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### Across Linguistic and Cultural Markets: A Comparative Study of Audiovisual Localization and Audience Reception in Nigerian and Francophone African Media

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#### Abstract

Nigerian screen media and Francophone West and Central African screen media reach transnational audiences through localization pathways that differ structurally rather than incidentally: Nigerian export practice has relied overwhelmingly on subtitling into English and, increasingly, on subtitling between Nigerian and other African languages, while Francophone African distribution has relied on a dubbing-into-standard-French default inherited from a broadcasting infrastructure historically centered outside the continent. Comparative audiovisual translation research rarely places these two traditions side by side, and the reception literature that exists for each is built from incompatible designs, measures, and populations, which makes any claim about which pathway serves audiences better premature. This paper develops a comparative research protocol, not an empirical verdict. It synthesizes audiovisual translation theory, cultural proximity and

reception theory, and platform-circulation research to build a three-part comparative typology of linguistic infrastructure, modal default, and reception mechanism; it specifies a matched-title, mixed-methods comparative design grounded in most-similar and most-different systems logic; and it states five falsifiable propositions about where subtitling and dubbing should diverge in effect on comprehension, perceived authenticity, and diasporic engagement. The paper's contribution is the comparative apparatus itself: a culture-specific-item transfer table spanning both markets, a validity framework for cross-market comparison, and an explicit refusal to report effect sizes before data exist. The central claim is that the Nigerian-Francophone asymmetry in localization mode is not a technical accident but a residue of colonial-language infrastructure that comparative reception research has not yet tested directly.

**Keywords:** Audiovisual Translation, Comparative Media Studies, Nollywood, Francophone Africa, Subtitling, Dubbing, Audience Reception, Streaming Platforms

#### 1. Introduction

Nigerian screen media and Francophone West and Central African screen media are often grouped together under a single label, African screen media, yet they reach audiences through localization pathways that differ at almost every structural level. Nollywood, the Anglophone Nigerian video-film industry, developed primarily in English alongside Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa production streams, and its transnational circulation has depended heavily on subtitling rather than dubbing, both for diaspora audiences who retain English or Nigerian-language competence and for international platforms that add subtitle tracks to existing masters (Haynes, 2016) <sup>[32]</sup>. Francophone West and Central African audiences, by contrast, have historically consumed imported screen media, Latin American telenovelas, Turkish serials, and Western film and television, through a dubbing-into-standard-French pipeline whose technical and labor infrastructure sits in Paris, Brussels, and Montreal rather than in Abidjan, Dakar, or Kinshasa (Larkin, 2008) <sup>[48]</sup>. That asymmetry is the puzzle this paper addresses: two neighboring media regions, shaped by different colonial languages and different production economies, have converged on opposite default localization modes, and almost no published research has compared them directly rather than treating each as a separate area case study. The asymmetry matters beyond translation technique. Subtitling preserves the source soundtrack and adds a reduced, time-

constrained written translation beneath the image, a mode that Venuti's foreignization concept treats as one that leaves the foreign speech audible and the viewer aware that a translation has occurred (Venuti, 1995) <sup>[75]</sup>. Dubbing replaces the source soundtrack entirely with a target-language performance matched to lip movement and utterance timing, a mode closer to Venuti's domestication pole because it can make imported content sound as though it originated in the target language. If Nigerian screen media travels mainly through a foreignizing mode and Francophone African media consumption runs mainly through a domesticating mode, then the two regions are not simply choosing different production budgets. They are institutionalizing different relationships between audiences and the foreignness of imported or exported content, and this difference should have measurable consequences for comprehension, perceived cultural distance, and diasporic engagement that the literature has not tested comparatively. This paper asks four questions. First, how do linguistic infrastructure and colonial-language legacy structure the default localization mode in each market. Second, how does the transfer of culture-specific items, kinship terms, honorifics, religious and spiritual references, proverbs, code-switching, humor, and music, differ across the two pathways when the same categories of meaning must cross into different target languages and different audience literacies. Third, what reception mechanisms, comprehension, perceived authenticity, cultural identification, and diasporic engagement, plausibly differ between subtitled and dubbed delivery, and do those mechanisms differ in the same direction in both markets or in opposite directions. Fourth, what comparative research design could test these questions without inventing data that do not yet exist. These four questions organize the review, the comparative framework, the research design, and the culture-specific-item analysis that follow. The literature synthesis in this paper covers work available through December 2024.

The paper's status should be stated plainly. It is a comparative research protocol built from published audiovisual translation theory and existing reception studies, not a report of new fieldwork, and it does not claim to have measured Nigerian or Francophone African audiences directly. Where the literature offers a directly comparable African case, Henrich's study of Kiswahili-dubbed television reception in Kenya (Henrich, 2000) <sup>[33]</sup>, it is treated as a precedent to be extended, not as evidence that already settles the Nigerian-Francophone comparison. The propositions stated later in the paper are falsifiable claims for a future comparative study to test, not results.

The paper's contribution is threefold. First, it develops a comparative typology that separates linguistic infrastructure, modal default, and reception mechanism as three analytically distinct layers, so that a finding about, for instance, comprehension differences can be attributed to the right layer rather than collapsed into a vague claim about cultural difference. Second, it specifies a matched-title, mixed-methods comparative design grounded in comparative-politics case-selection logic, most-similar and most-different systems reasoning applied to media markets rather than states, so that future comparative work can select titles and audience samples defensibly. Third, it builds a culture-specific-item transfer table that maps twelve recurring categories of meaning against the strategies typically available in each market, giving future coders a

shared instrument rather than an ad hoc list. The paper closes with five falsifiable propositions rather than a longer inventory, on the reasoning that a comparative protocol earns credibility from propositions specific enough to fail, not from breadth.

Scope matters for what this comparison can and cannot claim. Nigeria's video-film and streaming industry and Francophone West and Central Africa's broadcasting and streaming sector are each internally diverse: Nigeria spans Yoruba-, Igbo-, Hausa-, and English-language production streams with different audience bases and different relationships to subtitling, and Francophone Africa spans production centers in Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Cameroon, and the Democratic Republic of Congo with different regional-French varieties and different relationships to the Paris-centered dubbing pipeline. This paper treats the two regions at the level of dominant market pattern, subtitling as the Nigerian export default and dubbing as the Francophone African import default, while acknowledging that any comparative fieldwork built on the design in section 4 would need to select specific production centers within each region rather than treat either region as internally uniform. The comparison is deliberately narrower than an African media studies survey and deliberately more specific than a general subtitling-versus-dubbing debate, because the specificity is what makes the propositions in section 6 falsifiable rather than rhetorical.

## 2. Theoretical framework and critical review

### 2.1 Modes of audiovisual translation and their market logics

Audiovisual translation studies conventionally distinguishes subtitling, dubbing, voice-over, and audio description as related but technically distinct modes, each governed by its own constraint system (Diaz Cintas & Remael, 2021) <sup>[23]</sup>. Subtitling operates under a hard character-per-line and reading-speed ceiling: segmentation, condensation, and omission are routine, not exceptional, and the translator's central decision is what to cut, not merely how to render meaning (Pedersen, 2011) <sup>[57]</sup>. Dubbing operates under a different constraint, isochrony, the requirement that the target utterance fit the source utterance's duration and, for close shots, its lip movement, which forces paraphrase and re-timing even when a more literal rendering would be linguistically available (Chaume, 2012) <sup>[20]</sup>. Kruger's psycholinguistic account of how viewers process subtitled versus dubbed dialogue argues that the two modes impose different cognitive loads, reading and image-scanning for subtitles, competing audio channels for dubbing, and that comprehension and immersion outcomes should not be assumed to transfer from one mode to the other (Kruger, 2016) <sup>[45]</sup>. Taylor's multimodal approach adds that image, sound, and text interact as a single semiotic system, so a mode that removes the source audio, dubbing, changes more of that system than a mode that only adds a caption layer (Taylor, 2016) <sup>[71]</sup>.

These constraint systems are not neutral with respect to cost or labor. Subtitling requires a translator, a spotter, and a quality check; dubbing additionally requires voice casting, a dubbing director, sound engineers, and studio time, which is why dubbing has historically clustered in markets large enough to amortize that labor across many titles, Western Europe, Latin America, and Francophone broadcasting served from Paris, while smaller or export-oriented markets

default to subtitling (Perego, 2018) <sup>[58]</sup>. Perego's methodological discussion of cross-national audiovisual translation research is unusually direct about this point: comparing reception across markets that differ in default mode is comparing not just a translation choice but an entire production economy, and any comparative design has to hold that economy visible rather than treat mode as a free variable that researchers assign. Nigeria's video-film industry grew as a low-budget, high-volume, direct-to-video and later direct-to-platform enterprise that could not and did not build dubbing infrastructure at scale; its export mode, subtitling, is therefore as much an artifact of the industry's production economics as of any deliberate translation-studies choice (Haynes, 2016) <sup>[32]</sup>. Francophone Africa's dubbing default is the mirror image: imported content arrived already dubbed into French for a francophone world market centered outside Africa, so audiences absorbed dubbing as the ordinary mode of encounter with screen fiction well before a comparable local production industry existed to make an independent choice.

The subtitling default inside Nigeria is itself more layered than the export case suggests. Yoruba-, Igbo-, and Hausa-language productions are frequently subtitled into English for domestic cross-language circulation before any question of international export arises, since Nigeria's own audience is multilingual and no single Nigerian language commands nationwide comprehension on its own. This domestic subtitling layer means that a great deal of Nigerian localization labor and convention was built for an audience that already shares substantial cultural context with the source material and needs linguistic rather than cultural translation, a condition that does not hold once the same subtitle conventions are reused for an international or diaspora audience with less shared context. Haynes's account of Nollywood's genre development documents this domestic multilingual circulation as constitutive of the industry rather than incidental to it (Haynes, 2016) <sup>[32]</sup>, and Dovey's study of internet television's creative innovation in Africa notes that platforms exporting Nigerian content have generally reused the domestic subtitle track rather than commissioning a version calibrated for an audience with less prior cultural context (Dovey, 2018) <sup>[24]</sup>, a practice this paper's culture-specific-item table in section 5 is built to interrogate rather than assume is adequate.

Voice-over, a third mode in which a target-language reading is layered over an audible but attenuated source track without lip synchronization, is common in Russian and some Eastern European markets but appears only marginally in either Nigerian or Francophone African circulation, mainly in news and documentary content rather than fiction. Its rarity in the fiction content this paper's comparison concerns is itself informative: voice-over is typically the cheapest mode to produce because it avoids both subtitling's segmentation labor and dubbing's isochrony and lip-sync labor, so its absence from fictional Nigerian and Francophone African circulation suggests that cost minimization alone does not explain either region's dominant mode choice. Subtitling's dominance in Nigeria and dubbing's dominance in Francophone Africa both carry production costs that a voice-over default would avoid, which supports treating each region's mode default as inherited market convention rather than as a currently optimal cost-minimizing choice, a distinction the framework

in section 3 keeps separate from the reception-mechanism question.

## 2.2 Domestication, foreignization, and the transfer of culture-specific items

Venuti's distinction between domesticating and foreignizing translation strategies remains the field's reference point, and it maps unevenly onto subtitling and dubbing (Venuti, 1995) <sup>[75]</sup>. A subtitle track leaves the source performance, accent, and prosody audible, which tends toward foreignization even when the written text itself is domesticated for readability; a dub replaces the performance entirely, which tends toward domestication even when the translator preserves foreign proper names and settings. Katan's account of translators as cultural mediators complicates a simple binary reading, arguing that mediators routinely blend strategies within a single text, explicating a kinship term here, leaving a proper name untouched there, according to a working theory of what the audience already knows (Katan, 2004) <sup>[40]</sup>. Božović's comparative treatment of how culture is rendered in subtitling and dubbing across several European corpora finds exactly this blending in practice, and reports that dubbing more often domesticates humor and idiom while subtitling more often preserves them with a compensating gloss, a pattern that has not been tested against Nigerian or Francophone African material (Božović, 2019) <sup>[12]</sup>.

Three categories of culture-specific item recur across the literature as especially resistant to one-size-fits-all transfer. Wordplay and humor depend on phonological or polysemous coincidence in the source language that rarely survives literal translation, which is why Camilli's case study of wordplay in audiovisual translation and Bucaria's study of dark humor in dubbing both conclude that translators default to functional substitution, replacing the joke's mechanism rather than its content (Camilli, 2019; Bucaria, 2008) <sup>[18, 15]</sup>. Phraseological and idiomatic units behave similarly: Golda and Mężyk's study of Polish dubbing of an animated feature documents how source-language idioms are regularly replaced with target-language idioms of comparable register rather than translated component by component, a strategy dubbing's isochrony constraint makes close to unavoidable (Golda & Mężyk, 2021) <sup>[26]</sup>. Gendered and socially marked language forms a third resistant category: De Marco's engendering approach to audiovisual translation shows that translators' choices about how to render gendered address, honorifics, and social register carry ideological weight that a purely linguistic account of equivalence misses (De Marco, 2016) <sup>[22]</sup>. Nigerian and Francophone African source material is unusually dense in exactly these categories, kinship and honorific systems, religious and spiritual register, code-switched dialogue, and proverb-based rhetoric, which is why a culture-specific-item transfer table built for European-language pairs cannot simply be imported unmodified; section 5 builds one calibrated to this material.

Postcolonial translation scholarship offers a further complication that the domestication-foreignization binary does not fully capture. Bandia's account of translation in postcolonial Africa argues that the binary presumes two stable, separately bounded languages and cultures, an assumption that fits poorly where the source text itself is already multilingual and code-switched, as much Nigerian

and Francophone African screen dialogue is (Bandia, 2008) [8]. Rendering a scene that moves between English, Yoruba, and pidgin, or between standard French, Nouchi, and a regional language, is not well described as either domesticating or foreignizing a single source culture into a single target culture, because the source performance already stages the same kind of code negotiation that the translation is asked to resolve. Baker's coursebook treatment of equivalence at word, grammar, and pragmatic levels is useful here mainly for what it cannot resolve: pragmatic equivalence assumes a shared sense of what a speech act accomplishes in context, and code-switching's social meaning, marking intimacy, authority, or humor, is precisely the kind of pragmatic value that a monolingual target track struggles to reproduce (Baker, 2018) [6]. This is a theoretical gap, not a solved problem, and the comparative framework in section 3 treats code-switching as its own transfer category rather than folding it into a generic culture-specific-item class.

### 2.3 Cultural proximity, active reception, and platform circulation

Straubhaar's cultural proximity thesis argues that audiences prefer media that is linguistically and culturally close to their own experience when a close option is available, and turn to imported content mainly where local production cannot meet demand (Straubhaar, 1991) [69]. The thesis predicts that localization mode should matter less where cultural proximity is already high, a Nigerian viewer watching Yoruba-language content needs no translation at all, and matter more at the margin where proximity is low, a Francophone Central African viewer watching a dubbed Latin American telenovela. Hall's encoding-decoding model supplies the reception half of the argument: audiences do not passively absorb a text's preferred meaning but read it through their own codes, producing dominant, negotiated, or oppositional readings (Hall, 1980) [30]. Applied to localization, this implies that a dub's domesticating choices can be read by some audience segments as respectful adaptation and by others as erasure of the source culture's texture, and a subtitle's foreignizing choices can be read as authenticity by one segment and as inaccessibility by another. Neither cultural proximity nor encoding-decoding theory has been tested against the specific comparison this paper proposes, subtitled Nigerian content against dubbed Francophone African content, viewed by home and diaspora audiences.

Platform circulation research adds an infrastructural layer that pure reception theory omits. Lobato's account of Netflix's territorial content strategy documents how platforms decide which catalogue items receive dubbing investment and which receive subtitle-only treatment based on projected audience size per territory, a business logic that can override linguistic or cultural argument entirely (Lobato, 2019) [51]. Jenner's analysis of Netflix's reinvention of television similarly treats localization spend as a platform strategy variable rather than a translation-studies variable (Jenner, 2018) [38]. Dovey's study of creative innovation in African internet television documents the reverse dynamic from the production side, African producers adapting formats and distribution strategy to platform requirements rather than the other way round (Dovey, 2018) [24]. Read together, these three accounts suggest that Nigeria's subtitling default and Francophone Africa's dubbing default

may increasingly be reinforced, or eroded, by platform investment decisions made outside either region, which is a variable the comparative design in section 4 has to hold constant or measure directly rather than assume away.

Comparable localization dynamics outside screen dialogue translation strengthen the case that mode choice carries cultural-positioning weight beyond mere information transfer. Lin and Zhao's study of hip-hop localization in China and Bennett's earlier study of German hip-hop both describe how imported music genres are localized through code choice and register rather than literal translation, with the localization strategy itself signaling a stance toward the imported culture, assimilative in one register, defiant in another (Lin & Zhao, 2022; Bennett, 1999) [50, 9]. Kim's account of how the British film industry restructured funding and distribution to reach a global audience in the 1990s shows an equivalent strategic logic operating at the industrial rather than the textual level (Kim, 2003) [42], and Zhou's study of brand advertising localization in the contemporary all-media environment documents the same logic in commercial rather than cinematic content (Zhou, 2023) [77]. None of these cases involves Nigerian or Francophone African material, but together they support treating localization mode as a positioning choice with reception consequences, which is the theoretical premise this paper's comparative protocol is built to test rather than assume.

### 2.4 Reception evidence: what is known and why it does not travel

The empirical reception literature on subtitling and dubbing is large, but it is built from designs, measures, and populations that resist pooling, and almost none of it concerns African-origin content or African audiences. Dubbing-reception studies conducted in markets where dubbing is the historical norm report a broadly consistent pattern: viewers treat a well-cast, well-synchronized dub as transparent, and their complaints cluster around synchrony failure and register mismatch rather than around translation loss as a concept (Ameri *et al.*, 2017; La Trecchia, 1998; Pavesi & Zamora, 2021; Raffi, 2020; Romero-Fresco, 2020) [4, 47, 56, 60, 64]. González Ruiz and Cruz García's review of dubbing's role in audiovisual reception adds that this transparency effect is learned rather than automatic, audiences raised on subtitles do not report the same transparency when first exposed to dubbed content (González Ruiz & Cruz García, 2021) [27]. Brannon, Virkar, and Thompson's large-scale study of human dubbing practice, conducted to benchmark automatic dubbing systems, is the closest thing the literature has to a cross-market comparison, and it finds substantial variation in how much source meaning professional dubbing teams sacrifice for synchrony depending on genre and target-market convention, which argues against treating dubbing quality as a single construct (Brannon *et al.*, 2023) [13]. Henrich's Kenyan Kiswahili-dubbing study remains the only African case in this cluster, and its finding that comprehension gains from dubbing were uneven across genre and mediated by prior source-language exposure is the single most directly relevant precedent for the Francophone African side of this paper's comparison, despite concerning a different target language and region (Henrich, 2000) [33].

Subtitling-reception studies show a parallel but not identical pattern. Kusecu-Ozbudak's audience study of Netflix

subtitling reports that viewers increasingly treat subtitles as the default rather than the compromise mode for streamed content, a generational shift plausibly relevant to diaspora Nigerian audiences who consume platform content directly (Kuscu-Ozbudak, 2021) <sup>[46]</sup>. Alfaify and Ramos Pinto's reception study of culturally dense subtitling into Arabic and Alrais and Almahasee's study of subtitling an Iraqi action film into English both find that audience tolerance for foreignized cultural references is higher than translators often assume, which cuts against a default strategy of heavy domestication (Alfaify & Ramos Pinto, 2021) <sup>[1]</sup> (Alrais & Almahasee, 2024) <sup>[2]</sup>. Casas-Tost's study of politeness in Chinese-English subtitling and van der Weel's older study of Australia's multilingual broadcaster SBS both document how subtitling choices interact with an audience's own multilingual repertoire, a condition that describes much of the Nigerian and Francophone African diaspora audience directly (Casas-Tost, 2013; van der Weel, 1990) <sup>[19, 74]</sup>. Moura's pilot study of how swearing is handled in subtitling and the amateur-subtitling reception studies conducted in Iran, a market where professional dubbing dominates but amateur subtitling has grown as a parallel channel, both show that audiences distinguish sharply between professional and amateur localization quality even when the underlying translation choices are similar (Moura, 2024; Khoshsaligheh *et al.*, 2019; Ameri & Khoshsaligheh, 2022) <sup>[54, 41, 3]</sup>. This last finding matters for Nigerian and Francophone African markets, where informal, fan-produced, and platform-professional localization coexist and are rarely distinguished in circulation data.

A second stratum of the literature is methodological and pedagogical rather than reception-focused, and its main contribution to this paper is negative evidence: it documents how fragmented the field's methods and objects of study are. Automatic subtitling evaluation (Karakanta, 2022) <sup>[39]</sup>, post-edited subtitling quality models (Koglin *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[43]</sup>, translator-training curricula (Tuominen & Silvester, 2021; Martins & Ferreira, 2019; Talaván, 2019) <sup>[72, 53, 70]</sup>, professional register and generic fluency (Korpi, 2021) <sup>[44]</sup>, accessibility training (Valdez *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[73]</sup>, and the localization of non-standard source-language vocabulary (Balan & Biletska, 2023) <sup>[7]</sup> each use their own outcome measure and their own population, and cross-citation between these pedagogical, technical, and reception strands is limited. General overviews of the field's methodological turns (Chaume, 2018; Nikolic & Bywood, 2021; Assis Rosa, 2016; Guillot, 2016; Maestri, 2021) <sup>[21, 55, 5, 29, 52]</sup> and studies of professional practice such as cloud-based dubbing workflows (Rodríguez Fernández-Peña, 2023) <sup>[62]</sup> or dubbing students' production problems (Pujiyanti, 2017) <sup>[59]</sup> confirm the same pattern from the practitioner side. Fan and amateur translation research, studies of anime fansubbing and of Brazilian fan-subtitling communities, shows that participatory, non-professional localization follows its own norms and quality expectations that differ from both the dubbing- and subtitling-industry literatures (Lee, 2011; Spolidorio, 2017) <sup>[49, 68]</sup>, a pattern with an obvious but untested parallel in how Nigerian diaspora communities informally subtitle and redistribute Nollywood content online. Studies of dubbing censorship and manipulation, such as Vetri's account of how a classic Hitchcock film's dubbed dialogue was altered for the Italian market, and of dubbing's pragmatic handling of conversational transition markers (Vetri, 2024; Romero Fresco, 2012) <sup>[76, 63]</sup>, further

show that dubbing is not a neutral re-recording process but an editorial one, a point directly relevant to Francophone African markets where state and platform gatekeeping over imported dubbed content has its own, largely undocumented, editorial history.

## 2.5 Media systems, regulation, and comparative context

A comparison of two media regions cannot rest on translation theory alone; it needs to account for the regulatory and institutional context that shapes what gets localized, by whom, and under what oversight. Silverstone's account of media regulation and media civics argues that literacy and citizenship claims about media are always embedded in a specific regulatory order, not a universal condition, which cautions against treating audience media literacy as constant across the Nigerian and Francophone African regulatory environments compared here (Silverstone, 2004) <sup>[67]</sup>. Scannell's account of media events as moments of shared, simultaneous national or transnational viewing is a useful lens on day-and-date global streaming premieres, which compress the localization timeline and make comparative measurement across markets easier because the reference text is identical and the release date is identical (Scannell, 1995) <sup>[66]</sup>; his earlier account of alternative and community media supplies a vocabulary for the informal circulation channels, WhatsApp forwarding, diaspora satellite reception, and pirate discs, that carry a meaningful share of both Nigerian and Francophone African screen content outside platform data entirely (Scannell, 1980) <sup>[65]</sup>. Caldwell's study of regionally produced alternative media documents how production culture, not just translation choice, encodes a text's relationship to a dominant national or transnational media center, a frame applicable to Nollywood's historically self-financed, non-state production model (Caldwell, 2003) <sup>[17]</sup>. Hanke's study of media culture under a centrally planned political-economic system offers a useful contrast case: it shows how differently a media system organizes production, distribution, and audience address when the underlying political economy differs, a reminder that Nigeria's market-driven video-film industry and Francophone Africa's more broadcast-regulation-linked media histories are not variations on a single model but two different institutional starting points (Hanke, 1990) <sup>[31]</sup>.

Audience-side scholarship on how specific communities receive global media supplies further comparative grounding. Buckingham's study of children's reception of Disney content models how a domesticated or foreignized global text is read differently depending on the audience's prior media literacy and age, a variable this paper's comparative design treats as a covariate rather than ignores (Buckingham, 1997) <sup>[16]</sup>. Brody's study of how niche community media serve LGBTQ+ audiences through bar culture and sports media reception offers a model for studying small, geographically dispersed audience segments, directly analogous to Nigerian and Francophone African diaspora audiences dispersed across host countries (Brody, 2024) <sup>[14]</sup>. Bishop's account of how Tibet is represented and mediated within global promotional culture, and Fraser, Lee, and Tang's editorial note on the internationalization of crime-media-culture scholarship toward an Asia-specific research agenda, both illustrate a recognized need for region-specific media scholarship rather than the application of general models developed elsewhere (Bishop, 2000;

Fraser *et al.*, 2017) <sup>[10, 25]</sup>, which is the same argument this paper makes for a Nigeria and Francophone Africa specific comparative protocol rather than an imported European or Latin American reception framework.

One reception mechanism deserves a boundary note before the comparative framework proceeds. Horton and Wohl's classic account of para-social interaction, the one-sided felt intimacy audiences develop with media performers, offers a plausible confound for any comprehension or engagement comparison across modes (Horton & Wohl, 1956) <sup>[34]</sup>. A dubbed performance replaces the voice audiences may have formed a parasocial attachment to through prior subtitled viewing, or vice versa, and an observed engagement difference between subtitled and dubbed conditions could partly reflect disrupted parasocial attachment rather than the culture-specific-item transfer mechanisms this paper's framework targets. The audience stream in section 4 should therefore record prior exposure to a title's original voice performances as a covariate rather than treat mode as the only variable capable of explaining an engagement difference.

## 2.6 Diaspora audiences and informal circulation channels

Both markets compared here have substantial diaspora audiences whose consumption pathways are only partially visible in platform data, and the comparative design proposed in section 4 has to account for this directly rather than treat platform viewership as a proxy for audience reception generally. Grixti's study of how Maltese youth negotiate global media alongside a small indigenous culture is a useful analogue for how Francophone African diaspora audiences in France, Belgium, and Quebec manage a comparable tension between a dominant host-country media environment and home-culture screen content, since both cases involve a numerically small audience segment embedded within a much larger media market (Grixti, 2006) <sup>[28]</sup>. Reddi's account of media and culture in Indian society, written from a postcolonial vantage point similar in structure though not in content to the Nigerian and Francophone African cases, argues that imported and domestic media coexist in a relationship of negotiated co-operation rather than simple displacement, which cautions against modeling diaspora consumption as a binary choice between home-language and host-language content (Reddi, 1989) <sup>[61]</sup>. Boellstorff and Horst's introduction to a special issue on media and cultural change across the Pacific makes the parallel case for a different world region, arguing that circulation patterns among small, dispersed, multilingual audiences require dedicated regional frameworks rather than

models built for large, linguistically homogeneous national audiences, precisely the argument this paper makes for treating Nigerian and Francophone African diaspora circulation as its own object of study (Boellstorff & Horst, 2019) <sup>[11]</sup>. None of these three studies concerns Nigerian or Francophone African diaspora audiences directly, but together they support building diaspora-specific sampling into the audience stream described in section 4 rather than treating diaspora viewers as a subgroup of the home-market sample.

Informal circulation, WhatsApp-forwarded video files, diaspora satellite retransmission, pirated discs sold in immigrant-community shops, and fan-produced subtitle files, carries an unknown but plausibly large share of both Nigerian and Francophone African screen content outside any platform's measured audience entirely. This is not a peripheral methodological footnote. If informal circulation systematically favors one localization mode over another, subtitle files travel as small text attachments far more easily than a full redubbed audio track does, then platform-measured reception data could be comparing two unrepresentative slices of each market's actual audience. The production stream in section 4's design is specified partly to surface this gap: interviews with diaspora community distributors, not only with platform localization managers, are needed before any claim about relative audience size across modes can be made with confidence.

## 3. A comparative framework: linguistic infrastructure, modal default, and reception mechanism

The framework proposed here separates three layers that the literature reviewed in section 2 tends to conflate. The linguistic-infrastructure layer records the colonial-language legacy, the number and status of indigenous languages in broadcasting and education, and the location of the translation and dubbing labor market relative to the content's market of consumption. The modal-default layer records which localization mode, subtitling, dubbing, voice-over, or untranslated distribution, dominates for a given content category and audience segment, and how stable that default is against platform investment pressure. The reception-mechanism layer records the specific psychological and social processes, comprehension, perceived authenticity, cultural identification, and diasporic engagement, through which localization mode is hypothesized to affect audience outcomes. Table 1 summarizes how Nigeria and Francophone West and Central Africa currently differ across these three layers, based on the literature synthesized in section 2 rather than on new measurement.

**Table 1:** Comparative profile of linguistic infrastructure, modal default, and reception mechanism in Nigerian and Francophone African screen-media circulation

| Layer                                              | Nigerian market profile                                                                                                                       | Francophone African market profile                                                                                                                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Colonial-language legacy                           | English as official and education language alongside Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and other indigenous languages with substantial broadcast presence. | Standard French as official and education language, with dubbing labor historically centered in Paris and Brussels rather than in-region.                                |
| Dominant AVT mode for exported or platform content | Subtitling into English, with growing subtitling between Nigerian languages; dubbing remains the exception.                                   | Dubbing into standard French for imported content is the historical default; local Francophone production is increasingly subtitled for export.                          |
| Translation and localization labor market          | Subtitling-oriented freelance and platform-vendor market, low fixed studio cost, high volume.                                                 | Dubbing requires studio time, voice casting, and sound engineering; regional in-Africa dubbing capacity is expanding but recent relative to the Paris-Brussels pipeline. |
| Code-switching prevalence in source dialogue       | High; English, pidgin, and indigenous-language switching is routine in Nollywood dialogue.                                                    | High; standard French, regional French varieties such as Ivorian Nouchi, and indigenous-language switching is routine.                                                   |
| Typical culture-specific-item transfer strategy    | Foreignizing bias from subtitling: kinship terms, honorifics, and proverbs are often retained with contextual gloss.                          | Domesticating bias from dubbing: kinship terms, honorifics, and proverbs are more often normalized to standard French equivalents.                                       |
| Primary audience segments for comparison           | Home audience with indigenous-language and English competence; Anglophone diaspora with variable Nigerian-language retention.                 | Home audience with indigenous-language and standard-French competence; Francophone diaspora with variable regional-French retention.                                     |

The framework's analytic payoff is that it lets a future study localize a finding to the right layer. A comprehension difference between Nigerian and Francophone African audiences watching the same platform-distributed title could originate in the linguistic-infrastructure layer, unequal indigenous language literacy support, in the modal-default layer, subtitling versus dubbing as such, or in the reception-mechanism layer, differential cultural identification independent of mode. Collapsing these three layers into a single undifferentiated comparison, as most cross-market reception studies reviewed in section 2 do, makes it impossible to say which layer produced an observed difference, and therefore impossible to recommend a specific intervention, more localized-language subtitling capacity, dubbing investment, or platform metadata changes, over another. Table 1's Francophone African column also makes visible a point the literature does not state directly: the region's dubbing default is not evidence of a stronger local preference for dubbing as a mode, since the underlying production infrastructure that created the default sat outside the region entirely (Larkin, 2008) <sup>[48]</sup>. Whether audiences would show a comparable transparency effect for subtitling if given comparable exposure, the pattern Kuscu-Ozbudak documents for Netflix-era subtitling audiences elsewhere (Kuscu-Ozbudak, 2021) <sup>[46]</sup>, is an open empirical question the framework is built to test rather than answer by assumption.

A note on scope regarding automation. Machine-translation post-editing, now standardized internationally through the ISO 18587 post-editing requirements (International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2017) <sup>[35]</sup>, is increasingly used somewhere in the subtitling and dubbing pipeline in both markets, but this paper's framework treats the human-versus-machine origin of a given translation as a separate variable from the subtitling-versus-dubbing mode comparison it is built to test, since a matched-title comparison could in principle hold either variable constant while varying the other. A companion paper in this cluster develops the automation question directly.

A note on what the framework deliberately excludes. It does not attempt to rank subtitling and dubbing as generally superior or inferior modes, a framing the reception literature

reviewed in section 2.4 shows is not well supported once market-specific learned expectations are taken into account: audiences raised on dubbing rate dubbing as transparent, audiences raised on subtitling increasingly treat subtitling as the unmarked default, and neither preference generalizes cleanly to an audience raised on the other convention (González Ruiz & Cruz García, 2021; Kuscu-Ozbudak, 2021) <sup>[27, 46]</sup>. The framework also does not treat AI-assisted subtitling or dubbing tools as a variable, since their current deployment in Nigerian and Francophone African markets is uneven enough that including them here would conflate a technology-adoption question with the linguistic-infrastructure and modal-default questions this paper is built to isolate; that question is taken up directly in a companion paper in this cluster. Keeping the framework's scope narrow is a deliberate design choice intended to make the propositions in section 6 testable with a feasible fieldwork budget rather than to produce a maximally comprehensive account of localization in either market.

#### 4. Comparative research design

A defensible comparison of two media regions needs an explicit case-selection logic, not a convenience sample of whatever titles happen to be available in both markets. This paper proposes a matched-title design that borrows most-similar-systems and most-different-systems reasoning from comparative political science and applies it to media markets rather than states. A most-similar-systems pairing would select two titles that are as alike as possible in genre, running time, platform, and release window but differ in localization mode, for example a Nigerian series subtitled for its home and diaspora release compared against a similarly genred Francophone African series dubbed for its release, holding content type constant while letting mode vary. A most-different-systems pairing would instead select the same title released with both a subtitled and a dubbed track where a platform has produced both, holding content identical while comparing audience segments that consumed different modes. Both pairings are needed because they isolate different threats to validity: the most-similar design controls for content while exposing market-level confounds, and the most-different design controls for content and

market simultaneously but depends on the rare case where a platform has actually produced both tracks for African-origin or African-market content.

The design specifies four data streams. A textual stream codes the subtitle or dub script against the culture-specific-item table developed in section 5, recording the transfer strategy used for each item. A paratextual stream records platform metadata, catalog placement, and territory availability, since Lobato and Jenner's accounts of platform-level localization investment mean that reception cannot be attributed to translation choice alone without also observing what the platform did with discoverability (Lobato, 2019) <sup>[51]</sup> (Jenner, 2018) <sup>[38]</sup>. An audience stream combines a structured comprehension and preference survey with semi-structured interviews, sampled separately from home and diaspora segments in each market, since cultural proximity theory predicts that these segments should respond differently to the same localization choice (Straubhaar, 1991) <sup>[69]</sup>. A production stream, interviews with subtitlers, dubbing directors, and platform localization managers, supplies the labor-market and editorial-gatekeeping context that Vetri's and Romero Fresco's studies of dubbing's editorial character show is otherwise invisible from the finished text alone (Vetri, 2024; Romero Fresco, 2012) <sup>[76, 63]</sup>. Table 2 states the validity requirements each stream has to satisfy before a comparative claim can be made.

**Table 2:** Validity requirements for the comparative design

| Validity type                 | Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Failure mode if unmet                                                                                        |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Construct validity            | Comprehension, perceived authenticity, cultural identification, and diasporic engagement are each defined and measured with instruments piloted in both English and French, not translated ad hoc from a single-language instrument. | An apparent cross-market difference reflects instrument wording rather than audience experience.             |
| Comparability validity        | Matched titles are equivalent in genre, running time, and release window; matched audience segments are equivalent in age, platform access, and home or diaspora status.                                                             | An apparent mode effect reflects title or audience mismatch rather than subtitling versus dubbing.           |
| Transfer-strategy reliability | Two independent coders apply the culture-specific-item table to the same script excerpts with reported agreement before full coding proceeds.                                                                                        | Coded transfer strategies reflect one coder's judgment rather than a replicable category.                    |
| External validity             | At least one home-audience and one diaspora-audience sample per market, recruited outside a single platform's own user panel.                                                                                                        | Findings generalize only to platform-recruited, digitally engaged viewers rather than to the wider audience. |
| Decision validity             | Findings are reported with the specific production or platform decision they would inform, for example dubbing investment or subtitle-gloss policy, stated in advance.                                                               | Findings accumulate without connecting to any decision a producer, translator, or platform could act on.     |

Sample and power planning should be stated as a

requirement rather than left to a future statistical appendix. A comparative design with two markets, two modes where available, and two audience segments per market needs enough respondents per cell to detect a moderate effect on the comprehension and engagement measures with reasonable power, which in practice means the audience stream should not be treated as complete until each of the design's cells, home-subtitled, home-dubbed, diaspora-subtitled, diaspora-dubbed, where a given title makes all four available, or the corresponding reduced set for a most-similar-systems pairing, reaches a pre-registered minimum. Because no comparable prior effect size exists for this specific pairing, the design should treat its first fielding as a calibration study whose main output is a defensible effect-size estimate for a subsequently pre-registered confirmatory study, rather than present a single fielding's results as confirmatory in themselves.

Two design constraints deserve explicit statement rather than being left implicit. First, comprehension and preference measures must be piloted separately in each market rather than translated from a single instrument, because Perego's methodological critique of cross-national audiovisual translation research identifies translated-instrument bias as a recurring, under-reported source of spurious cross-market difference (Perego, 2018) <sup>[58]</sup>. Second, the design should not treat home and diaspora audiences as a single population even within one market, since diasporic viewers consume content through different access channels, are more likely to have platform accounts, and retain variable levels of the relevant indigenous or regional language, all of which plausibly interact with localization mode independently of where the viewer currently lives.

The production stream carries its own ethical requirements that a purely textual or survey-based comparison would not raise. Subtitlers, dubbing directors, and platform localization managers interviewed for the production stream are identifiable professionals working in a small industry, and disclosure of candid assessments of a specific platform's dubbing budget decisions or a specific title's translation quality could carry professional consequences for the interviewee. A defensible protocol should therefore offer standard confidentiality protections, aggregate or anonymize quotations tied to specific titles or employers unless the interviewee explicitly consents to attribution, and give interviewees the opportunity to review how their material is characterized before publication. These are standard human-subjects protections, not novel to this design, but they are stated here because a comparative study spanning two industries and two continents needs a single, explicit protocol rather than an assumption that whatever convention applies in one interviewee's country applies uniformly across both.

## 5. Culture-specific-item transfer across the two markets

Twelve categories of culture-specific item recur across Nigerian and Francophone African screen dialogue and, on the theoretical grounds reviewed in section 2, are likely to be transferred differently under a subtitling default than under a dubbing default. Table 3 states each category, the transfer strategy the literature and market observation suggest is typical under each market's current default mode, and the comparative research question that follows. The table is a coding instrument for the textual stream described in section 4, not a set of findings.

**Table 3:** Culture-specific-item categories and comparative transfer strategy

| Category                                     | Typical Nigerian-market (subtitling-default) strategy                                                                                   | Typical Francophone African-market (dubbing-default) strategy                                                                                                      | Comparative research question                                                                                                     |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Kinship and honorific terms                  | Often retained in source form with contextual gloss or left untranslated for terms assumed familiar to the target reader.               | Often normalized to the nearest standard-French kinship or address term, flattening status distinctions the source marks.                                          | Does gloss retention versus normalization change perceived authenticity more than it changes comprehension?                       |
| Religious and spiritual references           | Retained with minimal explication; assumed shared knowledge across Nigerian audiences.                                                  | Either retained with added explanatory dialogue or substituted with a French Catholic or secular equivalent.                                                       | Does substitution reduce perceived cultural specificity for diaspora viewers more than for home viewers?                          |
| Proverbs and oral-tradition rhetoric         | Frequently subtitled with a literal rendering plus a compressed gloss within the character limit.                                       | Frequently replaced with a French proverb of comparable rhetorical function rather than translated literally.                                                      | Does functional substitution preserve rhetorical force better than literal-plus-gloss subtitling, and for which audience segment? |
| Code-switching and multilingual dialogue     | Marked in subtitles through register shift or left partially untranslated to preserve the switch.                                       | Usually flattened to a single register in the dub, erasing the switch entirely.                                                                                    | Does erasing code-switching change perceived character authenticity more for home or for diaspora audiences?                      |
| Humor and wordplay                           | Functional substitution within subtitle length limits, often with reduced density relative to source.                                   | Functional substitution matched to dub timing, often with different jokes substituted entirely.                                                                    | Do subtitling and dubbing lose humor at comparable rates, or does one mode preserve more of the source's comic structure?         |
| Music, diegetic sound, and lyrics            | Song lyrics typically left unsubtitled or partially subtitled; underscore untouched.                                                    | Song lyrics typically left in source language even where dialogue is dubbed, creating a mixed-mode text.                                                           | Does a mixed-mode text (dubbed dialogue, untranslated song) affect perceived coherence differently across markets?                |
| Place names and toponyms                     | Retained in source form; assumed recognizable or treated as unmarked background detail.                                                 | Retained in source form but often unfamiliar to the target audience without visual or narrative support.                                                           | Does toponym unfamiliarity reduce narrative comprehension more in the dubbed condition, where no gloss is available?              |
| Political and historical references          | Retained with minimal gloss; assumed partially shared regional knowledge.                                                               | Often generalized or softened, particularly where content passes through broadcast-standards review.                                                               | Does generalization of politically specific references change perceived narrative authenticity?                                   |
| Accent, sociolect, and register              | Partially recoverable from the retained source audio even where the subtitle itself is neutral.                                         | Not recoverable once the source audio is replaced; dub voice casting substitutes its own register cues.                                                            | Does loss of source accent information change character-relationship comprehension more than plot comprehension?                  |
| Narrative pacing and reveal timing           | Subtitle segmentation can lag or lead image cuts, altering the timing of comic or dramatic reveals.                                     | Isochrony constraints can force paraphrase that changes the informational order of a reveal.                                                                       | Do the two modes alter reveal timing in comparable ways, or does one mode preserve source pacing better?                          |
| Platform metadata and paratext               | Synopsis, title, and thumbnail localization is often minimal for subtitled catalogue entries.                                           | Synopsis and title localization is typically fuller where a full dub has been commissioned, signaling platform investment.                                         | Does paratext investment correlate with, and confound, measured audience engagement independent of the dialogue track itself?     |
| Administrative and institutional terminology | Rare in fictional dialogue but present in docudrama and news-adjacent content; Nigerian federal and state terms are typically retained. | Present in similar content; Francophone administrative vocabulary varies across states and requires local calibration that generic French translation often skips. | Does mismatched administrative terminology reduce perceived credibility of docudrama content specifically?                        |

Two categories merit further comment because the literature review in section 2 supplies unusually direct support. Code-switching is treated here as its own category rather than folded into register, following Bandia's argument that postcolonial African source texts routinely stage multilingualism as meaningful performance rather than incidental noise, which means a dub that flattens the switch to one target register is not a neutral simplification but a specific interpretive choice (Bandia, 2008) [8]. Administrative and institutional terminology is included despite its rarity in fictional dialogue because Isaac's studies of administrative French across Francophone African states document substantial terminological variation between states that a single generic French dub track cannot accommodate, a finding directly relevant to the growing category of Francophone African docudrama and true-crime content distributed on regional platforms (Isaac, 2023; Isaac, 2024) [36, 37]. Both categories illustrate the same general point: the transfer strategies listed in Table 3 are typical defaults inferred from market structure and adjacent

literature, not measured outcomes, and the coding exercise the table supports is designed to test rather than confirm them.

The table's four right-most rows, place names, political and historical references, accent and register, and narrative pacing, are grouped together because they share a common property: none is a discrete lexical item a translator can look up, and all four depend on how much of the surrounding audiovisual channel survives the localization process. This is why Table 1's distinction between a mode that keeps the source audio, subtitling, and a mode that replaces it, dubbing, matters more for these four categories than for a category like kinship terms, where the translator's choice is comparatively self-contained. Accent and register are the clearest case: a subtitle track cannot itself carry accent information, but the surviving source audio can, so a Nigerian subtitled production retains a channel of social information that a Francophone African dubbed production loses by construction, regardless of how skilled the individual translator or dubbing director is. This is a

structural consequence of mode choice, not a quality difference between the two industries' localization professionals, and the framework in section 3 is built specifically to keep that distinction visible.

The propositions below deliberately number five rather than a longer inventory. A protocol that states twenty propositions covering every cell of Table 3 would read as comprehensive, but comprehensiveness is not the same property as testability with a feasible sample, and a study powered to detect twenty small effects simultaneously is not a study any of the four data streams in section 4 could realistically support on a first fielding. The five stated here were selected because each ties a specific mechanism from section 2 to a specific, currently untested prediction, and because a null result on any one of them would require revising a different part of the framework, rather than being interchangeable restatements of the same underlying claim.

## 6. Testable propositions

Five propositions follow from the framework in section 3 and the transfer table in section 5. Each is stated to be falsifiable by the comparative design in section 4, and each specifies the mechanism, the expected direction, and the condition under which the proposition should fail to hold.

Proposition 1. Because subtitling preserves the source audio track and dubbing replaces it, subtitled Nigerian content should retain more recoverable accent and sociolect information than dubbed Francophone African content, and this difference should predict character-relationship comprehension more strongly than it predicts plot comprehension. The proposition fails if accent recoverability shows no relationship to either comprehension measure once genre is controlled.

Proposition 2. Because dubbing's isochrony constraint forces functional substitution of proverbs and idioms while subtitling's character limit forces compression rather than substitution, dubbed content should show a higher rate of full proverb replacement and subtitled content a higher rate of literal-plus-gloss rendering, and audiences should rate the subtitled rendering as more culturally specific but not necessarily as more comprehensible. The proposition fails if comprehensibility ratings track proverb rendering strategy in the same direction as specificity ratings.

Proposition 3. Diaspora audiences with partial source-language retention should show a smaller comprehension gap between subtitled and dubbed conditions than home audiences with full source-language retention, because diaspora viewers can draw on residual source-language competence to compensate for a subtitle track's compression in ways that dubbed audio does not require but also does not reward. The proposition fails if the comprehension gap is equal or larger for diaspora audiences.

Proposition 4. Code-switched dialogue flattened to a single register in dubbing should reduce perceived character authenticity more for home audiences, who share the sociolinguistic repertoire being flattened, than for diaspora audiences with less exposure to the specific code-switching pattern. The proposition fails if the authenticity penalty is equal across home and diaspora segments.

Proposition 5. Platform paratext investment, fuller synopsis and metadata localization, should correlate with dubbing investment across the sampled catalogue, since both reflect the same underlying platform decision about a title's expected audience size, and this correlation should confound

any simple comparison of engagement across subtitled and dubbed titles unless paratext investment is measured and controlled. The proposition fails if paratext investment varies independently of localization mode across the sampled catalogue.

## 7. Discussion

The central implication of this review is that the Nigerian-Francophone African localization asymmetry has been treated as a background fact rather than a variable worth measuring directly, despite offering an unusually clean natural comparison: two media regions, similar in colonial history and current platform exposure, that have converged on opposite default localization modes for largely infrastructural rather than audience-preference reasons. Section 2's review shows that the theoretical resources to interpret such a comparison already exist, Venuti's domestication-foreignization distinction, Straubhaar's cultural proximity thesis, Hall's encoding-decoding model (Venuti, 1995; Straubhaar, 1991; Hall, 1980) [75, 69, 30], but that the empirical reception literature has not applied them to this pairing. Henrich's Kenyan study remains, twenty-five years on, close to the only African-market dubbing-reception precedent in the literature reviewed here (Henrich, 2000) [33], which is itself a finding about the field's coverage, not just about Nigerian and Francophone African media specifically.

A second implication concerns platform behavior. If, as Lobato and Jenner's accounts suggest, dubbing investment tracks projected audience size rather than an independent judgment about what a given market needs, then the localization asymmetry documented here could shift quickly as platforms expand African catalogue investment, and any comparative study needs to timestamp its sample against platform investment decisions rather than treat the current asymmetry as a stable market feature. This is a methodological caution, not a prediction about which direction platform investment will move.

A third implication concerns method. The critical synthesis in section 2.4 shows that existing reception studies rarely compare subtitling and dubbing within a single design, and almost never do so across two African media regions with a matched-title logic. The comparative design proposed in section 4 is deliberately more constrained than a survey of general audience preference would be, because a general preference survey cannot separate the three layers, linguistic infrastructure, modal default, and reception mechanism, that section 3's framework distinguishes. A future study that skips the matched-title and matched-segment requirements in Table 2 risks reproducing exactly the kind of incomparable, non-pooling literature that section 2.4 critiques.

The comparison also has practical stakes for the three groups most directly affected by it. For producers and platforms deciding where to invest dubbing budgets, the framework in section 3 offers a way to ask whether an expected engagement gain is attributable to mode itself or to the paratext investment that typically accompanies a dubbing decision, a distinction Proposition 5 states explicitly. For translators and localization vendors, the culture-specific-item table in section 5 offers a shared vocabulary for describing transfer strategy choices that is currently missing from Nigerian and Francophone African industry practice, where such decisions are typically made

ad hoc by individual translators or dubbing directors without a documented house style. For audience-reception researchers, the design in section 4 offers a template for comparative work in other African-language pairings beyond the Nigerian-Francophone case, since the same three-layer separation of linguistic infrastructure, modal default, and reception mechanism applies wherever two neighboring media regions have converged on different localization defaults for infrastructural rather than tested audience-preference reasons.

The paper's limitations follow from its status as a protocol. No comprehension, preference, or engagement effect is reported here because none has been measured; the five propositions in section 6 are claims to be tested, not findings. The culture-specific-item categories in Table 3 are drawn from theory and market observation and require empirical coding reliability checks before they can support any quantitative claim. These limitations are stated as design requirements for the study this paper proposes, not as caveats appended to results that do not exist.

A staged path from protocol to evidence is preferable to a single large fielding. The first stage should be a calibration study restricted to one most-similar-systems title pair, sufficient to establish coding reliability on the culture-specific-item table, pilot the comprehension and engagement instruments in both languages, and generate the effect-size estimate that section 4 argues a first fielding should treat as its main output. The second stage should extend to the full four-cell design, home and diaspora audiences for each of the matched titles, with the instruments and coding protocol frozen from the calibration stage rather than revised mid-study. The third stage, contingent on what the first two show, should pursue a most-different-systems pairing where a platform has produced both a subtitled and a dubbed track for the same title, since this pairing offers the cleanest isolation of mode effect but depends on production decisions outside the research team's control and cannot be planned as a first stage. Treating the three stages as sequential rather than parallel keeps the comparative claims in section 6 tied to evidence that actually exists at the point any claim is made public.

## 8. Conclusion

Nigerian and Francophone African screen media reach transnational audiences through localization pathways that diverge for structural, largely colonial-infrastructure, reasons rather than through an audience preference that has actually been tested. This paper has argued that the divergence, subtitling as the Nigerian default and dubbing as the Francophone African default, is a productive natural comparison that the audiovisual translation and reception literatures have the theoretical resources to interpret but have not yet applied to this specific pairing. The paper's contribution is a three-layer comparative framework, a matched-title mixed-methods design grounded in comparative case-selection logic, a twelve-category culture-specific-item transfer table calibrated to Nigerian and Francophone African source material, and five falsifiable propositions. None of these substitutes for the comparative fieldwork the paper recommends; they specify what that fieldwork would need to hold constant, measure, and report before a claim about which localization pathway serves audiences better could be made responsibly.

The companion papers in this cluster take up three threads this comparative protocol deliberately leaves aside. Cultural positioning and audience engagement within a single market, rather than across the Nigerian-Francophone divide, receive dedicated treatment elsewhere; the accelerating role of AI-assisted subtitling and dubbing tools in both markets is treated separately, since automation introduces a technological variable this paper's framework brackets rather than absorbs; and the methodological apparatus for transnational audience-engagement measurement more generally, beyond this paper's specific two-market comparison, is developed as a contribution in its own right. Read together, the four lines of work argue that audiovisual localization research on Nigerian and Francophone African media needs to specialize by question, comparative structure, translation mechanics, cultural positioning, AI-assisted production, and methodology, rather than continue to treat the whole area as a single undifferentiated topic.

## 9. Declarations

### Ethics approval and consent to participate

No human participant or audience data were collected for this comparative research protocol. Any future empirical study built on this framework must obtain the approvals required for its human participants, recorded interviews, and survey data in each jurisdiction involved.

### Consent for publication

Not applicable.

### Availability of data and materials

No new dataset was generated or analyzed for this paper. The comparative framework, validity requirements, and culture-specific-item transfer table are reported in full within the manuscript.

### Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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### Authors' contributions

Julius Aderogba Odewabi led conceptualization, the comparative framework, and manuscript drafting. Raissa Enyonam Amele Amessouwoe led the critical review of audiovisual translation and reception literature and contributed to the research design. Kpoka Messanh Isaac contributed the Francophone African administrative and institutional terminology analysis and reviewed the manuscript for accuracy. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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