so that was kind of ... I spotted that. [agreement and overlapping comments]
G: I didn’t really understand it.
F: Lomanen.
D: A little lomanen.
B: They went for a little lomanen.
G: To me lomanen means a shorter vacation than an extended weekend.
A: Yeah, but I mean no... I think... I’ve never come across the word lomanen.
E: I was just listening in English. [overlapping conversation]
H: But it wasn’t necessarily a bad thing.
B: It was a pretty funny invention.
As is seen here, the exchange was quite active: it contained comments from all but one group member, it needed no prompting, occasionally the informants talked over each other, and clear expressions of agreement were voiced on several occasions. Thus, this appears to have been a topic of some interest to the group. This interest is cautiously positive, even though G starts the exchange by stating that the word was not understandable. Instead of continued critical comments, several informants appear then to be “testing” the word and seeing how it can be used in conversation. Then, the initial exchange ends on the positive note that the word is a “funny invention.” This initial exchange was followed by further discussion comparing ‘lomanen’ and ‘mini-break.’ It became clear that several people had paid attention to this word and had opinions on its understandability:

D: Kyl sen niinkun ymmärsi tai no mä ainakin ymmärsin sit ku mä kuulin, et mitä ne sano siel englanniks. [myöntelyä] Mut kyl mä hetken aikaa ihmettelin et mikähän sana toi on että mistähän toi on nyt tullu. Siihen niin hirveest kiinnitti huomioo siihen lomaseen.
G: Joo. No mulle oikeestaan se kun siin oli se yhdistelmänä sen jonkun muun sanan kans. Mitähän se sano? [Taustalta: ”Se oli joku hiihto...”] Hiihtolomanen tai jotain tämmöstä niin mä niinku se niinku vilähti mulla siinä ohitte ja mulla et mitähän siinä oikeestaan luki.
B: Joo. Siinä oli liikaa kirjaimia.

D: It was understandable, or, well, at least I understood it when I heard what they were saying in English. [agreement] But I did wonder for a while what that word is and where it came from. The lomanen just attracted so much attention.
G: Yeah. Well, actually for me it was when it was in a combination with some other word. I wonder what she said? [In the background: “It was some hiihto...”] Hiihtolomanen [skiing mini-break] or something like that, then it kind of just flashed by me, and I wondered what it actually said.
B: Yeah. It had too many letters.
G: Yeah. I did understand what it meant. But I started to wonder what they were saying.

This exchange shows that, while it initially appears that a creative new word such as ‘lomanen’ is understandable, at least for some its understandability might be significantly supported by source-language information. In addition, the word made some informants “wonder” and “attracted attention” and may even have made reading more difficult, particularly in the combination ‘hiihtolomanen’ [‘skiing mini-break’]. This was an irritant and caused confusion by taking attention away from other aspects of the audiovisual experience. The statement that the
combination ‘hiihtolomanen’ “had too many letters” is particularly telling as an indicator of the possible distracting effect: if a word is not familiar, it requires closer reading and slows down the reading pace, and a creative combination with such a word is even more demanding.

Another unprompted target of negative attention was an instance where the subtitler had changed a slightly unfamiliar cultural reference to a more familiar one. In the scene, Bridget is eating ice cream and says: “Am enjoying a relationship with two men simultaneously. The first called Ben, the other, Jerry.” The reference to Ben and Jerry, a brand of ice cream that was not generally available in Finland at the time of the film’s release, was changed in the Finnish cinema subtitles to ‘Möven ja Pick’ [‘Möven and Pick’], referring to the Mövenpick brand. As Möven and Pick are not real first names in either Finnish or English, this solution was problematic, and the informants commented on it. This part of the translation was remembered by several group members, but there was some disagreement as to whether the translation could have been better.

E: I remember a scene where she was eating ice cream and then... I don’t remember what the ice cream was called in English, but it was translated into Finnish as Mövenpick.
D: Yeah, the Ben and Jerry.
E: Yeah, Ben and Jerry. I was listening to it in English and then I checked what it is in Finnish and then noticed that it wasn’t Mövenpick she was eating, but it was something...
D: I, on the other hand, was a little bothered by the Möven ja Pick. [loud laughter] Kind of. Well yeah. But maybe some would even know the English... the English version in Finnish [agreement] or like the equivalent, that what she meant by that, so the Ben ja Jerry would hit the mark a bit more logically than Möven ja Pick. [laughter]
G: Well actually I was looking at it a little, and I didn’t exactly get what it was. [laughingly] I was just like “oh, it’s some Mövenpick”.

The tone of these comments is more critical than in the exchanges on ‘lomanen’, as both E and D express disapproval of the translation. However, this is not the clear-cut opinion of the entire group, as G then talks of confusion caused by this reference. Her statement is quite vague and it is not clear whether the confusion was caused by the different brand names or by an unfamiliar name heard in the speech. However, it is clear that Mövenpick is the familiar point of reference and therefore the use of Ben and Jerry in the subtitles might have been problematic. This disagreement on the best solution continues later in the discussion, as I mention this translation as an example of a challenging part of the subtitles:

Moderaaattori: Entä oliko sellasii mitään jos ei virheitä, mut sellasii kohtii, joissa se olis se tekstityys ollu huomattavasti erilaista, että siin olis niinku menny kauas puheesta tai jotain? [hiljaista] Niinku ehkä vähän tyyliin niinku se Möven ja Pick? D: No se jää kyl minua henkilökohtaisest häiritsee mut [epäselvä, naurua] E: Tää Ben ja Jerry on varmaan niinku ainaki suomalaisille varmaan aika tuntemattomampi jäätelömerkki, että... F: Siis mun mielestä ei sitä voi suomentaa mitään muuten ku laittamalla joku Möven ja Pick, koska mä en ainakaan tiedä mitään. G: Toisaalt se on ihan tyhmä pistää niinku jotain Möven ja Pick, koska sit sitä rupee mieltii, että ”mikäs toi on?” Koska niinku Mövenpick kirjotetaan yhteen. [naurahdus] [päälekkäisyys alkaa] E: Niin no mut... F: Niin mutta ku se pointii oli siinä... B: ...ja Ben ja Jerry on taas eri... A: ...kahdesta miehestä, ja Ben ja Jerry on kaks miestä, mutta Möven ja Pick niin... [päälekkäisyys loppuu] G: Mut ei kaikki tommosia tiedä. [naurua]

Moderator: Well then, were there any, if not mistakes, then parts where the subtitles were very different, so that they were very distant from the speech or something? [silence] Maybe kind of like the part with Möven ja Pick? D: Well that one bothered me personally but [inaudible, laughter] E: This Ben and Jerry is probably a more unfamiliar ice cream brand at least for Finns, so... F: I don’t think you can translate it in any other way besides using something like Möven ja Pick, because I at least don’t know anything. G: On the other hand it’s really stupid to put something like Möven ja Pick there, because then you start thinking “what is that?” Because Mövenpick is one word. [chuckle] [overlapping conversation starts] E: Well yeah, but... F: Yeah, but the point is that... B: ...and Ben and Jerry on the other hand is different...
A: ...about two men, and Ben and Jerry are two men, but Möven and Pick then... [overlapping conversation ends]

G: But not everyone knows about stuff like that. [laughter]

Here, too, the conversation is extremely active, with a considerable amount of overlapping discussion, laughter and signs of both agreement and disagreement. The informants were clearly divided on whether the original reference should have been retained, and even though there was fairly general agreement on the fact that ‘Möven ja Pick’ was an awkward solution, its informative value was acknowledged by some informants who did not recognise the original reference. The exchange then continued, as the informants attempted to invent a more suitable translation, such as a domesticating use of Finnish ice cream brands, and the discussion overlapped more and became even more jocular. The informants were not able to present a more acceptable solution or formulate a consensus opinion on whether the translator’s solution was the optimal one. The conversation ended with no clear conclusion and on a sympathetic note. The differences of opinion and a sense of dissatisfaction remained, but the group concluded that jokes like this are almost impossible to translate, and no perfect solutions exist. Thus, the informants seemed to sympathise with the dilemmas subtitlers face, even though the general tone of the comments was critical. It is, however, useful to note that, especially when the source language is English, noticeable departures from the original can attract viewers’ attention and bother them, and in this case the irritation was increased by the fact that the translation was not fluent Finnish.

A third instance of critical commentary occurred after my question on the problematic translation of the word ‘proposition’ as ‘kosinta’ [‘proposal’]. The translation was not mentioned spontaneously in Group 1. When I asked the group whether they had noticed any mistakes in the translation, the question was followed by silence. Then, when I mentioned this part of the subtitles, the group members did state they remembered it and eagerly agreed that it was problematic. However, again, the first reaction was to seek a benign explanation for the translation. H speculated in the following way: “Oisko se tehty sit eri lailla, et se ois jo siinä kosinu, mut sit se on leikattu pois lopullisesta versiosta. Voi olla ehkä tämmönen.” [“Maybe it was made in a different way, so that she proposed there already, but

53See chapter 5.4 for a discussion on this translation.
then it was edited out of the final version. Could be something like that.”] H thus attempts to justify a problem in the subtitles with a far-fetched theory, which again shows willingness to express understanding rather than outright criticism towards various difficult elements in the subtitles.

However, in this case H’s comment is isolated and does not gain vocal agreement. Instead, the group begins to compare the translation with the source text and voice confusion about this translation. I then prompt the discussion slightly by expressing understanding for the fact that the informants did not remember this part spontaneously and note that “Sehän ei ollu mikään iso juttu, eikä siis varmaankaan suuresti häirinny” [“It wasn’t a big thing and probably didn’t bother you a lot”]. After this, several people finally mention having noticed the discrepancy between Finnish and English and express confusion. For example, G comments: “Niin määkin jäin kans miettiin sitä, että mitäs tässä sitten, mut mä aattelin, et se vaan meni ohi jotenkin.” [“Yeah, I wondered about it too, what was this all about, but then I thought that I had just missed something somehow.”] Thus, G expresses having had trouble partially blames herself, as she states that she thought she had missed something. However, as is indicated by the fact that no one mentioned these problems spontaneously, this did not appear to harm the viewing experience significantly or provoke strong feelings. This could suggest that viewers are used to dealing with problematic elements in the flow of the programme: they simply ignore them and move on. A telling indication of this is a comment by F: “Niin siitä huomas, että jää vaan niinku ihmetteleen sillain pikkusen, mutta sitte taas unohti sen koko homman, ja sitte taas se jatku eteenpäin.” [“You noticed there that you just kind of wondered about it a little bit, but then you forgot the whole thing, and then moved on again.”] It is noteworthy that all informants had forgotten this problem, whereas the two previously mentioned problematic points were brought up spontaneously and generated active discussion. This suggests that the informants had not been able to overlook those problems as efficiently.

Another slightly critical comment, again prompted by my question, concerned a reference to the television series Sex and the City. In the film, New York is described as a place where “Sex and the City isn’t just a programme; it’s a promise”. The Finnish title of the programme, Sinkkuelämää [Single Life], does not work well in this pun, but the translator used the Finnish title as is, without an effort to create a new pun. This solution might cause some confusion, and the humorous effect of the
reference is less powerful than the effect of the original pun. When asked about this reference, the informants did comment that the translation does not work, but they accepted that the translator had no choice but to use the existing Finnish title. Thus, here again, the group expressed understanding and tolerance towards the slightly clumsy translation, and even remarked that for those who have watched Sex and the City, the reference would be understandable even without the pun. During this exchange, D also made the following comment:

Mä en ainakaan siin kohtaa huomannu ollenkaa edes kattoo niit tekstii. Sitten kun sen niinkun kuuli sielt, ni sen niinkun tajus sen jutun ja sit se oli ohi. Sit mä en niinku kiinnittäny sihe huomioo, et se oli suomennettu sillai tai että se suomennos oli jotenkin hassu. [...] Kun sit ajattelee, niin kylhän se tietenkin on vähän.

At that point, I didn’t even think of looking at the subtitle. Then, when you heard it there, you sort of understood the thing, and then it was gone. Then I didn’t pay any attention to the fact that it was translated that way or that the translation was kind of funny. [...] When you think about it, it actually is, a little bit.

Although D elsewhere states that she primarily reads the subtitles and listens to the source text only when she has trouble understanding the translation, it seems here that the information from the original text came through easily, before she had time to absorb the Finnish text, and prevented any sense of confusion with or reaction against the translation. This again shows that, especially with programmes in English, the source text can be a significant influence in the way the subtitles and the whole programme are perceived, and this can be either supportive or distracting when making interpretations. Most importantly, this comment is a reminder that an audiovisual text is perceived as a whole, and the different elements within it all provide information, and subtitles can only be processed as one part of the whole.

One topic that generated a spontaneous, lively and critical exchange was translating obscene phrases and swearwords. In one scene, the phrase ‘fuck it up’ was translated as ‘mennä paskaksi’ ['turn to shit'], and the group expressed quite unanimously that the translation was not very fluent and that the joke was lost in the subtitles. In the scene, Bridget says: “I will not fuck it up again, Mum.” Her mother scolds her for using bad language, and Bridget corrects herself, but instead of eliminating the word ‘fuck’, she changes the word ‘Mum’ to ‘Mother’, to humorous effect. However, rather than discussing the problems of translating this pun, the criticism was directed at the use of ‘paskaksi’, which the informants felt is not an idiomatic Finnish obscenity in this context. The informants then discussed
alternative solutions and attempted to find idiomatic uses for the phrase ‘mennä paskaksi’. This discussion shows how much interest swearwords can generate. It is also an example of the strong opinions and willingness to criticise the translator’s choices whenever there is good cause for this. Again, the cause for criticism is an unfamiliar or clumsy Finnish phrase rather than a translation problem. The unidiomatic Finnish obscenity is something several informants were able to recall, and it apparently interfered with the viewing experience.

Although almost all of the critical comments on subtitles were couched in cautious and understanding language, the discussion contained few unambiguously positive comments on the subtitles. The group’s stated overall opinion was that the subtitles were reasonably good and understandable, and helped to understand the film, but the positive commentary was mostly constructed around the previously mentioned points of criticism, as attempts to sympathise with the translator’s choices and challenges. Some informants did note that they would not have been able to understand some parts of the film without subtitles, or that the subtitles may have provided a new level of understanding. The most explicitly expressed example of this concerned the scene in a Thai prison, where Bridget sings Madonna’s song *Like a Virgin* with her cellmates. The Thai women sing the lyrics incorrectly and in a heavily Thai-accented English, and the effect is comical. The subtitles do not present a translation of the song; instead, they repeat the incorrect English lyrics and rely on the viewers’ ability to interpret the English lyrics as a language-based joke. In an exchange that involved mainly B and G, as well as signs of agreement from several others, it became clear that some informants felt they would have missed this joke if they had not read the subtitles. Near the end of this exchange B remarks:

> [...] siinä luki että mitä siinä laulettiin. Juu en määkä olis niinku niitä sanoja välttämättä osannu erottaa. Tai olis pistäny sen vaan murteen piikkiin siitä sen "virginin".

> [...] the subtitles said exactly what they sang. Yeah, I don’t think I would necessarily have been able to distinguish the words, either. Or I would have thought that the “virgin” was just about the dialect.

The subtitles thus played a role in foregrounding language-related humour which may be difficult to catch when listening to a foreign language. Because the subtitles of this humorous scene were in English, the understanding of the subtitles and the joke required some understanding of English and background knowledge of
Madonna, but, at least for this group, the subtitles provided enough support to process the message, and the translator’s solution was successful. The subtitles brought the humour out and made the viewers pay attention to the desired element in the scene.

One final element in Group 1’s discussion on subtitles that deserves attention is their discussion on the visual, auditive and temporal elements related to subtitles. In fact, these elements were not addressed very actively, but the temporal and visual aspects were mentioned on a few occasions. The most interesting of such elements appeared to be reading speed and the pace of the subtitles. This matter was mentioned a few times during the discussion, and at one time the group members initiated a brief exchange on it spontaneously. Some comments indicated that the pace of the subtitles was indeed occasionally too rapid and may have prevented some viewers from reading the subtitles as carefully as they would have liked to. This problem, then, leads to a cursory or partial reading of the subtitles and to relying more heavily on the source text. H commented on the pace of the subtitles in the following way: “[I]n some places the subtitles went by so fast or when they spoke really fast, and it was good to listen to it in English at the same time so that you could understand it.” A few other informants made similar comments as well. Thus, while it is impossible for a viewer to estimate her or his reading speed, some viewers did recall pacing problems, and these problems can have an effect on the viewing experience by necessitating changes in the focus of attention. On the other hand, the general feeling in the group was that the subtitle pace was mostly suitable, and some informants did not mention having had any trouble. Viewers possess techniques for dealing with situations where the pace of the subtitles is quick. Especially when the source text English is linguistically relatively easy, it is not necessary to read the subtitles word by word, because both the source text and the subtitles serve as sources of information. The viewers’ comments indicated that timecueing and subtitle speed do affect the reception process, for example, insofar as they affect whether information is gained primarily from the source text or the subtitles. The choices in condensation and timecueing are therefore relevant, even if they may not be consciously noted by the viewers.
Another comment that concerned non-linguistic aspects of the text had to do with the subtitles’ relation to the visual message. This comment demonstrated that the connections between the visual message and the translation are occasionally noted and remembered, and a discrepancy between the two can be a cause for either confusion or dissatisfaction. In this case, the discrepancy had to do with the previously mentioned translation of Ben and Jerry’s ice cream as Mövenpick. In the picture, Bridget was seen with a Ben and Jerry’s ice cream container, which looks very different from a Mövenpick container. E noted this: “Mä kuuntelin sitä englanniks, sit mä katoin, et mitä se on suomeks ja sitte huomasin, et eihän se Mövenpickiä ollu, mitä se söi siinä” [“I was listening to it in English, then I checked what it was in Finnish and then I noticed that it wasn’t Mövenpick that she was eating”]. This is a minor point, used primarily to emphasise the problematic translation, yet it does illustrate that the visual and the verbal do interact. The translator’s solution is first taken as the absolute truth, with E speaking of finding out what the brand is in Finnish, but then he notices a conflict with the visual message, resulting in loss of credibility. After E’s comment, others in the group directed the discussion towards the problem of the brand names, and E’s remark on the visual aspect remained a lone comment on that topic. Thus, it cannot be seen as a particularly powerful indication of the role of visuality, but as a spontaneous comment it does indicate that the visual dimension can be memorable.

6.2.2.2 Reception strategies

The members of Group 1 spoke frequently of their reception strategies, and the discussion touched on various significant aspects of the reception process. The discussion showed that subtitles were read by everyone in the group, although there were differences in how closely they were read and how much information was gained from them. In some cases, an informant’s statements on personal reception strategies can be conflicting, and overt statements can tell a different story from the one that can be read between the lines. An example of this is E, who initially stated that he does not read subtitles at all. However, he soon made this previously mentioned reference to ice cream: “Mä en nyt muista, mikä sen jäätelön nimi englanniks oli mutta se oli suomennettu Mövenpick.” [“I don’t remember what the
This comment shows inadvertently that E did pay some attention to the Finnish subtitles and in this case remembered the translation better than the original. Later E commented again on reception strategies, but this time the comment was less absolute: “Mä ite kuun telin englantii pääasiassa.” [“I myself mainly listened to the English.”] Then, a while later, he made a final comment on strategies: “Mun mielest se on niin vaistomaista, et sitä ei huomaakaan vältämättä, että lukeeko tekstiä vai emmä nyt taida kiinnittää huomiota siihen että luenko mä vai enkö lue.” [“I think it’s just so instinctual that you don’t necessarily even notice whether you read the text or not, or I don’t think I pay any attention to whether I read or don’t read it.”] This remark is practically an admission that the first assertion of never reading subtitles was not accurate, and that subtitles have some significance, even though his focus is on the English text. This is an excellent demonstration of how difficult it can be for viewers to articulate their reception strategies accurately, and how initial impressions can differ from actual experiences. It also shows how the focus group method can reveal these experiences despite misleading overt statements.

Even though verbalising such automatic behaviour can be difficult, reception strategies appear to be an interesting topic of conversation. A considerable number of comments assessed whether English or Finnish was the primary source of information, and there were notable differences between individuals. The only commonality was that all informants both listened and read, at least to some extent, but one or the other was usually considered the primary source of information. E was the only individual who claimed to listen to only the English source text, and his initial assertion was eventually revealed to be inaccurate. Both Finnish and English were mentioned as the first source of information, and the secondary source of information was mentioned as a back-up if some element in the primary text is difficult to understand or if the text moved too quickly to be understood properly. For example, D mentioned not being able to concentrate on two things at once, and therefore having to put more emphasis on reading. Only when something seemed strange did the English text become important:

[E]i oikein pysty keskittyä sekä siihen kuuntelemiseen että lukemiseen, mut sit taas jos ei taju sielt jotaa täysin, niinku huomaat et tuli niinku joku juttu ja toss on nyt joku homma, just joku lomanen tai Mövenpick tai joku tammön, niin sit mä alan enemmän kuunteleen sit, mitä siel puhutaa.
You can’t really concentrate on both the listening and the reading, but when you don’t understand something completely, when you kind of realise that there was something there and that must be something, just like the lomanen thing or Mövenpick or something like that, then I start listening more to what they’re saying.

Despite the fact that subtitles were a significant presence in the statements on reception strategies, some informants assumed that it is more common to listen more than to read, and framed their statements accordingly, as, for example, F does: “Mä olen ehkä poikkeus, mää luen enemmän niitä tekstejä” [“I may be an exception, I read the subtitles more”]. This could be a defensive attempt to save face, as the general idea could be that it is more sophisticated to listen to English than read the subtitles, so that any divergent strategy would require some explanation.

The subtitles cannot, however, be automatically assumed to be the most important source of information, and English was mentioned as the primary source of information quite often. Some informants said that they mostly listened to English and only looked at the subtitles when they did not understand something in the original. The language in this film was considered quite simple to understand, and several informants said that because of this they did not read the subtitles very actively. These informants made reading the subtitles sound almost like surrendering to something undesirable. One example of this is H’s statement of what happens when the language of a film is difficult: “[S]itte joutuu enemmän turvautuun siihen teksti, siihen suomennokseen.” [“Then you have to resort more to the text, to the Finnish translation.”] This implies a preference for the spoken text and a perceived prestige for being able to listen to English only. On the other hand, when talking about not having enough time to read subtitles, B talked about listening to English in a similar way: “Mul on yleensä sille, et jos mä en ehi lukea niitä sit mää vaan kuuntelen. Sit se on niinku siinä, ymmärsin tai en.” [“For me it’s usually that if I don’t have enough time to read it, then I just listen. And then that’s it, whether I understood or not.”] B thus describes listening to only English in a resigned tone, as an uncertain experience where some parts of the text will probably be missed and following the film is not effortless. Such talk indicates how either source of information can be prioritised and the other one kept as a backup, to be used only when necessary.

Listening to the source text seems to be, according to the comments, particularly common in the case of humour or unfamiliar words. The word ‘lomanen’ as a
translation for ‘mini-break’ was unknown to the informants, and several people said that as they saw the strange word in the subtitle, they paid more attention to the spoken text in order to understand what the Finnish word was supposed to mean. It is also clear that language-based humour cannot always come across in translation. Viewers are well aware of this, and they take this into account in their viewing strategies. Several informants mentioned the problems of translating humour and talked about resorting to the source text to understand the joke. The group’s repeated, sympathetic discussions of how the translator cannot always produce an optimal translation, particularly in the case of verbal humour, also conversely suggest that the translation is not expected to match the quality and expressivity of the original.

One further interesting perspective on viewing strategies was the informants’ discussion of learning something. For example, in the case of the neologism ‘lomanen’, even though it was clearly problematic, H made the positive remark “mä opin uuden sanan” [“I learnt a new word”]. It should be noted that this remark refers to the Finnish word, not learning English, and thus expresses quite a strong level of trust in the subtitles. This trust was not contradicted by the rest of the group, and the statement met with expressions of agreement. This suggests that subtitles can be seen as a reliable source of linguistic information, and although some scepticism towards this new word was expressed, it was not rejected outright. A similar sense of initial acceptance was noticeable in the discussion of the mistranslation of the word ‘proposition’, translated as ‘kosinta’ [‘proposal’]. The first reaction by the informants was not to blame the subtitles but to doubt their own understanding, as was seen above in a comment by G, and as is evident in the following remark by D:

En kuunnellu sit kohtaa yhtää, et mitä ne puhu, et emmä sit sit huomannu, että se oli ihan väärin. Mä vaan aloin ihmettelee, et onks mul nyt menny joku ohi.

I didn’t listen to that part at all, to what they were saying, so I didn’t notice that it was completely wrong. I just started to wonder whether I had missed something.

Thus, it would seem that suspicion of subtitle inaccuracy is not always an automatic first reaction. It is quite possible, as was repeatedly expressed in this group, that the viewer accepts the subtitles and looks for explanations for the problem in his or her own attentiveness or reception strategies.
Another aspect of this interest in learning something was visible in the informants’ eagerness to discuss some translation strategies, compare the source text and the translation and discuss the translation process. This can be seen, for example, in exchanges related to swearwords, as mentioned above. In addition, a similar sentiment was expressed in relation to the Swedish subtitles, which were mentioned by F after a question on any memorable parts of the subtitles. F responded to this question very quickly by jokingly stating: “’Pösilö’ on ‘idiot’ ruotsiks.” [“The Swedish word for ’pösilö’ is ‘idiot’”] This comment was greeted with supportive laughter, and F went on to explain what he meant with this comment:

*Mulla on vaan semmonen paha tapa, et aina ku tulee joku tommonen sana pösilö tai joku kirosoaniin mä katon, mikä se on ruotsiks. Mä en tiedä, minkä ihmeen takia mulla on semmonen tapa, mutta mä aina teen niin.*

*I just have this bad habit that whenever a word like pösilö or some swearword comes along I see what it is in Swedish. I don’t know why on earth I have that habit, but I always do that.*

This comment, too, was followed by laughter, but the other group members did not continue pursuing this strand of their conversation. This might indicate that the habit of learning Swedish through subtitles is F’s personal idiosyncrasy and not indicative of a more general tendency. However, one interesting element here is F’s attitude towards the translations, in that he talks of them as uncontested equivalents of the original in both Finnish and Swedish and thus a way of learning new words. He states that he likes to see what a certain Finnish word is in Swedish, not how that word was translated. In addition, he is referring to the word found in the Finnish subtitle as the original word, instead of the English spoken word heard in the source text, so that the Swedish ‘idiot’ is a translation for ‘pösilö’ rather than for whatever the original English word was. Thus, he is expressing double trust in the translation: first, the Finnish translation as a true reflection of the original, and then the Swedish translation as a fully equivalent rendition of the Finnish term. This acceptance and interest in learning from the subtitles indicate a trusting, comfortable relationship with the subtitles. I will return to this question of quoting in either English or Finnish below, in section 6.2.2.3.

F was not the only informant to talk of this kind of comparative activity as one part of the viewing experience. Several remarks refer to comparing Finnish and
English, such as this comment from C: “[K]uunteli sen takia että sitä englantia niinku mielenkiinnosta, että miten se sopii siihen suomennokseen” [“[Y]ou listened to English out of interest to see how it fits with the Finnish translation”]. Of course, the fact that these viewers knew they were attending the focus group discussion may have made them more aware of the subtitles and more inclined to compare these to the original. However, I contend that the interest towards learning is an indicator of an underlying willingness to maintain a positive attitude towards the subtitles, because, when given the opportunity to criticise, the more common response from the group in general was positive or inquisitive, and difficulties were generally overlooked. In addition to their primary function, subtitles can be read out of some interest in them as a form of expression, or for the purpose of learning something. Clearly these motivations are not the main reason why subtitles are read, but these habits are related to the reception process and something that is interesting for the informants to discuss in a focus group.

Finally, the emphasis on overlooking difficulties in translation and even forgetting a confusing mistranslation showed how well the informants are used to processing subtitles and dealing with their uncertainties in the fast pace of a movie. The main reception strategy appears to be simply going with the flow instead of stopping to consider the translation or memorising mistakes. In fact, the phrase “going with the flow” is a fitting description for this reception process which cannot be paused or reversed. Viewers are able to gain a great deal of information both from the subtitles and from the spoken language, and sometimes it is difficult to analyse which was more important and what role each played in reception. It is interesting to note how often the informants spoke of automatic, subconscious or otherwise unintentional strategies. When the viewer is used to subtitled programmes, s/he does not necessarily pay significant conscious attention to the subtitles but merely follows the programme. The difficulty in describing one’s reception strategies is exemplified in a remark by F, where he mentions primarily concentrating on the subtitles but also listening to English by instinct. He explains that his instinctually listening to English is indicated by the fact that he would occasionally notice mistranslations, and he ends his statement hesitantly “vaikka mää en niinku aktiivisesti kuuntele sitä omasta mielestäni sitä englantia” [“even though I don’t really listen to the English actively in my own opinion”]. The
informants willingly tried to analyse their strategies but often had to admit that the strategies were automatic and subconscious and thus difficult to elaborate.

6.2.2.3 Quoting in English – Quoting in Finnish

As was suggested above, one indication of the role and importance of subtitles can be seen in how well informants remember specific words and phrases from the subtitles. Similarly, the viewers’ relation to the original English text can be seen in how well they remember English words and phrases. This can be examined by investigating how much the informants quote the Finnish subtitles and how much they quote the English original. To be counted as quoting the subtitles, I did not require the references to be perfectly accurate, word-for-word quotations of the translation, because that would be too much to expect when the text has only been seen once in the quick pace of the film. I believe that using Finnish words to convey the meaning of the film and getting them fairly close to the words of the translation is proof enough of the intent or inclination to quote the subtitles. Equally, I consider loose paraphrases of the English text to be quotations of the original. What is significant is the choice of language.

Group 1 quoted directly relatively rarely, and this was true of both the English and Finnish text; in one case an informant mentioned a word in the Swedish subtitles, as discussed above. Although the difference is not great, it should be noted that there were more references to Finnish than to English, approximately ten references to Finnish and approximately five to English.\textsuperscript{54} In addition, on some

\textsuperscript{54}I will not present detailed counts of the occurrences, but a general picture of the proportion of quotations in each language. The counts are approximations, because in some cases it is difficult to determine, for example, where one quotation ends and another begins in the course of the discussion. For example, in Group 2, K describes how “Bridget yrittää puhua niinku hienostuneesti ‘oh dear’ ja niin eespäin, ja sit jotain ‘he’s so something inclined’. ‘’ [“Bridget tries to use sophisticated language, ‘oh dear’ and so on, and then something like ‘he’s so something inclined’. ‘”] It is impossible to determine whether K intended these two phrases to be parts of the same quotation or separate references, and they could be interpreted either way. I have not wanted to focus the analysis on such interpretations, as the approximate numbers and relative proportions are sufficient indicators of the roles of the different languages.
occasions Finnish and English were mixed in various ways. There were also a few references, both in Finnish and in English, to other films, books or television shows, with no significant differences in the number of references between the languages. This overall picture indicates that both the English and the Finnish text are remembered to some extent, but possibly not well enough to enable quoting beyond a word or two or a very short phrase, as most references were very brief. It also suggests that the Finnish subtitles are not considered strictly secondary in the textual hierarchy but can be used when referring to the words of the characters and accepted as such by those participating in the discussion.

While mainly consisting of only one or two word subtitle references, one should note that the informants did make reference to two detailed and long quotations of the Finnish subtitles. One of these was a reference to a scene in Thailand after Bridget has an unfortunate experience with hallucinogenic mushrooms. In the scene, Daniel says to Bridget: “You were charming on drugs. In future, just say yes.” During the discussion, A elaborates the context of the phrase: “Siis oli puhetta siitä, että Bridget oli tosi söpö mömmöissään ja näin edespään, ja sit se siihen mun mielest heti perään sano että tästä lähin sano vaan kyllä.” [“So they were talking about how cute Bridget was when she was high and so on, and then I think right after that he said that from now on, just say yes.”] Here, the word “mömmöissään” is a direct quote from the subtitles, and the paraphrase as a whole follows the translation quite closely. This is also a good example of how the subtitles are referenced as the original text: A talks about what the characters were talking about, and quotes the subtitles as original speech. The second similar occasion was an even more direct quote, as well as being unprompted, so there was no possibility of previous discussion influencing the choice of language. This quote occurred during a discussion of the funniest parts of the film, when F, who expressed very negative attitudes towards the film, reluctantly admitted finding one line in the film amusing: “Sille mää hymähdin sille, että mitenkäs se meni? Mihinkä vastauksena oli Hitler.

In general, exchanges on one topic are counted as one quotation even when they contain comments from more than one informant. I believe that consecutive comments in the same exchange which refer to the same lines should not be counted as separate occurrences, because the previous person’s language choice may have an effect on the responder, and thus comments following the original quotation are essentially repetition. However, if the language changes during an exchange, I consider these two separate instances, as the change shows active preference for the other language.
Se oli että [...]. Kaikille pitää antaa toinen mahdollisuus paitsi Hitlerille.” [“That’s one thing I smiled at, how did it go? The answer was Hitler. It was [...] Everybody deserves a second chance except Hitler.”] Here, again, the Finnish translation gains the status of original text, and F remembers the words of the translation fairly accurately.

The informants also offered two slightly longer quotations or paraphrases in English. These were less accurate than the Finnish quotations, and the first one is particularly vague. It is contained in the following recollection by A: “Mä kuuntelin sit tekstii tai siis... just a something... show.” [“I listened to the text, or I mean... just a something... show.”] This refers to the line about Sex and the City quoted above, and the words “just a something... show,” which A says in English, are clearly meant to be quoting the English text, but A cannot recall the exact phrase and manages to remember only some vague English words which could be associated with the topic of the exchange. Still, this does illustrate a tendency to occasionally quote the original rather than subtitles. Here, I had just quoted the subtitles in my question, but A still attempted to quote the English line. Thus, this is a clear choice of preference by A, although a fairly rare one in this discussion.

Another example of an English phrase is equally short but more coherent and complete than the first one. This occurs in the following exchange:

B: Eihän ne kaikki niistä luisista naisista tykkää. [naurua] Toivot tavasti. [äänekkäämpää naurua]
G: Nii itse asias olihan siinä se yks thaimaalainen, joka tuli...
H: [keskeyttää] Niin oli. ”You had an order.” [naurua]
B: Niin joka olikin poika.

B: They don’t all like bony women. [laughter] Hopefully. [louder laughter]
G: Yeah, as a matter of fact there was that one scantily dressed Thai, who came...
H: [interrupts] Yes there was. ”You had an order.” [laughter]
B: Yeah, who turned out to be a boy.

The original line in the film was a heavily Thai-accented “You made order”. Again, H is unable to repeat the line verbatim, but the attempt shows that it is natural to include English quotations occasionally in Finnish discussion. One reason for using English may have been the character’s strong accent, which H emphasised when quoting this line. This emphasis on some of the auditive or phonetic qualities of the quoted line may create a preference for the source language, because those qualities are not reproduced in the subtitle. This could be an indication that subtitles are an
acceptable representation of original text when discussing a film, but English is used to make the point when this would not be clear enough with the Finnish subtitle. Thus, using English is imitation, while using Finnish is quotation. This does not, of course, apply everywhere, but in this group a case can be made for such a general inclination. The aspect of imitation is not as clear in the first English example, but even there A makes an effort to imitate the original line. As the line was a part of a television show within the film, it was delivered with slightly different intonation than ordinary dialogue, and this “performance style” might motivate an informant to quote in English.

A third manner observed of quoting the film was to mix English and Finnish. In Group 1, there were approximately five such cases. Typically, these were simply occasions where words from both the English source text and the Finnish subtitles were mentioned together, as the discussion went back and forth between what was said in English and what was said in Finnish. However, the discussion contained one particularly interesting pattern, which was connected to the references to Ben and Jerry’s ice cream in the source text and Mövenpick in the Finnish subtitles. When talking of Ben and Jerry’s, all informants replaced the word ‘and’ with Finnish ‘ja’, even though this Finnish combination of the names never appeared in the subtitles. The word ‘ja’ was used in the Finnish subtitle between ‘Möven’ and ‘Pick’, but it might be over-interpreting to state that the informants selected that word from the subtitle. ‘Ja’ is such an ordinary word that it should perhaps be no surprise that ‘and’ is easily replaced by it. This is, however, an example of how Finnish often seems more natural for the informants to use than English. Even as simple a word as ‘and’ can be something informants prefer to avoid whenever a Finnish alternative is available. Thus, it cannot be assumed that Finnish viewers who know English and are used to listening to it would be comfortable with processing their reception experience in English.

The one conclusion to be drawn from the relative numbers of references in English and Finnish is that the subtitles certainly were not a less acceptable source of information than the original English text. On the contrary, they seemed to be taken for granted as the text of the film, and quotations from the subtitles tended to be more accurate than quotations from the English. There is even some evidence that when talking specifically about the substance of the English text, the speaker can start sliding towards Finnish and mixing Finnish and English, as happened with
the Ben and Jerry example. Furthermore, the informants did not hesitate in referring to the subtitles as authentic text, even though in this subtitle-related research situation it would be easy to check oneself and talk consciously about subtitles as a superimposed, secondary construct. Thus, again, the general feeling of acceptance was noticeable in Group 1’s discussion.

6.2.3 Individual Viewer Profiles: A – H

6.2.3.1 A: Careful, informed voice of reason

A is a 24-year-old female. In the background questionnaire, she stated that she has seen the previous *Bridget Jones* film and read both novels, the first one in English and the second one in Finnish. A is the only member of Group 1 who has read the novels; all but one informant (E) have seen the previous *Bridget Jones* film. Thus, on the one hand A’s background knowledge is similar to the rest of the group, but on the other hand she has more knowledge than the others, because she is familiar with the novels. In all, she is a fairly well-informed viewer, as she knows the previous *Bridget Jones* texts and knows English well enough to have read one of the novels in English. This perhaps puts her in a better position than some others in the group on being able to understand the film and its intertextual levels.

A’s knowledge of *Bridget Jones* was indeed visible in the discussion. She was not particularly active during most of the discussion and usually made only short comments in support of others’ statements, such as agreeing with some negative comments on the film. She did not express strong personal opinions in the early parts of the conversation, except for stating that the Finnish word ‘lomanen’ was unfamiliar to her. However, when discussion turned to the *Bridget Jones* novels and Jane Austen, she became active and made a number of comments, engaging in a fairly long exchange with me, in which other group members only participated in a peripheral role. A discussed the comparisons with the *Bridget Jones* novels and provided information for other informants who were not as knowledgeable about the novels or the first film. She also talked about *Pride and Prejudice* and was quite critical of the way it had been used as a subtext for the film. Thus, negative overall comments on the film were accompanied by a negative estimation of intertextuality.
A’s comments also showed her comparatively strong English skills. She stated that she preferred listening to English and did not read the subtitles very much, the same strategy she described in the background questionnaire. This was also demonstrated by the fact that she referred to the English text rather than Finnish: whenever she quoted the film, she quoted it in English, even though she did not always remember the specific wording. She also commented on the English word choices on a few occasions. Together with her ability to recognise some of the intertextual connections, this shows A’s relatively high level of linguistic and cultural competence. A did not comment extensively on the subtitles, and therefore it appears that they did not play a significant role in her reception strategy. Furthermore, she once asked the rest of the group how a linguistic joke had been translated, indicating that she had not read that part of the subtitles very closely.

A’s viewer profile is largely based on her knowledge in the area of intertextuality, where she was most active during the discussion. She is knowledgeable, understands English well and does not read the subtitles very much, but, according to her own estimation, occasionally seeks support from them. The discussion created a picture of her as someone who comments only when she has something substantive to add but who is not afraid to voice opinions even if they go against the perceived norm. While she did not take on the role of maintaining the conversation, she did engage in small talk on a few occasions, and even made a few small jokes. When I asked at the end of the discussion what the group members’ general impression of the movie was, A was the first one to reply, stating “Mä haluun semmosen Mark Darcyn kanssa.” [“I want one of those Mark Darcys too.”] This comment was met by laughter and even agreement from some group members. The comment showed not only A’s occasional willingness to begin the exchange and lighten the mood, but also that despite her somewhat critical comments on the film, her thoughts on it were not exclusively negative.

6.2.3.2  B: Positive facilitator

B is a 22-year old female. Her role was quite active throughout the discussion. She commented actively and prodded the conversation by making small remarks when others were quiet and by elaborating on others’ replies, adding small details from
the film. Her humorous comments had a positive effect on the general atmosphere and kept the discussion going, as many informants reacted to her remarks, at least by laughter or agreement. She also made numerous substantive comments and on many occasions was the first to answer my questions, although sometimes her replies were quite short. She was not particularly active in making unprompted comments, but she did make one particularly significant unprompted observation on the topic of translation: after a fairly long exchange on some aspects of the subtitles, I asked whether anyone had anything more to say about the translation, and B replied by bringing up the scene where Bridget’s mother admonishes her for using bad language, and this started a lively exchange on translating obscenities. B also made suggestions on how the translation might have been improved in this scene, which was very rare in the non-expert groups’ discussions. She stated: “*Mut oishan sinne voinu niinku sanoo sen sillai niinku suomeks etä meni jotenkin huonosti ja sitten pistää sinne kirosanan väliin*” [“But you could have said in Finnish something like it went badly and then added a swearword somewhere in there”]. This is, of course, quite a vague suggestion, but a valid expression of an alternative translation strategy. With this comment and indeed some others, B revealed that she followed the subtitles and had definite opinions on them. She also made a few other direct comments on the subtitles, such as the remark that the word ‘*hiihtolomanen*’ [‘skiing mini-break’] had too many letters. She was also one of the informants who expressed understanding for the translator in the context of the problematic solutions ‘*lomanen*’ and ‘*Möven ja Pick*’.

B’s comments on her reception strategies reflect a fairly typical-sounding attitude towards subtitles, expressing that she only uses them as an aid for understanding when the source language is too difficult. When asked about the pace of the subtitles, she, however, mentioned a strategy that on the surface seems opposite to this. She stated: “*Mul on yleensä sillee et jos mä en ehi lukee nii sit mää vaan kuuntelen. Sit se on niinku siinä, ymmärsin tai en*” [“For me it’s usually that if I don’t have enough time to read it, then I just listen. Then that’s it, whether I understood or not.”] This implies that B would prefer to read the subtitles in their entirety, and concentrate on the source text secondarily, instead of always listening first and reading second. This seeming inconsistency could indicate that she uses both texts in varying ways, or it could simply be an example of how difficult it is to verbalise these strategies. B remembered some words from both the translation and
the source text, but was not able to fully describe what her actual reception process was like. The comments thus indicate that both languages play a significant role for her. Her response to the background questionnaire also confirms this impression.

In conclusion, B was an active, engaging commenter whose most significant contributions were keeping the discussion going and creating a positive atmosphere. She commented on the subtitles to some extent and expressed fairly typical views. She often started the discussion and drew others into it. A good example of her humorous, inclusive style comes from one of her final comments, after I had asked whether there were any funny parts in the film and B expressed hesitation: “Mä en muista, missä kohtaa mää nauroin. Muistatteks te, missää mää oon naurannu?” [“I don’t remember which parts made me laugh. Do you guys remember when I laughed?”] Others laughed at this, and the conversation on funny parts started flowing from then on. This was an interesting comment, because the entire discussion was quite critical of the film, and even this exchange started with two comments on how the film was not very successful in creating a genuine comic effect. Thus, B’s comment could be an attempt to save face, a way to avoid admitting that some of the scenes others had just dismissed had made her laugh. However, it also worked as a way to get the group laughing together and trying to remember any funny scenes. This comment from B is thus a good example of how she contributed to the atmosphere and managed to elicit responses from others.

6.2.3.3 C: Quiet observer

C is another 22-year-old female. Her role in the discussion was quite passive: she made few comments, and her comments brought few new aspects to the discussion. She answered the moderator’s direct questions and, especially in the beginning, occasionally participated in the discussion, but she did not make unprompted observations or control the discussion, as B often did and A did with some exchanges on intertextuality. At the beginning of the discussion, C was fairly active in discussing the general aspects of the film, and she expressed some criticism concerning the film’s quality and value, in agreement with the majority opinion of the group. As the conversation proceeded, C made fewer comments.
C did make one particularly interesting comment during the discussion. When the conversation turned to reception strategies, she stated that she listened to the English text in addition to reading the subtitles “mielenkiinnosta, että miten se sopii siihen suomennokseen” [“out of interest to see how the two fit together”]. She followed up this comment by admitting that participating in this study may have had something to do with that: “Ehkä just sen takia et tiesi tulevansa tänne mutta toisaalta sitte taas sen takia että ihan vaan muuten kiinnosti, koska siinä oli kuitenki ihan niinku aika paljon hauskoja sanoja.” [“Maybe it was because I knew I was coming here, but on the other hand, just because it was interesting, because there were lots of funny words.”] This is an important admission when considering the reliability of the informants’ statements and comparing this research situation to normal film viewing. The comment confirms that the situation can affect the way the informants experience the film and direct their attention towards the subtitles more than usual. The informants are aware of the special viewing context, and their reception processes are not therefore exactly what they would be in an ordinary situation. This could have led to the informants being more strongly aware of the subtitles, and perhaps even to adjusting their comments to what they felt would be expected of them. All of this is taken into consideration in this analysis.

This remark about the effect of the situation on her viewing habits is an example of C’s role as a thoughtful informant: she offered comments when she had something to say and occasionally voiced agreement with others but she rarely took the initiative in the discussion or maintained small talk. She did not discuss her viewing strategies, but the above statement shows that she paid attention to both subtitles and source text. Based on the fact that she talked about listening to the source text more than usual it the translation would seem to be her primary source of information, but it is impossible to draw further conclusions based on her scarce comments. In the background questionnaire, she stated that she primarily follows subtitles, which confirms the impression given by the discussion. In all, C presented herself as an average viewer who did not pay much attention to the challenges of translation, but perhaps did not have much trouble understanding the film, because she did not find reasons to comment on it. It is, of course, possible that she did not mention any difficulties for fear of losing face, but this was a tightly-knit group where others described their occasional confusion and where critical opinions were voiced openly, and she herself had admitted to not understanding intertextual
references. Therefore, she comes across someone who does not have much to share rather than someone who is unwilling to share her opinions.

6.2.3.4  D: Ignore and move on

D is a 22-year-old female. Her role in the discussion was considerably more active and varied than C’s, but not as comprehensive as B’s. She made some unprompted comments and answered questions, but she acted mainly as a reactive participant instead of initiating exchanges or maintaining the discussion through small talk. She did occasionally take a more active role but more often stayed in the background, agreeing with others and elaborating on some points made by others. Many of her comments reflected the group’s majority views, such as her somewhat critical attitude towards the word ‘lomanen’. In the exchange on the translation ‘Möven ja Pick’, D was the first one to express an explicitly negative view of the translator’s choice. The topic was brought up by E, who only mentioned seeing the discrepancy between Finnish and English. D then commented that she was bothered by the translation. As the exchange proceeded, D did not attempt to soften her opinion in order to find common ground with others and stated her preference openly. On the other hand, she did express understanding for the translator’s challenge, stating that “kai se varmaan on vaikee keksii sille suomenkielist vastinetta, mut tota mun mielest toi nyt ei ollu ihan parhaimmast päästä” [“I guess it must be difficult to think of a Finnish equivalent, but I think that this one wasn’t the greatest”]. Thus, D was sympathetic but critical.

D was one of the informants who mentioned subtitles as her primary source of information, both in the discussion and the questionnaire. However, one of her remarks implied that she had processed the English source text before the translation: as mentioned above in section 6.2.2.1, she stated that she had not noticed the problematic translation concerning Sex and the City because she had not looked at the subtitle, and that the spoken text was her source of information and understanding. This clearly indicates that the English text was primary for her in this instance. On the other hand, in the exchange on the mistranslation of the word ‘proposition’ she expressed the opposite reception strategy, commenting that she had doubted her own understanding of the scene when the subtitle was confusing
and she had not listened to the source text. These two conflicting statements again demonstrate that no single reception strategy applies to all situations, and both English and Finnish can serve as the primary source of information at different times for the same viewer. D’s two comments also demonstrate how easy it can be to miss a piece of information in either source, when attempting to follow both simultaneously.

For D, Finnish seems to be slightly more significant than English, as she herself mentioned that strategy, and this is supported by the above observation in the case of the word ‘proposition’. Still, English is also present in D’s reception experience. In fact, she formulated her relationship with English quite interestingly in the background questionnaire, stating that subtitles are primary to her, but “yritän samalla kuunnella” [“I try to listen at the same time”]. This makes her sound either unable or perhaps reluctant to use the source text and emphasises the role of the subtitles. The wording could be due to the fact that, as she stated in the discussion, she feels unable to do two things simultaneously and therefore attempting to listen to the source text while reading subtitles requires some effort. D also emphasised the automatic nature of reception and mentioned that it is easy to move on with the flow of the programme and forget the difficult parts of the subtitles. D expressed understanding for the translator and tended to accept the blame for difficulties or confusion. One good example of this is the exchange on the translation for the word ‘proposition’, as discussed in section 6.2.2.2. Thus, her comments show a significant level of acceptance for the subtitles.

D’s profile builds on her comfortable habit of ignoring any problems with the film or the subtitles and constructing her interpretations on the basis of the context. Her reception strategies are flexible and she uses both source text and translation to a differing extent at different moments. As a participant in the discussion, she did not take significant initiative but participated fairly actively. D was the one member of Group 1 who knew me in advance significantly better than the others. This was not evident throughout the majority of the discussion, but a few offhand remarks of shared knowledge made the familiarity clear. However, D’s role as a relatively passive, reactive member of the group helped render this personal connection invisible during the substantive parts of the discussion, as she did not dominate the

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55I will discuss D’s familiarity with me and its implications for the focus group further in 7.2.
conversation, nor did she explicitly bring up her relationship with me. It was also clear from her comments that she was a very cohesive member of the group: her comments did not differ noticeably from the others’, and she functioned as a member of the group without singling herself out.

6.2.3.5  E: Dissenting outsider

E is one of the group’s male participants and is 23 years old. In the discussion, E adopted an active role, participating in a majority of the exchanges and making substantive comments, including some unprompted statements. On a few occasions, he also asked questions, because he did not know as much about Bridget Jones as the other informants and was seeking additional background information. He was the only informant who had not seen the first Bridget Jones film, and thus was at a disadvantage with regard to the film’s narrative context. He voiced his opinions on Bridget Jones openly, and many of his views were quite critical. Some other informants commented that this was perhaps due to the fact that he was not the film’s target audience, and E seemed to be in agreement with this. Occasionally, he did express more positive opinions, but even those tended to be embedded in criticism. For example, he mentioned having enjoyed the music in the film, but added: “Toisaalt sit taas ne teki siit elokuvasta vieläkin naurettavamman, että […] kylhän ne osa sopii niihin mutta osa oli niinku sillee että ne kohtaukset tuntu et ne olis väillä jopa tehty sitä varten että voidaan soittaa tää biisi” [“On the other hand this made the film even more ridiculous, that […] some of the songs were very fitting but some felt like the scenes were made just so that they could play that song”]. Despite his critical attitude, E did not extend his criticisms to the subtitles. He was the informant who spontaneously brought up the problematic translation ‘Möven ja Pick’ and mentioned that the visual message had conflicted with the subtitle. However, he did not voice explicit criticism, as other informants did in this exchange. Later on, he even expressed understanding for the solution: “Tää Ben ja Jerry on varmaan niinku ainaki suomalaisille varmaan aika tuntemattomampi jäätelömerkki” [I guess this Ben and Jerry must be kind of an unknown ice cream brand for Finns’]. He also voiced slight disagreement when others went on to criticise the translator’s choice. On other occasions, when asked about the subtitles,
he did not find anything to criticise, and he made fewer comments on the subtitles than on the film in general.

One reason for E’s lack of comments on the subtitles could be his reception strategy. Even before the actual discussion began, he stated that he does not read subtitles and may not be the best person to comment on them. However, he did make the above-mentioned unprompted comment on the ice cream brands, where he remembered the Finnish brand better than the English one, and thus clearly had noticed the subtitle. Later in the discussion he softened his statements on his reception strategies, as was seen in section 6.2.2.2. In his comments, he quoted both English and Finnish and commented on some of his impressions of the subtitles, although not particularly actively. Accordingly, his answer in the questionnaire is less absolute than his original statement: “Pääasiassa kuuntelen puhetta ja silloin tällöin vilkaisen tekstityksiä. Esimerkiksi silloin kun puheessa tulee vaikeampia sanoja.” [“I mainly listen to the speech and now and then glance at the subtitles. For example when there are difficult words in the speech.”] It is indeed possible that the English text was E’s primary source of information. He seemed comfortable quoting individual words in English, and he expressed that he did not always remember the words of the Finnish translation. E’s statements convey the impression that the English text came first for him and the subtitles played a fairly minor role.

E’s critical attitude was in part aimed at the intertextual elements of the film. He participated in an exchange, initiated by F, who criticised the film’s beginning sequence parodying The Sound of Music as a trite cliché. While some other informants voiced strong disagreement on this point, E agreed with F and thus reinforced the impression that his view of the film was negative. However, E also made a positive comment concerning intertextuality, when he remarked that the casting of Colin Firth as Mark Darcy was inventive and a “hauska vitsi” [“funny joke”]. Thus, his opinions were not solely negative, even though his overall attitude towards the film was certainly critical.

E’s profile thus centres on his critical view of the film, his varied comments on his reception strategies, and his ultimate acceptance of the subtitles as they are. He was vocal in his criticism of the film but did not criticise the subtitles. At the end of the discussion he eagerly joined in an exchange listing the funniest parts of the film, and he came up with some scenes which he considered funny, even though he had
first stated that he had only laughed “*sen leffan tyhmyydelle*” [“at the movie’s stupidity”]. Thus, despite his critical views and his position as something of an outsider in viewing a chick flick and in a discussion concentrating on subtitles, he brought up interesting viewpoints and was not simply a voice of the opposition.

### 6.2.3.6 F: Perceptive, active critic

F is the other male informant in Group 1. As are most members of the group, he is a 22-year-old student. He was one of the most active participants both in maintaining the discussion with quick remarks and in expressing his opinions. Together with E, he expressed some of the most strongly critical opinions on the film in all of the three groups. The position of the two males as the most critical informants is not surprising, as the film is clearly aimed at women. E and F’s comments suggest that not being a part of the perceived target audience can bring about negative attitudes: E and F themselves, as well as other informants, repeatedly made this point during the discussions. However, the situation also led to valuable commentary that drew the rest of the group into the discussion. Similarly to E’s reactions, F, too, was outspoken in his criticism of the film but did not voice particularly critical opinions of the subtitles. He quoted the subtitles as authentic text of the film and brought up the Swedish subtitles in an equally accepting fashion. F’s explicit comments on the translator’s choices emphasise this sense of acceptance. When asked about problematic parts in the translation, he immediately answered that he cannot think of any, and when the discussion turned to the problematic ‘Möven ja Pick’ translation, he expressed his understanding for the translator. Furthermore, his comment on the *Sex and the City* pun was equally accepting, as he pointed out that the translator had no choice but to use the existing translation.

F’s comments on his viewing strategies were consistent with the fact that he quoted repeatedly from the subtitles. He stated that he always reads the subtitles and does not listen “actively”, but still usually notices errors in the translation, thus indicating that he does listen to the spoken text to some extent. In the questionnaire, he also gave subtitles the primary role but allowed the source text some significance, stating that he reads subtitles approximately 60% of the time and listens to the English source text for the other approximately 40%. However, it is
interesting to note that despite his concentration on the subtitles and his general criticism of the film, as well as his statement that he tends to notice translation errors, F did not remember the one mistranslation, nor did he bring up any other problematic parts of the subtitles. Thus, his listening to the source text or comparing it to the translation does not appear to have been active. In the exchange on the mistranslation of ‘proposition’, F also made the point that a viewer deals with problems by simply wondering about them for a moment and then returning to the flow of the film. This remark was a good example of how F’s comments on strategies often expressed the view of the entire group, which was confirmed by frequent confirming signals from the others.

As was seen above, both E and F’s negativity towards the film was also present in their comments on intertextuality. F was particularly vocal in this, as he initiated without prompting an exchange on the Sound of Music parody. He commented:

*But I think that definitely the funniest scene in the film was the beginning where two people were actually running in that field to meet each other while violins were playing. I just kind of... is it really possible that some film still has such a scene?*

With this comment, particularly by ending it with wondering how a film can still possibly contain such a scene today, he made the point that he considered this scene unintentionally amusing because it was clichéd and overused, and the intertextual link to every other film that has used a similar scene was a negative one. This provoked an energetic exchange where several others disagreed with F:

*G: Didn’t you get it, it was kind of like satire or some kind of irony or something?  
F: I don’t think it was satire there.  
G: Yes it was!*
B: It was straight out of The Sound of Music!
D: Maybe you needed to be able to recognise the song in the background and associate it with The Sound of Music.
E: That is such an incredibly stale cliché.
G: Maybe it was meant to be stale.
B: The entire movie was maybe kind of stale. Or it had all this old stuff that still made you laugh a little. [agreement]

This shows how the same allusion can evoke either a negative or a positive reaction. While some informants say that they see this as satire and thus accept the scene, F maintains his original position. Towards the end of the exchange, other group members start agreeing with F and E that the idea is clichéd. Thus, the group is attempting to find common ground, or the women in the group are yielding ground to the two dominant males, and disagreement on intertextuality is eventually used as an opportunity to criticise the entire film. However, the intertextual reference is not rejected entirely, and the conflicts in interpretations are not fully eliminated. Later in the discussion, F turned the topic back to the Sound of Music scene and again brought up the fact that this scene was the most memorable for him. This time, however, he mentioned having been conflicted about whether this should be seen as satire or whether it was just a tired cliché. This shows willingness to compromise on F’s part, but his general negative attitude has not changed.

F’s negative comments on intertextuality could be the result of his overall negative attitude towards the film, but they could also be an idiosyncratic reading of an intertextual reference, an intentionally dissenting opinion presented to provoke comments. What is indicative of F’s central role in the discussion is that after he criticised the film, others started expressing their reserved agreement that the film did indeed seem clichéd. Thus, F’s role is quite dominant, and both his and E’s initial negative assessments on the film found agreement in the group. It is difficult to say how much this has to do with gender, but it is interesting to note that the powerful views of the two males in the group steer the discussion in a more critical direction than that taken by the other two, all-female groups.

When characterising F’s role in the focus group, his critical comments are the most apparent defining feature. They are, however, only one dimension of his participation. The criticism is directed at the film in general, while his views on the subtitles are quite positive, and it is clear that he uses the subtitles actively in order to understand the film. Furthermore, his role in the discussion is positive, as he
actively engages others and takes initiative in commenting, thus keeping the discussion going. His critical comment on the *Sound of Music* scene was the first unprompted comment on a specific scene in the discussion, and it served a purpose in activating the conversation and inviting other informants to voice their own opinions.

6.2.3.7  *G: Contextualiser and agree-er*

G is 22 years old, and one of the group’s most active commenters. Many of her comments were brief expressions of agreement or small talk and jokes that elicited laughter from others, but she also voiced her own opinions and made unprompted remarks which led to participation from others. G was fairly critical of the film, but she was also the one to point out early on in the discussion that the male informants, who expressed critical opinions, do not belong to the target audience of the film, thus bringing the gender aspect into discussion. She even repeated this observation later in the exchange on *Sex and the City* and pointed out that the film and the television show have similar target audiences and the film audience can therefore be presumed to understand the reference. She also mentioned that people like her parents might not understand much of the film, which also assisted in narrowing down the definition of the target audience. In other words, G’s comments revealed that she gave some thought to contextual questions related to the film.

G’s attitude towards the subtitles did not become entirely clear, as her comments on this topic were mostly replies to others and not substantive personal comments. Her comments did, however, convey a fairly positive view. G made the sole unprompted positive comment on a specific part of the subtitles, when she mentioned that she would not have understood the scene where the Thai prisoners sang a Madonna song if it had not been subtitled. On the ‘Möven ja Pick’ translation, she expressed confusion but ultimately accepted the translation, as “*aha, jotain Mövenpickiä*” [“oh, it’s some Mövenpick”]. G’s acceptance even extended beyond this film’s subtitles. In the discussion on *Sex and the City*, G pointed out that the title could not have been originally translated into Finnish in any other way. Thus, rather than criticising the milder Finnish title or these subtitles, G accepted both without question. On the other hand, G also pointed out that she did not
understand the word ‘lomanen’ and disagreed on the meaning of the word. G also made one explicitly negative assessment when she called the ‘Möven ja Pick’ translation “stupid” and suggested an alternative translation using two Finnish ice cream brands, Valio-Ingman. This was one of the very few cases where an informant suggested an alternative translation, but even this comment was made jokingly, in a laughing tone which implied that G was not able to think of a truly viable alternative and that her proposal was not serious. In all, G expressed both negative and positive views, but the positive comments were more frequent, and even the negative ones reflect understanding and acceptance.

G’s comments on her reception strategies indicate that the English original was her primary source of information but that she read the subtitles fairly closely. Her answer in the questionnaire also suggests this strategy. During the discussion, she quoted individual words from the subtitles, thus revealing that she had read them closely enough to remember some parts. The fact that she had also listened to the source text quite closely came across in some comments, when she, for example, mentioned listening to the lyrics of the songs used in the film and finding their relevance for the plot. Furthermore, her comments on the word ‘lomanen’ showed that she both read the subtitles and listened to the source text, but was not able to extract information in a satisfactory way. She described her confusion in the following way: “[S]e niinku vilahti mulla siinä ohitte ja mulla et mitähän siinä oikeestaan luki.” [“It just kind of flashed by me and I was wondering what it actually said.”] Her comment suggests that she primarily listened to English but also tried to follow the subtitles, and when she was not able to read the subtitle attentively, she was left wondering about its wording. This indicates that G’s strategy was consistent with her statement of listening first and reading second, as it was the written text that she missed.

As was seen above, G actively debated the meaning of the Sound of the Music parody scene with F and described the scene as “vähän niinku satiiria tai jotain tämmöstä ironiata tai jotain” [“kind of like satire or some kind of irony or something”]. This showed that her reading of the scene was more in line with the intended, humorous meaning than F’s. However, G expressed a more critical view towards another example of intertextuality. When I started the entire discussion by asking about general views of the film, G’s first comment was: “Ja ois ne ees jonku muun miehen siihä löytäny” [“And I wish they’d at least found some other guy for
This statement most likely refers to the leading man, Colin Firth, or possibly the secondary male actor, Hugh Grant. G’s comment dismisses the intertextual connections created by using the same actor as in the first Bridget Jones film and, in the case of Firth, the Pride and Prejudice series. Thus, even though G disagreed with F on his assessment concerning the Sound of Music scene, she implied something similar with this statement and demonstrated her somewhat negative view of the film.

In all, G is a mildly critical viewer, although her views on the subtitles tend to be more accepting than critical. She is interested in looking at the bigger picture of the viewing context. She uses both the source text and subtitles actively, even though English seems to come first for her. As a participant in the discussion, she is active, particularly in supporting others’ comments and creating a comfortable atmosphere by making light remarks which are intended to elicit laughter. However, she is also capable of expressing strong disagreement, as in the exchange with F concerning the reference to The Sound of Music.

6.2.3.8  

**H: Careful and reserved**

The final member of Group 1, H, is 24 years old. Her role in the discussion was quite sharply divided, in that for some parts of the conversation she was very active, making unprompted comments and giving substantial, informative statements, while at other times she did not make any comments for significant periods of time, remaining silent throughout several entire exchanges. H’s opinions of the film matched those of most of the group: she was slightly critical of the film but admitted to finding some parts of it funny. On a couple of occasions she elaborated on why she found the film clichéd and thus agreed with others’ criticism.

H was the first informant to mention subtitles, spontaneously sharing how she learned the word ‘lomanen’ from the subtitles. H also made a second comment during the exchange, and it was also quite positive, remarking on the word’s unfamiliarity: “Mut ei se vältämättä ollu paha asia siis” [“But it wasn’t necessarily a bad thing”]. Thus, H’s tone in this exchange was positive, even if slightly confused by the new word. H also showed a significant level of trust in the subtitles during the exchange concerning the word ‘proposition’. She started
speculating on whether the film may have been re-edited at the last minute, which indicated a willingness to accept the translator’s decision and find a plausible explanation for it.

H’s comments on reception strategies were well in line with the rest of this group. She assessed herself as listening to the English text more actively than reading the subtitles, but noted that she often turns to the subtitles for support. Her answer in the questionnaire stated the same thing, and she explained this strategy there by stating that listening to the source text “antaa enemmän informaatiota” [“gives more information”], which might be a comment on the omissions and condensations of subtitles. Despite this explicit emphasis on the source text, H was the only one in all three groups to state that the pace of the subtitles was occasionally too fast, and that she did not have enough time to read all the subtitles. Some other informants made similar implications, such as G’s remark that the subtitle flashed by and left her wondering what it had said, but these comments had mostly to do with focus of attention, whereas H’s statement deals explicitly with subtitle pace. Her comment was offered as an explanation for why it was important for her to listen to the source text in addition to reading the subtitles. This makes it sound as if listening to the source text was a necessity for H, not a preferred choice of strategy. Her phrasing in this context, saying that she listened to English while she read, rather than the other way around, might also suggest that reading the subtitles was in fact the primary activity. She also quoted a few words from the subtitles. On the other hand, during another exchange on strategies, H stated that she listens more than she reads, and when talking about her need to read more closely when the language is difficult, she used the rather negative-sounding verb ‘turvautua’ [‘resort to’] to describe her relationship with the subtitles. She also mentioned a reason for her choice of concentrating on English, stating that jokes do not translate well. Thus, her explicit statements expressed some suspicion of subtitles and portrayed English as her primary source of information, but other statements implied that the subtitles also play a significant role in her reception process.

H’s viewer profile remains vague due to her sporadic participation. She stated her view of her reception strategies clearly and made some substantive comments on the film and the subtitles, but remained in the background throughout many conversations. Indeed, one could speculate as to whether her statements on the
subtitles were accurate. H was very careful not to voice criticisms of the subtitles and sounded quite diplomatic, stating that ‘lomanen’ was an interesting new word, and she attempted to find a benign explanation for the mistranslation of ‘proposal’. These statements, as well as H’s ability to use and quote the subtitles paint a picture of a politely positive attitude towards the translation. However, it is possible that some of H’s positive attitude is due to the situation, her attempt to conduct herself politely towards the researcher. Nevertheless, despite this doubt concerning the extent of her positive comments, the overall picture is of a viewer who trusts the subtitles and uses them as an aid to understanding, and even remembers some of them afterwards.

6.2.4 Concluding Group Profile: The Diplomatic Dissenters

The discussion in Group 1 was characterised by good-natured disagreement, and a view of subtitles as a helpful, yet quite forgettable, presence in film-viewing. The group was fairly cohesive, despite the fact that the group members’ opinions were quite varied. In such a group of friends, the informants appeared to feel comfortable enough to disagree with each other and jokingly comment on these differing opinions. The attempt to negotiate shared interpretations was quite clear, as differences of opinion and interpretation were discussed and mutual understanding was sought. Such understanding was not, however, always attained. Though the discussion was always friendly, occasional disagreements, such as on the value of intertextuality, remained. This created a sense of openness and occasionally energised the conversation, when opposing views were put forward actively. This allowed for a greater variety of responses than a more conciliatory, consensus-oriented group might have.

One interesting factor in this group, and one of its key differences when compared to the other two groups, is the fact that it was comprised of both men and women. To what extent did this have an effect on the discussion and on the opinions and interpretations expressed? How do men and women interpret – or comment – differently? Can the differences between the focus groups be attributed to gender? Some aspects of the interactions and interpretations in this group are different from the other two groups, and gender looks like a logical explanation for some
idiosyncrasies in this group. One of these is a more critical or even negative tone towards the film than in the other two groups. This critical view originates in the male informants’ comments, but the females also joined in this criticism. It does not extend to subtitles, but it can be seen as having an effect on the overall tone of the discussion.

As can be seen from almost all of the comments on difficulties the informants experienced with subtitles, the reactions are not straightforwardly negative. A better description for the tone of the discussion would be sympathetic understanding towards the translator’s challenges, and a tendency to blame oneself for problems in understanding. The group members did occasionally express confusion, particularly when the subtitles were in some way distracting, but the criticisms were expressed mildly. This shows that the tendency towards strong criticism that is clear in many discussions on subtitles is not as prevalent in this setting. Thus, the expected attitude of resistance to subtitles appears to be only one aspect of the reception experience and is not necessarily a strong presence in a concrete viewing situation. One must, however, keep in mind that this understanding, diplomatic tone may be due, in part, to the setting itself. The informants knew that they were having this discussion under a researcher’s observation. It is possible that this situation made them less willing to be forthcoming with criticisms, in an unconscious attempt to please the moderator or appear sophisticated, and different situational contexts may lead to different kinds of conversations highlighting different attitudes. However, the tone of this discussion credibly demonstrates that viewers’ approaches to subtitles are not singularly negative nor dismissive. The fact that subtitles are read, remembered and quoted as the film’s real words means that they are used effortlessly as one means of constructing the meaning of a film. Even the problems associated with subtitles are not automatically attributed to the subtitles themselves, as the group members showed by occasionally doubting their own understanding. It would be difficult to attribute such potentially embarrassing admissions simply to the social situation. Rather, this tendency to doubt one’s skills and to trust the translation appears to be a legitimate underlying attitude towards subtitles.

As can be seen from the viewer profiles, each group member had a distinct role in the discussion and presented both idiosyncratic and shared opinions. E and F were critical voices, finding fault in the film while simultaneously accepting the subtitles. B and G commented actively and encouraged discussion, while C and H
were more reserved and only entered the discussion when they truly had an opinion. A supplied the discussion with facts and reasoned opinions, and D provided a practical view of the subtitle reception process. Each, thus, had a distinct position, and each presented views and opinions. All voices were heard, and together they formed a conversation which presented conflicting opinions in a conciliatory way, criticised and even ridiculed the film but accepted the. The group represented a variety of reception strategies, but none of them ignored the subtitles completely.

6.3 Group 2

6.3.1 Preliminary Group Profile: All-Female Group of Near-Experts

Group 2 was included in the study as a comparison group: it was made up of students of translation studies or English, i.e. informants who have more knowledge than an average viewer of the themes of this study. The group consisted of four persons, all of them female and in their twenties. They were familiar to each other primarily through their studies, and were not a particularly close group of friends. Three of the informants were students of English translation, and one studied English Philology as her major subject. The translation students were recruited on a course I was teaching at the time, so they knew me as their teacher. The philology student did not know me beforehand, and she joined the group because she was familiar to one of the translation students. All four informants were quite advanced in their studies, at the Master’s studies stage. I call this group “near-experts”, because they are not professional, experienced translators but have extensive training in the area and thus have acquired something of an expert’s perspective on matters of language, culture, communication and translation. Because of this perspective, the members of this group were naturally familiar with translation and understood English very well, and they were more familiar with the source culture than the other groups. One should, however, keep in mind that these students are film viewers, too, and they fit into the target audience of the Bridget Jones films by both age and gender. Therefore, it is possible to start the analysis by constructing similar profiles to those of the other two groups.
As anticipated, the discussion in this group was, indeed, to some extent different from the other groups. It was more professional and academic in tone and showed a wider knowledge of issues related to translation and language. The style of the discussion and interaction also differed from the other groups. The discussion was very active, and the informants offered many unprompted comments and provided long, analytical answers, whereas the answers in the other groups tended to be shorter and needed more prompting. However, despite these differences, there were also similarities in the ideas presented, and the near-experts were comfortable with putting themselves into the viewer’s role and expressing their opinions, interpretations and attitudes.

6.3.2 Comprehensive Group Profile

6.3.2.1 Explicit comments on subtitles

Because many statements in Group 2’s discussions were long and thorough, the discussion yielded plenty of substantial commentary on translations and translating in general, as well as the *Bridget Jones* subtitles in particular. Even though the comments were more knowledgeable on translation, language and culture than those of the other groups, they were also similar in many ways and touched on similar topics. However, Group 2 paid attention to a wider range of issues than the other groups. They made both positive and negative evaluations of the subtitles, as well as neutral statements or questions on many aspects of subtitling. In some ways the informants were understanding of the subtitler’s challenges and the limitations of the context, but they did not try to explain away all the negative aspects of the subtitles. On several occasions the group members raised questions on individual solutions and proposed alternative translations. Thus, the group did not go easy on the translator out of collegial sympathy.

The discussion reflected a cautiously positive overall opinion of the subtitles, and initial comments on the subtitles were positive. An example of this is J’s comment: “Siis mun mielestä kaiken kaikkiaan [...] se oli mun mielest hyvä. Se tuki tekstitys sitä sanottua.” [“I think, overall [...] in my opinion it was good. The subtitles
supported what was said.”] In addition, L spontaneously mentioned a specific solution which she considered particularly good:

[S]iinä esimerkiks oli semmonen kohta, kun ne puhu sen, ne puhu sen Cleaverin kanssa siitä heidän harrastamastaan sukupuolitoiminnasta. Ja sitten se sano, että ’it was really good’, ja se oli suomennettu niinku että ’ei ollu pöllömpää’. Niin mun mielestä oli ihan siis tavallaan niinku tosi loistava, koska sehän on tosi semmonen niinku just semmonen, mitä vois sanoa, et jos joku tulee kyseleen tollasia niinku itsestäänselvyyksiä.

[F]or example, there was one part where she talked with the Cleaver guy about their sexual acts. Then he said ’it was really good’, and it was translated as ’ei ollu pöllömpää’ [’not too shabby’]. I think that was kind of like really brilliant, because that’s exactly like something you could say if somebody starts asking these obvious questions.

Remembering a positive element of the subtitles without prompting was a rare occurrence in the focus groups and suggests positivity towards the subtitles.

The informants also expressed understanding for the translator and the challenges of subtitling. Some critical comments were softened by remarks on how difficult it can be to find the optimal solution due to limitations imposed by the medium and the situation. For example, when discussing possible translations for the word ‘excrement’ and looking for the closest Finnish stylistic equivalent, M stated:

No mut näitä nyt on vähän turha sit toisaalt pohtia näitä näitä, että mikä olis parempi, koska siin on kuitenkin ne jotkut semmoset, ihan semmoset niinku tosielämän resurssit. […] mitkä silläkin kääntäjällä on ollu käytössään.

Well, on the other hand it’s kind of useless to think about all of this, about what would be better, because it’s always about the resources in the real-life situation […] that this translator would have been able to use.

“Resources” likely refers here to such matters as time and fees, which are often discussed in translation courses and are therefore a familiar topic to students. Another example of a critical recollection which was shared in an understanding tone, is this remark by K:

Joitain vivahteita. Mut se on just, et ne ei oikein mahdu välttämät sinne. Et jos sä rupeet just et niitä semmosia hirveen vaikeita lauserakenteita, jotka kuulostaa hienolta, jos vääntää ne suomeks, ni siihenhän menis hirveet tilat.

Some nuances. But it’s just that there isn’t necessarily enough space for them. So if you try to put in some of those really complicated structures that sound fancy, if you try to put them into Finnish, it would take up a huge amount of space.
This comment on space refers to the technical restrictions concerning subtitles, which is another topic more familiar to near-experts than non-experts. In all, the informants’ general reviews of the subtitles were slightly reserved but demonstrated sympathy and understanding.

However, as the discussion moved onto more detailed topics, the group made a significant number of critical comments or suggestions on how the subtitles could be improved. These were occasionally accompanied by sympathetic statements such as the ones above. One example of this was early on in the conversation, when J spontaneously brought up the Ben and Jerry scene, stating that the translation did not work. Others agreed, but the criticism was softened by M’s unfinished comment “parempi sekin ku ei...” [“even that’s better than no...”] K then continued: “Se oli sillee ehkä hyvä valinta. Ei suomes taida olla oikein niin hirveesti semmosia siihen sopivia nimää.” [“Maybe it was kind of a good choice. I don’t think there are lots of Finnish names that would be suitable there.”] The conversation continued with speculation on alternative translations and criticism towards the clumsy subtitle, but it is notable that part of the exchange was spent justifying the solution. Something similar occurred in Group 1, where this translation aroused debate on whether the pun is untranslatable.

Another similar cause for criticism was the word ‘lomanen’, which was also discussed in Group 1. This translation inspired the following unprompted exchange:

_L: Mun mielest se ‘mini-breakista’ käytetty sana ’lomanen’ oli aika semmosta... [äänekästä myöntelyä]
K: Mun mielest se ei kyl kamalan [päälekkäistä puhetta] kukaan käytä sellasta sanontaa.
M: Se on ’pitkä viikonloppu’ tai jotain.
K: Mut vähän ku tuli se ensimmäisen kerran että ’lomanen’, niin mä olin niinku että ”Mikä lintu?” [naurua] [edellisten puheenvuorojen aikana päällekkäistä puhetta, sekä myöntelyä että erimielisyyttä]
M: Aivan. Niinku varpunen
J: Voi olla, et sisihen ei mahtunut sit semmosta. Ei sitä koskaan tiää.

_L: I think the word ‘lomanen’ as a translation for ‘mini-break’ was kind of... [loud agreement]
J: But it’s appeared elsewhere too. I’ve seen it in other programmes. [M: Has it?]
In British shows where they’ve just said that they are going on a weekend vacation, a mini-break, they talk about lomanen.
K: I don’t think it’s very [overlapping talk] no one uses a phrase like that.
M: It’s a ‘long weekend’ or something.
K: But when it said ‘lomanen’ for the first time I was kind of like “What bird?”
[laughter]
[overlapping talk, both agreement and disagreement, during the entire previous exchange]
M: Exactly. Kind of like varpunen [sparrow]
K: It would even be better to have it as ‘miniloma’ [mini vacation]. Even that would be kind of [agreement] as a direct translation more understandable. [agreement]
Lomanen, huh? Just like some small, cute vacation. [agreement]
J: Maybe there wasn’t enough space for something like that. You never know.

All group members participated in this exchange, and the discussion was energetic, indicating that this was an interesting topic. This was the first item mentioned when I asked if any parts of the translation were difficult to understand, and there seemed to be considerable agreement on this opinion within the group. The tone of the first comment by L indicated that, although the words were vague, it was clearly critical of the translation. When J expressed a different opinion and mentioned having come across the word ‘lomanen’ before, other informants quickly expressed doubt and continued reinforcing their opinion that this word was not a good choice. Again, the informants presented an alternative solution which they saw as preferable to ‘lomanen’. However, J finally expressed trust in the translator, attempting to find a justification for the solution by wondering whether it was necessitated by space constraints. J was left alone with her accepting views, as none of the informants responded to this comment, but it was another attempt by one informant to understand and accept a problematic solution. In contrast to Group 1, the discussion on ‘lomanen’ centred more around looking for a better solution. The near-experts were clearly more prepared to criticise the translator’s choices and suggest a better strategy, whereas the non-experts talked about learning a new word and accepted the subtitles as is, even though they were slightly critical.

Another unprompted critical comment was made in reference to the only clear case of mistranslation in the film, the word ‘proposition’ which was translated as ‘kosinta’. K mentioned it, and others agreed that it was confusing and erroneous. In this exchange, the group’s near-expert status was made explicit, as K mentioned that this particular problem would probably bother even non-experts:
It wasn’t like, it’s the kind of thing that everybody else who was watching will notice too, because Bridget’s statement was explained in Finnish, and it was clear to everyone that she didn’t propose. So it wasn’t just that we professionals are going on about proposition and blah blah blah.

This comment shows that the group acknowledges its position as “we professionals,” different from non-experts. This point was made occasionally during the discussion, and the informants even sometimes sounded slightly apologetic for their different understanding of the subtitles and the film. The example of this mistranslation indeed shows how the near-experts were different from the other groups: this was the only group to mention the mistranslation without prompting. However, their comments were similar to those made by the other groups after prompting, in that this group also expressed confusion and a sense of missing something in the scene.

After prompting, Group 2 expressed a slightly negative view of the diluted joke in the translation of the Sex and the City reference. After the reference was mentioned by M as an example of intertextuality, I asked whether the informants felt the translation worked, and the following exchange ensued:

Moderattori: Miten se teiän mielest toimi se Sinkkuelämää-juttu? Jos nyt muistatte sen.
J: Joo mä mietin kans. Eihän se yhtä härski oo ku siinä...
K: [keskeyttää] Englanniks se on Sex and the City.
M: Where is the promise? [naurua, myöntelyä]
J: Mut Sinkkuelämää joo.
M: Se oli niinku... Se oli tota kääntäjän onni, että me ollaan nyt pääesty näkemään se Sinkkuelämää [myöntelyä] täällä oikeesti, ni ei tarvi...
J: Vanha juttu.

Moderator: How did the Sex and the City thing work in your opinion? If you remember it.
J: Yeah, I thought about that too. It’s not as dirty as it is in the...
K: [interrupts] In English it’s Sex and the City.
M: Where is the promise? [laughter, agreement]
J: But Sinkkuelämä [Single Life], yeah.
K: But anyway. Yeah. Anyone who’s watched Sex and the City would probably know what it’s about and [agreement] it’s probably pretty well known.
M: It was kind of... The translator got lucky that we’ve had the opportunity to see Sex and the City [agreement] here for real, and there’s no need...
J: Old news.

The group agreed that although the subtitle is not as explicit as the original, it is acceptable, as the theme of the show is known in Finland and the idea of the joke comes across thanks to that knowledge. Some disappointment is implied, but it seems that this was seen as the only realistic choice available to the translator. This is reminiscent of a similar exchange in Group 1, where it was also concluded that Finnish viewers would understand the joke through their knowledge of the series.

One issue which was not discussed in the non-expert groups to any significant extent but was an interesting topic for Group 2 was the way the film’s various terms of address had been translated. In Finnish, these terms are typically not as frequent as in English colloquial use. Therefore, they may sound clumsy if used extensively in translations, and their use could be considered source text interference. Terms of address were mentioned in the discussion on several occasions, and Group 2 discussed them extensively, listing different examples from the film and discussing possible translations as well as the possibility of leaving them out of the translation. The group was unanimous in their opinion that these terms should usually be left out. These terms also caused slight confusion for at least one informant. J mentioned having listened to the English text and being confused when she heard the name ‘Jeremy’ while the subtitle had the word ‘kamu’ [‘mate’]: “Mä siinä vaan jäin miettiin, että onks tää joku uus, englantilainen niinku tämmönen puhuttelu.” [“I just sort of wondered whether this was some new English term of address.”] This was said jokingly, but it does bring up a noteworthy problem: discrepancies between the source text and the subtitles can lead to this kind of confusion, particularly when the discrepancies are easy to hear, which is often the case with proper names. In this case, the English original included both the name ‘Jeremy’ and the word ‘mate’, so the translation was not incorrect, but at least for this one informant the subtitler’s decision to use the term of address instead of the name was confusing.

This conversation on terms of address was entirely unprompted, initiated by L, when she started guessing what my next question would be and jokingly said that it would probably be what should have been left out of the subtitles, because the previous question was what was missing from the subtitles. When I asked her to answer her own question, she mentioned terms of address. The following discussion
was lengthy, energetic and drew in all group members, who clearly constructed their opinions together and supported each other in formulating their views. For example, the group members tried to recall together all possible terms of address and jokingly speculated on potential translations for them. Occasionally the group members even appeared to complete each others’ sentences, such as in the following, partly overlapping part of the exchange:

$L$: Se on periaattees ihan tyhjää informaatioo, että...
$J$: Eikä ne sillä ees tarkota, että se ois oikeesti sen kaveri. [painokasta myöntelyä]
$L$: Ei ni. Se on vaan ihan...
$J$: Se on vaan niinku ”heipä hei”.
$K$: Tyyppi. [naurua]

$L$: It’s basically completely substanceless information that...
$J$: And they don’t even mean that he actually is his mate. [emphatic agreement]
$L$: Exactly. It’s just completely...
$J$: It’s just like “hey there”.
$K$: Dude. [laughter]

This element in the translation was apparently acceptable to the non-experts, or at least was not noticeable or memorable, because they did not mention it. The near-experts, on the other hand, built it into a lengthy, fairly critical exchange.

In addition to these critical comments which revolved around individual word choices, the group also commented on some macro-level translation strategies. The comments dealt predominantly with matters of style and register, and whether the translation adequately captured the register of the source text. In some places they felt the translation was too formal, and in other places some informants commented that the subtitles were too colloquial. This matter was discussed on several occasions, and although some comments were mildly positive, most were critical of the translator’s decisions. The comment on the translation “ei pöllömpää” which was discussed above was one incident where the stylistic solutions received positive feedback. One example of a critical comment was K’s following statement:

Siis mun mielest siinä vähän, siis kun se Bridget yrittää puhuu niinku hienostuneesti ’oh dear’ ja niin eespäin, ja sit jotain ’he’s so something inclined’, ja mun mielest tälläset ei tullu kyl suomen kielellä ollenkaan. Okei, niit on vähän hankala pystää, ku se sano tavalla, ihan yleisiä asioita, mutta toi, mut ku se yrittää kuulostaa niin kamalan hienolta, ja sit, sit se niinku ehkä vähä epäonnistuu, niin se jää ihan vallan pois välittämättä siitä.

I think it’s a little, when Bridget tries to use sophisticated language, ‘oh dear’ and so on, and then something like ‘he’s so something inclined’, I think these didn’t come across in the Finnish at all. OK, it’s kind of difficult to capture them, when
she’s speaking about really general things, but she’s trying to sound so terribly posh, and then she maybe fails a bit, and that’s left out completely.

Again, this comment expresses understanding for the subtitler’s challenges and admits that it is difficult to include all the nuances in the translation, but the attitude is critical, and K feels that a significant part of the original message fails to come across in the translation. Other informants expressed agreement, and this led to a fairly long exchange on matters of style, where various aspects of register choice were discussed. The formality of the source text was seen as a significant stylistic element, and therefore its absence in the subtitles was problematic. On the other hand, the opposite criticism, i.e. comments directed at translations that were too formal, was also present and was mostly related to obscene language, which the informants thought had been translated too mildly.

Swearwords and explicit language were a recurring theme in this focus group, just as in the other two groups. This was the topic of one of the liveliest parts of the discussion, when the informants compared Finnish and English words, looking for the best Finnish equivalents for terms used in the film and wondering about conventions for translating obscenities. The general feeling in the group was that the translations should have been stronger, and the mild translations distorted the style of the film. The first unprompted comment about subtitles in the entire discussion concerned swearing, and it was made by K, who started her comment, much like H in Group 1, with a slightly apologetic request to move to the topic of subtitles:

On the subject of translations, I’m diving right in here, but... It kind of bothered me that, well, okay, I guess it was because of trying to take the audience into account, but all the swearwords have been made milder, I mean every single one, and not just swearwords, but everything like crap and all those.

The group expressed strong agreement, and K started speculating on whether this translation strategy could be an implication of the intended audience: “Siinä vaiheessa mul tuli just semmonen olo, et onks tää suunnattu niinku nuoremallekin katsojakunnalle” [“That’s when I started feeling like, I wonder if this is aimed at a younger crowd”]. Thus, the translator’s choice seems to have made K doubt her
initial assessment of the style and target audience of the film, and the entire group considered this a negative aspect of the subtitles.

Later, the group returned to the topic of swearing, speaking of the stylistic nuances missing from the translation. M commented:

Mä olisin ehkä kaivannut, kun siel oli kerran alkutekstis niitä kaikennäköisiä hauskoja pikku haukkumasanoja ja kirosanoja ja kaikkea, niitä olis aikamoinen valikoima, et niihin olis etsitty jotain yhtä hupaisia vastineita, ni seki ois varmaa jo sille niinku saanu elävänmäks sitä dialogia.

I might have liked to see, because the source text had all kinds of funny little insults and swearwords and everything in there, it had quite a selection of those, that they would have looked for some equally funny equivalents, and that probably would already have made the dialogue a lot livelier.

This led to a fairly long exchange on possible translations and equivalents, as well as the conventions of translating obscenities. Especially the comparative strength of the words ‘fuck’ and ‘vittu’ inspired several comments, but no conclusive consensus was reached, apart from the fact that the words used by the translator were not strong enough. Another comment on a slightly obscene word concerned the term ‘tosser’ and its translation ‘pelle’. This, again, was felt to be too mild, and M even called this the film’s “low point” for her. Although this comment was made in a slightly joking manner, the fact that M said it shows what a central role such emotive words can play. This and some other comments on obscenities show the group members’ palpable disappointment in the translator’s choices. The translations of these words or phrases appeared to even have a general effect on the attitudes towards the entire translation, as they became indicators of poor stylistic choices which caused an overall slight sense of disappointment in some comments.

In general, the negative comments presented by this group could be best described to reflect disappointment. Whereas the other two groups expressed mostly confusion or misunderstanding, in this group the discussion on the problems was less personal: the problems did not necessarily cause confusion for the informants themselves, but these solutions were perceived as less than ideal on a more analytical level. This was probably due to the fact that all members of this group understood English very well and understood a great deal of the film’s intertextual and cultural references, and therefore did not need the assistance of the subtitles as much as most other informants.
Nevertheless, confusion was also evident in Group 2 on a few occasions. Two of these were the ‘lomanen’ case and the confusion between terms of address and the name ‘Jeremy’, which were mentioned above. The discussion on the mistranslation of ‘proposition’ also implied slight confusion caused by the incorrect Finnish term. These were the only times when any informant in Group 2 expressed trouble in understanding the subtitles. The rest of the commentary on problems was more academic in tone.

One theme which was brought up in all three groups was the role of the background music in the film. In Group 2 the discussion went further into the topic of translating song lyrics. K commented:

*Mä jopa niinku mietin sitä siinä vaiheessa, ku tuli se eka biisi, se Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word [myöntelyä], et niinku joissaisin leffoissa tai joissaisin ohjelmissa ne kääntäät, kääntäät kääntää ne biisien sanat, ja siin ois ollu melkein smmonen kohta [myöntelyä], et se liitty siihen aiheeseen, ja siin ei kukaan puhtuu niinku päälle. [myöntelyä] Mut sit ku niit rupes tulee niit biisejä enemmän, ni mä et no joo, et ehkä se on parempi, että, et niinku, et ei, et ne on aina ne sellaset biisin käännöiset pikkasen silleen kömpelöitä. [myöntelyä]*

*I even started thinking at that point, when the first song came on, Sorry Seems To Be The Hardest Word [agreement], that in some films or programmes they translate, the translators translate the song lyrics, and this would almost have been that kind of place [agreement], because it was connected with the topic, and nobody was talking over it. [agreement] But then when there were more songs, I thought that whatever, maybe it’s better that it’s not, that these song translations are always a little clumsy. [agreement]*

This comment did not generate significant discussion, but this one comment is interesting, particularly because it appeared to arouse agreement in the rest of the group. The comments again implied understanding for the translator’s solutions and did not reject the strategy chosen in the film, but discussed alternative solutions. It must be pointed out, however, that K was the group’s only language student, and this comment might therefore reveal that she is not familiar with the subtitling conventions as well as the translation students and is more receptive to alternative approaches. Those who have more experience in translation, however, are familiar with the convention that song lyrics are often not translated and therefore feel no need to comment.

Finally, it is interesting to note that even in this group of near-experts, the conversation on subtitles concentrated almost exclusively on their verbal aspect, and elements such as the subtitles’ connection to visual and auditive information as well
as the aspect of time went largely unnoticed. I did ask whether the informants felt that they had had enough time to read the subtitles, and they all said that they did not notice any problems, as they do not read subtitles very carefully. This exchange was quite brief, which probably indicates that there were no noticeable problems with reading times, but also that the informants did not pay much attention to this. Timecueing or strategies of dividing the text into subtitles did not come up in the discussion at all. The space constraints of subtitles were mentioned a few times and offered as a potential excuse for problematic translation choices. The discussion also included an exchange in which the informants compared cinema and television subtitles, commenting on the fact that cinema subtitles only have one line whereas television has two. Through this comparison the informants ended up jokingly discussing the possibility of adding translator’s commentary or footnotes to subtitles in order to explain intertextual references. All group members clearly understood this joke on the limitations of the audiovisual medium and added their own small comments. This exchange came across as a discussion among experts, where footnotes were a familiar, humorous theme. Thus, the exchange shows that the near-expert viewers were familiar with some basic limitations on the subtitler’s ability to add explanations, but even this understanding did not lead to significant conversation on the multimodal dimensions of audiovisual translations.

6.3.2.2 Reception strategies

The discussion in Group 2 focused considerably less on reception strategies than in the other two groups. This was perhaps due to the group’s near-expert identity, which means that the informants’ interests tended more towards discussing the translator’s side of the process than the viewer’s side. Thus, speculating on the translator’s strategies and alternative translations was prominent, whereas reception strategies did not inspire as much discussion. However, some interesting remarks were made on this theme, and they were very much in line with the discussions in the other groups’. This group also initiated discussion on whether the English source text or the Finnish subtitles were the primary source of information. Each group member stated that they listened first and only occasionally read subtitles, mostly when the English text was either too fast or could not be heard very well. The role
of the subtitles was seen as supportive, to be used only when necessary. It was
notable that none of the group members claimed not to read subtitles at all, but, on
the other hand, none of them named the subtitles as a major source of information.

M stated unequivocally that subtitles alone cannot be seen as a full representation
of the informational content of a programme. Thus, subtitles apparently do not
possess the ability to create the illusion of a complete text for her. She commented:

Jos esimerkiks joskus on sellasia tilanteita, että kotona kattoo telkkaa sillai, ettei
siin oo ääntä, ja siit tukeutut pelkkään siihen tekstitykseen [myöntelyä ja
myötätunnnon ilmakuksia: K: Se on ihan hirveätä.] sen jotenki tietää, et mää missaan
nyt seikyti prosentia kaikesta siitä, mitää sieltä tulee. [myöntelyä] Tuntuu tosi niinku
murheelliselta.

If, for example, you sometimes are in a situation where you watch TV at home with
the sound off, and you rely on just the subtitles [agreement and expressions of
sympathy: K: It’s really terrible.] then you just know that you’re missing seventy
percent of everything that’s going on. [agreement] It feels really pathetic.

The word ‘murheelliselta’ [‘pathetic’] is a dramatic choice, which puts the subtitles
in a very subservient role, describing them as an insufficient substitute for the
source text, something that can only express a fraction of the “true” content of a
film. It is, of course, true that many elements of speech, much less the entire
audiovisual text, cannot be conveyed in writing, and time and space constraints
force the subtitler to condense subtitles. However, as the purpose of subtitles is to
make a programme intelligible to those who do not understand the source language,
implying that subtitles only carry a minor part of the text’s meaning is a forceful
statement of mistrust. It is perhaps indicative of how common it is to understand the
source text at least partially, which may lead to an attitude that subtitles alone can
never be enough. However, this should not be taken as criticism for the quality of
subtitles; rather, it is a near-expert’s acknowledgement of their general constraints
as a form of expression.

Even though all group members named the English text as their primary source
of information, on some occasions they quoted the translation instead of or before
quoting it in English and described their process in a way that made it sound as if
the Finnish text was primary. For example, when discussing forms of address, J
said: “No kun maa aloin sitä kans kuunteleen, mut mun mielestä se sano, ihan kun maa
olisin kuullu, et se sano joku Jeremy.” [“Well I started listening to it too, but I think
he said, I almost think I heard him say something like Jeremy.”] Although this
statement does not make the reception process entirely clear, it is accompanied by a quotation of the subtitle in question and thus sounds as if J first read a clumsy term in the subtitle and then started listening to the original, and is more certain of what she read than what she heard. The phrasing “started listening” could, of course, simply mean that J started listening more attentively, but it could also be taken to mean that subtitles had been her primary source of information in that moment.

As with the other focus groups, this group also discussed the automatic nature of subtitle-reading and the necessity of going with the flow of the film’s pace. M observed that subtitles are an additional measure to help understanding in difficult spots, but that they are not read closely or carefully: “Niin mä en vaan niinku lue kaikke. Et on tosi vaikee se, se koko tapahtuma on niin salamannopee, kun sitä lukee sitä tekstillä sen vähän mitä sieltä tarvii.” [“Yeah, I just don’t read everything. I mean it’s really difficult to, the whole event happens at lightning speed, you just read the text, the little that you need.”] Interestingly, the same argument of not having enough time was used to support the opposite strategy in Group 1: here, some informants said that if the spoken text is too fast, they use subtitles, whereas in Group 1 some said that if they cannot read all of the subtitles, they have to listen more. Whatever the preference for primary source of information, time and speed are important determining factors for reception strategies and they affect understanding.

6.3.2.3 Quoting in English – Quoting in Finnish

As is evident from the discussion above, the informants even in this near-expert group did quote the subtitles quite a lot, and subtitles occasionally appeared in the position of original text in the comments. In a simple count of quoting instances, there are slightly more direct references in Finnish than in English, approximately 20 in Finnish and approximately 15 in English.\(^{56}\) One example of a statement where

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\(^{56}\) “Direct reference” means an instance where the context shows that the informant is quoting the film rather than discussing the words of the film or translation indirectly. In the case of the subtitles, this therefore refers to instances of quoting the Finnish translation as true words of the film. In addition, in several cases the informants quoted the subtitles while talking about the translation itself. These, too, are important, because they show what the viewers remember of the subtitles, but they do
the subtitle rises to the position of actual speech comes from L: “Ja mutenkin niinku koko elokuvan ajan, aina jos Bridget sano jotain, että tyylään just että ’minä olen saanut onnellisen loppuni’ niin ties heti, että kohta niinku tapahtuu jotain.” [“And in general throughout the entire film, every time Bridget said something like ‘I have finally found my happy ending’ you knew immediately that something was about to happen soon.”] Here, according to L, Bridget “says” something in Finnish, which implies acceptance of the subtitles. Interestingly, there was also one such quotation from the Finnish translation of the previous film Bridget Jones’s Diary. In a discussion of that film’s events, L quoted the following line: “Japanilainen. Julma rotu.” [“Japanese. A cruel race.”] Thus, it is possible to remember the words from subtitles even for long periods of time.

Because the informants in this group spoke and understood English very well, they, of course, quoted the English original comfortably. This shows that English is also remembered fairly well, and that on some occasions quoting English might feel more natural or appropriate than quoting Finnish, or the English original is for some reason easier to remember. Again, on some occasions English is quoted out of necessity, when making a point about the original in comparison to the subtitles, but in many cases either the Finnish or English could have been quoted, and the choice was English. Fairly often the references to English consisted of only one or two words, which seemed to be memorable “key words” from the film. One example of such key words is M:s statement: “Ooh, but what I really identified with was the part about the ‘wobbly bits’. It was really wonderful.” The line about ‘wobbly bits’ had been in the film’s trailer, and it was clearly intended to be “quotable”. Thus, it was memorable to M in English rather than Finnish. It is also interesting that the informants occasionally used English phrases even when they were not quoting the film. This demonstrates the strength of the group’s general English skills, but also their familiarity with commonly used
English film phrases. One such instance was after M remarked that secretaries usually take calls for their bosses. L replied by using the English phrase “on line one” as part of a sentence in Finnish: “Ja sihteeri soittais, että ‘Bridget Jones on line one.’” [“And then the secretary would call, ‘Bridget Jones on line one.’”]

While this does not have anything to do with the words of this film, it suggests a tendency to refer to well-known film phrases in English. This, in my opinion, makes it all the more remarkable that there are many references to the Finnish subtitles, as this shows that the informants are able to remember and quote English, but still often choose to quote Finnish, and English seems to be reserved for key words or catchphrases.

In addition to quoting either the Finnish or English words of the film, on several occasions the informants used Finnish and English simultaneously, comfortably mixing the source text and translation in their comments. This also shows how natural subtitles can be as a part of the audiovisual entity. Viewers who are fluent in English can quote the original, but even when they do, they sometimes move back and forth between English and Finnish, possibly quoting whichever comes to mind first, or whichever at that specific instance seems the most relevant. An excellent example of this comes from the discussion on the translation ‘Möven ja Pick’. This translation was criticised, and, accordingly, in the comment leading up to the criticism, K quoted the subtitles in Finnish but then switched to English and left out the poor translation: “Ja sit tää, missä oli, et ku se elämässä sen eron jälkeen ‘elämässäni kaksi miestä, Ben and Jerry’.” [“And then there was this, where it said that in her life, after the break-up, ‘I have two men in my life, Ben and Jerry.’”]

In contrast to Group 1, the informant here quotes the entire name of the ice cream in English, including the word ‘and’, which in Group 1 was consistently quoted in Finnish. This perhaps means a slightly more comfortable use of English, but it still did not lead to the informant quoting the entire passage in English, and the only English element was that which was considered unacceptable in the Finnish version.

Poor translation quality was not, however, the only reason behind this mixed quoting. In the following instance, the mixing of languages appears to be the result of a discussion on style and register. In this exchange, the group is discussing Daniel Cleaver’s character and his frequent linguistic jokes. L approvingly quotes an example where Daniel makes a disparaging comment on Mark Darcy’s sexual habits and stiff personality by attributing an amusingly formal quote to him: “Ja sitten...
'Sanooko hän yhä että mitä se nyt oli 'excuse me, but I have to come'. Se oli kyllä 'I think I have to come';’” [“And then... ‘Does he still say’ what was it ‘excuse me, but I have to come’. No, it was ‘I think I have to come’.”] In L’s comment, Daniel’s phrase is in Finnish, but the humorous feigned quote from Mark is in English. One could surmise that L remembered the English phrase better than the translation because the humour in the phrase was created by language-specific stylistic aspects and because linguistic humour was the topic of this exchange. In addition, this could be one case where the informants felt that the register of the translation did not capture the humour, and that made L prefer the source text, even though she started the quote with the words of the subtitles. This resembles the “performative” function of quoting English detected in Group 1, as here, too, the role of quoting in English is to imitate the film to a joking effect. Even though some shortcomings in the translation might have influenced the language change, the main reason for presenting part of the quote in English is rather highlighting the English register than emphasising a problem in the subtitles.

In all, the patterns of quoting in Group 2 show that even the near-expert group is prone to accept the authority of the subtitles. However, these informants also quoted the English source text repeatedly and comfortably and, whenever suitable, switched between the two languages in the middle of a quotation or a paraphrase. The group members’ strong English skills were evident in the way quotations were used, but this did not make their quoting patterns significantly different from the other groups. Subtitles were still a significant, and trusted, source of information.

6.3.3 Individual Viewer Profiles: J – M

6.3.3.1 J: Near-average viewer

J is a 24-year-old student of English translation. Of the informants in Group 2, her role in the discussion was the most passive, but she did make numerous comments and address all significant discussion topics. Her comments were often concise responses to others and expressions of agreement, but she also made substantial comments of her own and even several unprompted remarks. At the beginning of the discussion, she was the first to answer my question concerning general opinions
on the film, and she thus took the significant role of opening the discussion, perhaps even setting its initial tone. In a group whose members were slightly less familiar to each other than the members of the other two groups, this initiative is important in encouraging discussion and determining its direction.

Many of the expressions of confusion in Group 2 were made by J. Although the sense of confusion was less common and usually milder than similar expressions in the other groups, it was noticeable. For example, on the topic of the mistranslation of the word ‘proposition’, J said: “Mä en kuullu sitä, mitä se sano englanniks. Mä vaan luin että mitä hä? Kosikse muka?” [I didn’t hear, what he said in English. I just read that what what? Did he propose?”] As this example illustrates, some confusion is apparent, and J seems to have been momentarily unable to maintain her normal reception strategy of listening to the source text. This expression of confusion is exceptionally strong for J, and the few other similar comments by her were only remarks on how she was not certain of what she heard or that she did not interpret a scene in a certain, intended way.

J expressed some of the group’s most accepting opinions on subtitles but also made critical comments. Her overall expressed view of the subtitles was positive, even though she did not praise any specific solutions and simply said that the subtitles were generally good. J’s most notable expression of acceptance was the fact that she accepted the word ‘lomanen’ as an established Finnish word. She was the only informant in all three groups to express this opinion. However, in contrast with this exceptional sense of acceptance, J made critical remarks on some other elements in the translation, such as stating that the translation ‘Möven ja Pick’ “ei toiminu suomeks” [“did not work in Finnish”]. She was particularly interested in the translations of slang and swearwords and participated in this discussion actively, criticising the translator’s choices and speculating on alternative translations and on the strength of Finnish and English expressions.

The discussion also demonstrated J’s good understanding of many practicalities of translation, including the time and space constraints of subtitles, as well as differences between spoken and written language. She also participated in the group’s joking exchange on using translator’s notes in subtitles. This positions her as a near-expert who is capable of discussing translations from a professional perspective. Her professional perspective was also evident in the fact that she did not discuss her reception strategies extensively. She mentioned on one occasion that
subtitles are more of a support to her than an active source of information, and made vague references to the order in which she processed the two languages. One of these was the instance quoted above, where J expressed slight confusion about terms of address and described the situation by stating that she “started listening”, implying that she had not listened to the source text closely the whole time. Another similar remark was her statement of not hearing the word ‘proposition’. These suggest that she paid significant attention to the subtitles, and the view is reinforced by the fact that she quoted both English and Finnish very comfortably, even reminding others of exact phrases in both languages when they were unable to recall them. J also used the mixed quotation of referring to “Ben and Jerry” after quoting the beginning of the line in Finnish. In the questionnaire, she stated that she chiefly concentrates on the source text but seeks support in the subtitles. Thus, despite her professional discussion style, her reception strategy seems to have been fairly close to the norm of the other two groups, as she absorbed significant amounts of information from both Finnish and English.

In conclusion, J’s profile falls somewhere between a regular viewer and an expert. She is knowledgeable about translation and interested in language and culture. On the other hand, her reception strategies resembled non-expert viewers’ strategies, and she was often willing to accept the subtitles’ authority. On a few occasions, she demonstrated a sense of confusion similar to that seen in the non-expert groups. In this sense, she presented herself as slightly closer to the non-expert position than others in Group 2, and could perhaps be described as a “near-average viewer”: a near-expert whose reactions and attitudes resemble ordinary viewers but whose knowledge on the topic is more profound.

6.3.3.2 K: Almost-insider and literary expert

K is 23 years old and the only member of Group 2 who is not a student of translation. She studies English at a university, and thus her area of expertise is close to that of the translation students, and her English skills are as high as other group members’ skills. Her role in the discussion was fairly active, and she often initiated discussions or was the first to reply to a question. She was particularly active in bringing up matters related to translation. Perhaps this was an attempt on
her part to fit into the group by making clear that she was also able to notice various aspects of the subtitles. K also made overt attempts to emphasise her similarities to the others, perhaps as justification for belonging in the group. She, for example, described the group as “me ammattilaiset” [“we professionals”], thus separating them from other viewer groups and associating herself with the translation students. Others in the group accepted these expressions without protest, and K seemed to fit into the group well as another near-expert with a slightly differing background. She did not stand out as having significantly different opinions from the others. Her different background was, however, evident numerous times when she mentioned her studies, and in the discussions on subtitles it was occasionally subtly noticeable that she did not know as much about the practices of translation as the others. Her lack of expertise came across, for example, after she mentioned that obscene expressions were translated rather mildly.\footnote{See section 6.3.2.1 for a more detailed discussion of this remark by K.} While others agreed with this, M questioned this view cautiously, asking “Vai onks se sit vaa joku suomalainen konventio?” [“Or is it just some Finnish convention?”] This remark implied that K was perhaps less able to base her views on subtitling conventions than the others. However, as the other group members did not possess much insider knowledge on the particulars of subtitling, her comments did not stand out significantly.

K’s opinions on the translation were similar to the others’ views, and often more critical than views expressed in the other groups. K was the first in the group to mention the subtitles by spontaneously bringing up the above criticism on the translations of obscenities. K also made another unprompted critical observation by noticing the mistranslation of ‘proposition’. Furthermore, K discussed some macro-level strategies and expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of nuances in the style and register of the translation. K also participated in translation-related exchanges which were initiated by other group members. For example, she agreed with the majority of the group that ‘lomanen’ is not a familiar Finnish word and suggested an alternative translation for ‘mini-break’, which received positive feedback from the group. On the other hand, K also expressed positive and accepting attitudes, such as in the exchange on the translation ‘Möven ja Pick’. Although this solution was initially criticised, K made the following positive statement: “Se oli sille ehkä hyvä valinta. Ei suomes taida olla oikein niin hirveesti semmosia siihen sopivia nimää.”
[“Maybe it was kind of a good choice. I don’t think there are lots of Finnish names that would be suitable there.”] This shows both sympathy for the translator’s challenges and acceptance of the choice. Furthermore, K’s overall assessment of the subtitles was positive, stating that they were not missing much of the source text’s contents. She also compared the Finnish subtitles to the Swedish ones and remarked that the Finnish subtitles were better in her opinion. This comparison shows that K’s overall statement on the Finnish subtitles was based on substantive assessments rather than simply some vague, polite remark.

K described her reception strategies in a way that was typical for the near-expert group, emphasising the source text by stating that she concentrated on listening but occasionally sought support from subtitles. The same strategy was reflected in her answer in the questionnaire, although she gave the subtitles a fairly notable role by stating that she concentrates on the source text for approximately 60–70% of the time, thus leaving 30–40% for the subtitles. These assessments were supported by her statements on the translation and the source text. It was clear that she had followed both to some extent, but she quoted quite often from the source text, showing that it played a significant role for her and that she was able to recall it. She did also quote from the subtitles on several occasions, which demonstrated that she had paid attention to the translation as well. Thus, her reception strategy seemed to be a balance of both texts, with some emphasis on English.

One of the main elements in K’s viewer profile is her position as a slight outsider in the near-expert group. She was able to discuss the film and its subtitles knowledgeably, but occasionally stood out as having a slightly different point of view from the rest of the group. However, her attitudes and strategies were ultimately very similar to the group’s other informants. She criticised the translation and suggested alternative solutions and strategies, but was generally satisfied with the translation and accepted it as a legitimate source of information. She was able to weave her background in philology into the discussion and bring up related points, such as the Shakespearean time perspective, which were outside the other group members’ scope of knowledge. K also demonstrated a good knowledge of Pride and Prejudice, and she was the only informant in any group to recognise the Mrs Dalloway allusion. These factors contribute to a profile of someone who is knowledgeable in English literature and able to apply this knowledge in her interpretations. In fact, K’s knowledge of literature was one factor which made her
stand out slightly in the discussion, as the other informants made note of K’s superior knowledge of literature.

6.3.3.3  L: Comic relief, quoter and style expert

L is a 26-year-old translation student. Her role in the focus group discussion was not as active as K’s, but she participated in the discussion quite extensively and expressed her views on numerous topics, even though she did not participate in all exchanges. Her role in much of the discussion was humorous: she made jokes which were occasionally slightly off topic, and she elicited laughter from the other group members, thus encouraging a positive, relaxed atmosphere. Some of L’s jokes were self-deprecating, such as two references to her lack of skiing skills and a reference to her questionable taste in music. Such remarks were significant in creating cohesion in the group, as she shared something personal with the other informants and encouraged others to share their personal experiences. These comments did not draw many responses, but they did make the others laugh and thus served their purpose. On the other hand, L occasionally also steered the discussion back on topic by ending an off-topic exchange and explicitly saying that it was time to get back to the point. Sometimes these comments echoed M’s similar statement, and L followed these up by initiating a substantive discussion on some relevant theme. Thus, she adopted the role of maintaining a positive and productive atmosphere.

L made a number of extensive comments on her interpretations of the film, which showed her interest in and knowledge of Bridget Jones. She had read the first Bridget Jones novel and seen the first film several times and was able to remember and quote specifics from these previous texts. She also commented on the linguistic aspects of the film, such as analysing the style and register of various characters’ speech. This analysis was the basis for most of her comments on the translation. For example, she commented on the use of swearwords as expressive of a character’s personality, implying a critical view of the subtitles where swearwords had been reduced and made milder. However, she also expressed understanding for the translator by stating that “se olis ollu aika vaikee laittaa sinne” [“it would have been pretty difficult to put it there”], meaning that this speech pattern would have been difficult to replicate in the subtitle format. In addition, she made a positive
comment on the translation “ei pöllömpää” [“pretty good”] and its ability to convey the original’s style. L also initiated the long exchange on terms of address and their translations, which she considered clumsy and unidiomatic. Furthermore, L initiated, without prompting, the discussion on the word ‘lomanen’. She did not participate in it beyond the initial comment, but her critical attitude towards the translation became clear.

L did not talk about her reception strategies, but in the questionnaire she stated: “Luen yleensä tekstitkin mutta puhe tärkeämpää.” [“I usually read the subtitles, too, but speech is more important.”] The formulation of the comment implies that she reads subtitles thoroughly, even though she values the source text more as a source of information. This approach is confirmed by the fact that, during the discussion, she quoted extensively in both English and Finnish, thus showing that she had paid attention to both. She was a particularly active quoter, often informing others of what the lines in either the source text or the subtitles were and incorporating the words into her humorous remarks. She even quoted verbatim one line from the translation of the previous Bridget Jones film and the novel Bridget Jones’s Diary: “Japanilainen. Julma rotu.” [“Japanese. Cruel race.”] In her use of quotations, she did not imply any hierarchical relationship between the translation and the source text. She quoted the Finnish text as the true words of the film in the same way she quoted the English original. L made exceptional use of many long English quotations, but on the other hand she also used many long quotations from the translation. One demonstration of the significant role of English for L was the fact that she also used several English phrases which were not in the film, such as saying of Mrs Dalloway that “she was a naughty, naughty girl”. Thus, it seems that for her, the balance favoured English, but Finnish played a significant, trusted role.

L presented many opinions on the film and its subtitles and engaged in many parts of the conversation. She discussed the subtitles and expressed critical opinions on them but did not reject the subtitles as a whole. Instead, her criticism was academic in nature and contributed to the tone of the entire discussion. However, her most noticeable role in the discussion was as the informant who entertained others, made them laugh and inserted suitable quotations from this film and other sources into the discussion.
6.3.3.4  M: Agree-er, facilitator, pseudo-moderator

M is a 28-year-old student of English translation. Her contribution to this focus group discussion was considerable: she was an exceptionally active commenter in both maintaining the discussion and making substantive remarks, and many of her comments were extensive and detailed. Her contribution to maintaining the discussion consisted of small talk, such as expressing agreement, repeating other informants’ points in different words and elaborating on previous statements. She also invited participation from others by, for example, asking questions in a manner that almost sounded like she was acting as a moderator and taking charge of keeping the group talking. In addition to this important role as a facilitator for the discussion, M’s personal comments were significant and extensive.

M’s comments on the film were analytical, not only expressing what she found positive or negative but commenting on the narrative structure, genre and style. Her comments on the translation largely followed others’ opinions. M did not initiate exchanges on the translation, but she did participate in all of them. She expressed her agreement with the criticisms of the word ‘lomanen’ and the mistranslation of ‘proposition’. She also agreed with K that the swearword translations were too mild, although she speculated on the possibility of this strategy being a Finnish convention. Later in the discussion, she brought up swearwords and insults again and made an extensive comment on how more colloquial Finnish equivalents could have improved the translation. In the case of ‘Möven ja Pick’ she expressed reserved understanding, stating: “Mövenpick. Niin parempi sekin ku ei...” [“Mövenpick. Yeah, even that’s better than noth...”] The comment is unfinished, but it appears to be intended as cautious acceptance of the translator’s choice. She also made a joking suggestion of an alternative translation “Valio ja Ingman”, which is the same suggestion as was made in Group 1. Although this was not made in a serious way in either group, simply making the suggestion exposed some doubt of the original solution. Finally, M remembered the Sex and the City reference and its translation without prompting, and, when asked for an opinion on the translation, she voiced acceptance of the translator’s choice, saying that the translator was lucky that Finnish viewers would know the show.

M’s overall opinions on the translation were slightly conflicted. On the one hand, she made the general comment that the translation was fluent and nothing negative
stood out, but, on the other hand, she had complaints on some matters of style. She mentioned that there were some clumsy parts in the translation and that the register of the translation did not match the source text. In all, M’s comments on the translation were specific and knowledgeable. Furthermore, her comments demonstrated understanding for the translator and the specifics of subtitling. Thus, despite the criticism and a sense of disappointment, she also clearly thought that compromises cannot be avoided and the optimal translation cannot always be achieved for practical reasons, mentioning the “tosielämän resurssit” [“the resources in the real-life situation”] which constrain a translator’s work. This understanding softened her criticism.

M made two explicit comments on her viewing strategies and emphasised in both a preference for receiving information largely from the source text and reluctance to rely on subtitles. She stated that she reads subtitles only when she has not been able to hear everything from the source text but admitted that the process is so quick that it is difficult to analyse it consciously. She made the dramatic comment of finding it “pathetic” when she occasionally has to rely on subtitles only. In the questionnaire, M was also fairly forceful, stating that she reads subtitles only as a source of support if she cannot hear the sound well, or out of interest when she wants to see how something has been translated. The forcefulness of her written statement comes across in particular given the fact that M had underlined the word “vain” [“only”] in her description of the role that subtitles play in her viewing experience. These statements do not reflect acceptance of the subtitles as a reliable source of information. However, M quoted both the subtitles and the source text throughout the discussion, which showed that she had read the translation fairly attentively and relied on it to some extent. On a few occasions, she quoted the translation as the characters’ authentic words. On the other hand, she also quoted the English text frequently and accurately. For example, she referred to the phrase “wobbly bits” twice and explained its importance as a point where she identified with the film’s protagonist. Thus, it was the English phrase that she recalled when discussing words that carried emotional meaning for her. It is impossible to observe a clear pattern in her quoting, but her statement of preferring the source text is supported by her manner of quoting.

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58 See section 6.3.2.2 for a more detailed discussion on M’s remarks on her reception strategies.
In conclusion, M’s role in the discussion was dominant, both as a facilitator and as an analytical commenter. She participated in all the exchanges on the significant points of the film and the translation, and encouraged others to voice their opinions. She kept the discussion going and on occasion acted almost as a moderator, posing questions and requesting clarifications. She expressed critical views towards the translation and voiced her strong preference for the original text, but also sympathised with the translator’s challenges and difficult compromises to be made in subtitling. In fact, many of her criticisms sounded more academic than explicitly negative, even though her preference for the original text was clear.

6.3.4 Concluding Group Profile: Collegial Analysts

The conversation in Group 2 was lively and consisted of statements that tended to be longer and more analytical than in the other groups. Thus, the informants’ near-expert status was clearly evident. However, there were also plenty of moments of levity, joking and acting social rather than academic. These moments served the function of building common ground between informants, and creating a comfortable situation for the discussion. Interaction between informants and with me as the moderator was quite relaxed, and the interactive element was significant. Even though there were many long, monologue-like comments, these were tied together with communicative, interactive utterances. One could also observe that a great deal of interaction was based on initial agreement and common ground instead of working through differing opinions, as was the case in Group 1. Even though the discussion in Group 1 was not confrontational and contained much agreement, there were many moments when the group members expressed explicitly differing opinions. In Group 2, on the other hand, the discussion proceeded on a more analytical note, where differences in opinion were not as pronounced. In addition, Group 2 was particularly forthcoming in contributing substantive unprompted comments, perhaps due to their familiarity with translation, language and culture. This familiarity allowed the informants to initiate exchanges without explicit prompting.

As this group was more active in discussing translations than the other two, it became clear that all group members had coherently formulated opinions on various
translation strategies and solutions. This also meant that it would be impossible to categorise any of them as either resistant or accepting of the translation, as all of them discussed varying points of view in an analytical manner rather than settling for a single impression of the translation. Much of the translation-related discussion in this group was quite critical, as alternative strategies were suggested and problems with the translation verbalised. However, the criticism was academic in nature, more reminiscent of discussions in a translation class than outright rejection of the translation. The conversation was also characterised by the informants’ preference to discuss translation strategies rather than their reception strategies, thus reinforcing the near-expert nature of the group and distancing it from ordinary viewers. On the few occasions when reception strategies were brought up, various combinations of listening to the source text and reading subtitles were mentioned. None of the informants claimed only to listen to the source text, even though their English skills would have allowed that strategy. It is impossible to know for certain whether this reflects their genuine reception strategies or is a result of the focus group situation, where it might have felt more acceptable to mention reading the subtitles. However, the fact that both the source text and subtitles were quoted repeatedly would reinforce this perception of the informants’ strategies: both Finnish and English are present in the reception experience.

As the discussion style in Group 2 was academic, it was a familiar situation for both the group and myself. Perhaps for this reason, the informants sometimes drew me into their conversation. As most group members were students of translation in the same department where this study was being conducted, they were somewhat aware of the project and made some references to that, even though they did not know the details of the study. Still, the fact that they had some previous knowledge of the study and knew me as a teacher and researcher may have had some effect on the situation. Some preconceived assumptions could be detected, but this was not disruptive, as the group members became immersed in their discussion. I will return to the question of potential moderator influence in Chapter 7.

The profile of Group 2 relies heavily on the group’s academic background in languages, cultures and translation. The discussion was agreeable and academic, and analytically critical of the translation and the audiovisual text. Problematic translations caused disappointment rather than confusion, and the translation’s position of authority, while in existence, was occasionally questioned. The group
made its near-expert status clearly known, but also demonstrated that near-experts are viewers, too. The group raised many of the same questions as the non-expert groups and expressed similar opinions and strategies, but also went beyond the other groups in the width and depth of discussions on translation. The conversation was largely conducted from experts’ point of view, by maintaining something of a professional distance from the text and the interpretations, and by concentrating on translation strategies rather than reception strategies. The questions connected to near-expert status warrant an even closer look, and I will therefore discuss the differences between Group 2 and the other groups in more detail in section 7.3.

6.4 Group 3

6.4.1 Preliminary Group Profile: All-Female Group of Close Friends

The very first impression of Group 3 that comes to mind in retrospect is that this was the loudest of all the groups, laughed the most and was the most talkative. This combination produced a fascinating discussion – albeit a challenge for transcription, and very difficult to quote due to lengthy, convoluted exchanges and much overlapping speech – with a wealth of material which, in many instances, was quite different from what was observed in the other two groups. This was an interesting contrast, and the similarities and differences tell their own story of how viewers’ reactions can or cannot be predicted, how interpretations can be very individual, and how a group’s social dynamics can steer the discussion and influence its outcomes. Because there were significant differences between the groups, the similarities that can be detected between all three groups, or the two non-expert groups, are all the more significant in terms of finding general patterns in the reception processes.

Group 3 consists of six members, all female. They are close friends and know each other very well, and this perhaps explains the relaxed atmosphere and lively conversation. The group quite easily steered the discussion into areas related to their personal interests or inside jokes among the group. This means that the discussion occasionally started veering off topic, but as it always stayed on the general theme of the Bridget Jones films or films in general, this did not present a problem. The
topics Group 3 discussed were, however, slightly different from the topics brought up in the other groups. They, for example, paid a great deal of attention to certain material or productional aspects of the film, discussing things such as product placement and car or ski brands.

The members of this group were slightly older than the other two groups, with ages ranging from 26 to 30. Although slightly older than the others, they still fit easily within a chick flick’s target audience. They also represent a larger variety of educational and professional backgrounds, but are all quite highly educated. None of the members has a background in languages or translation and are thus not experts in this field. This group was also the least familiar with me in advance. Most group members had not met me, and their preconceived ideas of the study were minimal. Only one group member had met me previously. The group was, however, invited to the study by a friend of theirs who knew me, and thus the risk of an uncomfortable or reserved atmosphere was not as high as with complete strangers.

As the group consisted of close friends, the informants had very much in common and shared many opinions and experiences. However, there were also clear differences and signs of disagreement in the conversation, and these differing viewpoints were expressed openly. The group’s mutual familiarity perhaps facilitated the expression of differing opinions without fear of losing face, and many of the informants’ personal differences were known to the group in advance and did not require explanation. One significant factor in leading to differing responses was the fact that the group members’ English skills varied widely. In Group 1 and, for obvious reasons, Group 2, such differences were not evident, whereas here the informants’ language skills became a recurring theme in conversation, and differences in reception strategies were at least partly due to differing linguistic abilities. These differences, as well as the group’s many similarities and general group cohesion made for a very colourful discussion.
6.4.2 Comprehensive Group Profile

6.4.2.1 Explicit comments on subtitles

While the discussion in Group 3 was lively, the group did not start discussing the subtitles voluntarily, as happened in both Group 1 and Group 2. However, when asked about subtitles, the group did discuss them at some length, and the informants made a number of relevant comments without specific prompting. Comments in Group 3 again showed the significance of subtitles for Finnish viewers, but also demonstrated how difficult it is to consciously articulate the role of subtitles in the viewing experience. As with the other two groups, general comments on the quality of the subtitles were quite positive, and no significant overall problems were mentioned. When asked whether there were errors in the subtitles, none of the informants mentioned noticing anything. The general impression was that the subtitles served their purpose, but the group members did not pay very close attention to them, because the most natural way of watching a subtitled film is to concentrate on the overall multimodal text instead of reading subtitles closely.

The first subtitle-related conversation topic concerned the wordplay in the scene where Bridget cleans up her language by changing the word ‘Mum’ to ‘Mother’ instead of eliminating an obscene expression. The informants’ comments showed some confusion caused by the slightly clumsy translation. This instance was also brought up in the other groups as an example of clumsiness in the subtitles. In this group, the conversation started with this comment by O:

[M]ä sen oisin halunnu huomata, miten se kun Bridget tuli sieltä vankilasta, ja ne oli siinä, sen äiti käski käyttämään parempaa kieltä, ja sen jälkeen se vaihto sen, ei vaihtanu sanaa 'paska' vaa vaihto sanan 'äiti'. [myöntelyä] Ni mää sitä en näny, miten se oli käännetty alun perin suomeksi. [myöntelyä] Mää vaa tajusin, huomasin katsoo sen vasta sitte siinä vaiheessa, ku se [taustalta: N: Ku se vaihto vaa sit sen 'äiti'-sanan] ku se niinku tuli. [myöntelyä]

I would have liked to notice the part where Bridget came from the prison and they were there, her mother told her to use nicer language, and then she changed, she didn’t change the word ‘paska’ [shit] but the word ‘äiti’ [mother]. [agreement] I didn’t see how it was originally translated into Finnish. [agreement] I only thought of checking out the word when she [in the background: N: When she only changed the word ‘äiti’] when that part came. [agreement]
Instead of outright confusion or criticism, O’s comment expresses interest in the translator’s solution, which she claims she did not notice in its entirety, even though she correctly quotes the word ‘paska’ from the subtitle rather than using the obscene phrase of the source text. However, as the exchange continued, it became clear that the translation had not communicated the joke successfully. Several informants communicated that they did not understand the joke. The discussion suggests that those who concentrated primarily on reading the subtitles did not understand the joke, while those whose primary source of information was the spoken text easily understood it. O is a good example of this: she stated that she primarily listened to the English source text and consequently discussed the scene comfortably, implying that she had understood the joke, but she was suspicious of the translation, commenting that “mä en tajunnu, mitä siin oli hauskaa suomeks” [“I didn’t understand what was funny about it in Finnish”]. On the other hand, P, for example, said that she did not understand the joke because she did not listen to the source text.

Those who had understood the joke pointed out that most viewers in the cinema had seemed to miss the joke, and this collective lack of response detracted some of the amusing effect of the scene. As Q comments: “Mut se huono puoli siinä oli kyllä väillä niinkun esimerkiks tää kohtaus, niin mua nauratti se kyllä ihan niinku suunnattomasti, mut koko katsomo istuu hiirenhiljaa, ni ei siel voi vetää semmosta ‘hi, hi’.” [“But one bad side to this was that sometimes, with this scene for example, I found it extremely funny, but the whole audience sat in complete silence, so I couldn’t be all ‘tee, hee, hee’.”] Thus, especially in the cinema, a clumsy translation can cause disappointment even in those who barely read subtitles due to the social nature of reception. Furthermore, as pointed out by O, a poor translation can be confusing even if the joke is understood, if the viewer starts paying too much attention to the subtitle and trying to find out what the text is trying to express. This is another example of how the viewer wants to go with the flow instead of being drawn out of the audiovisual experience by a distracting translation.

Another aspect of the subtitles mentioned in a critical light were terms of address. This topic was also discussed in Group 2, but there the discussion was much more specific and covered several different terms and contexts, whereas in this group the comments only referred to differences between using a person’s name and using a third-person pronoun. Some criticism was directed at the translator’s possible over-
explicitation by changing a pronoun to a name. This discussion started with the following exchange between O and R, eventually joined by N:

O: Now that you mention it, I remember the part where they broke up. It said in the Finnish translation, when it said that Bridget said to him that you are about to find a woman, and then she used the word ‘she’ and it was translated as ‘Rebecca’, with the woman’s name right away.
R: [interrupts] That’s right, it was.
O: That was something that caught my attention. [agreement]
R: I noticed that part, too. But maybe it was better this way in Finnish, then.
O: It just felt funny somehow, because she didn’t really specify anyone there, what wo-, that ‘you may have already found her’. [agreement] But when it mentioned her directly by name [agreement], the Finnish basically already said that you found ‘the right’ woman.
R: True. [agreement] [quiet moment]
N: And was it necessary? Could it have said that ‘you may have found a new woman’, because then... [agreement]
R: Yeah, so that it wouldn’t have to be ‘hän’ [he/she].
N: Yeah, because the ‘hän’ is often confusing.

The group members express repeated agreement, feeling that the translator is revealing a plot twist prematurely. However, the discussion revolves chiefly around attempting to find an explanation for why the translator made this choice. One reason mentioned here is the fact that Finnish only has one, gender-neutral third-person singular pronoun. The group does offer an alternative solution, i.e. saying “woman” instead of using the proper name, but R also expresses trust for the translator’s solution. However, this comment is not met with vocal agreement from the rest of the group. Thus, the group’s response is somewhat critical rather than
entirely accepting, even though an outright rejection of the translator’s choice is not evident. The criticism is accompanied with a sense of acceptance and interest in the translator’s choices.

One further topic mentioned by Group 3 without prompting were omissions in the subtitles and the possibility of some parts of the source text having been left untranslated. Although omissions were referred to in the other two groups as well, neither of them spent as much time discussing this topic. The discussion started when Q asked the others whether they noticed that anything had been left out of the translation. She mentioned that her boyfriend likes to pay attention to omissions and even “hunts for” missing words: “Se kuuntelee ja lukee yhtä aikaa, ja se vähän välillä sanoo, että 'taaskaan ei käännetty pitää, ja taas jää jotain kääntämättä’.” [‘He listens and reads at the same time and says all the time that ‘they left it out again, and the translation missed something again’.”] Others agreed that this is common in subtitles, but no one could mention examples of omissions in this film. This exchange reinforces the perception that the group members used the subtitles as a support mechanism for understanding the film quite successfully but did not concentrate on them closely enough to notice details such as omissions. Of course, this can also mean that the translator was successful in condensing the text and managed to fit all relevant information into the subtitles. Based on the discussion in Group 3, these subtitles managed to achieve the illusion of a complete text. This is a clear indication of the viewers’ accepting attitude: on a general level, there is agreement that important parts of a source text can often be missing from subtitles, but when talking about this film and its subtitles, no such examples come to mind. Perhaps this is a signal of a more general tendency of viewers to use subtitles automatically and successfully without finding anything seriously wrong with them, but criticising subtitles in general more freely when the topic is not restricted to a specific set of subtitles. However, this exchange also indicated that omissions can be a significant factor in the viewers’ evaluations of subtitle quality, as this appears to be a question which viewers discuss and notice even outside the research setting. In addition, it serves as a reminder that subtitles are indeed noticed and discussed, often in a critical light, by ordinary viewers.

One part of the subtitles which caused confusion amongst the group members was discussed only after prompting. This was the mistranslation of the word ‘proposition’, and it was discussed in the following exchange:
Moderaattori: [J]äikö mitään sen tyypist mieleen, että, et siel olis ollu jotain virheitä tai tai mitä olis sanottu eri taval siel tekstityksessä kun sit siin puheessa, joka olis kiinnittäny huomiio?
O: Mä yritin kattoo, mutta mä en kauheesti löytäny ainakaa.
S: En määkän löytäny.
O: Koska mä ihan tarkotuksella niitä yritin sieltä hakee, mutta [myöntelyä] ei tullu siltään.

Moderaattori: Mä tarkotuksella etsin. Mul on yksi esimerkki, jonka mä haluan nyt teille esittää ja kysyä, että muistatteko sen. Siin ihan lopussa, kun, kun Bridget ja Mark tuli sinne ulos sieltä, ku Bridget oli tölyvänny sinne mis niit ministerejä [myöntelyä] ja sit ne meni ulos selvittää välejää, ja sit Mark sano Bridgetille, mitenkäs se nyt menikää, että, että ”toi nyt ei ollu kovin romanttinen kosinta”.

Tuntuks se [myöntelyä] teist jotenkin... [hetki hiljaisia]
R: Mää kiinnitin siihen huomiota, mut mä en muista minkä takii [naurua].

Moderaattori: Se oli...
O: Nyt mä en muista, mitä se sano sitten englanniksi.

Moderaattori: Se sano englanniks 'proposition', et se ei ollu kovin romanttinen 'proposition'.
O: Okei. Joo siis se oli outo.

P: Niin no voi se olla, ku mä sitä täs vähän aikaa ajattelin ni eihän se sitä kosinu vaan se oli [päälekkäinpuhuntaa, äänestä myöntelyä]
R: Nii tota vähän mä ajattelkin joo.
P: Mulla oli se mielessä että niinku että no joo, no voihan tota tietysti nyt kosintanaki pitää, mutta eihän se nyt orkeestaan... [päälekkäispuhuntaa]
R: No aivan samaa mieltä. Ihana samaa.
N: Asiyhteydestä toisaalta vähä vois ajattela. [...]
Q: Koska eihän se niinku kosinu vaan se heitti vaan, että ”kuhan ny et sano...

Moderator: [D]o you remember anything like mistakes or anything that would have been put differently in the subtitles from what was in the speech, something that caught your attention?
O: I tried to look for that, but I didn’t find much.
S: I didn’t either.
O: Because I tried to look for them on purpose, but [agreement] I didn’t notice anything.

Moderator: I looked for them on purpose. I have an example I want to present to you and ask whether you remember it. In the very end, when Bridget and Mark came there out of there, when Bridget had barged into the room with the ministers [agreement], and then they went out to talk about their relationship, and Mark said to Bridget, how did it go, that, that ”toi nyt ei ollu kovin romanttinen kosinta” [“that wasn’t a very romantic proposal”]. Did that [agreement] feel like kind of... [quiet moment]
R: I noticed it, but I can’t remember why [laughter].

Moderator: It was...
O: I can’t remember what he said in English.

Moderator: In English he said ‘proposition’, that it wasn’t a very romantic ‘proposition’.
O: Okay. So yeah, it was weird.
Moderator: Yeah. [inaudible speech in the background] Because that would be, I believe the dictionary meaning would be ‘ehdotus’ ['proposition'] and not ‘kosinta’. ‘Kosinta’ would be ‘proposal’.
[agreement]
P: Yes well it might be, now that I think about it for a bit, he didn’t propose to her, and it just was [overlapping conversation, loud agreement]
R: Yes well that’s kind of what I was thinking, yeah.
P: I was thinking that, well yeah, I guess you could see that as a proposal, but it wasn’t really... [overlapping conversation] R: I agree completely. Totally agree.
N: On the other hand the context could sort of make you think so. [...] Q: Because he didn’t really propose, he was just like “as long as you don’t say...”

Here, just like in Group 1, the group did not spontaneously mention the problem but, when asked about it, expressed confusion and agreed that the Finnish word was misleading. However, the mood of the exchange was questioning and slightly confused rather than strongly critical. The best example of this is P’s statement that "voihan tota tietysti nyt kosintanaki pitää, mutta eihän se nyt oikeestaan..." ["I guess you could see that as a proposal, but it wasn’t really..."] Thus, in this group, too, the first impulse is not to call the translator’s solution an error but to experience confusion and look for explanations which might reveal how the solution could be acceptable after all. N goes furthest in attempting to justify the translation when she says: “Asiayhteydestä toisaalta vähä vois ajatella.” [“On the other hand the context could sort of make you think so.”] The comment is vague but seems to suggest that the context might somehow justify the translation. The group does not agree with this attempt at explanation and finally appears to accept that the translation was incorrect, even though there are no strong voices of criticism or rejection. Much like the two problematic parts of the translation mentioned above, this solution caused confusion but did not have a significant effect on the viewing experience as a whole or on the informants’ thoughts on the subtitles. Eliciting even the confused reaction out of the group required considerable prompting, which suggests that the error was not very noticeable.

As was the case in the other two groups, participants in Group 3 also expressed significant interest in the translation of slang, swearwords and obscenities. The discussion turned to this theme on a few occasions. The topic was clearly interesting to several members of the group, and the comments indicated that some group members had given it some thought even outside the research setting. O mentioned
on a few occasions that even though she does not read subtitles to any large extent, she is interested in finding out how slang expressions are translated and looks for them in the subtitles. Similarly, N mentioned that she finds it interesting to see how obscenities are translated. After my specifying question on whether the translations of obscenities in this film were notable in some way, N explained her comment further: “[M]äs sorruun yleensä aina tekee niin, mä en tiedä miksi.” [“I can’t help myself and usually always end up doing it, I don’t know why.”] Thus, N expressed embarrassment about her interest in comparing obscenities in the translation and the source text. She further commented that she did not find anything particularly problematic in this film, but that “joskus jos katsoo, huomaa katsoo käännöstä, niin joskus ois voinu aatella, että elokuvan luonteeseen ois voinu sopia joku vähän rumempikin ilmaisu kuin tämä.” [“sometimes when you look, remember to look at the translation, then sometimes you might think that the nature of the film would have allowed an even dirtier expression than this.”] N’s comment is masked in hesitation and softened by qualifiers such as “sometimes” or “might think”, and, again, she does not criticise the subtitles of this film or name other concrete examples of the problem. The criticism is aimed at subtitles in general: problems exist, but N cannot name a specific example, and the subtitles under discussion are met with acceptance.

The group did, however, mention one specific Finnish phrase as an example of a clumsy, non-idiomatic translation for an obscene phrase. The Finnish phrase, first brought up by S, is “minä paskat nakkaan” as the translation for “I don’t give a shit.” This does not appear in this film, and the comment was a more general criticism of an apparently common translation. No source was mentioned, only that it is often seen in film translations. In addition, O responded to S by speaking of this Finnish phrase in a negative way, sarcastically calling it her “suosikkikäännös” [“favourite translation”]. She clearly recognised S’s reference, because she was able to quote the English source phrase, even though S did not mention it. The rest of the group also voiced agreement and recognition, indicating that either this topic is something the group had discussed previously, or, more generally, that some widely used phrases from subtitles can be actively recalled. However, as no source is mentioned, the criticism remains slightly vague.

In her comments on obscenities, N also expressed some understanding for translators’ solutions. Even though she said that translations can be too mild, she
speculated that some swearwords might feel too strong in written form and are therefore rare in subtitles. Notably, this is the argument translators and translator trainers often make with regard to translation strategies for obscenities, and N’s comment thus shows that the audience can sympathise with this view. O also made a similar comment in the context of the discussion on “I don’t give a shit”, commenting that “mä en tiää, että onks se sitten enemmän, et se on teeveessä. Sitä mä en muista ikinä nähneeni lefateatterissa. Mä en o ihan varma onks se tullu joksus, mut ilmeisesti teeveessä ei voi käyttää sitten niin ronskia kieltä mukamas sitten.” [“I don’t know it, it’s more that it’s on tv. I don’t remember seeing it ever in the cinema. I’m not totally sure whether it’s appeared sometimes, but apparently you can’t use such raunchy language on tv.”] This, too, shows that viewers occasionally think about the constraints of subtitling, and although they might disagree with the solutions, they recognise the reasons which might have led to these decisions.

Another sign of a sense of acceptance was the idea of learning through subtitles, and this idea, too, concentrated on the translations of obscene expressions. The previously mentioned comments on checking how certain expressions have been translated are one example of this approach to subtitle reading as a learning experience. The idea is reinforced by a further comment from N following her statement that she likes to check how obscenities are translated. This comment reinforces the impression that comparisons serve a purpose in language learning. N tells of an experience with a word which she had recently learned:

*Mä jouduin sanakirjasta tarkistaan sen sanan, ’decaitful’ vai ’deceitful’ vai mikä ikinä se nyt onkaan, ni, ni sitte ku se mainitsi siinä, se mainitsi siinä yhdessä kohdassa sille Hugh Grantille, että sä olet nyt joku, mikä petollinen joku […] ni sitte mä aattelin, että no niin, nyt esiintyi tuol, tää oli ensimmäinen kerta, ku mä kiinnitän tohon sanaan mitään huomioo, ku mä oon ton tarkistanu sanakirjasta.*

*I had to check this word in a dictionary, ‘decaitful’ or ‘deceitful’ or whatever it was, so when he mentioned at one point to Hugh Grant that now you are some, whatever deceitful something […] I thought that well ok, now it appeared there, this was the first time I paid any attention to this word, after checking it in the dictionary.*

Hearing a recently acquired vocabulary item in the film and reading its translation was a positive moment of recognition for N, and this is another sign of positive attitudes towards subtitles. N’s way of referring to the translation of the word rather
than the English quote gives the impression that her understanding and learning was reinforced by the joint appearance of the subtitle and the English word.

The two problematic translations discussed most actively in Group 1 and Group 2, ‘lomanen’ and ‘Möven ja Pick’, were not mentioned in Group 3. Instead, two other scenes – the one with the reference to Rebecca and the one with a swearword-related pun – were more interesting to Group 3. Of the two, the swearword-related pun was discussed in Group 1, but not in Group 2. It therefore seems that Group 3 had accepted the solutions ‘lomanen’ and ‘Möven ja Pick’ at least enough not to actively remember them as problematic, and the swearword pun was not memorable to Group 2, even though they too discussed swearing in other contexts. This shows that each group can easily develop its own idiosyncrasies, and one must not automatically assume that the non-expert groups’ discussions would always be similar to each other and that the near-expert group would stand out in every respect. The similarities and differences show that viewers can pay attention to a number of different aspects of subtitles. What these different subtitle-related issues have in common is the desire for an idiomatic fluency that does not distract the viewer.

On the matter of visual, temporal and auditory elements, Group 3, too, was asked one specific question on reading times and whether the pace of the subtitles was suitable. The answers were generally positive, and the group members expressed no criticism with regard to pacing. P was the only person to offer a comment specifically about the pacing of the film’s subtitles. She stated that she had enough time to read the subtitles as carefully as she wanted, and the rest of the group expressed agreement. The conversation then moved to a more general level, discussing subtitle-reading strategies. With respect to pacing, this exchange was significant in the sense that it showed how little attention the viewers paid to pacing, and how it appeared to be taken as a given. The group members pointed out that they do not read subtitles very thoroughly, thus implying that pacing is not important, as they usually only glance at the Finnish text. However, one comment showed that reading subtitles to a satisfactory extent can occasionally be difficult, perhaps due to problematic pacing. Even here the commenter, R, did not blame the subtitles but rather herself:

Se on käsi joku keskittymisvika vai mikä mulla on, [...] mutta kyllä semmosia hetkiä tulee aina niinku että hyvänen aika että ku on paljo ruvennu keskittymää vaikka
I guess it must be some kind of concentration disorder or something with me, [...] but there are always moments when you are like oh no, you start concentrating a lot on the speaking, for example, or [...] you start hearing and understanding better, so then suddenly you are in a situation where now you didn’t understand it and you panic, like oh no, I didn’t read that and now I’m totally clueless again.

Although the comment does not directly refer to speed, it gives the impression that in the situation R describes she tends to run out of time and cannot read the subtitles quickly or thoroughly enough, or the subtitle disappears from screen before she has had time to orient herself appropriately. While the problem can be due to a lapse of concentration on the viewer’s part, it could also result from problematic pacing or translator’s solutions that interrupt the automatic reading. R did not, however, mention this as a possibility. This suggests that even if some problems in reception are due to poor timecueing or excessive speed, it is not easy for the viewers to realise this. A similar tendency was observed in the other groups, where no criticism was directed at the pace, and comments made in reference to potential problems mainly dealt with adjusting one’s viewing strategies.

6.4.2.2 Reception strategies

The English skills of the informants in Group 3 are a good example of what is to be expected from Finnish young adults. The discussion showed that although English is understood widely, not everyone understands it well enough to be able to watch programmes in English without a translation. Furthermore, even if it was possible, some might not want to rely on the source text. A good example of this is the following statement from P: “Jos mua kerran palvellaan, niin totta kai mää luen” [“If that service is provided to me, then of course I read”]. This comment was made in a joking tone, but it suggests a conscious choice to concentrate on subtitles rather than the source text, especially in context with P’s other answers which indicated the same. On the other hand, it could also be read as a defensive statement, an attempt to rationalise subtitle use if concentrating on the original is assumed to be the more sophisticated strategy. The same defensive spirit came across in R’s reply.
to this comment: “On joku tyhmä, joka ei ymmärrä.” [“There’s some idiot who doesn’t understand.”] Even though the tone of both comments is humorous, the fact that the informants thought of mentioning these things is interesting and might imply some tension in the choice of reception strategy. However, as the discussion advanced, the informants talked openly about reading subtitles and were not embarrassed by it, at least in the company of close friends.

One person in Group 3 brought up the idea of not being able to do two things at once, not unlike D did in Group 1, as an explanation for why she only reads the subtitles. This was, again, P, who further explained her previous statement of using the service that has been provided: “[M]is mä yritin lukea ja kuunnella yhtä aikaa, eihän siitä tullut yhtään mitään [...] Mä menin ihan sekasin. Luin vaan siit niit sanoja, ja siit niinku lopputulos oli vaan niinku se kaaos.” [“[W]henever I tried to read and listen at once, it didn’t work at all [...] I got completely confused. I just kept reading the words, and the end result was just chaos.”] It is clear that viewers can find it difficult to follow both English and Finnish, and then adjust their viewing strategy accordingly. However, although this matter came up in two groups, few individuals expressed this as their personal experience. It is understandable that receiving verbal information simultaneously through two channels can be a challenge, and it is therefore not surprising that this opinion was voiced, but perhaps Finns are so used to this situation that they are often able to divide their attention flexibly and seldom consciously recognise this problem in the way P and D did.

One member of this group, Q, said that she did not read the subtitles, stating that she had not read a single subtitle during the film. She continued this statement by saying: “Jossain kohtaa mä tajusin, että hittolainen, tässä elokuvassahan on tekstitys [naurua]. Ja totesin, että no en mää oo sitä tähän asti lukenu, ni emmää sitä nytkään rupee lukeen.” [“At some point I realised that damn, the film actually has subtitles [laughter]. And then I concluded that, well, I haven’t read them so far, so I’m not going to start reading now.”] Even though this was said laughingly, this is a particularly strong statement of actively overlooking the subtitles. Q further explained this by commenting that when she is fully immersed in following a film and listening to the dialogue, she does not notice subtitles, thus reflecting the opposite view from P’s full concentration on subtitles. It seems that both strategies of concentrating solely on one source of verbal information can be justified by the need to focus concentration.
A few informants in the group said that they mainly listened to the source text and only used the subtitles as support, such as N in the following comment: “Must tuntuu et se on niinku meikäläisellä semmonen niinku ettää varmistaa ettää pysyy kärryillä “ [“I think that for me it’s just a kind of way to make sure that I’m understanding it”]. N’s comment received clear expressions of agreement from the others, indicating that this is a shared feeling and that subtitles are often in a supporting role. However, some informants said the opposite, that they mostly read the subtitles and listened only occasionally. As a fascinating sign of how difficult it is to discern one’s reception strategies, N also expressed this as her strategy, stating that her English is not very strong and that she therefore always reads subtitles. Thus, the reality appears to be that subtitles are an important source of information for her but, when the source language is English, she is also able to listen to it enough to feel that she does not need to rely only on subtitles.

This confusion was also evident in the informants’ quoting patterns, and on some occasions informants who mentioned using primarily the English text quoted the Finnish translation, or vice versa. N, again, is an interesting example. Her explicit admission that her English is not very good makes it likely that she indeed relies heavily on subtitles, but when she talked about following how swearwords are translated, she said that she pays particular attention to subtitles whenever she hears an English word that fits this category: “[S]itte ku ne tänne iskee tajuntaan, niin sitten äkkiä kattoo siihen rivin niinku oikein tarkasti, ettää vaik mutuen sitä ei niin aattele, ettää miten siellä on niinku se homma laitettu.” [“[T]hen when it hits you all of a sudden, you sort of quickly look at the line very carefully, even though you don’t otherwise think about it so much, about how it’s said there.”] This comment would imply that English comes first for N, and hearing certain specific words simply increases her level of attention towards the subtitles. Of course, this does not mean that the English text is absolutely primary for her, but it is interesting that an individual who has stated that her English is quite weak still describes her processing of verbal information in this way. It certainly demonstrates that, for many Finns, listening to English is such a well established practice that even with weaker linguistic skills the source text is bound to play some role in reception.

The group also made observations on the automatic nature of subtitle-reading, and on the development of a subtitle-reading technique. As in the other groups, this one also discussed how difficult it is to analyse the reading process consciously,
because it occurs as part of the audiovisual experience without full conscious attention. This is exemplified in the following comment by P: “Ei niitä oikeastaan varsinaisesti niinku lue, ei niinku kirjaa. Mä aina niinku nopeesti mää katon, et no just joo.” [“You don’t actually really read them, not like a book. I always kind of quickly glance at them, like that’s right.”]. This group also brought up an important question about the level of concentration on subtitles. It was said that if the viewer pays too much attention to subtitles, it takes him/her out of the world of the programme and interferes with viewing. Therefore, specific strategies of cursory reading are usually adopted, as, again, explicated by P:

Jos mä vahingos ajattelen et mä luen niitä riviä ni mä en niin kerkee lukee niitä. [myöntelyä] Niinku jos mää luen niitä ajatuksella mut sit kun siihen leffaan pääsee kiinni, ni sit niitä vaan lukee. En mää ees huomaa, että mää luen niitä [...] Mä luen ne niinku vahingossa etten mää huomaa.

If I accidentally happen to think about reading it then I won’t have time to read it. Like if I read them and concentrate on them, but when you become absorbed in the film, then you just read them. I don’t even notice that I read them [...] I read them kind of by accident, without noticing.

This “accidental reading” is a good description of a typical reception strategy, and also a fitting explanation for how subtitles become an indistinguishable part of the audiovisual text. Subtitles do not receive significant attention; they are read sporadically and superficially as part and parcel of the flow of the film. In fact, an accidental reading style could also be one explanation for N’s slightly conflicting statements about her reception strategies which were discussed above: her subtitle-reading is cursory but becomes more attentive when she encounters something particularly interesting or difficult. The comparison with book-reading made by P is also important. It indicates that subtitles do not hold the same kind of position for a reader as literary text does: subtitle-reading is not seen as “real” reading, it is strategic, intended for the service of the viewing experience. Even more importantly, many comments on reception strategies show that the informants are conscious of these differences in reading practices and knowingly afford subtitles less attention than they would for other kinds of texts. However, even though they are conscious of these differences, the strategies are not necessarily employed actively, but are “automatic”, “accidental” and a result of internalised viewing practices. Thus, while the informants are comfortable discussing their reception
strategies and are able to discern them to some extent, they cannot fully explain what happens when they read subtitles.

The problem with the strategy of accidental reading is that occasionally the gist of the dialogue can be missed because of inattentive reading. A good example of this is a humorous line where Daniel Cleaver talks about his sexual experiences and, at the end of a sentence and the end of a subtitle mentions the name ‘Simon’. This reference to a man is supposed to be surprising and humorous, but some members of this focus group mentioned not getting the joke, as pointed out by Q, because “sitä ei taas ninku välttämättä lukenu loppuun asti. Että mä katoin vaan ’viidennellä luokalla’ ja dididididii” [“there again you didn’t necessarily read it all the way through. So I just saw ‘viidennellä luokalla’ [‘in the fifth grade’] and dididididii”] or, as P puts it, “mää taas varmaan luin sillai nopeesti jotain omiani siit” [I guess I was again just reading quickly something that I made up”].59 Q even mentioned having heard the name in the spoken text, but it is not clear from the comment whether that helped her understand the joke. It seems possible that hearing the name did not ensure that the joke was understood, when a quick, careless reading of the subtitle did not reinforce that impression.

Another interesting remark about the level of attentiveness was made by O, in a joking comment about boring films: “[I]f the film is really boring, then I start reading.” This remark was met with some expressions of agreement and understanding. The idea was also reinforced by Q’s response to O’s comment, stating that if a film is boring, Q reads both Finnish and Swedish subtitles, but if it is interesting, she does not notice the subtitles at all. These comments, and the expressions of agreement and acceptance they garnered, demonstrate how differently some consider subtitle-reading in comparison to other kinds of reading; close reading can, in fact, be seen as a negative attribute, as it can be an indicator either of a film not worth watching closely, or a signal of a translation that is too difficult to read and requires too much effort.

59 This remark by Q is also interesting because, in contradiction with her stated reception strategy, it shows that she remembers at least this one subtitle and thus did not ignore the translation completely. I will discuss Q’s reception strategy further in section 6.4.3.4.
As the English skills of informants in Group 3 were diverse, it was to be expected that there would be significant variation in the way the film was quoted and which language would be used. The results, however, were fairly similar to the results of the other two groups in that both English and Finnish were used, sometimes mixed together in a single reference, and Finnish was slightly more common than English. There were more than twenty references in Finnish and approximately 15 in English, as well as four references which included both English and Finnish. The informants recalled both English and Finnish phrases quite well, even though most references were not perfectly accurate, word-for-word quotations. It was, however, quite clear that the viewers had paid attention to both English and Finnish.

As was the case in both Group 1 and Group 2, here, too, the references in Finnish often treated the translation as the original, instead of referring to it as a derivative text. The Finnish references became a natural part of the conversation, in this group perhaps even more than in Group 1, where there were fewer references and the references were mostly quite short. Here, the references were often complete sentences or phrases instead of only one or two words, and the sense of the subtitles was remembered quite accurately. The references were typically not direct quotations of the subtitles, and the exact Finnish words may not have been remembered, but the tendency to use Finnish still shows that the informants accorded the subtitles authority and that the Finnish words were quite easily and comfortably taken as the characters’ authentic lines. The informants were also able to remember some specific words from the subtitles correctly, such as the term ‘mummohousut’ [‘giant panties’], used by Daniel Cleaver to humorously describe Bridget’s underwear.

One interesting example of quoting in Finnish comes from a comment by O, who is talking about translating terms of address but, when explaining the context of the English original word, uses the Finnish phrase. Her comment is as follows: “Nyt ku tuli puheeks, nyt tuli mieleen se kohta, että missä ne eros. Niin suomennokseen oli käännetty, ku se sanottiin, että niin oli niin Bridget puhui tälle, et sä oot löytämässä jonkun naisen, ja sit ku käytti sanaa ’she’, ja se oli käännetty ’Rebecca’, sen naisen nimellä suoraa.” [“Now that you mention it, I remember the part where they broke up. It said in the Finnish translation, when it said that Bridget said to him that you
are about to find a woman, and then she used the word ‘she’ and it was translated as ‘Rebecca’, with the woman’s name right away.”] O mentioned during the focus group discussion that she mostly listens to the original text and, thus, she probably is quite fluent in English. Therefore, it is interesting to note that despite her preference for English she paraphrased lines from the film in Finnish. Several similar examples of using Finnish occurred throughout the discussion, and the role of the subtitles as a source of information was not questioned.

Another good example of using Finnish as the actual words of the film comes from R: “[S]inä ykkösoassa oli myös tämä kohta, että, et Daniel halus niinku, että niin, et ’ei puhuta nyt siitä tyhmästä jostain, vaan että puhutaan, puhu s-tai kerro minulle siitä, kun teit jotain’.” [“[T]he first film also had this kind of scene where Daniel kind of wanted to, like, ‘let’s stop talking about the stupid something and let’s talk about, or tell me about the time when you did something’.”] Here, R is trying to recall a phrase which had been used in both Bridget Jones movies, and specifically aiming for the Finnish wording of that phrase. By the end of the reference, she is using fairly formal Finnish words instead of the typical spoken Finnish at the beginning of the comment, which indicates that she has switched to quoting instead of vaguely paraphrasing what was said in the two films. Her words are quite close to what was seen in the subtitles of the second film. This reference is thus another example of how the informants used the Finnish words quite naturally as the words of the characters and managed to recall the gist of the subtitles.

At the very end of the discussion, as the group started comparing the film with other films in the same genre and discussed genre conventions and typical scenes, the discussion also revealed some shared knowledge of a subtitle convention, or a phrase widely used in translations. This came up in an exchange about wedding scenes and how they are typically depicted. After some description of such scenes, R added a comment on the words often used in this situation and said: “Ja just niin et ‘olemme kokoontuneet tänne’.” [“And then it’s like ‘olemme kokoontuneet tänne’ [‘we are gathered here’].”] Again, Finnish is comfortably used to refer to an English phrase used in wedding ceremonies, and the intention is clearly to use a conventional Finnish translation for this phrase. This phrase and the translation appear at the end of the Bridget Jones film, but in the context of talking about film conventions, it could be seen as a wider reference to a film cliché – and a somewhat clichéd translation, well known to the group members and easily understood.
However, the discussion also contained numerous references to the film, and some other sources, in English. These are also used in the discussion quite easily, probably with the understanding that all group members will understand them sufficiently and possibly also remember them from the source, whether this film or elsewhere. However, in a similar manner as with Group 1, the references to English were much shorter than the Finnish ones, and they were mostly catchphrases or other widely known phrases from the film. These included, for example, a reference to Bridget’s mother’s “Turkey Curry Buffet”, and this hesitating reference from R: “Lord and mikä ikinä olikaan, lord Darcy.” /“Lord and whatever it was, Lord Darcy.”] Here, R is trying to recall the way Bridget dreamed of herself and Mark Darcy becoming “Lord and Lady Darcy”. R cannot recall the word “lady” and is only able to mention “Lord Darcy”, and no other group member provided the other title, either. Thus, the English references, while usually quite close to the words uttered in the film, were very short and even incomplete, and less commonly used than references in Finnish.

There is one exception to the general tendency to quote only catchphrase-like short extracts from the film. This comes from O, who attempted to provide a quotation in English after I mentioned it in Finnish. O said: ‘‘Sex and the City is [epäröintiä] onl, is a promise.’ Tai joku tämmönén.” /‘‘Sex and the City is [hesitation] onl, is a promise.’ Or something like that.’] As the point of my question was to draw the group’s attention to a pun which does not work equally well in Finnish, it is understandable that the group would try to recall the line in English. While O is speaking, several other group members make encouraging sounds, but no one provides the English phrase for her when she hesitates. She is unable to provide an actual quotation or even a complete sentence that would reflect the sense of the original line. Her attempt shows that in some situations the English original can be considered a preferable source, but this does not mean that the viewers would have paid enough attention to the English text to be able to quote from it, or perhaps their English skills are not good enough to allow them to formulate a complete paraphrase on the spot during a discussion. The differences between quoting in English and quoting in Finnish show again that Finnish viewers are more comfortable with speaking Finnish, and English paraphrases or quotations are reserved for specific purposes where the Finnish translation does not express everything that is needed for the purposes of the discussion.
As with the other groups, the discussion in Group 3 also contained some references where English and Finnish were mixed together, but in this group there were only four such instances. Here, too, the English part of the reference was fairly simple and consisted of few words. One such example is N’s description of an embarrassing situation where Bridget bursts into the middle of a meeting. N described the scene in the following way: “[S]iellä oli se kokous menossa, ja sitte ku se joutu siinä selittelemään, että ja vetämään kaikki ’hello, hello’ ja ’hieno taulukko’ vai mikä se oli.” [“[T]he meeting was going on in there and she had to explain everything and be all ’hello, hello’ and ’hieno taulukko’ [’nice graph’] or whatever it was.”] ‘Hello’ is certainly an easy English word to recall, but perhaps the word ‘graph’ was not familiar enough, and N therefore switched into Finnish for the second part of her paraphrase. Another interesting example of mixing Finnish and English came in an extended exchange concerning the interpretations of the phrase “Just Say No”. In this exchange, in which almost all group members were active participants, the phrases “just say yes” and “say no to drugs” were the only English phrases used. The use of these English phrases can be explained by the fact that the question which started this discussion had to do with the meaning of the phrase “just say yes”, which is another fairly simple-to-recall catchphrase with no difficult vocabulary. As the group members tried to make sense of this phrase, they used it, and its modification “say no to drugs”, in English, but every other quotation or paraphrase was in Finnish. The other references were also considerably longer and more complicated than the simple three-word phrase. The best example of this mixing of languages is N’s following comment:

"Ku se oli tää ‘just say yes’, niin mä aattelin, että se liittyy justiin tähän, että ku se ottaa huumeita, kun se oli niin sitten siinä ’haluan olla alasti tässä nyt pyöriä’, ’sä oot niin ihana ja sul on kauniita värejä’, niin mä aattelin, että kun se sitte nimenomaan sanoo ’yes’ niille huumeille, koska se on niin sitten antautuvainen tälle, helppo nakki."

Because it was ‘just say yes’ I thought that it’s related to the fact that when she takes the drugs, she was all ‘I want to roll around naked here’, ‘you are so lovely and you have beautiful colours’, so I thought that when she actually says ‘yes’ to the drugs she is so ready to give herself to him, easy.

It should be noted that the word ‘yes’ in the final part of this comment is also said in English, even though it comes in the middle of N’s own commentary made in Finnish. Thus, the simple keywords are in English but the wider context and more
extensive paraphrases are invariably in Finnish. This is a sign of either strong acceptance of the subtitles or insufficient English skills that do not allow for active use of the language – or perhaps both. Whichever it is, this is a strong argument in favour of subtitles and in support of the fact that they are read extensively and affect the way viewers see a film.

6.4.3 Individual Viewer Profiles: N – S

6.4.3.1 N: Social glue, product placement expert and learning enthusiast

N is 28 years old and has a university degree in education. She was a very active participant in Group 3’s discussion. Although she did not participate in some lengthy exchanges, she generally voiced her opinions readily, making both unprompted comments and responses to others’ statements. She repeatedly assumed a cohesive role by agreeing with and reinforcing others’ statements, and, even more significantly, by mentioning the group’s in-jokes or referring to their common experiences, thus making it clear that this was a close-knit group. She, for example, talked about “siitä elokuvasta, mikä me viime viikonloppuna katsottiin” [“the film we watched last weekend”]. On a few occasions N even assumed the role of spokesperson for the group by talking about what “we” think of the film or something related to it. For example, she commented on the group’s reactions to the film by stating “Mutta meille toimi kyllä ihan hyvin.” [“But it worked just fine for us.”], and she made an approving comment of the film’s soundtrack, calling it “semmosia vanhoja musiikkeja, mitkä me tunnistettiin niinkun sieltä meidän ajalta” [“the kind of old music that we recognised from our days way back”]. In addition, N brought her own personality and background into the discussion quite strongly by talking about her work, her favourite music, her language skills, and other personal details or recollections. This could be taken to indicate her comfortableness within the group and willingness to talk about personal matters, and is one strategy of constructing social cohesion in the focus group situation. In many instaces, N indicated that these personal comments are part of the group’s joint history and that the group would be familiar with these due to their close relationship. Thus, even by talking about herself, N constructed and reinforced the group’s joint identity.
Many of N’s comments reflect a fairly positive attitude towards the film and the subtitles, and her active commenting indicates a positive attitude towards the focus group situation. She did also make some slightly critical comments but their tone was rather mild, calling some aspects of the film “funny” or asking why something had been done in a particular way. In addition, she made a few general comments about the sorts of problems that often occur in subtitles, but repeatedly stated that these were not present in this film, which also projected a politely diplomatic, positive attitude. It should also be noted that several of N’s turns were quite long, with detailed recollections or explanations. Thus, her comments received significant attention and space. This also constructed the image of her as an active informant who contributed both to the discussion and the atmosphere. Her lengthy comments touched on many topics, including her views of the film, subtitle-reading strategies and the aforementioned personal anecdotes. However, even though some comments turned to personal topics, they were all relevant to the theme of the discussion.

In fact, many of N’s extensive explanations concerned subtitles and her use of them. This shows that N was willing to discuss language and translation and was, to some extent, aware of her reception processes and strategies. N admitted willingly to using subtitles in aid of understanding because her knowledge of English is not particularly strong. However, as was seen above, her explanations of her reception strategies were somewhat confused, and she also stated that, while watching films in English, she is not solely reliant on subtitles. In her questionnaire answer, she stated that she both listens to the source text and reads subtitles, but that she reads slightly more. Thus, she positions herself as a fairly average subtitle user who reads the Finnish text while listening to the English speech and gains information through both channels. In this way she also aligns herself with many of the group’s other informants and their comments on reception strategies. This strategy is also reflected in N’s tendency to quote both English and Finnish. N’s comments are an excellent example of using English when the quotation is short and simple but moving to Finnish with anything more extensive or complicated. Thus, N says “Go, Bridget, go,” “hello” or “just say yes” in English, but resorts to Finnish when quoting “hieno taulukko” [“nice graph”] or imitating Bridget’s drug-induced babbling. This pattern of quoting is consistent with N’s evaluation of her English skills and use of subtitles: she is able to use English to a limited extent, but anything complicated requires Finnish.
Furthermore, N’s commentary is an excellent example of some informants’ stated willingness to learn through subtitles and of conscious attention to some aspects of subtitles. For example, N mentioned paying attention to the word ‘deceitful’, as was discussed above. She also discussed her interest in seeing how swearwords and slang are translated. In addition, she made a vague comment which can be interpreted either as a criticism of some translations or praise of the learning opportunities provided by subtitles. She remarked:

No kyllähän siinä varmaan tulee, taikka siis se sanotaan, taikka semmosia kohtia, että jotain ois itse aatellu, että kun tulee toi sana, ja kun ei itse tiedä sille välttämättä sille sanalle kun yhden merkityksen, nin ihmettelee, että miks se on käänetty noin

Well there must be, or it’s said, or there are parts where you would have thought something yourself for that word, and when you don’t necessarily know more than one meaning for that word, then you wonder why it’s been translated that way

N appears to be saying that unexpected solutions in subtitles can give a viewer pause and that she pays attention to them. This can either mean that these solutions are an opportunity to learn a new meaning for a particular word, or that they cause undesired surprise and confusion. In any case, the comment indicates N’s conscious attention towards subtitles. N’s comments on subtitles are an example of slight criticism combined with the idea of trusting subtitles enough to learn through them.

One of the most notable peculiarities of Group 3 was its tendency to discuss matters connected with the material aspects of the film by commenting, for example, on car models and ski brands. One of the individuals who was fairly active on this theme was N. She was the first individual to bring up such matters by mentioning the ski brand Salomon in connection with a lengthy comment on a skiing scene in the film and her own skiing experiences. She finished her comment by asking rhetorically “Kuinka hänelle onkin vielä valittu tällaiset Salomonin viimeisimmät mallit” [“And how did they happen to choose the latest Salomon model for her”]. The comment met with laughter and expressions of agreement from the group, but others did not continue this line of conversation. However, N returned to the same topic in her following comment, stating that “Mut toisaalta kaikest tärkeintä siinä oli se Salomonin mainos.” [“But on the other hand the Salomon ad was the most important thing there.”], again receiving laughter and indications of agreement, even though no further comments were made on this theme. N was thus quite insistent in attempting to turn the discussion towards this
slightly cynical, materialistic aspect of popular culture, and even though others did not respond in this situation, they later returned to the theme in other exchanges, and N herself made further similar comments.

In conclusion, N’s role in this group was visible and multi-dimensional. On the one hand, she is a positive, engaging builder of group spirit, and on the other hand she gives lengthy soliloquies on topics concerning translation, languages and Bridget Jones. Her extensive comments can be analytic and display some level of attention to the challenges of translation, even though her comments are not quite as knowledgeable and fluent as those made by the near-experts of Group 2. Perhaps her background in education is evident in her desire to learn and understand. Her explanations of her reception strategy are slightly conflicting, but her strategy appears to be a fairly ordinary combination of source text and subtitles, with perhaps slightly more emphasis on subtitles.

6.4.3.2  O: Active responder, translation analyst and humorist

O is 30 years old and has a degree in a technological field from a university of applied sciences. She is one of the two 30-year-olds in Group 3, and the two are the oldest informants of the study. O’s participation in the focus group discussion was slightly less noticeable than N’s, but she was an active member of the group and participated in many exchanges both as initiator and responder. At an early stage of the discussion, for example, when the group was asked about any parts of the film they might remember, O was the first one to respond by bringing up a fight scene and describing it as “erittäin hyvä” [“very good”]. This was followed by a brief exchange on this scene. O’s expressed opinions on the film were more critical than N’s, but she was careful to say that something was, for example “pikkusen liikaa” [“a little too much”], rather than voice her disapproval strongly.

In addition to comments on the film itself, O made several remarks, both initial comments and responses, on questions concerning translation, and expressed an interest in issues relating to subtitles. O was the first informant in Group 3 to respond to the first translation-related question. She stated that she paid little attention to the film’s subtitles, but made a comment, discussed above in 6.4.2.1, remarking that she would have liked to notice how the pun based on an obscene
phrase and the words ‘Mum’ and ‘Mother’ was translated. O’s interest in the translations of swearwords and slang was also made evident in a few other comments. She stated that she had attempted to see how some slang-like expressions had been translated but was unable to recall examples, and, in response to N’s comment concerning obscenities, O said that this film did not contain particularly poor translations of swearwords. She also made a sarcastic comment on the Finnish translation for “I don’t give a shit”, stating that the phrase “minä paskat nakkaan” is “mun kaikkien aikojen suosikkikäännös” [“my all-time favourite translation”]. She ended this exchange by speculating on translation norms for television and cinema, commenting that stronger language might be forbidden on television and the translator would have to settle for something milder such as “minä paskat nakkaan”. These comments signal O’s interest in the translation of slang and obscenities, which was a common topic in all three focus groups.

Swearwords were not, however, the only aspect of translations O mentioned. In addition, she made an unprompted, lengthy comment concerning terms of address, as mentioned above in section 6.4.2.1. This led to an active exchange among several informants and brought an entirely unprecedented topic into the conversation. The exchange was brought to a close, again, by O’s comment that the subtitler’s solution to use the name Rebecca could not even have been due to limited space, because the solution was longer than O’s preferred option. This shows that O was aware of some technical limitations related to subtitling. Thus, O’s participation in the topic of translations was active and her contributions to the discussion significant. Her speculation on subtitles, and the ability to comment on particular translations both from this film and from her other viewing experiences, might indicate that she has paid some attention to translations, both in this particular situation and in general.

O’s comments also give some indications of her reception strategies. She stated explicitly that she tends to primarily listen to the English source text and pays only occasional attention to subtitles, or uses them as a way of passing time if a film is boring. Her reply in the questionnaire was quite similar: she stated that she receives more information through listening and only checks the most difficult words in the subtitles. However, as her comments on some translation solutions indicate, she has paid relatively close attention to the subtitles. On the topic of the wordplay with obscenities, ‘Mum’ and ‘Mother’, although O first indicated she did not notice the translation, she then commented “mä en tajunnut, mitä siin oli hauskaa suomeksi”
[“I didn’t get what was funny about it in Finnish”]. This suggests that she did read the subtitle and was disappointed in it, even though she might not recall the translation verbatim. Thus, it would appear that O’s reception strategy was primarily to listen to the English text but also gain some information from the subtitles. However, she stated that because of the research situation she intentionally paid more attention to the subtitles than she normally would and attempted to find interesting and problematic elements in them. This is problematic, as it suggests that her reception experience was not an entirely typical one. It is difficult to know how accurate this evaluation is, but it is, of course, logical that such a situation might make the informants more aware of subtitles and encourage them to pay more attention. However, even though O might have read the subtitles more closely than usual, her comments, at the very least, show some interest in subtitles and an ability to process them simultaneously with the source text, and some motivation to contemplate translation strategies and norms.

O’s quoting practices show some preference for Finnish in the case of longer extracts while using English when the quotation is short or simple. O made few direct quotations, but the few paraphrases which come close to being quotations are in Finnish. However, she also attempted to quote the entire sentence of the source text’s reference to Sex and the City, even though that was not entirely successful. Thus, her quoting pattern would, again, reflect a reception strategy where both the Finnish subtitles and the English source text play a role, and O is capable of gaining and actively remembering some elements of information from the source text. Thus, it is plausible that her reception strategy would emphasise active listening of the source text.

During some parts of the discussion O also assumed the role of an amuser. While she did not make jokes as noticeably as some other informants, she did make many small remarks which elicited laughter from the rest of the group. This is an important contribution to the atmosphere of a group and to the feeling of cohesion among group members. Some of her humorous side notes, such as calling the Thai prison an excellent weight-loss camp, or referring to Bridget’s white teeth, were also similar in spirit to the group’s tendency to steer the conversation cynically towards material and production-related themes. However, O did not participate actively in the most explicit discussions on product placement. As a whole, O’s comments during the discussion reflect an informant who is actively engaged in both the social
situation and the topic of discussion. She displayed interest in translation and subtitling and made several spontaneous, constructive remarks and voiced her opinions openly, expressing even fairly critical views. O was an active member of the focus group and an influential presence in the discussion.

6.4.3.3  **P: Friendly, subtitle-dependent follower**

P is 28 years old and has a technical degree from a university of applied sciences. In a group of active commenters, P was yet another eager participant in the discussion. Her comments were characterised by following and repeating: she often attempted to keep the conversation going by making small, occasionally humorous remarks or repeating a previous commenter’s words or thoughts. On several occasions, she was the first one to continue the conversation after a slight pause, either after my question or after the end of an exchange. In this way, she played an important role in constructing an active and friendly social situation. In addition, she made many substantive comments and was occasionally the first person to respond to questions. Her conversational style was conciliatory, and she attempted to express her opinions in a way that would not diverge significantly from the views of the other informants. Her style was evident on several occasions when she voiced an opinion and faced opposition, which then led to her softening her initial point. However, she did also express her own views openly. On several occasions, when others said something critical of the film, she turned this into something positive, as in the following example:

**O:** Mulle se oli pikkusen liikaa siinä, mikä oli, kun ne lähti sinne laskettelulomalle. Se oli pikkusen liian ylitte, että lähetään menee sitä jo, mitä [muut sanovat: kilparataaj]. Mulle se oli vähän liikaa, et se...
**P:** Nii se oli liikaa, mut sit se loppu oli mainio, ku se tuli [myöntelyä, taustalta: Joo se loppu oli erittäin hauska]. Se niinku kompensoi sen, että se oli vähän yliampuvaa [naurua].

**O:** For me that was a bit too much there, where, when they went on that skiing holiday. That was a bit too over the top, that they would start going down that, what [others say: race course]. That was a bit too much for me, so that...
**P:** Yeah, that was a bit too much, but then the ending was great, when she came [agreement, in the background: Yeah, the ending was very funny]. That compensated for it, that it was a bit over the top [laughter].
In this way, P turned the criticism around in order to mention something that she found amusing. Such discussion tactics made P sound positive about the film and willing to find reasons for approval even where others were critical. She was not, however, entirely uncritical: she was, for example, the first to answer my question about negative opinions on the film by pointing out a scene which she had not liked.

P’s comments on her reception strategies were characterised by an emphasis on subtitles. P was consistent in stating that her primary source of information was the translation, and that she was unable to follow both the subtitles and the source text simultaneously. She gave the same answer in the questionnaire, stating that she only listens to the source text occasionally. In the discussion she also remarked, jokingly, that if such a subtitling service is provided for her, she will make use of it, and commented that trying to concentrate on both the source text and the subtitles resulted in “chaos”. P also verbalised the automatic nature of subtitle-reading by stating that she does not read subtitles like a book and that she never pays conscious attention to the reading process. However, on one occasion, when discussing the reference to *Sex and the City*, Q and R commented on an inconsistency in P’s description:

O: *Sex and the City* is [epäröintiä] onl, is a promise. Tai joku tämmönen. Mää kiinnitin huomioo tohon [myöntelyä].
R: Joo huomasin mäki sen.
P: Ku se oli aivan siinä alussa, että mää vielä kuuntelin sitä tekstiäkin siinä vaiheessa. [naurua]
R: Ei se ollu kovin alussa.
Q: Se oli puolessa matkaa. [myöntelyä]
P: [epäselvää] kyllä mä vahingossa sitte kuuntelin sitä [naurahtaa, myöntelyä].

O: *Sex and the City* is [hesitation] onl, is a promise. Or something like this. I noticed that [agreement].
P: [agreement, overlapping talk, inaudible] I also [inaudible] not like the text.
R: Yeah, I noticed it too.
P: Because it was right at the beginning, and so I was still listening to the text at that point. [laughter]
R: It wasn’t really at the beginning.
Q: It was halfway through. [agreement]
P: [inaudible] I guess I accidentally listened to it then [laughs, agreement].

P then continued by suggesting that “sieltä sit tuli tää niinkun läpittä” [“this kind of made it through”], which is an attempt to reformulate her description of her reception process to accommodate the contradicting comments. This indicates that,
although it appears that P does primarily read the subtitles, she is aware of the source text and cannot avoid listening to it. P’s quoting patterns do not offer much evidence of her reception strategies, because her comments include very few quotes. She did not quote anything in English, and the few paraphrases she made were in Finnish, which supports the perceived primary status of the subtitles. Another factor which supports her estimation is the mistake which she makes in thinking that the name ‘Simon’ refers to a woman, as was discussed in section 6.4.2.2. Although it would be possible to make this mistake both on the basis of the spoken and the written text, a careless reading of a subtitle is the most likely reason for such a mistake. Thus, P’s reception strategy appears to favour the subtitles.

Although P was an active participant in the discussion, she made relatively few substantive comments on the translation. On several occasions, she simply agreed with the rest of the group. She expressed acceptance of the translator’s choices: in the exchange on Sex and the City, she recalled that her immediate thought on the translation was “tosiaan, voihan sen noinki sanoo” [“that’s right, it’s possible to say it that way too”], which is a strong indication of trust despite the fact that her comment also expressed some confusion. In addition, P made an interesting comment on subtitle quality in the background questionnaire: she stated that she rarely pays attention to quality issues, but she occasionally notices reading a subtitle before the same line is spoken or vice versa. Thus, she notes the significance of timecueing for the viewing experience. This is the only occasion in the focus groups and questionnaires where timecueing is mentioned explicitly. On the one hand, this could suggest that the question is not very relevant or noticeable to viewers, but, on the other hand, even one reference to it demonstrates that poor timecueing is something that viewers might notice and it might disrupt the viewing experience. Perhaps this is emphasised in those viewers for whom subtitles are a primary source of information, because problems in synchronization probably affect their viewing experience more than the experience of those who only glance at subtitles. However, P’s comment is also a reminder of the fact that, despite her stated reception strategy, she processes the source text to some extent, or she would not be able to notice problems in synchronization.

P was somewhat active in discussing the productional aspects of the film. Several of P’s comments were connected to this theme, such as remarks on how the skiing scene could have been filmed, how text printed on a shirt might have indicated a
sponsorship agreement, and how a scene with burning candles appeared improbable. Thus, P’s comments fit in well with the group’s general habit of moving the discussion towards such cynical considerations. P’s profile as an informant is constructed on the basis of her apparent reliance on subtitles and acceptance of them as reliable information, as well as her genial, accommodating comments and attempts to keep the discussion active. Even though she did not make many comments on the translation, she presented herself as an example of a Finnish film-viewer who does not pay much attention to the spoken English text and accepts the subtitles without need to discuss or analyse them to any significant extent. She did make interesting comments on the automatic nature of subtitle-reading and the challenges of following two verbal texts simultaneously, and thus made significant contributions to this group’s conception of the subtitle-reading process.

6.4.3.4  **Q: Subtitle-resistant, gender-conscious commentator**

Q is a 27-year-old university graduate with a degree in business. While a fairly active commenter, Q’s role was less visible than many other informants’ for the majority of the discussion. She did express her opinions and participate in the social aspects of the discussion, such as making humorous remarks or continuing others’ thoughts, but she most typically was not the first to respond, and her comments did not tend to stand out in the group’s discussion. She did, however, on occasion take initiative and, for example, was in a few instances the first to begin talking after a brief silence. Thus, she was not a passive member of the group, but she was less visible than some other informants. She expressed both positive and critical opinions on the film, largely in keeping with the rest of the group’s opinions. She stood out from the group through her repeated remarks on the significance of gender in this film’s viewership. She referred to this as a women’s film and gave it a positive review, with the disclaimer that this opinion would only be applicable to women. While all of this gained expressions of agreement from the group, Q was noticeably the most active informant in making these comments.

Another significant aspect in Q’s comments which stood out from the rest of the group was her relationship to subtitles. While all others in this group indicated that they use subtitles as an aid for understanding, Q stated that she did not read the
subtitles at all and barely noticed their existence, using the same explanation as P did for the opposite strategy and stating that she cannot do two things at once. She also agreed with O, slightly dismissively of the role of subtitles, that she might read them if a film is boring, but then she would read both Finnish and Swedish subtitles. In addition, she alluded to her use of the source text alone by commenting that she tends to laugh at a different time compared with others in the cinema, or even laugh when others do not laugh, because the pacing of the source text is different from the subtitles, and subtitles might not convey humour effectively. Other group members expressed acknowledgement and agreement with this sentiment, but none of them went on to explicitly describe similar experiences. On a few occasions during the discussion, others either implicitly or explicitly acknowledged Q’s knowledge of English and her habit of not reading subtitles, which illustrated this as a recognisable characteristic to Q’s friends. In the questionnaire, Q stated that she listens to the source text and only reads subtitles “hyvin harvoin” [“very seldom”]. However, her early statements were contradicted later in the discussion by her recollection of one scene where she described her viewing process as “mä katoin vaan ‘viidennellä luokalla’ ja dididididii” [“I just saw ‘viidennellä luokalla’ [‘in the fifth grade’] and dididididii”]. This is a reference to the Finnish words of the subtitle, not the spoken text. Even though she also mentioned hearing the same elements in the speech, this comment suggests that Q did not entirely ignore the subtitles but was, in fact, able to recall at least one part of them. Thus, while Q’s reception strategy appears to have emphasised the source text, she still gained some information through subtitles.

Upon examination of Q’s quoting patterns, it becomes clear that, even though she might know English well enough to understand the film through the source text, she uses Finnish actively to paraphrase or quote passages from the film. This might be an attempt to take into account her friends’ weaker English skills and to allow them to understand her references, but it also gives the impression of an individual who is comfortable with putting Finnish words in the characters’ mouths. The previous example of a direct quote from the subtitle is the most significant indication of this, but on several other occasions Q also used Finnish to describe the characters’ lines. She did use English on three occasions, but only for short, easy phrases, of which only one was an accurate quote from the film: she mentioned the phrase “just say yes” in an exchange concerning this reference in the film, and was the first one to
say it in English. In the same exchange, she also used another English phrase, “say no to drugs”, to compare the film’s phrase with it. This was, however, not a quote from the film. Additionally, earlier in the discussion, when the group was talking about a television programme portrayed in the film, Q called the show “Good Morning, Britain”; this was, however, incorrect, and other group members corrected her. Thus, her use of English does not express reliance on the source text alone but shows that she does know English quite well and is able to use it to refer to the film.

Another noticeable contribution by Q was her initiation of an unprompted exchange on omissions in subtitles. She made a gesture which was quite rare in all three focus groups and asked the other group members a question:

_Huomasitteks te sitte, että jotain jäi kääntämättä, koska mun poikaystävän huomauttaa... Se kuuntelee ja lukee yhtä aikaa, ja se vähän välää sanoo, että "taaskaan ei käännetty sitä, ja taas jäi jotain kääntämättä"._

_Did you notice that something was left out of the translation, because my boyfriend keeps mentioning... He listens and reads at the same time, and he says all the time that “they left it out again, and the translation missed something again”._

This suggests that Q has some interest in subtitles and occasionally discusses them voluntarily, even if her relationship with subtitles remains quite distant.

In accordance with the rest of Group 3, Q also made several comments relating to the film’s productional context and the entertainment business. She, for example, discussed the possible use of a stunt actor, talked of advertisers’ views on the film’s target audience, and speculated on whether the ending of the film was calculated to leave room for a sequel. Most notably, she also initiated an active exchange, in which she herself and R were the major participants, concerning a car seen in the film. After N commented that there were no “bad” examples of product placement in the film, Q said: “_No olihan siinä se uus Fordi, se joka ajo siihen oven eteen._” [“Well they did have the new Ford, the one that drove right to the door.”] This led to an exchange about the car model and whether this was the same car as in the first _Bridget Jones_ film. Towards the end of the exchange, Q even mentioned that one scene looked as if it had been taken from a car commercial. Q’s comments are similarly cynical to those of many members of Group 3.

The individual profile for Q therefore consists of her low profile within the group, combined with her reluctance to admit to reading subtitles, eagerness to discuss the productional and financial dimensions of filmmaking and attention to
gender-specific aspects of film viewing. On the one hand, she fit in to the group well by discussing product placement, joking and engaging in active exchanges. On the other hand she stood out by making it clear that subtitles were less significant to her than to most others in the group. Because of her insistence that she did not read subtitles, Q’s contributions in translation-related exchanges were small, but as an example of an individual who says that she does not read subtitles at all, her contribution was interesting. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Q’s part in the discussion was her inadvertent quoting of the subtitles, which again showed that it is not as easy to avoid subtitles as some viewers might think or claim.

6.4.3.5  R: Positive, accepting agree-er and Bridget Jones fan

R is 26 years old and has a university degree in education. Her contribution to the discussion in Group 3 was positive in tone and contained a large number of short expressions of agreement and acceptance, and humorous rejoinders to preceding comments. Her role was therefore significantly in the social realm of the discussion, as a person who vocally expressed acceptance of others’ opinions and thus encouraged further discussion. In addition to the numerous expressions of agreement, R did make some independent comments. In her comments, she expressed a significantly positive attitude towards the film, and also appeared positive and accepting towards the subtitles. R was the first to offer a substantive comment, after some nervous chattering, to my first question concerning the group’s impressions of the film. She said: “Joutui nauramaan aika paljon, ja... Nii. Aika loistava.” [“It made you laugh a whole lot, and... Yeah. Pretty brilliant.”] Later on, she reiterated these positive comments on several occasions and noted that she had also enjoyed the previous Bridget Jones film and had seen it many times, and that she had read the Bridget Jones novels. Possibly due to this background, she was able to comment in detail on many of the film’s scenes and their connections to the previous film and the books. Her comments were not exclusively positive, but her overall tone was upbeat, with many phrases and words of explicit, strong praise.

R’s positive attitude extended to the subtitles, and her comments reflected acceptance and trust. She did not offer many independent, unprompted remarks on the subtitles, and most of her comments were expressions of agreement with either
other group members or me. For example, she was the first to answer my question concerning the mistranslation of the word ‘proposition’. She replied: “Mää kiinnitin siihen huomiota, mut mä en muista minkä takii.” [“I noticed it but I can’t remember why.”] This initiated a lengthy exchange in which the group members attempted to interpret the scene to see whether the word ‘kosinta’ might be an appropriate translation and recounted their reactions to the translation. R participated in the exchange, mainly by agreeing when others pointed out that a proposal did not occur and then quite accurately paraphrased a line from the scene which reinforced the group’s interpretations. She also replied to N’s comment on omission by agreeing with her that she did not notice significant omissions in these subtitles. Thus, her statements on the subtitles reflect the group’s general opinions, and she did not offer personal comments or complaints but agreed with much of what others said.

R did not make many explicit statements on reception strategies, and even in the questionnaire she responded that it is “Vaikea arvioida, kun ei tule kiinnitettyä huomiota” [“Difficult to estimate because I don’t pay attention to it”]. She continued her answer by stating that she listens to the source text “yllättävän paljon” [“surprisingly much”] but uses subtitles for confirmation. Her reliance on both translation and source text became evident through some remarks in the discussion. In a lengthy comment relating to reception strategies, she concurred with N’s remark that it is occasionally necessary to read subtitles closely but then said that it is impossible to do that for the entire duration of a film. As was seen in section 6.4.2.1, she called it a personal “keskittymisvika” [“concentration problem”] that she cannot focus on the translation and the source text simultaneously. Her comment is slightly convoluted and vague, but it suggests that she receives information through both source text and subtitles, but the strategy is not conscious, and she refers to a feeling of panic and confusion, wondering “oonko mä nyt katsonu tota kuvaa vai oonko mää lukenu ruotsia vai suomee vai kuunnellu” [“did I watch the picture or did I read Swedish or Finnish or did I listen”]. In this way, R’s comments exemplify the difficulties of verbalising one’s reception strategies and affirm the superficial nature of subtitle-reading.

In other contexts, R implied that her understanding of English is not very strong: for example, when discussing whether the informants read the Bridget Jones books in translation or in English, R made it clear that she must read in Finnish in order to understand the story. In her questionnaire answer R alluded to her English skills
having improved lately, which had led to her listening to the English text to a surprising extent. Consequently, even though her comments on reception strategies were vague, it appears likely that she uses both English and Finnish but is more comfortable relying on the Finnish translation. Additionally, some of her comments indicate that she trusts the subtitles quite strongly. For example, when talking of translation strategies for terms of address, R remarked that she noticed the problem brought up by O, but then commented, “Mut ehkä se sopi suomeen sit paremmin näin.” [“But maybe it was better in Finnish this way.”] This implies trust in the translator’s solution and acceptance of a strategy even though it felt problematic. Interestingly, R also called those who need subtitles “tyhmä” [“stupid”]. This was an obvious joke and did not imply serious embarrassment or condemnation of subtitle use. However, it might indicate R’s recognition of the perceived prestige of the source text, and, as such, could be considered slightly defensive in tone.

While R’s comments suggest that she does not understand English very well, her quoting tendencies indicate something slightly different. In fact, R was one of the most active users of English words and phrases in Group 3. She repeated some short lines from the film, such as “turkey curry buffet”, “netball”, “Captain von Trapp” and “Lord Darcy”. On a few occasions, she also used English words and phrases which were not from the film, such as “welcome to my life”. However, like many other informants, R tended to turn to Finnish when she wanted to quote or paraphrase longer excerpts of the film, and she used Finnish to quote the film on several occasions. Her quoting patterns thus make it clear that, even though her own confidence in her English skills does not appear to be high, she has been able to retain parts of the source text and can repeat them quite accurately, even though she produces the more extensive extracts in Finnish.

As was the case for almost all others in Group 3, R, too, participated in some of the exchanges concerning product placement and other productional aspects of filmmaking. She pointed out some practical aspects of the film, such as wondering why Bridget was not covered in snow after falling down from a ski lift, and she was the first to speculate on whether the ending would allow for a sequel. Most significantly in this respect, she also participated very actively in the exchange on car models, initiated by Q. Thus, while her profile is most significantly constructed by her active social role and her positive, accepting attitude, she also contributed to the element of discussion which was specific to this group. R was an integral part of
the discussion, even though she made relatively few substantial comments and, for example, did not explicate her reception strategies.

6.4.3.6  \( S: \) Passive swear-word hunter

\( S, \) the other oldest informant in the study, is 30 years old and has the lowest level of education of all informants, as she has a technician’s degree. \( S \) was, by far, the least active member of Group 3. She made few comments, and her comments were short and rarely offered anything significantly new to the discussion. She did not, for example, discuss her reception strategies or voice opinions on the subtitles. In the questionnaire, she stated that subtitles are usually her primary source of information but she also listens to the source text. However, this strategy did not come across in the discussion. Her comments consisted mainly of expressions of agreement with others, and the short comments she made on the film and subtitles conveyed a positive rather than negative attitude. She commented that she found the English of the film quite simple, which suggests that she followed the source text to some extent, and she pointed out that the characters in the Thai prison scene spoke fluent English, again suggesting that she followed the spoken text. Because she made no comments on reception strategies, said almost nothing about the subtitles and did not quote or paraphrase any lines from the film, it is impossible to speculate further about \( S. \) These few comments, however, together with her questionnaire response, demonstrate that \( S \) was not solely dependent on the subtitles and was aware of some aspects of the source text, even if she does favour subtitles as a source of information.

\( S \)’s only spontaneous comment, which initiated the only active exchange in which \( S \) participated, concerned the translation of swearwords. After \( N \)’s description of her habit of finding out how swearwords are translated, \( S \) commented: “Ja ku usein leffoissa on tää ‘minä paskat nakkaan’, mikä on tää käänös.” [“And then movies often have this ‘minä paskat nakkaan’, which is the translation.”] The rest of the group responded with laughter and agreement, which could be taken to mean that either \( S \) mentioned something the informants had discussed with each other before, or this phrase genuinely had attracted several informants’ attention previously. Whichever was the case, it is interesting that the one exchange initiated
by the most passive member of the group concerned swearwords. S even mentioned “hunting” for such words in translations. This is another piece of evidence suggesting that swearwords are particularly interesting to the audiences of translations, and readers pay particular attention to these words.

It is impossible to know why S would be the most passive member of Group 3. She could be quiet and reserved by nature, or she may have felt awkward in the unfamiliar research situation. One interesting point concerns education. As she is the only informant in all three groups without university-level education, she stands out from the others slightly. Could educational background have an effect on how willingly informants share their opinions, or could a perceived low level of education make an individual less inclined to participate in such discussion? This is, of course, quite speculative, and the suggestion would need to be investigated through further research. This idea is, however, consistent with some findings in my previous reception study (Tuominen, 2002), where the test subjects with a lower level of education occasionally were more reserved in their responses. Thus, it would appear possible that education can be a contributing factor. However, in S’s case it would be irresponsible to draw such conclusions without further evidence. It can only be said that her profile as an informant is a subdued, passive one, and although she appears to have followed the discussion actively, her participation was minimal, and the only question to arouse her interest in a noticeable way had to do with swearwords.

6.4.4 Concluding Group Profile: The Friendly, Cynical Amusers

Group 3 was extremely cohesive. The informants knew each other well and had joint history, which also meant that they had pre-existing roles, which they maintained during the focus group discussion. This clearly had an effect on the direction of the conversation and the manner in which it was conducted. Interaction in Group 3 was lively and friendly, with a great deal of laughter and indications of mutual familiarity. This lively atmosphere had practical implications for this analysis, as the fast pace, overlapping conversation and multitude of laughter and distractions made the discussion somewhat challenging to transcribe and quote. Most group members took on some role in the construction of the social cohesion of
the group, for example by recounting shared past experiences or opinions, bringing up topics which were interesting to many of the group members, joking, expressing agreement or correcting others’ inaccurate statements. With the exception of S, the informants also assumed fairly equal responsibility for keeping the discussion going so that, for example, many of them initiated exchanges and responded first to my questions, instead of leaving this up to one or two dominant individuals. This created an atmosphere where the discussion flowed freely and both agreement and disagreement were easily expressed.

This group also reinforced the supposition that there is some interest towards subtitles among average film viewers, and subtitles are discussed even outside such a research situation. An example of this is the active following of translation strategies for obscenities, as well as Q’s remarks about her boyfriend’s interest in omissions. The comments concerning learning something through subtitles also suggest that subtitles hold some educative significance for viewers. In addition, similarly to both Group 1 and Group 2, this group showed more acceptance of rather than resistance towards the subtitles. Even though this group occasionally portrayed even quite cynical attitudes, the informants did not express such ideas about translations. Quite the opposite, they seemed to accept the subtitles as appropriate for the situation, and even though there were some points of criticism, these were quite mild and tended to turn into a learning experience: “kun ei itse tiedä sille välttämättä sille sanalle kun yhden merkityksen, nin ihmettelee, että miks se on käännetty noin” [“when you don’t necessarily know more than one meaning for that word, then you wonder why it’s been translated that way”], and “ai nii, tosiaan voihan sen noinki sanoo.” [“oh yeah, really, you can say it that way, too.”] The criticism might have been stronger in a different setting, and talking to a researcher may have led the group’s members to conduct themselves diplomatically, but the underlying attitude towards subtitles appeared quite accepting.

One of the most obvious specialities of Group 3 was their almost cynical attention towards product placement, financial reasons for filmmaking and realism reflected in the visual dimension of the film. Group 3 was not alone in, for example, speculating on the reasons for making sequels and attracting certain types of audiences, but this group was the only one to initiate long exchanges on these themes. They noticed the brands of skis and models of cars and had opinions on those, and speculated on sponsorship deals behind these choices. Although this does
not have a direct relationship to the translation or even interpretations of the film, it is interesting to note that viewers’ attention can be directed very differently, and they do not always suspend their disbelief on matters surrounding filmmaking. This cynicism could perhaps explain some of the critical attitudes towards films and even translations, as viewers look at films as cultural products, products whose goal is to make profit, rather than absorb themselves in the stories told through films. This aspect cannot be forgotten when looking at reception. While viewers naturally want to enjoy what they are watching, they also often want to make sure that they do not appear naïve or gullible, and therefore bring up critical views of the filmmaking process. These three focus groups did not extend this criticism to the subtitles, but it is possible that the criticism can sometimes include subtitles and their creation process. However, as the practices of subtitling are less familiar to viewers and perceived to be less significant in the audiovisual entity than filmmaking itself, the questions of subtitling appear to be, based on these three groups, to some extent peripheral. While the film itself faces some criticism, subtitles are easily accepted and considered a legitimate part of the film. In other words, even though there is potential for criticism based on this cynical outlook, it does not manifest itself as criticism of subtitles very often, especially when talking of a specific, concrete example of one film’s subtitles.

In conclusion, a final profile of Group 3 builds itself on the basis of the close social relationships within the group. The members of the group know each other so well that they probably fell easily into their normal social roles in the focus group situation, and this had an effect on the group dynamics. In addition, the group members expressed a significant amount of shared knowledge and knowledge of each other’s backgrounds. They used this knowledge to formulate assumptions on each other’s responses to the topic of discussion, including each other’s language skills and subtitle reception strategies. Therefore, the cohesiveness of the group defined the style of discussion as well as at least some of its substance. The cohesiveness may also have helped in creating a very positive, talkative atmosphere. The open, pleasant discussion revealed how these fairly average film-viewers, without exception, gain at least some part of the information through subtitles but also listen to the source text. Their relationship to subtitles is automatic and subconscious and relatively difficult to verbalise. What is easier to discuss is the general framework of the entertainment industry and film-making. The group,
despite its light-hearted and pleasant atmosphere, made it clear that they do not take entertainment products naively and seriously but, instead, understand something of the circumstances of their production and are willing to question certain aspects of it.
7. Conclusions, Comparisons and Reflections

In this chapter, I will discuss the implications of the analysis conducted in the previous chapter and contextualise this study further through comparisons with other reception-related data. In the first section of the chapter, I will draw together the narratives constructed in the previous chapter to search for underlying group norms. In this way, I will investigate what idiosyncrasies arise in such a study, and, on the other hand, what kinds of shared attitudes, opinions and processes can be detected, and what factors thus construct the framework of this reception situation. I will also contrast these findings with other reception studies. In the second section, I will discuss the significance of the moderator’s role and reflect on how my performance as moderator may have affected the focus groups. Then, in the third section, I will refine the focus group narrative by discussing how the near-experts in Group 2 differed from the non-experts. After this, in the fourth section, I will again move towards the objective of contextualisation: I will look at some examples of spontaneous comments on subtitle reception and compare this to the focus group data. This provides an additional frame of reference for the focus group data: a comparison between spontaneous comments and the focus group data can help in understanding how the focus groups fit into the landscape of Finnish subtitle viewership. Finally, I will discuss the benefits and shortcomings of this research methodology and then offer a short conclusion of this chapter by presenting a final, concluding profile of this reception study in its situational context.

7.1 Group Norms: Shared Themes and Idiosyncrasies

One of the central objectives in a focus group study is investigating the group norms and collective processes which lead to the opinions and attitudes expressed in the discussion (Bloor et al., 2001: 4). In focus group discussions on subtitles,
investigating group norms could mean, for example, searching for what appears to be an acceptable or normal way of using subtitles and talking about them, as well as finding common ground within the groups in their discussion topics. Thus, in the following, I will discuss some norms and processes which underlie the three focus group discussions of this study. I will begin with some discussion themes which were shared by all groups and then proceed to discuss collective tendencies related to reception strategies and attitudes towards subtitles and subtitling. Finally, I will discuss the significance of subtitle quality in the light of the focus group data.

7.1.1 Swedish, Swearing and Songs

One way of building a coherent narrative for all three focus groups is to foreground the groups’ shared themes, i.e. discussion topics which were brought up without prompting in each group. These themes are the Swedish subtitles, swearing and slang, and the role of music in the film. Each theme was discussed in all groups, and although some exchanges were more extensive than others, all themes attracted some interest in each group. These themes appear, therefore, to have been particularly interesting to the informants and relevant to their viewing experience.

The Swedish subtitles were a slightly surprising and entirely spontaneous theme of comments in all three groups. As all informants were native Finnish speakers, I had not anticipated that the Swedish subtitles would play any role in the discussions, but they were brought up in each group. Even though the reasons for mentioning the Swedish subtitles were different, and some remarks were fairly short, it is interesting to note that each group paid some attention to the Swedish text. This could be taken as proof that subtitles truly cannot be avoided. Even the duplicate subtitles in a language that is not the informant’s mother tongue – and might even be weaker than the source language – are noticed, read and remembered to the extent that they can inspire discussion. Some informants were even able to comment on the contents and quality of the Swedish subtitles, which shows that some viewers occasionally read the second set of subtitles with enough attention to be able to discuss them. The discussions did not indicate that all informants had read the Swedish subtitles, but they showed that at least some informants in every group had noticed them and were interested enough to mention them.
The second topic which recurred in all three groups was translating obscenities, swearwords and slang. This was a particularly interesting discussion topic for all the groups, significantly more interesting than the Swedish subtitles, which, although mentioned in each group, did not always inspire active exchanges or engage several informants. On the other hand, swearwords generated active discussion in each group. One reason for this may have been that the film contained a considerable amount of slang and swearing, and therefore plenty of material for discussion. Another possible reason is that obscene words are often, even according to some informants’ statements, some of the most easily recognised elements of a foreign language, which makes it easy to compare the source text to the translation. A third possible factor is that quite often obscenities are either left out or modified in subtitles, and that could attract a viewer’s attention. Whatever the reason for this interest, it is quite significant to note that many informants not only paid attention to the translations of obscene and slang expressions but were also able to recall some very specific details afterwards. Viewers notice changes and pay close comparative attention to swearwords, and to translation strategies whose justification is not immediately obvious. Such changes can generate a negative response as well as undermine the credibility of the subtitles. Furthermore, it appears to be of great importance that the translated obscene expressions are fluent and idiomatic Finnish, as was seen, for example, in the discussion concerning the phrase ‘mennä paskaksi’ ['turn to shit’] in Group 1 (see section 6.2.2.1). The focus group discussions suggest that slang and obscenities can easily become a focal point in conversations concerning subtitles, and they prick the curiosity of some viewers. It might therefore be justified for a translator to pay specific attention to such elements of the text and be wary of veering too far away from the original text, because that could distract or even irritate viewers.

The third theme which recurred in each focus group was the film’s soundtrack. All groups had unprompted exchanges about the songs heard in the film. Music was brought up for various reasons which were not always connected to translation or subtitles but, on occasion, the exchanges did touch on translation as well. The informants in the near-expert Group 2 discussed the translation and non-translation of song lyrics and speculated on the necessity and function of such translations. In the other two groups, the soundtrack was discussed on a more general level, but even in those groups the significance of the songs for the entire audiovisual
experience and the plot of the film was mentioned. Even though this had no explicit connection with subtitles, it was a reference to understanding the entire film and the role of the songs and their lyrics in it. Informants in both groups were able to use the music choices as an aid in constructing their interpretations of the film and were able to understand, for example, the significance of certain lyrics chosen for certain scenes. Of course, only some of the informants participated in these exchanges and it is impossible to chart each informant’s individual interpretations and levels of understanding, but the general feeling in the groups was one of understanding rather than confusion or dismissal. This indicates that this element was significant in the interpretation of the film, even though the songs were not subtitled. Thus, subtitles are not relied on so heavily that any untranslated source-text verbal information would be automatically dismissed as mere background noise. In this way the discussions concerning the film’s soundtrack confirmed the idea that subtitles are only one part of the whole text and that the entire multimodal experience is significant to viewers.

However, in this light it is interesting that none of the focus group discussions considered the multimodality in particular of the reception experience. Most of the discussion centred around the film and its plot in general, its background, or the subtitles. All of this, to a large extent, relied either on the film’s verbal or visual aspects alone, but the interplay of the film’s visual, verbal, auditory and temporal dimensions played a minimal role. One exception to this was the remark made in Group 1 (see 6.2.2.1) on the translation ‘Möven ja Pick’ in place of the original reference to Ben and Jerry: this was a comment on the inconsistency between the translation and what was seen on screen. However, despite this exception, what the data suggests is that either the viewers did not pay conscious attention to the multimodality of the film or this did not cause significant problems and was therefore left unmentioned. In comparison, it is interesting to note Henrik Gottlieb’s (1995: 409) study, in which one of his conclusions was that the non-verbal visual aspects of a subtitled programme are absorbed before subtitles and are remembered better than subtitles. Gottlieb suggests that this might indicate that nonverbal visual information is given priority over verbal text. The informants’ comments in this study do give some reason to support Gottlieb’s contention, as accurate, verbatim quotes were relatively rare in discussions and the overall visual appearance of the film was remembered fairly well. However, it is impossible to determine whether
the informants prioritised verbal or visual information, because so little was said about the two in comparison to each other. Thus, this data does not favour visual information with significant primary status but, on the other hand, does not obviously contradict Gottlieb’s findings, either. The visual aspect is clearly important, but its importance does not diminish the significance of the verbal dimension of the audiovisual text.

Of course, given the fast pace of a film, and viewing it only once, it is likely quite difficult to pay conscious attention to the interplay of its visual, auditive and verbal elements. This may in part explain the relative lack of comments in this regard. It is also difficult to pose questions concerning these areas, because the questions would have to be fairly general, and there are not many overall aspects that non-experts could be expected to notice. The only question asked about these features concerned reading time and whether the subtitles stayed on screen long enough, and this was mostly met with rather passive but positive responses, stating that the reading times were adequate, but the viewers did not pursue longer exchanges on this theme. Thus, it is not possible to draw significant conclusions in this area on the basis of the focus group data. These aspects of subtitle reception can presumably be better studied through more focussed, detail-oriented research methods, as was the case in Gottlieb’s study. The one comment on inconsistencies between the visual and the verbal in Group 1 would suggest that very obvious lapses of credibility could be noticed and they can cause irritation, but such minimal notice does not indicate that this is a critical issue within the viewing experience.

7.1.2 Reception Strategies

In addition to the three themes mentioned above, discussions about reception strategies were a recurrent topic which generated active exchanges in all three groups. From the informants’ explicit comments, it is possible to distinguish four perceived strategies for processing the source text and the subtitles in a situation where the source text is English: i) only listening to the source text, ii) only reading the subtitles, iii) listening to the source text primarily and supporting this with the subtitles, and iv) reading the subtitles primarily and supporting this with the source text. The same four categories were evinced in all groups, with one noteworthy
exception: none of the informants in the near-expert Group 2 claimed either of the exclusive strategies, i.e. that their strategy consisted of only listening to the source text or only reading the subtitles. What is particularly interesting is that none of the near-experts claimed to use only the source text. This is certainly the group whose members have the strongest English skills and would best be able to rely on the source text alone. While this could be a coincidence instead of a sign of a more general pattern, it is at the very least an intriguing observation. It could be related to the research situation, where it is natural to pay more conscious attention to the subtitles than in regular viewing, or it could be a reflection of informant diplomacy towards the moderator and the study, an unwillingness to express that subtitles are insignificant. In addition, it could reflect the near-experts’ willingness to pay attention to subtitles out of professional interest, or their awareness of the fact that subtitles are indeed unavoidable.

The expressed reception strategies of Group 2 are, in fact, a credible representation of the insistent presence and noticeability of subtitles. By this I mean that, despite some informants’ explicit declarations in Group 1 and Group 3, further investigation into the discussions reveals that none of the informants have been able to concentrate singularly on the source text; all have also received some information through the Finnish subtitles and, in general, noticed their existence. Similarly, those who would suggest that they concentrated solely on the subtitles were invariably found to have also heard and processed at least some parts of the source text. Thus, on closer inspection, it appears that the four viewing strategies can be condensed into two: one of reading the subtitles primarily and listening to the source text secondarily, and another of listening to the source text primarily and reading the subtitles secondarily. In both cases, the secondary support is necessary most typically when the pace of the primary text is too fast for comfortable comprehension, or when the primary text contains verbal material that is difficult to understand. There are, of course, variations and degrees within these two strategies, but the discussions indicate that both source text and subtitles have a presence in all viewing processes. Thus, it is clear that subtitles are not irrelevant to the overall reception experience, and they also unavoidably enter into an interplay with the source text, particularly when the source language is more or less familiar to the viewers, as English is to many Finns.
The informants’ comments on their viewing strategies, and the contradictions contained in these comments, also demonstrate how unconscious and automatic these strategies are and how difficult it is to analyse one’s own viewing process. Furthermore, they show that these unconscious strategies are accompanied by a reading process that is cursory and superficial, an automatically occurring reading, dictated by the pace of the film, that does not concentrate on the details of the translation or allow for extensive recollection afterwards. This is beneficial, even necessary, for the viewing process in that it allows the viewers to follow the flow of the film easily and flexibly and does not fixate attention on the translation. However, it can also be problematic, as some details are bound to be missed, as was seen, for example, in Group 3’s discussion of the joke concerning the name ‘Simon’ (see 6.4.2.2). Thus, subtitles are by no means an unproblematic means of distributing information, and their reading processes are not identical with conventional reading processes. This would suggest that, in order to be successful in communicating the message, subtitles should be easy to understand at one, quick glance. Complicated language or verbal details which require attention can either distract from the viewing experience or be missed entirely with this superficial reading strategy.

Against this background it is interesting to consider Ali Hajmohammadi’s (2004) recommendation for subtitles to be condensed as much as possible. His view is well founded, and it is supported, to some extent, by the findings concerning viewers’ superficial reading strategies. The suggestion stands, however, in contradiction to some viewers’ stated opinions on omissions, as several informants in this study commented that notable omissions are a problem in subtitles. Omissions and condensations also inspired some protests from test subjects in Henrik Gottlieb’s (1995: 409) study, and it is clear that excessive omissions can affect the readability and understandability of subtitles adversely. On the other hand, if eye tracking studies such as d’Ydewalle et al. (1991) demonstrate that subtitles take up a significant proportion of viewers’ attention and if the current study’s data suggests that extensive attention to subtitles can be distracting, it follows that Hajmohammadi is correct in his assertion that considerable omissions are needed in order to diminish the role of subtitles. These two viewpoints are obviously

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60 See chapter 2.2 for further discussion on Hajmohammadi’s views.
contradictory with each other and cannot be satisfied simultaneously. However, both have merit and are founded on credible empirical evidence. This is a useful reminder of the fact that audiences are never homogenous, and opinions are not uniform. No empirical data can account for the needs and preferences of the entire audience: some may find omissions objectionable, while others find lengthy subtitles too distracting. Additionally, explicit statements can be different from automatic reading strategies, and while viewers might voice negative opinions on omissions, they might benefit from condensation without realising it, because it allows for a smooth reception process. In short, it is not self-evident that viewers know “what is best for them”. It is, however, useful to be aware of both points of view in order to knowingly search for balance between the two: even though condensation and omission are necessary, they can attract negative attention and adversely affect perceptions of subtitle quality. Therefore, they require careful consideration so that the strategies are not distractingly visible to the audience.

One interesting parallel for the reception strategies found in the focus group data of this study is offered by a study on user responses to simultaneous interpreting, conducted by Anna-Riitta Vuorikoski (1998). Vuorikoski (1998: 188) states it as her hypothesis that simultaneous interpreting could be considered “satisfactory if the listeners use the service, and if they give positive feedback on the content and quality of the oral translation they have received.” The situation of listening to a speech with simultaneous interpreting is in some ways similar to the situation of watching a subtitled film: in both instances, both the source and the target text are readily available, and individual audience members must decide which one to use. The decision in the case of interpreting must be more active and exclusive than in film-viewing, because listening to simultaneous interpreting involves making use of a technical device that must be consciously employed and that, to some extent, shuts out the original message, whereas subtitles are always available on the same screen as the source text, and both messages can be used simultaneously without conscious decisions towards either one. Of course, one can listen to interpreting with only one ear while listening to the original speech with the other, but this choice, too, is made consciously, and it is a more demanding strategy in terms of dividing one's attention than receiving subtitles and the spoken source text simultaneously.

However, the choice of different reception strategies also creates similarities between subtitle reception and the reception of simultaneous interpreting, and this
can be seen in some of Vuorikoski’s findings. Vuorikoski (*ibid.*: 190) states that, in her study, at least three distinct categories of addressees could be detected: those who did not listen to the interpreting at all, those who listened to both the original and the interpreting to varying extents, and those who listened only to the interpreting. These three categories are remarkably similar to the four stated viewing strategies found in this study. Vuorikoski goes on to point out that individual listeners do not necessarily stay in one category throughout the entire event but “may move from one category to another, depending on their mood or interests or the hour of the day or, most importantly, depending on the addressor’s idiosyncratic features and presentation style” (*ibid.*: 190). This could also be true of subtitle reception strategies: while four different categories have been verbalised by the informants, none of these categories are stable or permanent, but vary even within one viewing situation. Despite the fact that one strategy may be predominant, others are also employed whenever the situation calls for it. Therefore, it is not surprising that even those viewers who state that they do not read subtitles have, at some point during the viewing situation, changed their strategy and absorbed some information through the subtitles. The end result is that viewers cannot avoid either reading the subtitles or hearing the source text, and any overall viewing strategy involves receiving both in differing degrees.

The unavoidability of subtitles has been previously discovered by eye tracking studies. As d’Ydewalle *et al.* state (1991: 652), subtitle-reading is “obligatory,” and eye tracking data shows that viewers’ eyes move quite automatically towards subtitles whenever they are on screen. In fact, it has even been found that if viewers are used to subtitles, their eyes might move to the bottom of the screen even when no subtitles are on display (Mäkisalo, 2012). This obligatory nature of subtitle-reading was reflected in the focus group comments, when one informant called subtitle-reading “accidental”: when subtitles appear, the viewer looks at them without conscious action. However, d’Ydewalle *et al.* (1991: 660) also suggest that subtitles might be, automatically, the preferred channel of receiving information for the viewer. This view is not entirely supported by either the informants’ subjective statements or their less conscious remarks in the current study: both subtitles and the source text are mentioned in the informants’ comments and used in referring to the film, and both appear to have had an effect on the reception experience. Consequently, while this qualitative look at subtitle reception is in agreement with
d’Ydewalle et al.’s central point of subtitles being obligatory, it also casts doubt on the hypothesis that subtitles would be prioritised. Rather, it seems that both subtitles and the source text are, to some extent, obligatory, and viewers can no more avoid the spoken text than they can the subtitles. Typical viewing strategies consist of a combination of “accidental”, cursory reading and equally automatic listening to whatever elements of the source text are recognisable and audible to the viewer.

The automatic, obligatory reading of subtitles means that they are also read by those who do not necessarily need them. As Dominique Bairstow (2011)\(^6\) has found, this has potential to be extremely distracting and hinder the understanding of the entire audiovisual text. However, Bairstow’s study does not address the question of whether subtitles are a help or a hindrance for those viewers who understand some of the source text but who understand the subtitles even better, which is typical of Finnish audiences. It would be interesting to study Finnish viewers with Bairstow’s research framework and compare the results with her study to see how helpful subtitles truly are in such a situation. On the basis of the current study, it is impossible to speculate much on this aspect of viewing strategies, but the focus group discussions do provide some interesting data which could be related to this. First and foremost, the data shows that the informants were able to watch the film comfortably and understand the story quite well, demonstrated by the fact that all informants, with the sole exception of S in Group 3, participated quite actively in discussions concerning the film’s plot and details. This shows that the joint strategy of both listening and reading can produce a satisfactory result, despite a few momentary distractions. The viewers’ superficial reading strategies probably helped them maintain a balance in their attention and concentrate somewhat on the rest of the multimodal text, instead of spending too much time and effort on subtitles. In addition, the fact that many informants pointed out that they use subtitles to understand difficult words or phrases indicates that even those whose knowledge of the source language is fairly strong do look to subtitles for help in understanding and interpretation. Thus, in this data, subtitles do not appear to be a severe distraction; they are a helpful support, even if they are not needed all the time.

One explanation for the apparent lack of distracting effect might be the fact that Finns are very used to subtitled material and, as was occasionally indicated in the

\(^6\)For a discussion on Bairstow’s study, see section 3.1.5.2.
focus group data, have formed automatic reception strategies through plenty of experience beginning in childhood. This might allow Finns to use subtitles flexibly and comfortably, without the risk of severe distraction. Bairstow’s study did not indicate how used to subtitles the test subjects were, but, as France is a dubbing country and English-speaking countries are dominated by English-language audiovisual material, it is possible that viewing subtitled material is not as much a lifelong habit for Bairstow’s test subjects as it is for the Finnish viewers who participated in this study. It is easy to understand how the appearance of subtitles can be distracting for a viewer who is not used to watching subtitled material, while someone equipped with automatic processing strategies might not be as affected by subtitles even in a situation where subtitles are superfluous. However, as was stated above, this study cannot provide exhaustive evidence on this question, and it would need to be examined with a different methodology.

From the point of view of group norms, it can also be significant to investigate what informants say of each other’s viewing strategies and viewing strategies in general. This may reveal underlying assumptions which explain the informants’ explicit comments. One interesting example in this regard is F’s comment “Mä olen ehkä poikkeus, mää luen enemmän niitä tekstejä” [“I might be an exception, I read the subtitles more”]. Through his slightly uncertain remark, F suggests that he believes his habit of primarily reading subtitles is uncommon. Similar notions could be detected in some other informants’ statements, leading to the impression that many viewers assume that others primarily listen to the English source text. This can then lead to somewhat apologetic attitudes towards reading subtitles, or a defensive, over-compensatory emphasis on subtitles. However, as has been seen from the focus group data, the source text is by no means the primary source of information for all informants, and the informants freely admit to reading subtitles, albeit occasionally in slightly defensive or apologetic ways. Many informants did want to present the source text as their primary source of information, but the ensuing discussion often revealed that subtitles also played a significant role. Thus, subtitles are read, and the group norm for discussing subtitle-reading does not dictate that one must not admit to reading subtitles. At most, subtitle use may occasionally be minimised. However, what the group norm does appear to dictate is that one should not expect others to read subtitles actively.
The focus group data does not support the informants’ stated impression of subtitle-reading as a minority strategy, but it is naturally impossible to draw definitive conclusions for the wider Finnish film audiences’ strategies from this data. One reason for subtitle-reading possibly being over-emphasised in this data is the research situation: the informants may have been motivated to express a more active relationship with subtitles than they would in some other context, because subtitles were the topic of conversation. Consequently, the impression gained on reception strategies from this focus group situation could emphasise subtitles as a source of information more than information gained from a different context. However, it is clear from the discussions that subtitles are a significant presence in the reception experience. Thus, it is conceivable that the informants do use subtitles actively even in other, more natural viewing situations, but they are perhaps not as conscious of subtitle use in those situations as they were in this particular context.

One further question on reception strategies concerns the effect of the viewing situation. Is watching a subtitled film in the cinema different from watching a subtitled film on television? The situation is, of course, very different, and even the subtitles are different, most visibly due to the presence of two languages in Finnish cinema subtitles. However, what is more difficult to determine is whether these differences affect reception strategies or the understanding of subtitles. It is possible that the informants of this study were able to pay more attention to subtitles and the entire film in this cinema context than they would have been in a television-viewing situation, and this could have, for example, helped them remember the film and parts of subtitles better. However, in order to be able to offer any conclusions on this, a comparative study between television-viewing and cinema-viewing would be necessary. Thus, this method alone cannot tell whether the observed viewing strategies were cinema-specific.

One distinctly cinema-specific element of the reception context did arise from the focus group discussions. This was the social situation of watching a film in a crowd of people. For example, Group 3 discussed how it feels to laugh at a different time from the rest of the audience and how that can dilute the comedic effect, and there were occasional remarks of other audience members’ reactions to the film. These show that the general social situation is relevant to the viewing experience, as other viewers’ noticeable reactions become a part of the film-viewing context and can affect an individual’s experience. Even subtitles can be a factor in this, and
individual variation in reception strategies can cause variation in reactions: if, for example, subtitles are paced differently from the source text or if they are missing a joke, those concentrating on the subtitles react differently – with less laughter or with laughter at a different time – from those who prioritise the source text. In a large group such as a cinema audience, this variation can affect the entire audience’s reactions. Consequently, by enabling a variety of reception strategies, the presence of subtitles inserts this ambivalence into the communal reactions of a cinema audience and can affect the overall enjoyment and opinions of individual viewers. On a smaller scale, the same can of course be true of television-viewing in groups, where varying reactions within the group can affect others’ responses and feelings. However, the social situation of television-viewing is different from cinema-viewing, and these effects should therefore be investigated separately.

7.1.3 Attitudes towards Subtitles and Subtitlers

One of the beginning premises (see 1.2) of this study was that viewer comments on subtitles would often tend towards the negative, pointing out shortcomings and omissions in the subtitles and expressing problems in the reception experience. The reality of the focus group data was, however, remarkably different. The expressed overall attitudes towards the subtitles in all three groups were either neutral or cautiously positive, respecting the authority of the subtitles as stating what was said in the film and accepting them as a reliable source of information. The neutral statements most often conveyed a sense of overlooking or forgetting concrete details of the subtitles: the subtitles were noticed and read, but they were instrumental and secondary to the entire reception process, not something to be remembered or thought of consciously. Thus, when reminded of problematic aspects of the subtitles, some informants agreed and appeared to remember the part in question, but had not been able to recall it without prompting and typically expressed that these problems were negligible as the film moved on and did not have an effect on the overall viewing experience. The fact that similar attitudes were repeated in all three groups and in largely similar ways makes these statements particularly compelling. They point to a reception context where negative views on subtitles are
easily suppressed and what comes to the informants’ minds during the discussion are statements of trust and acceptance.

Even when the film itself was criticised, occasionally with fairly strong words, the criticisms did not extend to the subtitles. Several informants expressed a sense of learning something from the subtitles, in one case in Group 1 even learning something new about one’s native language through an unfamiliar word in the subtitles. This implies that subtitles can be viewed as an authoritative source of information on language, culture and communicative conventions. Thus, any group norms concerning discussions on subtitles did not constrain the discussion to negative aspects of the subtitles; quite the opposite, the groups approached subtitles with acceptance, and criticisms were softened through polite turns of phrase as well as attempts to understand the translator’s solutions. The groups did not attempt to turn the discussion towards harsher criticism even when invited to do so by my prompting. However, it must also be noted that the discussions contained little explicit praise for the subtitles: even though the tone was accepting, the informants were no more able to recall particularly successful parts of the subtitles than they were to point out poor solutions.

There were, of course, occasional critical comments in the discussions, but these were surprisingly rare and mild in tone, most typically expressing slight puzzlement or uncertainty over interpretations. Even in many such critical exchanges, some informants attempted to find fault in things other than the subtitles, such as their own faulty understanding or differences in interpretations. Consequently, the subtitler was not directly accused of poor work, nor were accusations of deficient quality brought against the subtitles. Whatever perceived problems the informants had to deal with, they bypassed them with little attention and based their understanding of the film on an overall interpretation, which did not rely only on details contained in the subtitles. The only significantly problematic theme to arise from the discussions was not an unambiguous subtitling error but, more accurately, any part of the subtitles which drew unnecessary attention to itself and away from the entirety of the multimodal text. This could naturally mean language that is unidiomatic or in conflict with Finnish conventions, such as the somewhat clumsy translation ‘mennä paskaksi’. However, it can similarly be language that is entirely correct and acceptable, but simply draws attention by not being very familiar. An excellent example of this was the word ‘lomanen’ which was mentioned as
something peculiar in both Group 1 and Group 2. The word itself, while slightly unusual, is not a mistranslation or incorrect Finnish, but simply a creative translation for ‘mini-break’, which does not have an obvious, short Finnish equivalent. The unfamiliarity of the word appears to have made the informants stop and consciously think about its meaning. As a result, they had to focus more attention on the subtitles than on other parts of the text, thus being taken away from the world of the film and being forced to concentrate on the artifice of the subtitles.

This tendency is reminiscent of Inkeri Vehmas-Lehto’s (1989) empirical study on translation quality, which employed the concept of covert error. As found in Vehmas-Lehto’s study, covert errors, which diminish the fluency and readability of the translated text without being actual mistakes, can have a significant effect on the text’s reception. The same was true in the current study: aspects of the subtitles which could be called covert errors, i.e. elements that are not fluent, natural and easily readable Finnish, were what attracted the viewers’ attention, while the one overt mistake did not cause any significant amount of protest. These interruptions to the flow of the film came up in all focus groups, and they appear to be at the core of a majority of problems in subtitle reception. One could, consequently, surmise that when the Finnish text is fluent and pleasant to read, even if its content may be slightly incorrect in comparison with the source text or the audiovisual context, it is possible for the viewer to just read the subtitle and move on without being too distracted. On the other hand, when the Finnish text sounds strange, unnatural or unfamiliar, be it due to a creative neologism or a clumsy pun, it is much more difficult to ignore the problem and easier to remember the problematic aspects afterwards. This observation speaks in favour of simple, easily readable subtitles where the words are not too obscure or too innovative, and language that does not deviate too far from a standard register. This is, of course, not to say that mistranslations are inconsequential: noticeable errors can also be distracting, and

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For a discussion on covert errors, see section 3.1.5.1. Additionally, Anthony Pym’s (1992) discussion of binary and non-binary errors makes a similarly useful distinction, although he does not base this division on empirical reception research. In Pym’s terminology (1992: 282–283), a binary error is one that is unequivocally wrong and can only have one correct solution, while a non-binary error involves a number of potential, more or less correct solutions. Thus, non-binary errors could be compared to Vehmas-Lehto’s covert errors. Pym’s error categories have been used by Tuulikki Vuonokari (2008) in her analysis of viewer comments on subtitles.
frequent errors or inconsistencies will certainly cause interruptions to the flow of the reception process. Furthermore, the need for maintaining a standard register does not mean that all elements of slang or spoken language should be eliminated from subtitles, but that it might be well advised for subtitlers to think carefully about which effects to employ and how far the translation should go in adhering to a non-standard style. Perhaps subtitling, because of its temporal constraints and multimodal context, as well as the presence of the source text, is expected to be in some ways slightly more conservative than many other modes of translation, in order to avoid distracting the flow of reception.

In addition to the fairly mild comments expressing confusion and loss of concentration, some informants did, on a few occasions, express stronger criticisms of subtitles in general. However, these were not connected to the subtitles of this film; these were general expressions on issues which, according to the informants’ statements, are usually or often problems in subtitles, but the informants were not able to find examples of such problems in this particular film. Similar criticisms were also presented in the background questionnaire: when asked about subtitle quality, the most common response, offered by seven informants, was that errors attract the viewer’s attention, and the second most frequent, with six responses, was that jokes lose their effect in subtitles. What this shows is that many informants were keen to point out on a general level that they notice mistakes or the loss of humour, but very little of this entered into the discussion on the Bridget Jones subtitles. This points to one possible tendency in viewers’ attitudes towards subtitles and the ways in which subtitles are discussed: it is easy to make critical remarks on subtitles in a general conversation on subtitle quality, but when faced with a concrete example of subtitles in context, it is more difficult to find actual examples of these problems. This does not mean that the general criticisms are not valid; rather, it is an indication that, despite some perceived problems in subtitles, it is much easier to simply follow the subtitled programme and overlook problematic details than interrupt one’s concentration in order to memorise the details of quality problems. In a multimodal context, many factors of the text both support the viewer in being able to follow the programme and, on the other hand, claim the viewer’s attention, and therefore the problems in subtitles are not the only aspect of the text to concentrate on or the only basis for interpretation and understanding. This could explain why concentrating on the problems of subtitling is not necessarily a priority.
Interestingly, this tendency to be accepting of specific, concrete subtitling instances while criticising subtitles in general is reminiscent of the media researcher Jostein Gripsrud’s attitude towards subtitles, as presented in section 3.2.2. While Gripsrud (1995: 110–111) calls translation in general “treason”, he also states that the subtitles to Dynasty, whose reception he investigates, do not change the original text at all (ibid.: 133). Thus, the same divergence of opinion witnessed in the informants’ comments can be seen in this academic commentary. Gripsrud is not a specialist in translation studies and as such cannot be expected to present a full analysis of the Dynasty subtitles, but it is nevertheless interesting to observe that he would not devote any time or analysis to the possibility of the Dynasty subtitles being “treasonous”, in Gripsrud’s parlance. Thus he, too, makes generalised, critical comments on the idea of translation but then accepts the particular case of subtitles in his own research material as neutral, transparent and perfectly reflective of the original text. This reveals that directing specific criticism at subtitles is not as easy and as widespread as often suspected.

A similar sense of acceptance can be noted in Henrik Gottlieb’s study (1995) on viewer reactions to subtitles. Gottlieb (1995: 396–398) found that “subjects don’t seem to object as much as we had thought they would”, meaning that even obvious, intentionally introduced problems in subtitles attracted relatively few protests from the test subjects. Gottlieb (ibid.: 409) concludes that a strong protest response would require “severe dialog misrepresentation”. In addition, the study found that viewers may protest ordinary subtitling practices, such as condensation, as well as matters which are unrelated to the subtitler’s work. Furthermore, Jukka Mäkisalo (2012) has reported on very similar findings in a Finnish eye tracking study, where errors in timecueing were more problematic for viewers of a subtitled programme than mistakes in the translation. This indicates, largely in accordance with the current study, that errors or problems in subtitles are not particularly noticeable to viewers, and a low rate of protest might be taken as a sign of acceptance towards subtitles. It is also interesting that the viewers in Gottlieb’s study protested comparatively actively on matters which are not subtitling errors but interrupt or distract the viewing process, while Mäkisalo’s results suggest that desynchronisation can cause difficulties for viewers. Both of these findings are further indicators of the viewers’ need to become immersed in the programme flow, and any interruption to that flow becomes a reason for protest. In this way, both Gottlieb’s and Mäkisalo’s findings
suggest a similar disregard for fluent, overt errors but attention to distracting covert errors as was detected in this study.

One reason for the largely unquestioning and uncritical atmosphere in the discussions could be the context of the discussion, as was pointed out above with regard to reception strategies: the informants might, knowingly or unknowingly, attempt to be polite towards the researcher and self-censor their more critical attitudes, expressing only cautiously diplomatic statements of understanding and acceptance. However, when examining the discussion data closely and symptomatically, it appears that even some less conscious ways of discussing the subtitles project an attitude of acceptance and trust. For example, many informants unwittingly referred to the subtitles as the authentic words of the film and allowed the translation to speak in the place of the source text without comment. The authority of the subtitles was not questioned when discussing what some word of the source text “is” in Finnish, and the subtitles were referred to as a learning opportunity. Thus, even though a tendency towards politeness may explain some of the acceptance present in the discussions, these less conscious aspects of the discussion reinforce the attitudes detected in explicit comments. In addition, it cannot be assumed that positive attitudes would be the informants’ preferred message in a focus group situation; equally, some could reason that expressions of criticism are signs of informed sophistication and therefore a desirable way of commenting. Thus, it is impossible to know how the informants might want to colour their opinions, and the best way of treating the data is to read it symptomatically, without accepting the surface opinions as the only truth but also without automatically assuming them to be distorted in a certain way. In this context, as has been seen, the symptomatic reading reveals accepting attitudes of seeing subtitles as a useful tool for understanding the film.

One should also note that the attitudes of the focus groups are consistent with the findings of two small questionnaires investigating subtitle reception in Austria (Widler 2004) and Portugal (Alves Veiga, 2006). In both studies, responses concerning the general quality of subtitles were largely positive (Widler, 2004: 99–100; Alves Veiga, 2006: 165). Similarly, in a study investigating the reception of dubbing in Italy, one of the findings was that viewers have a predominantly positive attitude towards the quality of dubbing (Antonini, 2008: 144). This shows that it is
not unprecedented for informants to express acceptance of audiovisual translations, despite anecdotal evidence that might suggest otherwise.

The accepting attitude towards subtitles could be seen as a parallel to the category of “referential” reading, in contrast to “critical” reading, as used by Liebes and Katz (1993: 32) in their study on the reception of *Dallas*. Liebes and Katz use the two categories to describe viewers’ general approach to watching the television programme, either taking the characters and events as real (referential reading) or discussing their nature as an artefact (critical reading). In subtitle reception, the same categories could be used to reflect either a referential use of subtitles, i.e. treating them as the true words of the film, or a critical use, where the informants’ emphasis is on the construction of subtitles and where the discussion might revolve around, for example, translation strategies or the translator’s motivations. Thus, although some critical talk was discernible in each focus group, a clear majority of the discussion was referential. Rather unsurprisingly, the group with the most critical tone was the near-expert Group 2, but even there the discussion contained significant referential elements. In contrast with this referential tendency with regard to subtitles, the discussions on the film itself contained many more critical elements, such as discussions on the film’s casting, its status as a sequel, product placement, and so on. Thus, the informants were not particularly non-critical in their approach to the film, but their critical readings where predominantly directed at the film itself, while the subtitles received a more referential reading. This might be explained by the fact that the background to film-making is probably more familiar to viewers than the technical and practical aspects of subtitling, and therefore it is easier to discuss the film in a critical manner than it is to discuss the subtitles. However, extensive information on the background of subtitling is not a prerequisite for critical discussion; it is equally possible to adopt the critical style without any tangible knowledge of the field. Thus, it is significant to note that the informants were comfortable discussing subtitles in a referential manner, even though the critical discussion style was within their repertoire.

In addition to the general sense of acceptance and a referential discussion tone, the focus group discussions suggest that subtitles – and subtitlers – are quite forgettable. The informants were, in general, not actively aware of the details of the subtitles, even though they were able to quote or paraphrase some parts of them. Furthermore, in the background questionnaire, none of the informants were able to
remember the name of the subtitler. This is, of course, not a great surprise, as viewers probably quite easily stop paying attention once the film itself is over, but it is interesting that not even the near-experts were able to name the translator. This is also an interesting factor when considering the credibility of the informants’ contributions in the focus group. The fact that the informants could not remember the translator’s name suggests that they did not pay excessively close attention to the subtitles, and they certainly did not attempt to please the researcher or to appear knowledgeable by memorising the translator’s name. This is, again, a small piece of information which suggests that the informants did not emphasise the subtitles in their viewing experience to an overly large extent, and it could be taken as a sign that the viewing situation was fairly realistic and that the informants behaved largely in the way they would in an ordinary viewing situation.

The expressions of disinterest and lack of attention described above show that the discussions clearly placed subtitles in a secondary role in the viewing experience. The lack of attention is helpful in aiding viewers in following the entire multimodal text: as was discussed above, excessive attention given to subtitles would take away from the viewer’s ability to follow the rest of the film. In Group 3 this point was made explicit when a few of the informants jokingly mentioned that they start reading subtitles attentively if the film itself is boring and that the only time when subtitles were read attentively was in childhood, when one’s reading skills were not yet fully developed. In general, these comments on the subtitles’ role and explanations of how subtitles are used clearly point out their instrumental role in supporting the viewing experience. Therefore, recalling them afterwards is not very likely. This view is also supported by Alves Veiga’s survey, which found that the respondents did not pay attention to subtitles and were unable to name any subtitlers (Alves Veiga, 2006: 165–166). Consequently, while subtitles clearly serve a purpose and are trusted, they do indeed appear to be hidden in plain sight.

7.1.4 What About Quality?

As has been previously pointed out, the focus group discussions suggest that, at least in this context, a clear mistranslation in the subtitles did not arouse strong feelings and was not necessarily even noticed. This is an interesting finding with regard to
the discussion concerning subtitle quality and the consequences of poor quality for the viewing process. In some studies, translation quality has arisen as a possible explanation for audience responses, with the implication that poor quality can be blamed for misunderstandings and negative reactions. This is, of course, a logical conclusion. However, based on both the focus group discussions conducted for this study and Gottlieb’s (1995) findings on causes for protest in subtitle viewing, as well as Mäkisalo’s (2012) eye tracking data on the effects of poor timecueing and translation errors (see 3.1.5.2), the relationship between quality and reception might not be entirely straightforward. Some indicators of objectively poor quality, such as outright errors, do not necessarily attract attention, while some ordinary elements of subtitles, such as established subtitling conventions, can generate criticism, and synchronisation presents itself as a more important quality concern than word choices. Of course, in extreme cases of remarkably poor translation quality, the reception process will most likely suffer. However, those situations are relatively rare, and it is more common for quality problems to be more occasional and smaller in scope. In these cases, it might be much more difficult to uncover connections between translation quality and reception.

When looking at the quality discussion through the focus group data, what arises as a significant criterion for subtitle quality from the viewers’ point of view is fluency: as discussed above, the informants’ problems with subtitles often occurred in instances where the subtitles distracted them from the rest of the reception experience, while a non-distracting error did not have as significant an effect. In addition, the informants’ explicit statements on their perceptions of quality add two concrete themes: swearwords and omissions. The focus group discussions contained few exchanges that directly offered any criteria for subtitle quality, but these themes inspired some discussion, and the discussions indicated that both are, in at least some informants’ expressed opinion, instrumental in creating the impression of either high-quality or low-quality subtitles. These two themes are certainly not the only quality criteria from the audience’s point of view, but they are what inspired the most overt quality-related discussion in this focus group context. The exchanges demonstrated that if the translation of an obscene or slang expression is less than credible in a viewer’s opinion, this can affect that viewer’s opinion of the

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63See, for example, Fuentes Luque (2001) and Chiaro (2007).
translation. Similarly, noticeable omissions are something viewers may discuss and criticise, and omissions can therefore affect opinions on subtitle quality. This view is reinforced by the fact that Gottlieb (1995: 409) also found omissions to be a potential source of viewer protest. However, as can be seen from the above discussion on Hajmohammadi’s (2004) recommendation for condensation in subtitles, even this question is not straightforward, and omissions can also serve the viewers’ needs. Another question, then, is what the true reactions are and how easily such matters are observed in real viewing situations, as the focus group data indicates that concrete examples of problems can be difficult to isolate. It is, however, clear that these themes attract attention and are therefore more possible sources of dissatisfaction than those aspects of subtitles which do not arouse as much interest.

Whatever the criteria for quality are, the central question is whether and to what degree quality can have repercussions for reception even in cases where quality problems are not so severe that the text would be obviously unusable. Or would it, based on the examples found in this study, be appropriate to say that the quality of subtitles is irrelevant? Could viewers make do with less meticulously crafted subtitles, as long as something appears in their own language on screen? To some extent, the focus group discussions support this argument, as trust in the subtitles is quite high and viewers are able to ignore some problems and inconsistencies. However, the focus groups also reveal a fairly strong attachment to conventionalised and familiar methods of expression, and a need to become immersed in the audiovisual text. Thus, fluent text, even containing some mistakes, is fairly tolerable to these groups of viewers, but if the subtitles contain, in Inkeri Vehmas-Lehto’s terms, covert errors, i.e. language that is not suitable for the context, is not “typical” Finnish, or if the subtitles claim excessive attention and unnecessary processing effort, they also invite criticism and can feel inappropriate to the viewers. This is in keeping with Vehmas-Lehto’s (1989: 213) following comment on covert errors: “In spite of their inconspicuousness they may cause serious damage not only to the formal elements of the translation, but also to the communication of the message.” In a way, this presents an even greater challenge to a subtitler than merely managing to create factually correct subtitles. The subtitler should attempt to avoid covert errors by being familiar with the nuances and communicative conventions of the target language, as well as being able to conform to the conventions of subtitling, in
order to create subtitles that slip effortlessly into the flow of the audiovisual text, are accurately timecued, and do not distract viewers’ attention from the film itself.

### 7.2 The Moderator’s Role and Influence

The role of the moderator in the focus group situation is significant and can affect the resulting data in many ways. Therefore, it is important to reflect on the moderation and discuss its possible consequences. The main objective of my work as moderator in this study was to be as neutral as possible, while also building an open and relaxed discussion atmosphere. This encouragement occasionally meant participating in the discussion and even sharing some of my own opinions, as advocated, for example, by Schröder et al. (2003: 143). I allowed the discussions to proceed on their own as much as possible, even allowing for short pauses and only intervening with comments or questions if none of the informants took the initiative to maintain the exchange. This strategy worked quite well, as the discussions produced rich and relevant data for analysis. Acting as a moderator myself was quite beneficial, as it allowed me to be present in the discussions and observe the situational factors affecting them. This is useful in the analysis, because I do not have to wonder about the moderator’s motives and strategies in commenting or wonder why the moderator framed questions in a certain way. Another practical benefit was that I was able to explain my research in my own words and make sure through informants’ feedback that questions were understood the way they were intended.

When the informants know something of the researcher or the topic of research in advance, this prior knowledge may affect their comments and attitudes. This was apparent in some comments made by some informants in this study. All groups knew in advance that my research concerns translation, but they had no further information on the specifics of this study. The knowledge of the study’s general area encouraged at least some informants, according to their explicit admissions, to pay closer attention to the subtitles than they normally would. However, some of the data, such as the informants’ inability to recall the translator’s name or extensive details of the subtitles, do suggest that the informants were able to maintain a fairly normal viewing process without paying inordinate attention to the subtitles.
Nevertheless, the viewing situation was not entirely natural and the informants’ ability to comment on subtitles was probably better than it would have been after a regular viewing experience. While this makes the situation slightly artificial, it also assured that the informants were able to discuss subtitles, and allowed them to watch the film without worrying about the topic of the subsequent discussion. Because the informants did not know the details of the discussion topics, they were not able to prepare specific responses during the viewing and were thus able to participate in the discussion only on the basis of what they themselves found relevant in the subtitles. I feel that this compromise in preparing the informants allowed for active discussion while still remaining a credible example of a reception situation. As the discussions centred around popular culture, entertainment, and the informants’ personal opinions rather than factual knowledge, having some previous knowledge of the topic does not distort one’s answers at all significantly. The topic is not controversial or intimidatingly sophisticated and is therefore easy to discuss within a group of friends. The sense of familiarity may even have helped the informants relax and be more forthcoming with their comments, as they felt in control of the situation.

In addition to some knowledge concerning my background, Group 2 was also aware of some of my previous research interests because of their studies in the same department, and this led to comments which indicate shared knowledge, such as being aware of the fact that I have been interested in intertextuality. However, these indications were fairly vague, mostly on the level of nonverbal expressions of recognition, and did not attract much attention within the substance of the discussion. Rather, they were a factor in the social dimension of the discussion by encouraging a sense of familiarity through emphasising connections between the informants’ background and the research. I will discuss my moderation in Group 2 in more detail below in section 7.3.4.

However, I must admit that some weaknesses in my actions as moderator may have had an effect on the discussions. It is difficult to effectively adopt the role of a friendly observer who manages the discussion and occasionally participates in it. It is important to avoid the semblance of both an intimidating outside authority figure whose presence creates tension and nervousness and an overly intrusive participant in the discussion. Striking the appropriate participation balance is challenging, and maintaining that balance throughout all discussions is impossible. My moderation
style tended more towards participation and familiarity than distance and observation. As a particular problem from this style, some questions I posed may have been leading, for example in pointing out specific examples of intertextuality and asking the informants for their opinion. In fact, the theme of intertextuality was the most problematic one to discuss, and many of the instances of possible moderator interference were related to it. For example, I may have let slip my own interpretations and thus potentially influenced the informants’ comments in a few instances connected to intertextual references, as I was forced to explain my questions or was asked what a reference meant. It was impossible to avoid participation in those cases, and some of my comments may have offered more information than was necessary. However, this is a natural part of any such discussion, and it is hardly surprising that the informants would ask for further information of the person who possesses it. This additional information, though, did not reveal the objectives of the study or provide any indication as to how the informants might be expected to answer.

Nevertheless, I have de-emphasised the theme of intertextuality in the preceding analysis, so that questions relating to intertextuality were only discussed when it was particularly relevant to the overall analysis and was not dependent on exchanges potentially influenced by moderator interference. Thus, potentially distracting moderator's comments have remained outside the substance of the analysis and have not influenced the conclusions drawn from the focus group data. I did not make this decision solely on the basis of potential moderator influence, but the slightly problematic role of the moderator in these exchanges was a contributing factor in my decision. The conversations on intertextuality were productive and interesting but, for the benefit of the overall analysis, they have been excluded.

Despite these shortcomings, the discussion material was clearly useful for the analysis, and the discussions as a whole present themselves as credible focus group situations in which the moderator, though visible and active, does not distort the substance of the discussions. The discussions did not betray any signs of informants changing their minds because of the moderator or using their previous knowledge of the research topic in any substantive way. The discussions concentrated on the informants’ personal experiences and views, and pre-existing knowledge of the research or researcher was irrelevant. If I had chosen complete strangers as informants, the questions of moderator influence might have been lessened, but
unfamiliar informants might not have been as willing to discuss their opinions openly, and unfamiliarity could have resulted in misunderstandings or the need to over-explicate immaterial background issues or spend time on rapport-building small talk. In fact, a plausible argument could easily be advanced that my presence and participation would have exerted much greater influence and authoritative intimidation had complete strangers served as informants. Decisions on research setup always invoke a delicate balancing act, and each decision carries its own risks.

In terms of familiarity, one informant stands out in particular. This is informant D in Group 1. She was the only individual in all three groups who knew me well personally and was therefore aware of my background and interests, even though she did not have detailed knowledge of the purposes and objectives of this study. She was an integral member of the pre-existing social group that formed Group 1 and was therefore included in the study. Our mutual familiarity became obvious during the discussion on a few occasions when she made remarks which implied shared pre-existing knowledge between us. One of these was at the very end of the discussion, when D mentioned a possible intertextual link which one scene in the film brought to her mind. Instead of mentioning the name of the film specifically, she laughed and said: “Mulle tuli siit vähän mieleen se huulipunan laitto siellä lentokoneen hätälaskun yhteydessä” [“It kind of reminded me of the lipstick application during the plane’s emergency landing”]. This is a veiled reference to the film Airplane! which D knew to be familiar to me. She emphasised our personal relationship by this reference, which was then explained to the rest of the group. As the remark came at the very end, though, it did not distract the discussion but, instead, made the rest of the group laugh and was a suitably light-hearted way of concluding the discussion. D’s few other similar allusions were also delivered in a humorous way and were usually related to small talk, which did not appear to affect the rest of the discussion. The only substantive element of the discussion in which her familiarity with me was apparent was an exchange on Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice. Here, too, she phrased her reply in a way that showed that she was aware of her shared knowledge with me. It is unclear how much this affected her comment and interpretation of the intertextual reference, but the interpretation was entirely her own, made unaware of my opinions. However, as the exchanges on intertextuality have been left out of the analysis, this instance of familiarity and its potential effects on the discussion also remain outside the analysis.
Despite her familiarity with me, D did not know about the purposes of my study, and thus was not able to benefit from our relationship during substantive parts of the discussion. In addition, D’s rather passive role in the discussion ensured that her connection to me did not become a distraction. Because I knew D quite well, I was fairly certain in advance that she would not monopolise or distract the conversation with her personal connection to me, and I was therefore comfortable with including her in the group. The entire group was aware of D’s familiarity with me, and it is impossible to know whether this might have had an impact on the group’s dynamics, but nothing in the discussion suggested that this might be the case. This situation exemplifies quite well the challenges of informant selection. Choosing informants from one’s own social circle might be easier than using unknown individuals, and familiar people might be less likely to drop out of the study or be unmotivated to take it seriously. However, shared knowledge means they cannot be presumed to be the kinds of naive commenters many studies look for. In the current study, I resolved this by recruiting mainly informants who were not in my immediate social circle, with D and, to some extent, members of Group 2, as the only exceptions. In addition, in a study such as this where the discussion revolves around casual experiences and personal opinions on a topic that is not difficult to approach, the familiarity of these few people was in no way problematic, and even served to emphasise the unassuming, friendly discussion style that emulated ordinary reception contexts.

The effects of my familiarity with D and the students in Group 2 are worthy of discussion, because they could have implications for further similar focus group studies. While the participation of one individual who was familiar to me and four more whose studies acquainted them with some of my research interests did not present problems in this research context, this kind of informant selection can involve risk. The familiarity meant that, as a moderator, I was occasionally forced to insert myself into the conversation, either by participating in knowing exchanges on my research or explaining inside jokes with D to the rest of the group. Such familiarity has the potential to be problematic for the focus groups, and risk could be eliminated by choosing informants who do not have such a connection to the moderator. Thus, the ideal option would be for any students chosen as informants to be slightly removed from the researcher, and close associates to be excluded as informants.
7.3 The Near-Experts vs the Non-Experts

In order to fully understand the data collected in this study, it is important to see how the discussions of the non-expert viewers in Group 1 and Group 3 compare to the discussion of the near-expert viewers of Group 2. The objective of this comparison is to see how translators’ opinions and attitudes might differ from their audiences, and in what aspects of the discussions these differences are to be found. A second objective is to compare the results of the near-expert group to the non-expert groups to find out whether conducting this sort of study with translation students can produce credible and useful information. The comparative setup can shed some light on how the answers of students might compare with answers from individuals who have no connection with translation or language studies.

As was noted in the analysis in Chapter 6, while there were some differences between the discussion in Group 2 and the other two groups’ discussions, there were also obvious similarities. This indicates that these near-experts are audience members first and can watch films for the purpose of personal enjoyment. The attention of Group 2 was directed towards similar issues as in the other two groups: they discussed obscenities, Swedish subtitles, reception strategies and the film’s soundtrack. Their general impressions of the subtitles were quite positive, as were the impressions in the other two groups. Furthermore, they made unprompted remarks on the word ‘lomanen’ and the solution to translate ‘Ben and Jerry’ as ‘Möven ja Pick’, reminiscent of the discussion in Group 1. The reception strategies in Group 2 appeared fairly similar to strategies expressed in the other two groups. Thus, many parts of the discussion proceeded along similar lines, and the opinions presented were quite similar. However, on closer inspection, the near-expert group does stand out, both in the style and substance of their discussion.

7.3.1 Differences in Discussion Style

In terms of discussion style, the first notable distinguishing feature of Group 2 informants is their different answering style. Group 2 did exhibit certain behaviours in common with the other two groups: they often exchanged back and forth remarks, they resorted to humour to maintain the co-operative spirit and general feeling of agreement within the group, and they also experienced some silent interludes. None
the less, on numerous occasions individual Group 2 informants made comments that were significantly longer and more analytical than comments in other groups. Group 2’s comments, just like the comments in the other groups, did include numerous qualifying expressions, hesitation and ambivalence, such as “mun mielestä” [“in my opinion”], “tai jotain” [“or something”], “mikä se nyt oli” [“whatever it was”], and “ihan kun mä olisin kuullu” [“I almost think I heard”], showing that they did not present their opinions much more confidently than the other groups’ members, but the statements themselves distinguished this group from the other two. Group 2 was also slightly more active in making unprompted comments that related directly to the topic of discussion. These differences are easily explained by the fact that these informants were more knowledgeable on translation and languages, and they were used to analysing these questions in a group setting. It might have been easier for them to formulate opinions and interpretations than for informants in the other two groups, who did not have the same kind of background. Therefore, it is not surprising that the extemporaneous answers in Group 1 and Group 3 were generally less specific and less extensive than the answers proffered in Group 2.

What was slightly more unexpected was that the comments in Group 2 were more critical than the majority of the comments in the other two groups. While non-experts expressed acceptance and tended to blame themselves rather than the subtitles for their lack of comprehension, Group 2 often criticised the subtitles and sought better alternative translations. This, too, might be explained by the informants’ near-expert status and their ability to analyse translations extemporaneously, as well as their near-professional perspective on what is acceptable in subtitles. The non-expert groups were more prone to accept subtitles as they were instead of speculating on alternative translations. This could imply that regular viewers tend to trust the authority of the “official” translation as the only possible solution. Furthermore, they are probably not aware of the details of many subtitling and translation conventions and are therefore unable to pinpoint elements which to an expert or near-expert immediately present themselves as problems worthy of mentioning. Near-experts, on the other hand, are aware of the subjective nature of a translator’s solutions and are willing to discuss alternative solutions and strategies more freely. It is also possible that the other two groups refrained from making critical comments because of the focus group situation. Being face to face with a translation researcher may have discouraged them from voicing their most
critical opinions, while situations involving critiquing translations are not unfamiliar to such a student group. However, even though one can speculate that some degree of self-censorship affected the discussions, it is likely that the lack of criticism was at least in part due to the non-expert groups’ inexperience in analysing translations and their weaker understanding of the source text, as well as a subconscious acceptance of the translation shown on screen.

The critical and analytical tendencies in Group 2 were also evident in how the group members reacted to problematic sections of the translation. It was typical for Group 2 to criticise those parts of the translation they felt might be problematic for others but which did not cause trouble for them, because they understood the source text and culture very well. One example of this is M’s comment related to the relatively mild translations of swearwords, stating that a different strategy “ois saanu kyllä sen personaa niinku kieltä osaamattomalle paremmin estin” [“would have brought out her [Bridget’s] personality better for anyone who doesn’t understand the language”]. Although there were some expressions of confusion in Group 2, these were less frequent than in the other groups, and more often the criticisms were presented in a detached fashion. Again, their approach to problems was analytical, whereas in the other groups criticism tended to indicate instances where the commenter himself or herself had had trouble with the subtitles. Furthermore, Group 2 used academic expert vocabulary, including words such as ‘konventio’ ['convention'], ‘karikatyyriset’ ['caricatureish'], ‘fraasit’ ['phrases'], ‘informaation lähde’ ['source of information'], ‘vieraannuttava kokemus’ ['an alienating experience'], ‘predominantti’ ['predominant'], ‘lähtötekstissäkin’ ['in the source text as well'], ‘intertekstualisuus’ ['intertextuality'] and ‘stereotypia’ ['stereotype']. These terms reinforced the analytical and academic tone of the discussion. In Liebes and Katz’s (1993) terms, Group 2’s discussion on subtitles tended more frequently towards the critical style than in Group 1 and Group 3, where the subtitle discussion was predominantly referential. This made it clear that Group 2 had a slightly different perspective on translation than the other two groups.
7.3.2 Differences in Discussion Focus

Another aspect of Group 2’s near-expert status is apparent in the group’s discussion themes. While Group 2 commented on many of the same things as the other groups, they also made comments on some aspects of the translation which were not mentioned in either of the other two groups. One example is the mistranslation of the word ‘proposition’, which the two other groups mentioned only after my prompting. In Group 2, this mistranslation was brought up spontaneously by one informant, showing that she had noticed the error and was able to recall it afterwards. This ability to recall the mistranslation is one example of Group 2’s better recollection of the film text overall. Compared to the other groups, Group 2 quoted both the film and the subtitles more often and more extensively. In the other two groups, the references were mainly quite short and not necessarily verbatim, whereas the members of Group 2 referred to the actual words and phrases used in the film. However, in line with what was observed in the two other groups, Group 2 also quoted the subtitles slightly more than the source text. It would have been a reasonable expectation that viewers whose English skills are very good might more likely quote from the original English, especially when the viewers in question are aware of the challenges and limitations of translation. However, the group members did not accord the English text more prominent status than the other two groups, and they showed some acceptance of the translation’s words as the true words of the film. This emphasises the fact that near-experts can to some extent be seen as ordinary viewers, and their attitude towards the translation does not necessarily differ dramatically from that of average viewers.

In addition to the case of the word ‘proposition’, there was also a more general differing tendency with regard to discussion themes. While the translation-related exchanges in the two other groups were predominantly on the level of individual words or expressions, such as questions of word choice, style or understandability, the near-expert group discussed a wider range of questions on both micro and macro levels. On the macro level, they paid attention to overall stylistic choices and source text interference, such as the use of terms of address as stylistic interference. They also suggested various improvements for the translation, which the other two groups did not do to any significant extent. In the other groups, the few improvements that were brought up were typically very vague or mentioned in a joking way. Group 2
also discussed potential translation strategies more than the other two groups. In fact, one noticeable difference between the groups was that this group spent more time discussing translation strategies while the other two spent more time on reception strategies. This reflects the different orientation of the groups: while the non-expert groups positioned themselves as the film’s audience, the near-expert group adopted a dual role, since they looked at things from the audience’s point of view, yet balanced this with discussing the translator’s side, and saw the situation from a professional’s stance. Again, this could be put in Liebes and Katz’s terms in the sense that the discussions taking the translator’s perspective are critical in nature, while the discussions from a viewer’s point of view are more referential.

7.3.3 The Identity and Awareness of a Near-Expert

The informants in Group 2 were fully aware of their role as not only film viewers but near-experts. They made explicit comments about their expertise, such as referring to themselves as “me ammattilaiset” [“we professionals”] and occasionally spoke of the audience in the third person, expressing their views on what an ordinary viewer might think while excluding themselves from that group. Their references to problems in the translation were usually not accompanied by a sense of confusion, rather by a sense of disappointment and attempts at finding better solutions, and they occasionally employed professional or academic vocabulary in their comments. They also referred explicitly to their studies to explain some of their opinions, such as mentioning the Shakespearean time perspective to discuss the time span of the film. All of these aspects of the informants’ commenting style demonstrate their difference from the non-expert informants in Group 1 and Group 3, and show that they are aware of this difference. The group openly discussed its expertness and its views on the translation from an expert’s point of view.

The group’s near-expert status was also evident in the informants’ specialised knowledge concerning some issues. Their strong knowledge of English and ability to discuss matters related to language was naturally one thing that set them apart from the non-expert groups. In addition, the informants were somewhat more knowledgeable on intertextuality and able to discuss it more insightfully than the
other two groups. Whereas most of the intertextual references were unfamiliar to most if not all of the informants in Group 1 and Group 3, the members of Group 2 were able to recognise more of these references and interpret the film accordingly. This validates the near-experts as more culturally literate in the source culture than the other two groups. This is a significant indicator of the near-expert group’s different perspective in comparison to the non-experts. It is also a valuable reminder that translators know the source culture better than their target audiences and are therefore able to interpret intertextual references more appropriately, which can make it difficult for translators to assess their target audience’s intertextual competence reliably. This is something a translator must keep in mind when deciding on translation strategies for intertextual references.64

However, indications of expertise did not dominate the discussion in Group 2. For a majority of the time, the informants spoke as regular viewers, without attempting to separate themselves from an ordinary audience. Only occasionally did they bring up their distinctive status. It must also be emphasised that even though the group had this dual role and a stronger understanding of issues related to translation, the substance of their opinions was not noticeably different from the other groups, and they did not seem to possess significantly more insight into subtitling than the other two groups. These students had no extensive background in subtitling, and therefore were only slightly better positioned to comment on it than the non-expert groups. Rather, their expertise centred around the English language and culture, and the specifics of translation, generally speaking. This expertise was mostly demonstrated in their ability and willingness to discuss alternative translations and speculate on various interpretations. They expressed occasional insights into issues related to subtitles, such as remarks about subtitlers’ working conditions and the space and time constraints related to subtitles, but these accounted for but a minor share of the discussion. Generally speaking, the near-experts’ approach to subtitling was remarkably similar to the non-experts’ approach.

64For more discussion on the intertextual competence of readers of translations, see Leppihalme (1997) and Tuominen (2002).
7.3.4 The Moderator’s Position

One further interesting characteristic of Group 2 was its occasional ability to draw me as the moderator into the discussion. This could simply be due to the fact that three of the group members were used to communicating with me in the classroom setting, and initiating a discussion therefore came naturally. This, as well as the fact that the informants had some knowledge of my research interests, occasionally led to what could be described as moderator influence. Thus, I occasionally expressed my opinions on some parts of the film and speculated on the meanings of some intertextual references with this group. These incidents did not extend to long discussions and were mostly individual comments either elaborating on others’ comments or agreeing with others. The moderator’s role was slightly more involved than in other groups but still remained fairly similar in that the comments were attempts at maintaining easy conversation. My comments often came at a moment when an exchange was about to end or when the group was quiet for a while and looked for something to discuss. Thus, although my position was somewhat different here compared with the other two groups, it did not affect the flow of the conversation. The group was engaged in active conversation, in which I participated, because that was what the group expected. It would have been unnatural and forced for me to stay entirely outside the discussion. The informants invited my participation and addressed some comments and questions directly to me in a way the other groups did not, expressing familiarity and collegiality.

As mentioned earlier, familiarity between the moderator and the informants could admittedly be construed as problematic, since it can affect the discussion in unexpected ways. In such a situation, it can be difficult for the informants to see the moderator as someone who is supposed to remain outside the actual discussion. It can also be difficult for the moderator not to participate in a discussion with familiar group members, because the atmosphere in the conversation is meant to be as natural and comfortable as possible, and pulling back from the conversation can seem artificial. Introducing artificial distance may also be an interfering factor in the conversation, if it makes the informants confused or uncomfortable. In fact, familiarity with the informants and participation in the discussion is not necessarily negative for the focus group data and can even be beneficial, as has been suggested, for example, by Schröder et al. (2003: 143). This appears to have been the case in
the current study, as the familiarity aspect facilitated a positive atmosphere and allowed for active conversation. However, it also created situations in which I was required to adopt a more active role, which can pose risks for the integrity of the data. These risks were avoided mostly by excluding most of the discussion on intertextuality from the analysis, as any interference was again largely related to that topic. In addition, most of the analysis concentrated on the informants’ spontaneous comments and ensuing exchanges, or other exchanges in which I did not participate. In all, my participation in this group’s discussion was not slightly more involved than in the other groups, but its effect on the substantive parts of the discussion was not ostensibly problematic.

7.3.5 Background Factors as a Potential Explanation

In addition to the group members’ near-expert status, there were some other differences in the composition of Group 2 in comparison with the other two groups, and this could also explain some of the differences in their discussion. Perhaps the most significant difference is the group size. Group 2 consisted of only four informants, compared to eight in Group 1 and six in Group 3. This may have allowed the informants to make longer comments, as there were few other informants attempting to take their turn and little overlapping conversation. However, the conversations in the other two groups proceeded slowly at times and contained fairly frequent pauses, which would have allowed for more extended comments, but longer comments did not occur to the same extent as in Group 2. In Groups 1 and 3 the conversations were maintained with short remarks, jokes and small talk emphasising group cohesion, rather than by making extensive substantive comments. Furthermore, even though informants did interrupt each other and comments did occasionally overlap, this was not persistent enough to create a situation where the informants would not have been able to talk more than they did. Thus, even the larger groups could have accommodated longer comments, but the informants were not inclined to make them. The analytical, extended comments were a feature of the near-experts’ discussion, not solely as a result of the small group size. However, the small group size may have further encouraged extensive
comments by creating a more intimate setting than would have been the case with more participants. Thus, the role of the group size cannot be entirely dismissed.

The informants in Group 2 were also slightly less familiar with each other than the members of the other two groups. The other two groups were made up of friends. In this group, even though the informants knew each other, they were mainly connected through their studies. In addition, the single language student apparently knew only one informant in the group in advance. This difference could have had some effect on the conversation and on what was said, perhaps encouraging the group members to stay on topic and make well-thought-out comments instead of merely jokes. On the other hand, the argument could be made that formulating more extended comments is more intimidating an exercise with unfamiliar people as compared to amongst friends. On some occasions the group members explained something of their personal background in a way that would not have been necessary for members of the other two groups, but there was also a considerable amount of relaxed joking and small talk in this group. The explanations simply revealed that the level of familiarity in this group was slightly lower than for the other two groups.

7.3.6 Are Near-Experts Suitable Informants?

In conclusion, it can be said that there were no great differences in the way non-experts and near-experts watched a subtitled film, and their opinions on the subtitles were largely similar. Even though Group 2 paid more attention to macro-level issues than the other two groups, in large part all three groups discussed similar matters and often mentioned the same parts of the film and the subtitles. What was different was the background knowledge of Group 2, the informants’ ability to discuss subtitles knowledgeably and with a more detached view than simply a viewer’s personal reaction. Perhaps because of this wider background knowledge, their discussion had a more academic, analytical tone, with longer answers, specialised vocabulary and allusions to the group’s near-expert status.

The outcomes of the discussions suggest that conversation in a near-expert group does not follow the same lines as the discussions of non-experts, but the similarities between near-experts and non-experts in their actual opinions and attitudes appear to
be quite significant. Therefore, a near-expert group can provide useful information on the reception process, but not necessarily on the way reception is discussed. It is, nevertheless, well advised not to blindly recruit students of the same field as informants, because the differences in their discussion style and amount of background knowledge on the topic might distort the data. An acknowledgement of the students’ status as a non-average viewer group is necessary, and a comparison such as this is a significant part of finding out what each group’s comments might actually signify when placed against the larger context of subtitle viewership. Near-experts can be useful as informants, but only if the differences between them and non-experts are adequately recognised and taken into account.

7.4 Focus Groups vs Spontaneous Reception Commentary

One of the initial premises of this study was that viewers’ attitudes towards subtitles and the tone of the discussions would be negative. This was, however, not the case, and much of the conversation reflected acceptance of the subtitles’ authority and restricted criticisms to mild expressions of misunderstanding or confusion. The expectation was based, among other things, on casual observations of viewer comments, which are often critical in tone. This discrepancy between the expectation and the actual discussions raises the question of why the discussions conducted for this study appear to be so different from viewer comments which occur outside such research situations. How do these focus groups compare with other discussions on subtitles? One must keep in mind that this individual case of focus group conversation is not universally generalisable as the opinion of most film viewers, and the same is true of a selection of randomly observed spontaneous statements on subtitles. Combined, however, these two divergent facets of reception commentary will allow the researcher to begin to construct a fuller picture of the various approaches to discussing subtitles, viewer attitudes and the contextual factors which may affect them.

In order to provide such a comparative perspective, I will look at some examples of spontaneous viewer comments on subtitles, which have appeared outside the research situation. These examples were chosen as indicators of what spontaneous
discussions on subtitles can be like and in what formats they take place. The Internet, of course, provides a convenient, easily accessible and popular platform for such discussion, either on anonymous discussion forums or on personal, often equally anonymous blogs. Anonymity, as well as access to like-minded peers with whom to exchange views, can attract unguarded opinions, and subtitles are one topic which is occasionally brought up and which generates fairly lively discussion. The scope of the current study does not allow for a detailed analysis of these reception discussions; rather, they are provided here as an example of a different point of view to subtitle reception and a way to further elaborate the context of the focus group discussions.

The most notable example of spontaneous reception commentary comes from online discussions conducted on five discussion forums. All of these forums are either general discussion forums or concentrate on topics other than translation or films and television. Thus, the occurrence of translation-related exchanges was not due to the forum itself, but rather a spontaneous decision on the part of the forum participants. In addition, the posters who started the discussions appeared in each case to be audience members rather than translation experts. It is, of course, impossible to know anything about anonymous Internet posters for certain, but they presented themselves as only interested viewers and did not claim any expertise in translation.

The first of the five discussions occurred between 6 April and 8 April 2004 in the discussion forum of the Finnish tabloid newspaper *Ilta-Sanomat*65. The discussion consisted of 43 posts and revolved around the subtitles of the British reality programme *Big Brother*. The title of the discussion was “*Big Brother – hauska viihdettä, järkyttävää käännöstyötä*” [“Big Brother – fun entertainment, appalling translation”]. This was the only discussion in which the topic of the conversation was a specific programme rather than subtitles in general. The second discussion occurred between 23 December 2006 and 23 November 2007 on the Peliplaneetta.net website, which is dedicated to news and discussion concerning computer and console games66. The discussion comprised 115 posts under the title


“Ärsyttääkö teitä tv sarjojen ja elokuvien suomentajien mokat?” [“Are you annoyed by tv and movie translators’ slip-ups?”]. The third discussion comes from the general discussion forum Suomi24.fi and occurred between 27 February 2008 and 7 September 2009.67 There were 42 posts in all, but many of them degenerated into off-topic disagreement, and only approximately 20 comments were related to subtitles. The title of this discussion was “Miksei kääntäminen onnistu?” [“Why can’t they get translation right?”]. The fourth discussion, and the only one conducted in English, occurred between 17 and 20 December 2008.68 It was conducted in English because its venue, Finland Forum, is aimed at individuals from all over the world with connections to Finland.69 The discussion was short and included only eight posts, and its title was “TV subtitling blunders”. The final and longest discussion both temporally and by number of comments, consisting of 505 posts, occurred between 9 April 2002 and 7 September 2010 on the Jatkoaika forum70, focused on ice hockey. The title of the discussion was “Huonoimmat/ärsyttävimmät suomennokset” [“The worst/most annoying Finnish translations”]. It is clear from this selection that translations evoke interest in many people, as the discussions occurred in a variety of venues and attracted the participation of numerous posters. It is also interesting that, although two of these discussions referred to translation in general in their titles, all five concentrated almost exclusively on subtitles. Thus, the discussions demonstrate interest in and ability to discuss subtitles, which is reminiscent of the focus groups’ activity.

As is evident from the titles of the discussion threads, the initial attitude towards subtitles is critical. The posters have brought up subtitles because of a perceived shortcoming, either in a specific programme or in subtitles in general. In the Suomi24 discussion, for example, the initial poster pointedly comments: “Tuntuu kuin kääntäjät eivät osaisi suomea enää ollenkaan. Vai eikö vierasta kieltä osata?” [“It feels as if translators don’t know Finnish anymore. Or is it that they don’t know the foreign language?”] The critical tone continues throughout the discussions:

69http://www.finlandforum.org/index.php?sid=833a1c5c1c8d6750e57df9d27f8a0d2c, accessed 31 August 2011.
many examples of poor translations are brought up, translators’ professionalism and intelligence are questioned, and a sense of irritation, frustration and disbelief is conveyed. For example, in the Jatkoaika discussion, one commenter accompanies an example of a poor translation with the following comment: “On suorastaan mykistävän lamaannuttavaa, että noin huonolla populaarikulttuuritiedoilla varustettu ihminen pääsee tekstiään mun telkkarin ruudulle asti tuottamaan! Melkein vahingoitin itseäni ja telkkariani turhautumani keskellä.” [“It is incredibly shocking that someone with such poor knowledge of popular culture is allowed to produce text that makes it all the way to my television screen! In my frustration, I almost did myself and my tv set some damage.”] Such elements are non-existent in the focus group data, and it is therefore clear that the tone of these Internet discussions is decidedly more negative than the tone in the focus groups.

However, a significant number of comments also express understanding for translators, such as the comment on Finland Forum stating “I generally feel great sympathy for the sub-title brigade – it's a sh itty job to awful deadlines and with a 32-character limit on one's creativity,” and another professing “sympathy for the brave souls.” On many occasions, the commenters on each forum speculate on tight timetables, lack of decent dialogue lists, or other factors making it more difficult for the subtitler to produce acceptable quality. In addition, many commenters refute the original posters’ points of view by stating that occasional mistakes do not bother them or that mistakes are more amusing than irritating. Even the examples of mistranslations are often presented with a sense of amusement, which does not indicate outright condemnation. Thus, even in this context where criticism is very easy to express, some people adopt a fairly mild attitude towards subtitling errors. While many criticisms are harsh and direct, many commenters also express sympathy or present their criticisms in either a diplomatic or amused way. It could therefore be said that the Internet discussions demonstrate a range of attitudes, not all of them negative or dismissive, and the existence of the discussions alone is

71 This is reminiscent of Jouni Paakkinen’s website mentioned in Chapter 1 (http://www.jounipaakkinen.fi/kaannos.html), where readers can send in any subtitling blunders they have found. The tone of the site is humorous and the intention appears to be to entertain rather than present serious criticism. Paakkinen has also published two collections of these subtitling blunders in book form (Paakkinen, 2003 and Paakkinen, 2005) with a clear entertainment objective.
proof of viewers’ interest in subtitling. What is largely missing in these discussions in comparison to the focus group discussions is the sense of learning from subtitles or blaming oneself for misunderstandings, and this difference does contribute to a more critical general tone. Furthermore, the commenters do not give the subtitles a position of authority to the same extent the focus group informants did. It is, however, also notable that few commenters mention that they do not read subtitles at all, thus revealing that even the critical viewers’ dismissal of subtitles does not manifest itself as a refusal to accept subtitles altogether. This reinforces the notion that subtitles are an important factor in a viewer’s reception experience.

The online discussions contain numerous examples of unsuccessful translations, as well as more general criticisms, such as pointing out that numbers or car terminology are often translated poorly. Thus, the Internet commenters are able to give examples to support their negative views, whereas in the focus groups the informants were often unable to point to specific examples of problematic elements in the subtitles at hand. The negative examples in the Internet discussions are, of course, hand-picked from various sources to demonstrate subtitling problems, rather than spontaneous findings from a single film. However, even a single film can occasionally provide sufficient material for an extremely critical look at subtitling. This is demonstrated by a blog post at the filosofia.fi website. In a post called “Hyvin tehty!” [a non-idiomatic translation for the English phrase “Well done!”] the writer Jarkko S. Tuusvuori reviews the film Emperor’s Club and focuses much of the review on criticising the film’s subtitles. He points out numerous instances where the translation is either unidiomatic or factually wrong on matters of history or philosophy, which are central to the film. Even in this case, however, the film is hand-picked due to its poor subtitles and as such is different from the focus groups, where the film was not chosen for the poor quality of its subtitles. This is a clear difference between the focus groups and the spontaneous commentaries: whereas the Internet criticisms are directed at subtitles specifically chosen for their blunders, the focus group encountered a film whose subtitles were not guaranteed to be poor. It is naturally much more difficult to find problematic elements in subtitles and present criticisms in such a situation, and this can in part explain the differences in tone between the spontaneous commentaries and the focus groups.

The selective approaches of critical spontaneous reception commentary have also been reported by Tuulikki Vuonokari (2008) in her master’s thesis concerning subtitling critiques. Looking at a number of Internet forum discussions, as well as viewer feedback sent to MTV3, the Finnish television channel, a few letters to the editor in the Aamulehti newspaper and a blog post and the ensuing discussion (Vuonokari 2008: 25), Vuonokari finds that the discussions concentrate chiefly on mistakes and other poor solutions in subtitles (ibid.: 60). She remarks that in order to be noted as particularly good or successful, a solution in the translation must be exceptionally good and the source text particularly demanding. Any other, relatively problem-free solutions apparently tend to blend into the programme flow without attracting viewer attention or provoking commentary (ibid.: 60). In quite the same way, the focus group discussions contained very few positive evaluations of subtitles, despite the generally accepting tone. Vuonokari also notes that many comments turn errors and blunders into humour and thus something pleasurable (ibid.: 33), and that some commenters spend time analysing the translator’s solutions from multiple viewpoints and attempting to understand the translator’s motivations (ibid.: 34–35), which is an understanding way of relating to problematic translations, similar to that frequently observed in the focus group discussions. Thus, Vuonokari’s analysis shows that even though criticism is the most common attitude and errors the most common reason for discussing subtitles, the discussions contain a multitude of attitudes which are not always outright condemnations.

A similar observation could be noted concerning many personal comments made by viewers when the opportunity is presented: the reason for commenting is usually some problem in subtitles, but the tone of the comments is not always one of severe condemnation, even if it is critical. As a subtitler myself, I have often received comments from film and television viewers on their views on subtitles. Some of them can be quite diplomatic, yet point out instances where subtitles are less than idiomatic, such as a comment made by a man who enjoys westerns: ‘John Wayne would never say ‘hyvää päivänjatkoa’ [‘have a nice day’].’ On the other hand, some commenters may casually dole out even harsh criticisms, such as a young man’s gleeful question: “Why are subtitles always so terrible?” In addition, comments are often presented as “customer feedback”, i.e. complaints on some recently seen subtitling blunder. These experiences contribute significantly to the impression that the audience’s reactions to subtitles are coloured with criticism and
that, at best, they enjoy laughing at poor translations. However, all of these comments are also a reminder of how important a presence subtitles occupy in many Finns’ experience of popular culture, and even the most critical comments demonstrate the viewer’s awareness of and interest in subtitles.

What, then, do these individual instances of subtitle commentary say about subtitle reception? What kind of comparative context do they offer for the focus group data? These examples, on the whole, certainly paint a more negative picture of viewers’ attitudes towards subtitles and draw more attention to errors, both covert and overt, than the focus group data. Whereas the focus groups put much emphasis on discussing reception strategies and the informants’ understanding of the subtitles, the spontaneous subtitle comments concentrate largely on mistakes and problems. It could even be said that whereas the tone of the focus groups was largely referential (cf. Liebes & Katz, 1993), the spontaneous viewer comments appear to be much more critical. It is not surprising that the views expressed in online discussions, viewer feedback, blog posts or even personal comments are negative; it is much more likely that a viewer would take the initiative to comment on something negative than praise something positive. In contrast, the focus group discussions set out with a different perspective: they were initiated by the interests of the researcher, in order to discuss a film and its subtitles. The informants did not initiate the conversation and were forced to discuss a specific set of subtitles which was not guaranteed to contain serious errors. Thus, the different starting points could easily have affected the tone of the comments. Additionally, different contexts allow for different kinds of communication and create different group norms. Therefore, whereas the focus group situation invites a calm, fairly polite discussion, Internet forums and viewer feedback channels summon a more critical tone, even encourage commentary that is in some way “edgy” or attracts attention and inspires further discussion. Both contexts reveal something about reception, but they might be useful for different kinds of investigation: the focus groups offer a glimpse into informants’ immediate impressions of their reception process and into the social aspects of reception, while various types of spontaneous viewer commentary show how viewers respond to problems and errors. Both viewpoints are, of course, relevant when investigating the reception process.

It should be noted that the focus group data and the viewer commentaries are not entirely different from each other. One of their similarities is the fact that few
commenters deny reading subtitles, and that subtitles are seen as a significant support for understanding. It is also interesting to note that, despite the negative overall tone, numerous commenters express positive, accepting and understanding opinions on subtitles and subtitlers. The blog post which criticised a film’s subtitles did not refer to the subtitler a single time and, instead, laid the blame for quality problems at the door of the subtitling agency, even disparaging the agency’s website. A great number of commenters also stated that subtitling blunders were a source of amusement, and incorrect translations were often presented as funny rather than irritating. This is reminiscent of the way many other professions are playfully mocked through collections of blunders, where the intention is not to condemn the profession but to provide humour, with the understanding that everyone makes mistakes occasionally. In the end, the comments presented subtitling errors in an overwhelmingly light-hearted tone. Both the focus group informants and the Internet-based commenters expressed sympathy for translators, although the online commenters’ sympathies were sometimes overshadowed or lurked behind their explicit comments on the mistakes they noted.

This short comparison of the focus group data with spontaneous reception commentaries demonstrates that focus groups alone cannot offer exhaustive information on reception. They present a polite discussion situation where criticisms are not emphasised and discussion revolves around personal experiences, reception processes and shared interpretations. The spontaneous data observed here shines the spotlight on the shortcomings of subtitles and takes a more negative and questioning attitude. The criticisms are softened with understanding, sympathy and humour, but this does not detract from the general sentiment that errors are noticed and they affect the reception experience. The value of looking at such comments is, then, particularly in investigating what kinds of errors evoke reactions in viewers, and how these reactions are presented. The focus group discussions, on the other hand, provide more detailed information on the entire reception experience, which such fragmentary and anonymous comments cannot offer.
7.5 What Is the Value of the Focus Group Method?

As the preceding discussion demonstrates, focus group data can be very useful in the investigation of reception, and such an ethnographically-oriented research style can be a productive method in translation-related reception research. I believe that the methodological propositions articulated at the beginning of the study were shown to be correct: this is indeed one possible way of studying reception, the informants were able to produce valuable research material, and the social situation of the focus groups was one dimension which had an effect on the material and provided interesting opportunities for analysis and comparison. However, the methodology also has its limitations, which are important to consider when looking at the conclusions drawn from the data. The focus group method allows the researcher to look into the social processes of interpretation and negotiation which would be unavailable through other methods, such as questionnaires or structured interviews. However, the scope of the focus groups is necessarily limited, as the number of participants in the groups must be fairly low to allow for thorough analysis. Therefore, this study does not offer the final word on what subtitle reception is or provide solid evidence on audience responses to individual elements of the subtitles; this is the narrative of one reception situation and as such presents opportunities for understanding what factors in the reception process are significant.

In addition, the focus group situation is not an entirely natural reception context, and it cannot be assumed to perfectly reflect everyday reception. Therefore, the interpretations of the data must concentrate primarily on the systems and processes uncovered underneath the surface of the focus group discussions.

The informants of the study gave substantive, credible answers and discussed the themes freely, making interesting unprompted and prompted comments which are useful in charting the reception process. Although some informants naturally talked more than others, almost every participant was active, forthcoming and willing to participate in the discussion without much hesitation or apparent fear of losing face. This suggests that the familiarity of the group members and the informal atmosphere were beneficial for the study. Admittedly, there were moments when the situation resembled a group interview more than a discussion, as the groups relied on my questions to keep the conversation going, but those situations were only momentary, and soon progressed into a more genuine discussion. The informants’ explicit
comments were reinforced by what could be read between the lines, by the totality of their statements, and the focus group situation in general, and thus their conscious statements were only a partial basis for the conclusions drawn from the data.

One of the most significant challenges in a focus group study is its reliance on the researcher’s interpretations, on the need to read between the lines and construct coherent narratives of fragmentary, inconsistent comments. The focus group situation does provide opportunities for the moderator/researcher to clarify the statements made and ask further questions, but even with this support it is always necessary to make interpretations that have the appearance of subjectivity. This was the case in the current study, too: in processing the focus group data and searching for commonalities, differences, group norms and patterns of any kind, the perspective of the researcher is unavoidably present. This means, of course, that any conclusions must be soundly explained and grounded in the data. This has been my intent throughout the study, and it is the reason for the occasionally lengthy descriptions of the discussions and the informants’ comments. The objective of the narrative presentation style has been to demonstrate how the focus group conversations can be understood to form cohesive entities that tell the story of reception in this context. The narratives could, of course, be constructed in many ways, and the ones compiled for this study are only one way of reading the focus group data. They are, however, firmly based in the focus group discussions that have been read symptomatically, and the researcher’s role has primarily been to choose which aspects of the discussions to foreground and which symptomatic clues to follow. The richness of the material means that it could be used to investigate many questions that have not been approached at all in this study.

An important question in interpreting focus group data is how much to trust the informants’ comments. As was mentioned above, the reading of the data has been symptomatic and holistic. This means that the surface-level comments have not been taken as the entire truth but have been interpreted as part of the whole of the informant’s comments and the focus group situation, and have been seen as indicators of underlying systems and processes rather than direct factual evidence. In this way, even outright untruths can be valuable, as they indicate something simply by having been brought up. However, this entire interpretative apparatus is, of course, founded on the discussions and what was said in them, because even a
symptomatic reading must proceed from the primary, surface-level data of the informants’ statements.

This, then, leads to the question of how to relate to the informants’ statements. As was seen in section 3.1.5.1, Rachele Antonini (2007: 165), for example, has found that test subjects claimed to understand cultural references better than they did in reality. Thus, informants’ statements can be misleading, because self-evaluation is difficult. In the focus group discussions, the one area where this was evident was in the case of reception strategies, where informants described their own strategies and were thus performing self-evaluation on the reception process. Therefore, the analysis on strategies included other statements besides the explicit self-evaluations and took into account the discussion as a whole, so that the self-evaluations would not be given excessive weight. The background questionnaire also provided an example of self-evaluation: in the question on subtitle quality, many informants pointed out that they notice subtitling errors, even though few of them managed to recall the one error in the Bridget Jones subtitles during the discussion. Thus, this was one example where self-evaluation was overly optimistic: it is easy to make a general statement on noticing errors, but proving this by finding an actual mistranslation in the film was much more difficult. On the other hand, some self-evaluations in this data were more cautious than in Antonini’s case. For example, the informants openly admitted to not understanding many of the film’s intertextual references. This could be due to the discussion structure: the informants were not only asked whether they understood something but how they interpreted it, and this eliminated the opportunity for optimistic self-evaluation. Furthermore, the exchanges on intertextuality were largely eliminated from final analysis and therefore any possible self-evaluations on culture-bound references did not enter into the analysis. For the most part, the rest of the analysis proceeded on the basis of stated opinions and attitudes rather than stated skills or knowledge, and in these elements self-evaluation was not as significant.

One further approach to evaluating the credibility of the focus group analysis is by applying Mona Baker’s (2006) three categories of narrative coherence discussed in section 4.3.1: internal coherence, external coherence and characterological coherence. Internal coherence, or the narrative’s consistency and logical reasoning, was the central motivation behind the construction of the various reception profiles in the analysis. The profiles are based on a careful interpretation of the informants’
statements, and even though some individual comments contradict each other, these profiles as a whole form, in my opinion, a sound and believable narrative entity. The consistency and coherence are built on the level of symptomatic reading, which is a way of exploring how seeming, superficial contradictions can fit together due to underlying explanatory factors. External coherence, on the other hand, can be observed when comparing these narratives to other narratives on the same topic. That is why the profiles have been compared here to various other studies on similar themes, to spontaneous reception comments, and to each other. This has revealed some similarities and differences, which all expose something further of the reception situation of this study. Again, these comparisons form a logical dialogue which elucidates the analysis and reinforces and explains some of its findings.

Lastly, characterological coherence comes from the credibility of the narrative’s participants, which can be evaluated through my descriptions of the informants and through my reflections on my own participation in the narratives. The focus group data exposes the informants as enlightening examples of Finnish subtitle audiences. The informants were articulate and willing to share their opinions, and the group dynamics allowed them to test the credibility of their statements against each other. In these pre-existing groups, which were not afraid of disagreement, it is likely that any statements that severely lacked credibility would have been met with protest or unease and as such would have been scrutinised. Some individual examples of such shifts in statements were seen, such as E’s evolving statements on his reception strategy or P’s re-evaluation of her statements after comments from other informants. The situation thus allowed for the adjustment of these momentary weaknesses in credibility. This shows how focus groups, in fact, offer a productive method for judging characterological coherence through the situation itself, and in the case of this study, the smooth overall progress and productivity of the focus groups speaks in favour of the informants’ credibility.

Although the credibility of the focus group method and the ensuing analysis must be evaluated, the truth of the subjective, interpretive tendencies in focus group research should also be seen as a strength. One of its greatest benefits is that this kind of qualitative approach allows for creative, new research avenues to emerge. As Juha Kytömäki and Ari Savinen (1993: 2) have remarked, qualitative research setups allow informants the best opportunities to make their thoughts understood, without the limitations caused by restrictive questionnaires. According to Kytömäki
and Savinen, response options drawn up by the researcher can be particularly
problematic when investigating a hitherto little-known matter, or when previous
knowledge is somehow faulty (ibid.: 2). Subtitle reception is one area where
previous knowledge, particularly of viewer attitudes and strategies, is quite scarce,
and where therefore such a qualitative approach can be exceedingly beneficial in
building a foundation for future studies with greater specificity. Thus, the current
study offers a solid foundation for further research, and it can help in formulating
new, more specific questions and more detailed research frameworks.

7.6 Concluding Profile: Focus Groups in Context

By now, the focus group data has gone through many levels of profiling,
comparison and narrative interpretation. I will not spend further time examining the
data from yet another viewpoint. In this section I will only offer some concluding
thoughts on the final profile of the three focus groups in their various situational
contexts.

The focus groups watched a film that is widely considered to be light
entertainment chiefly aimed at women – a chick flick. It is also a sequel to a popular
film, and a film version of a popular novel, itself naturally also a sequel. Both the
Bridget Jones novels and the two films have been extensively discussed in the
media, and they also contained within them a wide-ranging network of intertextual
connections both to the popular culture of their time and to established classics of
the English-speaking world. As such, the film was surrounded by texts of all kinds,
and it is likely that the informants would have been confronted with some of them
before participating in this study – many even mentioned this in the discussions.
Each of them therefore came into the situation with his or her own presuppositions
and pre-existing knowledge. In addition, they were all faced with the same
immediate situation of viewing a film in the cinema, in their own immediate group
of friends and among the larger cinema audience. Their understanding and
interpretation of the film were influenced by this entire context. However, the
context most visibly conditioned their response to the entire audiovisual experience,
not to the subtitles. For example, the male informants in Group 1 were decidedly
more critical towards the film than the female informants, possibly in part due to a
pre-existing impression of the film as a chick flick, but the criticisms were not aimed at the subtitles. Where, then, do subtitles fit in? What is the story of the reception of *Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason* by three groups of Finnish viewers who read the film’s Finnish – and to some extent also Swedish – subtitles? What part do the subtitles play in this experience?

This reception situation, where the viewers encountered a popular film with Finnish and Swedish subtitles, is quite ordinary for a Finnish film audience: the informants watched a film with friends, and, because the film was in a language other than their mother tongue, subtitles provided them support in understanding it. Then, after the film was finished, they did something that was not as familiar to them: they discussed the film and the subtitles under the direction of a researcher/moderator. It can be difficult and even uncomfortable to attempt to express one’s views and experiences in such a situation, but amongst a group of friends, when the questions were not terribly difficult and when no one was expected to demonstrate sophisticated knowledge, the informants were relaxed enough to share their views and to attempt to verbalise their experiences. Some of their statements were hesitant and presumably even inaccurate, but the context allowed for the interpretation of these inaccuracies. In addition, the interpretations of the focus group data were aided by comparisons to spontaneous reception commentaries and other reception studies. These comparisons revealed intriguing similarities, suggesting that the focus group data is truly a part of a larger story of reception. The comparisons also pointed to some differences, which indicate the focus group method’s special characteristics and the kinds of data it can reveal.

The focus groups discussed subtitles actively, and expressed both agreement and disagreement within the groups, negotiating individual interpretations but allowing some disagreements to remain. The group which included two male informants, Group 1, was more critical towards the film than the other two, and its internal disagreements were more visible than those of the other two groups, even though the group was very friendly and conducted the discussion in a comfortable atmosphere. Group 2 consisted of near-experts in translation and languages and demonstrated its status through detailed, analytical comments and knowing engagement of the moderator in discussion. Group 3 was loud, laughing and friendly and particularly interested in critical readings of the film. Thus, each group had its peculiarities but also contributed to a fuller picture of the reception situation.
All groups expressed interest in and reliance on subtitles. They read subtitles while watching the film, albeit to differing extents, gained some information through them, and built parts of their interpretations on the basis of the subtitles. They were particularly interested in discussing swearing and slang both in the film and the subtitles, and they expressed interest towards the Swedish subtitles, the role of music in the film, and details related to the film’s production, i.e. the film as a cultural artefact.

The informants’ attitudes towards the film were not necessarily the same in tone as those they voiced about the film’s subtitles: even those who presented negative views of the film did not question the authority of the subtitles, and the occasional critical readings of the film were accompanied by a nearly unanimous and constant referential reading of the subtitles. Reading or accepting the subtitles was not a taboo for the groups, and discussing various ways of using subtitles to aid in understanding the film was a recurrent topic of conversation. Thus, the study confirmed the supposition that subtitles play a role in reception, but refuted the supposition that discussion on subtitles would be predominantly negative. Subtitles were clearly an established and accepted part of the film-viewing experience, and they were even described as a learning method by some informants. However, the expectation that the subtitle-reception experience would be ambivalent was reinforced to some extent by the focus group data: the informants’ commitment to reading subtitles was not very strong, and their expressed reception strategies occasionally minimised the role of subtitles. The story that these focus group discussions tell is of viewers who use subtitles whether they intend to or not, and who also listen to the source text, whether they want to or not. Subtitles are a tool, a supportive text that helps in absorbing the audiovisual message. They are not something to be read attentively and remembered afterwards, but something to be read quickly, superficially and accidentally in the multimodal flow of the film.

The focus group discussions were defined by a mild, polite tone. No harsh criticisms of subtitles or subtitlers were made, and statements were cautious and humorous rather than strong or extreme. When conveying a negative view, informants tended to express confusion and suggest that some of the responsibility could be theirs and thus absolve the subtitles and the film of part of the blame for comprehension problems. Some criticisms were kept vague and only referred to general ideas of what is usually wrong with subtitles, without concrete examples or
references to the subtitles under discussion. This attitude could be due to the focus
group situation where the informants were sharing their opinions with a researcher,
a specialist in translation. This contextual constraint may have encouraged caution
and a diplomatic approach to the discussion. The informants did not actively share
their worst subtitle experiences or mock poor translations, except for a few
individual exceptions. The discussions did not contain exchanges where subtitling
blunders would have been shared for entertainment purposes. This lack of criticism
is what particularly sets these focus groups apart from spontaneous commentary on
subtitles, where the two primary motivations for discussion appear to be either
criticising subtitles and subtitlers or providing humour through amusing translation
error examples.

While it is understandable that spontaneous comments would often be due to
some perceived problem whereas the focus group discussions were initiated in order
to simply discuss a reception experience, this discrepancy also points to one area
where focus groups cannot draw a full picture of subtitle reception. The acceptance
and trust demonstrated in the focus groups is certainly one aspect of the reception
experience, but it must be tempered with the caveat that viewers can also be highly
critical and detect errors whenever those errors interfere with reception. This does
not necessarily imply a lack of trust in subtitles; rather, it emphasises the need for
fluent and credible subtitles and serves as a reminder that subtitling is vulnerable to
criticism due to the constant presence of the source text, and viewers are capable of
using this opportunity to criticise and ridicule. This is not necessarily brought up in
a research situation but is nevertheless one aspect of the reception experience, albeit
a more marginal one, as it involves only those viewers active enough to follow both
the source text and subtitles attentively and then comment on them, and deals with
only small fragments of individual subtitles. Individual references to poor subtitles
do not mean that subtitles in general are not used successfully; they only mean that
problematic elements are easier to spot and comment on than the majority of
subtitles that constitute a fluent part of the multimodal text.

The subtitle-related criticisms that were expressed in the focus group discussions
emphasised, in large part, covert errors that distract the viewer by reducing the
naturalness and credibility of the subtitles or by forcing the viewer to focus
excessive attention on the subtitles, thus interrupting the flow of the multimodal
reception experience. Those overt errors that did not create a distraction appeared to
be much easier to overlook by following the entire film and diverting little attention to the erroneous element. This is a significant indicator of the role of subtitles as a subservient part of the film experience: subtitles should adjust themselves to the flow of the film without attracting too much attention and leave room for the reception of the film as a whole. Subtitles are read, but they are not allowed to take on a strongly visible role. For the same reason, subtitles are not read very attentively, and the reading process is very different from the reading of ordinary texts, such as literature. This means that some details of the subtitles are easily missed, and their nuances are not absorbed carefully. Again, subtitles are an aid, not the prioritised element in the multimodal text, and as such they are not allowed to monopolise the viewer’s attention. Their reading process is largely perfunctory, and they are read almost by accident without being given much conscious thought. Subtitle-reading is automatic, accidental, superficial, yet obligatory.
8. Concluding Thoughts: Is There a Way to Study Reception?

In the course of this study, I have presented a qualitative, ethnographically-oriented research framework for studying the reception of subtitled audiovisual texts. The purpose of the study was to both test how such methods might be useful and analyse the attitudes and reception processes of film viewers. With many assumptions and uncertainties prevailing in the practices of audiovisual translation, concrete knowledge of reception is much needed. As subtitling is a process of making compromises, constructing challenging illusions, and trying to find the most tolerable of available solutions, being able to glance at the viewers’ perspective can offer support to translators, as well as a way to justify one’s decisions.

The study produced interesting information with regard to both of its objectives: the focus group analysis offered a contextualised look at the informants’ processes of reception and related interactions, providing ideas on how viewers use subtitles as a part of their normal viewing experiences; and the productivity of this analysis confirms that such an approach can be successfully applied to translation-related reception research. The questions discussed in this study are of a different nature than questions approached by other varieties of reception research. The focus of this study has been the reception process as a whole and the attitudes and systems related to it. This means that many questions of a more technical or detailed nature were not addressed, as those matters require a different methodology. This qualitative approach can, however, complement and expand on the quantitative data gained from eye tracking and other similar methods.

One of the fundamental findings of this study is that subtitles are indeed a part of these Finnish viewers’ normal viewing experience, and that they are used as a support when watching foreign-language material, even when the source language is fairly familiar. Viewers navigate comfortably between listening to the source text and reading the translation and construct their interpretation and their viewing experience on the basis of both. Subtitles are often trusted implicitly to be an
accurate representation of the source text and even a method for learning both the source and target language. In addition, subtitles can be a productive topic of conversation and inspire both positive and negative attitudes. This confirms that subtitles are a notable presence in Finnish culture, even though their presence is largely of an instrumental nature and they are at their most acceptable when they do not attract excessive attention.

Because of the open-ended nature of this research, rather than end with a set of conclusive statements that look like answers, I wish to end with a set of further questions that have arisen in the course of this study. That is, after all, one of the fundamental objectives in the use of focus groups: focus group research allows informants to use their own words to freely express their thoughts, producing rich and varied data which can be used as a starting point for the construction of ever-more specific research propositions and questions. Questions arising from this focus group study, and deserving of further attention, include the following:

- What is the relationship between quality and reception? How do variations in subtitle quality affect the reception experience? What are the audience’s criteria for good subtitle quality?
- What preferences do viewers express with regard to condensation and omission? Would it be better to make subtitles as minimal as possible, or would audiences prefer extensive, detailed subtitles?
- When the viewer understands the source language quite well, are subtitles a support or a distraction (cf. Bairstow 2011)?
- How do viewers process the multimodality of subtitled programmes? How does the interplay of picture, word and sound affect the reception of subtitles?
- What differences can be detected in subtitle reception between the cinema context and television viewing?
- What effect does timecueing have on reception and understanding?
- What strategies and attitudes would a comparable study find in a different country and a different subtitling culture?
- How different would the data of a focus group study like this be, if…
  o ...the informants were not familiar with each other or the moderator?
o ...the informants did not know anything about the topic of the study in advance?

o ...the informants did not understand the source text at all?

o ...the genre or style of the film was something very different?

o ...the demographic backgrounds of the informants were less homogenous?

All of these questions have been alluded to in this study, and many of them have been discussed to some extent. However, each of them would deserve more detailed attention, either through similar methods of focus groups, ethnography and qualitative investigation, or by a different methodological apparatus altogether. The length of this list demonstrates the creative, productive potential of focus group research as a way of identifying areas and questions which invite further investigation. The opportunities for further research are vast and, even though the area of reception research has seen new studies in recent years, many questions remain unexplored. It would be important to amass a much more extensive body of evidence on the cultural effects of subtitles, on what significance subtitles have for their readers. In a time of globalisation, outsourcing, and ever more demanding production processes with increasing constraints on the translator’s work, it would be particularly valuable to find out how the end results of such processes present themselves to the viewers and whether those processes could be improved in order to better respond to the cultural and social significance of subtitles. Studies in different contexts, with different types of informants, different translated materials and different sets of questions would add new perspectives to the data from existing studies. Therefore, as important as the conclusions drawn from this study are, the questions which it inspires are equally meaningful.

The use of subtitles reported in this study also offers intriguing opportunities for further research concerning the cognitive processing of subtitles. It would, for example, be extremely useful to clarify how the strategy of accidental reading works in practice, and how much attention viewers actually devote to subtitles. Methods such as eye tracking or the use of “complaint buttons” as in Gottlieb’s (1995: 390) study might be some ways of looking into the processes of subtitle-reading. One area which could provide models for further research is usability testing, which has a long tradition of investigating the usability of various products by having actual users perform required functions. As subtitles are an instrumental text to be used as
a support for understanding the subtitled programme, some ideas of usability might be applicable to research on subtitle reception.\textsuperscript{73}

Another reason for further research is the fact that the world keeps changing. New technologies and inventions result in new ways of reading and of consuming audiovisual culture, and the role of subtitles in this changing world will also change. For example, the Internet is now a more important medium than television for younger generations (see, e.g., Herkman and Vainikka, 2012), and this changes reading habits as well as the role subtitles play for these people. When the way we read and focus attention changes, and when we view programmes through the Internet rather than on television, our use of subtitles will change, and research should monitor and analyse these developments. Accidental reading might become even more accidental when our simultaneous consumption of several media increases, or it may become less accidental and more concentrated if we become less used to watching subtitled materials, as we view more unsubtitled programmes online. In addition, new phenomena such as the rise of social media might affect viewers’ attitudes towards subtitles and their ways of discussing these attitudes. Therefore, it would even be interesting to repeat a similar study after some years have passed to see what might have changed.

On a final note, I want to respond to the question I pose in the title of this chapter: Yes, there is a way to study reception. In fact, there are many ways, one of which was demonstrated in this study. None of these methods will comprehensively encapsulate reception and audiences, because the act of reception is always situation-bound and each audience member is an individual who reads texts in his or her own way. “Audience” as a homogenous entity with easily definable characteristics is only a discursive tool, an abstraction of a multitude of everyday realities. This can make reception research seem like a discouraging effort, but, in truth, it is well worth the trouble. With the accumulating knowledge gained from the various ways of approaching reception, we will be able to increase our understanding of how translated products meet their audiences, and we will be better able to meet the needs of those audiences.

\textsuperscript{73} For a discussion on links between usability and translation studies, as well as the use of usability testing methods in the context of translations, see Suojanen et al., 2012.
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Research Material


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Appendix 1: Focus Group Questions and Discussion Outline

Fokusryhmäkeskustelujen kysymykset
(suluissa mahdollisia tarkentavia kysymyksiä)

1. Yleistä elokuvasta
   - Mitä piditte elokuvasta? (Olisitteko käyneet katsomassa sen vapaaehtoisesti vai tulitteko vain, koska teitä pyydettiin mukaan tutkimukseen?)
   - Oliko elokuva mielestänne hauska? Mille nauroitte?
   - Jääikö mieleseen mitään erityistä suosikkikohtaa?

2. Yleistä käännöksestä
   - Jääikö teille mitään mieleen tekstityksestä? (Oliko siinä jotain hyvää tai huonoa?)
   - Oliko elokuvassa kohtia, joiden merkitys jäi epäselväksi?
   - Ehdittekö lukea kaikki tekstit tai ainakin riittävästi, jotta asia tuli selväksi?
   - Puuttuiko tekstityksestä mielestänne jotain olennaista, minkä jouduitte poimimaan englanninkielisestä tekstistä / olisitte halunne poimia englanninkielisestä tekstistä?
   - Oliko tekstitys mielestänne jossain kohdassa huomattavasti erilainen kuin kuulemanne englanninkielinen puhe?

3. Yksityiskohdista ja intertekstuaalisuudesta
   - Oliko elokuvassa tai tekstityksessä mitään, mikä muistutti teitä kirjasta, johon elokuva perustuu? Tuntuiko teistä, että joitain asioita oli/olisi ollut vaikea ymmärtää lukematta kirjaa?
   - Toiko elokuva tai käänös mieleen mukua olemassa olevaa elokuvaan, kirjaa tms.? Vaikuttiko tämä käsityksiinne elokuvasta?
• Ymmärsittekö, mitä tarkoitti Daniel Cleaverin sanoma *Sinkkuelämää* – lupaus –repliikki?
• Miten ymmärsitte Danielin repliikin ”Just say yes” / ”Sano vain kyllä”?
• Mitä mielestänne tarkoitti Danielin repliikki lentokoneessa rouva Dallowaysta?
Appendix 2: Translated Focus Group Questions and Discussion Outline

Questions for the Focus Groups
(possible further questions in parentheses)

1. General questions about the film
   - What did you think of the film? (Would you have watched it voluntarily or did you only show up because you were invited to this study?)
   - Did you think the film was funny? What made you laugh?
   - Can you remember any particular favourite scene in the film?

2. General questions about the translation
   - Do you remember anything in particular about the subtitles? (What was good or bad about them?)
   - Did you have trouble understanding any parts of the film?
   - Did you have enough time to read all the subtitles or at least to read enough of them to understand what was going on?
   - Did you feel that the subtitles were missing something essential that you had to pick out from the English text / would have liked to pick out from the English text?
   - Were there, in your opinion, any situations where the subtitles were considerably different from the English speech?

3. Questions about details and intertextuality
   - Do you remember any parts of the film or the subtitles that would have reminded you of the novel on which the film is based? Did you think that some things were/would have been difficult to understand without having read the book?
• Did the film or the translation remind you of any other existing book, film, etc.? Did this have any effect on how you saw the film?
• Did you understand what Daniel Cleaver meant with his line about *Sex and the City* and a promise?
• How did you understand Daniel’s line “Just say yes?”
• How did you interpret the comment Daniel made on the plane about Mrs Dalloway?
Suurkiitokset tutkimukseen osallistumisesta!


Voit ottaa minuun yhteyttä sähköpostitse. Sähköpostiosoitteeni on:
tiina.k.tuominen@uta.fi

Kiitos vielä kerran!
Taustatietolomake vastaanottotutkimukseen osallistujille

Henkilötietoja
Nimi (etunimi riittää) ________________________
Ikä _____
Koulutus __________________________________

Elokuvaan liittyviä tietoja
Oletko nähnyt aiemman Bridget Jones –elokuvan Bridget Jones – elämäni sinkkuna?
___________________________________________
Oletko lukenut jomman/tai molemmat Bridget Jones –kirjat? Millä kielellä?
___________________________________________
Jos olet lukenut kirjan/kirjat, kumpi oli mielestäsi parempi, kirja vai elokuva?
___________________________________________

Yleistä elokuvien katselusta ja elokuvatekstityksistä
Kun katsot tekstityettyjä, englanninkielisiä elokuvia, kuinka paljon oman arviosi mukaan luet tekstityksiä ja kuinka paljon kuuntelet alkukielistä puhetta? Saatko enemmän informaatiota tekstityksestä vai puheesta?
___________________________________________
___________________________________________
Kiinnitätkö tavallisesti huomiota tekstitysten laatuun? Millaisia hyviä tai huonoja puolia tekstityksissä havaitset?
___________________________________________
___________________________________________
Muistatko, kuka oli suomentanut/ruotsintanut näkemämme elokuvan?
Appendix 4: Translated Background Questionnaire

Many thanks for taking part in this study!

All of your comments are very useful for my research, and I would therefore be happy to receive your observations and comments even after this group discussion. So, if you later remember something that you think you could have mentioned during the discussion, you can contact me any time. I will also be happy to answer any questions if something was unclear to you, or if you want to know more about this study. I can also tell you about the results of my research as soon as I have compiled them.

You can contact me by e-mail. My e-mail address is: tiina.k.tuominen@uta.fi

Thank you again!
Background Questionnaire for Reception Study Participants

Personal Data
Name (first name only) ________________________
Age _____
Education ___________________________________

Some Questions on the Film
Have you seen the previous Bridget Jones film, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*?
___________________________________________________________________
Have you read one or both of the Bridget Jones novels? In which language?
___________________________________________________________________
If you have read the novel/s, which do you think is better, the book or the film?
___________________________________________________________________

General Questions on Film-Viewing and Film Subtitles
When you watch subtitled, English-language films, how much do you, by your own estimate, read the subtitles, and how much do you listen to the original speech? Do you receive more information through the subtitles or through the speech?
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
Do you usually pay attention to the quality of subtitles? What kinds of positive or negative characteristics do you notice in subtitles?
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
Do you remember the name of the Finnish/Swedish subtitler of this film?
___________________________________________________________________