

The Process and Features of Fansubtitling in Iran

Masood Khoshsaligheh¹

**Assistant Professor in Translation Studies, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad,
Mashhad, Iran**

Elham Fazeli Haghpanah

MA Student in English Translation, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Mashhad, Iran

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Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The current advancement of technology has significantly influenced various fields such as audiovisual translation. The emergence of fansub groups is among the most important effects of technological development in the translation world. Easy access to various types of computers as well as free subtitling software programs have resulted in an increasing number of fansubs on a daily basis. A *fansub* is a non-professional subtitled version of an anime or movie, carried out collaboratively by an unpaid group of volunteers which will be available to users for free. Several reasons have been mentioned for fansubbing such as: providing translation for people who are not familiar with the source language, reluctance or failure regarding the official and commercial subtitling in portraying cultural issues and unique features of foreign products and also, introducing a cultural product that is not so well-known in other parts of the world. Primary studies in this field have been conducted during the late 1990s; over time, the number of such studies have been increased and their various aspects have been discussed. A number of studies have been conducted during the first decade of the current century, introducing specific features concerning this type of audiovisual translation and explaining the process, people involved, and technical requirements. Furthermore, some researchers have studied fansub from different perspectives such as: its distribution, comparison between the processes involved in fansubbing and professional subtitling, quality of translation, fansubbing norms, and political subtitling networks.

1 Corresponding Author: khoshsaligheh@um.ac.ir

2. Method

The process of producing fansub for anime and other forms of animations, common challenges, and the applied equipment and facilities in Iran have been investigated in this qualitative phenomenological study. To achieve this purpose, a few number of active users in fansubbing field were selected through the snowball sampling technique. By conducting interviews, a set of descriptive information have been gathered regarding technical dimensions of the production process such as timing, typesetting, encoding, among others. The interviews, consisting of almost 20 questions (general and specialized), were conducted individually through either face-to-face or telephone conversations. The seven participants were anime fansubbers in Iranian online forums who took on different responsibilities such as anime translation, editing, timing. Their educational backgrounds were very different from each other and often irrelevant to translation. Their ages ranged from 18 to 30 years with an average of 23.7 years old. These seven participants including three men and four women, have been working in this field for 7 to 10 years. Moreover, using a sample selection of products with non-professional Persian subtitles, some of the mistakes in translations were presented and discussed.

3. Results

Based on the results of interviews, fansubbers carry out this process through several steps using various software and hardware equipment. These steps include: 1) original anime acquisition, 2) translation, 3) translation check, 4) timing, 5) typesetting and karaoke, 6) final edit 7) encoding, 8) quality control and 9) distribution of final product. Active fansubbers are usually members of the anime and manga fandom who are quite skilled in working with different software programs. Iranian fansubbers' motivation is to provide top anime masterpieces with Persian subtitles for Persian speakers as soon as possible. In the past, due to the low age range of anime and manga fans, their activities in producing fansubs had also started in an early age; they have been studying in middle school or high school when they began their activities. During the last few years, growth in the age range of anime and manga fans has resulted in older fansubbers working in this field who often study different majors in universities. The majority of active fansubbers in translation and editing sections are older than those active in technical and software related areas. Various software programs are used for different parts of fansubbing process; some are more popular and more useful: a) original anime acquisition: a peer to peer program like *Bittorrent* or direct link; b) translation: a text editor such as *Notepad* or *Microsoft Word* and a video player software like *KMPlayer* is sufficient; c) timing: *Sub Station Alpha* has been mostly used in the past but currently, *Aegisub*, *JacoSub* and *Sabbu* are also widely used. However, it is worth mentioning that the timing stage is no longer necessary, because many official companies release English subtitles in softsub format for anime series; d) typesetting and karaoke: *Aegisub* software has all the requirements for typesetting. Though *Sub Station Alpha* also meets all of typesetters' needs; e) final edit: Similar

to the translation stage, a text editor and a video player software are needed; f) encoding: softwares such as *Format Factory*, *Freemake Video Converter* and *Virtual Dub*; g) distribution of final product: softwares like *Bittorent*.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study reveal the non-professional dimensions of fansubbing process as a voluntary and collaborative activity and indicate that fansubbers are only involved in such a process because of personal interests. They do not have educational backgrounds in fansubbing field and their only intention is to translate their favorite works of anime for their Persian speaking friends who are not familiar with a foreign language. Fansubbers do not expect to make money from this profession and if someone were to do so by selling these products, the fansub community would regard such actions as improper and inappropriate. Due to the non-professional nature of producing this form of subtitling, the products' quality are often too low and far from professional subtitling standards. Fansubbers usually decide to quit the fansubbing scene after a while; because fansubbing is a complicated and time-consuming task. Furthermore, fansub groups work for free and hence, the activity is not economically viable. However, we have to consider the fact that there is a wide range of audio visual productions including anime, animations, movies, TV series and even educational films with Persian fansub accessible for native Persian speakers. Certainly, Fansub is not a new phenomenon and has a long history in the world; it has been studied extensively in other countries yet in Iran, it seems to have passed unnoticed by our scholars and only a few have studied in this field.

Keywords: audiovisual translation, subtitling, non-professional translation, fansub, Anime.

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