## BOOK REVIEWS

Serenella Massidda. (2015) *AVT in the digital era. The Italian fansubbing phenomenon*. London: Palgrave. x, 133 pp.

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This book describes the phenomenon of Italian fansubbing from a multidisciplinary perspective, while it also reflects on theoretical concepts related to subtitling and translation processes, as a whole. The book's main argument is that fansubbing in Italy has become a practice with an important and positive impact on professional subtitling in the country. This conclusion is obtained from the qualitative analysis of subtitles proposed by fansubbers (two Italian fansubbing communities, namely ItaSA and Subsfactory) and professional subtitlers (DVD versions) for a few episodes of the American TV shows *Lost* and *Californication*. The book is the result of a PhD research project.

The book contains an introduction, seven chapters, and a concluding chapter. The Introduction explains the context and the methodology used in the research, and it also establishes the theoretical framework which will steer the later analysis. A 'declaration of principles' can be read on page 13, where the author mentions the scholarly work that has inspired her analysis: Toury's seminal book on Descriptive Translation Studies (1995), Chesterman's work on norms (1997), Schleiermacher's dual approach to translation (1813), Lewis's "abusive fidelity" (1985), Venuti's concept of the translator's "visibility" (2008), and Nornes's concept of "abusive subtitling" (1999). The author also makes it clear that her intention is not only to "analyse the phenomenon in depth" but also to determine "a set of future guidelines for subtitlers," to be derived from actual mainstream and fansubbing conventions (13). These new guidelines appear on page 63 of the book.

The seven chapters that follow the Introduction could be split up in two main groups. Chapters 1 through 4 present a general overview of fansubbing in the context of Audiovisual Translation (AVT) and new technologies. This first group of chapters creates the relevant context and paves the way for the analysis itself, to be found in chapters 5, 6, and 7. The final chapter, devoted to Conclusions, presents a summary of the study and discusses some future steps which may serve as a continuation of the study.

Chapters 1 to 4 are dedicated to 1) "Web 2.0: A Marketing Ideology?"; 2) "The State of the Art of Italian AVT: Dubbing vis-à-vis Subtitling"; 3) "Fansubbing"; and 4) "Subtitling and Fansubbing Standards: A Hybrid Proposal." They cover pages 14 to 64 in the book, and they are very comprehensive and interesting to read. While

also discussing some general questions regarding AVT, dubbing and subtitling, they provide some detailed insights into the fansubbing phenomenon, especially in the context of Italy. Importantly, the author describes her own experience as a member of the two Italian fansubbing communities referred to in the book, which enabled her to understand their hierarchy and organization, as well as to gather some valuable information about their guidelines, procedures and staffing levels (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2 on pages 51 and 54, for ItaSA and Subsfactory, respectively). This set of chapters finishes with a "hybrid proposal" for guidelines aimed at both professional subtitlers and fansubbers. The proposal includes three topics, namely "General aim," "Layout" and "Omission," but it could be summarised in two main recommendations. First, subtitlers should try to follow a foreignizing approach, for example, by using loan words for translating cultural references, by subtitling loan words and conversational false starts, and by introducing neologisms. Secondly, subtitles of two lines with a maximum of 45 characters each (the fansubbing practice) are recommended. This second aspect may involve quite a big change in professional subtitling, and it also proves to be crucial to the analysis performed and explained later in the book.

As mentioned above, chapters 5, 6 and 7 summarise the analysis of the corpus used in the research. The two former chapters make use of two episodes of the American TV show Lost (episode 1 of the second season and episode 1 of the final season) in an attempt to carry out a diachronic analysis of the evolution of fansubbing practices, while comparing it with the professional (DVD) versions. The analysis covers aspects such as line length and characters per second, text on screen and position of subtitles, measurements and conventions, interference from dubbese, mistranslations, faithfulness in translation, text compression and omission, and typographical conventions. The final chapter in this group, entitled "Censorship and Humour in *Californication*," studies a pilot episode of the American TV show *Californication*, and it focuses on several important translation issues such as sex, humour and foul language, political correctness, adaptation and mistranslation. Again, the subtitles proposed by the two Italian communities are compared with the ones in the professional (DVD) version. The analysis is presented in the form of 'tables' with examples – 13 tables for Chapter 5; 14 tables for Chapter 6; 15 tables for Chapter 7 – which are also thoroughly commented in the text. The Italian renderings are back-translated into English, which helps to understand the explanations and points made.

On the basis of the analysis, Chapter 6 concludes that "on the whole, there is a 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" (95). Along similar lines, at the end of chapter 7 one can read that "censorship […] cannot explain the inadequate

renderings of the original text made by professionals throughout the whole episode" (111). And also:

> the tendency among fansubbers to adhere to the source text strictly, has proved ultimately successful, since for each mistranslation or undertranslation 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.
>
> (112)

As a consequence, the main outcome of the analysis seems to be twofold: 1) professional subtitlers seem to incorporate in their work some of the proposals made by fansubbers; and 2) subtitles by fansubbers are of superior quality compared to the professionally produced ones.

It may seem that these two conclusions could be called risky, to say the least, if the methodology followed (purely qualitative) and the small corpus size (3 episodes) are taken into account. The tables with examples are appropriate to present the points made, but it is not explained in the book if these examples are recurrent throughout the corpus, or how many similar instances there are. Altogether, these conclusions are drawn out of just 42 tables (all the ones in Chapters 5, 6 and 7), and they are intended to cover a vast number of aspects in the analysis. Furthermore, one can even wonder if the proposals made by fansubbers and professionals as shown in the tables are really comparable, since the number of characters in each case (and, consequently, the reading speeds as expressed in characters per second, for example) is different, namely, 35 versus 45 maximun per line of subtitle. One may assume that this availability of an extra ten characters per line of subtitle enables the fansubbers to minimize the reduction effort – representing the main characteristic and difficulty of subtitling as an AVT mode – and thus gives them additional space to come up with more creative solutions. Similarly, the reading speeds for both proposals are not the same (as shown in Table 5.2, page 68), again making the comparison rather questionable. All in all, the intended readership, or target audience, for both subtitling proposals is basically different, which may in the final analysis cast some doubt on the whole comparative exercise as a basis for the assertive statements which are made.

Still, the research presented in this book is undoubtedly innovative and of great value, since it sheds light on an evolving AVT mode (fansubbing), which has not been subject to a detailed research like this one, for the case of Italy, so far. Moreover, the interactions between fansubbing and professional subtitling are a particularly interesting field of research, and this book has paved the way for more in-depth studies, maybe from a global perspective.

# References

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