Graduation thesis

Bachelor's degree

Lost in mistranslation

A case study of Japanese TV-drama fansubs

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Abstract

「Fansubs」というのはファンが翻訳した字幕のことである。
本稿では日本のテレビドラマの「Fansubs」の特徴を調べる為、３つのテレビドラマの日本語の台詞と、ファンが作った字幕を比べている。原文のテキストが翻訳と字幕制作でどのように変わったかを情報の増減や誤訳など９つのカテゴリーに分類し、字幕テキストを分析した。作成したのがプロの翻訳者ではなく、または非常に短期間で作成されたこの「Fansubs」は、公式のテレビやDVDの字幕よりも誤訳などのエラーが非常に多いことが分かった。

1. Introduction

I have for some time been interested in a phenomenon called "fansubs" which are subtitles produced by fans, or at least amateurs and distributed through the internet. While reading these subtitles I have noticed differences compared to the ones usually seen on TV or in movies. When doing preliminary research it became clear that most of what has been written about this subject is focused on subtitling of anime, Japanese animation. As my interest lies in Japanese TV drama series, for which no previous research could be found, it seemed like an interesting area to investigate.

1.1 Background

Although Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sanches states that a fansub is "a fan-produced… version of a Japanese anime programme"[1], it is in fact not restricted to anime and Perez Gonzalez describes it merely as a phenomenon that "has gone hand in hand with globalisation of Japanese animated cinema"[2]. Subtitles produced by fans of Japanese animation or "Fansubs" have been around since the 1980s when it started to spread on VHS and laserdisc, but as computer and internet access has increased so has the fansub communities who cooperate and distribute their work online[3]. Before that, fan communities distributed original films as a way to protest the localisation policies at the time[4]. These policies resulted in material that, except for a different narrative and visual identity could not be identified as anything other than an American product. Although it started with anime fans translating and distributing the shows and movies they liked, it has since spread to all genres of movies and TV, even video games.

There are two distinctly different kinds of fansubs, hardsubs and softsubs. Hardsubs are encoded in to the video which means that if you want to watch the program subtitled in another language you would have to get another video file. The hardsubs usually take advantage of the flexibility in layout they present by making use of typesetting, using different text colours and fonts for different characters and doing karaoke text effects [animated text] for opening and closing songs. Softsubs on the other hand utilises a separate file containing the text which the media player software then shows superimposed on the screen using a time code in the text file to show them at the right time. This kind of fansub looks a lot like what you would see on TV or in movies. The obvious advantage of softsubs over hardsubs is that you can easily get another language file without the need to download another big video file and you can also choose to watch the program without any text at all. In my experience TV drama fansubs are more commonly done as softsubs while the ones for anime are done as hardsubs. Though fansubbing is commonly performed by groups where each member performs one or several tasks, there are also individuals who release their own subtitling offers. According to Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sanches the process of fansubbing usually consists of the following 9 steps[5].

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[1] Jorge Díaz Cintas & Pablo Muñoz Sanches, Fansubs: Audiovisual Translation in an Amateur Environment. *The Journal of Specialised Translation issue 6: 37-52,* 2006, p. 37

[2] Luis Perez Gonzalez, Fansubbing anime: Insights into the 'butterfly effect' of globalization on audiovisual translation. *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology vol.14, No.4: 260-277, 2006,* p. 260

[3] Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sanches, 2006, p. 37

[4] Perez Gonzalez, *2006,* p. 265

[5] Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sanches. 2006. *pp. 40-43*

1. Acquisition of the untranslated "raw" video.

2. Translation.

3. Timing of the text to the dialog.

4. Typesetting, choosing fonts etc.

5. Karaoke for opening and ending songs.

6. Revision by an editor, finding and fixing mistakes.

7. Encoding the new video file with subs.

8. Quality check.

9. Distribution.

In the case of softsubs, steps 4 and 5 are not possible to do since the video player software decides fonts, etc., and step 7 is not needed since the text is delivered as a separate file.

Anime fansubs were once regarded as a testing ground of sorts, for the commercial actors to check the publics interest in certain series and to broaden the fan base. While they still recognise the importance fansubs has had, they now see them as a threat to their sales[6].

The reason for the lack of academic interest in the fansubbing of Japanese TV dramas may of course be that it is a much smaller scene than is the case with anime. Although academic interest in anime fansubs is not that big either, there has at least been some work done on the characteristics of those subtitles, but I have yet to find any work specifically dealing with Japanese TV drama series. It could just be that very few of these have any official distribution overseas, the situation is similar to when fansubbing of anime started out, when licensed and sold material were hard to find outside of Japan. With the rise in high speed internet connectivity, these series could now all be watched as streamed media online in the same manner as Netflix, HBO and similar sites. In fact, streaming is already available, but at the time of writing only one site was found, Crunchy Roll[7], that offers licensed and subtitled Japanese drama. The number of drama series is still rather small though, compared to the anime titles available on the same site it is virtually non-existent and because they are still not available in all countries and because fans all over the world still want to see new series, the fansubbing is probably not going stop any time soon.

1.2 Previous studies

There have been a lot of studies made on subtitles through the years, in order to determine e.g. optimal number of characters or words per line in regard to average reading speeds of the general public, not least by Jan Ivarsson and Mary Caroll[8]. But not that much has been done on the subject of fansubs.

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[6] Hye-Kyung Lee, *Participatory Media Fandom. Media Culture Society November 2011 vol. 33 no. 8: 1131-1147* pp. 1139-1141

[7] Crunchyroll. accessed 2013-11-07 http://www.crunchyroll.com/videos/drama

[8] Jan Ivarsson & Mary Carroll. *Subtitling.*1998.

In his paper "Features and Typology of Japanese Subtitles in Films in English", Toshihiko Kobayashi has categorised the words of the entire dialog of 35 english language movies and compared them to the Japanese subtitles to find out about the changes the text goes through in the process of subtitling[9]. From this paper comes the foundation for the method of analysis used in this thesis.

Previous studies on fansubs are largely focused on fansubbing of anime. Since that is where the whole fansubbing phenomenon seems to have started, it is only natural that it has attracted the most attention. But the fact is that there are a great number of fansubs being produced for other genres of film and TV as well and these have not been subject to research to the same extent as anime fansubs. A rather comprehensive description of the (anime) fansubbing process can be found in "Fansubs: Audiovisual Translation in an Amateur Environment" by Jorge Díaz Cintas and Pablo Muñoz Sánchez[10]. In this paper they give a detailed description of how fansubs are produced, who are involved, ethics and also of the characteristics of the finished fansub.

Moving on from the world of anime, in his research on fansubbing of English language movies into Swedish[11], Fredrik Ivarsson found that the fansubbers more or less translated the entire spoken dialog into the Swedish subtitles. In professional subtitles it is common to see a reduction of about 43% from the original dialog script[12]. This has resulted in many more subtitles in the fansubbed versions, than in the professional DVD subtitles he used as comparison and as a result they present a greater challenge to the viewer, giving them more to read and not enough time to watch the movie itself[13].

As far away as the fansubs may be from traditional subtitle conventions, some of the techniques used by them have found their way in to mainstream media. Pérez-González takes the 2010 British TV series "Sherlock" as an example where text is placed all around the screen in order to visualise Sherlock Holmes' process of deduction[14].

Another interesting study has been conducted by Lisa Olsson on the effects that the omission of intensifiers, interjections and fillers in the official English subtitles of the TV-series "The Wire" have on the viewing experience[15]. The conclusion is that it robs the characters of their individuality, making the dialog stiff and formal.

These studies represent some of the more prominent works in the area of subtitling and fansubs, along with a couple of other, equally interesting and useful studies.

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[9] Toshihiko Kobayashi, *Features and Typology of Japanese Subtitles in Films in English, 2000,* Accessed 2013-10-28. http://hdl.handle.net/10252/729

[10] Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sanches, *Fansubs: Audiovisual Translation in an Amateur Environment,* 2006.

[11] Fredrik Ivarsson, *Subtitling: Quality differences between professional and amateur subtitlers,* 2007 p. 70.

[12] Luiz Pérez-González, Amateurs subtitling and the pragmatics of spectatorial subjectivity, *Language and Intercultural Communication, 12:4, 335-352,* 2012. p. 350.

[13] F Ivarsson, 2007. p. 70.

[14] Luis Pérez-González. *Co-creational subtitling in the digital media: Transformative and authorial practices.* pp. 14-18, Accessed 2013-10-30, http://ics.sagepub.com/content/16/1/3.abstract

[15] Lisa Olsson, *Omission Phenomena in the American TV-series "The Wire",* 2010, p.15.

1.3 Research questions

This case study of three fansubs will take a closer look at what Japanese TV drama fansubs are like and how they compare to the "rules" that professional TV subtitle producers go by.

I. How accurate are the translations? I.e. how many, or few, mistranslations and other alterations has been made?

II. Do they follow recognised subtitle traditions regarding characters per line and words per minute, etc.?

2. Method and material

2.1 Method

The first part of the research for this paper was to find some TV drama series to investigate. In the next step the lines of the original dialog and the corresponding lines of the fansubs were collected in three spreadsheets for analysis (see table 1 for example). Because of differing word orders, when a spoken piece of dialog spans more than one subtitle it will be presented only on the same row as the first subtitle. The source for all fansub files used in this research was the subtitle index of D-Addicts, an internet community where mainly asian TV drama series are shared and discussed[16].

Table 1 - Example of collected data

Original dialog	Subtitle #	start	end	English subtitle	Alteration	Notes
高田純次どうかなぁ〜。	1	00:00:09,64	00:00:12,23	How about Takada Junji?(Actor and comedian)	Addition - Clarification	

When analysing the collected data, a first overview of the translations was performed to see if any problem was more prominent. Noting occurrences of mistranslations, simplifications, omissions, etc., while at the same time comparing the three selected fansubs to each other. For example the group of fansubbers (see Material section below) was expected to make less mistakes since there should be more than one person checking the results.

In categorizing the changes that had occurred in translation a system devised by Toshihiko Kobayashi was used to determine whether the level of information in the subtitles had increased or decreased compared to the spoken dialog (see table 2 below)[17].

Table 2 - Kobayashi's categorisation

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
1. Reduction	1. Simplification	1. approximation, 2. generalisation, 3. integration
	2. Omission	1. subject, 2. verb, 3. object, 4. adjective, 5. adverb, 6. idiomatic phrase, 7. example, 8. interjection, 9. sentence
2. Addition	1. Clarification	1. contextualisation, 2. compensation, 3. specification, 4. emphasis, 5. conversion
	2. Variation	

He uses three levels of categories, but in this thesis only the first two levels are used. There are two top level categories to decide whether there has been a **reduction** or **addition** of information. That is, does the reader of the subtitle know more or less than someone who only listens to the spoken dialog? At the next level he specifies that reduction can be either **simplification** or **omission**. Omission is simply when words or sentences have not been transferred in to the subtitle and it is not

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[16] Subtitles Index of D-Addicts. Accessed 2013-10-28. http://www.d-addicts.com/forum/subtitles.php

[17] Kobayashi, *2000,* pp. 37-38.

compensated for in any other way. Simplification could be the use of ''bank'' instead of the name of the bank. This can be used if the bank is well known in the source culture but not in the target culture. It could also be the rewriting of two sentences in to one, to fit in one subtitle. Addition is divided into **clarification** and **variation**. Clarification is when the translator adds some kind of information that was not explicitly uttered in the dialog. Fansubbers in particular are prone to use translator's notes to explain cultural phenomenon and this would be considered clarification. Variation on the other hand, is used when the speaker repeats a word or sentence, but it would be too monotonous to have the exact same subtitle being shown several times. The translator can then change some of them to something that is similar in meaning or expression and which fits with the situation. For this paper two new top level categories, **mistranslation** and **change of contents**, have been introduced. This was decided on as a lot of mistranslations and changes were discovered in the research material. It could be argued that mistranslations represent a reduction of information, but that is not necessarily true, it could be the same amount(of wrong information). It was therefore decided to make it a new top level category. A subtitle is categorised as a mistranslation if any part of it is translated incorrectly, e.g., if one subtitle contains a dialog pair, where one is correct and the other is not. Mistranslations are further divided into four groups: Misinterpretation, Wrong Reference, Wrong Negative and Other. Misinterpretation is used for cases when the translators have completely misunderstood what is being said. Wrong reference is a category for when the text in the subtitle refers to someone or something that the spoken dialog does not or the other way round. Wrong negative is for when the translator has made a negative sentence in the dialog into a positive one in the subtitles without making any other changes. Change of contents is a category applied to subtitles which are not translations at all, i.e. the contents does not reflect what is being said. This is sometimes used when what is said does not contain any vital information, instead the translator takes the opportunity to, for example explain something that is implied in the situation or might be understood only through cultural knowledge.

Table 3 – Categories

Level 1	Level 2	
Reduction	Simplification	Abbreviations, generalisations etc.
	Omission	Deleting words or sentences without any compensation.
Addition	Clarification	Adding information not uttered by the actors. Translator's notes etc.
	Variation	Using different words with the same or similar meaning to avoid repetition.
Mistranslation	Misinterpretation	Complete misunderstanding of the original dialog.
	Wrong Reference	Subtitle is not referring to the same person or thing as in the spoken dialog.
	Wrong Negative	Confusing positive and negative sentences.
	Other	All other mistranslations.
Change of Contents	–	The contents of the subtitle has nothing in common with the spoken dialog.

Arranged after Kobayashi (2000)

The fact that English and Japanese are such different languages makes it hard to always categorise each word, comparing it to a corresponding word in the other language. Because there are not always one to one correspondence and because of that a difficulty to decide on a category for each word, it was decided to apply the categorisation on a sentence or subtitle level as opposed to Kobayashi's word level.

The next part of the analysis was to compare the fansubs to generally accepted subtitle traditions. For example the ITC (Independent Television Commission, now Ofcom) in the UK, recommends not to exceed 140 words per minute under normal circumstances. In exceptional cases you could go as high as 180 words per minute[18]. However, Díaz Cintas & Remael states that a rate of 180 words per minute is the norm for DVD subtitles[19]. Since the format of fansubs more resembles that of DVDs than TV, the latter rate seems more appropriate for a comparison.

2.2 Material

The material for this study are the subtitle text files for the first episodes of the following Japanese TV-dramas and the original dialog of each episode:

D1. ゴーイング マイ ホーム, Going my home[20]

- Subtitles by Heiwa Fansubs [Group][21]

D2. パーフェクト・ブルー, Perfect blue[22]

- Subtitles by Super Saiyan [Individual, 22 years old, Netherlands][23]

D3. リッチマン、プアウーマン, Rich man, poor woman[24]

- Subtitles by Eric Paroissien [Individual, 53 years old, France][25]

For the rest of this paper they will be referred to as D1, D2 and D3 as indicated above. These are all ordinary TV-drama series and according to the DramaWiki the genres are "Family", "Mystery" and "Romantic comedy"[26] respectively. Information about the fansubbers are their own statements, taken from their forum posts or home pages. Because these are just postings on the web, it has not been confirmed if they are correct or not.

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[18] ITC, *ITC Guidance on Standards for Subtitling,* 1999. p. 11. Accessed 2013-09-09. http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/archive/itc/itc_publications/codes_guidance/standards_for_subtitling/index.asp.html

[19] Jorge Díaz Cintas and Aline Remael, *Audiovisual Translation: Subtitling.* Manchester: St. Jerome Pub. 2007, pp. 84 & 98.

[20] KTV/Fuji TV, *Going my home.* 2012.

[21] Heiwa Fansubs, *Going my home, subtitle text file,* 2012. Accessed 2013-10-28 http://www.d-addicts.com/forum/viewtopic_120194.htm

[22] TBS, *Perfect Blue episode 1,* 2012.

[23] Super Saiyan, *Perfect Blue, subtitle text file,* 2012. Accessed 2013-10-28 http://www.d-addicts.com/forum/viewtopic_120430.htm

[24] Fuji TV, *Rich man, poor woman,* 2012.

[25] Eric Paroissien, *Rich man, poor woman, subtitle text file,* 2012. Accessed 2013-10-28 http://www.d-addicts.com/forum/viewtopic_114202.htm

[26] The DramaWiki of D-Addicts. Accessed 2013-10-08. http://wiki.d-addicts.com

D1 is labeled as a family drama and has a very slow pace throughout the whole series with a warm atmosphere and low key humour. It seems the producer of this drama want to promote life in smaller towns where you live close to nature and your family, in contrast to the stressful life in Tokyo. It was aired on stations in the Fuji Network System in 10 episodes during October-December of 2012. The group behind the fansubs, Heiwa Fansubs had 13 members at the time of writing, according to the groups page on D-Addicts. They have listed 39 fansubs over three years prior to the one used in this study, which would suggest a reasonable amount of experience in the production of fansubs. This fansub was released 3 days after the episode was shown on TV in Japan.

D2 is categorised as a mystery drama and the dialog is more fast paced than that of D1 and it also contains vocabulary specific to the world of police work and crime solving. It revolves around a small detective agency that is run "by women, for women". They help their clients while at the same time searching for the truth behind a family member's supposed suicide. It was aired in 11 episodes on TBS, Tokyo Broadcasting System, during October-December of 2012. The fansubs were produced by "Super Saiyan" and according to the post for the subtitle files this was one of his first drama translations. This fansub was released 7 days after the original air date.

D3 is labeled as a romantic comedy and focuses on the relationship developing between a university student and a computer whizz kid who has made a lot of money in the internet gaming business but who now wants to take on a more serious task. Aired in 11 episodes on Fuji TV during July-Sep of 2012. The fansubs were produced by Eric Paroissien who according to his own website has produced other fansubs prior to this one, though mostly movies. This fansub was released the day after it was originally aired in Japan.

These dramas were chosen because they represent different genres and different kinds of fansubbers (group vs individuals). The selection was made with the hope of getting some overview of the TV drama part of the fansub world. The material is limited to include only the first 20 minutes of the first episode of each series. A reason for looking at the first episode of each series is that the fansubbers would not yet have a full understanding of the shows from watching previous episodes. This could then give an indication on how much research they do for their respective translations.

3. Results

Table 4 – Results

	D1 Going my home	D2 Perfect blue	D3 Rich man, poor woman	Total
Number of subtitles	299	269	220	788
Mistranslations	41 (13.7)	11 (4.1)	27 (12.3)	79 (10)
Addition	14 (4.7)		2 (0.9)	16 (2)
Reduction	6 (2)	12 (4.5)	26 (11.8)	44 (5.6)
Change of Contents	6 (2)		9 (4.1)	15 (1.9)

Number of subtitles (% of all subtitles)

The most prominent problem found in the fansubs in this research is mistranslation. It was mentioned in the method chapter that the subtitles produced for D1, by the fansub group (Heiwa

Fansubs) was expected to have a low number of errors, but in fact the results show the opposite. This seems to be supported by Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sanches as they point to the risk of miscommunication when several participants are involved[27]. On the other hand, the fansub for D3 which also contains a lot of errors, was produced by a single person (see table 4 above). A category that you would expect to find a lot of in official subtitles is omission[28], but there are not many omissions in any of the three fansubs. On the contrary, in D1 we find 14 instances of clarification where information that is not part of the spoken dialog is added to the subtitles. Another important characteristic of these fansubs is the Change of contents category. In numbers it comes behind both simplifications and omissions, but the possible impact on the experience of the viewer can be quite big.

4. Analysis

In this chapter we will take a look at some examples of the different categories found in each drama.

4.1 Reduction

First we will look at examples where the level of information has decreased in the translation from dialog to subtitles.

4.1.1 Simplification

Simplifications in subtitles are usually used as a means of saving space or to make it easier to read, but the fansubbers in this survey has not shortened the texts significantly and so they have not used simplifications much either, a few examples will be given anyway.

1 – D1

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
59	大げさなんだよな　あの担任は。	00:03:19,56	00:03:21,75	That teacher is just exaggerating things.

This is an example of generalisation where a 'homeroom teacher' has been translated with its superordinate 'teacher'.

2 – D1

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
80	じゃあ萌江　その人と何語でしゃべってんの？	00:04:28,85	00:04:31,25	Then Moe, how do you talk with this person?

Here the subtitle saves a little bit of space by paraphrasing the original, which is asking for what language she uses, into 'how do you talk…'.

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[27] Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sanches, 2006, p.39

[28] Pérez-González, 2012, p.350.

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
191	はい　兄がずっと親代わりを	00:14:55,69	00:14:58,36	Yes, my brother has been taking care of me…

The original states that his big brother acted as a parent to him, but in the subtitle it has been shortened to 'my brother…taking care of me…'. The **big brother** has also been generalised and replaced with the superordinate **brother.**

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
105	大学　うちらに死ねって　言ってんのかな？	00:08:54,73	00:08:58,22	Our university wants to kill us

The question in the dialog is asking if their university is telling them to ''drop dead'', but this has been slightly shortened by paraphrasing the rhetorical question into a shorter, direct statement.

4.1.2 Omission

Moving on from the simplifications, we will now look at omissions. These are cases where part of the dialog has been cut without paraphrasing, generalisation or other techniques. In D1 there are only two omissions and both of these are interjections and none of them really needed to be translated, so no examples will be presented from D1.

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
152	お前が思ってる新人と違う。一何それ	00:12:30,69	00:12:34,05	But it's different from what you imagine.

In this case the translator has omitted the second persons short answer to the first statement, maybe to save a little space.

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
182	それは… これ	00:14:19,04	00:14:22,02	That was …this.
	ゴルフボール			Omitted
	これをこう　脇に挟んで　ここの動脈を押さえて脈を止めてたらしい。			Omitted
183	何か手品のネタで使う手法だそうだ。	00:14:22,02	00:14:32,01	It appeared to be a technique using a trick.

In example 6 the translator has omitted two lines of the dialog, instead leaving subtitle #183 on screen for ten seconds, covering all three spoken sentences. Perhaps he couldn't find a short enough translation to the middle sentence and thought the visual demonstration on screen coupled with the last sentence explained it well enough. The first omission ゴルフボール, **golfball**, is an English loan word and the typical fansub viewer shouldn't have any problem understanding the Japanese pronunciation, especially as a golfball is shown in the picture at the same time. According to Díaz Cintas and Remael, leaving the subtitle on screen for ten seconds is also a bad idea since it can cause the viewer to start rereading[29].

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
220	お願いします　刑事さん**お願いします**	00:14:19,04	00:14:22,02	Please, officer.

In this subtitle one word, a second お願いします**, please,** has been omitted. It is not a big loss of information but it makes the dialog a little more bland. It is of course compensated for by the audiovisual components of the video.

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
37	安岡です。日向社長は興味のない人のことは覚えない。	00:04:14,73	00:04:20,00	President Hyuga I know you don't remember people you have no interest in

As in example 7 above, the presentation in example 8, 安岡です, **I'm Yasuoka**, has most likely been omitted because it is a repetition, in this case from the line immediately before it. But in this subtitle there is also a case of addition, with **I know** being added although it is present in the next subtitle as well, creating a new repetition while at the same time deleting another.

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[29] Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, p 89.

<div align="center">9 – D3</div>

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
89	資格も取った。　–万全だね	00:07:59,10	00:08:02,37	I even took the qualifications supplement.

A short answer, 万全だね, "You're really well prepared!" has been left out, slightly reducing the viewers understanding of the friendly conversation.

<div align="center">10 – D3</div>

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
136	あと　奥の小山さん梅チュー追加ですけど　梅入れると怒ります。	00:09:25,18	00:09:28,03	Mr. Koyama wants a plum cocktail, but gets mad if you put a plum into it.

In this example 奥の小山さん, "Mr. Koyama **in the back**" (of the restaurant). **In the back**, has been omitted because this piece of information is not important to the plot and can safely be deleted, thereby saving some space in the subtitle.

4.2 Addition

This category is mainly present in D1. This is also the only drama of the three that was translated by a fansub group and not just one individual. Perhaps members of this group have previously participated in the fansubbing of anime and have taken the tradition of using translator's notes[30] in anime fansubs and brought it with them when they started to do TV drama subtitles. This category also contains additions where there the translator seems to have felt the need to be a bit more explicit in order for the subtitle to be easily understood.

4.2.1 Clarification

<div align="center">11 – D1</div>

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
7	昔で言ったら　植木等見たな	00:00:25,82	00:00:28,05	…Just like Ueki Hitoshi long ago… (Ueki Hitoshi - comedian who represented Japan in the 1960's during its rapid economic boom then)

<div align="center">12 – D1</div>

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
11	ガチョーンの人？	00:00:36,53	00:00:38,49	The "Gachon" guy? (Gachon - catch-phrase for a member of the comedy team "Crazy Cats")

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[30] Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sanches, 2006, p.46

Above are two examples of using translator's notes to explain cultural references the ordinary fansub viewer might not know about. This kind of note can become a bit long and in example 11 we see a total of 21 words displayed for less than 3 seconds. They are spread across three lines with one containing 50 characters. Going by the norm for DVD subtitles a three-second subtitle should contain no more than 9 words displayed with a maximum of 40 characters per line[31].

13 – D1

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
281	もうねぇお客さんが天使に見えましたよ。	00:18:54,74	00:18:57,66	When you arrived, it was like seeing an angel.

The translator has added information to the English subtitle that is not being said outright in the Japanese dialog. In the video, we have just seen the customer arrive and we have seen the taxi driver inviting him to take his car so I don't think it is absolutely necessary, but it does make the English sentence feel more natural.

4.2.2 Variation

14 – D1

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
34	そうだな。	00:02:05,02	00:02:06,25	That's true.
35	そらそうだ。	00:06:76	00:06:77	You've got a point there.

Finally an example of addition in which the translator has not really added any information, but seems to have wanted to create a little variation by slightly altering the words of one of the lines. The two lines of the original dialog basically have the same meaning, so they could have been translated with the same words in both lines, but to avoid having the exact same subtitle appear right after the first one, a little variation has been introduced.

4.4 Change of contents

Change of contents is a category where the contents of the subtitle does not seem to have anything to do with the contents of the spoken dialog.

15 – D1

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
99	自販機に温か~いのコーナーが出来る頃ですね。	00:06:33,77	00:06:37,53	The time when vending machines come out with their warm coffees.

The translator has changed the "warm corner" of the dialog to **warm coffees** in the subtitle. He might have opted to use coffee because of the difference in usage of the word corner between

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[31] Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, pp. 84 & 98.

Japanese and English and because these ''warm corners'' of the vending machines most often contain cans of warm coffee.

16 – D3

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
207	えっ？お前どういうサイト見てんの？	00:18:22,41	00:18:24,41	You'll never get a chance

Here is another example of a subtitle where the meaning has changed completely from that of the spoken dialog. In the original dialog one person is asking another ''What kind of site are you looking at?''. In this case the translator might have taken the opportunity to give emphasis to the difficulties that awaits the main character instead of correctly translating what is supposed to just be a funny comment. Although this may have been a conscious change of meaning, it does contradict a previous utterance by the same character and because of this it might also be considered as a mistranslation.

4.5 Mistranslation

As the data has been processed one problem area stood out more than any other and that was mistranslation, with misinterpretation being the most common subcategory.

4.5.1 Misinterpretation

17 – D1

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
30	じゃあ　どうすんだよ。	00:01:41,94	00:01:43,81	Then, where should I do it?
31	上からいくの？下から？	00:01:44,15	00:01:46,22	Take her upstairs? Down here?

In the scene where this example is taken from a woman is asking her husband to talk to their daughter about some problem at school and he asks his wife the above questions. This is an example of where the translators has completely misinterpreted the dialog, probably because he or she could not understand the gestures that one of the characters made directly after the above lines where uttered. In line 31 he is asking if he should approach their daughter ''from above or from below'', meaning if he should have a stern and authoritative approach or have a softer tone and be more friendly. Looking at the Oni-gesture (oni = Japanese demon) the wife does, one can understand that she wants him to take on a more strict approach. The translator does not seem to have had enough cultural knowledge to pick up on this and this resulted in the mistranslations in example 17.

18 – D2

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
192	証券会社に勤めながら	00:14:58,36	00:15:01,03	…and while he worked at a security company…

Example 18 from D2 shows a lack of knowledge in both source and target languages. It seems the translator did not know the Japanese word, but when looking it up, got the English word wrong as well. A 証券会社 is a **securities** company i.e. a financial business. He is not working at a **security**

company, guarding people or buildings, as you would think after reading the subtitle. Of course the translator could also just have misread the English dictionary entry, but it does indicate that he is not a native English speaker.

19 - D3

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
143	どうすれば 丸がもら えるんでしょう？	00:11:12,22	00:11:15,23	What can I do? You'll give me a ''0''

This case of misinterpretation seems to stem from a lack of knowledge of the source language culture, where 「丸」, or a ring, is used to mark a correct answer on tests etc. The protagonist is a

hardworking student, but when it comes to finding a job, she can't find ''the right answer''. In this line she is asking the student counsellor what to do to get the correct answer, while the in the spoken dialog no reference is made to that person which makes end up in the wrong reference category as well. The original sentence has also been divided into two as a result of the translator not understanding the original dialog correctly.

4.5.2 Wrong reference

20 - D1

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
141	今の親子ってサメ キシコ人だっけ？	00:09:02,46	00:09:05,30	Were your parents Mexican?

In this example from D1 the person speaking has just watched a video commercial with a child and an adult in it and is talking about the actors saying, ''That parent and child, did you say they were Mexicans?'', but in the subtitle he is referring to the person he is speaking to, the producer of the video.

21 - D2

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
142	マサがやられて熱くな るのも分かるけど	00:12:04,35	00:12:07,35	I know Masa gets hot when he suffers…

In example 21 the translator has missed that the person being spoken to is not explicitly mentioned, as is often the case in Japanese sentences. In English there would have been a pronoun like

you, or the speaker would have used a name. The translator did not see or hear that in the dialog and ended up with a bad subtitle where he references the dog (Masa) instead of its owner. Apart from the translation error, "Masa gets hot when he suffers" looks rather odd in an English sentence and can probably be attributed to the fact that the translator is not a native English speaker. A better translation for this subtitle could be something like "I understand you get worked up because Masa got beaten".

22 – D3

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
14	帰るぞ。　えっ？	00:02:03,41	00:02:06,41	He's back
15	あいつ日本に帰った。	00:02:06,41	00:02:10,41	He's back in Japan

In subtitle line 14 of D3 the translator is making a reference to a person they have been searching for, but in the original dialog he is referring to himself and the person with him, saying "We're going back", not **He's back**.

4.5.3 Wrong negative

23 – D1

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
149	普通社長プレゼンなんて　うちのプロデューサー立ち会いませんよね？	00:05:38,06	00:05:42,05	Our producer normally attends each presentation to the the Presidents, doesn't he?

In this example we see a case of where the translator has mixed up negative ending of the sentence. Instead of **…normally attends… doesn't he?** What he really says is, "Our producer **doesn't normally attend** presentations to the the Presidents, **does he**?".

24 – D2

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
77	ではストーカーからの直接的な接触はないということでしょうか？	00:05:38,06	00:05:42,05	And could you say there was…
78		00:05:42,05	00:05:44,06	…direct contact with the stalker?
79	はい 視線を感じるというか	00:05:44,06	00:05:46,38	Yes, the feeling of how should I say it… a glance.

In this example from D2 we have another case of a missing negative where the subtitle asks if there was direct contact, but where the original dialog ask the opposite, "Would you say that there has not been any direct contact from the stalker?". The translator did not pay attention to the negative nature of the question. Different languages have developed in societies with different world views and

different ways to perceive a lot of basic concepts[32] and in this case there is a difference in how you answer a simple question. If you ask someone ''There was no contact then?'' in English, you would not expect to get ''**Yes**, there was no contact'' as an answer. In Japanese though, this is perfectly natural and I think this is where the translator went wrong. The translator, seeing or hearing the answer in the dialog starting with 「はい」 ''Yes'', could therefore have ended up with this mistranslation. In this

case, the answer would rather correspond to ''Thats right…''. If the translator would have given this a second thought he could have picked up on the fact that the person answers that she had ''the feeling of… a glance'' and a glance is not direct contact.

<div align="center">25 – D3</div>

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
82	自信持って。まだ７月じゃないですか。	00:07:36,41	00:07:39,41	Have some self-confidence, we're not in July yet.

Here the translator has misinterpreted the negative part of the second sentence and has also left out the question marker. Instead of the subtitle's ''we're **not** in July yet'' it should be something like ''we're still(only) in July, **aren't** we?'', making it a rhetorical question. This mistake could have been caught when the translator reached subtitle #84 where he has written ''[8 month before in November]'' translating the Japanese open caption in the video. Some simple arithmetic will make you realise that this scene takes place **in** July rather than **before**.

4.5.4 Other

<div align="center">26 – D1</div>

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
23	遅かった？ ん？	00:01:18,39	00:01:20,91	- Won't you be late? - Huh?

In this example from D1 we see that the translator has missed or misinterpreted the dialog, resulting in a subtitle with the wrong tense. This has meant that the following subtitle is also having the wrong tense. In the spoken dialog the person is asking ''Did it get late?'', not ''**Won't** you be late?''. The reason for this mistake is not immediately obvious, but could be a result of TL, target language, interference. As the people involved are anonymous this has not been confirmed.

<div align="center">27 – D3</div>

Subtitle #	Original dialog	Start	End	Subtitle
116	おととい　ビール２杯で変なスイッチ入りましたから	00:09:29,28	00:09:31,19	yesterday after the second beer he turned odd

Here the translator has translated おととい, as **yesterday** instead of **the day before yesterday** which is the correct translation.

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[32] Yukio Naruse, 翻訳の教科書, 2008, Accessed 2013-11-30. https://sites.google.com/site/junbikakougi/5-fan-yino-jiao-ke-shu pp.45-46

5. Discussion

In this section an attempt to assess the quality of the subtitles will be made and possible reasons for the ways in which the text has been handled will be investigated.

The three dramas in this research are aimed at different audiences and so the language used also differs, but when reading the fansubs all three seem very similar and the individual characters also become more alike. This is a common problem in subtitling because of the space and time limits imposed on the medium, making the subtitles "stiffer and more formal" than the spoken dialog, just like Olsson found in her study on omissions in "The Wire"[33]. But since the fansubbers in this research did not shorten their subtitles significantly you might have expected more of the dialogs' idiosyncrasies to shine through in the translations, but it does not. This could be a result of the translator's inexperience with writing good texts, they just haven't had the time to polish their English language capabilities enough and the fact that for at least two of the translators, English is not their first language.

The lack of omissions is also something that you notice right away and which is an interesting characteristic of these fansubs. It makes fansubbing look less like ordinary subtitling and more like literary translation. In all three dramas most of the dialog has been translated, even when it has meant producing subtitles that are too long to read in the time they are shown on screen. According to Diáz Cintas & Remael the norm for DVD subtitles is a maximum of 40 characters per line and 180 words per minute (3 words per second)[34]. The fansubs often show numbers higher than this, like example 11 from D1 which has 21 words displayed for only 3 seconds, giving a rate of 7 words per second. That is more than double the recommended amount. At the same time, one of the lines contains 50 characters, also a lot more than the recommended 40 characters. In D1 there are also examples of subtitles that are visible for less than a second, with one of those also containing two lines. According to Carroll and Ivarsson "no subtitle should appear for less than one second"[35]. Although there is little text in that very subtitle, if you are not prepared for it you risk being left wondering what it said and will have to stop and jump back to read it again.

Because of the nature of subtitles with their limitations in space and time, omissions are "a necessary evil" and is something that is common in all professional subtitles. If you present too much text on screen, even if you give it enough time to be read comfortably, it will take too much attention from the action and as result the overall experience of the program will suffer. In these three fansubs however, the omissions are rare and far between. The main reason for this is probably because the fansub audience is likely to consist of people who have a strong interest in the source language and its culture, in this case Japanese and the Japanese culture and therefore do not want a "censored" experience that they would probably get if the drama was ever commercially released in their home countries. According to Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez, translators of anime fansubs know that they have an audience with a great interest in Japanese culture and because of that tend to stay close to the original text[36]. As the lack of omissions found in this study would suggest, it seems a similar attitude to try to stay close to the original, can be found among the translators of drama series as well.

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[33] Olsson, 2010, p.15.

[34] Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, pp 84 & 98.

[35] Jan Ivarsson & Mary Carroll, *Code of good subtitling practice,* 1998, p.2.

[36] Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez, 2006, p.46.

There are also omissions that disrupt the synchrony between dialog and subtitle, like example 6. Someone who doesn't know Japanese would probably wonder about the asynchrony between spoken dialog and subitle. Example 5 is another example of a not so appropriate omission, because it omits a character's response to what was just said, leaving the exchange of dialog unfinished. Someone not knowing Japanese might get frustrated, wondering about the second part of the dialog. From these examples we can learn that it is important to synchronise the subtitles with the dialog, both in time and contents. Díaz Cintas and Remael points out that accurate timing is crucial to a correct understanding of the programme[37] and Ivarsson and Carroll that, the contents of the dialog and subtitle must also be synchronised as far as possible[38]. We must however consider that the intended audience of these fansubs is not the average TV or DVD-watching audience, but one that is used to all manners of unconventional subtitling techniques and in this context, these kinds of omissions may not be that damaging to the overall experience, but they still risk breaking up the flow of reading the subtitles, pulling the attention away from the action.

In D1, omission is only used two times, both times for interjections that were not necessary to translate in the first place. Instead of shortening the text, there are several instances where information is added to the subtitle that was not uttered by the actors. However, this extra information is generally not given any extra time on screen and so it is all but impossible to read without pausing the video. As demonstrated by example 11, this can lead to an information overload that would not be acceptable in TV or cinema subtitles, but which is possible to have in the context of fansubs because the viewers want this kind of extra information.

Another thing that immediately stands out when analysing these fansubs is the large amount of mistranslations. Fansubbers are generally amateurs and they often produce the fansubs in a very short time after the drama has been aired, but both D1 and D3 show a large amount of erroneous subtitles with 13.7% and 12.3% respectively of the subtitles containing some sort of mistranslation. D2 weighs in at 4.1%. Ivarsson found no mistranslations at all when analysing 249 subtitles from four different DVDs and out of 356 DivX-subtitles (i.e., fansubs) only 5 (1,4%) contained mistranslations[39].

Looking at the examples of mistranslations in these fansubs none of them contain any particularly difficult source text sentences. Considering that the rest of the dialog, that is translated correctly, contains language of the same or greater difficulty, one reason for these mistakes could be that the translator has not had enough time. The one that took the longest, D2, is also the one with the least amount of translation errors. According to Díaz Cintas and Remael, the whole process to subtitle a full-length film can take 12 to 15 days[40]. Although the production of a fansub does not require laser engraving on a film copy (modern digital cinema wouldn't either) and the episodes are generally shorter than a full length film, it is quite obvious when you look at the results that one day, even one week, is not always enough to produce a really good fansub. Of course there will always be exceptions, but in general the fansub community could benefit from allowing the process to take some more time. There are those who just wants the subtitles to be good enough to be able to follow the basic plot and don't care about some errors here and there, but based on this author's own experience, for example, learners of the Japanese language like to watch these programs with subtitles as a support for when they sometimes run into words they don't understand. After analysing these fansubs though, it seems you should not trust their translation too much.

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[37] Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, p.90.

[38] J Ivarsson & M Carroll, 1998, p.2.

[39] F Ivarsson, 2007, p.52

[40] Díaz Cintas & Remael, 2007, p39.

6. Further research

This has been a small case study with some interesting findings and it could be interesting to perform a more large scale survey of TV drama fansubs to see if these findings are symptomatic to this entire area, or if they are particular to the dramas in this study.

It could also be interesting to try to get an interview with the translators to hear their view on the matter. Was the reason for the mistranslation that they wanted to finish the subtitles as fast as possible and did not have the time to do proper research or were there other factors involved? Maybe they only do this for their own sake, to improve their own language skills? Since these people are quite active on the forums it could at least be possible to get an e-mail interview with some of them.

7. Conclusion

The results from this research has been somewhat surprising with a large amount of mistranslations, on average 10%. Though a certain amount of errors were expected, it is after all subtitles produced by amateurs, the numbers are quite high. In addition to the translators not being professionals, all fansubs were produced in a rather short amount of time. Three, seven and one days respectively for the episodes in this study, with the one taking the longest time also being the one with the least amount of mistranslations. Releasing the subtitles for D3 after only one day, Eric Paroissien was the fastest working of the three. While that is impressively fast, this has also resulted in a lot of mistranslations with 12.3% of the subtitles containing some kind of error.

Let us return to the research questions that started it all. They were I. How accurate are the translations? and II. Do they follow recognised subtitle traditions? Through this research we have seen that the fansubs in this study are not accurate, they contain a lot of mistranslations and some other changes that while seemingly done on purpose, ended up distorting the text, possibly even confusing the viewer. We have also seen that they often break with the traditional practices of subtitling and as such, would not be fit for a mainstream, official release.

Without interviewing or conducting a survey determining the Japanese language levels of the fansubbers it would not be possible to tell for certain if the great number of mistranslations stem from lacking knowledge (language and culture) or to what degree it is the result of a lack of time. Whatever the reason, the fact is that there are too many errors in the translated subtitles for them to be considered for an official release. There are even errors that will make the viewer completely misunderstand the situation. Because of this they pose a risk to someone without enough language skills to not understand parts of the story correctly. On the other hand the activity of fansubbing can act as language training for the one doing the translation and perhaps that is a driving force for the fansubbers themselves.

As mentioned earlier, the general fansub audience consists of people who have a large interest in the Japanese language and culture and who are used to reading subtitles of varying standards and so might be more tolerant towards the kind of problems mentioned above. Nevertheless, the fansubbers should take an extra look at their work, or let someone else review it, before they release it to the public and if possible, take the time they need to produce correct and readable subtitles. As translations and subtitles for a general public the fansubs in this study are inadequate, though for the fan of Japanese drama and for lack of a better, official alternative, they might just be good enough.

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Appendix

Data collection, see separate file "FANSUB_DATA.xlsx"