

Massidda, Serenella. (2015) *Audiovisual Translation in the Digital Age: The Italian Fansubbing Phenomenon*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. 133pp. ISBN: 978-1-137-47036-2 (Hardback) € 69.54; ISBN: 978-1-137-47037-9 (e-book) € 49.99

The fan translation of subtitling, commonly known as fansubbing, has grown into a worldwide online activity over the past three decades. With a spirit of “translations for fans by fans” (Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz-Sánchez, 2006), the phenomenon of fansubbing has extended beyond its traditional domains of Japanese anime and manga into other media and languages. While considered resolutely esoteric niche activities, pushing ethical and copyright boundaries (O'Hagan, 2012), fansubbing has gained a substantial following in many countries and regions around the world. Despite its existence over the last few decades, the practice of fansubbing has only recently begun to be recognized by research in Translation Studies. Increasing scholarly attentions have been given to this topic over the past years, with several journal articles¹ and conference panels² dedicated to fansubbing related issues. However, this area of research is still young and under-theorized, requiring more in-depth discussion and analysis. *Audiovisual Translation in the Digital Age: The Italian Fansubbing Phenomenon* by Serenella Massidda is a timely monograph that addresses fansubbing related issues with a special focus on the situation in Italy. Methodologically, the author adopts both empirical and speculative approaches, with a theoretical investigation on norms in mainstream subtitling and fansubbing, and a linguistic observation in the comparative case studies. Based on her PhD research project and personal involvement with the two major Italian fansubbing groups, namely *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*, the author provides valuable insights into the current practice of amateur audiovisual translators in Italy. This book demonstrates that fansubbers have challenged long-established fixed rules in the professional practice of subtitling and their collective efforts have contributed to the investigation of future subtitling norms, which can be a source of inspiration for both academics and professional subtitlers.

Chapter One begins with an introduction of the fansubbing phenomena by discussing the technical and commercial revolution of Web 2.0 and its connection with “digital playbour”

¹ 27 articles can be found by searching the key word ‘fansubbing’ in the Translation Studies Bibliography <https://benjamins.com/online/tsb/> (accessed 9 March 2016).

² For instance, the 4th Media for All conference (2011, London, UK); the 5th Media for All conference (2013, Dubrovnik, Croatia); the 6th Media for All conference (2015, Sydney, Australia); the 1st Non-professional Interpreting and Translation (2012, Forli, Italy); and 2nd Non-professional Interpreting and Translation (2014, Gernersheim, Germany).

(Scholz, 2013), a concept indicating work and play can coexist at the same time. The author then delves into the legal issue of the fansubbing practice, one of the most controversial and debated topics, by investigating clauses from the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works and the End User License Agreement (EULA) regarding copyright issues. The chapter finishes with a discussion about the responses to the issue of piracy from the two Italian fansubbing groups.

Chapter Two examines the two major AVT modes practised in Italy, namely dubbing and subtitling. Firstly, the author explains the tradition of dubbing in Italy from the 1930s to present day. She shows that currently there is a complex and uneven hierarchical structure existing amongst the cinema adaptors in Italy and a small elite group of privileged people are responsible for the dubbing of a large number of foreign films. She then presents the development of the Italian subtitling industry, with a specific emphasis on the influence of transformed market conditions and the professional identity crisis. The author suggests that the state of the art of both dubbing and subtitling is challenged by the radical transformation of the globalized film industry.

Chapter Three monitors the progress of amateur practices in Italy through the investigation on the philosophy of fan communities. The author starts the discussion with an overview on the social cultural background that cultivated the emergence of the fan-based underground form of audiovisual translation activities in opposition to the mainstream professional practice. She then goes on to describe the origins of the two major Italian fansubbing groups, *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*. Lastly, she discusses the motivations behind the practice of two fansubbing groups, the creation of the communities and the hierarchical structure within each group, which presents a detailed picture of the fansubbing machine. The author also presents the technicalities required to edit, produce and release the fansubs of a TV show. She concludes that the fansubbing groups tend to adopt a translation strategy of “speaking the truth” rather than to “nationalize” the dialogue in American TV shows for the audience in Italy (Massidda, 2015, p. 35).

Chapter Four begins with an overview of the main features of mainstream subtitling and a brief introduction into the standard subtitling practice. The author then explores the codes of practice and provides a comprehensive description of the fansubbing guidelines adopted by the two fansubbing groups. An analysis of different treatments of punctuation conventions in

professional subtitling and fansubbing are then provided by referring to Chesterman's concept of "expectancy and operational norms" (1997). Lastly, the author advocates a "hybrid proposal", in the hope of establishing a well-balanced blend of the best resources adopted by both professionals and amateur experts. She aims to come to a set of norms granting subtitlers with more freedom in translation which makes them more visible. In this way, subtitles "would no longer act as guidance, but as a vehicle able to convey cultural and linguistic 'otherness'" (Massidda, 2015, p. 63).

Chapter Five reports the case study on the American TV drama series *Lost*, comparing the subtitling in the DVD version and the fansubbed versions from both fansubbing groups. The author provides a comparative analysis on perspectives, such as the key features of fansubbing, line length and characters per second, text on screen and position of subtitles, measurements and conversion, timing and workflow, interferences from dubbese and mistranslations. By analysing the first episode of the second season and the first episode of the final season of the show, the author traces the development of fansubbing groups and evaluates the quality of their work over a six-year period.

Chapter Six continues to report the case study of *Lost*, examining the influences amateur practice have had on dubbing and mainstream subtitling. The author reports the modifications made by both *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* over time and the features remained unchanged. Topics such as pros and cons of faithfulness in translation, text compression and omission, condensation, style, register and typographical conventions are investigated. The author demonstrates that subtitling professionals seem to take advantages of fansubbed versions with no acknowledgement of their contribution. She believes that the co-creative labour of the fansubbers play a crucial role in the subtitling industry, as they could be the driving force for great change to the industrial practice.

Chapter Seven deals with the censorship and manipulation associated with humour, external references and slang. The author begins with an investigation on examples of censorship and humour, after which she discusses a set of examples concerning mistranslation and under-translation of slang terms from both professional subtitlers and fansubbers. She goes on to explore the adaptation of politically incorrect contexts by giving examples from the pilot episode of the American TV show *Californication*. This chapter demonstrates the irredeemable

inability of the mainstream subtitling to produce an adequate output, in adherence to the original. Meanwhile, fansubbers tend to adhere to the source text in a stricter manner, which, based on the examples given, is considered more successful than the professional translators. The author concludes that the fansubbed versions, although not absolutely perfect, retain the humour, style, register and core messages of the audiovisual products from a foreign language and culture.

This book provides a comprehensive review of the fansubbing practice in Italy which discusses fansubbing from various perspectives, covering legal issues, translation norms, translation strategies, internal organization of fansubbing groups, and censorship issues. It would be interesting to see a more in-depth theorization of the fansubbing phenomenon, particularly in terms of its connection with the concept of “digital playbour” and the right to translate in the boundary-less cyberspace. Further research is required to investigate the fansubbing phenomenon in a global context, addressing issues such as the association between fan-subbing and online activism, the reception of fan-subbing, and self-images and group identities of fansubbers in different cultures. As a pioneering researcher, Massidda has presented a comprehensive research on the practice of fansubbing groups and their impact on the subtitling industry in Italy. The detailed investigation together with the author’s personal experience with both of the fansubbing groups in question turns this book into an updated and trustworthy reference for scholars in the field of audio-visual translation and other disciplines.

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