

Non-professional Subtitling in Italy: The Challenges of Translating Humour and Taboo Language

El subtitulado no profesional en Italia: los desafíos para traducir los tabúes y el humor

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Abstract: Fansubbing is one of the most common forms of non-professional audiovisual translation today, whose popularity is increasing thanks to digital technology advances. This happens especially in countries like Italy, where English is not the official language. The fansubbing phenomenon is at the same time a source of entertainment and knowledge, and it gives the possibility to fans to watch their favourite programme in their language. Despite being an illegal activity, the phenomenon has several benefits both for the programme itself and for the audience. Through the analysis of the amateur translation of the subtitles of an episode of *Vicious*, this paper will attempt to show the main translational differences between mainstream subtitling and fansubbing, focusing on the rendering of humour and taboo language.

Keywords: AVT, Subtitling, Fansubbing, Humour, Taboo language.

Resumen: El *fansubbing* es una de las formas más comunes de traducción audiovisual no profesional en la actualidad, cuya popularidad está aumentando gracias a los avances de la tecnología digital. Esto sucede especialmente en países como Italia, donde el inglés no es el idioma oficial. El fenómeno de los *fansubbing* es, al mismo tiempo, una fuente de entretenimiento y conocimiento, y brinda a los aficionados la posibilidad de ver su programa favorito en su idioma. A pesar de ser una actividad ilegal, el fenómeno tiene varios beneficios tanto para el programa en sí como para la audiencia. A través del análisis de la traducción *amateur* de los subtítulos de un episodio de *Vicious*, este artículo intentará mostrar las principales diferencias traductológicas entre la subtitulación general y el *fansubbing*, centrándose en la interpretación del humor y los tabúes.

Palabras clave: TAV, subtitulado, *fansubbing*, humor, tabúes

INTRODUCTION

In the modern age, digital technology, along with its latest developments and updates, has a great influence on people's lives and social relationships. Whereas in the past paper-based sources were predominant, today audio-visual media are gradually gaining ground. Their production and distribution are notably easier and faster compared to the past, and the different codes that they consist of allow a more complete and enjoyable way of communicating. The major technological advances that took place in the Nineties had a strong influence on every field. As far as the translation domain is concerned, the digital era led to the introduction of new techniques and consequently, new audience perceptions and demands (Díaz Cintas 2013). Audiovisual translation can be subdivided in three main forms: subtitling, dubbing and voice-over. Nowadays, since the digital screen is the support par excellence (Díaz Cintas 2013), the activity of subtitling has significantly grown in importance and popularity. Given that today subtitles are easily available to the audience, they allow people to watch their favourite programme or TV series in any language and their distribution has become interactive and dynamic. In addition, several free programmes and freeware are now available on the web and are relatively user-friendly. Consequently, tools that once were employed only by professionals are currently accessible both to media producers and consumers (commonly referred to as "prosumers") that have recently started to collaborate on the co-creation of media content, especially subtitles. Regarding non-professional subtitling, Orrego-Carmona (2015) proposes two different categories:

- *Crowdsourced subtitling*: this type of subtitling is managed by a company that controls the activity, owns the content to be translated and makes it available for translation. Professional standards are usually followed and sometimes a professional translator is involved to check the quality and collaborate in the project management.
- *Collaborative subtitling*: this practice is initiated by users, seen as a unit that creates, manages and administrates the activity. Users choose the material to be translated and define both their *modus operandi* and their conditions. They adopt translation strategies that transgress professional translational conventions and rules, and experiment on the use of language at different levels and in creative ways.

The latter type is widely known as *fansubbing*, an amateur co-created phenomenon, reacting against mainstream translational methods with their very long release dates for professionally translated subtitles.

This paper will first provide a historical overview of the fansubbing phenomenon and practice, focusing on its presence and origins in Italy. Then, it will attempt to give an account of the legal issues that it faces, moving on to consider the potentialities of fansubbing as a foreign language learning activity. The following section of this paper will analyse - from a translational point of view – the fansubs of an episode of *Vicious*, made by *Subsfactory*, a well-known Italian fansubbing group, focusing on the rendering of humour and the main translational strategies adopted.

1. AMATEUR AUDIOVISUAL TRANSLATION: ITALIAN FANSUBBING

1.1. *Historical background and main features*

The earliest known fansubbing product is a copy of *Lupin III* dating back to 1986 (Leonard, 2005. Cited in Bold, 2011:6). Fansubs are thus among the earliest forms of user-generated audiovisual content (O'Hagan 2012), and they were introduced in the 1980s in Japan with the foundation of the first anime clubs. Thanks to the technology developments and the availability of both computer software and free online subbing tools, the fansubbing phenomenon has experienced a significant growth in the mid- 1990s (Diaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006:37). Consequently, the first digital subtitles, often referred to as "digisubs", were distributed in the late 1990s (Massidda 2015:25). The practice started because fans felt the need to watch their favourite programme in their own language, since the official translation was not available or because the production of the licensed subtitles had severe delays. Moreover, fansubbing was born as a reaction by fans to the over-editing of the original product made by United States companies in the translation of Japanese anime (O'Hagan 2012). Fans had and still have an intense desire to access the original cultural product and feel as close as possible to the textual experience of the source language audience. Somehow, this quest for authenticity appears to justify the transgression of translation norms (O'Hagan 2008).

In the 21st Century, the focus shifted from anime to the American TV series, with the first fansubbed appearance in Italy of a translated version of 'Lost', in 2005, that anticipated the dubbed version. Although Italy is one of the countries where dubbing is much more popular than subtitling, fansubbing potentially emerged in opposition to dubbed versions which according to the fans, deprive the original text of its sense of otherness and cultural variance (Massidda 2015:38). The limits imposed by a licensed translation are also due to the localization of a product. In her paper, Rembert-Lang (2010:28) states that it involves a process of censorship and some visual transformations of the foreign version that, along with the dubbing practice, reduce access to the

original work.

As far as Italy is concerned, there are two main fansubbing communities: ItaSA and Subsfactory (Massidda 2015:39), which aim at restoring the foreign product in order to give fans the possibility to appreciate the original voices, soundtrack and foreign atmosphere. The communities' members are young people who are on average between 18 and 35 and have a linguistic education and awareness. The main differences between the two communities are the priorities given to their translations: Subsfactory is usually more faithful to the source dialogue and gives emphasis to the accuracy of the text. On the other hand, ItaSA leaves more space for the creativity of the translators and values speed of translation more (Massidda 2015:40).

Each member of a fansubbing community has a different task and is involved in the production of fansubs. According to Diaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez (2006:38-39), the job is divided as follows:

- *Raw provider*: provides the source material to be translated.
- *Translator*: has a good knowledge of the language and translates the text.
- *Timer*: defines the timing of each subtitle.
- *Typesetter*: defines the font to be used and synchronizes all the written elements.
- *Editor and proof-reader*: revise and correct the translation.
- *Encoder*: uses an encoding programme that allows the subtitled version of an episode to be produced.

This distinction shows the importance of effective teamwork and coordination between the members and their respective duties.

1.2 *Copyright and piracy issues*

There would seem to be very little literature regarding copyright, but since its first appearance, fansubbing has raised important legal and ethical issues that to date have yet to be resolved (Liu 2014:1107). First of all, fansubbing implies a profit loss for the author of the original work. Indeed, since fansubs are free and available to anybody, fans can easily have access to the translated work, and do not purchase the original TV series or movie when the mainstream translation is released. The fansubbing practice is legally highly contestable (O'Hagan 2012), even if on their websites, fansubbers declare that they will delete their translation as soon as the official one is released. Once the mainstream version is available on the market, fansubbers start to support the original version and invite their fellow fans to do the same. This form of copyright protection is called "notice of use" (Rembert-Lang 2010:32-33) and should be written in different languages

according to the nationality of the fans. This practice helps the fans to understand the ethics of the community and is very useful for the broadcasters, the producers and even the artists, indicating in which countries the product might have most success. In order to limit the legal issues concerning the appropriation of copyrighted material, fansubbers prefer publishing “soft subs” instead of “hard subs”. While the latter are subtitles encoded with the original video (Massidda 2015:38), soft subs are released in .srt files separated from the licensed video, so that the published translation can be seen as a personal interpretation of the original dialogue. In spite of this, while in the past the effort made by the translator was recognized (Rembert-Lang 2010:24), now the author of a work has several rights related to the translation as well. As present in international law, not only has the author the right to control the translation and its quality but he or she also has the right to delay the release date of a TV programme or movie in order to decide whether the product can be translated (Rembert-Lang 2010:25).

Another form of protection from legal issues is referred in Rembert-Lang’s paper (2010:25-26) to as ‘defence for fair use of a work’. In other words, the use of a copyright protected work is considered fair and hence legal provided that it has teaching, or educational purposes and it is non-profit. Accordingly, fansubbing is a valuable educational activity (see section 2.3), and it is not commercial, given that fansubbers are not paid for their work. However, the problems related to copyright infringement are often neglected and set apart, because trying to solve them might cost too much to the owner’s rights both in terms of money and time. For instance, as O’Hagan points out (2008), in the United States copyright holders usually disregard fansubbing considering it not worthy of costly lawsuits. Moreover, some companies believe that an earlier introduction of some of the first episodes of a TV series might be useful for its popularity, while others simply tolerate a fan activity unless it becomes a danger for the company’s profit (Diaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006:45). Despite the concern that fansubs can raise over the owner’s copyright, it provides several benefits to the global market, the publisher and the audience. For example, it has a great impact on the promotion of American TV series in Italy and has allowed the growth of many Japanese anime industries, that have almost taken no legal action against the phenomenon (Massidda 2015:23). In addition, since fansubbing started, the dubbing process in Italy has increased. As a matter of fact, some Italian networks have started to adapt to the new needs of the audience and quicken the releasing process (Massidda 2015:24). This is probably one of the reasons why some researchers suggest a collaboration between fans and professionals (Bold 2011:16). Since fansubs are online, free and easily available, they represent a valuable source of inspiration for today’s companies which, because of the crisis and its effects, are willing to hire non-

qualified translators in order to pay lower rates (Massidda 2015:95). The problem with this sort of legalized plagiarism is that the work of fansubbers is not acknowledged. Turning to the consumer's point of view, Rembert- Lang (2010:21) argues that copyright is a limit that protects the needs of the author but overlooks the consumer. From this perspective, copyright law negates the access to a multicultural viewing experience of a foreign programme or movie and threatens the experience of learning and becoming part of a foreign language and culture.

1.3 Benefits of fansubbing as a language learning activity

From a theoretical perspective, interest in translation teaching has recently increased (Beseghi 2013:396), especially in the field of audiovisual translation, which is widely seen as one of the most common forms of translation experienced by people in their everyday lives. Indeed, translation in cinema, television and in the web, is becoming more and more important (Ibid). Audiovisual translation can thus be a very useful tool for language learning and translation teaching, in particular when it comes to the practice of subtitling. When translation students learn how to subtitle in the classroom - a non-professional teaching-purposed environment - they might perform a similar activity as fansubbers do. According to a study carried out by Beseghi (2013:400), if students are given the possibility to subtitle their favourite TV series or programme, they are more motivated and put a lot more effort into that translation. In the same way, fansubbers are non-professional translators that work on their favourite programmes and TV series. The passion or interest for a topic motivates the students to work harder, which means an enhanced learning and understanding experience. For this reason, studying a foreign language through subtitling exercises based on something that students are interested in significantly improves both their language and translation skills. As a result of the study mentioned above, performing an activity similar to fansubbing in the classroom fosters both cultural knowledge acquisition and vocabulary building. Since the subtitling activity includes different codes (dialogues, images, sounds, writings, etc.), it is very stimulating and recreational (Beseghi 2013:404-405). Another study on non-professional subtitling carried out by Professor Bączkowska (2015) reported that the majority of the students questioned about studying a new language through subtitling said that watching subtitled films is an engaging alternative to more conventional foreign language instruction. This teaching method is developing in Italy and, as stated by Wang (2014:1908), it is promising and interactive, and it is based on learning minority languages by watching subtitled film sequences.

Outside the academic environment, fansubbing as a language learning activity has been very successful in the current age of crowdsourcing. When amateur

translators are well motivated, fan translation networks reveal themselves as valuable learning environments (O'Hagan 2008). Beyond allowing a considerable enrichment of the L2 in question, Lakarncua (2017:35-36) states that translation is an effective way to raise the translators' consciousness and help them to become aware of their writing weaknesses. In addition, given that fansubbers work in groups and each member as a specific task, this fan translation activity can both encourage the learner's autonomy and his or her capacity to work well in groups. The fans' love and passion for their favourite TV series or programme drive their cooperative work to achieving a common translational goal (O'Hagan 2008). Moreover, building what Pérez- González (2012:337-338) calls a "shared native location", which consists of a set of common values or beliefs, encourages participation within the community and the cooperation between its members. This collaborative *modus operandi* promotes a cultural and language exchange between members creating new social relationships as well. The common desire of sharing the same passions and hobbies with other fans contributes to broaden the horizons of the fansubbers giving them notable satisfaction and personal reward.

2. A FAN TRANSLATION CASE STUDY

The objective of the following analysis is the non-professional translation by Subsfactory - an Italian fansubbing group - from English into Italian of the subtitles of the "Wedding" episode of *Vicious* (Season 2, episode 6). *Vicious* is a British TV comedy series that tells the story of Freddie (Ian McKellen) and Stuart (Derek Jacobi), an elderly gay couple who have been together for almost 50 years and live in a flat in central London. The comedy is set mainly in their flat, where the two men often squabble with each other whilst entertaining their usual guests: Violet, Ash, Penelope and Mason. The episodes are therefore very rich in dialogue, which is the main source of humour in the series. In the "Wedding" episode the couple gets married after having been together for a long time, but nothing goes as expected.

Since fansubbing bears some differences from standard subtitling, the following preconditions must be considered. First, fans translate a TV series or a film because they like it and they want to share their passion with other fans who do not know or understand properly the language in which the video has been released. Given that fansubbers translate without any remuneration, they are mainly motivated by their passion, although some communities receive small donations from their fans. Thus, audience satisfaction is the main priority for fansubbers, because the subtitles should be available to the fans as soon as possible. The first group that releases the fansubs usually

gets the highest number of downloads (Wang 2014:1905). Indeed, they are normally released within less than one day from the TV series or film release date. As a consequence, the time to carry out the work is limited, even more so that the fansubbing process has several steps and involves a team that has to accomplish different tasks. Moreover, each subtitle has time and space restrictions to be respected and, since the main function of media texts is entertainment, reading the subtitles should not impose too much effort for the viewer (Wang 2014:1905).

2.1. Subsfactory's working method

As mentioned in section.1.1, Subsfactory is one of the main Italian fansubbing communities. Each fansubber community has its own rules and standards that must be followed in each translation and have to be taken into account when analysing a non-professional translation. Subsfactory's modus operandi is outlined as follows (Massidda 2015:52-53):

- Every member has to read the translation rules and follow them.
- Every subtitle has a maximum length of two lines of 45 characters each.
- Do not start a new line breaking the syntactic and semantic structure of the sentence.
- Use apostrophes instead of diacritics in order that the software can read them.
- The time allowed for each subtitle is 1-6 seconds.
- Be careful not to anticipate suspense, humour or surprise in the subtitles.
- Translate the non-verbal text that appears on the screen.
- Avoid calques and use the target language's structures.
- Watch the whole episode before translating it.
- Revise and check the translation carefully before uploading it.
- Read the feedback you receive from your reviser in order to improve your translation skills, learning from your mistakes.

In most cases the translations are made from the source language subtitles and it is rare that the fans have to translate directly from the audio. Despite the fact that fansubbers are not professional translators, Subsfactory's members have their own philosophy that goes further than the idea that the sooner the subtitles are released, the more the audience appreciates the work. Indeed, as they explain on their website (Subsfactory 2006), subtitling takes time and they do their utmost to convey the correct meaning, register and cultural background in the target language. Consequently, their translations are not always the first to be released, but

they argue that their subtitles are worth a slightly longer waiting. Generally, the fansubbers' typical faithfulness to the original dialogue can lead to the creation of calques or the imitation of foreign syntactic structures in the target language (Massidda 2015:94), among the most common mistakes that fan translations make. However, Subsfactory's members affirm that they strive to avoid these sorts of inaccuracies.

2.2 Main differences between non-professional translation and mainstream subtitling

Although it is hard and time-consuming to pinpoint any single mistake made by fansubbers when comparing a non-professional translation to the official version, there are some general linguistic and syntactic features that can help distinguish between one and the other. One of the main differences between professional and amateur subtitling is the condensation of the source text in translation. While the commercial subtitled version of a film or a TV series is usually shorter and more concise than the audio version, fansubs are generally very literal translations.

In the DVD version of *Vicious* there are no subtitles included except for the English HOH (Hard of Hearing), which are usually different from mainstream subtitles. They should reproduce as much as possible the content of the original dialogue, and therefore condensation is not used. As pointed out by Diaz Cintas (2013), fansubbers use conventions taken from other translation forms, such as the deaf and hard of hearing subtitles. Besides the fidelity to the source text, HOH subtitles and fansubs have in common the use of different colours depending on the type of utterance or writing that appears on the screen. Turning to the faithfulness to the foreign audiovisual product, this is considered one of the most important features of fansubbing (Massidda 2015:86). This principle probably derives from one of the main reasons why fansubbing was born: the phenomenon represents a reaction against mainstream subtitling which did not satisfy anime fans (Massidda 2015:36). According to them, the official translation is too detached from the original version as it hides some essential aspects of the source culture. Consequently, fansubbers tend to translate everything rather than omitting words that are normally omitted in the official translation, because not sticking to the source text would be interpreted as a failing for them (Massidda 2015:86). This is the reason why colloquial words used to address someone or repetitions - usually removed in mainstream subtitling - are translated in the target language. For instance, in the audio version Violet calls Freddie and Stuart "darling", which is translated in the correspondent Italian "tesoro". In this case this word is important to convey the register and emphasize the style of the character of Violet, whose exuberance always annoys Freddie and Stuart. Repetitions are not removed because the dialogue is supposed to

imitate the naturalness of spontaneous language, in which they are very common, especially in filmic discourse (Bączkowska 2015). For example, the line “Yes, yes, yes, just move it along!” in the English HOH version is literally translated into Italian, keeping the repetition: “Sì, sì, sì. Muoversi!”. On the matter, Ivarsson and Carrol (1998:87-88) argue that repetitions, as well as conversational words and tautologies, can be omitted, but sometimes their presence makes the difference. In fact, in this case the repetition emphasizes the annoyance of Freddie while he is kicking his weird guests out of his house. As for exclamations and names called out, they are generally removed in professional subtitling, because it is thought that the viewer can understand what is said anyway (Ivarsson and Carrol 1998:93). By contrast, in *Vicious*, both exclamations such as “Oi” - translated as “Ehi” in the Italian version and names called out are kept in the target text.

According to Bączkowska (2015), the main function of subtitles is reproducing what the authors say, but since they are written, they necessarily have features of written discourse, which collocates them midway between written and spoken language. Following this argument, interjections should be removed from subtitles, even though some of them are lexicalized. Since interjections can have different meanings in different languages (Bruti and Zanotti 2015), their translation can be very difficult and problematic, even more so as some of them exist for instance in the source language but have no meaning for the target audience. In spite of the risk of misinterpretation, amateur translators usually retain a significant number of interjections in the target text. The two most common interjections in the Wedding episode of *Vicious* are “Well” and “Oh”. The former corresponding word in Italian is lexicalized as “Bene”, but is translated as “Beh”, which is a very common Italian interjection. Even if exhaustivity tends to be the main criteria for fansubbers (Bruti and Zanotti 2015), the interjection “Oh” is usually omitted, probably because in Italian it is less common in a discourse. Traditionally, bad words should be treated as interjections, but in recent years they are considered independent words and softened in the official subtitles (Bączkowska 2015). This is not done in the fan translation of *Vicious* however (see section 4.2). Another feature of the fan translation examined is the presence of three dots at the end of several lines, even though they are not necessary. Indeed, in their book about subtitling, Ivarsson and Carrol (1998:94) explain that three full stops should be used only in extreme situations, such as pauses and hesitations.

As stated previously, the translation of subtitles is limited by the time restrictions conventionally established. Accordingly, in mainstream subtitling it is recommended to leave the subtitles on the screen for five to six/seven seconds (Ivarsson and Carrol 1998:63-64), because besides the text, the

viewer must be able to understand what is occurring overall: images, sounds and writing are part of the viewing experience too. Differently, Subsfactory allows one to six seconds, which might be considered too little time, but bearing in mind that the target audience is mainly young, their reading rhythm is generally fast.

3. TRANSLATING HUMOUR

Interestingly, humour can be considered to be one of the most challenging aspects of translation. What people laugh at depends very much on their culture, their habits and their social status. Moreover, different nations may not find the same things funny, because in each country humour can be based on different factors. Hence some people might not understand a translated joke, if the translator does not take into account all the reasons why people find the original text funny. Humour is also subjective and depends on everyone's tastes, even people who share the same culture and have the same social status might laugh at different jokes. Taking into account the hypothesis made by Chiaro (2005:138), that humour on screen is more likely to be successful in its country of origin rather than abroad it can be very difficult to do a functioning translation of humour that meets the requirements of the audience. In subtitling, translating humour can be even more complicated, because sometimes the tone and the level of the voice are crucial to understand a pun, and they cannot be directly rendered in a written form.

As far as fansubbing is concerned, fans usually have enough knowledge of the source culture to understand the sense of humour of the country in question. Besides, the extratextual elements can play an important role in making a comedy even funnier. As Antonini (2005:212) points out, humour on the screen is expressed both by words and images, which means that it is strictly related to the visual and the verbal aspect of a comedy. Likewise, the use of canned laughter – adopted in *Vicious* as well - highlights the presence of a joke or a funny situation, drawing the viewer's attention to that scene and letting him or her know that something amusing is going on. In *Vicious*, Freddie and Stuart are homosexual and the way they talk, both in terms of linguistic expression and tone, aims at emphasizing the characters they represent. Curiously, the couple are gay in real life as well, which makes all the jokes even more entertaining. In the next section, I will analyse the main manifestations of humour in the fan translation of *Vicious*, outlining the translational strategies used and giving an account of the use of swearing and taboo language for entertaining purposes. In *Vicious*, indeed, swearwords are one of the most common language features used to make the audience laugh.

3.1. Translation strategies

Verbally expressed humour is even more difficult to translate if the reading support is the screen, and this is particularly true for subtitling. First, subtitling imposes time and space constraints that must be respected, and since verbal language is the only aspect of the audiovisual product that the translator can modify, the subtitler's work becomes harder (Chiaro 2006:199). Even though every audiovisualelement contributes in conveying the meaning of each utterance, the dependence that subtitles have on these elements is another difficulty for the translation of humour (Chiaro 2006:200). Another challenge of translating humour is that jokes can be created from any knowledge resource, without limits (Wang 2014:276). The refore, the translator has to make sure that he or she knows where the humour comes from and that the target audience can understand the source of the joke in the translated version. There are three main translational strategies adopted to deal with humour on the screen, that aim at achieving in the translation the same effect and emotional response that humour produces on the source audience (Chiaro, 2004. Cited in Chiaro, 2006:200):

- Verbally expressed humour (VEH) in the source language is substituted with another example of VEH in the target language.
- VEH found in the source language is substituted with an idiomatic expression in the target language.
- VEH in the source language is replaced with a compensatory VEH in another part of the target language version.

The following chart provides some examples of the humour manifestations in the original dialogue compared to the Subsfactory's version.

Dialogue (ST)	Subsfactory's version (TT)	Back Translation
<p>A: "But I still have more maid-of-honour duties to fulfil"</p> <p>B: "Matron"</p> <p>"You look like something out of a Dickens novel."</p> <p>"We always have that rapid-fire Katharine Hepburn/Spencer Tracy</p>	<p>A: "Ma devo ancora adempiere agli altri doveri della damigella d'onore"</p> <p>B: "Matrona d'onore"</p> <p>"Sembri uscita da un romanzo di Dickens."</p> <p>"Tra noi c'è sempre, come...una scarica di proiettili, Katharine</p>	<p>A: "But I still have to fulfil the other maidof-honour duties"</p> <p>B: "Matron of honour"</p> <p>"You look like something out of a Dickens novel."</p> <p>"There's always like a bullet-burst between us, Katharine Hepburn</p>

back and forth rat-a-tat-tat.”	Hepburn e Spencer Tracy, avanti e indietro, ra-ta-ta.	and Spencer Tracy, back and forth, rat-a-tat-tat.”
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Table 1: Examples of humour in *Vicious*

The three versions use the same translation strategy, which does not correspond to any of the strategies mentioned above but consists of foreignizing the target text and translating the utterances literally. In the first example, Violet defines herself as the “maid of honour”, but Freddie corrects her calling her “matron”, because of her age. Despite “matrona d’onore” is not frequently used in Italian, the literal translation is the best solution, because the purpose of the joke is kept in the fansubbed version, and the words “maid of honour” and “matron of honour” exist both in English and Italian.

The second example is taken from a scene in which Violet wears a white long dress for the wedding that makes her look like a bride. Freddie looks at her disappointedly and tells her that she looks like something out of a Dickens novel. Dickens was a great English novelist of the Victorian era, which is not part of the Italian culture.

However, Dickens is well known in Italy by people of all ages, so once again retaining the original is a translational solution that works well. In addition, the target audience of fan translations has a good knowledge of the source culture, so they know the background of the joke.

Lastly, the witticism reported in the third example is used as an ironic metaphor to describe the relationship between Violet and her mean careless husband. Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy were two American actors who were very famous in Italy as well in the Fifties, but young people are not very familiar with the couple. The fansubbed episodes viewers are mainly young people who may not understand the comparison. Translating this line by substituting the VEH in the source text with another example of VEH in the target text would have probably been a better solution, given that these fansubs do not include explanatory notes nor comments. In other cases, this practice is instead very common: footnotes and explanations, as well as different character sizes or fonts are used by fansubbers to reproduce the paralinguistic features found in the source text (Wang 2014:270). The third example considered demonstrates that when it comes to the translation of cultural elements, their rendering can be complicated. The most common strategies used to translate cultural references which are familiar in a language but not in the other can be either source language oriented or target language oriented (Pedersen 2005:3). Amateur translations are target language oriented: this foreignization provides the viewer a closer

understanding of the source text and, as stated by Pérez-González (2012:336), the translation plays an intercultural brokerage role between the producers and the users.

3.2. *Swearwords and taboo language*

In his paper concerning foul language, Gürkan (2013:19) argues that there is not a great number of publications and studies on swearing. However, there are some conventions that translators should take into account when dealing with bad language in accordance with the professional translation rules, Ivarsson and Carroll (1998:126) argue that even if the subtitler does not necessarily have to act as a censor, bad words and obscenities should be toned down. As mentioned above, different countries laugh at different things. In the same way, different countries have a different perception of swearwords: bad language derives from taboo are as that depend on culture, people's lifestyle and religion. There are however intercultural taboos, such as words related to sexual intercourse and bodily effluvia (Gürkan 2013:18). Also, swearing and taboo language have a stronger effect in written form than in dialogues, especially if the expressions are translated literally. On the contrary, fansubs must be faithful to the source text, even though it means rendering foul language, which is neither levelled down nor suppressed (Massidda 2015:90). Swearwords and taboo language play an important role in characterizing humour in *Vicious*, because Freddie and Stuart playfully insult each other and their guests all the time. According to Gürkan (2013:25-26), the two most common translation strategies used for swearwords are the following:

- *Direct translation*: bad words are translated with words that have the closest meaning and register to the original version and that create the same effect in the target language as in the source text.
- *Omission/neutral translation*: foul language is either removed or substituted with euphemisms in order to moderate the impact of swearing. Another solution can be permutation, which consists in replacing the taboo area in question. Permutation can be stronger, equal or milder, depending on the vulgarity of the taboo area chosen in the target language.

The following chart provides some examples of swearing in the episode of *Vicious* analysed.

Dialogue (ST)	Subsfactory's version (TT)	Back Translation
"Who the hell let you in?"	"Chi diavolo ti ha fatto entrare?"	"Who the hell let you in?"
"You're a really crap matron of honour. Do you know that?"	"Sei proprio una matrona d'onore di merda. Losai?"	"You're a really crap matron of honour. Do you know that?"
"What the fuck is she wearing?"	"Come cazzo si è conciata?"	"How the fuck is she dressed?"
"Oh, good Lord!"	"Buon Dio!"	"Good Lord!"
"As the matron of honour, you have been absolutely no frigging help at all."	"Come matrona d'onore non sei stato di alcun diavolo d'aiuto".	"As the matron of honour, you have been non bloody help at all."
"And who the bloody hell are you?"	"E tu chi diavolo saresti?"	"And who the hell are you?"

Table 2: Examples of swearing and foul language in *Vicious*

As reported in the chart above, the main humour categories found in *Vicious* are related to sex, religion and bodily effluvia, language areas that are usually considered taboo. Looking at the back translation of each fansub, the original dialogue is mainly translated literally, and foul language is not omitted. The dominant translational strategy used instead is direct translation. All the bad words are retained from the original and the taboo areas used in the source text usually remain unchanged. However, in the two last utterances, swearwords seem a bit levelled down. Whereas "frigging" in the original version is a vulgar word and has a strong impact on the viewer, the word "diavolo" in Italian is slightly more colloquial, and it is a lighter form of swearing compared to the literal translation of "frigging". In the last line, the expression "who the bloody hell are you" should be translated in Italian as "Chi cazzo sei?" ("Who the fuck are you?"), while the Subsfactory's version is a little toned down, using the word "diavolo" once again. In spite of this limited difference, as stated by Gürkan (2013:8), while the official translation would have used milder words, fansubbers translate swearing with words of equal force. In the mainstream version, the occurrence of foul language might be problematic, because each audience has a different reaction to it. However, in fan

translation these linguistic features are not hidden, because otherwise the viewers would not understand the meaning of the sentences and the situations properly (Gürkan 2013:12). The risk in translating swearwords is that by depriving an audiovisual text of strong and politically incorrect language one might cause a semantic loss (Massidda 2015:97), especially as far as *Vicious* is concerned, where explicit language has a strict connection with the expression of humour.

As for the perception of swearing in subtitles, in Italy there are no specific rules related to censure. In fact, even the audiovisual translation industry does not adopt explicit norms but relies on simple common sense (Bucaria 2015). The translational choices of bad words depend therefore on the translators themselves, who judge which solution might be most acceptable for the target audience. Moreover, translation manuals do not specify how to deal with controversial language, but it should be toned down and its rendering should be admissible in the target culture (Diaz Cintas and Ramael, 2007. Cited in Bucaria, 2015:85).

4. CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted to provide an account of Italian fansubbing taking as an example a translation made by the Italian online fansubbing community called Subsfactory. At present, there is not a great amount of academic work on the manifestation of the fansubbing phenomenon in Italy. The reason is probably that Italy - as well as Germany, France, Spain, etc. - is known as a “dubbing country”, in other words a country where subtitling is not as common as dubbing, which is the main form of audiovisual translation used. Nevertheless, the availability of and accessibility to subtitled programmes has led to the preference for a multilingual approach to the audiovisual market, and to an increased use of subtitling (Antonini 2005:211). This growth is fostered by fansubbing which, despite being an actual copyright infringement, has notably helped several foreign audiovisual products to become popular and appreciated around the world by diversified audiences. This fandom practice is rewarded only by the satisfaction of fans who share their passion with other fans and who contribute to form part of a massive number of volunteers who keep joining the amateur communities (O’Hagan 2012). As some studies have demonstrated, fansubbing also has considerable potential to improve language learning. It has been suggested that a strong interest in a particular genre – for instance comedies or Japanese anime can greatly enhance second language acquisition (O’Hagan 2008). Moreover, it helps to build a network of relationships and improves team work skills, making fansubbing a potentially valuable teaching method.

The analysis carried out in this paper demonstrates that the preferred translational choice adopted by fansubbers is foreignizing. Fansubs retain as much as possible of the original product, in order to make the viewer read and feel the foreignness that is usually lost or hidden in mainstream translation. Indeed, sometimes the audience understands the target language, but still needs the subtitles to watch a particular episode or movie. Several times the subtitles are different from the original dialogue, and these viewers complain if the changes made are more than necessary (Ivarsson and Carroll (1998:74). This denotes how important the spectator's perception is, even in translation: on this matter, Nornes (1999:20) argues that when the translator exaggerates by cutting too much of the original text, most of the readers will consider this reduction "inept".

In the last section, I focused on the translation of humour and bad language in amateur subtitles: rendering humour is particularly challenging and bad language should be in some way moderated. However, everything is translated literally, using words or phrases of equal force, because in the case of *Vicious*, swearing and taboo language describe the personality of the main characters. Despite the absence of a domesticating strategy, the literal translation has the benefit of showing the Italian audience, which knows the source culture, which humorous features are considered funny by a British audience. Although the solution illustrated breaks professional translation norms, the use of a different translation strategy seems to be unnecessary, considering the target audience and the purpose of the translation.

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