A Survey on Viewing Preferences and Habits of Iranian Audience of Audiovisual Translation

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ABSTRACT

The remarkable popularity and success of foreign feature films and television series as a source of entertainment cannot be disputed. The emergence of amateur subtitling communities has led to dramatic changes in individuals' viewing habits and styles as fansubbers offer an ideal opportunity for people to access international audiovisual materials, especially in dubbing countries like Iran. However, empirical research on audience viewing preferences and habits in terms of audiovisual translation is scarce. To bridge the gap, over 1200 Iranian viewers filled in an online questionnaire. The results suggest the emergence of new habits and preferences as proportionately more Iranians nowadays access international films and TV series with Persian subtitles, at least among young adults. Also, a small number of the respondents prefer to watch foreign films and programs dubbed. Additionally, there was a weak interplay between viewers' English proficiency and their tendency towards watching dubbed or subtitled programs, and national TV channels do not appear to be the primary entertainment source when it comes to international cinematic products. Understanding viewers' preferences and viewing styles forges possible future paths for the translation industry to cater for the needs of individuals with different viewing styles and needs.

KEYWORDS: Audience; Audiovisual translation; Dubbing; Foreign and domestic productions; Subtitling; Viewing habits and preferences

1. Introduction

Dubbing is deep-rooted in Iran and its history can be traced back to many decades ago. While the current Iranian governmental policies still resist the introduction of professional subtitling on Television, considerable innovation in recent years in terms of audiovisual material consumption has put forward new solutions to remedy this problem, mirroring the active role of the audience in creating their own materials. In the past, the audience had to wait until their favorite program being broadcast on Television or screens in cinemas. But now online translators work around the clock to offer the quickest release of the translation for foreign cinematic products (Khoshsaligheh et al. 2020) even though this activity has given rise to ethical issues, such as the breach of copyright and film piracy (Orrego-Carmona, 2018). The foreign programs, especially the fictional genres are pirated and widely shared and distributed across the Internet (Dwyer, 2017, p. 2019). Illegal distribution of foreign cinematic production has been very frequent in Iran due to the lack of copyright laws there (Zeydabadi-Nejad, 2016). This comfortable and inexpensive access to original materials has brought about a change in people's behavior towards cinematic productions; from being a passive receiver to an active producer of such products (Pérez-González, 2014; Orrego-Carmona & Lee, 2017).

As far as the translation of foreign programs in Iran is concerned, before the introduction of Iranian online video-on-demand (VOD) services, such as *https://www.filimo.com*, there was always much delay in broadcasting and screening the dubbing of foreign films and TV series. The Iranian broadcasting center, IRIB, is virtually lagging behind, on account of reluctance to dub new releases. Some programs are dubbed and shown with a several-year delay. Some people, especially film buffs, are unlikely to put up with a grueling dubbing or subtitling release schedule where the delayed screen of a foreign product is expected as is the case with the Iranian broadcasting center, IRIB (Ameri & Khoshsaligheh 2018). We are therefore witnessing the emergence of translations outside the professional and official circles in such a way that the border of the translation practice has been widened to embrace new forms, and consequently, this has opened up many opportunities for viewers (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2020).

According to Díaz Cintas, "the way in which viewers can consume audiovisual productions has been revolutionized" because viewers "who are now in the driving seat" have the chance to decide on how to watch their favorite audiovisual programs (Bogucki & Díaz Cintas 2020, p. 15). Therefore, one can claim there have been some shifts towards subtitling in dubbing countries, especially among the younger users. Chaume (2019) considers it a new way of choosing a given form of audiovisual translation (AVT) because, unlike what was common in dubbing countries in the past, now the audience is not necessarily obliged to consume only dubbed products and they have more access to subtitled programs. This generally means that AVT choice is no longer nationally defined but should be understood from an individual perspective, stressing individual variations among viewers (Pedersen, 2018). Empirically speaking, a few researchers have reported that people, in particular the youth, in dubbing countries have begun to watch subtitled programs (Matamala, Perego, & Bottiroli, 2017; Matamala & Ortiz-Boix, 2018, Orrego-Carmona, 2014; Enríquez-Aranda & García Luque, 2018). This is likely because there is a relationship between audience age and their language competency, as the youngsters are more competent in languages; therefore, they are more interested in subtitled programs than dubbed ones (MECD, 2012).

This should be noted that some scholars argue that it is rather difficult for individuals accustomed to a particular AVT modality, say dubbing, to change their viewing preference and habit (Antonini & Chiaro, 2009) just because individuals "are creatures of habit" (Ivarsson as cited in Antonini & Chiaro 2009, p. 97). For Díaz-Cintas, tradition is not the only decisive factor as many other factors, such as age and language mastery, have a role to play (Bogucki & Díaz Cintas, 2020, p. 15). The discussion above therefore takes us to believe that the research objectives should be complemented with such variables as language proficiency to figure out if habits and preferences may also be driven by this variable. Especially significant is how viewers access cinematic programs, which can provide insights into the popularity of old and new multimedia service providers.

Against this backdrop, this paper queries Iranian viewers' AVT habits and preferences, drawing on an online survey. The empirical evidence of this investigation will have implications for modifying the current norms and polices of the Iranian AVT industry, which has been long known to ignore audience needs and habits. The questions, which guide this study are:

- To what extent do Iranian viewers watch domestic and foreign productions?

- To what extent do Iranian viewers watch dubbed and subtitled productions?

- Is there an association between viewers' command of English and their tendency to watch dubbed and subtitled productions?

- How do Iranian viewers prefer to access foreign productions?

- What are Iranian viewers' preferences concerning a film's country of origin?

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. The changing landscape of audiovisual translation

The introduction of talkies or sound films in the European society of the 1930s resulted in the emergence of two crucial translation types, which facilitated the circulation of foreign films around the world. These translation types were called dubbing and subtitling, where the former replaces the original dialogue track with a new one that is understandable to target viewers and the latter presents the translation in the form of captions at the bottom of screen, leaving the original soundtrack untouched (Pérez-González, 2009; Gambier, 2013; O'Sullivan & Cornu 2019).

The introduction of sound films was, however, more complicated than it was assumed and thought, especially in Europe as it crippled the local film industry in countries whose budget was small and their film infrastructure was not sophisticated. Home productions in these countries were consequently suppressed, leading to an increased import of foreign programs (O'Connell, 2007; see also O'Sullivan & Cornu 2019). Small countries, such as Belgium, Portugal, Denmark and

Scandinavian countries chose subtitling to drive the expenses down. Such big countries as France, Italy, Germany, and Spain, however, selected dubbing because it became "an assertion of the supremacy of the national language" (Danan, 1991, p. 612) and it was their government goal to treasure their national language, and to shield it from "the onslaught of anglicisms" (Chiaro, 2013, p. 3) or because some countries, such as Iran, were suffering from a high degree of illiteracy (Naficy, 2011). This division of countries into dubbing, subtitling and voice-over, however, does not work anymore. This is because not only are these classifications obsolete but also they had been devised on the basis of clichés (Chaume, 2012, 2013). In other words, "dubbing/subtitling boundaries regarding consumer choice remain fuzzy and fraught with bias" (Chiaro, 2019, p. 171). Notwithstanding this, it is still reasonable to think that some countries still have one primary AVT modality, along with other (emerging) modalities.

Using the concept of "digitalization", which is "the actual process of change", Chaume (2019, 108) contends that AVT practices across the globe have been under the influence of "digital production, digital distribution, digital consumption and digital manipulation". This in turn has led to the belief that new habits of audience and AVT types have begun to rise to the surface. Digital technology, including downloading and streaming, as Chaume (2016, p. 69) puts it, has empowered audience to have more choices on how and what to watch and it has also boosted the diversity of translation types and practices. This digitalization has resulted in shaping audience viewing styles, notably in dubbing countries, as people now use more and more subtitled programs (Chaume, 2019, p. 108). In line with this reality, "the instantaneity and global reach of audiovisual content flows", as Pérez-González (2019, p. 2) notes, have certainly questioned the way we used to define and understand the audience. Evidently, national audiences are no longer homogenous and it is difficult to imagine a coherent AVT market around them, highlighting the fact that "the dominance of specific AVT modalities within individual countries" has started to collapse (Pérez-González, 2019, p. 2). In addition, the widespread availability of large unauthorized online archives of films and TV shows—again as a result of digitalization—has made it easier for audience to access more foreign content (Orrego-Carmona, 2018). Be that as it may, the AVT industry in many countries does not have the capability to cater for the needs of viewers who may wish to watch their favorite program shortly after its original release. This is where audience, especially those in dubbing regions, rely most heavily on amateur subtitling, which is both cheap and swift and does not suffer from content manipulation (He, 2017; Massidda & Casarini, 2017).

The above discussion clearly reveals that watching cinematic programs has experienced a significant shift with the emergence of digitalization and participatory practices like amateur subtitling. Notwithstanding this, such anecdotal evidence has remained unsubstantiated and should be complemented with empirical investigations on audience. Empirical studies, Díaz Cintas (2020, p. 221) points out, "towards evaluating and appraising the prescriptive conventions applied in the profession" are extremely rare. Accordingly, this article aims to bring to light how Iranians watch foreign cinematic programs nowadays and what constitutes their viewing preferences and habits, when it comes to AVT.

2.2. Empirical reception studies

Audience or receivers, according to Díaz Cintas and Szarkowska (2020), constitute an essential part of the communicative act and cannot be ignored in process-oriented research. Interest has emerged out of the curiosity of researchers for understanding how viewers perceive, receive and understand translated programs. Borrowing Chaume's (2018) methodological turns, reception studies could be positioned at both social studies and cognitive studies. Exploring viewers' viewing habits, for example, is part of the social turn in AVT where relevant data are accumulated through questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups, allowing for both or a mash-up of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The cognitive turn, in contrast, offers an analysis of what is happening in the mind of the spectator, "bringing feelings and body response to the surface" (Chaume, 2018, p. 54). When conducting a reception study, Gambier (2018) maintains, several variables could be taken into consideration:

- Sociological variables, which include demographic information of the viewers, such as age, gender, language proficiency and so forth

- Audiovisual variables, which embrace, among others, genre, broadcasting time and the relationship between images and dialogues.

Research has it, for example, age and language proficiency could impact the reception of subtitling and dubbing (for example see Orrego-Carmona, 2016; Perego, 2018). The audiovisual variable, such as the complexity of the program could also affect the way viewers apprehend and appreciate dubbed and subtitled programs (Perego, Missier, & Stragà, 2018).

To the best of our knowledge, there have been a few large-scale AVT studies on audience viewing habits and preferences. For instance, Kizeweter (2015) used internet forums as a source to gather data on AVT habits among the Polish. An important question was already posted in the blog which was "voice-over, dubbing or subtitles[?]" (171). The overall analysis showed that 14.8% of the users preferred dubbing, but the majority (62.96%) argued against dubbing, and 22.22% did not provide a flat answer for the question. Along the same line, Szarkowska and Laskowska (2015) reported the result of an online survey on the AVT preferences of Polish viewers (both with and without hearing impairments). In this large-scale study, 815 respondents took part, yet only 427 participants answered all questions. The results showed that the majority of the

participants (82.67%) preferred watching films with subtitles. Such a result was expected as nearly half of the respondents were deaf or hard of hearing. However, other results showed that 77.25% of hearing participants preferred subtitling, while only 6.88% favored the voice-over modality. The findings of a quantitative survey by Orrego-Carmona (2014) with 332 university students in Spain suggest that Spaniards mainly use the Internet to watch their favorite program and a good—but not large—number of the respondents reported watching subtitled programs. Dubbing was the favorite choice for more than half of the respondents.

In a Spanish context and with 72 viewers, Enríquez-Aranda and García Luque (2018) reported that most of the audience prefer to watch foreign films (than Spanish films) and with Spanish subtitles (than with Spanish dubbing) and they prefer to watch foreign programs in the cinemas. Also, English-language and French-language films were audience's preferences. Though not as viewing habits investigations, Matamala, Perego, and Bottiroli (2017), Matamala and Ortiz-Boix (2018) and Ameri and Ghodrati (2019) found that the participants of their studies are mainly subtitling users even though they had grown up with dubbed content.

This survey of the small body of literature that has so far examined audience habits and preferences brings to the fore the need for further research in new contexts. Taken all together, the principal underlying purpose for doing this study is to survey the current pattern in terms of Iranian audience habits and preferences when watching foreign films and TV shows. Also, the study investigates if there is a correlation between the language mastery and viewing preferences of the audience of audiovisual translation. Broadly, it offers insights into Iranian viewers' engagement with AVT and explores the situation of subtitling and dubbing in Iran.

3. Method

3.1. Research design

This study enjoys an Internet survey. A survey is a quantitative research instrument which collects large-scale data like attitudes, opinions, habits, etc. from an enormous number of audience and it aims to discover possible patterns and trends among a specific population, say viewers here (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison 2018; Mellinger & Hanson 2017). The present web-based survey was administered online and respondents were requested to fill in the questionnaire, that was designed and developed by an Iranian online survey tool. More specifically, "in web surveys the questionnaire is accessed and answered by respondents using a web browser" (Vehovar & Manfreda 2017, p. 146), as is the case with the present survey. Both open-ended and close-ended items collect data concerning individuals' demographic information, attitudes and opinions for this study. Additionally, the close-ended items were not based on a Likert scale and were measured at the categorical level.

3.2. Participants

A total of 1261 Iranians participated in the study. The final sample, however, comprised 1137 Iranians who completely filled in the questionnaire, including 357 females (31.4%) and 780 males (68.6%). Owing to the online data collection procedure, the participants were from across Iran. Convenience sampling—a non-probability sampling technique—was employed as the participants "included in the sample cannot be determined" in advance and "it is left up to each individual to choose to participate in the survey" (Fricker Jr, 2017, p. 166). Here, it suffices to mention that the survey link was posted on Telegram channels, where it was left up to users visiting posts of the channels to choose to click on the link and attend the survey.

The age range of the respondents was between 12 and 59, with the mean age of 25.19 (SD = 7.96). As for the educational background, the participants were students or graduates of high school (N = 333, 29.3%), B.A. (N = 507, 44.6%), M.A. (N = 176, 15.5%) and Ph.D. (N = 70, 6.2%) programs, and others (N = 51, 4.5%). With reference to the European Framework of Reference for Languages, the participants self-reported their level of English as follows; not familiar (N = 42, 3.7%), basic (N = 291, 25.6%), intermediate (N = 419, 36.9%), upper-intermediate (N = 266, 23.4%), and advanced (N = 119, 10.5%), which more and less resembles the report of EPI (2020) where Iran holds a low level of proficiency in English. This should be added that self-reported language proficiency, Kaushanskaya, Blumenfeld, and Marian (2020) maintain, is quite in line with the objective assessment of individuals' competency.

3.3. Instrumentation

Due to the lack of any relevant questionnaire for gauging individuals' viewing habits and preferences in AVT, the questionnaire was built by the researcher. The questionnaire was designed and developed in consultation with translation studies scholars and a review of the relevant literature so that the items are comprehensive and representative, and act in accordance with the research purposes. The questionnaire had 14 items; four measured demographic information and the other ten items explored individuals' preferences and habits. In other words, the constructs of the questionnaire include:

- demographic information: age, gender, educational background and English language mastery

- film viewing habits and preferences: weekly hours of and preferences for watching domestic and foreign cinematic products, favorite genres, favorite types of cinematic programs, favorite international cinemas and favorite ways of accessing foreign productions

- AVT habits and preferences: dubbing and subtitling viewing habits

To ensure the validity of the questionnaire, it was sent to four Iranian translation studies researchers to comment on the accuracy and wording of the items. After minor modifications were made following the expert reviews, the questionnaire was piloted and refined using a sample of ten individuals who read the items one by one and stated their understanding of each item. This helped us mark problems with the understanding of the items. The scale was in Persian, which matches the respondents' mother tongue, and the reliability was not possible to be reported as the items were not based on a Likert scale and were measured at the categorical level.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

The present Internet-based survey was operated on an Iranian website that hosted the questionnaire (http://cafepardazesh.ir). Given that anyone could be a viewer of audiovisual programs, an "unrestricted sample" was favored, indicating that anyone can complete the questionnaire (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). In addition, there is a bias with the Internet surveys, because, at times, those who are not tech-savvy or have no Internet connection or cannot click the links to unknown or unsafe websites do not attend the survey. Also, the sampling procedure is non-probability and mainly attracts volunteers (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison 2018). These defects may decrease the generalizability of the findings. To recruit the respondents, attempts were made to use some specialized channels on Telegram. Telegram is dominant in Iran and this helped us collect considerably more answers and include a wide spectrum of viewers from entire Iran, and as a result, the study is not confined to a select group of respondents. A couple of Telegram channels on films were chosen and the first author contacted admins of these channels and they were asked to share the online survey link on the channels. The collected data were imported into Statistical Package for Social Sciences Program (SPSS, version 22) and the relevant variables were defined.

4. Results

4.1. Data screening

Prior to the data analysis, the data were inspected for normality and missing values. This is because the data should be clean and reliable for any further statistical analysis. Given that the questionnaire used for this research lacks any Likert-based items and all the items are categorical, running a normality test sounds pointless. When the respondents deliberately or accidentally left some items unanswered, the researchers are faced with data called missing data or values. As to the missing data treatment, the present literature has come up with three techniques. The first of which is the "deletion method" where the entire data of any case (i.e. the respondent) with one or more missing data are entirely removed from the analysis or the researcher can only remove only those cases with a particular missing item and variable. The former technique is called "exclude cases listwise" and the other is named "exclude cases pairwise" (Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 752-753). The removal of missing data should be done cautiously because this can result in losing numerous cases. The other alternative method for dealing with missing data is "imputation method" wherein the missing values and variables are replaced with educated guesses and it is for situations where the missing data pattern is pretty systematic (Cohen et al., 2018, 752-753). Because a considerable amount of data was collected and the scale had only 14 questions—which means that all items are more and less equally important for the data analysis—, the first technique "exclude cases listwise" was chosen. This exclusion of missing data resulted in losing roughly ten percent of the data (124 cases) and having 1137 cases who filled in the questionnaire completely.

4.2. Film viewing habits

The first research question asked how much the respondents watch domestic and foreign fictional programs. The descriptive data, including percentages and frequencies can be found in Figures 1 and 2. As the figures illustrate, while more than half of Iranians watch domestic programs less than one hour a week, roughly 20 percent of them watch more than nine hours of foreign programs per week as the likelihood is much higher.
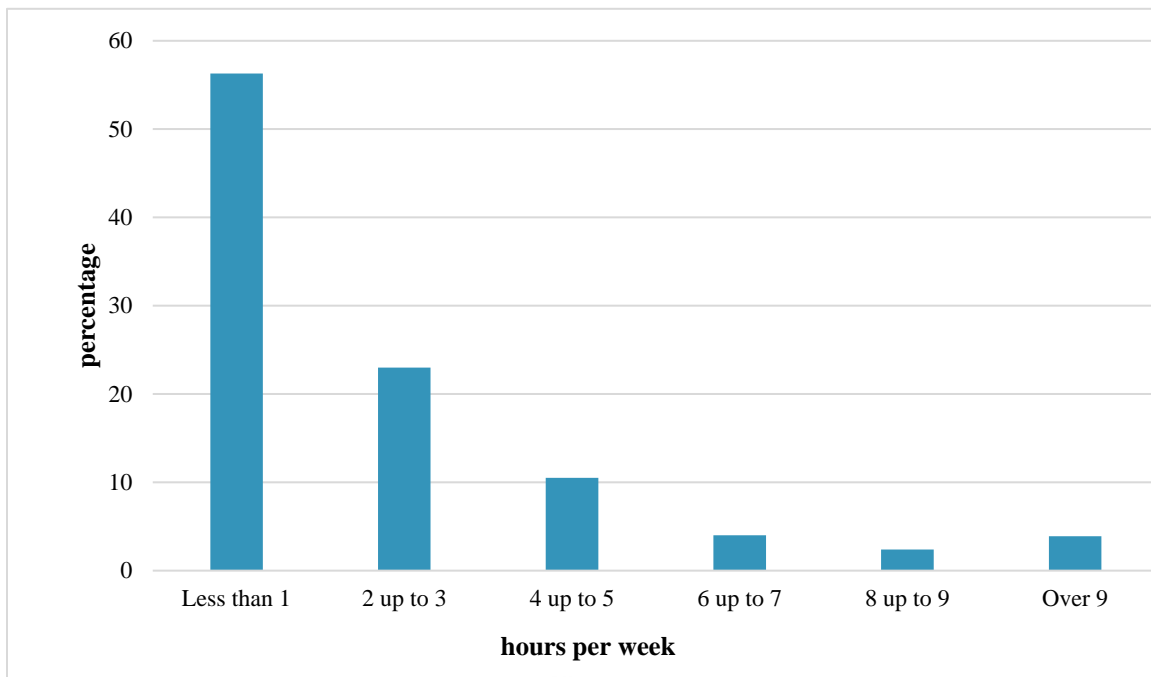
Fig. 1 Film Viewing Habits: Iranian Productions

What can be implied from these numbers and figures is that Iranians are more inclined toward foreign programs. In other words, foreign programs account for a fair amount of their viewing time. This clearly highlights the central position of foreign programs among Iranians.
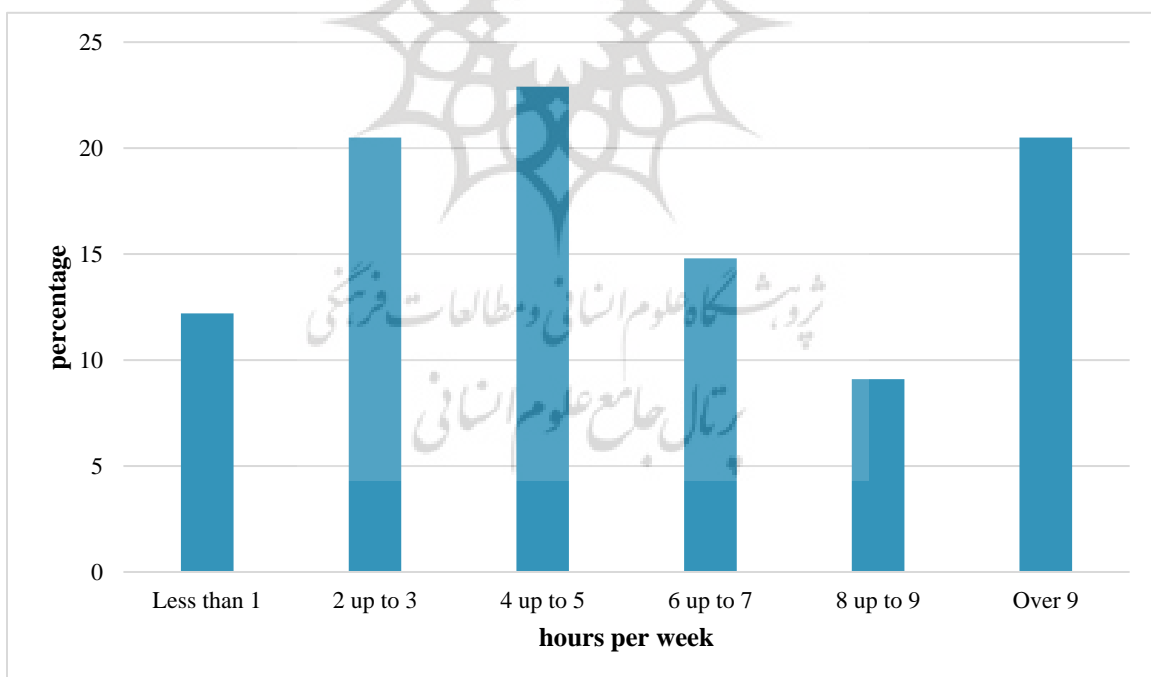
Fig. 2 Film Viewing Habits: Foreign Productions

4.3. Audiovisual translation viewing preferences and habits

The second research question asked how Iranians prefer to watch foreign fictional programs. As Figure 3 illustrates, more than half of the participants choose Persian subtitling, and only 20 percent of them would like to watch programs dubbed. Besides,

16.9 percent of them tend to watch their programs with the original language subtitles, and a handful of them (4.9%) watch foreign programs without the aid of dubbing and subtitling.
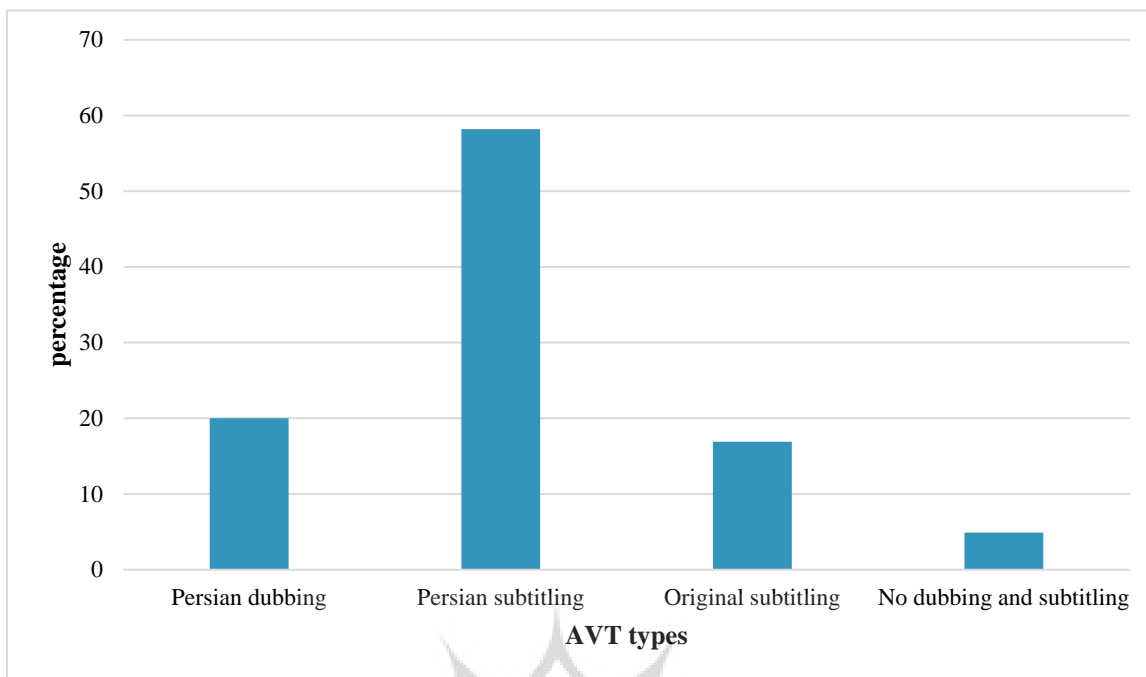

Fig. 3 AVT Viewing Habits

To deeply understand the viewers' AVT viewing habits and offer more detailed answers to the second research question, the respondents were asked to report to what extent they watch dubbed and subtitled programs, and its results are offered in Figures 4 and 5. What is learned from Figure 4 is that the personal judgment of 66.8 percent of the viewers consisted mainly of *always* and *usually* for subtitling. An opposite trend can be seen about dubbing since the reports of 27.9 percent of the viewers consisted mainly of *always* and *usually*, together with 47.2 percentage for *barely* and *never*.
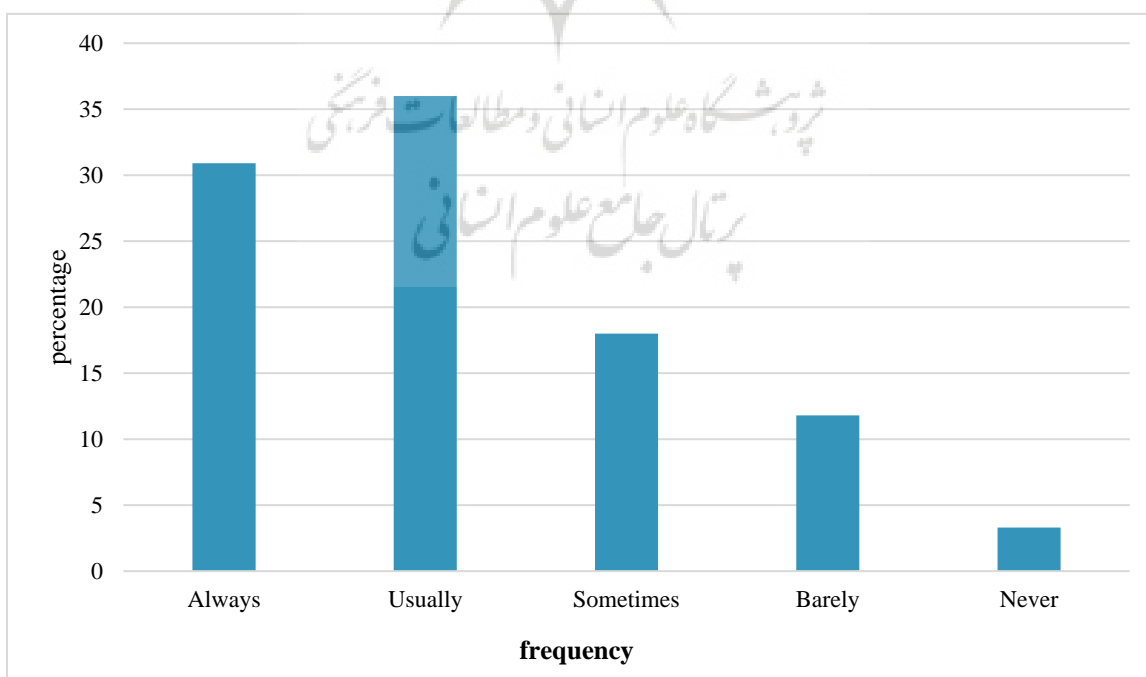

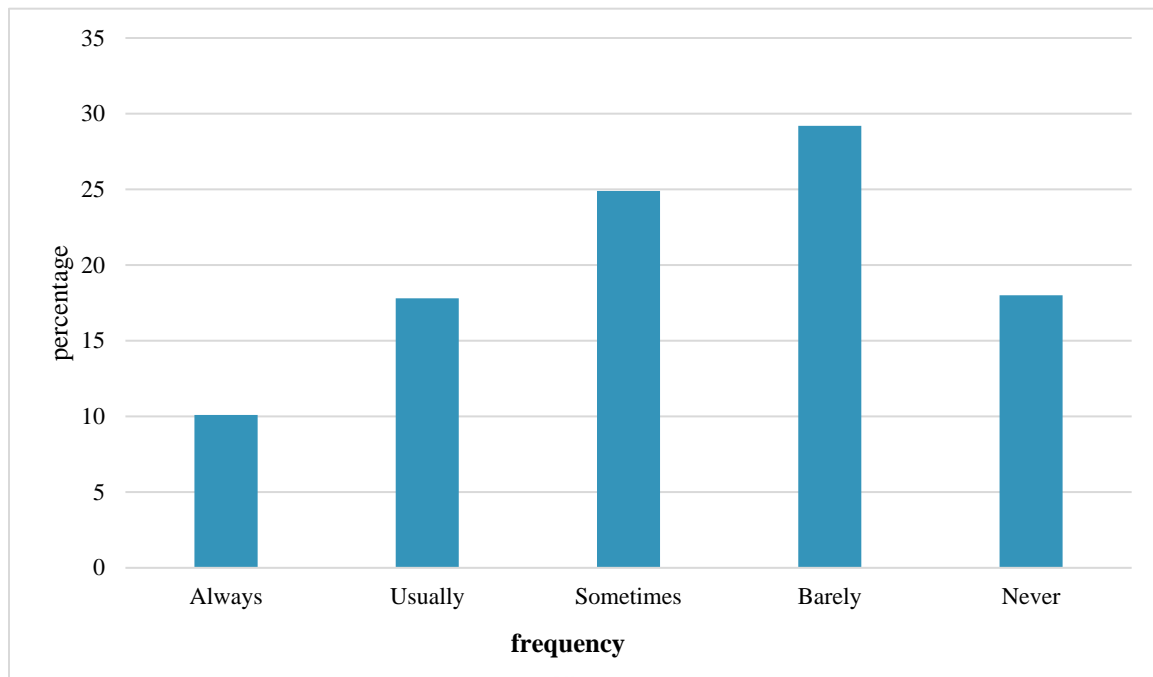
Fig. 4 Subtitling Viewing Habits

Fig. 5 Dubbing Viewing Habits

4.4. Correlates of audiovisual translation preferences and English language proficiency

In order to answer the third research question concerning the relationships between individuals' AVT viewing habits and their English competency, a chi-squared test was used. A significant association between the two variables emerged from the analysis ($\chi(1) = 240.75$, p = 0.00). Nonetheless, the strength of the relationship between the two variables, according to the Cramer's *V* test, is weak. This statistical analysis, in sum, suggests that the two variables are not independent of each other. Given this statistically significant chi-squared test, a post-hock test was employed to discover the significance of each cell. Any statistics beyond 1.96 for the adjusted residuals are significant. However, some types of corrections should be applied here, which is a Bonferroni correction. The p-value of 0.05 should be divided into 20, which results in a Bonferroni corrected p-value of 0.00024 (see Beasley & Schumacker, 1995). The result of computing variables to find the significance of the adjusted values is reported in Appendix A. To sum up, several cells were significantly different from the expectation of the null hypothesis. As far as the interpretation of the findings is concerned (see Appendix B), those with an advanced level of English are more inclined to watch fictional programs with English subtitles or without the help of dubbing and subtitling. The opposite trend is observable in those who are not familiar with English as they prefer to watch dubbed programs. The other telling results indicate that with the increase of one's mastery over English, the tendency towards watching the original program with Persian subtitles increases excepting the advanced group who mainly goes for English subtitling (i.e., intralingual subtitles).

4.5. Different ways to access foreign productions

The fourth research question addressed how the Iranian audience access foreign audiovisual programs and the results are shown in Figure 6. The interesting point is that most people download them from the Internet and the number of individuals who watch TV channels is roughly ten percent which is less than those who watch satellite channels. Other ways that were mentioned by the respondents embrace personal archives, borrowing programs from relatives and friends, using the phone application Rubika, and Telegram channels[1].

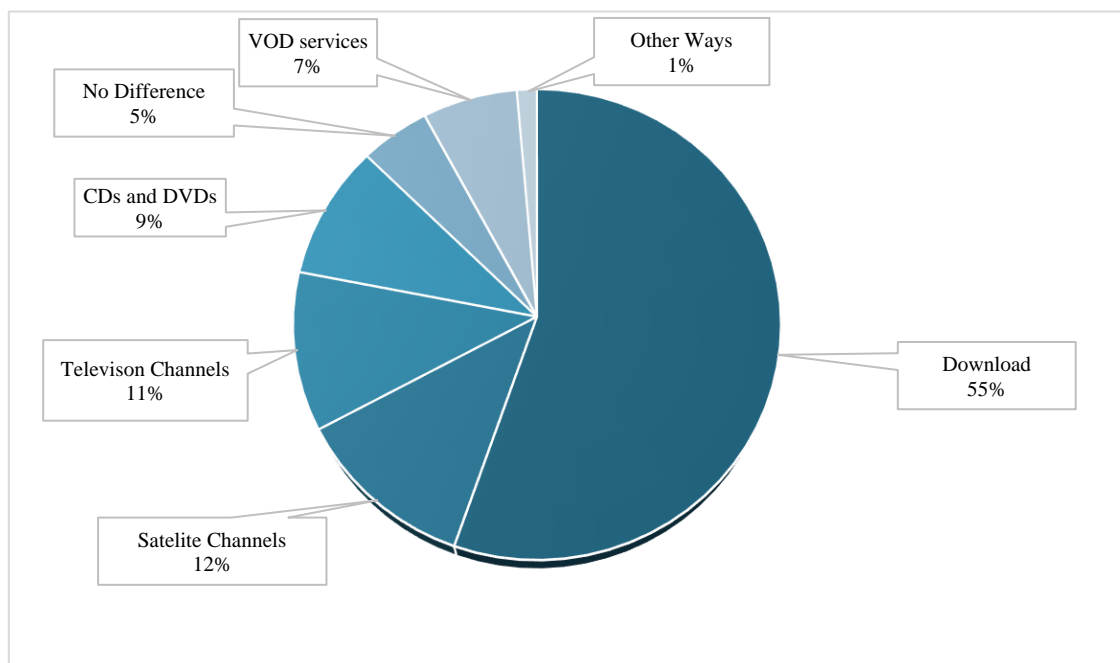[1] The reason for excluding cinemas is that Iranian cinemas only screen Iranian productions.

Fig. 6 Different Ways to Access Foreign Productions

4.6. Preferences concerning a film's country of origin

The last research question investigated participants' preferences with regard to a film's country of origin. As could be expected, and presented in Figure 7, more than 60 percent of the respondents stated Hollywood cinema among their favorite foreign cinema. To this, we should add Korean, Turkish and Bollywood productions (9%, 8%, and 7%, respectively)[2]. Other international cinemas mentioned by the respondents include China, Japan, France, England, Russia, Germany, Italy, Australia, and Poland.
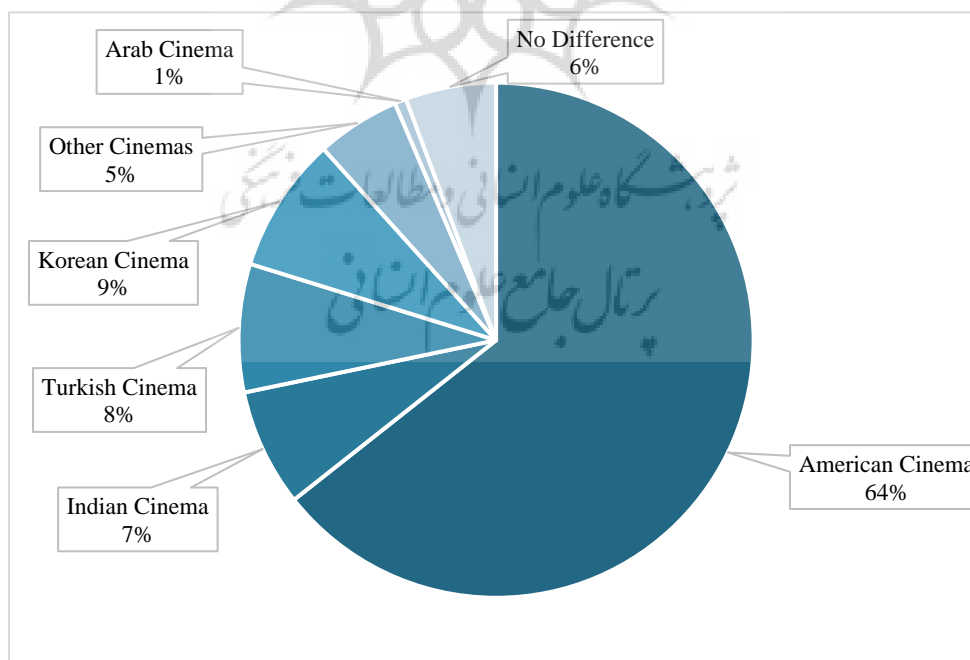

Fig. 7 Preferences on Film's Country of Origin

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[2] Numbers may not total 100 percent as participants were permitted to choose multiple alternatives.

5. Discussion and conclusion

This article has explored Iranian viewers' viewing habits and preferences in terms of AVT. The initial results showed that the respondents spend more time watching foreign programs, accounting for a large percentage when compared with domestic productions. A possible explanation for this finding is that the present time has enjoyed an unprecedented boom in the production of English audiovisual programs. Besides, the number and volume of foreign films and TV shows are much larger than those of Iranian programs; therefore, people have a wider range of choices. Foreign cinematic programs have therefore found their way into Iranian society. From a cultural perspective, Zeydabadi-Nejad (2016, p. 110) is of the view that foreign film viewing has become a big part of Iranian culture and is "part of the culture of resistance to regime impositions". This finding tallies with that of Enríquez-Aranda and García Luque (2018) in Spain, where people are using more audiovisual products with a language different from Spanish.

Despite being called a dubbing country on paper and to some extent in practice, Iran has a smaller number of dubbed productions, compared to amateur subtitling productions and given the omnipresence of multimedia products in our world, non-professional subtitling of cinematic products has become a daily practice in Iran (Ameri & Khoshsaligheh, 2019; Khoshsaligheh et al. 2020). The results revealed that dubbing is now way past its prime, which leaves just a small handful of individuals, at least not the younger groups, who still use dubbing. Just 20 percent in total choose dubbing as their preferred modality, while a considerable percentage of the respondents were subtitling users (nearly 60 percent). Needless to say, this discussion does not suggest that such changes and shifts have happened overnight because subtitling, albeit in its amateur form, has existed in Iran since the late 1990s. Therefore, continual exposure of Iranians to subtitling over the past two decades has altered their viewing habits, and watching subtitled programs is now part of people's everyday life. To quote Chaume (2020, p. 321), "habits and tastes are not easily changed in a short space of time".

However, taking into account the issue of habits, Mereu Keating (2019) claims that people may find it hard to change their old habits, and viewers in dubbing countries are scarcely accustomed to reading subtitles, and consequently they "would stay away from screenings of foreign films whose dialogue exchanges were conveyed through fast-disappearing" (2019, p. 72). The role of digitization should not, however, be overlooked here, which appears to play an important role in "moulding the habits of local audiences" (Chaume, 2019, p. 114). VOD platforms, along with the Internet and new technologies, being constantly on the rise in Iran, have allowed audience "to watch what they want, when they want and in the quantities that they want" (Díaz Cintas & Nikolić 2018, p. 3); therefore, they are not bound to a dictated translation modality. In the words of Chaume (2016), "the days of decisions taken by just a few agents, used to dictating what audiences like and dislike, are progressively coming to an end" (p. 72).

The noticeable tendency for watching foreign cinematic programs with subtitling in Iran has already been reported in Ameri and Ghodrati (2019) with a select sample of university students who used subtitled programs as a viable tool to hone their English skills; an issue which has already been well-studied in both applied linguistics and translation studies (e.g. Incalcaterra McLoughlin 2019, Rupérez Micola et al. 2019). Likewise, the study also showed how language competency of viewers could be an essential factor in choosing dubbing or subtitling. As shown, it is more than likely that people with a higher mastery over English would rather watch subtitled programs than dubbed ones. A new piece of research has it that people of subtitling countries have a higher level of English competency as far as the TOEFL exam scores are concerned; thus, a far-reaching effect of exposure to subtitled multimedia content is noticeable (Rupérez Micola et al., 2019).

Besides, the increasing popularity of and preference for subtitling, particularly in the younger groups in other dubbing countries (Matamala & Ortiz-Boix 2018; Matamala, Perego & Bottiroli, 2017, Perego et al., 2016, Orrego-Carmona, 2014, Enríquez-Aranda & García Luque, 2018) or voice-over countries (Szarkowska & Laskowska, 2015) are not just a coincidence. There is a reason why such shifts began to shape; subtitling is associated mainly with "general openness and curiosity for different languages and cultures" (Matamala, Perego, & Bottiroli, 2017, p. 431). Additionally, the unpopularity of dubbing among the respondents may result from the shortcomings and defects observed in the Persian dubbing industry. Ameri and Khoshsaligheh (2020), for example, report that the Iranian dubbing industry, according to the Iranian viewers, is no longer capable of offering high-quality products due to poor translations, lousy voice-acting, wrong policies, such as censorship, and unexpected setbacks in dubbing blockbusters. On a relevant note and in the case of Italy, Casarini (2012) maintains that despite the fact that this country has enjoyed a strong and stable tradition in terms of dubbing, many audiences, who turned out to be tech-savvy, are increasingly voicing their discontent "with the lower quality" and "rushed dubbing" of TV shows. Therefore, it is common to witness that they are willing to "to resort to fansubs – subtitles voluntarily created by language-skilled fans and available for free shortly after each US broadcast" (Casarini, 2012, p. 64).

The other impressive result of this research lends support to the idea that film piracy is very prevalent in Iran. First, only a handful of people watch national or satellite channels and less than this number tends to access video entertainment through VOD services, while roughly half of the viewers download their programs from the Internet, which hosts a growing volume of film piracy websites. Therefore, film piracy, as suggested by Orrego-Carmona (2018), has offered unlimited access to new releases and it costs viewers almost nothing. It is noteworthy that according to Zeydabadi-Nejad (2016), the case of Iran

is far from piracy because Iranians have not been permitted by the authorities to have access to international cinematic productions and more importantly, the copyrights of original works produced outside the Iran borders are barely protected by the Iranian government; therefore, by downloading foreign films and TV shows, "Iranians are not breaking the law so far as copyright is concerned" (p. 100). Overall, people are not watching as much TV channels anymore, and the public service broadcasting is now being replaced by new rivals.

Although American productions still constitute a large part of Iranian audience preference—which makes sense when considering the fact that major film studios feeding international markets are located in the United States—, non-English language films have garnered some popularity in Iran, thanks to national TV and satellite channels which have given rise to Turkish and Korean TV shows in the last decade. This result acts as evidence supporting the idea of "the destabilisation of English as the language par excellence in media entertainment and the renaissance of other original languages" (Bogucki & Díaz Cintas, 2020, p. 30).

As indicated by Díaz-Cintas, reception studies have the potential of establishing the missing link between the research and industry; "a cooperation that in turn holds promise for the development and provision of better products for end users" (Bogucki & Díaz Cintas, 2020, p. 28). Therefore, in light of the research findings, the policymakers in Iran are advised to take into consideration the changes that have happened in individuals' AVT preferences. The findings are indicative of changes but the Iranian national TV channels still resist the introduction of subtitling as an AVT alternative. The time has come for new changes to be made in the Iranian AVT system so as to meet the new needs and habits of Iranians. Therefore, the audience should be granted more extensive choices of AVT in Iran. It should not be taken to mean that nothing has been made to cater to audience needs in terms of subtitling, as Iranian VOD platforms have been forerunners in introducing subtitling to the Iranian society since 2017 or thereabouts (Khoshsaligheh et al., 2020). Notwithstanding these preliminary efforts, considerable steps should still be taken on TV channels. These measures could prevent individuals from the illegal downloading of cinematic products, and professional subtitling on national TV channels can be a possible way to fight piracy and cater to the audience needs. The results could be carried over into film translation classrooms to raise the awareness of translation students regarding the audience current viewing habits and styles and how audience and their reception may shape translation decisions and choices.

The paper has some limitations, which could be promising avenues for future studies. To avoid self-report biases and elicited data and to collect rich data through online observation, netnography (Kozinets, 2019) can be used. Netnography is a reliable method to reach qualitative understanding of, say, film community, blogs or any relevant forums and social media where many people voice and express their ideas and opinions about translation. Journal entries and diaries, to the best of our knowledge, have barely been used in the context of reception studies and AVT preferences. Indeed, research can benefit from these research tools by inviting people to record their daily exposure to subtitled and dubbed content to gain invaluable insights into individuals' AVT consumption. Additionally, the data were gathered through an Internet survey, introducing some biases as the majority of the respondents turned to be young. It is therefore recommended that future studies make use of face-to-face surveys to incorporate more respondents from the elderly group. Finally, at the time of collecting data for this study, the Iranian movie streaming services were few and they were at their early stage of development, but now are mushrooming, especially with the shutdown of many Iranian movie piracy websites in October 2019. In addition to their subtitling activities, the VOD platforms have been very active in dubbing new releases. A final recommendation is therefore the replication of this study to assess the impact of these services on dubbing reception.

6. Disclosure statement

The authors have no conflicts of interests to declare.

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8. Appendix

Appendix A. Bonferroni corrected p-value

Bonferroni corrected p-value

Adjusted squares	chi-squares	Bonferroni corrected p-value
3.39	11.49	.00070*
-1.42	2.02	.15561
-.78	.61	.43539
-1.30	1.69	.19360
6.27	39.31	.00000
-1.85	3.42	.06431
-3.56	12.67	.00037
-2.20	4.84	.02781
1.13	1.28	.25848
3.12	9.73	.00181
-3.59	12.89	.00033*
-3.24	10.50	.00120
-5.80	33.64	.00000*
3.00	9.00	.00270
.61	.37	.54186
1.89	3.57	.05876
-4.79	22.94	.00000*

-5.56	30.91	.00000*
10.36	107.33	.00000*
6.44	41.47	.00000*

Appendix B. Crosstabulation of English Mastery and AVT Viewing Habits

Crosstabulation of English Mastery and AVT Viewing Habits

			AVT Viewing Habits				Total
			Dubbing	Persian SUB	Original Language	English SUB	
English Mastery	Not Familiar	Count	17	20	1	4	42
		Expected Count	8.4	24.5	2.1	7.1	42.0
		% within English Mastery	40.5%	47.6%	2.4%	9.5%	100.0%
		% within AVT Viewing Habits	7.5%	3.0%	1.8%	2.1%	3.7%
		% of Total	1.5%	1.8%	0.1%	0.4%	3.7%
		Adjusted Residual	3.4	-1.4	-.8	-1.3	
	Basic	Count	95	156	3	37	291
		Expected Count	58.1	169.4	14.3	49.1	291.0
		% within English Mastery	32.6%	53.6%	1.0%	12.7%	100.0%
		% within AVT Viewing Habits	41.9%	23.6%	5.4%	19.3%	25.6%
		% of Total	8.4%	13.7%	0.3%	3.3%	25.6%
		Adjusted Residual	6.3	-1.9	-3.6	-2.2	
	Average	Count	91	269	8	51	419
		Expected Count	83.7	244.0	20.6	70.8	419.0
		% within English Mastery	21.7%	64.2%	1.9%	12.2%	100.0%
		% within AVT Viewing Habits	40.1%	40.6%	14.3%	26.6%	36.9%
		% of Total	8.0%	23.7%	0.7%	4.5%	36.9%
		Adjusted Residual	1.1	3.1	-3.6	-3.2	
		Count	20	176	15	55	266

		Expected Count	53.1	154.9	13.1	44.9	266.0
Above Average	**% within English Mastery**	**7.5%**	**66.2%**	**5.6%**	**20.7%**	**100.0%**
	% within AVT Viewing Habits	8.8%	26.6%	26.8%	28.6%	23.4%
	% of Total	1.8%	15.5%	1.3%	4.8%	23.4%
	Adjusted Residual	**-5.8**	**3.0**	**.6**	**1.9**	
Advanced	Count	4	41	29	45	119
	Expected Count	23.8	69.3	5.9	20.1	119.0
	% within English Mastery	**3.4%**	**34.5%**	**24.4%**	**37.8%**	**100.0%**
	% within AVT Viewing Habits	1.8%	6.2%	51.8%	23.4%	10.5%
	% of Total	0.4%	3.6%	2.6%	4.0%	10.5%
	Adjusted Residual	**-4.8**	**-5.6**	**10.4**	**6.4**	
Total	Count	227	662	56	192	1137
	Expected Count	227.0	662.0	56.0	192.0	1137.0
	% within English Mastery	20.0%	58.2%	4.9%	16.9%	100.0%
	% within AVT Viewing Habits	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
	% of Total	20.0%	58.2%	4.9%	16.9%	100.0%