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*for the degree of PhD in Theory and*

*Practice of Translation*

**CICLO XXV**

# THE ITALIAN FANSUBBING PHENOMENON

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

*“An expansion of crowd-sourced translation risks obscuring the essential, but already underappreciated distinction, between subtitling a movie and translating its words.”*

*(Paletta 2012)*

The quotation above was chosen as a brief example illustrating the prevailing opinion concerning the fansubbing phenomenon worldwide. Both academics and professionals can rest assured that we might agree with this statement to some extent. Yet, the purpose of this study is not to demonstrate the superior quality of fansubbing over subtitling, since the aim is to explore the origin and evolution of the amateur translator’s practice and beliefs, with particular reference to the impact that this phenomenon has had on audiovisual translation methodologies in Italy.

The inspiration behind this research into amateur translation came long before the PhD career path became a viable option. At that time, I was enrolled in the MSc programme in Scientific, Technical and Medical Translation with Translation Technology at Imperial College London (ICL). When the time came to decide on a topic for my final dissertation, I immediately thought of fansubbing as the most attractive option, since it represented a new research field with considerable potential. The fansubbing project had, in fact, started three years before in Italy: I had been following the movements of fansubber from their inception, so that I was already familiar with their practices and methodologies, and considering my background as a teacher of English and translator, they obviously exerted a strong fascination over me.

Unfortunately, I was forced to focus on another topic as far as the master's dissertation was concerned, since I realised that a longer period of investigation was mandatory for a field of audiovisual translation that four years ago was largely unresearched. In fact, three years ago, when the PhD research project started, the first and foremost difficulty encountered was the absence of a substantial review of literature on the subject matter. I, thus, embarked on a long journey in search of relevant material not only on the same field of study, but also on correlated areas of research that might be of use to the project.

It was thus that I came into contact with Media Studies, to find that various academics had studied the phenomenon of 'crowdsourcing' from an angle other than linguistics, namely from the point of view of the fans.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The term, resulted from merging the words of 'crowd' and 'outsourcing', was coined by Howe in 2006, in his *Wired* magazine article 'The Rise of Crowdsourcing'. According to the author, "thanks to the technological advances the gap between professionals and amateurs has shrunk, allowing companies to take advantage of the talent of the public"

The discovery was enlightening since I came to realise that, in order to understand fansubbing thoroughly, I had to shift my perspective from the point of view of the researcher to the perspective of the fan. This is, then, the story of a PhD candidate who became a fansubber.

Initially, I approached *ItaSA* by emailing them in order to take the test as a would-be-fansubber. As a result, I was sent a link to a video, a file with time codes and a link to the subtitling software necessary for the process. When it was ready, I submitted my translation and had to wait a week before finding out I was a member of *ItaSA* as a junior translator. A tutor assisted me during the trial period in which I was to produce a certain number of translations for the community. The worst part at first was the mastering of a variety of subtitling software programmes which required long hours of practice, and in that particular phase of my research I could not find enough time to explore these aspects. As a consequence, my contribution to the community lasted only a few months, and ended with the decision to leave it because I was unable to perform as many translations as they needed from me.

After a year, during a visit to the department of Humanities (ICL), I decided that it was about time to get in contact with the other fansubbing community: *Subsfactory*. Upon successful completion of the entry test for translators, I became a SIP.<sup>2</sup>

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(Anon. 2012:11).

<sup>2</sup> “Subber in prova”, or would-be fansubber, the equivalent of “junior translator” for *ItaSA*.

A helpful tutor introduced me to the community and a proficient “master syncher” taught me how to cue the subtitles using the customised software.

The trial period was hard, as I spent long hours attempting to master the timing process using open source resources, certainly less user-friendly than the professional ones I was already accustomed to. Yet, after a couple of months I became a fully-fledged “master subber”.

The community was pleasantly welcoming and I found myself at ease with them. Once I was part of the fansubbing machine, I was able to grasp how the organization operated from the inside, namely the motivation behind their work, their passion as fans, along with their desire to learn English and share the fruit of their work with fellow fans. I also discovered that the fansubbers at *Subsfactory* took their “job” very seriously, showing a profound respect for the hierarchy (the revisers and administrators of the site) and particularly for the responsibility associated with the fansubbing process. Admittedly, I started to develop a dual personality: the researcher on one hand, and the fansubber on the other. Retrospectively, despite the considerable commitment required, I believe that participating in the community as a full member allowed me not only to collect valuable information about the fansubbers’ workflow and organization, which would otherwise have been impossible for me to obtain, but also to develop a wider perspective concerning the phenomenon.

The present research study builds on prior research concerning amateur translation conducted by Łukasz Bogucki, and found in Díaz-Cintas and Anderman's *Audiovisual Translation: Language Transfer on Screen* (2009).

In his paper, *Amateur Subtitling on the Internet*, the author affirms that the rise of crowdsourcing was due to the widespread use of internet technologies, thanks to the advent of Web 2.0, the so-called “web revolution” giving rise to a new audiovisual translation mode, that of amateur subtitling.

After a brief overview of the phenomenon, Bogucki made it clear that the problem with fansubbing “lies not so much in squeezing the gist of what the original characters say into 30 or so characters per line [...]; the problem, it seems, lies mostly in the quality of the source material and the competence and expertise of the translators” (2009:50).

In the concluding remarks of his paper, the author ultimately deems the work of fansubbers to be unfeasible, since the lack of access to original scripts makes their work highly unpredictable, while their linguistic incompetence severely undermines its credibility. However, he also argues that if amateur subtitling were to reach near-professional standards, the resulting fansubs could be subjected to translation quality assessment and thus contrasted with professional subtitling. Since the quality of Italian fansubbing translations has greatly improved with time, being produced under conditions almost comparable with those found in a professional environment, as well as fulfilling the requirements proposed by Bogucki, continued research into the field was felt to be appropriate.

The phenomenon under analysis, in which emphasis is placed on the amateur translation of American TV series, has mainly emerged as a response to the demands of fans, primarily as a means of avoiding the long waits between seasons due to bureaucratic processes, as well as an alternative to dubbing, which is nowadays perceived as an outmoded, unreliable, and ultimately unsuitable mode of audiovisual transfer.

The key-factor in the phenomenon under analysis is the growth of the Internet, with its almost infinite storage capacity, enabling anyone to watch, download and upload a wide selection of content. This is the reason why, during the past decade, with the widespread use of the Internet, younger generations of Italians have come into closer contact with American culture. Being exposed to American TV programmes in their original version on a daily basis, they began to perceive that the Italian dubbed versions, addressed to a stereotyped, homogeneous and monolithic audience, had undergone a process of ‘nationalisation’ (Danan 1999), which was no longer acceptable.

According to Cantor and Cantor (1986), “programmers care primarily that their product appeals to large numbers of viewers [...] and care little about the meanings, significance, or ritual that television fulfils as a cultural product to a core audience of dedicated fans”.

Italian fans have felt, in some way, betrayed and grossly underestimated by the policies of these dubbing companies. They have felt compelled to take the lead in the current Internet revolution by gradually developing into organised communities capable of creating their own alternative modes of translation for themselves.

Guided by the subculture surrounding fandom, fans have abandoned mainstream broadcasting channels in order to experiment with unconventional pathways built by grassroots networks of fans, the most popular of all being *ItaSA* ([www.italiansub.net](http://www.italiansub.net)), immediately followed by *Subsfactory* ([www.subsfactory.it](http://www.subsfactory.it)).

In this study, the phenomenon of Italian fansubbing is examined from its origins until now in order to understand the profound transformations experienced by Italian audiovisual translation to date. The focus of this research project primarily involves the context within which the fansubbing revolution began, followed by a review of the fandom and ‘co-creational labour’ (Banks 2009) seen from the perspective of Media Studies.

According to Banks, formerly passive TV consumers have ended up becoming the primary actors in a major revolution, a collective subculture able to resist the hegemony of more powerful institutions (Jenkins 1992).

Having contextualised the phenomenon from the angle of Media Studies, in the third chapter the driving forces at the roots of this practice will be examined, namely the creation of the first online communities, their hierarchical structure and the roles adopted by fansubbers along with the protocols and the technicalities employed in order to edit, produce and release the fansubbed versions of the shows. In chapter four the comparisons between subtitling and fansubbing norms will be investigated, as well as the ideological aspects of this phenomenon.

In the light of the theories propounded by Lewis (1985), Nornes (1999), and Venuti (2008), relevance is given to the approach employed by fansubbers, an approach which relates to “foreignization” and “target-orientedness” as opposed to “domestication”, which is the guiding principle of mainstream subtitling. The last section in the chapter focuses on subtitling based on brand new guidelines deriving from a hybrid approach to both fansubbing and mainstream practices. A ‘hybrid proposal’, resulting from the merging of both the professional and the fansubbing worlds, should aim to take into account the needs of the viewer, while striking a balance between professional standards and common sense. A set of norms with these features might, indeed, be welcomed by a wider audience of Italian viewers who might choose to opt for subtitling instead of dubbing.

In chapter five, a number of case studies will be described in order to examine the main features of amateur subtitling, providing evidence for the evolution of the communities under analysis in terms of quality and workflow organization. The first case study focuses on *Lost*, a sci-fi TV programme with a complex, nonlinear storyline developed with an extensive use of the ‘flash-sideways’ technique and a multiple narrative perspective device known as ‘polyphonic narrative’ (Cate 2009). The case study in question is a comparative analysis of episode one of the second season and episode one of the final season of *Lost* aiming to identify the key features of fansubbing and trace the evolution of amateurs’ methodologies over time.



The second case study addresses the topics of censorship and humour, as well as the *défaillances* of both fansubbers and professionals. It is an analysis of the pilot episode of *Californication*, a TV series treating the life of a novelist à la Bukowski dealing with a writer's block as well as battling with his addictions: sex, drugs and alcohol, a set of hot topics expressed in rather explicit language.

Through a set of examples based on the failings of professional audiovisual translators, there has also been an attempt to emphasise and discuss the reasons for the deepening crisis in the subtitling market, as well as the current transformation in the role of subtitler. Awkward though the failings of professionals may be, they clearly indicate that the sphere of professional translation is undergoing a critical phase, or as Gee and Hayes put it, “the crisis of the experts” (2011: 44). Thus, the conclusions derived from this study transcend a merely qualitative linguistic analysis to encompass a wide range of sociological aspects relating to the status of professional translators and the professional opportunities facing translators in the future.

The thesis concludes with a consideration of fansubbing and the new avenue of research connected with this study. By way of conclusion, it is argued that Italian fansubbing has led to a redefinition of subtitling standards by both professionals and academics. Indeed, the reshaping of subtitling norms — a hybridisation of approaches, merging professional and fansubbing conventions — might be advisable and is likely to happen in the future, and it might also represent an interesting trend concerning research into Translation Studies, which is likely to be forthcoming in the future.

## 1.1 RESEARCH CONTEXT

The process of devising a methodological framework for the research is dealt with in the introductory chapter of this thesis. The multidisciplinary approach adopted here necessitated an investigation of different theoretical and methodological studies, since the thesis includes both empirical and speculative components, namely the theoretical investigation concerning norms in mainstream subtitling and fansubbing, and the linguistic observation carried out in the comparative case studies described in chapter 5 and 6. Therefore, the speculative and practical nature of the project needed to be contextualized and placed within definitive areas of research within Translation Studies as a discipline.

The motivating force behind this research was if, and to what extent, fansubbing has influenced audiovisual translation practices in Italy. It also includes the dominant and recurrent inquiry posed in this project, the question which is recurrent in every section of the dissertation, which we have attempted to answer from a cultural, sociological and professional perspective.

The first step involved in the process was the selection of the audiovisual material to be investigated, material which included a large archive of fansubs (belonging to *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*), videos, and DVDs with multilingual features needing to be scanned in search of salient features peculiar to

fansubbing, as well as being useful in order to make parallels with subtitling. Needless to say, the data collection stage proved to be relatively long and laborious, since it involved viewing three versions of the same audiovisual product several times.

In order to exemplify the empirical methodology adopted during this phase, a screenshot has been included, showing the organization of a number of videos and text files as they appeared on the computer screen during an examination of an episode of the TV series under analysis (see figure 1).



Fig. 1

For the purpose of this research, the approach devised was of a qualitative rather than a quantitative nature, even though a quantitative approach was adopted initially by emailing a set of questionnaires to both *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* in order to acquire information about fansubbing communities.

Unfortunately, this technique was not favourably welcomed by the fansubbers themselves, so we were forced to resort to different methods of investigation more in tune with the research context.

It was thus decided to adopt a qualitative paradigm consisting of interviews and direct observations, owing to the fact that by developing a more informal approach it was possible to come into closer contact with these underground subtitling factories. Once established, the relationship with the amateur translators went on to become a quasi-professional commitment, since it was concluded that, in order to understand the phenomenon fully, it was necessary to join the two communities in the role of fansubber.

## 1.2 REFLECTIONS ON THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

In this section the various theoretical approaches employed in the research will be examined. In previous research focusing on audiovisual translation (cf. Nida, 1969; Ivarsson and Carroll, 1998; Hatim and Mason, 2000), an approach in which the study was carried out using a combination of subtitle translations and back translations was used in order to find out whether the core meaning, style and register of the original had been conveyed into the target text. Drawing on this research pattern, the design of the empirical study proposed is a comparative analysis of different translations of the same source text, focusing on particular aspects relating to subtitling strategies, such as omission, deletion, adaption, faithfulness and accuracy.

Toury's *Descriptive Translation Studies* (1995) was selected as the most suitable approach for a comparative methodology of analysis, as it sheds light on the norms at work in the subtitling process. Holmes' map of translation studies (1972; 1988) formed the basis of Toury's *Descriptive Translation Studies* (DTS), considered as one of the two main fields in Translation Studies, the first centred on the empirical description of translation phenomena, and the other focused on the theorisation of principles.

As suggested by Holmes, the branch of DTS, in turn, is further divided into three sub areas: “product- oriented”, “function-oriented” and “process-oriented”. As far as this research is concerned, “product-oriented” DTS has been used during the examination of existing translations, an examination which involved a source text (ST) – target text (TT) comparative analysis of several versions of the same text.

However, as stated by Toury, the three branches in question are strictly interdependent and a thorough investigation requires a wider perspective embracing the three aspects of DTS noted above. Seen in this light, the “function-oriented” type of DTS, served to analyse the research context from a social-cultural point of view, and the “process-oriented” DTS, came into play during the attempt made to understand the reasons behind the translational choices made by subtitlers.

The results of the comparative analysis based on DTS were eventually fed into the theoretical aspects of the research project, namely those relating to the study of norms and conventions in subtitling and fansubbing. Therefore, drawing on the initial empirical analysis, a particular emphasis has been placed on the specific norms at work in subtitling and fansubbing, in an attempt to describe the possible evolution of mainstream conventions as a result of the empirical observation of translational behaviour (Pedersen 2011).

The issue of subtitling norms has attracted the interest of researchers over the past few decades (cf. Toury 1981; Nord 1997; Chesterman 1997; Ivarsson and Carroll 1998; Karamitroglou 1998; Hermans 1999; Carroll et al. 2004; Pedersen 2011). Toury (1980; 1995) regarded translation as an activity governed by specific norms which he categorised as “initial norms”, “preliminary norms” and “operational norms”. “Initial norms” involve the selection on the part of the translators either of norms related to the source language or the target language with a closer adherence to source language norms leading to translation ‘adequacy’ as far as the source text is concerned, whereas ‘acceptability’ in the target language culture is reached when translators adhere to the norms of the receiving culture. “Preliminary norms”, on the other hand, focus on the choice of the source text (e.g., text typology and language) and “operational norms” govern the process of translation. In turn, they are subdivided into “matricial” (centred on the omission and deletion of the target text) and “textual-linguistic” norms (focused on language and style).

Conversely, Hermans (1999) proposed an alternative to Toury’s notions of “adequacy” and “acceptability”, using the expressions: “source-oriented” and “target-oriented” respectively. Hermans’ approach to norms, together with Chestermans’ reformulation of Toury’s norms will form the methodological framework of this study.

However, since there is no mutual consensus of opinion as far as the term ‘norm’ is concerned, in the present study Chesterman’s concept of “expectancy norms” (1997) has been used, a fact which is apparently central to the approach adopted here, since they emanate precisely from what viewers expect and above all demand: “expectancy norms are established by the expectations of readers of a translation (of a given type) concerning what a translation (of this type) should be like” (1997: 64).

According to Chesterman’s dichotomy, “expectancy norms” indicate the audience’s expectations concerning subtitled products, while “professional norms” refer to the rules universally accepted by translators (cf. Sokoli 2011).

Chesterman holds the belief that readers are able to perceive what is either appropriate or inappropriate in the translation of a certain text typology, thus approving of the fulfillment of expectations related to translation. In fact, as the author of this thesis has posited, at times there may be no shared consensus of opinion regarding the norms imposed by the established authority.

The research departs at precisely this point, since we have speculated regarding the manner in which fansubbing emerged in resistance to both dubbing and subtitling conventions. The niche audience of TV show fans has, in fact, permitted us to perceive mainstream conventions as outmoded, inadequate and above all excessively “target-oriented”. In other words, “target-oriented” translation norms are blamed for altering relevant aspects of signification, idioms and register, and also for impoverishing the sense of otherness inherent in the foreign dialogues in the name of fluency, readability and the questionable notion of transparency.



Against this background, it has been decided to employ a “source-oriented” approach as constituting the core theoretical framework for this study, a method inspired by the work of Schleiermacher (1813) and further developed by Lewis (1985), Nornes (1999), and Venuti (2008).

The first academic to initiate the debate concerning domestication and foreignization was Nida (1995), who was in favour of domestication. He pointed out that potential misunderstandings should be avoided in translation and, therefore, that it should read as fluently and transparently as possible.

However, it was Schleiermacher’s lecture *On the Different Ways of Translation* (1813) that for the first time managed to give relevance to the concepts of “identity” and “foreignness”. The dichotomy between “domestication” and “foreignization” is further explained in Venuti’s *The Translator’s Invisibility* (2008), in which the author, following Schleiermacher’s theories, envisages an approach which gives prominence to the cultural and linguistic difference of the source text, noting that the translator should “leave the author in peace and move the reader towards him” (ibid.:19). In contrast with the dominant domesticating approaches to translation, he calls for a theory of the “visible translator”, a theory that is able to counteract and resist “dominant target-language cultural values in order to convey the foreignness of the original text” (ibid.: 23).

Lewis’s concept of “abusive fidelity” further amplifies Venuti’s ideological theories on translation:

“Abusive fidelity directs the translator’s attention away from the conceptual signified to the play of signifiers on which it depends, to phonological, syntactical, and discursive structures, resulting in a translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies or plurivocities or expressive stresses of the original by producing its own”. (ibid.:24)

The experimental strategies proposed by Lewis and involving various aspects of translation, registers, dialects, styles, and lexicon for instance, consistently adhere to the fansubbers’ philosophy of translation. In their adherence to the linguistic and cultural features of the source text, fansubbers, the “abusive translators”, represent the genuine application of the foreignizing theories described above. Fansubbers are not simply “literal” in their approach to translation, yet in the light of the above, they are almost revolutionary, as confirmed by Nornes and his “abusive subtitling theory” (2004).

According to Nornes (1999), the “corrupt practices” of mainstream subtitling aim to hide the otherness of the original audiovisual product by conforming to the values, language and culture of the target audience. The umbrella term ‘corruption’ embraces a variety of translational behaviours defined by Danan (1991) as “nationalization”, for example, the frequent practice prevalent in Italian audiovisual translation of appropriating the source text by converting foreign popular names into their target text equivalents, even though the audience would be able to understand them perfectly.

These corrupt practices entail the reduced freedom of translators on different levels. Following the global economic crisis, freelance subtitlers are now requested to work on ‘templates’, where time codes have already been

established, so that they simply replace the source by the target language. Needless to say, this *modus operandi*, meant to cut the costs of software dongles, is also a way of retaining obsolete norms, set during the age of the Hollywood studio system (cf. Nornes 1999; Díaz-Cintas in Anon. 2012).

In fact, the inability to perform the cueing process results in an added curtailment of the translator's already limited freedom. Díaz-Cintas argued that:

“When the timing has been done by a professional other than the translator, the latter's freedom can be severely restricted. [...] if translators could do their own spotting, they could be more flexible and make a more rational use of the spaces needed for any given subtitle”. (2002:2-3)

Similarly, Georgakopoulou (2006:30) highlighted the fact that “thanks to the development of dedicated subtitling software, subtitlers could [...] spot the film themselves and then write their translations so as to fit the time slots they had spotted”. Since they work outside the professional translation industry, fansubbers, on the other hand, are able to fulfil the role of both ‘synchers’ and translators, and as a result, are responsible for and in greater control of the whole subtitling process.

Therefore, whether we define our methodological framework as “source-oriented”, “foreignized, or “abusive”, the central idea is to move away from a fluent, domesticated, transparent translation to an “overt” kind of translation (House 1977), in order to preserve the cultural and linguistic flavour of the original. Thus, not only is the methodological approach used here openly “source-oriented”, but also “viewer-centred”, since the end-viewers, with their

growing demands for a revolution in the niche area of subtitling TV shows, are central to the reshaping of subtitling norms. According to Hermans, “norms change because they need to be constantly readjusted so as to meet changing appropriateness conditions” (1999:84).

In conclusion, a methodological overview of the multi-layered approach employed in the investigation of the theory and practices adopted by the Italian fansubbing communities has been provided in this chapter. Much has been drawn from the systems theories related to translation, in particular from Toury's *Descriptive Translation Studies* (1995) and Chesterman's subsequent studies regarding norms (1997), with special reference to the notion of “expectancy norms”. In addition, the different approaches belonging to the ideologies under examination within the field of Translation Studies, including the dichotomy between “domestication” and “foreignization” examined by Schleiermacher (1813) and Nida (1995), Lewis' “abusive fidelity” (1985), Venuti's concept of the translator's “visibility” (2008), and Nornes's “abusive subtitling” (1999) all concurred to clarify the orientation adopted by the fansubbing communities for their translations.

Not only were they paramount in helping to categorise and analyse the phenomenon in depth, but also in determining a hybrid proposal — a set of future guidelines for subtitlers — derived from mainstream subtitling and fansubbing conventions (see chapter 4), considered as the main contribution of this study to academic research in the field of audiovisual translation.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE STATE OF THE ART OF ITALIAN AVT

#### DUBBING *VIS-À-VIS* SUBTITLING

In this chapter, the main audiovisual translation modes adopted in Italy are examined, in an attempt to place them within their historical and cultural perspectives, while highlighting the state of the art of these modes of transfer which are currently being challenged by the radical transformation being experienced by the increasingly globalised film industry. After a brief introduction to the perennial dichotomy between dubbing and subtitling, the well-known classification between northern and southern European countries will be analysed.

While, in the first section, the tradition of dubbing in Italy is illustrated from the advent of the first silent ‘talkie’ in the late 1920s until the present day, in the last section the state of the art of the Italian subtitling industry is described, with a particular emphasis on the impact of changed market conditions, as well as the professional identity crisis (cf. Kapsaskis 2011).

Italy is a country where dubbing is the predominant and rather systematic form of screen translation employed, whereas subtitling is not even a secondary option on public television, being merely confined to the niche market of film

festivals, DVDs and pay-TV channels. Italy traditionally stands among those European countries labelled as ‘dubbing countries’, along with Austria, France, Germany and Spain. In fact, geographically speaking, Europe has been ideologically divided into two groups, namely, dubbing and subtitling countries. This categorisation may appear to be oversimplified (cf. the European Commission “Study on Dubbing and Subtitling Needs and Practices in the European Audiovisual Industry” 2007), but it clearly shows to what extent other forms of audiovisual translation are eclipsed by these two practices.

While, on the one hand, subtitling is typical of small countries — for example, Netherlands, Denmark, Greece, Portugal, Belgium and Finland —, characterised by a small population, the presence of bilingualism, and a high percentage of imported films, on the other hand, dubbing is associated with large, officially monolingual and more affluent countries. (Perego 2007).

Yet, these features alone, do not account for the choice of dubbing as the preferred mode of translation in Italy, where historical events have played a major role.

## 2.1 A BRIEF HISTORY OF DUBBING

The origins of Italy's strong dubbing tradition may be traced back to the 1930s. In 1927 the American film industry released *The Jazz Singer* by Alan Crosland, the first 'talkie' with synchronised dialogues: though mostly silent, the film switched to 'talkie mode' whenever the star, Al Jolson, was singing.

The original version was first presented in Italy in 1929, causing a tidal wave of adverse reaction on the part of Mussolini's Fascist Party which responded with a ministerial decree aiming to ban the distribution of foreign films with their original soundtrack. The 1930 act stated that: "the Interior Ministry has ordered that, from today, no permission will be granted for the screening of films containing speech in a foreign language".<sup>3</sup>

The intervention of censorship, to counteract the predominance of American film companies and to promote the Italian cinema industry, was also meant to preserve the national language and control any information from outside the national borders perceived by the regime as inappropriate.

Thus, the original film dialogues were replaced by captions, a practice that was not favourably received by the audience, as viewers were forced to make the extra effort to read while watching, and secondly because of the illiteracy rate, which in 1930, equated to 25 per cent of a population of around 40,000

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<sup>3</sup> My translation. In the original: "Il ministero dell'interno ha disposto che da oggi non venga accordato il nullaosta alla rappresentazione di pellicole cinematografiche che contengano del parlato in lingua straniera sia pure in misura minima" (Perego 2007: 21).

people, with 50 per cent of people experiencing problems with reading (Di Cola 2000).

Meanwhile, American majors like *MGM*, *Fox*, and *Warner Bros.* in Hollywood, attempted to re-enter the Italian market by shooting multiple dubbed versions of the same film, in which actors of different nationalities would employ the same script in their mother tongue. Yet, the impediment to success of this method was that the actors — who were mainly Americans of Italian descent —, used a regional dialect rather than the standard language, a feature which was perceived as phony and misleading by the receiving culture.

Eventually, with the support of the fascist regime “that realised the massive appeal and impact film with sound could have on the masses” (Danan 1991: 611), the first Italian dubbing company was founded, the *Cines-Pittaluga* studios based in Rome, where celebrated theatre actors were recruited as dubbers, and from that moment on, the rest became history.

In time, the dubbing industry was to achieve a level of absolute excellence, despite the many drawbacks involved in the practice which do not seem to have discouraged the Italian audiovisual translation companies. Among these drawbacks, the enormous expenses and the time required for the adaptation of films may be singled out in particular. Following Danan, “in an effort to build strong nationalistic states, these countries [...] created infrastructures that are still central to their film industry today” (ibid.: 611).



Hence, the practice of dubbing, which was once mandatory under the pressure of the Fascist regime, not only affected the contemporary mode of transfer, but after over eighty years, it also continues to determine the preference of the audience.

Nowadays, cinema adaptors belong to a complex, uneven hierarchical structure. At the top is the elite, a small group of privileged people responsible for a large number of dubbed film versions: they decide what to translate — mainly films and high quality TV productions —, and set their own, very high wages. At the bottom we find the largest group, which is made of adaptors striving for a chance to work in the film industry (Pavesi and Perego 2006).

The study carried out by the authors noted above, has demonstrated that, when asked about their training, adaptors affirmed that they did not believe it necessary to their profession, whereas an excellent knowledge of Italian, experience, writing skills and natural gifts seemed to be of paramount importance. Moreover, the adaptors made it clear that they did not consider themselves translators *tout-court*. Only a few of them hold a degree in translation, since professional crafts and skills are said to be acquired on the job. The manner in which adaptors join the dubbing industry is also quite revealing. Acquaintances and family relations are the key factors to success in the business, which in turn leads to an impenetrable working environment “hardly accessible to outsiders” (ibid.:105).

In recent years Italian adaptors have been facing radical changes in the dubbing sector, “with globalisation dictating that films should be premièred simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic” (Antonini and Chiaro in Díaz-Cintas and Anderman 2009:99), so that a film which was once adapted in three weeks, now takes five days to be completed to the detriment of quality.

Ultimately, dubbing is expensive and time-consuming; authenticity is sacrificed by depriving characters of their real voice, and most importantly, it does not seem to have adjusted to the rapid changes witnessed by the film industry in the new millennium.

## 2.2 THE SUBTITLING INDUSTRY IN ITALY

*“Subtitling indirectly promotes the use of a foreign language as an everyday function in addition to creating an interest in a foreign culture.”*

*(Danan 1991: 613)*

In 2011 the European Commission published a study on “Dubbing and Subtitling Needs and Practices in the European Audiovisual Industry”, contained in *An Inventory of Community actions in the field of multilingualism 2011 update*<sup>4</sup>, and intended to encourage linguistic diversity. This document reveals that some countries traditionally inclined to dubbing (e.g., Italy, Spain and France) are progressively moving towards subtitling as far as cinema distribution is concerned, even if the costs are almost double the European average. From this study, it also emerged that, for TV broadcasters, the choice of whether to adopt dubbing or subtitling is mainly due to audience preferences. Dubbing, thus, seems a ‘bad’ habit hard to break, since “the general public prefers the comfort of the national language” (Anon. 2011).

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<sup>4</sup> A summary can be found online at: [www//ec.europa.eu/culture/media/programme/docs/overview/evaluation/studies/dubbing\\_sub\\_2007/ex\\_sum\\_ds\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/programme/docs/overview/evaluation/studies/dubbing_sub_2007/ex_sum_ds_en.pdf). Accessed 07/10/2012.

The history of subtitling started with the so-called ‘intertitles’, which first appeared in 1903 in E. S. Porter's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, as a text inserted between the sequences of the movie. In 1938, subtitles made their debut on television when the *BBC* presented the first foreign film with English subtitles, Robinson's *Der Student von Prag*; yet, it was only during the 1960s that the first caption generators entered the market, and by the mid-70s the teletext system had invaded the market to such an extent that in the late 1990s “fifteen European countries were providing a teletext subtitling service for the deaf” (Ivarsson 1998:25).

Nowadays, the Italian subtitling industry mainly operates within the market for DVDs, pay-TV channels, and film festivals. Following the *Subtitle Research Project*<sup>5</sup> — a study on the Italian subtitling industry carried out by the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies in Translation, Languages and Cultures (SITLeC), University of Bologna<sup>6</sup> —, the subtitling market started to develop during the 1990s with the widespread programming of DVDs and satellite channels. Accurate information about a small number of subtitling companies operating in Italy was collected as part of the study: *Atlante*, *Classic Titles*, *Colby*, *Ellemme Edizioni*, *Laser Film*, *Microcinema*, *Ombre Elettriche*, *Raggio Verde* and *Underlight*. Some of these companies specialise in film festivals and opera, others are in cinema with the remainder working in DVD and television subtitling (Angelucci 2004).

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<sup>5</sup> See more information at: [www://subtitle.agregat.net/index.php/ita\\_open/presentation/](http://subtitle.agregat.net/index.php/ita_open/presentation/). Accessed 20/10/2010

<sup>6</sup> Dipartimento di Studi Interdisciplinari in Traduzione, Lingue e Culture, Università di Bologna.

The first Italian subtitling company was created in the mid-80s, but it was only during the second half of the 1990s that the majority of subtitling companies entered the market. On the whole, Italian companies are relatively small with no more than fifteen employees, and hire freelance professionals when necessary. The companies interviewed in the research project referred to above, agreed on the fact that the most important parameter when assessing the quality of subtitling is readability, followed by reduction, the conciseness of the subtitles, and finally faithfulness to the source text. They did not seem to focus much on spotting technicalities, on translation accuracy and above all on the need to differentiate the approach to subtitling standards depending on the specific target viewers addressed (Angelucci 2004:119).

As far as the profession is concerned, subtitlers are currently facing major challenges relating to the increasingly tight deadlines of translation projects, as well as the significantly dropping tariffs, to the extent that they cannot make a living through subtitling alone.

The European Commission has recently published a report on “the status of the translation profession in the European Union” (Pym *et al.* 2012), emphasising that it is, in fact, the current market disorder that has become the main focus of professional translators. Among the causes of the crisis are the declining prices, exacerbated by the widespread availability of cheap, poor quality translation, and also resulting from tight deadlines which are wholly incompatible with an adequate output, not to mention the increasingly high proportion of part-time and freelance contracts current in the translation industry as a whole.

Among professionals, the vast majority of subtitlers assert that fansubbing and crowdsourcing in general are affecting the market, putting the blame on “the rise of the amateur” (O’Hagan 2011:11) and absolving themselves of their own guilt. It is, in fact, “the crisis of the experts who undervalue what they do not know and overvalue what they do” (Gee and Hayes, 2011: 44).

Any criticism of professionals by this reference is unintentional, although it seems that they should be more aware of the changes taking place in the translation environment. According to the European report on the status of the translation profession, the changes brought about by fansubbing practices seem to have had a major impact both on translation theory and practices, not to mention on the audience’s perception of subtitling (Pym *et al.* 2012). The study also reports that “even though crowdsourcing is still a niche activity and affects the sector only to a limited extent, its influence is bound to grow and there are useful lessons to be learnt concerning good practices for professional translators as well (ibid.: 37).

The concepts, emerging from the 2012 European report, are elaborated in chapter four which focuses on the comparison between subtitling and fansubbing norms and in which possible future subtitling standards are proposed.

## CHAPTER 3

### FANSUBBING

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the phenomenon of amateur translation by monitoring the progress of fansubbing practices in Italy by analysing the beliefs of online communities.

Fan translation is a new ‘genre’ within the field of audiovisual translation and has mainly been examined in connection with Japanese anime. The state of the art of Italian fansubbing relating to the subtitling-based mediation of American TV shows is the focus of this study. We will begin by investigating the motivation behind this practice, the creation of the first online communities, their hierarchical structure and the tasks performed by fansubbers along with the various phases involved in the process, and the technicalities needed in order to edit, produce and release the fansubbed versions of a TV programme. A description of the practices and beliefs of fansubbers will be offered throughout the various sections, with an explanation of their tendency to ‘speak the truth’ rather than to “nationalise” the original dialogues for the receiving audience (Danan, 1991).

This chapter concludes with a brief account of the ethical and legal issues relating to the infringement of copyright issues associated with the practice and distribution of fansubs.



### 3.1 THE HISTORY OF FANSUBBING: JAPANESE ANIME FROM SASE TO DIGISUBS

*“The earliest known reported fansub  
in the United States is said to be  
the VHS version of Lupin III  
produced in the mid-80s”  
(Kearns 2008:161)*

The history of fansubbing can be traced back to the late 1980s (O’Hagan 2009) when Japanese ‘anime’ — the French abbreviation for “animation” (Leonard 2004) —, were banned in the United States or heavily censored due to their inappropriate content, a fact that led to the Japanese withdrawal from the American market in 1982. As a consequence, fans of the genre began to gather in ‘anime clubs’ devoted to the translation and distribution of their favourite animations. Fans began to produce amateur subtitled copies so that they could share them with their fellow fans. “At the time, the Internet had not as many users as it has nowadays, and these pioneers used to distribute fansubbed anime on videotapes rather than in digital format” (Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006).

Before the digital era, fansubbers employed the ‘SASE system’<sup>7</sup> to disseminate their fansubs, a system through which tapes were mailed out to fans free of charge. With the advent of high-speed Web access, along with new software programmes capable of editing and ripping DVDs, the SASE system was abandoned in favour of digital fansubbing (digisubbing). Digisubs made their first appearance in the late 1990s, and were distributed through three main channels: P2P<sup>8</sup>, IRC<sup>9</sup> and Usenet. The most widespread P2P file sharing networks at the time were *BitTorrent* and *Emule*. *BitTorrent* allowed users to retrieve files on the net via the fansubbing group tracker — a web page displaying the link to .torrent files in order to download the fansubs —, while *Emule*, on the other hand, was much slower than *BitTorrent*, and supported the searching of files by name using the *ed2k* network (Scarpa 2005). At the time, the most common form of IM<sup>10</sup> used by fansubbers was the IRC, a real time chat ideal for group communication, forum discussion, and data transfer, including file sharing.

*Usenet* was a hybrid between emails and web forums, where users could post as well as share content on the web. Moreover, several websites were dedicated to the distribution of fansubs. Some of the most popular were *Animefactory*<sup>11</sup>, the first to produce digisubs in .avi and .DivX format, and *Anime-Fansubs*<sup>12</sup> — created in 2000 and still active —, and *Elite-Fansubs*<sup>13</sup>,

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<sup>7</sup> Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope.

<sup>8</sup> Peer-to-peer, networking able to share workloads among peers.

<sup>9</sup> Internet Relay Chat, a real-time text messaging and chat.

<sup>10</sup> Instant Messaging, a form of real-time chatting communication.

<sup>11</sup> [www.animefactory.org](http://www.animefactory.org)

<sup>12</sup> [www.anime-fansubs.net](http://www.anime-fansubs.net)

<sup>13</sup> [www.mayday-anime.com/forums](http://www.mayday-anime.com/forums)

popular for having heated arguments with the online communities mentioned above (ibid.: 2005)

## 3.2 CO-CREATIVE LABOUR:

### THE ORGANISED FAN INDUSTRY

This section is devoted to the fansubbers themselves so as to facilitate a thorough comprehension of the phenomenon, by examining their behavior through a sociological lens, that is to say the theoretical perspective of Media Studies. Much of the academic attention concerning fandom has focused on the definition of “fan” and in recent years, a large number of scholars have tackled the issue in conjunction with networked subcultures.

The term ‘fan’ comes from the Latin word “fanaticus”, and the English derivation “fanatic” refers to someone obsessed by an interest or enthusiasm for a particular activity (Costello and Moore 2007). Thus, the authors mentioned above, differentiate fans from traditional consumers as their approach to consumption is regarded as ‘excessive’.

In his book, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992), Henry Jenkins distinguished between ‘viewers’ and ‘fans’, suggesting that while viewers follow an isolated model of media consumption, far from simply consuming a product, fans participate in discussions and reflections on their experience, and are involved in a varied range of interactive activities: writing letters to producers, conversing with other fans on forums, and attending fan events for example.

As a consequence, if we agree with Jenkins's definition, being a fan implies the possession of a social and cultural identity not shared by the ordinary viewer. Moreover, fans do not perceive themselves as consumers, since for them "the dichotomy between production and consumption, the supply-side and the demand-side, breaks down" (Beilby *et al.* 1999:37).

Over the past few decades, the widespread use of Internet technologies has empowered fans, turning formerly passive media consumers into the principal actors in a major revolution, making media as co-creators and circulating user-created content incorporated into the products owned by media companies (Banks 2009). Hence, the traditional connotation of the term "fan", as defined by Jenkins, has undergone a profound shift towards the concept of "co-creative user" (*ibid.*: 2009). These unofficial producers have been reshaping the paradigms of the world media scenario — particularly as far as commercial television narratives are concerned —, building up a force, a co-creative labour, that, in the case of Italy, could be regarded as a challenge to audiovisual translation practices.

An instructive case study was offered by the Italian dubbed version of the American TV show *The Big Bang Theory*. In order to acknowledge the strong influences of fansubbing on audiovisual translation practices in Italy, this case study as presented by Innocenti and Maestri at "MM2010. Le frontiere del 'popolare' tra vecchi e nuovi media"<sup>14</sup> is examined.

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<sup>14</sup> Available at:  
[www.amsacta.cib.unibo.it/3036/1/Il\\_lavoro\\_dei\\_fan.\\_Il\\_fansubbing\\_come\\_alternativa\\_al\\_doppiaggio\\_ufficiale\\_in\\_The\\_Big\\_Bang\\_Theory.pdf](http://www.amsacta.cib.unibo.it/3036/1/Il_lavoro_dei_fan._Il_fansubbing_come_alternativa_al_doppiaggio_ufficiale_in_The_Big_Bang_Theory.pdf) Accessed 05/09/2012

In their paper, “Il lavoro dei fan. Il fansubbing come alternativa al doppiaggio ufficiale in *The Big Bang Theory*”, the authors explore the American TV show *The Big Bang Theory*, focusing on the phenomenon of fansubbing as an alternative to dubbing. According to Innocenti and Maestri, the majority of fans would rather watch their favourite TV series in the original rather than in the dubbed version, as they are fully aware of the disgraceful alteration of dialogues once they have been adapted into Italian. The supposed alteration involves both the original soundtrack, which is replaced by different voices, as well as the translation in which much of the humour expressed by culture-bound words is cut out as well as inside jokes and foreign references, mostly unknown to the Italian audience.

The *Big Bang Theory* is a sit-com starring four characters similar to the very fans under analysis in this paper: they are ‘nerds’<sup>15</sup> just like fansubbers. Once Mediaset had acquired the copyright for the show, the programme was dubbed by Post in Europe (PIE) in Rome and broadcast on the pay-TV channel Steel in 2008. When the first dubbed episodes of *The Big Bang Theory* appeared on TV, the fans, who had been following the show since 2007 thanks to fansubbers, noticed that, owing to the ‘italianisation’ of the dubbed version, the whole nerdy-related content had been dumbed down, making the product unbearably dull. The adaption had levelled down the language to such an extent that the programme did not appeal at all to the target audience who criticised the work of the dubbing company harshly.

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<sup>15</sup> Slang word used to describe someone devoted to academic, scientific or technical pursuits but socially inept.

Hence, a bitter controversy carried out by fans of *The Big Bang Theory* sparked several online blogs leading to dramatic changes to the dubbed production. From episode nine of the first season, the dubbing director, Silvia Pepitoni was replaced by Leslie La Penna and the whole team of adaptors was entirely replaced. As a result, the new team carried out a better adaptation, characterised by more faithful and coherent dialogues (Innocenti and Maestri 2010). The effective resistance of the Italian active audience made it clear that the patronising authority of the dubbing technique has been losing its grip in Italy.

In an attempt to describe the concept of “resistance” in translation, Nornes (1999) has pointed out that dubbing is clearly the most extreme exemplification of domestication, with the foreign language becoming a mere "cultural disadvantage" which needs to be smoothed over, polished and restored for the receiving culture. “This is the logic of corruption [...] practiced by distributors for whom translation serves little more than surplus value.” (ibid.: 1999:4)

In the light of the case study analysed by Innocenti and Maestri, and according to Vellar (2011:8), “subbers are now recognised as experts by fan cultures and by mass media”, as is shown by important web-radio shows, *Versione Beta* and *Dispenser* on *Radio2*<sup>16</sup>; important national magazines, like *Wired Italia*<sup>17</sup>, and the popular TV programme *Sugo*<sup>18</sup> on *Rai4* which a substantial part of the show has been dedicated to fansubbing as a phenomenon.

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<sup>16</sup> See a full list of online references here:

[www.italiansubs.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=5251&Itemid=86](http://www.italiansubs.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=5251&Itemid=86)

<sup>17</sup> Available at: [www/mag.wired.it/rivista/storie/sub-wars-dal-tramonto-all-alba-traducendo-lost.html](http://www/mag.wired.it/rivista/storie/sub-wars-dal-tramonto-all-alba-traducendo-lost.html)

<sup>18</sup> Available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaZ37YRGaos](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IaZ37YRGaos)

### 3.3 THE ITALIAN FANSUBBING PHENOMENON

*"If we were living in the 12th century [...] the practitioners of dubbing would be burnt in the marketplace for heresy".*  
(Jean Renoir 1974:106)

In recent years, Italy has witnessed the emergence of a fan-based, underground form of audiovisual translation in opposition to mainstream practices. The word “fansubbing” resulted from merging the words “fan” and “subtitles”, which then became a neologism defining the activity of amateur translators producing the subtitled versions of American TV shows in order to make them accessible to fans.

Although, as we seen, the activity of fansubbers was initiated more than twenty years ago in association with Japanese anime (see section 3.1), in the new millennium the focus has shifted towards American TV series.

The project started with the most popular TV show of all time: *Lost*. The first episode of *Lost* was aired in Italy in 2005, and from that moment on, the interest surrounding this show resulted in an ever-increasing fan base.



It soon developed into online communities devoted to translating the episodes into Italian, in an attempt to counteract the long waiting periods between seasons due to the fact that the dubbing process is rather a time-consuming activity.

Hence, in an effort to allow fellow fans to watch their favourite show almost in real time with the United States, a new figure emerged on the Internet: the fansubber. The lives of fansubbers are characterised by sleepless nights spent watching the recording of a TV episode, translating the English subtitles or even translating by ear if necessary, in order to release the Italian subtitled version as soon as possible after the episode has been aired in the USA.

This revolutionary mass phenomenon has given rise to two main fansubbing communities, *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*, producing more than a dozen soft subs<sup>19</sup> every day. Soft subs, unlike hard subs, which are encoded into the video itself, are .srt files which are separate from the video clip loaded by users onto specific video players such as VLC.<sup>20</sup> The choice of soft subs over hard subs, meaning that the subs are not merged with the video, is probably due to the problems relating to copyright infringement, a delicate issue that will be discussed later on (see section 3.6).

In addition to the reasons considered so far, Italian fansubbing communities supposedly emerged in opposition to dubbing, as a form of resistance against its supposed authenticity and the unchallenged idea that dubbing might unequivocally represent ‘the best of all possible worlds’.

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<sup>19</sup> Soft subtitles can be read by some video-players (e.g., Videolan) separately from the video file.

<sup>20</sup> *VideoLan* media player.

While adaptation might be perceived as smooth, Italian-sounding and easily comprehensible to the average viewer, the process of domestication it undergoes does not allow for a good quality product in terms of linguistic and cultural mediation (Antonini and Chiaro in Díaz-Cintas and Anderman 2009:100).

Fansubbers and their followers perceive dubbing as an interference depriving viewers of the sense of ‘otherness’ and leaving them with a “transnational decultured product” (Ascheid 1997: 40).

In 2008, *Rai4* broadcast a special edition of the programme *Sugo* devoted to the phenomenon. As explained by the amateur translators belonging to *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* who were interviewed, their activity is aimed at ‘restoring’ the foreign product, allowing fans to appreciate its original voices, soundtrack and atmosphere while skipping the bureaucratic delays involved before the copyright of TV shows can be acquired, the script adapted and the dialogues dubbed.

The wider implications of fansubbing on audiovisual translation practices in Italy — and other dubbing countries —, was clearly appreciated only four years after *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* were created. On May 24 2010, a unique event took place: the final episode of *Lost* was aired simultaneously by *NBC* in the United States, *Sky1* in the United Kingdom, *Fox Italia* in Italy, and many more countries worldwide. In Italy the episode was aired in English at 6.00 am, and fansubbed by *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* just a few hours later. It was then re-aired twenty-four hours later with Italian ‘pro-subtitles’ and eventually broadcast on May 31 in its dubbed Italian version.

Never before had Italians experienced such a speed in dealing with audiovisual translation, and it is no wonder that the ‘Italian fansubbing movement’ paved the way for it to happen.

These significant changes were discussed in an interesting forum connected to *ItaSA* in November 2010. In brief, the fansubbers stated that a great revolution was taking place. Concerning *Lost*, they wrote that *Sky TV* had dramatically reduced the traditional time lapse between seasons, managing to subtitle the show only twenty-four hours after the airing in the United States. All of them ultimately agreed that they had had ‘some hand’ in it. It is, therefore, apparent that Italian amateur translators are unashamedly opinionated concerning translation matters.

Exactly who these fansubbers are is a difficult question to answer. The majority of them are relatively reserved, preferring to take a backseat and hiding behind nicknames. When asked about their ‘real life’ they appear to be very evasive. However, judging from a set of online interviews conducted with the leading figures of both communities (see section 3.2), and thanks to a collaboration with both *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* (a three-year field research project which was spent in regular day-to-day contact with amateur translators), it can be concluded that the people who initiated this underground activity were young people between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, belonging to a generation which had grown up in a globalised context, were linguistically aware and educated — either to an undergraduate or postgraduate level —, and united by a slavish addiction to American TV shows (see section 3.2 for more details).

The founders of these communities — who allegedly collaborated for a short period of time —, are best known as, e.g., LordThul, Superbiagi Metalmarco, Tutorgirl, and Chemicalchiara, very well-known nicknames to the adherents of fansubbing.

In the next section detailed description is offered, differentiating between the two fan groups previously analysed, in terms of their approach to translation.

### 3.4 ORIGINS OF ITASA AND SUBSFACTORY

In the previous section we have described how in the new millennium, the focus of fansubbing shifted in favour of American TV series. After an initial outline of the Italian fansubbing phenomenon, the coordinating mechanism underlying the two major online communities, *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*, will be introduced. The former was created in 2006, in the wake of the exceptional interest aroused by *Lost*. It is a large community of fansubbers, much larger than *Subsfactory* (see fig.2 and 4, chapter 4), more popular and ‘younger’ with staff members aged between sixteen and thirty with end-user in the same age group. The latter, *Subsfactory* is supposed to be the first Italian fansubbing community — its genesis as a fan base dating back to 2003 when a small group of fans started to translate Japanese anime —, although their website was, in fact, created much later in 2006.

*Subsfactory* is smaller, older — subbers are aged between seventeen and sixty —, and less popular than *ItaSA*, even though it has recently been gaining increasing success, thanks to the widespread use of social networking sites, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Although there are rumours to the effect that they collaborated for a short while in 2006, these communities currently occupy the opposite ends of the spectrum.

Apart from the fact that they hold different views on translation — *Subsfactory* claims to be more faithful to the source text and *ItaSA* admits to leaving more space for the creativity of the subber (Barra and Guarnaccia 2009) —, they also differ concerning their main starting point with *ItaSA* aiming to ‘get there first’, releasing the subs as soon as possible after the airing of the American TV show, while *Subsfactory* proudly claims to give priority to accuracy rather than speed (ibid: 2009).

There is evidently an intense rivalry as well as more positive spirit of competition between the two communities, pushing them towards high levels of performance.

### 3.5 THE FANSUBBING MACHINE

*This well-oiled machine made of standard routines  
closely mirrors professional companies practices.  
Yet, fansubbing communities are no-profit groups  
solely driven by personal motivation, a flare for  
sharing and maybe a little bit of narcissism*<sup>21</sup>

*(Barra and Guarnaccia 2009:2)*

Given the enormous commitment in terms of hours, the activities of fansubbers resemble a job more than a hobby. The ‘fansubbing factory’ can be likened to a strategic pyramid-shaped structure, made of progressive hierarchical subdivisions in terms of tasks. These unofficial workers are organised into teams committed to the translation of a specific TV show, and coordinated by an appointed reviser.

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<sup>21</sup> My translation. In the original: “[...] una macchina oliata, con routine produttive ormai standard, con una divisione del lavoro [...] con una scala gerarchica interiorizzata dai componenti del gruppo, con un’organizzazione che non lascia nulla al caso. Come – e più – che in un’azienda. Solo che qui non ci sono fini di lucro: a far girare ogni ingranaggio sono[...] la gratuità del dono e un po’ di narcisismo”.

Before the episode is even aired in the United States, the reviser makes sure the team is ready and available for the forthcoming task. Upon confirmation, the team starts the operating machine, first searching for both the original video and the .ts raw online.<sup>22</sup>

As a matter of fact, subbers employ readymade English subtitles originating from Chinese sources, rather than translating by ear, which they do more rarely. Sometimes, when these resources are not available, they may rely on transcripts obtained either via OCR or voice recognition software.<sup>23</sup>

Once retrieved, the English subtitle file is uploaded in a private area of the forum together with the reviser's subdivision of tasks and the final deadline. Thus, subbers may choose to work directly on the .srt file, which is converted into a .txt file or to use some open source software for different OS<sup>24</sup> such as *Subtitle Workshop* and *Visual SubSynch* (Windows), *Subtitle Editor* (Linux) or *Miyu* (Mac OS X), to name but a few.

Subsequently, subbers — also fulfilling the role of 'synchers'<sup>25</sup> —, start the cueing phase in order to adjust the 'in' and 'out' of subtitles in perfect harmony with both the soundtrack and the images. Subbers do not work alone. Throughout the process, they operate as a collaborative team, supporting each other by communicating through specific threads on the forum or via IM in real time.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The 'ts' (MPEG transport stream) is obtained by exporting and converting the closed captions displayed on TV into a suitable format.

<sup>23</sup> Optical character recognition software programmes allow the conversion of scanned PDF files into editable Word documents.

<sup>24</sup> Operating systems.

<sup>25</sup> The role of the subber and the syncher may be played by the same person. This is the case of *Subsfactory's* "master subber", able to translate and also spot or 'synch' their subtitles.

<sup>26</sup> For example, *Skype* and *Windows Live Messenger*.



Moreover, a set of established guidelines (see chapter 4 which focuses on fansubbing conventions) assist fansubbers to standardise the terminology, the number of characters and the CPS<sup>27</sup> allowed for each subtitle, the editing and formatting standards, the punctuation conventions, the use of accents and so on. When the Italian version is ready, each subber submits his/her own part to the reviser who collects the files merging them in order to finalise the process. During this phase, the emphasis is on linguistic and technical revision, and particularly on translation consistency and fluency. The .srt file is then released, uploaded online to a dedicated repository ready to be shared by the whole virtual community.

*ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* are also open to new members eager to contribute to the cause. Would-be translators are ‘hired’ upon completion of an entrance test. They are given a zipped folder containing an .avi file and an .srt file to be uploaded in *Subtitle Workshop*. More often than not, the subtitles in question may be in a different language from the original soundtrack (e.g. Portuguese rather than English) and the ripped video may belong to an unknown TV show. These combined factors may ultimately result in a challenging task for aspiring fansubbers.

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<sup>27</sup> Characters per Second.

### 3.6 PIRACY OR PROMOTION?

The issue of legality was alluded to briefly in the opening of this chapter. As previously mentioned, the choice of soft subs for fansubbing purposes is largely due to the threat represented by copyright infringement.

In the disclaimer section of its forum, *ItaSA* makes it clear that:

All downloadable content in this website is absolutely free. The translations available, in accordance with the current regulations, are a free interpretation by our translators and therefore protected by law. The content available does not include any copyrighted video or link to proprietary materials.<sup>28</sup>

And on its homepage, *Subsfactory* offers the following assurance:

The website does not infringe copyright and it is 100% legal, as the translations provided are a free interpretation by our translators to whom we are deeply grateful! Merging the .srt files we provide with the copyrighted video is contrary to the spirit in which they have been produced, besides being against the law.<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>28</sup> My translation. In the original: “I contenuti offerti dal portale sono interamente gratuiti. [Il sito contiene] traduzioni che, a norma delle vigenti leggi, sono interpretazioni dei traduttori e pertanto tutelate dal diritto vigente. Il sito non contiene filmati o link a file audiovideo coperti da copyright.” Source: [www.italiansubs.net](http://www.italiansubs.net)

<sup>29</sup> My translation. In the original: “Il sito non infrange nessun copyright ed è legale al 100%, considerato che le traduzioni sono interpretazioni dei traduttori. si ringraziano tutti i subber per il loro fantastico lavoro!!! Subsfactory.it fornisce sottotitoli che sono una libera interpretazione dei traduttori, unirli a video e' scorretto ed e' contrario allo spirito per cui sono stati creati, oltre che illecito!” [www.subsfactory.it](http://www.subsfactory.it)

In conclusion, what Italian fansubbers do is to release a translation conceived as a personal interpretation of a TV programme in order to share it with fellow fans. As a result, the way fans retrieve the copyrighted video associated with the fansubs is therefore irrelevant to them. The impact of fansubbing on the promotion of the vast majority of American TV shows in Italy is no secret. What was said in the past concerning other underground practices can easily be applied to this new phenomenon.

According to Lessig (2004:27), “major media in the US, including films, recorded music, and cable TV, all depended heavily on ‘piracy’ for their early success”. Popular culture industries such as Japanese anime have greatly benefited from fansubbing, as is shown by the almost total absence of legal actions taken against it. In a recent interview, Superbiagi, one of *Subsfactory*’s administrators, advises users against associating subtitles with copyrighted videos, with the assurance that:

Our website does not have the numbers or the false pretences to undermine the market of audiovisual translation. If we are supposed to challenge professional subtitling, how come that SKY has not hired us yet?”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> My translation. In the original: “Un sito come il nostro non ha i numeri né le pretese né la presunzione di poter influenzare il mercato dei traduttori. Se le nostre produzioni amatoriali togliessero effettivamente lavoro ai traduttori professionisti, perché allora *Sky* o chi per loro non ci ha assunti tutti?”.

Yet, the fact that on Italian satellite channels the gap between seasons has been significantly reduced is due to the underground work of these passionate fans. Thus, even if they represent the proverbial drop in the ocean, to some extent what they do really matters.

These communities, averaging 1000 daily active users, nearly 15,000 (*Subsfactory*) and 40,000 (*ItaSA*) fans on *Facebook*, and a record of 7,000 downloads in a few hours, inevitably play a decisive role in the success of the programmes they translate. Not only do subbers make up for the time lag characteristic of dubbing, but in doing so, they also control the success of future TV shows, owing to the quality and speed with which they work.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **SUBTITLING AND FANSUBBING**

#### **STANDARDS: A HYBRID PROPOSAL**

The first section of this chapter opens with an introduction to the main features of subtitling and closes with a brief overview of standard subtitling practices. The codes of practice used by fansubbers are explored in the second section, and a comprehensive description of the fansubbing guidelines used both by *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* is given.

A definition of the theoretical approach followed is offered in the final section in order to advance a hybrid proposal for future subtitling norms, following an analysis of the standards used by both professional and amateur subtitlers.

## 4.1 STANDARDS IN PROFESSIONAL SUBTITLING

In this section a brief overview of mainstream subtitling features and practices is given, based on previous studies carried out by a number of academics (cf. Luyken *et al*, 1991; Ivarsson, 1992; Gottlieb, 1998; Ivarsson and Carroll, 1998; De Linde and Kay 1999; Díaz Cintas, 2001 and 2003a; Chaume, 2004; Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007). De Linde and Key hold the belief that “the main condition of subtitling stems from the integration of text, sound and image, the reading capabilities of target viewers, and the restrictions which these two factors place on space and time” (1999:6).

This definition is a clever attempt at condensing a variety of fundamental traits characteristic of subtitling into a few lines. Audiovisual translation in general, and subtitling in particular, represents a constrained form of translation characterised by a shift of mode from speech to writing, where the message is conveyed by both the aural and visual channels within several spatio-temporal limitations.

Linguistically speaking, two main different types of subtitling may be distinguished:

- Intralingual subtitling, or same-language subtitling, for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH);
- Interlingual subtitling, which implies the translation of one language into another.

The second typology is the focus of this chapter, provided in an attempt to list the stages involved in the process of subtitling. The first stage involves the so-called ‘timing’, ‘spotting’ or ‘cueing’ process. Depending on the subtitling company, the practice of setting the ‘in’ and ‘out’ of subtitles can be performed either by specific technicians, or by the subtitlers themselves. As far as freelance professionals are concerned, the current trend is to provide them with pre-established time codes. The next phase focuses on the translation of the original dialogues, followed by the editing process along with the segmentation of subtitles based on semantic-syntactic criteria, and then the final revision carried out by the subtitlers. These are the main stages involved in a process governed by the long-established and almost unanimously accepted rules cursorily described in the next section.

### 4.1.1 SUBTITLING CODES OF CONDUCT

Subtitling is a well-established form of constrained audiovisual translation. Many scholars have argued that it is closer to the process of adaption (Delabastita 1989) than to translation *tout court*. It is characterised by specific communicative purposes and by the use of standard norms aimed to simplify the source text in order to facilitate the interpretation of the original message (Perego 2007).

Among the various features characteristic of subtitling, one in particular makes it unique: both the source and target texts co-exist in the subtitled version, enabling viewers to hear the original soundtrack and read the subtitles at the same time. As a result, subtitling is exposed to all sort of criticism on the part of viewers who, depending on their linguistic competence, may find fault with it if it does not match what they hear, thus considering it unreliable. In fact, another relevant aspect of this mode of transfer is “the filtering of potential loss of information” (Tveit in Díaz Cintas and Anderman 2009: 21), since the written channel does not allow for the nuances of speech to be accurately conveyed: “the written words cannot possibly compete with speech” (ibid:21).

Moreover, converting spoken language into written text often leads to the use of “nominalization” strategies in Italian, a transformation that prevents subtitles from retaining the naturalness and orality typical of spontaneous speech.



Yet, despite the almost inevitable loss of linguistic nuances implied in the diamesic shift from the oral to the written mode (Perego 2007), good subtitles are supposed to pass unnoticed and act as guidance throughout the viewing experience. As Minchinton puts it, viewers just “blink down at the subtitles for information, they ‘photograph’ them rather than read them” (1993: 14–15).

Technically speaking, subtitling presents translators with two constraining factors, space and time, profoundly affecting the way subtitles appear on screen. Subtitles may be displayed with a maximum of two lines — with an average of 40 characters per line in the case of Italian —, and their exposure time ranges between two and six seconds, the ideal span of time allowing the viewer to read at an appropriate speed (Luyken *et al.* 1991). Furthermore, subtitles should be “semantically and syntactically self-contained” (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007:172), since good quality and coherent line breaks are supposed to facilitate readability and comprehension. Ideally, in the case of two-line subtitles, the first line should be shorter than the second. Needless to say, this is not always feasible, as segmentation is a relatively difficult art. Priority should always be given to the completeness of meaning within each line of the subtitle, while the aesthetic norm noted above is only a secondary consideration. Due to the limited time and space available for the subtitles, linguistic constraints may be dealt with by employing the strategy of “reduction”.

According to Kovačič's categorisation (1991: 409), we are able to distinguish between three levels of discourse elements: the indispensable, the partly dispensable and the dispensable. While the indispensable elements are essential and must be translated in order for the audience to follow the plot of a film, the partly dispensable can be condensed, and the dispensable elements can be simply omitted. In fact, subtitlers usually leave out some words that are universally known ("yes" and "no", for instance), repetitions, utterances conveying a phatic function ("well" and "you know", for example), false starts and exclamations that do not need a translation as they are easily understandable by viewers all round the world.

The "relevance theory", as proposed by Sperber and Wilson (1986), might constitute an interesting approach to dealing with the strategy of reduction in subtitling. According to this theory, "an assumption is relevant in a context if, and only if, it has some contextual effect in the context" (Sperber and Wilson 1986:122). As a result, subtitlers should aim to express similar "contextual effects of an utterance in a given context" (Kovačič 1994:247).

Needless to say, this is not always feasible, owing to the complexity of segmentation. Although it is true that the subtitled version of a programme is always a condensed form of the oral source text, "it is too limited to view subtitling as a mere condensation of a so-called original" (Gambier 1994:278). As Gambier explains, when analysing a subtitled version of an audiovisual product, the perception of a variety of omissions and a difference in the number of words transferred from one language to another occurs quite naturally,

although what really matters are not these losses or additions, the focal point being “what is transformed and why” (ibid.: 278).

Hence, in the creation of interlingual subtitles, the strategy of “condensation” and “relevance theory” should always be balanced with the notion of equivalence. Kruger (2001) has attempted to investigate this relationship by using the semiotic approach as a starting point. In his opinion, semiotics, or “the study of signs and sign-using behavior”, and interpretative semiotics in particular, seem to explain this delicate balance.

According to this theory, three categories of equivalence, the “qualitative”, the “referential” and the “significational” are identified (Gorlée 1994). “Qualitative equivalence” refers to the external features of the sign (e.g. rhyme structure). “Referential equivalence” refers both to the ‘immediate object’ of a sign, or “the idea called up directly by a particular sign use” (ibid.: 176) and the ‘dynamical object’, that is “the hypothetical sum of all instances of the sign-bound immediate object” (ibid.:177). “Significational equivalence” refers to the relationship between the object and the interpretant, considered as “that which the sign produces in the quasi-mind which is the interpreter” (Eco 1976: 68).

In Kruger’s opinion, the latter is apparently the only type of equivalence to ensure that the effect produced by the text in the source language viewers is similar to the perception of the translated text in the target language viewers. According to her, subtitlers can ‘deviate’ from the source text by producing “a new target text which is nevertheless significationally equivalent to the original” (Kruger 2001: 185).

This overview of interlingual subtitling is not intended to be exhaustive; it is meant to provide a general introduction to subtitling codes of conduct.

In 1998 Carroll and Ivarsson presented a proposal for good subtitling practices<sup>31</sup> endorsed by the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation (ESIST). This comprehensive document covers both translation and spotting practices, so that its use is felt to be appropriate here, since it constitutes a standard example. It is summarised as follows.

Regarding translation, subtitlers should:

1. work on a dialogue list along with a glossary of specific terminology and special references;
2. focus on high-quality translation, paying attention to cultural nuances, appropriate register, and correct grammar;
3. use simple syntactic units distributed on a maximum of two lines;
4. distribute the text in syntactically self-contained subtitles, (if on a two-liner subtitle the length is unequal, the upper line should be shorter in order to reduce eye movement);
5. avoid repetitions of names and common expressions;

As far spotting is concerned, subtitlers should:

6. follow the rhythm of the dialogues, taking into consideration shot changes, and sound bridges;
7. pay attention to suspense and surprise when cueing the subtitles;
8. follow the seven-second rule<sup>32</sup> (min. 1, max. 7 second per subtitle), and respect the maximum CPS (number of characters per second, around 70 in 6 seconds), in order to facilitate the readability of the message;

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<sup>31</sup> Available at:

[www.esist.org/ESIST%20Subtitling%20code\\_files/Code%20of%20Good%20Subtitling%20Practice\\_en.pdf](http://www.esist.org/ESIST%20Subtitling%20code_files/Code%20of%20Good%20Subtitling%20Practice_en.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> Note that it is common practice to follow the six-second rule (D'Ydewalle et al. 1987; Brondeel 1994).

9. leave at least 4 frames between subtitles enabling to perceive the shift from one subtitle to the next;

During the translation phase, subtitlers are faced with a variety of challenges imposed by spatio-temporal limitations; these may be overcome by adopting a range of strategies, for example text reduction and omission (partial and total), condensation (at word/close level), and reformulation, which should always sound idiomatic and fluent in the target language (Díaz Cintas and Remael, 2007).

This brief overview of interlingual subtitling is not intended to be exhaustive. It is intended to provide a general introduction to subtitling, as it represents a starting point from which to develop a more specific investigation concerning the differences between the professional and amateur subtitling guidelines.

## 4.2 FANSUBBING GUIDELINES

This section, which is intended to provide information on fansubbing practices, is based on a three-year field research project spent as a member of the two communities under analysis, and hence in regular day-to-day contact with amateur translators belonging to both *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*.

In order to understand fully how the fansubbing machine works, its guidelines will be analysed. Both *Itasa* and *Subsfactory* present fansubbers with a set of guidelines to be followed during the translation process. The list includes a variety of information concerning each step of the process, from the spotting to the editing of the subtitles.

*ItaSA*'s guidelines will be analysed first of all, and a description of the organization of their workflow as shown on their website will be given. *Subsfactory*'s standards and practices, their approaches to translation and subtitling synchronization will be presented, with a list of rules, tips and tricks of the trade.

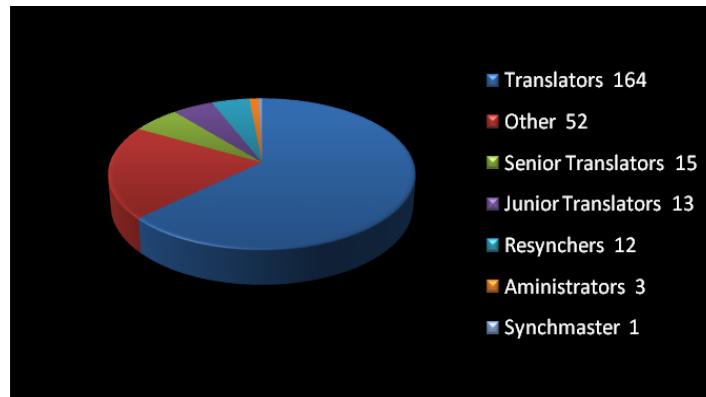
## 4.2.1 THE ITASA METHOD

The first community to be analysed here is *ItaSA*, a large community created in 2006 composed of fansubbers aged between sixteen and thirty, with the end-user belonging to the same age group. When *ItaSA* was first approached over two years ago, an analysis of the homepage of their website ([www.italiansubs](http://www.italiansubs)) and their forum was the first task. This is displayed in figure 4.

It represents the manner in which a junior translator — “traduttore junior” — is able to access the private translation area or “Pannello Itasiano” of the forum. On the left, there is a list of notifications of the fansubs that have just been submitted, while on the right there is a list of teams to which the fansubber in question belongs. A list of TV genres translated is followed by another table displaying the details relating to the specific episode, being accessed under “traduzioni” (“translations”), namely the deadline (“scadenza”), the TV show genre, the “status” — team available or unavailable —, the number of fansubbers needed (“posti”) and the name of the reviser (“revisore”) appointed for the translation of the programme.

The workflow seems very well-organized and professional for a group of unpaid and untrained translators, a group which has currently reached almost 260 members. The roles of the *ItaSA* members within the community are summarised in the following table (figure 2).

## ITASA STAFF (260 members)



**Fig. 2** Average figures referred to May-June 2012.

“Junior translators” are the new would-be fansubbers, the translators who have passed the entry test and must demonstrate their skills to the community. “Translators” are qualified fansubbers who have passed the trial period, while “senior translators” are the subbers who have been promoted to the role of revisers after a certain period of time spent in the fan group. “Resynchers” are also listed among the various roles covered. They are responsible for adjusting the spotting in the fansubbed version to accord with the various versions available online<sup>33</sup>.

There are also “synchmasters”, who are responsible for teaching would-be translators the art of timing, and finally the “administrators” who take care of the website and “run the fansubbing company.”<sup>34</sup>

The fansubbing ‘assembly line’ and its internal structure have been described in detail in chapter 2. We should, therefore, now turn to an analysis

<sup>33</sup> For example: NORMAL or 264, HD or 720p, FULL HD or 1080p, WEB-DL from iTunes, and DVDRip from DVDs, depending on the resolution chosen for the video.

<sup>34</sup> In order to explain their work, ItaSA uploaded two interesting videos on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com): ItaSa Faq 1.1: [www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=Ixs0ogaEvek#!](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=Ixs0ogaEvek#!) ItaSa Faq 1.2: [www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=4crg1L3pI9g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=4crg1L3pI9g)



of the fansubbers' guidelines, focusing on the different approaches differentiating them from professional subtitling norms. *ItaSA*'s "Vademecum for Translators" covers the following points:

1. **Software employed**

*Visual Sub Sync ItaSA Mod, Subtitle Workshop, Miyu, Subtitle Editor, Jubler;*

2. **Translation norms**

- 45 characters per line, on max. 2 lines (90 characters);
- duration: between 1-5 seconds (1 second for monosyllables or two very short words; never reach the 5 seconds, and always keep it lower)
- italics for flashbacks and songs (adding the hash [#] symbol);
- apostrophes instead of diacritics (since video players cannot 'read' them): à, è, ì, ù, ò, become a', e', i', o', u';
- asterisks for doubts regarding translation renderings;
- standard format for the file to be submitted:  
TVshow + episode + fansubber's nickname + part:  
ex. LilBush.1x04.Boby.126-257.

# ITASA'S WEBSITE

**italiansubs.net**  
LA COMMUNITY ITALIANA DEI SOTTOTITOLI

**myitasa**  
Le tue serie preferite sempre a portata di click. Serie consigliate, Afrinità, Ultime novità, RSS personalizzati. E tanto altro... **PROVALO!**

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**::Italian Subs Addicted::** community  
18 Marzo 2010, 12:22:12

Mostra i nuovi posts dalla tua ultima visita.  
Mostra le nuove risposte ai tuoi posts.

News: Sai lo spagnolo? Vuoi diventare traduttore? [Click qui](#) per fare il test!

FORUM HELP RICERCA PROFILO MESSAGGI PREFERITI PANNELLO ITALIANO CALENDARIO UTENTI

ATTIVITÀ CORRENTI | ATTIVITÀ ARCHIVATE | TRADUZIONI DISPONIBILI | TEAM DISPONIBILI **Status: Traduttore Junior**

Pannello Attività Italiane :: ITASA FORUM::

TUTTO | IN CORSO | CONSEGNAE | RILASCIATE

**Notifiche**

- [18/03 02:07] **Daimonion** ha consegnato la traduzione di Medium 6x16
- [17/03 21:43] **daitaro 3** ha consegnato la traduzione di Medium 6x16
- [17/03 11:06] **IML** ha consegnato la traduzione di Medium 6x16
- [17/03 10:04] **Ariasia** ha consegnato la traduzione di Medium 6x16
- [17/03 00:02] **mau\_rizio** ha consegnato la traduzione di Ghost Whisperer 5x16
- [16/03 22:12] **biancave94** ha consegnato la traduzione di Ghost Whisperer 5x16
- [16/03 21:52] **Calimary** ha consegnato la traduzione di Ghost Whisperer 5x16
- [16/03 21:20] **SeM** non fa più parte del team di Ghost Whisperer
- [16/03 12:17] **kirjuve** ha consegnato la traduzione di Ghost Whisperer 5x16
- [16/03 11:56] **frankmars** ha consegnato la traduzione di Medium 6x16
- [15/03 20:17] **inuyash4** ha consegnato la traduzione di Medium 6x16
- [14/03 22:36] **war machine** vuole entrare nel team di Ghost Whisperer
- [14/03 22:27] **bri** ha consegnato la traduzione di Ghost Whisperer 5x16
- [14/03 21:46] **Flond** ha consegnato la traduzione di Ghost Whisperer 5x16

**Team**

<b>The Ghost Team</b>		
Ghost Whisperer		
<b>I premiati</b>		
The Golden Globes Awards		
<b>Gli Psicici</b>		
Medium		
<b>Lo facciamo per la Canalis</b>		
The Academy Awards		
<b>I Lucertoloni</b>		
V		

Traduzioni	Scadenza	Status	Posti	Revisore	Gestione
The Academy Awards 82x01	TBD	Completa	19/4	hnort	

ATTIVITÀ CORRENTI | ATTIVITÀ ARCHIVATE | TRADUZIONI DISPONIBILI | TEAM DISPONIBILI **Status: Traduttore Junior**

Traduzioni attualmente in corso :: ITASA FORUM::

Scelta Genere:

- Action
- Crime
- Horror
- Sit-com
- Tutto
- Adult
- Documentary
- Legal
- Sport
- Anime
- Drama
- Medical
- Teen
- British
- Fantasy
- Musical
- Thriller
- Cartoon
- Film
- Mystery
- Comedy
- Game Show
- Reality
- Costume
- History
- SciFi

Scelta Status: **Aperte**

**Mostra**

**AVVISO:** Prima di partecipare a qualsiasi traduzione vi invitiamo a postare nel topic corrispondente.

Traduzioni	Scadenza	Genere	Status	Posti	Revisore
Metalocalypse 2x12	TBD	Cartoon	Aperta	4/6	gi0v3
Metalocalypse 2x13	TBD	Cartoon	Aperta	3/6	gi0v3
The Mentalist 2x17	TBD	Crime	Aperta	2/7	zefram cochrane
The Secret Life Of The American Teenager 2x20	TBD	Teen	Aperta	6/7	exitmusic
The Office US 2x05	TBD	Comedy	Aperta	3/5	Rhinoceros
The Office US 6x19	TBD	Comedy	Aperta	0/5	chiarachi
Scrubs 9x13	TBD	Comedy	Aperta	4/6	gi0v3
United States of Tara 2x01	TBD	Drama	Aperta	2/5	demgirl
Beautiful People 1x06	TBD	Comedy	Aperta	4/5	hnort
South Park 14x01	TBD	Cartoon	Aperta	5/6	Yossarian
Better Off Ted 2x11	TBD	Comedy	Aperta	1/5	Sheva

Fig. 3. ItaSA's website as displayed by a junior translator (March 2010).

## 4.2.2 SUBSFACTORY’S MODUS OPERANDI

The following guidelines outline *Subsfactory*’s standards for fansubbing. In contrast to *ItaSA*’s, their “Guida del Traduttore” (“guide for translators”) is much longer and more detailed.

Its incipit, which is addressed to future fansubbers, states that:

“The guide you will read is the result of years spent translating, of discussions between subbers and revisers. It is a sort of vademecum for your very first translation and contains the main Italian grammar rules. Reading the guide is not optional, on the contrary, it is compulsory for everyone, since each translation must follow the established conventions.”<sup>35</sup>

Here is a resume of fansubbers’ rules, tips and tricks of the trade:

### 1. **Software employed**

*Jubler, Media Subtitler, Subtitle Workshop, Visual Sub Sync:*

### 2. **Subtitles**

- Maximum 2 lines of no more than 45 characters each.
- Make the lines even, divide up the text into whole sentences, and avoid subtitles like the following:

---

<sup>35</sup> My translation. In the original: “La guida che andrete a leggere è il risultato di anni di traduzioni, di discussioni tra subber e revisori. Serve come vademecum fin dalla vostra prima traduzione e contiene le principali regole di grammatica italiana. La lettura della presente guida non è facoltativa, è obbligatoria per tutti e la traduzione deve avvenire secondo le convenzioni indicate”.

*ex. I ain't saying he shouldn't. I wasn't told to*

*invite him.*

The following would be better:

*ex. I ain't saying he shouldn't.*

*I wasn't told to invite him.*

- Apostrophes instead of diacritics (since video players cannot ‘read’ them): à, è, ì, ù, ò, become a', e', i', o', u'.

### 3. **Timing**

A list of norms follows on after a set of technical instructions on how to use various types of subtitling software (113 pages):

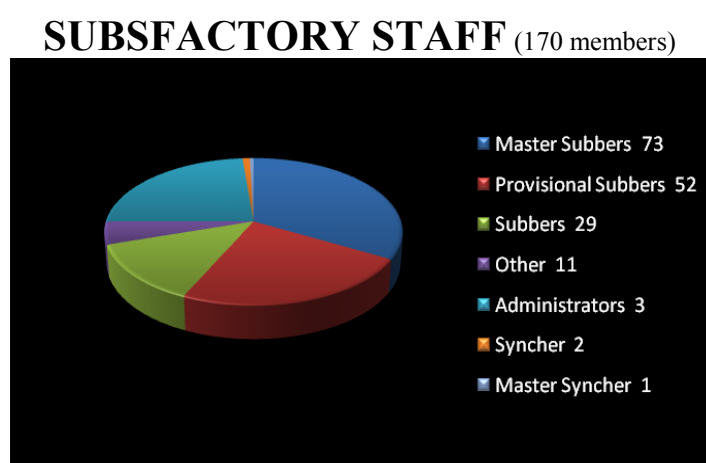
- 1-6 seconds allowed for each subtitle.
- Subtitles expressing humour, suspense and surprise should be treated carefully: never anticipate a piece of information (e.g., punchlines) placing it before the speaker actually utters the sentence containing it.
- Remember to cue text from letters, signs, newspapers etc.

### 4. **Tips**

- First of all, watch the whole episode (with English subtitles or the ‘ts’ provided).
- Synch your part before translating, then edit your subtitles, and finally translate.
- Avoid calques; remember that the structure of Italian sentences is different from English ones.
- Once revised and uploaded on the website, check your translation and read the feedback written by your reviser in order to learn from your mistakes.

Then a list of online resources and glossaries specific to each TV show translated by the community is included.

*Subsfactory* ([www.subsfactory.it](http://www.subsfactory.it), see figure 5) is smaller than *ItaSA* — 170 vs. 260 members (figure 4 below) —, yet judging by their guidelines, they appear to be more accurate and rigorous as far as translation and timing are concerned.



**Fig. 4** Average figures referred to May-June 2012

In addition, fansubbers and fans belonging to the community often reflect on their work in various topics found on their forum. Some of them discuss the difference between professional and amateur subtitles in a specific thread. What emerges from these exchanges is that the majority find fault with the extreme conciseness of mainstream subtitles — “ridotti all’osso”, literally reporting what they wrote, or “cut down to the bone” —, since they seem to convey only the gist of original dialogues, leaving out their stylistic flavour and play on words.

They also believe that subtitles are not meant to facilitate the viewer's experience of a foreign product, but that they should be in tune with the specific audience' requirements concerning faithfulness and accuracy. They affirm that the translation of TV shows should be treated more carefully, given the 'seriality format' which tends to develop a very distinctive inside talk throughout the seasons. Mainstream subtitling is perceived as extremely irritating and condescending so that fansubbers feel betrayed and treated like half-wits who are unable to perceive both the visual and the written codes at the same time. Amateur translators and their followers are the most proficient target audience regarding subtitling, so that it might be appropriate to differentiate between them and the average viewer. Overall, they agree on the fact that the ability to read subtitles is just a question of training: the more you watch subtitled products, the more proficient you become.

Figure 4 above shows the roles of the members of *Subsfactory* within the community. A distinction is made between "provisional subbers", the equivalent of the would-be translator, and "subbers", or translators not yet qualified as "synchers"; "master subbers" who translate and cue subtitles, and finally the site administrators.

Having examined the practices of both communities, we might conclude that a greater number of characters allowed per line is among the most distinctive features of fansubbing, when compared to the reduced freedom characteristic of professional subtitling. It may be argued that fansubs are aesthetically cumbersome, yet there are some positive aspects.

Subbers are left with more space available in order to express the necessary nuances in the source language dialogue — for example the reproduction of an adequate style and register —, aspects that are systematically cut out in professional subtitling. Moreover, they rarely employ the 45 character line, and only when the CPS allow it. The user-friendly guide suggests that, should the lines translated exceed the 45 characters allowed, the subtitling software will be automatically set to solve the problem by splitting the line, or to produce two perfectly symmetrical lines. In accordance with professional subtitling norms, semantic segmentation is paramount in fansubbing. In fact, subbers are strongly advised to produce self-contained lines.

A long list of false friends and common mistakes with regard to punctuation are also included in the fansubbing guidelines, for example the use of capital letters after an ellipsis, the different uses of punctuation in English and Italian, and above all, the correct use of diacritical marks and apostrophes. As already mentioned in this section, apart from the freedom derived from the 45 permissible characters per line, the paramount feature of “abusive subtitling” is the “source-oriented” approach to translation, a topic which will be examined in the next section, which is devoted to the ‘hybrid proposal’ posited in the thesis.

# SUBSFACTORY'S WEBSITE

**News:** Hai Facebook o Twitter? Per essere sempre aggiornato sui sottotitoli e sulle news delle tue serie preferite, diventa Fan o Follower di Subsfactory!

HOME HOME FORUM HELP RICERCA PROFILO MESSAGGI CALENDARIO UTENTI DOWNLOAD SOTTOTITOLI LOGOUT

**subsfactory.it**

Hai Facebook o Twitter? Per essere sempre aggiornato sui sottotitoli e sulle news delle tue serie preferite, diventa Fan o Follower di Subsfactory!

**Regolamento**

**Il Regolamento di Subsfactory**  
Leggere con attenzione!

1 Posts  
1 Topics

**Ultimo post** da SF  
in REGOLAMENTO DI  
SUBSFACTO...  
il Lunedì 30 Agosto 2010 22:11 22

**SUBSFACTORY.IT**

	<b>STATO AVANZAMENTO TRADUZIONI</b> Quando escono i sottotitoli per...? I dati di questa board sono aggiornati direttamente dai nostri traduttori !!!	243 Posts 241 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da webmistress (aka superbgi) in Re: SUPERNATURAL STAGIONE 8 il Oggi alle 08:57
	<b>Richieste sottotitoli e segnalazione errori suggerimenti</b> per segnalare errori, fare richieste. <i>Moderatore: indierocknroll</i>	8287 Posts 2177 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da somebodyto in Re: serie tv - vegas il Oggi alle 09:54
	<b>News e dicono di noi...</b> riguardanti subsfactory	1036 Posts 101 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da kolt in Re: DONAZIONI il Venerdì 28 Settembre 2012 20:32 20
	<b>Presentazioni</b> Presentatevi qui alla nostra community	11506 Posts 1298 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da Kal-Earth2 in Re: Ciao a tutti!! il Oggi alle 00:06
	<b>Staff</b> Entra a far parte dello staff!	67756 Posts 3839 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da Debug in Photoshop addicted, crea... il Oggi alle 09:51

**Boards Secondarie:** [Suggerimenti](#) [Richieste evase, problemi risolti e thread chiusi](#) [Guide](#)

**Boards Secondarie:** [Traduttori](#) [Collaborazioni](#) [Moderatori e Blogmaster](#) [Area Transcript dall'audio](#) [Area Svago Staff](#)

**TELEFILM**

	<b>ALTRI TELEFILM</b> per commentare le serie che non hanno una loro sezione!	33499 Posts 1495 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da valussa in Re: BONES il Teri alle 22:21
	<b>News da telefilmelandia</b>	1020 Posts 198 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da nocturnalconcerto in Re: Upfronta 2012 - Il p... il Domenica 23 Settembre 2012 13:54 13
	<b>American Horror Story</b> <i>Moderatore: seanma</i>	692 Posts 11 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da seanma in Re: American Horror Stor... il Lunedì 24 Settembre 2012 08:49 08
	<b>Battlestar Galactica e Caprica</b> <i>Moderatore: zenzero</i>	1041 Posts 104 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da Kal-Earth2 in SPOSTATO: Sub miniserie il Venerdì 09 Marzo 2012 17:45 17
	<b>Californication</b> Visitate il nostro sito dedicato a Californication	228 Posts 49 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da lalastro in Re: [SONDAGGIO] - Vota l... il Venerdì 20 Luglio 2012 14:56 14
	<b>Cartoons</b> <i>Moderatore: Anksol</i>	919 Posts 89 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da Kal-Earth2 in SPOSTATO: Young Justice ... il Sabato 04 Agosto 2012 01:19 01
	<b>Castle</b> <i>Moderatori: Dia, valussa</i>	661 Posts 12 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da Dia in Re: Promo & sneak peek il Teri alle 21:52
	<b>Chuck</b> <i>Moderatore: indierocknroll</i>	693 Posts 66 Topics	<b>Ultimo post</b> da all_pal in Re: [COMMENTI] Chuck 5x1... il Domenica 12 Febbraio 2012 15:04 15

Fig. 5 Subsfactory's website as displayed by a provisional subber (March 2010)



A screenshot of *Subsfactory*'s homepage has been included at the end of this section (see figure 5) as a way to display the main threads in the forum, namely the regulations (regolamento del forum), translation status (stato avanzamento traduzioni), staff area where fansubbers are able to coordinate their activities, and a list of the current TV programmes translated.

## 4.3 A HYBRID PROPOSAL

*“There is a potential and emerging subtitling practice that accounts for the unavoidable limits in time and space of the subtitle, a practice that does not feign completeness, that does not hide its presence through restrictive rules.”*

*(Nornes 1999:13)*

The issue of subtitling norms has attracted the interest of researchers over the past few decades (cf. Toury 1981; Nord 1997; Chesterman 1997; Ivarsson and Carroll 1998; Karamitroglou 1998; Hermans 1999; Carroll et al. 2004; Pedersen 2011).

These norms will be analysed in the present chapter from the perspective of Toury’s Descriptive Translation Studies (1995). In other words, the evolution of subtitling conventions as a result of the empirical observation of translational behaviour (Pedersen 2011) will be examined. Since there is no unanimous consensus of opinion as far as the term ‘norm’ is concerned, Chesterman’s concept of “expectancy and operational norms” (1997) will be referred to here, understood in the sense that, while “expectancy norms”

indicate the audience's expectations of subtitled products, "professional norms" refer to the universally accepted rules followed by translators (cf. Sokoli 2011:21-27).

In his 1998 paper, "A Proposed Set of Subtitling Standards in Europe", Karamitroglou has attempted to classify a series of subtitling standards enabling European countries to operate as a single unit. He argues that, although the sudden departure from long-established conventions might seem difficult at first, the introduction of minor changes to these established norms could be gradually accepted over time. Despite the challenge involved in keeping up with the very latest developments and cultural trends, production companies, customers commissioning the subtitles and professional translators, should all make an effort to adapt to this constant process of social and technological transformations (Hermans 1999).

The subtitling conventions covered by Karamitroglou (1998) are analysed below:

1. **General aim** Facilitate access to audiovisual products by favouring the readability of the subtitles produced.
2. **Layout** Subtitles, which are positioned on the lower part of the screen, should be displayed on a maximum of two lines with around 35 characters per line (40 characters would reduce the readability); the font colour should be white.

3. **Duration** The average reading speed (viewers aged from fourteen to sixty-five, from an upper-middle socio-educational class) ranges between 150-180 words per minute (between 2.5-3 words per second).
4. **Segmentation** In a two-liner each subtitle should display a semantically self-contained sentence, “as equal in length as possible, since the [...] eye is more accustomed to reading text in a rectangular rather than a triangular format.” (ibid: 1998).
5. **Omission** Translators are not requested to transfer everything, “even when this is spatio-temporally feasible” (ibid: 1998). As a consequence, the elements that are classified as irrelevant are normally sacrificed in subtitling, including false starts, redundant words (repetitions, indicators of politeness), discourse markers (e.g., well, so, but), down-toners and intensifiers (e.g., nearly, almost; utterly, really).

However, sometimes, these apparently nonessential features have the valuable function of conveying both characterisation and the style of an audiovisual product (for further details, see the case studies analysed in chapter 5).

By using Karamitroglou's codes of practice as a benchmark, it is possible to single out the main deviations detected in the translational behaviour of fansubbers. Concerning their general aims, subbers belonging to both *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*, state that the main purpose of their translations is faithfulness to the source text within the set of spatio-temporal constraints that allows for up to 45 characters per line (a limit seldom reached). As far as reading speed, punctuation and segmentation parameters are concerned, amateur practices are almost identical to professional ones. Conversely, the topic of omission is treated rather differently. Subbers aim to convey 'everything' belonging to the original dialogues, deeming it of paramount importance to detach themselves from the mainstream practices of "domestication" and the excessive conciseness of professional subtitling, while, "moving the viewer towards the movie", to paraphrase a well-known assertion made by Schleiermacher in 1813 (Lefevere 1977:74).

The majority of subtitling manuals suggest that perfect subtitles should pass unnoticed and guide the spectator through the viewing experience by minimising any graphical 'disturbance'. As a consequence, after being suitably adapted to the receiving culture, they should flow naturally as if written in the local tongue. Yet, in 1999, prior to the Italian fansubbing phenomenon, Nornes argued that it was time to rethink audiovisual modes of translation, given the significant function played by multiculturalism and diversity in our societies.

Since the new millennium, which was characterised by major technological breakthroughs, for example the advent of Web 2.0, a factor that dramatically altered the essentially passive role of consumers concerning audiovisual goods, following the same routines has proved to be unacceptable.

Seen in this light, what professional subtitlers discard *a priori* as a textual and graphic violation, may end up constituting a new experimental field in translation. This is fansubbing's major contribution to translation studies.

The first scholar to have introduced the concept of 'abusive translation' was Lewis in 1985. His post-structuralist approach sheds light on current fansubbing norms, highlighting the fact that translation should represent an accurate interpretation of the source text, even if the adoption of a "source-oriented" approach leads to profound alterations of the syntactic and structural boundaries imposed by the target language. Venuti (2004) clearly described the task of 'abusive subtitlers' by quoting Nornes in *The Translation Studies Reader*:

"The abusive subtitler assumes a respectful stance vis-à-vis the original text, tampering with both language and the subtitling apparatus itself" so as to signal the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign film. He imagines a range of experimental procedures that include different styles of the translating language to match the stylistic peculiarities of the screenplay, as well as changes in the font, colour, and positioning of the subtitles to complement the visual and aural qualities of the film. (Venuti, 2004:332)

More recently, Colm Caffrey (2009) has pointed out that the advent of Web 2.0 has had a major influence on the development of co-creative online communities, allowing untrained and amateur subtitlers to translate and share ‘abusive subtitles’ that break free from professional graphic and linguistic norms in order to produce a more transparent and authentic translation. Abusive subtitling appears to challenge the ‘corrupt’ mainstream procedures which obscure the original from its end-viewers (Nornes 2004).

While Jenkins (1992) was the first academic to perceive amateur practices as a form of resistance to the media industry, Nornes was the first to define mainstream standards as ‘corrupt practices’ aiming to hide the original otherness by causing it to conform to a strictly “target-oriented” and conservative structure (1999).

The umbrella term ‘corruption’ embraces a variety of translational behaviours defined by Danan (1991) as ‘nationalisation’, for example the almost systematic and relatively widespread practice current in Italian audiovisual translation of aggressively appropriating the source text by converting foreign popular names into their target text equivalents, even though the addressees are perfectly capable of understanding them.

In addition, owing to the global economic crisis, freelance subtitlers often work on Rich Text files exported from subtitling software programmes, or ‘templates’, where the source language is simply replaced by the target text. Needless to say, this *modus operandi*, which is meant to cut the costs of software dongles, is also a way of retaining the obsolete norms set during the age of the Hollywood studio system (Nornes 1999; Díaz-Cintas in Anon.

2012). In fact, the very fact that they are precluded from performing the cueing process can only further reduce the already limited amount of freedom open to the translators themselves. Díaz-Cintas argued that:

“When the timing has been done by a professional other than the translator, the latter’s freedom can be severely restricted. [...] if translators could do their own spotting, they could be more flexible and make a more rational use of the spaces needed for any given subtitle”. (2002:2-3)

According to Kapsasis, the current subtitling trend in which the work is performed directly on template files is inadvisable:

“Until the early days of DVD subtitling, the subtitling process consisted in two major tasks: a technical task, [...] the timing of the subtitles, [...] and the translation, directly from the audiovisual material. Often the same person would carry out both tasks, thus fully “originating” a subtitling file.” (2011:2).

Similarly, Georgakopoulou (2006: 30) highlighted the fact that “thanks to the development of dedicated subtitling software, subtitlers could [...] spot the film themselves and then write their translations so as to fit the time slots they had spotted”. Conversely, fansubbers, working outside the professional translation industry, and fulfilling the role of both ‘synchers’ and translators, are responsible for, and are in greater control of the whole subtitling process.

In this study, the limits of mainstream practices will be explored in order to encourage a debate on new approaches more in tune with the demands of the contemporary target audience and specifically addressing the issue of compartmentalisation of subtitling audiences.



In his study on fansubbing, Pérez-González writes:

“Fansubs are subtitled versions [...] that fans (amateur subtitlers) produce primarily to express their disagreement with commercial subtitling practices and to impose linguistic and cultural mediation strategies of their own” (2007:4).

The fans’ complaint concerns the process of dissimulation of the source text, and as a result, its distorted representation, since “subtitles [are] rarely used to enhance viewer awareness [...]. The defamiliarizing effect of subtitles is thus played down, since they no longer bring about a rupture of the filmic flow.” (Kapsaskis 2008:8).

Against this background, a ‘hybrid proposal’ was felt to be appropriate, namely a well-balanced blend of the best resources used both by professionals and amateurs. In this regard, Chesterman’s concept of “expectancy norms” (1997) appears to be central to this approach, as it originates precisely from what viewers expect and above all demand: “Expectancy norms are established by the expectations of readers of a translation (of a given type) concerning what a translation (of this type) should be like” (ibid.: 64).

Provided that the use of this theoretical framework is accepted, “source-orientedness” will be the core approach of this proposal, a method inspired by the work of Schleiermacher (1813) and further developed by Lewis (1985), Nornes (1999), and Venuti (2008).

Whether we define this method as “foreignisation”, “abusive fidelity”, or “source-orientedness”, the idea is to move from a fluent, domesticated, transparent translation to an “overt” kind of translation (House 1977), in order to preserve the cultural and linguistic flavour of the original.

The successful outcome is “a translation that values experimentation, tampers with usage, seeks to match the polyvalencies [...] of the original by producing its own” (Lewis 1985:41). Hence, not only is this approach openly “source-oriented”, but also “viewer-centric”, since the end-viewers, with their growing demands for a revolution in the niche area of the subtitling of TV shows, are central to the reshaping of subtitling norms. Thus, having outlined the theoretical approach to translation it is now appropriate to return to the concept of expectancy norms for which translation standards are set by the expectations of the receivers.

Among the main complaints made by the adherents of fansubbing is the style employed by professional subtitling, described as flattening and inconveniently imprecise. Other characteristics include the incompetent rendering of special jargon (e.g. nerdy slang), cultural references — tributes to cult movies and TV shows—, and inside jokes, only accessible to true connoisseurs of a specific TV series. Ultimately, this translates into a set of minor modifications to the traditional subtitling apparatus, which will be outlined below.

1. **General aim** To allow viewers to appreciate the audiovisual product by strictly adhering to the style, the flavour and the cultural and linguistic diversity of the original dialogues, paying particular attention to the niche audience addressed.
2. **Layout** Normally positioned on the lower part of the screen (on the upper part when on-screen text appears), subtitles should be displayed on two lines with a maximum of 45 characters per line (between 42-43 being the best option). The font colour should usually be white, but it could also be of a different colour if necessary.
3. **Omission** Translators are requested to transfer everything they can within the spatio-temporal constraints imposed. Repetitions, false starts and redundant elements should be left out, while cultural references and semantic voids should always be rendered by employing loanwords (e.g., cultural-bound expressions explicitated by notes), neologisms (e.g., derived from youth culture slang) in order for obscure foreign concepts to enter the target culture.

As for duration, punctuation and segmentation, the codes of practice are exactly the same as those described in Karamitroglou and Ivarsson and Carroll's guidelines. In conclusion, this proposal stems from specific theoretical approaches giving prominence to faithfulness in translation in order to come to a set of norms allowing increased freedom to subtitlers.

Thus, subtitles would no longer act as guidance, but as a vehicle able to convey cultural and linguistic ‘otherness’ where the touch of the subtitler is made visible.

In the next chapter, which is focused on the case study of the American TV show *Lost*, the consequences of the resistance of amateurs will be examined in depth, showing how subtitling professionals seem to have taken advantage of fansubbed versions without acknowledging their contribution.

# CHAPTER 5

## EVOLUTION OF FANSUBBING COMMUNITIES

The following section is devoted to the analysis of a case study focusing on the TV show *Lost*.

It is a comparative analysis of episode one of the second season and episode one of the final season of *Lost*, aiming to identify the key features of fansubbing and trace the evolution of amateurs' methodologies over time.

The progress made by fansubbers as far as translation, timing and workflow are concerned, will be traced by comparing the fansubbed and the subtitled versions, in order to measure the quality of their work over a six-year period.

## 5.1 *LOST*: FROM INITIAL STRUGGLE TO HAPPY ENDING

*Lost* is a sci-fi TV show created by J. Lieber, J. J. Abrams and D. Lindelof and aired on *ABC* from September 2004 to May 2010. It is an account of the 324 survivors of the crash of Oceanic Airlines Flight 815 on a deserted tropical island. For the first time on TV, the audience was presented with a complex, nonlinear storyline developed with an extensive use of ‘flash-sideways’, a combination of flash-backs and flash-forwards, served with a pinch of mythological elements and written using a multiple narrative perspective device called “polyphonic narrative” (Cate 2009). With such narrative novelties, along with the large ensemble cast, and the cost of filming, mostly set in the breath-taking location of Oahu, Hawaii, it is no small wonder that it was to become the most successful TV drama of all time.

As a way to trace the evolution of fansubbing practices, in the case study under analysis, episode one of the second season of *Lost*, broadcast in Italy in 2005, is investigated and compared with the first episode of the final season. It was decided to start with the second season rather than the first owing to the issue of workflow standardisation. In fact, while during the first season the communities’ approach to fansubbing was relatively casual and erratic, they began to employ a set of translation guidelines and a series of cueing standards that permitted a reliable analysis of the process from season two on.

## 5.1.1 KEY FEATURES OF FANSUBBING

The following investigation takes into account three different versions of the first episode of season two, *ItaSA*'s, *Subsfactory*'s and the official version commercialised on DVD. The main traits of fansubbing will be highlighted through the use of screenshots, and the various mistranslations, formatting and cueing mistakes made by the two fan groups during the very first stage of their work as translators will be examined, comparing them with professional standards.

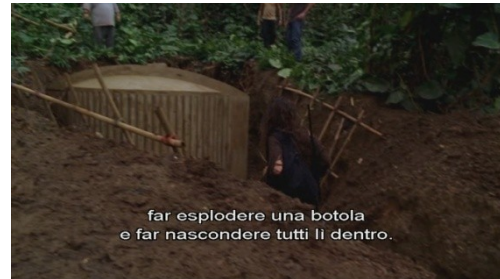
We will analyse a set of features common to fansubbing attempting to distinguish among different translation issues, namely line length and characters per second, text on screen, measurements and conversions, terminology and mistranslations, and interference from other audiovisual translations modes.

## 5.1.2 LINE LENGTH AND CHARACTERS PER SECOND

The first topic under analysis is line length of the subtitles, introduced by the screenshots below (1 A-B).



Screenshot 1A - *Subfactory*



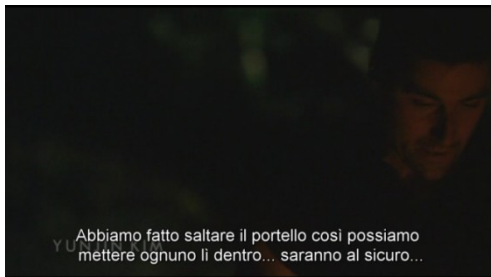
Screenshot 1B (IT) - DVD

The standard characters allowed in mainstream subtitling (35-40 characters) and fansubbing (45 characters) have been listed in chapter 4 on subtitling and fansubbing standards. Even though fansubbing guidelines allow for 45 characters per line, the images below show an editing mistake on the part of subbers, a one-liner composed of 63 characters that literally invades the bottom of the screen thus making it inconveniently long and hard for the viewers to read. On the other hand, screenshot 1B shows how the same subtitle is rendered with a two-liner and a good formatting procedure in the DVD version.

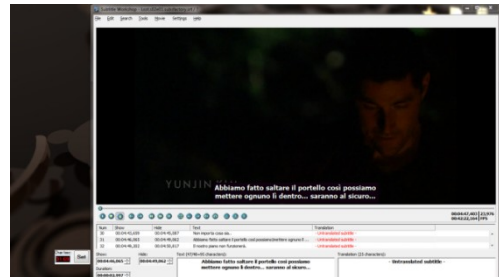
A parallel topic is the one relating to CPS (characters per second) constraint. It is extremely important to strike a balance between the number of characters employed and the time exposure of the subtitle.



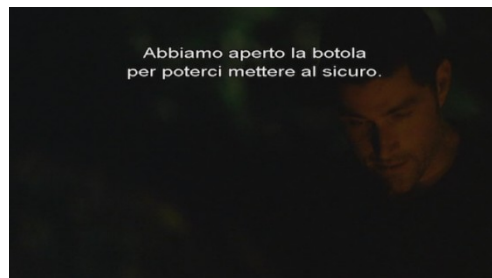
Once again, *Subtitle Workshop* developers created an add-in programme called *CPS Auto-checker* in order to verify that the harmony between the parameters noted above is always achieved. In the following example (screenshot 2A), fansubbers produced a two-liner made up of a total of 95 characters within a time span of nearly three seconds which is highlighted in red a s a mistake by the *CPS Auto-checker* (see screenshot 2B).



Screenshot 2 A - Subsfactory



Screenshot 2 B - CPS Auto-checker



Screenshot 2 C - DVD

In the official version above (screenshot 2C), we can see that the source text is condensed and that the characters per second limitation is balanced with the time exposure of the subtitle.

## 5.1.3 TEXT ON SCREEN AND POSITION OF SUBTITLES

In the following example (screenshot 3A-B) the issue of non-verbal visual signs and text on screen is addressed. The images show a keyboard key sign and its translation into Italian.



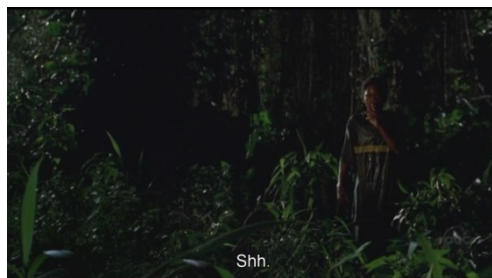
Screenshot 3 A (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 3 B - *Subsfactory*

In *Subsfactory*'s version the visual sign is untranslated. In fact, in the early stages of fansubbing this type of mistake was quite frequent, so that it appears that either the subbers did not consider it appropriate to translate it or perhaps it simply passed unnoticed.

Conversely, fansubbers added subtitles even it was unnecessary, for example in the following image (screenshot 4) where a character utters “shush!” the equivalent fansub reads “Shh.”.



Screenshot 4 - *Subsfactory*

As a rule, interjections are always omitted in professional subtitling because the viewers recognise the communicative intention behind them. Words like “oh” and “ehm” and so on do not need any translation as they are universally understood and also because the image speaks for itself.

Yet, they are transcribed by fansubbers as if they were producing SDH subtitles. This tendency may be due to the source text employed, the so-called “ts”, a sort of transcription of TV captions (see chapter 3 for more details).

Following on from the issue of text on screen, let us turn to screenshot 5A below. Both *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*'s fansubbed versions display the subtitles over the credits, making them confusing and sloppy. It might have been that, at that time, fansubbers were not yet able to master the use of the subtitling software employed. In *Subtitle Workshop*, one of the most frequently used open source software programmes, the position of the subtitles is controlled by a tag, hence by just adding `{\an8}` at the beginning of the subtitle, it simply moves upwards. Both the fansubbed and the official versions that display the correct position of the subtitle on top of the screen are shown in the following screenshots (5 A-B).



Screenshot 5 A - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 5 B - DVD

A frequent mistake encountered in the fansubbed versions is the translation of the subject pronoun into Italian. As a rule, subject pronouns are regularly omitted in Italian, since the verb form indicates the subject. The following figures (screenshots 6A and 6B) and the table below show how the DVD version omits the subject pronoun in favour of a more fluent and less literal translation. In addition the fact that fewer characters have been used allows for a better adaption.



Screenshot 6 A - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 6 B - DVD

ORIGINAL DIALOGUE	
We'll never get everyone down in time.	
SUBSFACTORY'S VERSION	DVD VERSION
Noi non metteremo tutti li dentro in tempo.	Non riusciremo mai a far scendere tutti in tempo.

Tab. 1

As is shown in screenshots 5 and 6, the subtitles in the DVD version have been moved to the top of the screen so as not to overwrite the text on screen, while in both fansubbed versions they are located at the bottom. This practice is sometimes used in fansubbing, but it depends on the tastes of the revisor and on the popularity of the TV show translated (screenshots 7 A-C below).



Screenshot 7 A - DVD



Screenshot 7 B - ItaSA

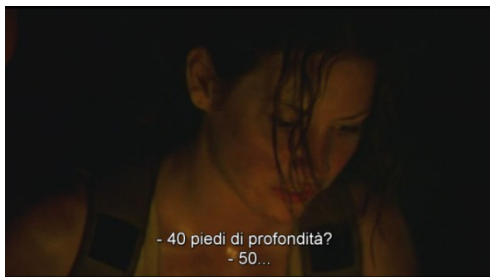


Screenshot 7 C - Subsfactory

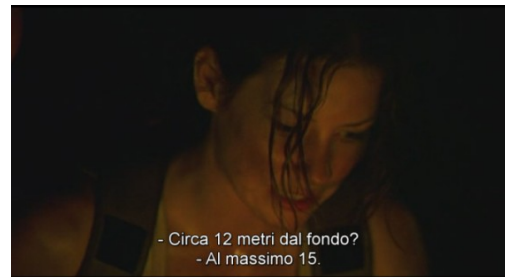
As we can see, in both fansubbed versions the subtitles have been left at the bottom obscuring the initial credits of the show, although the same mistakes does not occur in the DVD version.

## 5.1.4 MEASUREMENTS AND CONVERSION

During the translation phase, the professional subtitling practice is to convert measurements as a way of facilitating the comprehension of the target audience. In screenshot 8 A-B, *Subsfactory*'s version, which leaves the original imperial measurement (feet) without converting it into its metric equivalent, is displayed, while screenshot 8B shows that the measurement has been converted in *ItaSA*'s fansubs.

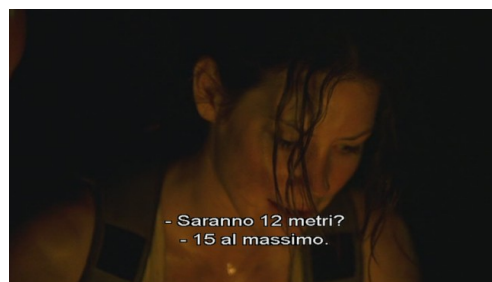


Screenshot 8 A - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 8 B - *ItaSA*

And here is the official translation:



Screenshot 8 C - DVD

Once again, in this stage, the behaviour of the fansubbers has proved to be erratic. In the source dialogue the characters say: “Kate: - 40 feet down/John: - 50, tops”. As we can see in screenshot 8C, *ItaSA*’s conversion is correct, and the translation is almost the same as the official one.

### 5.1.5 INTERFERENCES FROM DUBBESE

Every once in a while, other audiovisual translation modes may interfere with amateur translation practices. Influences from ‘dubbese’, a variety of the language of dubbing, are prevalent in fansubbing versions. The artificial language adopted in dubbed films resorts to calques from American English in order to create a touch of orality. Although the neologisms created by dubbese do not belong to the Italian spoken language, they have, nevertheless, become part of conversational routines in film dialogues (Filmer 2011).

The following is an example of the hybridisation between this variety of language and the amateur subtitling style.



Screenshot 9 A (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 9 B - *Subsfactory*

The source text reads: “The French woman is missing a bloody wing nut”. While in the DVD version the translation tends to mitigate the effects of the original expression (back translation: “the French woman has a screw loose”), in *Subsfactory*'s it is rendered quite literally, using the expression “fottuta pazza” (“bloody wing nut”), where the Italian adjective “fottuta” is a loan from dubbese, the “hybrid language used by the Italian dubbing industry to transpose both fictional and non-fictional foreign TV and cinema productions” (Antonini 2009:3). Dubbing routines, in fact, have a tendency to employ the adjectival intensifier “fottuta” in order to render the American English equivalent of “fucking”, “frigging” and “bloody”. Fansubbers seem to act similarly when dealing with these aspects of language, perhaps because they have been exposed to dubbing for too long a period.

It is surely worth noting that the translation of the term “dude” constitutes another interesting case in the TV show, particularly when it is pronounced by the actor playing the role of Harley (screenshots 10 A-D).



Screenshot 10 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 10 B (IT) - DVD





In their fansubbed version, *ItaSA*, quite creatively, has opted for the neologism “coso” (back translation: “thing” plus the male suffix -o), a choice heavily influenced by dubbing. The example provided below attempts to shed light on style, an aspect often neglected by mainstream subtitling. As a rule, professional subtitling guidelines omit redundant elements considered to be irrelevant. Yet, at times translating apparently superfluous words serves the valuable purpose of conveying the source text style. This function is rather important if we are to analyse the protagonist of the following scene, Hugo "Hurley" Reyes, played by Jorge Garcia, *Lost*'s comic relief.

As was previously mentioned, in the dubbed version of the show this important aspect of translation was conveyed by employing the neologism “coso” (see Screenshot 10 D above) when the character utters the word “dude”.

## 5.1.6 MISTRANSLATIONS:

### WHEN PROFESSIONALS GO WRONG

At an earlier stage of fansubbing, a distinguishing trait was that of source text mistranslations. In the scene under analysis we have a flashback set in the E.R. where one of the characters (Jack) used to work before the plane crashed on the mysterious island. A patient arrives and the nurse introduces her case saying: “Female, late twenties, no ID”. *Subsfactory* translated it as follows: “Femmina in ritardo 20s, nessuna identificazione”, where “late” refers to the woman who “seems to be late”, producing a sentence that does not make sense at all. On the other hand, the DVD version leaves out the fact that she has no ID and produces a two liner adding another piece of information: “She coded twice”.



Screenshot 11 A - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 11 B - DVD

*ItaSA*'s version reads as follows:



Screenshot 11 C - *ItaSA*

Another interesting case of mistranslation on the part of fansubbers is shown in the following screenshots (12 A-D).



Screenshot 12 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 12 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 12 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 12 D - *ItaSA*

In the professional version the word “lottery” is adapted and rendered as “lotto”, for no apparent reason, since “lotteria” is the perfect equivalent in the target language. The translation in the DVD version is quite arbitrary, but is still acceptable. In *Subsfactory*'s fansubs, “burrito” becomes “ice cream” (“gelato”), while in *ItaSA*'s translation “frozen” becomes “deep fried” (“fritto”).

This kind of mistake may unintentionally appear to be quite hilarious, yet it reveals the level of inaccuracy of the two fansubbing communities at this particular stage in their work.

Another example concerns the source text expression “chicken joint” and is rendered as follows:



Screenshot 13 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 13 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 13 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 13 D - *ItaSA*

While the DVD version translates it correctly as “fast food”, *Subsfactory* leaves it untranslated and *ItaSA* makes up a neologism, “catena di polli” which has no meaning in the target language. As a matter of fact, the character in question (Harley) used to work at “Mr. Clucks”, a chicken restaurant, or more precisely a fast food joint. In the case of *Subsfactory*, at a very early stage of fansubbing, a sort of ‘loanword strategy’ was used every time the transfer of certain concepts was unclear.

On the other hand, *ItaSA* employed a calque where an Italian equivalent was ready-made: the hypernym “fast food” is sufficient to explain the source text expression even if it does not specify the type of food served in this kind of restaurant.

The following example focuses on the translation of the term “folks”, which in American English is used to address group of people in an informal way.

This is illustrated in the following screenshots (14 A-B):



Screenshot 14 A (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 14 B (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 14 C – *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 14 D - *ItaSA*

In this scene one of the characters suggests that the party should wait for a group of survivors who tried to get away from the island in order to ask for help because the ‘others’, or the enemies, were coming.

The following table shows how the source text expression “brave folks” was rendered in the three versions:

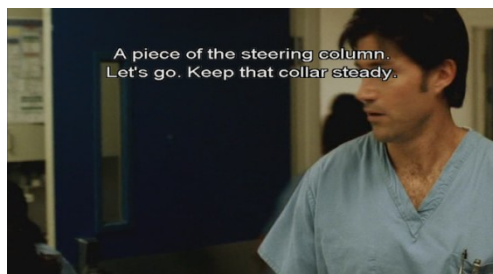
ORIGINAL DIALOGUE	
Wait for the brave folks on the raft to bring help.	
DVD VERSION	BACK TRANSLATION
Aspettare che <b>quelli</b> della zattera chiedano aiuto.	Wait that <b>those of the raft</b> ask for help.
ITASA’S VERSION	BACK TRANSLATION
Aspettare i “ <b>nostri eroi</b> ” sulla zattera che ci portino gli aiuti.	Wait for <b>our heroes</b> on the raft who bring help.
SUBFACTORY’S VERSION	BACK TRANSLATION
Aspettiamo i <b>popoli coraggiosi</b> sulla zattera che ci portano aiuto,	Let’s wait for <b>the brave peoples</b> on the raft who bring help.

Tab. 2

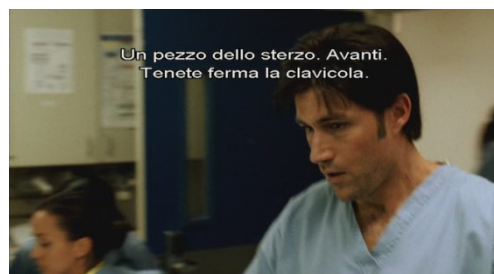
The official translation opted for levelling out the source text and omitted the adjective “brave”, while *ItaSA*’s choice was to employ the strategy of explicitation by transposing the concept elicited by the term “brave” into the noun “eroi” (“heroes”). *Subsfactory*, unfortunately, gave a literal rendering of the expression, consequently misrepresenting the intended meaning of “folks” with “peoples” (“popoli”).

Professional subtitlers occasionally make ghastly mistakes, and the following screenshots (15 A-D) show an interesting case of mistranslation.

In the scene in the E.R. mentioned above (screenshots 11 A-C), another patient is brought in by the paramedics:



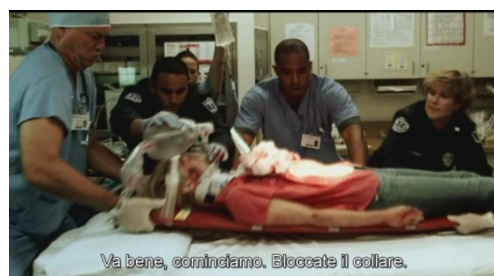
Screenshot 15 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 15 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 15 C - Subsfactory



Screenshot 15 D - ItaSA

The following table shows the three different versions examined and particularly how the source text term “collar” was rendered.

ORIGINAL DIALOGUE	
A piece of the steering column. Let's go. Keep that collar steady.	
DVD VERSION	BACK TRANSLATION
Un pezzo dello sterzo. Avanti. Tenete ferma la clavicola.	A piece of the steering column. Let's go. Keep that <b>collar-bone</b> steady.
SUBFACTORY'S VERSION	BACK TRANSLATION
Ok iniziamo... tieni quel colletto fermo.	Ok, let's start. Keep the <b>collar of the shirt</b> steady.
ITASA'S VERSION	BACK TRANSLATION
Va bene, cominciamo. Bloccate il collare.	Ok, let's start. Keep the <b>cervical collar</b> steady.

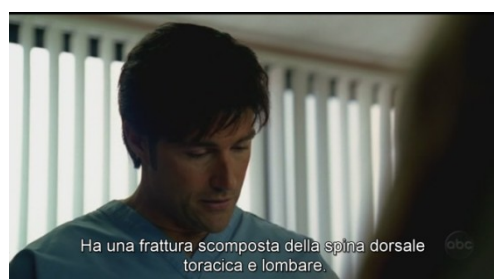
Tab. 3



Here, the problem revolves around the polysemy of the term “collar”: it may refer to a body part, a garment or a medical device. Its meaning is, in fact, apparently quite clear: a wounded patient has just entered the emergency room and is wearing a collar in order to keep his neck straight and to support the head. Hence, just by translating what is represented in the images, it is apparent that the correct translation is the one produced by *ItaSA* (screenshot 15 C).



Screenshot 16 A (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 16 B - ItaSA

Another case of mistranslation related to medical terminology is illustrated in screenshots 16 A-B. The source text expression, “fracture dislocation” is rendered as “frattura dislocata” in the DVD version, while the correct Italian equivalent should be “frattura scomposta”, and the term “spine”, rendered as “spina”, ought to be “rachide” in the target language.

This kind of mistake demonstrates the poor quality of terminology research on the part of professional subtitlers in contrast to *ItaSA*’s more accurate translation of the same medical expressions, where “spine” is rendered as “spina dorsale” which is a perfectly acceptable variation of “rachide”.



The last instance of mistranslation on the part of subtitlers revolves around the meaning of the verb “roll around”. In one of the many flashbacks in the TV show, the main character’s flow of thought sends the viewer back to a time when, before the air crash, he used to work as a doctor and was talking to one of his patients. The woman in question was about to get married when she had an accident in which she was left completely paralysed.



Screenshot 17 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 17 B (IT) - DVD

The phrasal verb “to roll round” defines the activity of moving on wheels, or using a wheelchair. In the DVD version it was translated simply as “roll”, which seems rather out of context. *ItaSA*, on the other hand, came up with a free translation into Italian, “comportarmi normalmente” (back translation: “act normally”), which bears no relation to the source language verb.



Screenshot 17 C - ItaSA

## 5.2 EVOLUTION OF ITASA AND SUBFACTORY

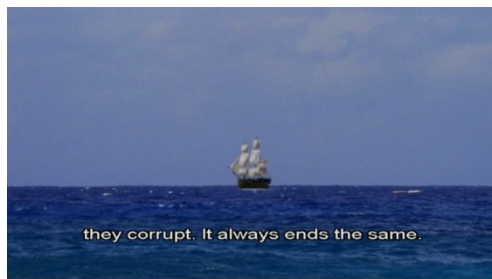
The final season of *Lost* was aired in Italy in 2010, almost in real time with the United States. What is more, on 24 May 2010, a unique event took place: the final episode of the series was aired simultaneously by *NBC* in the United States, *Sky1* in the United Kingdom, *Fox Italia* in Italy, and many more countries world-wide. In Italy the episode was aired in English at 6.00 am, and fansubbed by *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* a few hours later. It was then re-aired twenty-four hours later with Italian ‘pro-subtitles’ and eventually broadcast on 31 May in its dubbed Italian version. Never before had Italians experienced such a speed in dealing with audiovisual translation. It is no small wonder that the ‘Italian fansubbing movement’ paved the way for this to happen. Five years later, after the first steps into audiovisual translation had been taken by the fansubbing communities, we are able to attest to a significant number of developments in various areas of the phenomenon.

Firstly, fansubbers do not simply translate, as they used to at the beginning, but they also originate the subtitles, a role carried out solely by the so-called ‘synchers’. Nowadays, this practice has been adopted by both communities, meaning that there are more specialised fansubbers and a brand new assembly line.

The changes made by the two communities over time we will be analysed in this section and the features which have remained unaffected will also be examined. The pros and cons of faithfulness in translation, condensation, omission and style, and punctuation conventions will be among the topics covered.

## 5.2.1 FAITHFULNESS IN TRANSLATION: PROS AND CONS

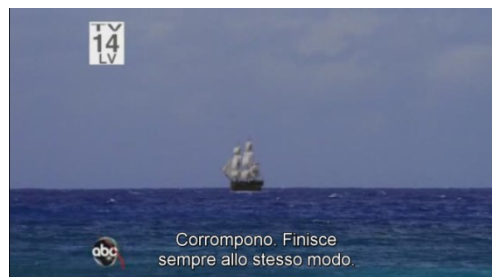
Episode one of the final season starts with the following images (18 A-C) in which a ship sailing on the ocean is illustrated:



Screenshot 18 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 18 B (IT) - DVD



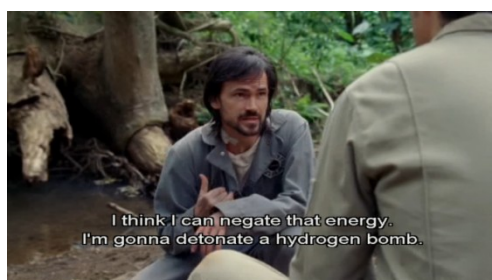
Screenshot 18 C - *Subsfactory*

The character uttering the words in the subtitles is complaining about the enemies, also known as ‘the others’. In this case, the versions produced by *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* are almost identical. The verb “corrupt” is rendered rather literally by the Italian ‘corrompono’, although there is a problem in that it acts as a transitive verb, meaning that it must be followed by a direct object or the resulting sentence would be grammatically incomplete.

A good equivalent is found in the DVD version where the subtitler has opted for “rovinano tutto” (back translation, “they ruin everything”), which conveys the exact meaning of the source text.

After all these seasons, what seems to remain unchanged in the behaviour of the fansubbers is the tendency to remain scrupulously faithful to the source text, even if it is sometimes not absolutely necessary. Fansubbers apparently strive towards a slavish adherence to their own guidelines, and believe that faithfulness to the original dialogue should be paramount, a dominant trait which could result in undermining their ability to adapt the original dialogues to suit the target language and to produce a more fluent translation.

This trait becomes apparent in the following scene, where no mistake is actually made. However, the example in question gives us a hint of their attitude towards translation. “Detonate” is translated as “detonare” in both fansubbed versions (screenshots 19 C-D), while in the official translation it is rendered as “esplodere”.



Screenshot 19 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 19 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 19 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 19 D - *ItaSA*

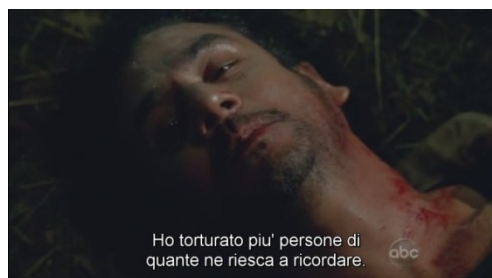
The tendency to extreme faithfulness can also be found in the next example (screenshots 20 A-D), where the translation in the fansubbed version results in a literal rendering, producing an awkwardly incoherent rendering, while a better solution is offered by the official translation.



Screenshot 20 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 20 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 20 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 20 D - *ItaSA*

The back translation of the source dialogue in the DVD version reads, “I even can’t remember how many people I have tortured”, while *Subsfactory* and *ItaSA*’s Italian syntactic structures are almost identical to those of the source language.

The following example focuses on the option to translate or omit the word “man” found in the source text sentence: “you shouldn’t let that happen, man”. In mainstream subtitling, this colloquial method of addressing a person is systematically omitted, although fansubbers believe that it is important to translate these seemingly superfluous words.

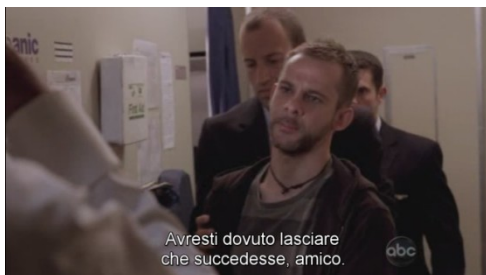
There is, apparently, no need to convey nuances of language, yet it is sometimes essential to include them in order to characterise both the style and register of the original version. The character uttering this sentence speaks in an English accent, and he is also a drug addict as we can infer from the scene, so that the addition of a simple word like “man” might help to convey some of the peculiarities of his behaviour and background. Moreover, the omission of these apparently meaningless and redundant vocative forms (above all at the end of subtitles) is seemingly interpreted by fansubbers as a failing, hence their tendency to translate everything.



Screenshot 21 A (EN) - DVD



Screenshot 21 B (IT) DVD



Screenshot 21 C - Subsfactory



Screenshot 21 D - ItaSA



As shown in the screenshots above, the DVD version omits the term “man”, displaying a very aseptic subtitle, while *Subsfactory* translates it literally as “amico” (“friend”) in a style reminiscent of dubbese, and *ItaSA* attempts to adapt it by employing the word “bello” (“handsome”), which, although it is not used very frequently in Italian, can be found in some sub-varieties of standard language or youth slang used in specific regions of the country.

The same behaviour can be found in the rendering of the words “mate” (in the original sentence: “so mate, do you mind if I sit here?”), and “brother” (uttered with an Irish accent, hence strongly marked), respectively fansubbed using the equivalent Italian term “amico” and “fratello”, and omitted in the professional version (screenshots 22 A-C and 23 A-D):



**Screenshot 22 A – Subsfactory**



**Screenshot 22 B – ItaSA**



**Screenshot 22 C (IT) - DVD**





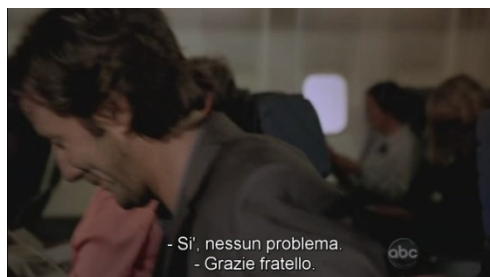
Screenshot 23 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 23 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 23 C - *Subsfactory*



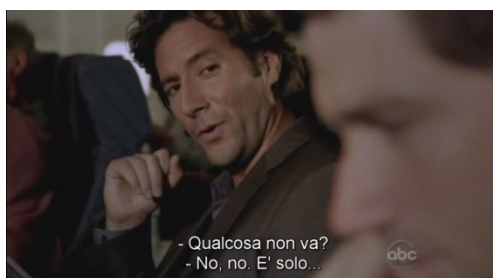
Screenshot 23 D - *ItaSA*

The translation of everything belonging to the original dialogues, which is one of the peculiarities of fansubbing, is due to the rigid principle of remaining as faithful as possible to the foreign audiovisual product. Yet, the reason behind this obsessive preoccupation with inserting false starts and hesitations could also be due to the specific cueing standards of fansubbing. As we have already seen in the preceding sections (see chapter 4), amateur translators believe that subtitles should start with the first sound uttered by a character, and, even if the sound does not constitute a proper word (e.g. hesitations, false starts, and the like), they believe that it should be rendered anyhow.

This is how fansubbers perceive the timing process and, consequently, how they ‘synch’ (or originate) and produce the subtitles. In addition, given that the script employed by subbers (the so-called ‘ts’) is derived from the closed subtitling or captioning files meant for viewers with an aural or hearing

impairment (SDH subtitling), the norms governing this type of transfer are completely different, as is its end purpose.

An example based on the repetition of “no” is given below (screenshots 24 A-C).



Screenshot 24 A - *Subfactory*



Screenshot 24 B - *ItaSA*



Screenshot 24 C (IT) - *DVD*

On the other hand, professional versions can also sometimes be quite literal. The original dialogues belonging to the scene shown below — once again, focusing on time travel —, reads: “Blown up, just like we left it, before we started jumping through time.” Here the expression “jump through time” has a perfect equivalent in Italian, “viaggiare nel tempo” (back translation: “travel through time”). Literally transposing the verb “jump” into Italian results in a translation that reads as a ‘translation’ (screenshots 25 A-B below).

Conversely, while *ItaSA* reproduces the same mistranslation, *Subsfactory*, quite professionally recognises the correct equivalent and translates it into Italian as “travel” (screenshots 25 C-D).



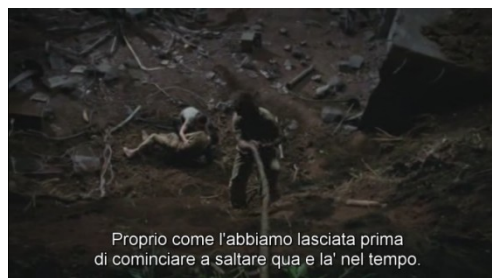
**Screenshot 25 A (ENG) - DVD**



**Screenshot 25 B (IT) - DVD**



**Screenshot 25 C - Subsfactory**



**Screenshot 25 D - ItaSA**

## 5.2.2 TEXT COMPRESSION AND OMISSION

A hybrid approach to future subtitling standards is proposed in chapter 4, which is devoted to a comparison between subtitling and fansubbing norms. In this section the topic of condensation in subtitling will be treated so as to clarify what is reduced in both fansubbing and subtitling translations and why. A comparison between the amateur and professional translational approaches may be useful in order to understand the strategies at work in both environments.

The following (see screenshots 26 A-H) is an excellent example of how mainstream subtitling could be less concise and much more specific. In the original dialogue two characters on the plane talk about the possibility of a plane crash: “Actually, in calm seas with a good pilot, we could survive a water landing”. The DVD version shows an oversimplified rendering, even if the number of characters available allow for a complete translation (back translation: “if the sea was calm and the pilot good, we could make it, actually”).

As shown in screenshots 26 A-D, the subtitlers who produced the DVD version have plenty of space available for a complete rendering, yet we witness an inadvertent inaccuracy here.



Screenshot 26 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 26 B (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 26 C (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 26 D (IT) - DVD

On the other hand, the versions produced by *Subsfactory* and *ItaSA* allow for a complete translation of the source text; while the latter is lacking in fluency, the version offered by *Subsfactory* is of a better quality.



Screenshot 26 E - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 26 F - *Subsfactory*





Screenshot 26 G - ItaSA



Screenshot 26 H - ItaSA

Sometimes, however, ‘extreme condensation’ is not only necessary, but is also advisable. The following scene, in which the characters are arguing about a bomb that went off and was supposed to change the course of time, shows how a sequence of two subtitles can be merged in Italian, and transformed into a single sentence. The source text is composed of the following sentences: “You said we could stop it from ever being built!”, and “That our plane would have never crash on this land”. In the DVD we find the following rendering: “Dicevi che impedendone la costruzione, // l’aereo non si sarebbe schiantato sull’isola”, — back translation: “You said that, avoiding the construction // the plane wouldn’t have crashed on the island!” (see screenshots 27 A-D).



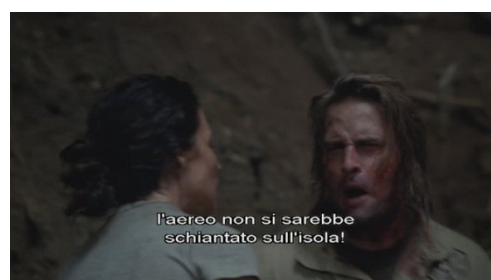
Screenshot 27 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 27 B (IT) - DVD

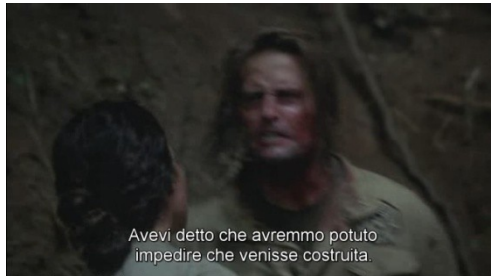


Screenshot 27 C (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 27 D (IT) - DVD

On the other hand, the translations in both fansubbed versions are rather literal, in accordance with established fansubbing guidelines which aim for an extremely faithful rendering of the source text (screenshots 27 E-H).



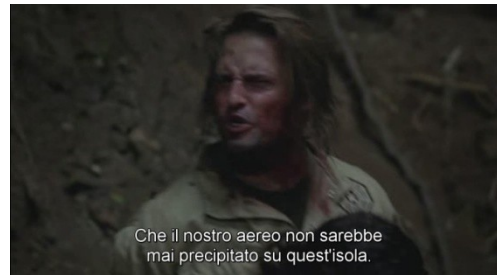
**Screenshot 27 E - Subsfactory**



**Screenshot 27 F - Subsfactory**

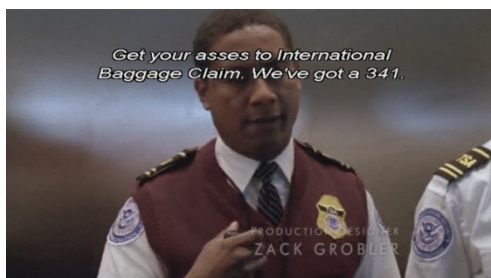


**Screenshot 27 G - ItaSA**



**Screenshot 27 H - ItaSA**

Similarly, fidelity to the source text can also mean rendering nuances of the audiovisual product style, such as informal and foul language as in the following scene.



**Screenshot 28 A (ENG) - DVD**



**Screenshot 28 B (IT) - DVD**



Screenshot 28 C - *Subsfactory*

As we can see, *Subsfactory* (see screenshot 29 C) renders the source text expression “get your asses” with the quite literal “portate il culo”, while in the DVD all the traces of foul language are omitted and the translation reads: “come immediatamente”. Unfortunately, and to the TV show’s detriment, foul language is often censored in professional versions (see section, 5.3, which focuses on humour and censorship).

Incidentally, in this subtitle, apart from the issue of censorship, we can discern a significant mistranslation on the part of pro-subtitlers of the term “baggage claim”. In airports, a “baggage claim” is an area where passengers can claim their luggage after disembarking from the aeroplane. In the Italian version, “baggage claim” becomes “reclamo bagagli” (back translation, “complaint baggage”) where “claim” acts as a false friend. Interestingly, *Subsfactory* produces a perfect translation of the expression, rendering it as “area ritiro bagagli” (screenshots 28 A-C).

Another case of omission relating to slang is displayed in the source language sentence: “That sucks!” which becomes “It’s terrible!” in Italian (Screenshot 29 B).



Once again, both fansubbing communities offer a translation that does not level down the language or suppress the original meaning, by using an appropriate equivalent and an adequate register in the target text: “Che sfiga!” (back translation: “what bad luck!”).



Screenshot 29 A (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 29 B (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 29 C - Subsfactory



Screenshot 29 D - ItaSA

In the final example an interesting case relating to the translation of the word “walkabout” is introduced.

On the plane two characters are engaged in a conversation in which one of them asks the other the reason for his trip to Australia; the other character replies that he went there for a ‘walkabout’. The other goes on to ask: “Like Crocodile Dundee?”, in an attempt to specify the kind of activity implied (IT: “Tipo Crocodile Dundee?”). What seems strange here is that in all the versions produced, both fansubbed and professional, the term “walkabout” has been left untranslated (screenshots 30 A-C).

In Australian English, a “walkabout” is a “temporary return to traditional aboriginal life, taken especially between periods of work or residence in modern society and usually involving a period of travel through the bush.”<sup>36</sup>

It could also indicate a simple walking trip, or a short leave of absence from work. In all these cases, the average viewer would probably not understand the exact meaning of the word without an adequate translation. Yet, the reasons behind this choice become clear if we bear in mind the fansubbing behaviours analysed so far, to convey a sense of otherness, for instance. However, this does not explain the decision to adopt a borrowing for this term on the part of the professional subtitlers.



Screenshot 30 A (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 30 B - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 30 C - *ItaSA*

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<sup>36</sup> Definition found at: [www.thefreedictionary.com/walkabout](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/walkabout).

The examples included here are not meant to denigrate professional translators. On the contrary, they merely highlight the fact that not all amateur translators are as bad as is commonly thought. It is the aim of this research to emphasise the fact that audiovisual translation in general should be taken more seriously and involve recommended and qualified professionals, instead of relying on “cheap alternatives” (see section 3.2, which focuses on co-creative labour).

Hence, all things considered, the behaviour of fansubbers is not arbitrary; on the contrary, their faithfulness to the source text is a regular trait in their approach to translation, and as we have shown in the cases cited above, it can lead to a positive outcome as far as the expression of style and register are concerned.

### 5.2.3 TYPOGRAPHICAL CONVENTIONS

In chapter four the topic of norms has been dealt with quite extensively. This section includes an analysis of the different treatment of punctuation conventions in professional subtitling and fansubbing. As far as punctuation is concerned, subtitling standards employ italics, “to indicate an off-screen source of the spoken text” (Karamitroglou 1998:2).

In the scenes below, we find one of the leading characters, Jack Shepard, in an airport listening to an announcement over the loud speakers.



Screenshot 31 A (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 31 B - Subsfactory

While in the DVD version (screenshot 31 A), the subtitles make use of italics to highlight the fact that the voice comes from an electronic device, in the fansubbed version no such differentiation is made. When using *Subtitle Workshop*, subbers can easily switch the typographical font from normal to italics by simply adding the tag “<i>” at the beginning of the subtitle. The use of italics for the same purposes as in professional subtitling is established in both *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*’s guidelines, yet, after analysing a large number of versions in order to map out the frequency of italics in fansubbing, the

conclusion has been reached that its use is relatively rare and is limited to the translation of specific genres, (e.g., British and period dramas).

This typographical font seems to be used more to highlight an anachronistic style rather than a contemporary one. In this case, the fact that the voice speaking does not belong to one of the characters on screen is quite straightforward, suggesting that subbers might have thought it unnecessary to stress the difference.

We should now address the question of how fansubbing has evolved over time. Apart from the fact that the constant and disproportionate faithfulness to the original dialogues has remained unchanged, there are a number of other changes, notably that the fansubbed versions relating to the last season of *Lost* do not show the same cases of mistranslation or lack of comprehension observed during the first seasons. Indeed, the fact that the number of characters established in the fansubbing guidelines is religiously followed and in general the CPS are respected means that, not only are amateur translations of a better quality, but clearly the cueing process has also attained a standard of excellence.

Thus, even if some subtitles might ideally be more condensed and concise, the translation is of a good quality and at times the choices made for the adaption are far better than the version produced on DVD. This would indicate that an evolution has taken place within these communities over time, not only in terms of language proficiency, but also in terms of artistic expression and creativity, aspects frequently marginalised by professional subtitlers.

We might conclude by asking how dissimilar professional and fansubbed versions are one from the other. Apart from a set of accidental misprints, for example the use of commas before the conjunction “e” in Italian, the excessive faithfulness to the dialogues, which often leads to the imitation of the same syntactic structures in the target language, as well as a number of cumbersome syntactic and semantic segmentations, it is impossible to pinpoint any appreciable difference between the official and the fansubbed versions.

On the contrary, the DVD version appears to have been influenced by the work of the amateurs, even if it is then refined, embellished and finally polished for publication. Apart from the differences noted above, after a careful analysis of the three versions, (the DVD, *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*), on the whole there is the sense that the work of professionals is frequently the result of the best of both fansubbed products, since many renderings, adaptations and solutions resemble those published by amateur translators too closely.

Therefore, all the evidence suggests that fansubbing, — since it is online, free and available —, provides a convenient source for translation rough drafts containing ideas, tips and hints, from which professionals can draw liberally at anytime. Unfortunately, this sort of ‘legal plagiarism’ can be perceived throughout the episodes analysed.

The work of amateur translators seems to be better than might be expected, not only for professional subtitlers who exploit it, but also in terms of financial gain for subtitling companies which are able to rely on simply proofreading free translations. According to Vellar, “Italian professionals started to

capitalize on the skills of fansubbers to produce professional content without always acknowledging their contribution” (2011:5).

In times like these, with the global financial crisis and all its consequences, subtitling rates have been consistently lowered, a fact which has led companies to hire inexperienced, unqualified translators who are willing to accept inadequate rates, while experienced subtitlers are turning to other markets in which to make a living. Fansubbers play an important role in this respect and, if they were to realise how crucial their co-creative labour is to the subtitling industry, they might hold the key to great change.

## CHAPTER 6

### CENSORSHIP AND HUMOR

#### IN *CALIFORNICATION*

This section focuses mainly on the topic of censorship associated with the expression of humour, external references and slang. It begins by investigating a set of examples concerned with censorship and humour, followed by an analysis of cases based on specific instances of mistranslation and undertranslation as far as adaption is concerned, due to the misinterpretation of external references, inside jokes, and slang terms on the part of both fansubbers and professional translators.

In the translation of audiovisual products, the practice of censorship, or the suppression of what might be perceived as offensive on many levels — foul language, explicit or inconvenient content, for example —, unfortunately still remains an unresolved issue in both dubbing and subtitling.

The reason behind this peculiar attitude towards audiovisual translation is due to various factors: not only to distribution companies and the policies of public TV networks, “in order [for them] to adhere to what they consider politically correct” (Scandura 2004:1), but also, in the worst-case scenario it may derive from a process of self-censorship on the part of translators, who



lack adequate knowledge of the foreign sub-culture and sub-language, which results in instances of undertranslation of which they are unaware.

However, when we deprive an audiovisual text of the strong language used to express explicit references to sexual practices, the use of drugs, and offensive or politically incorrect language, there is a sense of semantic loss, especially when these references are not arbitrary, but strictly connected to the expression of puns on words and humour in general. This is, in fact, the case with the TV show *Californication*.

*Californication* is a TV show created by Tom Kapinos and aired for the first time on *Showtime* in 2007. The series revolves around the main protagonist, Hank Moody (David Duchovny), a novelist à-la Bukowski, who is involved in a complicated relationship with his long standing girlfriend Karen (Natascha McElhone) and daughter Becca (Madeleine Martin). In the episode under analysis, we find him dealing with a writer's block as well as battling with his addictions to sex, drugs and alcohol, which are expressed in rather explicit language.

In Italy the pilot episode under analysis was broadcast on 6 March 2008 by the digital satellite pay TV *Jimmy*. *ItaSA* released the fansubs on 4 June of the same year at 23:15. The subtitled version analysed relates to the DVD distributed by *Paramount Home Entertainment Italy*, and released on 20 January 2009. The fact that the distribution company provided the translation without relying on the services of any subtitling firms has resulted in a low quality outcome, as is shown in detail in the following analysis.

## 6.1 SEX, HUMOR AND FOUL LANGUAGE

A scene in which we find the protagonist, Hank, in bed with a married woman is depicted in the first screenshots of the section. After having sex, the two characters are engaged in a conversation full of metaphors and references to erogenous body parts as she is complaining about the fact that her husband does not give her enough pleasure (screenshots 32 A-B).



Screenshot 32 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 32 B (ENG) - DVD

As we can infer from the images above, the original dialogues begin with a metaphor referring to the act of oral sex performed on a female, known as ‘cunnilingus’, making use of imagery connected with ‘hoods’ and ‘southlands’. The tension builds up until Hank comes up with the neologism “vaganus”, a combination of “vagina” and “anus” to refer to the area that contains both external openings (see table 4).

ORIGINAL DIALOGUE		
<p><b>Hank:</b> Does he [...] go downtown, tour the southland?  <b>Woman:</b> Never  <b>Hank:</b> Go under thee hood? Near the vaganus?</p>		
DVD'S	SUBFACTORY'S	ITASA'S
<p><b>Hank:</b> Si fa mai un giro da quelle parti, là in basso?  <b>Woman:</b> Mai.  <b>Hank:</b> Va mai nel boschetto? Vicino alla bernarda?</p>	<p><b>Hank:</b> Lui non va mai giù in centro? Verso sud?  <b>Woman:</b> Mai.  <b>Hank:</b> Nella foresta? Vicino alla vagina?</p>	<p><b>Hank:</b> Lui non va mai in perlustrazione laggiù a sud?  <b>Woman:</b> Mai.  <b>Hank:</b> Non entra nella foresta? Vicino all'altro buco?</p>

Tab. 4 (screenshots 32 A-D)

In the DVD, the translator employs the word “bernarda” to translate the English term, an old-fashioned expression that only refers to “vagina”, toning down the strong sexual connotation of the source language and censoring the word “anus” (screenshots 33 A-B).



Screenshot 33 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 33B (IT) - DVD

*Subsfactory* simply chooses the easiest way by employing the neutral term “vagina”, while once again omitting the reference to “anus” (screenshot 33 C below).



Screenshot 33 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 33 D - *ItaSA*

On the contrary, a more creative and complete translation is offered by *ItaSA*'s subbers who manage to render all the references implied in the source text message by using a rather indirect style, “vicino all'altro buco?” (back translation: “near the other opening?”). It is worth noting that, in the dubbed version, “vicino all'ano?” (back translation: “near the anus?”) is chosen, as described by Bucaria (2009) in her paper “Translation and censorship on Italian TV: an inevitable love affair”.

We may assume that the DVD version may have censored the neologism, or worse, it could be a case of oversight on the part of the professionals. However, *ItaSA* at least has demonstrated a certain degree of creativity, aiming for more care and accuracy in their version.

In the scenes below, the conversation about sexual matters between the two characters continues, focusing on the exact position of the clitoris, as the woman's husband seems to have some issues finding it. Making fun of this inexperienced man, Hunk says: “I just so happen to have my GPS with me. I've stored it up my ass.” In this case, the focus of the analysis has been shifted from sexual innuendo to the translation of foul language. The term “ass” has a perfect and straightforward equivalent in Italian, “culo”.



Screenshot 34 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 34 B (IT) - DVD

Once again, in the version on DVD an edulcorated translation has been chosen, using the equivalent “chiappe” (back translation: “buttocks”), a term which is reminiscent of the archaic style of the word “bernarda” previously used. In the dubbed version, the word “sedere” has been used, toning down the connotations of the source term even further. The inevitable consequence of mitigating the offensive language of the piece is that the style of the original dialogues is profoundly altered and the humour implicit in the strong words is instantly destroyed.



Screenshot 34 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 34 D - *ItaSA*

Conversely, in the versions produced by both *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* the word “ass” has been translated by direct Italian equivalent, “culo” (screenshots 34 C-D), maintaining the original atmosphere of the TV show.

As the scene goes on, the woman’s husband comes back home and Hank tries to find somewhere to hide saying: “Well, maybe I should hide under your

clit”, making a reference to the previous scene when the woman said that he had no clue where her clitoris might be.



Screenshot 35 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 35 B (IT) - DVD

In the official version “clit”, the short, colloquial form of “clitoris” is translated by “vulva”. We should now turn to a comparison of the two terms. While the term “clitoris” is defined as “the female erogenous organ capable of erection under sexual stimulation (female homologue of the male penis)”<sup>37</sup>, and hence openly related to sex, the term “vulva” is described as “the external female genitalia surrounding the opening to the vagina and that collectively consist of the labia majora, the labia minora, and the clitoris”<sup>38</sup>. Linguistically speaking, we might say that the professionals have adopted a hypernym in order to suppress an overtly sexual content and express the same content by a more neutral solution.

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<sup>37</sup> [www.britannica.com/search?query=clitoris](http://www.britannica.com/search?query=clitoris)

<sup>38</sup> [www.britannica.com/search?query=vulva](http://www.britannica.com/search?query=vulva)



On the other hand, faithful to the source text as usual, fansubbers belonging to both *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory*, simply used “clitoride”, the perfect equivalent of “clit”.



Screenshot 35 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 35 D - *ItaSA*

The following example serves to introduce the topic of swearwords.

Bucaria’s study (2009), clearly indicates that, as far as Italian dubbing is concerned,

“no recurring patterns indicating a specific rationale for the deletion or toning down of swearwords or other potentially disturbing elements seemed to emerge from the analysis, perhaps suggesting a certain level of arbitrariness in the translational choices”. (ibid.:1)

It is suggested here that what is absolutely true for dubbing can be also applied to subtitling. Screenshots 36 A-D constitute just one of the number of cases of total omission of explicit words.



Screenshot 36 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 36 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 36 C - *Subsfactory*

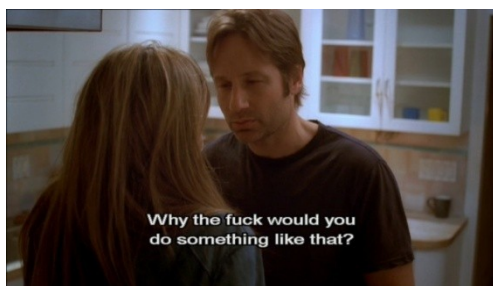


Screenshot 36 D - *ItaSA*

The offensive word is “fuck”, extensively used throughout the programme and apt in terms of characterising the protagonist and the style of the script. The situation in which Hank pronounces the sentence, “hey, what the fuck was that?” appears to be relatively critical, because he has just heard a noise meaning that the woman’s husband is returning home and is about to find out that his wife has cheated on him. Hence, the term in question creates a liberating and comic effect by releasing the anxiety building up inside the protagonist. The perfect Italian equivalent would be “cazzo”, which was the choice adopted by both fansubbing communities. Needless to say, the word is omitted completely in version on DVD with the translation reading, “what was that?”.

Rather than being deleted entirely, bad words are often toned down, but considerably toned down in the professional version, as in the following scene, where “why the fuck” becomes “perché diammine” (back translation “what on earth”) in the DVD, while it is correctly rendered in both fansubbed versions.





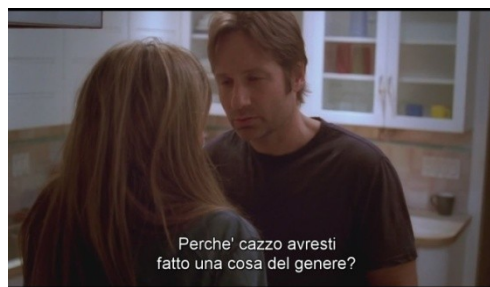
Screenshot 37 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 37 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 37 C - Subfactory



Screenshot 37 D - ItaSA

This process of censoring explicit language on the part of professional translators continues relatively arbitrarily throughout the whole episode, in which we find that “motherfucker” becomes “figlio di buona donna” (back translation “son of good woman”), instead of “figlio di puttana” (used by both communities) which is the literal translation of the original swearword (screenshots 38 A-D).



Screenshot 38 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 38 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 38 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 38 D - *ItaSA*

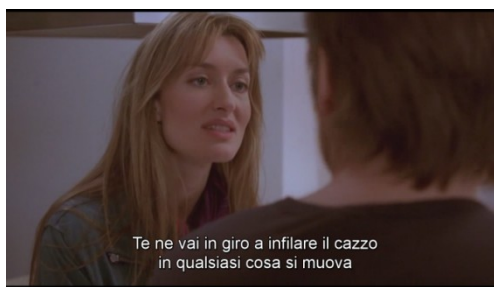
Similarly, the explicit slang term “dick” becomes “biscotto” (back translation “biscuit”) in the DVD (screenshot 39 B), while it is rendered literally as “cazzo” by *ItaSA* and “uccello” (“bird”) by *Subsfactory*.



Screenshot 39 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 39 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 39 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 39 D - *ItaSA*

Among other strongly edulcorated swearwords found on DVD, the terms: “asshole” and “dick”, frequently rendered as “idiota” and “deficient” (back translation “idiot” and “moron”), should be also highlighted; these appear, however, as “cazzone/coglione” (back translation “prick”) in the fansubbed versions.

Yet, not only do bad words magically disappear becoming slight reproaches, but as we have observed in the previous scenes, every little reference to male or female genitals is systematically omitted. This is the case of the source sentence, “that’s the look that shrivels me testes”, which presents a metaphor that makes reference to male genitals, “testes”, being a diminutive of testicles.

In screenshot 40B, displaying the version on DVD, we can see that the reference is deleted, and the translation reads: “quello è lo sguardo che mi fa tremare” (back translation: “that’s the look that makes me shiver”).



Screenshot 40 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 40 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 40 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 40 D - *ItaSA*

Conversely, both *Subsfactory* and *ItaSA* have managed to keep the reference to “testicles”, using an adequate register to render the humorous expression. *Subsfactory* has translated testicles as “palle” (back translation “balls”) and *ItaSA* has used “coglioni” which might be a little strong (back translation, “buttocks”), although they are both suitable equivalents.

## 6.2 POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

In this section, the adaption of politically incorrect content is analysed in the pilot episode of *Californication*.

In the following example Karen, Hank's ex-wife, teases him since he has appeared at her home without any trousers, after escaping from the woman's husband who had caught him in bed with his wife, comparing him to “a special-needs person that works at McDonalds”.



Screenshot 41 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 41 B (IT) - DVD

It is a relatively strong statement, as it is a joke with a direct reference to disabled people. In the DVD, “special needs” is rendered as “con difficoltà di apprendimento” (back translation “with different learning abilities”), which is a way to censor the original expression while losing the humour expressed in the metaphor (screenshot 41 B).



Screenshot 41 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 41 D - *ItaSA*

*Subsfactory* uses the expression “persone disabili” (back translation “disabled people”), which is perfectly in keeping with their faithful approach to translation in general as well as quite appropriately retaining the humour of the target text. *ItaSA*, on the other hand, has opted for “persone bisognose” (“people in need”), misconstruing the original reference and producing a mistranslation.

As been shown above, politically incorrect language may address specific groups of people, although it can also be used to reflect a pronounced bias towards gender, sexual orientation, culture, policies, religions, ideologies and the use of drugs. The example given below (screenshots 42 A-D) relates to a scene where Hank and his ex-wife are having an argument. The protagonist, commenting on a statement made by his ex-wife, says: “[...] then it’s possible that you are higher than me right now”. The problem revolves around the translation of the term “higher” in the three versions. This word, which would normally define a state of altered consciousness induced by the use of narcotics, in this particular instance expresses the state of being out of one’s mind.



In the DVD the metaphor disappears and “higher” is rendered as “più fuori” (back translation “more crazy”), where the reference to drugs appears to be toned down and the general meaning altered in favour of a more politically correct reference to psychological issues.

As usual, both fansubbing communities have opted for the more straightforward equivalent, the slang term “fatta” (back translation “stoned”), which conveys the exact intention of the original dialogue.



Screenshot 42 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 42 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 42 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 42 D - *ItaSA*

## 6.3 ADAPTION AND MISTRANSLATION

The leitmotiv of this chapter, which focuses on censorship and its consequences, especially when it comes to the expression of humorous content, involves the irredeemable incapacity of mainstream subtitling to produce an adequate output in terms of faithfulness to the source text and adherence to the original style. The manner in which fansubbing manages to restore the original dialogues, attempting to produce faithful versions of the foreign product with excellent results has also been demonstrated.

Apart from the topic of the censorship of offensive language, we have found that in the episode analysed, professional subtitlers sometimes produced a series of mistranslations totally unrelated to the expression of explicit language.

The following example shows how the source sentence expression “quid pro quo” is rendered in the three versions.



Screenshot 43 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 43 B (IT) - DVD

In screenshot 43 B, we can see that in the DVD version the sentence has been left almost untranslated: “qui pro quo”. At this point, the meaning of the expression under analysis should be explained. “Quid pro quo” in English is used to convey the Latin phrase meaning "something for something". In fact, the woman is telling Hank that “you’re nice to me, I’m nice to you”. In Italian, the same sentence has a rather different meaning, since it equates to another Latin sentence, “do ut des” (back translation "I give so that you will give"). Conversely, a “qui pro quo” in Italian defines a misunderstanding, or the substitution of one thing for another.

Hence, while the professional subtitlers seem to have completely misunderstood the actual meaning of the source sentence, at least one of the two fansubbing communities produced a good translation of the expression. In this case, *ItaSA* used “do ut des”, as shown in screenshot 43D, while *Subsfactory* made the same mistake as in the DVD version.



Screenshot 43 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 43 D - *ItaSA*

The next example focuses on the adaption of slang expressions. The source sentence, “Are you still feeling cute?” is uttered by Hank's ex-wife as a response to his nonchalant behaviour after his daughter has found a naked woman in her father’s house.



In the DVD the translation reads: “Hai ancora voglia di scherzare?” (see screenshot 44B).



Screenshot 44 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 44 B (IT) - DVD

The style used in the source sentence is quite informal, as Karen is trying to mock Hank by questioning his nonchalance. The verb “scherzare” in Italian is neither informal nor does it have any specific connotations, hence we might categorise it as constituting another case of undertranslation, since it does not manage to convey either the register or the humour of the original.

In both fansubbed versions the English expression has been translated by “Fai ancora/ti senti ancora figo?”, where “figo” is a literal equivalent of “cute”, hence a perfect translation solution in terms of register and accuracy (screenshots 44 C-D).



Screenshot 44 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 44 D - *ItaSA*

Throughout the whole show, there is only a single case in which the DVD version shows a better adaption of a slang term than the fansubbed outcome. In the scene analysed, Hank and his ex-wife are having an argument based on their past relationship, when a slang term comes up: “googling”. The humorous sentence reads: “sitting there, googling yourself, I saw you”. In Italian there is an equivalent expression, “googlare”, a neologism derived from “Google”, the name of the browser. This time, it was only the official translation that opted for the perfect and most commonly used equivalent (screenshot 45 B), while both communities used “cercarti su google” (back translation: “looking for yourself on google”).



Screenshot 45 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 45 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 45 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 45 D - *ItaSA*

The most interesting example of mistranslation in the entire episode of *Californication* is illustrated in the following images. There is an ongoing discussion between the two characters and Karen makes another remark concerning Hank's flaws: "you've always been a walking id, Hank".

The rendering of this sentence presents a set of challenges: first of all, the meaning of "id" in the context; secondly, its contextualised meaning associated with the adjective "walking". In the DVD version, the Italian subtitle reads: "sei sempre stato un "id" ambulante", which is the literal translation, and appears rather awkward since it has no meaning in the target language and resembles a fansubbed version rather than a professional one.

The term "id", as defined by the Encyclopaedia Britannica, is related to Freudian psychoanalytic theory: it is the oldest of the three psychic realms — ego, superego and id —, and the one containing "a set of uncoordinated instinctual drives".<sup>39</sup> The Italian equivalent of "id" is "es", the more widespread translation of the term found in the majority of books published on the topic.

Yet, when it comes to the collocation of this term with the adjective "walking", another issue arises, since the meaning of the sentence changes. The subbers from *Subsfactory* attempted to adapt it by using the sentence "sei sempre stato un Es con le gambe" (screenshot 46 C), which is still quite literal, but at least shows a certain degree of elaboration since it provides a metaphor in which the "id" ("es") has legs ("gambe").

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<sup>39</sup> [www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/281641/id](http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/281641/id)



Screenshot 46 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 46 B (IT) - DVD



Screenshot 46 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 46 D - *ItaSA*

Conversely, the fansubbers from *ItaSA*, demonstrably understand the real meaning of the source text and have attempted to use the strategy of explicitation to make it comprehensible to the viewer: “sei sempre stato una mina vagante, Hank” (back translation “you’ve always been a loose cannon, Hank”).

Similarly, in the following scene (screenshots 47 A-B), the adaption of “one-hit wonder”, presents another case of mistranslation in the DVD version that reads: “una stella cadente”.



Screenshot 47 A (ENG) - DVD



Screenshot 47 B (IT) - DVD

The source term expression refers to Hank's job as a writer who has published a best seller, and now cannot seem to produce a single sentence, since is suffering from writer's block. Hence, he considers himself to be a person who has enjoyed only one single success in his life. "Una stella cadente" is a "shooting star" in English, therefore there is no relation between the DVD subtitles and the original dialogues. Both *Subsfactory* and *ItaSA* translated the expression as "uno da una botta e via" (back translation "a man for a one-night stand") altering the initial meaning by changing the metaphor for a sexual innuendo. However, their version is a good attempt at conveying the meaning of the source expression.



Screenshot 47 C - *Subsfactory*



Screenshot 47 D - *ItaSA*

## 6.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

A set of findings from the analysis of the pilot episode of *Californication* has revealed that the official translation found in the DVD version display a range of undertranslations due to various factors. Initially, as described in the first section, it was found that there was a tendency of professional subtitlers to tone down and often delete possible references to sex-related content — images connected to body parts, and sexual acts — as well as offensive content (swearwords of different levels of intensity). Therefore, the consistent presence of diverse forms of censorship has led subtitlers to produce poor quality translations in terms of faithfulness to the source text language and style.

Moreover, this “censoring behaviour”, whether intentional or not — since no specific pattern was found to explain the deletion of disturbing elements —, destroyed the humour inherent in the very censored terms which were removed, creating a totally different product, which became mostly dull, neutralised and almost unrecognisable. Yet, censorship may be a plausible justification for certain types of undertranslation, but as was shown in the second section which focused on adaption and mistranslation, it cannot explain the inadequate renderings of the original text made by the professionals throughout the whole episode.

We might of course accept such erratic and unpredictable behavior if it had been found in the translation carried out by fansubbers, but we would certainly not expect this level of inaccuracy on the part of professional translators.

On the other hand, the tendency among fansubbers to adhere to the source text strictly, has proved ultimately successful, since for each mistranslation or understranlation found in the official subtitled version, a good equivalent and an adequate rendering of style and register were offered in one or both fansubbed versions under analysis.

In conclusion, even if they were not absolutely perfect, the fansubbed versions managed to retain the humour, style, register and core message of the foreign audiovisual product, a rather unpredictable outcome for which we were unprepared during the first stages of the study.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS:

#### A STEP INTO THE FUTURE

It has been mentioned repeatedly throughout this study, that the Italian fansubbing phenomenon owes much to the TV show *Lost*. From the perspective of Media Studies, *Lost* “has demonstrated a tremendous ability to encourage almost unprecedented viewer involvement and commitment both in form and degree” (Askwith 2007:152). It has been proved that the potential value of the viewer’s engagement with television, “the larger system of material, emotional, intellectual, social and psychological investments a viewer forms through their interactions with the expanded television text” (ibid.: 154), plays a substantial role in the development of crowdsourcing in general and fansubbing in particular.

The fundamental purpose of this thesis was to understand if, and to what extent, the phenomenon of amateur translation has had an impact on audiovisual translation modes of transfer in Italy. To this end, the wider implications of the practices of amateurs on audiovisual translation studies have been observed in two major ‘historical’ events.



In 2008, *Mediaset* acquired the copyright for the *The Big Bang Theory*, a TV show that was eventually dubbed by *Post in Europe* and broadcast on the pay-TV *Steel*. The reaction to the airing of the dubbed episodes on the part of the fans — who had been following the show since 2007 thanks to fansubbers — was immediate and relatively harsh. Owing to the ‘italianisation’ of the dubbed version, the nerdy-related content, which characterised the programme, was dumbed down; the adaption had levelled down the language to such an extent that it did not appeal at all to the target audience who criticised the work of the dubbing company. Eventually, the controversy, which sparked several online blogs, led to dramatic changes to the dubbed production, to the point that the dubbing director, Silvia Pepitoni was replaced by a whole team of adaptors. As a result, the new team carried out a better adaption, characterised by more faithful and coherent dialogues (Innocenti and Maestri 2010). Thus, the effective resistance of the active Italian audience made it clear that the patronising authority of the dubbing tradition was losing its grip in Italy.

The second crucial moment came in 2010, when for the very first time, the final episode of *Lost* was aired simultaneously by a large number of pay-TV channels worldwide. In Italy, the episode was fansubbed by *ItaSA* and *Subsfactory* just a few hours after it had been aired in its original version; it was then re-aired by *Sky Italia* twenty-four hours later with Italian ‘pro-subtitles’ and eventually broadcast after seven days in its dubbed Italian version. Never before had Italians witnessed such speed in dealing with audiovisual translation, and it is no wonder that the Italian fansubbing movement paved the way for this to happen.

In fact, in Italy the practice of speeding up the audiovisual translation process — as far as pay TV channels are concerned —, has currently been consolidated, at least for some important TV shows such as *Grey's Anatomy*, for instance. In fact, following what we might define as ‘the great AVT turn of 2010’, *Sky Italia* provides the Italian subtitles for the show noted above after only twenty-four hours and the dubbed version only after seven days after the airing in the United States.

As a matter of fact, the key-events described clearly illustrate the crucial role played by amateur translation in the evolution of audiovisual practices in Italy. While such an outcome might be further perfected — owing to the fact that subtitling practices are still criticised by the fans of TV shows for not preserving the authenticity of the original product —, it is hopeful that it might pave the way for future experiments and innovations in the area relating to subtitling norms.

The issue of norms has been another relevant aspect examined in this study. In fact, having revealed a series of interesting aspects concerning fansubbing practices, the case studies presented in the final chapters might inspire future research leading to the development of new subtitling standards.

A hybrid proposal has, therefore, been advanced in this study, deriving from what we have considered as the best resources offered by both subtitling and fansubbing codes of practice.

The research project, which was begun with the assumption that, owing to the amateur nature of their work, fansubbers would ultimately have a lot to learn from professional translators, eventually reached the opposite conclusion.

In fact, despite their apparent naivety, fansubbers have proved, by challenging long-established, fixed rules, that their collective effort might be a source of inspiration for both academics and professionals as well as a valuable contribution to the investigation of future subtitling norms, thus enriching the debate concerning the reshaping of subtitling norms underlying future audiovisual translation in Italy.

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