

Contemporary global media circulation based on fan translation: A particular case of Thai fansubbing

Abstract

This article argues that fan translation serves as a contemporary, alternative mechanism for the circulation of global media texts. By focusing on the fan subtitling practice in the case of Thai fansubbing of a Korean TV programme, we observe unique ways in which fans exploit semiotic resources to produce fansubs in relation to professional subtitling norms. For example, novel features of fansubs include the treatment of “impact captions” prevalent on Korean TV which are typically untranslated in official Thai translations as these captions are not common in Thailand. Using Actor Network Theory (ANT) as a framework, we analyse survey and interview data collected from Thai fansubbing communities of the Korean TV show *Running Man* ([Author] 2018). The data indicate the close interrelationship which seems to develop between fansubbers and “non-translating” members of fan communities. The previously less recognised importance of such an inter-dependency points to the building of trust, especially epistemic trust, which underlies fansubbing practices. We thus argue that this modern alternative circulation mechanism for global media texts can be characterised by the particular way fans exploit semiotic resources and the way in which it is supported by epistemic trust within the fan community.

Keywords: fan translation, fansub, Thai fans, trust, epistemic trust, Actor Network Theory

1. Introduction

In this article, we focus on fan translation as an alternative mechanism to official professional translation for reproducing and often recontextualising media texts for global circulation. In particular, we examine “fansubs” from the point of view of fan management of subtitles as semiotic resources, which is understood as meaning potential according to social semiotics (e.g. van Leeuwen 2004). Fansubs or fansubbing refers to the practice of subtitling by fans of audiovisual content in which language, image and music are combined in a synchronised manner (Pérez-González 2009, p.13). Ranging from verbal to nonverbal elements, fans exploit semiotic resources in generating fansubs which are often distinct from their professional counterparts, as is well explored in the literature on audiovisual translation (AVT) (Dwyer 2018). Fansubbing community members can be treated as “sign makers” in the target language who exert their agency in transforming semiotic resources socially and culturally (Kress 2010). Against this backdrop we set out to answer an overarching research question: in what way is fansubbing contributing to a new

understanding of a contemporary mechanism in reproducing and recontextualising global media? In an attempt to characterise fansubbing communities as sign makers contributing to new form of global media circulation, we focus on the way in which fans collaborate to exploit semiotic resources to generate fansubs, which are distinct from the professional counterparts, and also to sustain their unofficial and often-precarious practices.

We posit fansubbing practices in the context of technological changes which provide the supporting infrastructure to promote “fan AVT” (Dwyer 2018, p. 436). We will then tease out how these sign makers collectively achieve their goal of sharing their chosen media texts through fan translation, often in the contested space of readily accessible yet unofficial channels. In order to understand the distinct way in which fansubbers use semiotic resources, compared to their professional counterparts, we draw on empirical data on Thai fansubbing communities in the form of surveys and interviews conducted as part of a larger study ([Author 2018]).

Following this brief introduction, we first contextualise fansubbing practices and then locate our work by drawing on the literature on fansubbing. Next, the methodology section explains our data collection method, Actor Network Theory (ANT) as our main analytical framework, as well as the concept of trust and in particular that of epistemic trust (Origgi 2012, 2014) as a theoretical basis. This is followed by a data analysis on Thai fansubbing communities to answer our research questions. Key findings are summarised in the conclusion section together with further work needed.

2. The Survey of Literature

2.1 Contexts - Digital Environments and Fandom

Dynamic online environments have come to play a crucial role in today’s media consumption. Irrespective of the physical location of media viewers, they are increasingly able to freely access popular media texts, including TV programmes (Booth 2015). The Internet-based media consumption has, in turn, led to a shift in certain behavioural traits of viewers who invest emotionally in activities revolving around their favourite media texts (Jenkins 2006). Such behaviours typically characterise what we commonly call “fans”. Driven

by their passion towards particular media texts, fans exert their efforts in the pursuit of their fandom, often irrespective of monetary gains, by exploiting an alternative form of production and circulation of such texts (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2013). Fans act as grassroots audiences who use their social and cultural experience to transform their favourite media texts (Fiske 1992). This reproduction and circulation afforded by dynamic technological environments suggest a major shift in media consumption which was formerly controlled by the media industry, hence beyond the influence of individuals as media users. With advances in technology, fans are now equipped to engage with their favourite media texts without being constrained by the pre-determined framework set by the media industry. Fans' participation in the creation of "fan work" which often resides outside the jurisdiction of the media industry can imply defiance to passive consumerism (Hills 2002). This, in turn, gives rise to fan translation as a major, if legally dubious, mechanism to achieve an alternative global media circulation across languages and cultures.

Fans often contribute to "user-generated content" of which fan translation is an example. Such user-generated translations involve a variety of media texts and forms, including literary works, manga (Japanese comics), video games, films and TV programmes. These activities can be seen as one manifestation of fandom where cultural practices are collaboratively performed by fans as deeply engaged media users (Jenkins 2010; Booth 2015). In this way, they overtly display emotional commitment to their favourite media texts (Sandvoss 2005, p.8).

Furthermore, technologies contribute not only to reproducing the media text itself, but form the driving force behind the formation of online fan communities. Fans usually conduct their translation activities in communities through fan networks rather than working individually (Jenkins 1992). Dynamic online environments have equipped fan groups to be able to exploit the technological resources needed to collectively reproduce their chosen media texts (Mittel 2013). New communication platforms on the Internet, such as blogs, video sharing sites, and social media have become virtual sites to support different types of interactions between fans regardless of time and space (Pearson 2010). They have become channels for fans to exchange a broad range of physical and virtual artefacts related to the object of their affection. These platforms have enabled them to establish an online community to gather those who share a common interest in certain media texts, enabling

fans to engage in online collaboration and circulate user-generated content¹. Such fan activities are often considered part of a participatory culture where fan interpretations and social interactions lead to cultural products that in turn serve their fandom (Jenkins 2006).

Fan collaboration in fansub production and circulation can be interpreted as evidence of the empowerment of fans who are now able to fulfil their passion optimally to engage with their favourite media texts. Yet, such fan communities are by no means a simple entity where members carry equal responsibilities and play the same role. A closer look into the evolving interrelationships among fans reveals a complex picture.

2.2 Fan translation network formation

The domain of research on fansubbing is located within the relatively new yet increasingly recognised area of study labelled “non-professional translation” (NPT) (Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012). More recently, it is also referred to as fan AVT (Dwyer 2018, p. 436). With the advent of user-generated content, embraced by Web 2.0 technologies, the previously less visible NPT has become an integral part of today’s porous translation industry ([Author] 2012). The type of NPT discussed in this article is particularly related to fandom involved in various media texts now widely circulated on the Internet, supported by networking technologies combined with file sharing platforms (Dwyer 2018, p. 436).

Fansubbing is typically motivated by the unavailability of, or the delay in, the circulation of official translations, as well as the over-mediation which fans claim is applied in certain official subtitles ([Author] 2012). The origin of fansubbing can be traced back to the USA where Japanese anime was shown on TV networks in the mid-70s, mainly intended for children and usually provided in dubbed form. It was in 1977 when the first US anime fan club was formed in reaction against the shutting down of some anime series due to offending elements such as violence². These fan clubs started to distribute certain Japanese anime programmes with subtitles, initially using largely analogue technologies, and also sometimes providing their own translations. This is hence seen as the beginning of the

¹ Some see such online communities of fans as engendering “networked affect” (Hillis, Paasonen and Petit 2015) through “affinity spaces” (Gee and Hayes 2011).

² for a further discussion, see Dwyer 2018, pp. 438-439

phenomenon of fansubbing. However, it was not until the end of the 1980s before fansub became more widely accessible (Dwyer 2018, p. 439). These pre-Internet practices became more visible to the general public in the mid-1990s with the advent of digital technology supported by the expanding digital networks (Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006, p.37). The growing visibility of fansubbing went hand in hand with the changes in viewer media consumption behaviours, with TV viewing habits shifting to being more Internet-based. Online technologies have provided viewers with the opportunity to make choices in terms of time and place of media consumption, showing a democratisation in media viewership (Hartley 2004). This promoted fansubbing to become a global phenomenon, as shown in research on fansubbing in various cultural settings beyond the USA (Pantumsinchai 2012) to include Italy (Massidda 2015), Spain (Orrego-Carmona 2015) and China (Li 2015), for example. That said, to date few studies have focused on the South East Asian region, more specifically Thailand. This gap led us to focus on Thai contexts to extend the scope of fansubbing research into unexplored regional practices.

Fansubbers are self-selected translators who typically lack formal translator training, but some of them may subsequently become professional translators. They no longer passively accept the programmes of interest, as provided by media companies, but rather, control them by becoming the producers and distributors of translations of their chosen favourite content (Pantumsinchai 2012; Bold 2011). The fans help remediate the audiovisual content from one culture into their target culture contexts by generating fansubs in their own styles, as they see fit, to reflect their own preferences as fans and share them with their fellow fans. Given they are not remunerated, the time and effort put into fansubbing shows the extent of their collective devotion to their favourite media texts (Lee 2011). Through such collaboration, the fansub practice can be considered a co-creative practice, where consumers, i.e. fans, involve themselves in the production and circulation process of media content and experiences (Banks and Deuze 2009, p.419).

Shared tasks in fansubbing, in turn, have come to shape the collective identities of fansubbers in digital environments (Li 2015). However, the co-creation in fansubbing is not limited to the collaboration of fansubbers who are the producers of translation. It extends to non-translating fans who are also an integral part of fansub communities as supporters who encourage the translating members and help them focus on their task at hand (Ito

2012). Not only do fansubbers and non-translating fans share roles and responsibilities, but they also come to share ethical values in fansubbing communities. This is reflected in the way they justify the “legitimacy” of the fansub practice in their own way ([Author] 2018). Fansubbing communities continue to operate typically without the permission of the copyright holders for the use of the AV material and often in defiance of potentially serious legal implications.

A growing body of fansubbing studies ([Author] 2018; Dwyer 2016; Bold 2011) point to the formation of fan translation networks as owing to fan collaboration in the production and circulation of translations in digital environments. [Author] (2013) discussed the impact of digital environments in fan collaboration in which digital technologies are the key force behind the formation of fansubbing networks. Key players and roles in the formation of fansubbing networks are illustrated in the way fans, especially fansubbers, collaborate in fansub production and circulation. For example, Lee (2011) discusses fan interactions in fansubbing as the source of empowerment of fans in the participatory culture, giving rise to their network formation.

Ito (2012) argues that fans’ motivation involves their commitment to contributing to fandom, which is closely related to the ethics of fansubbing, despite legal issues, as mentioned earlier. While fansubbers use their skills and expertise in producing a translation in various languages, non-translating fans act as supporters paying homage to fansubbers. Relationships between fansubbers and non-translating fans are also discussed by Panthumsinchai (2012), who argues that their co-dependency is driven by their common interest in favourite content in the participatory culture where both parties cooperate to sustain and protect their activities.

The fansubbing network, in turn, can illustrate “dark energy” (Condry 2013, p.162), where fans’ devotion to their favourite media texts can drive them to collectively take part in fansubbing, treading the precarious boundary between piracy and “public good” to serve other fans. It is also argued that fan status is a key component which seals the relationships between fansubbers and non-translating fans in online communities (c.f. Lee 2011, Ito 2012, and Pantumsinchai 2012), which can be connected with the issue of trust and acceptance formed within the communities (Sperber et al. 2010). Fans’ moral commitment can be associated with trust building among community members (ibid.), which is believed to help

sustain the collaboration in the communities (Li 2015). Later in this paper, we will return to examine how trust serves to fulfil fans' collective agency on the basis of the theoretical framework of epistemic trust combined with Actor Network Theory as our analytical framework.

3. Methodology

We explore fansubbing in a Thai context as a social practice, aiming to investigate the interrelationships of fansubbers and their fellow fans, facilitated by technologies. The article draws on the primary data generated for a larger study ([Author] 2018) in the form of surveys and interviews with fansubbing communities of *Running Man*, a Korean TV variety show popular in Thailand. These instruments provide an insight into the perceived roles of communities of fans, allowing the researchers to extrapolate fan interrelationships, which largely develop on online spaces such as Facebook. They provide fans a platform for forming communities enabling interactions with other participants.

3.1 Data collection

This study combined fansubber interviews and an online survey of fans as well as an offline survey of non-fans with the latter designed as a reference sample group data. Following the institutional research ethical approval, the interviews and surveys were conducted in Thai, the native language of the participants, for their convenience and all the data were then translated into English by one of the authors. The 10 Thai fansubbers (9 female and 1 male) were interviewed in a semi-structured way with the questions covering their experiences in fansubbing and their attitudes towards the practice. The format of the interview ranged from text chat to Skype, respecting the participants' preference. For the online fan survey posted to reach different fansubbing communities, 84 valid responses were received [76 female (90%) and 8 male (10%)]. The survey questions consisted of demographic information of the respondents, their viewing behaviours of foreign programmes and fansubs, and their viewpoints towards fansubbing. Among the surveyed fan respondents, more than half were 21-30 years old (57%). The rest constituted 20 years or younger (21%),

31-40 years (16%), 41-50 years (5%) and over 51 years (1%). Nearly half of the surveyed fans (48%) were students while 44% in some form of employment. Additionally, the non-fan³ offline survey data, with the same set of questions in the fan survey, were obtained from university students [83 female and 39 male] to serve a supplementary source to serve a broad comparative purpose vis-à-vis the fan survey data. This sample group was considered a relevant population which is likely to access a variety of media via the Internet, including fansubs (See Author (2018) for further details).

In approaching the participants both for the surveys and interviews, the status of one of the authors as a fan as well as once being an insider of the audiovisual translation industry in Thailand, was fully disclosed to the study participants. This shared background played a critical role in reaching out to prospective study participants and eliciting information during the data collection process in the interviews (see [Author] 2018 for further detail).

3.2 ANT as an analytical framework

Actor-Network Theory (ANT) (Latour 1987, 2005) has been widely applied to gain insight into technological innovation and scientific advances (Chesterman, 2006, p.21) as well as new innovations in dynamic technologised environments (Latour, 2005, p.142). ANT foregrounds the investigation of associations made up of human and non-human actors, such as technological artefacts, in forming a social practice (Matthewman, 2011). Through such an investigation, key human and non-human actors are identified, and the interrelationships between actors which cause transformations are described (Law, 2007). ANT allowed us to investigate fansubbing from a socio-technical perspective, where the interactions between fan community members were of particular interest while acknowledging the key roles played by technology in fansubbing.

ANT focuses on the movement of human and non-human actors in the network, formed when the actors gather and collectively undertake, negotiate, interpret and transform their roles in order to fulfil their interest or complete their tasks (Callon and Latour, 1981, p.279). Such movement can be clarified through Callon (1986)'s four overlapping moments: (1)

³ In this study, the term "non-fans" refers to those who do not belong to fansubbing communities.

problematization (actors gather to achieve their goals); (2) *interessement* (actors form a group to collectively complete the task); (3) *enrolment* (actors take action and negotiate their roles with others); and (4) *mobilisation* (roles of the actors are transformed). The actors whose roles are dynamic and can be transformed are called “mediators” (Latour 2005). This transformation of actors’ roles can subsequently form a network of actors.

The analysis of these negotiations and transformation of the actors’ roles using ANT allow the present study to take into consideration the impact of technology on fansubbing in detail. Such impact is closely associated with the way human actors, i.e. fans, form and foster their interrelationships within the communities in translation production and circulation. In addition, this analytical framework enables the researcher to take into consideration the external factors such as legal issues which are closely associated with fansubbing, and their influence on human actors in the fansubbing network. The ANT framework’s focus on the interactions among the actors in the network, therefore, proved to be suitable for the current study. Due to the limited scope of this paper, we make a limited application of ANT based mainly on the four movements described above.

3.3. Trust in translation network and epistemic trust

Trust has been recognised as a key element which underpins interactions between participants on translation networks in the Translation Studies literature. Abdallah and Koskinen (2007) considered trust as a crucial factor in forming strong relationships among human actors involved in translation production as their trustful relationships can ensure the commitment of the translators in the network of translation. Translators are also able to work within their scope of ethics in translation and empower the negotiations between actors in translation (Pym 2012). In addition, research points to the evidence that trust by translators in both translation data and their sources can guide them when they use such resources in translation production (De Barra-Cusack 2014).

Not only is trust related to the translation production process, but it is possibly linked to the perception of translation, as shown in fansub quality. Švelch (2013) suggested that non-translating fans’ praises for fansub quality form part of their “silent gratitude” to fansubbers and are evidence of non-translating fans’ dependence on fansubs (Švelch 2013, p.6). These

perceptions of fansub quality can arguably indicate the significance of the interrelationships between translating and non-translating members of a fansubbing community.

However, in contrast to the monolithic broad treatment of trust in the literature in Translation Studies, the current study focuses particularly on the concept of epistemic trust (e.g. Grasswick 2010; Origgi 2012; Fonagy and Allison 2014) by taking into consideration different levels of trust from individuals as cognitive and social beings and interpersonal relationships (Origgi 2012). That is, the concept of epistemic trust delves into underlying factors in trust building with the focus on the shared value and experiences of collective groups of individuals in communities. This focus, therefore, can help explain the fostered interrelationships between fan community members in the fansubbing network.

The concept of epistemic trust is, in one aspect, related to the social dimension of knowledge and develops from an individual's social experience through a shared context of communication (Origgi 2014). This suggests the dependence of individuals on learning and gaining knowledge from others while taking the risk of being misinformed (Hendriks, Kienhues and Bromme 2016). The concept involves "the complex cognitive mechanisms, emotional dispositions, inherited norms, reputational cues we put at work while filtering the information we receive" (Origgi 2012, p.224).

Fonagy and Allison (2014) emphasised the interrelationships among individuals and viewed epistemic trust as what is developed from close social connections and bonds in the form of attachments between individuals. These attachments are forged when individuals have a tacit understanding and share common beliefs. This view, in turn, echoes Daukas's (2006) argument that trust is developed by the interactions of individuals in a social practice on the basis of their membership and shared experiences in a community. Similarly, Grasswick (2010) explains epistemic trust in terms of social relations between individuals in connection with knowledge production and circulation in communities. The development of trust depends on whether the expectations of individuals can be fulfilled.

Origgi (2012, p.227) provides various sources of trust which individuals rely on when filtering information. They include: (1) inference on the informant's reliability; (2) inference on the content's reliability; (3) internalised social norms of complying with authority; (4)

socially distributed reputational cues; (5) robust signals or any evidence which is known as a fact; (6) emotional reactions; and (7) moral commitments.

As it addresses many layers of trust, the notion of epistemic trust helps to explore the act of building trust between fan community members in the fansubbing network where digital technologies play a crucial role in creating an environment for sharing knowledge and experiences as well as emotional connections in fansubbing. Epistemic trust is therefore employed in this study to understand how fans as community members construct their interrelationships in a fansubbing network.

In the next section we analyse the data on the basis of the ANT framework supported by the concept of epistemic trust. The analysis shows the way in which the fansubbing network has formed through the interrelationships among the key human and non-human actors, which are mainly fansubbers, non-translating fans, digital technologies, and the legal framework, as discussed in some detail in the following section.

4. Discussion

4.1 Formation of Thai fansubbing network

The data of fan survey and interviews of fansubbers illustrate interactions of human and non-human actors in fansub production and distribution, giving rise to the formation of Thai fansubbing network. On the basis of ANT, the *problematization* of the fansubbing network can be seen as starting with fans' initial goal of watching their favourite TV programmes. This is made possible by their exploitation of digital technologies to access their favourite media texts. When asked which media viewing channels they used to watch foreign programmes, the majority of the surveyed fans (93%) indicated free online streaming channels. This shows how digital technologies played a crucial role as a viewing platform for fans. The *enrolment* of this non-human actor (i.e. digital technologies) in the fansubbing network helped strengthen close relationships between fans and their favourite media, developing the former's attachment to the media texts. The data confirms empirically that such emotional connection drove fans to gather in a group and actively participate in completing a task of producing and distributing fansubs to share with other fans. For

example, one fansubber [Interviewee 6] was encouraged by a member of the Korean TV fan group in which she was involved to become a fansubber while another fansubber [Interviewee 9] stated that she has been a member of a Korean star's fan page and volunteered to make fansubs when her favourite stars played in a movie. Following the process of *interressement* of these fans, their roles were transformed from simply engaged media viewers into proactive media users, who are either translators or their supporters. Within the group of fan translators, they *mobilised* fansubbing practice, with the interview data indicating that different roles and responsibilities in fansub production and circulation are shared. For example, while some [Interviewees 1, 3 and 6] played technical roles in fansubbing, others [Interviewees 2, 5 and 7] took a translating role. In this production process, the interrelationships among human actors were built while digital technologies were found to have played another significant role as facilitating tools. That is, the digital technologies such as subtitling software, online dictionaries and search engines helped fan translators to make and distribute their self-styled translations. Specifically, the majority of interviewed fansubbers favoured particular software, i.e. Aegisub, in making fansubs. Furthermore, two fansubbers [Interviewees 4 and 10] specifically mentioned that they selected this program because it allows them to freely create subtitles in their own styles which can serve their interest. This shows how technological tools, when *enrolled* in the fansubbing network, can influence the decision-making of human actors in fansub production.

An example of self-styled fansubs created by fans can be seen in the fan translation of a specific type of captions, known as "impact captions" (see Figure 1). Originating in Japan, these intralingual captions are widely used on Korean television ([Author] 2010). They are usually inserted by TV directors in charge of the programmes in various fonts and colours (Park 2009, p.550). Designed to draw viewers' attention to certain aspects of the ongoing dialogue or scenes, they function as textual props on the screen ([Author] 2014). These captions, usually written in a conversational style, can be prominent on screen and is distinct from closed captions for the deaf and the hard-of-hearing. Their role is to draw the viewer's attention to certain aspects of the programme content. Since such captions are not customary in Thailand, the captions are rarely translated in official Thai subtitles. Technological tools such as Aegisub play a crucial role as a non-human actor by facilitating

fansubbers to translate these captions which would be impossible otherwise. We later discuss the importance of the treatment of these impact captions in fansubs.

In addition to their role in facilitating the creation of fansubs, the collected data show that digital technologies serve as a platform for translator collaboration and a circulation platform for fansubs. In parallel, the fansub circulation by fan translators raises legal issues due to their typical unauthorised use of the copyright content to create fansubs. This situation has led to the *transformation* of fan translators' roles to include finding technological resources to safeguard and maintain their work. This also accentuates the role of digital technologies as a *mediator* for the fan translators to work around the legal issues in order to sustain their fansubbing practice. In addition, such roles played by fan translators have been shared by non-translating fans through their communication and shared experiences. These interactions result in further strengthening the interrelationships among the community members developed from shared emotional connections and values, as discussed in the following section, which can then help mobilise the fansubbing network.

The interactions of the key human and non-human actors as discussed above give rise to the *transformation* of their initial roles, leading to the *mobilisation* of fansubbing practices in the communities. Such mobilisation subsequently shapes the Thai fansubbing network, which is maintained in the digitally-mediated environment.

4.2 Close interrelationships of fans in the network: shared emotional connections and ethical values

As briefly discussed towards the end of the previous section, the empirical data demonstrate that within fan communities, fansubbers and non-translating fans develop their relationships from their interdependence within the Thai fansubbing network. As well as strong attachments to their favourite media texts, they deepen their engagement in fansubbing from their interactions in the network. These emotional connections have developed their close interrelationships, as demonstrated by the interviewed fansubbers shown below:

Friends on my fan page are really nice. I have a good friendship with them. ... Whatever I post, my followers would show their appreciation

and send me support, giving me the strength to continue fansubbing.

[Interviewee 6]

I feel proud that they click 'Like' [on my work], but I do not expect to get a large number of 'Like' supports. I prefer the comments from them, to have interactions with each other. [Interviewee 2]

The above extracts show the impact non-translating fans make on fansubbers in the form of moral support through their comments and 'Likes' on social networking sites, i.e. Facebook. Fansubbers feel encouraged by non-translating fans' appreciation and support. This co-dependency characterises the interrelationships between fansubbers and non-translating fans.

These strong interrelationships among fans in the network can be also shown in the form of shared ethical values within the communities. The interviewed and surveyed fans expressed the values of sharing and justified their activities as ethical. The interviewed fansubbers give reasons why they produce and circulate fansubs, as intended for "Thai people to have [the] opportunity to watch a good programme" apart from their own "love of the programmes". Many fansubbing groups even insert additional messages expressing their devotion to the programmes on the screen along with their translations. These insertions are, in turn, recognised by many surveyed fans. These further signal a shared feeling between fan translators and other fans. In addition, the interviewed fansubbers legitimise their practices as serving fandom beyond their own personal gain, against the claim of copyright infringement due to the unauthorised use of media content; they insist this is not for their personal monetary profits. In turn, the non-translating fans display similar ethical values in fansubbing as many surveyed fans recognise the effort put in by fansubbers in producing fansubs. This aligns with fansubbers' ethical position, as indicated in the interview.

The interview data show fansubbers strongly oppose the action of bootlegging, where some individuals sell fansubbed materials for their own financial gain without permission from the fansubbers who produced the translations. Another example can be found where fansubbers and non-translating fans help one another to exploit technological resources to come up with an alternative solution whenever fansubs are taken down for legal reasons. The data showed that following a shut-down of their site, the interviewed fansubbers quickly created a closed group on Facebook to circulate the fansub in a closely guarded

manner and asked the members not to redistribute the fansubs elsewhere. Some non-translating fans voluntarily offered to reupload fansubs on the fansubbers' fan page after the removal incidents. These incidents which were reported in the interviews provide evidence of the interdependence between fansubbers and non-translating fans who do their utmost to keep their fansubbing communities alive, according to their shared ethical beliefs in fansubbing.

4.3 Perceptions of fansub quality and trust

Personal interactions between fansubbers and non-translating fans and their deep emotional involvement as well as shared ethical values seem to build trust in the communities. In particular, trust can be sensed through fans' high regard for fansub quality.

When asked why they watch fan translated content, 62% of the surveyed fans selected translation quality as one of the reasons. Within a fan community non-translating fans recognise fansubbers' passionate interest in and their extensive knowledge of the given media texts as well as their understanding of fans' expectations for fansubs, as shown in the following extracts:

Translators pay more attention to the details in translation due to their interest in the programme. They use various colours and styles of subtitles. Simple word choices are selected so that the viewers can enjoy watching the programme [Fan Survey Respondent 24]

Fansubbing teams have experience in translating the humour in the programme. This helps the translation to be easily understood and to be able to convey the sense of humour in the programme. [Fan Survey Respondent 82]

These extracts reveal that non-translating fans equate a deep understanding of their favourite programmes to high-quality fansubs ([Author] 2013). This assumption suggests a sense of trust which non-translating fans place in fansubbers on the basis of fansubbers' genre expertise (Origgi 2012).

In addition, the extracts imply that in watching the translated version of their favourite content, non-translating fans are dependent on fansubbers, who make the media text accessible to them through translation in a way that can serve their strong emotional involvement in the favourite media texts. These seem to help build non-translating fans' trust in the translation quality of fansubs. This aligns with what Švelch (2013) addressed in terms of the link between fans' positive dispositions towards fansub quality and the respected status of fan translators in their communities. It can be argued that non-translating fans' respect for fansubbers influences their attitudes towards fansub quality, and this trust has developed from the internalised norms of complying with authority where the individuals who have a higher status in the community, i.e. fansubbers who are the producers of fansubs, can build trust from those who are dependent on them (Origi 2012).

Fans consider fan translations to be high quality because fansubs meet their viewing expectations by enabling them to fully engage in their favourite programmes. An example can be seen in the fan translation of Korean impact captions, as in Figure 1 showing a screenshot of a scene in *Running Man* with the Korean impact captions at the bottom of the screen. These captions are prevalent in Korean TV programmes, but not in Thailand and official Thai translations tend to leave them untranslated. By comparison, the Thai fansubbed version shows they are translated, as indicated by the grey box in Figure 1.

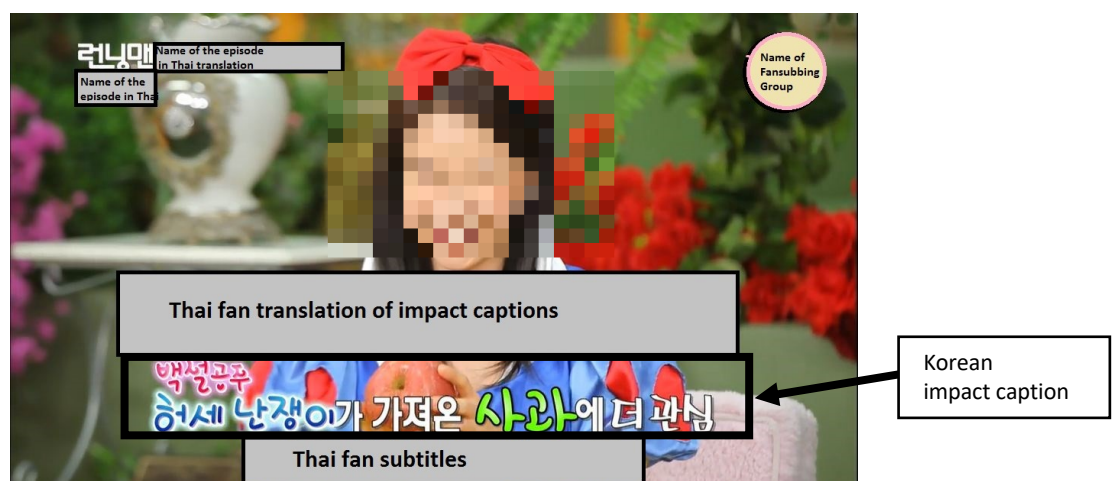


Figure 1: *Running Man Episode 204*, SBS TV Channel (Broadcast 13 July 2014)⁴ [our own highlights indicating the Korean impact caption with grey boxes showing its Thai translation (above) and a fansub of the dialogue (bottom)]⁵

Although translating these impact captions poses a challenge for fansubbers, given the lack of space as well as the varying styles and other visual elements employed by these captions, the interviewed fansubbers show their attention to detail with their attempt to keep these visual elements close to the original captions⁶, as shown in the following extract:

In translating the dialogues, I choose the visual styles of fansubs which are easy to read. That is because they [viewers] have to read a lot. In the case of Korean impact captions, I try to select similar styles [to the original] such as simple or curved styles, depending on the original. [Interviewee 3]

It also indicates the translating fans' attempts to be inventive in order to serve other fans' preferences and expectations by exploiting the verbal and nonverbal elements of semiotic resources associated with impact captions.

In turn, interestingly, over 90% of surveyed Thai fans expected such additional information on the screen to be fully translated. Such a view is expressed in the extracts below:

I personally think the translation of impact captions is needed ... That is because such impact captions can help us have a better understanding of the dialogues or contexts of the programmes. The translation can also help us gain more enjoyment in watching the programmes. [Fan Survey Respondent 2]

Culture, language and some expressions in other countries can be different from us. So, the explanation of such elements helps us gain a better understanding. [Fan Survey Respondent 7]

The above extracts demonstrate fans' strong attachment to the programmes and their expectation to be able to understand the meaning and context of their favourite media texts as fully as possible. These translating and non-translating fans' attitudes appear to show how

⁴ <https://programs.sbs.co.kr/enter/runningman/>

⁵ The Korean impact caption describes what happened in the scene, which can be translated as "the Snow White character is showing interest in the apple brought by the "Bluffing' dwarf". That is, the woman in the image, who is a cast member on the TV Show, and who is dressed as Snow White, received an apple from a guest dressed like a dwarf who liked to bluff other people.

⁶ The Thai fansubs are not included here due to the legal implications of fansubbing.

trust is built by the former fulfilling the latter's expectations as community members (Grasswick 2010), as demonstrated in the following extracts from the interviews:

The translation is created to serve our preferences. That is why it has a high quality. The meaning is clear and easy to understand [Fan Survey Respondent 12]

[Fansubs] can better portray the feelings of each member [of the *Running Man* team] [than the official translation]. That is because [fansubbers] normally have a thorough understanding of the personalities of each member. Therefore, they can translate by selecting the appropriate word choices for the members' characteristics. [Fan Survey Respondent 20]

The above extracts confirm the enjoyment fans experience while watching fansubs on their favourite media texts as evidence of their positive attitudes towards the quality of fansubs. Not only are these perceptions related to fans' viewing expectations, but they are also associated with the extent to which the translations can trigger a range of strong emotional responses to fans' favourite content. The satisfaction fans experience in watching fansubs can develop a further attachment to their favourite programmes. Such an emotional link may make them place trust in the quality of translations carried out by fansubbers, revealing trust building from emotional connections of individuals to others or things they feel attached to, explainable in terms of epistemic trust (Origgi 2012).

On the contrary, results from the survey with non-fans reveal that they had opposite perceptions towards the quality of fansubs. They seem to question the quality of the translation produced by fansubbers, as shown in the following extracts:

The meaning in fansubs can be inaccurate. It is possible that viewers are misled by the fansubs. [Non-fan Survey Respondent 8]

There are occasionally some errors in translation. For example, the misinterpretation of the content can lead to mistranslations. This results in low-quality subtitles and the translated contents are not the same as the original. [Non-fan Survey Respondent 10]

Fansubs can be mistranslated because their accuracy is not approved by the professionals. [Non-fan Survey Respondent 47]

The above extracts illustrate the suspicions of non-fans over the accuracy of translations in fansubs, implying distrust towards the skills of fansubbers in the production of translations⁷. This shows the low credibility of fansubbers in the eyes of non-fans. Their lack of trust in fansubbers can be explained in terms of epistemic trust. First, non-fans may regard fansubbers as non-professional translators who operate without translator training. This affects their trust in the reliability of the fansubbers (Origgi 2012). The second reason concerns their non-membership in fansubbing communities. Non-fans are outsiders of the fansubbing network. This means they do not foster any interrelationships like fansubbers and non-translating fans do. Therefore, they do not gain any shared experiences, nor do they develop bonds which can build trust in the communities (Fonagy and Allison 2014; Daukas 2006). This results in their lack of trust in fansubs which is shown in the way non-fans perceive the translation quality of fansubs quite negatively.

Additionally, responses to our survey with non-fans reveal how they focused on the legal issues involving the practice, as shown in the extract below:

The income of the programme is reduced because of copyright infringement. The sales of products in relation to the programmes also decrease. [Non-fan Survey Respondent 65]

[Fansubs] are considered copyright violation. The copyright holders lose the opportunity to gain income because the programmes are available for free on the Internet. [Non-fan Survey Respondent 122]

These extracts demonstrate that non-fans' views indicate the opposite to the ethical viewpoint shared between fansubbers and non-translating fans, as discussed earlier. This shows non-fans' lack of trust in terms of moral commitment to the activity (Origgi 2012), highlighting their negative attitudes towards the translation quality and even the fansubbing practice as a whole.

⁷ Fans' criteria for high quality are likely to be different from those by non-fans, but going into the detailed analysis of quality criteria is beyond the scope of this article.

The discussion thus far has shown that Thai fans place trust in fansubbers, unlike non-fans. The trust has been built from the close interrelationships between fansubbers and non-translating fans in the fansubbing network. This trust in fan culture is likely to develop fans' epistemic trust, resulting in their positive attitudes towards fansubs, including their quality.

5. Conclusion

We set out to shed light on the ways in which fansubbing contributes to a new understanding of a contemporary mechanism in reproducing and recontextualising global media. The Thai fansubbing of Korean entertainment TV shows illustrates how modern fans actively seek to engage with their favourite programmes in a way that satisfies their needs. Fansubs, in contrast to professional translation, seem to serve such needs largely because fan translators have a better understanding of fan culture and fandom. Additionally, the translation work by fansubbers is not achievable without the support of non-translating fans who constitute an integral part of fan communities. In this interdependent relationship, the empirical data shows the critical role played by trust between translating and non-translating fans, who mutually reinforce each other's pursuit of fandom.

Our empirical data support that fansubbers engage in the fansub production and distribution to serve fandom not only for themselves but also for other fans. Fansubs in turn demonstrate that fansubbers attempt to convey the message embedded in the original media text, including the additional information contained in impact captions, which are often neglected by official translations as these captions are not common in Thailand. This meant that there were no clear norms for Thai fansubbers to follow in terms of the treatment of impact captions. Faced with the challenge, the fansubbers utilise technologies and exploit semiotic resources such as different fonts and colours for such captions in an attempt to recreate fansubs to generate a similar effect. They assume the role of "sign makers", who guide and inform fellow fans on the meaning of the global media texts even when there is no clear precedence to follow.

The formation of the fansubbing network analysed according to ANT, enabled us to tease out the interrelationships that develop among members of fan communities. Fansubbers as producers and distributors of fansubs come to command respect among the fan community

members as figures of authority who are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to make global media accessible across cultures and languages. Our empirical data shows evidence indicating conflicting perceptions of fansubs. On the one hand, fan communities consider fansubs to be trustworthy, and of high quality, whereas non-fans see them as suspicious, illegal practices carried out by untrained, ad hoc translators. This can be explained in terms of specific types of trust, namely, epistemic trust, which develops within the fan communities, in contrast to epistemic vigilance demonstrated by outsiders of the communities, who find fan work to be questionable.

Looking ahead to future work, we anticipate fan translation and fansub practices, in particular, will continue to gain ground in AVT research, especially in the dynamic digital landscape embracing a participatory culture. However, at the same time, an uncritical association of fansubbing to participatory culture is cautioned against. For example, Dwyer (2018, p. 438) highlights the ambivalent nature of fans being culturally resistant but also conformist to consumerism in some contexts. This hybridity can arguably be linked to the often unpredictable ways in which fans exploit semiotic resources to fulfil their fandom, as partly shown in our study, but also manifest in the pure bootlegging enterprise. There is much more to explore in this research sphere in future, including the increasing tie-in of fan translation groups with commercial entities to further develop new types of global media distribution mechanisms (Dwyer 2018).

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