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Bridging the gap between non-professional subtitling and translator training: a collaborative approach

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The impact of technology on audiovisual translation has been enormous, and it continues to change not only audiovisual production and distribution models but also the profile of the translator and the concept of audience. The development of new digital technologies has led to the emergence of internet communities of non-professional translators who subtitle popular TV series and films using freeware and sharing their collective intelligence. This article describes a teaching project which investigates the potential benefits of integrating activities inspired by non-professional subtitling into a formal teaching context. Making the most of their knowledge as fans as well as of their linguistic skills and socio-cultural awareness, students work in teams to produce interlingual subtitles for different episodes from a variety of TV series, including comedy, medical drama, crime and science fiction. Such collaborative approach, based on a social constructivist view of translator training, has important pedagogical implications for areas such as translator competence, student motivation and learner autonomy.

Keywords: audiovisual translation; fansubbing; non-professional translation; subtitling

1. Introduction

As Cronin (2013, 1) points out, “translation is living through a period of revolutionary upheaval. The effects of digital technology and the internet on translation are continuous, widespread, and profound.” Indeed, the impact of technology on audiovisual translation (AVT) has been massive, and its effect has been pervasive as regards audiovisual production and distribution as well as the profile of the translator and the target audience.

In the words of Díaz-Cintas (2018, 131):

In the specific case of subtitling, traditional roles and tasks have changed quite dramatically as technical advances have had an immediate impact both on the subtitling practice from the practitioner’s perspective, and also on the perception of subtitling that we have as spectators and consumers.

In this rapidly changing scenario, translator training has become increasingly challenging. One of the common issues is that students are not always exposed to the technological advancements that characterise the professional world of AVT, often due to limited funding. The absence of cutting-edge technology in the translation classroom makes it difficult for the trainer to foster all the competences of an audiovisual translator, who needs to meet strict deadlines and adapt to new tools in addition to mastering language and translation skills and being able to deal with the semiotic complexity of audiovisual texts.

The democratisation of digital technologies has led to the emergence of online communities of non-professional translators who produce subtitles for popular TV series and films and share them on the internet. Sharing their collective intelligence and making the most of these new platforms, amateur translators are challenging the traditional AVT methods and norms, and provoking a significant impact on viewing habits and distribution (Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006; Pérez-Gonzalez 2006; Massidda 2015). The availability of free subtitle editors and the collaboration that characterises non-professional subtitling are two dimensions that could be explored in the formal training of future translators, as discussed by Orrego-Carmona (2014), who also highlights the need for more academic studies on non-professional subtitling in the field of translator training (Orrego-Carmona 2015).

This article reports on a teaching project carried out in the academic year 2017-2018 as part of a translation course delivered at the University of Parma. The aim was to assess the benefits of integrating activities inspired by non-professional subtitling into a formal teaching environment. Students were encouraged to familiarise themselves with fansubbing communities and were then asked to recreate a similar environment in class, based on collaboration and the use of freeware. Working in teams, they produced

interlingual subtitles for episodes from a variety of TV series of their choice. A qualitative approach, based on questionnaires and in-class discussions, was adopted in order to investigate the students' opinion of non-professional translation and to gauge their motivation to complete subtitling tasks inspired by fansubbing communities. The article also explores the consequences of adopting an approach inspired by non-professional subtitling in the translation classroom and its potential implications for translator training.

2. Non-professional subtitling: a global phenomenon

Non-professional subtitling refers to a wide range of activities in which “communities of volunteers that produce non-professional subtitles come together online and use the technological resources at their disposal to create subtitles and distribute them over the Internet” (Orrego-Carmona and Lee 2017, 2). Other terms, such as *fansubbing*, *amateur translation*, *fan translation*, *user-generated translation*, *collaborative translation*, *community translation*, *volunteer translation* and *social subtitling* have been proposed over the years to label this phenomenon. Orrego-Carmona and Lee (*ibid.*, 5) offer a detailed overview of the terminology that has been used to date and suggest the use of non-professional subtitling as an umbrella term for all practices in which “a self-selected group of translators” create subtitles for a target audience, to which they belong, without receiving any kind of remuneration.¹

In this article, the terms non-professional subtitling and fansubbing are used to refer to online communities of fans who subtitle TV series and films, mainly produced in the United States. Fansubbing was actually the first term used to refer to a revolutionary practice that started in the 1980s as a collaborative effort of fans of Japanese anime in the United States, who wanted to have uncensored access to their favourite programmes

¹ See also Pym (2011) for a description of the academic terms used to label non-professional translation.

(Orrego-Carmona 2015, 215). In the last two decades, fansubbing has spread from the Japanese anime subculture to popular mainstream TV products, such as US TV series and films, which are regularly translated into myriad languages by online communities. Pedersen (2018, 51) proposes a definition of fansubbing which highlights its amateur, voluntary and legally dubious nature and which is not limited to a specific genre or language combination: “Fansubs are subtitles produced by fans, with little or no professional training or experience, carried out without pecuniary remuneration and normally without the consent of the copyright holders of the source text.”

Díaz-Cintas (2018), who includes fan-subtitles or fansubs in the wider phenomenon of “cybersubtitles”, underlines the strong sense of belonging that defines fansubbing communities. He notes that they “generate and inculcate a sense of community by allowing fans to voluntarily work together to produce subtitles for foreign audiovisual productions with the aim of sharing and spreading those materials among like-minded people through the cyberspace” (*ibid.*, 130). As observed by Massidda and Casarini (2017, 65), “it was the adoption of volunteer subtitling practices by mainstream television series fans that paved the way for the rise of fansubbing as a widespread form of audiovisual translation that was able to challenge the monopoly of dubbing even in traditional dubbing countries”, not only in Europe (Italy, France, Spain and Germany) but also in Latin America and Asia. On the other hand, fansubbing appears to be a more marginal phenomenon in typical subtitling countries, such as Sweden, where “there is simply not such great need for fansubs as there is in places like Italy, South America, China, or the USA” (Pedersen 2018, 74). As noted by Díaz-Cintas (2018, 131), non-professional subtitling is having a significant impact on the profession, the distribution as well as the consumption of audiovisual productions:

the development of fansub groups has served as a stepping-stone for the subsequent commercial distribution and subtitling of foreign audiovisual programmes, by cultivating a generation-wide audience that enjoys watching foreign programmes in a regular fashion.

Unsurprisingly, non-professional subtitling has been receiving ever-increasing academic attention, especially in the last decade. There has been a proliferation of conferences and publications looking at the phenomenon from a variety of angles, ranging from the purely linguistic and technical features, to the socio-cultural and (il)legal aspects, as well its audience reception (Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006; Pérez-González 2006, 2007, 2012; Bogucki 2009; Bruti and Zanotti 2013, 2015; Lepre 2015; Massidda 2015; Orrego-Carmona 2015, 2016, 2018; Massidda and Casarini 2017; Wang 2017; Díaz-Cintas 2018).

2.1. Non-professional subtitling and translator training

Within the existing body of research on non-professional subtitling, the number of studies that consider it from the perspective of translator training is still limited, although it has grown rapidly in the last decade (O'Hagan 2008, 2013; Beseghi 2013; Tonin 2013; Orrego-Carmona 2014; Baczkowska 2015; Bucaria 2015; Bolaños 2017; Talaván and Ávila-Cabrera 2017). Given the fact that non-professional subtitling is one of the most active forms of fan translation (Orrego-Carmona 2015, 216), it makes sense to discuss it as part of the translator training curriculum. O'Hagan (2008, 178), who explored the possibilities of fan translation networks as a translator training environment, concluded that "Translation Studies can no longer afford to overlook fan translation" and translator training should consider the relevance of amateur communities in the promotion of translator competence. More recently, Orrego-Carmona (2014) conducted a classroom experiment, the aim of which was to analyse students' perception of non-professional subtitling platforms by asking them to become involved in two non-professional online

communities. The study concluded that non-professional platforms encourage students to be part of a community and to engage in translation activities outside of the classroom.

There are numerous reasons to justify studying the feasibility of implementing activities inspired by non-professional subtitling practices in the AVT classroom. First of all, as pointed out by Bolaños-García-Escribano (2017) in his study on the effects of fansubs on EFL education, younger audiences tend to watch fansubbed audiovisual programmes that are freely available online. This “means that fansubbed videos are acting as a linguistic model to many students of English as a foreign language” (2017, 122) and that fansubs are already part of students’ everyday lives.

Secondly, as pointed out by Massidda and Casarini (2017, 80), “the phenomenon of fansubbing has had a much deeper impact on audiovisual transfer in Italy than one might suppose for an underground, volunteer form of translation.” Indeed, in response to the success of fansubs, important distributors like Netflix have experimented with their workflows, releasing the episodes of one of their talk shows in less than 34 hours in 20 different languages simultaneously (Díaz-Cintas 2018, 132). As noted by Massidda (2015, 115), Italian pay-TV channels such as Sky have accelerated their AVT process and now broadcast the most popular shows, with professional subtitles, only 24 hours from the first airing. It thus appears essential to raise students’ awareness of this influential phenomenon, which reflects Jenkins’s (2006) convergence culture, by encouraging them to explore the process of translation *prosumption*, where production and consumption are combined and “it is the potential audience for the translation that does the translation” (Cronin 2013, 100).

Thirdly, fansubbing has emerged in an era of enormous change in the field of translation, which has seen, among other, the rise of online collaborative translation undertaken by volunteers (Fernández Costales 2012, 2013; O’Hagan 2012). From

crowdsourcing initiatives instigated by institutions and private firms (e.g. Facebook) to other forms of community translation (e.g. Wikipedia), collaborative translation has proliferated on the web, giving rise to a democratisation of translation practices. Indeed, as highlighted by a number of studies (Barra 2009; Bold 2012; Massidda 2015; Orrego-Carmona 2015; Beseghi 2016; Massidda and Casarini 2017), fansubbing communities base their work on collaboration, both for the production and revision of their outputs, not only among members of the translation community, but also with their communities of followers (Pérez-González 2017). This kind of collaboration seems particularly useful in the context of translator training and can easily be transferred to the AVT classroom. According to the social constructivist model of learning, collaborative work “allows learning activities to revolve around projects that reflect the complexity of real-life situations” and provides students with “lifelong learning skills that can serve them in an infinite and unpredictable variety of situations once they leave the institution” (Kiraly 2000, 37). From this perspective, the emphasis is on what Kiraly (*ibid.*, 10-14) calls “translator competence”, as opposed to “translation competence”. While the latter refers to “the specific skills that allow one to produce an acceptable target text in one language on the basis of a text written in another” (*ibid.*, 13), translator competence involves “being able to use tools and information to create communicatively successful texts that are accepted as good translations within the community concerned” (*ibid.*, 13-14). Translator competence is the ability to join new communities and to interact with them successfully:

it means knowing how to work co-operatively within the various overlapping communities of translators and subject matter experts to accomplish work collaboratively; to appropriate knowledge, norms and conventions; and to contribute to the evolving conversation that constitutes these communities.

(Kiraly 2000, 14)

Non-professional subtitling complicates the concept of community discussed by Kiraly (*ibid.*) as non-professional translators are also the consumers of the translations they contribute to produce.

Finally, as O'Hagan (2012, 38) observes, the era of non-professional translation seems to further highlight what Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2007, 55) referred to as “subtitling’s vulnerability”. Generally speaking, subtitles are a form of translation that coexist with the source text and can thus be scrutinised by viewers. In this respect, non-professional subtitles can be said to be even more vulnerable as they will be consumed and judged by a niche audience made up of fans of those shows, who have their own specific expectations.

3. Case study

The project described in this article is based on the integration of non-professional subtitling in the AVT classroom. It was carried out in the academic year 2017-2018 at the University of Parma, in the AVT module offered as part of the English Language and Translation course, in the third year of the degree in Foreign Languages and Cultures.² The format of the AVT module was designed to first introduce students to the main AVT modes and then focus on subtitling and its technical features. The module, both theoretical and practical in nature, adopted a social constructivist approach based on the collaborative learning model proposed by Kiraly (2000), with the aim of developing a wide range of skills that can be applied to various situations and translation tasks. In this context-dependent, learner-centred and co-creative pedagogical approach, rather than focusing primarily on translation as a product, students are encouraged to take an active role in the

² The author has been introducing fansubbing activities into the translation classroom since the academic year 2011-2012 (Beseghi 2013).

process of translation, to take responsibility for their choices and to work and collaborate in teams. Indeed, subtitling is essentially a team effort based on co-operation (Sánchez 2004). These may all be potentially valuable transferable skills, should they plan to make a career in translation (Beseghi 2018).

3.1. Participants and materials

A total of 45 university undergraduate students who attended the AVT module lessons took part in the project. The group consisted of 32 female and 12 male students, aged between 22 and 24. Their level of English proficiency was between B2 and C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference. All the students were Italian native speakers and in the AVT module they translated from English into Italian. During the first two years of university they had studied translation theory and carried out translation tasks for a wide range of text types (e.g. literary, specialised, technical), but none of them had previous professional experience in the field of translation.

At the beginning of the module, students were introduced to the theory of AVT, with a focus on subtitling. After critically analysing professional subtitles for films and TV series in the first activities, students moved on to produce interlingual subtitles for short clips, both individually and in groups, in class and at home, in order to become acquainted with the technical features of subtitling. At this stage, the tasks were ‘passive’ (i.e. analysing already subtitled material) and ‘active’ (i.e. producing subtitles for audiovisual material). The practical lessons were held in the university computer laboratory and the software used for the activities was Subtitle Workshop, a user-friendly programme which can be downloaded free of charge. The use of this application allowed students to develop basic technical skills in subtitling with no financial cost for the university and, by downloading their own copy, they could also practise independently at home whenever they felt the need (Beseghi 2013). After this theoretical and practical

introduction to subtitling, trainees engaged in active subtitling, recreating an environment inspired by non-professional communities and based on collaboration.

3.2. Procedure

As noted above, the case study took a qualitative approach and involved the use of two questionnaires, one at the beginning and one at the end of the project.

3.2.1. First questionnaire

Immediately after the theoretical and practical introduction to subtitling, a questionnaire consisting of nine questions (Table 1) was administered to the students in order to investigate their knowledge and potential usage of non-professional subtitling. The underlying hypothesis was that most of them would be familiar with fansubbing and all 45 participants filled in the first questionnaire anonymously. The questions were all closed-ended, except for Q3, where students could indicate the name of a fansubbing community:

Q1. Are you familiar with the concept of non-professional subtitling or fansubbing? a. YES (100%) b. NO (0%)
Q2. Have you ever watched a film or episode of a TV series with non-professional subtitles? a. YES (93%) b. NO (7%)
Q3. Do you remember the name of at least one fansubbing community? (If yes, please specify) a. YES (69%) b. NO (31%)
Q4. Do you know why fansubbers produce subtitles for free? a. YES (47%) b. NO (24%) c. NOT SURE (29%)
Q5. Do you know how fansubbing communities work (i.e. workflow, organisation)? a. YES (27%) b. NO (40%) c. NOT SURE (33%)
Q6. Have you ever taken the entry test of a fansubbing community? a. YES (7%) b. NO (93%)
Q7. Have you ever collaborated with a fansubbing community? a. YES (7%)

b. NO (93%)
Q8. Would you like to become a member of a fansubbing community? a. YES (24%) b. NO (14%) c. NOT SURE (62%)
Q9. On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the overall quality of fansubs? a. 1 (0%) b. 2 (29%) c. 3 (45%) d. 4 (26%) e. 5 (0%)

Table 1. First questionnaire on non-professional subtitling

Q1, aimed at elucidating the extent to which students were aware of non-professional subtitling, revealed that they all knew of its existence. These data confirmed the initial assumption that undergraduate students specialising in foreign languages are familiar with the new forms of translation resulting from the digital revolution and the emergence of the “Viewership 2.0” (Casarini 2014). The answers to Q2 showed that the majority of participants (93%) had already watched a film or TV series with non-professional subtitles, while only three students (7%) knew about the fansubbing phenomenon but had never experienced it directly since, as they later specified, they did not use subtitles at all and only watched audiovisual programmes either in the original version without subtitles or in the dubbed version. The most frequently quoted names in Q3 were the three most popular fansubbing communities in Italy at the time – Italiansubs, Subsfactory and Subspedia –, and only a few students mentioned the less known Traduttori Anomini and Subsccloud. Incidentally, after the present study was completed, many Italian fansubbing websites were closed down for legal reasons from September 2018.³

In Q4, students were asked whether they knew the motivation behind fansubbers’

³ Students should be made aware of the legal problems often associated with non-professional subtitling. In the case of Italy, fansubbing communities were able to skirt legal issues, claiming that what they were doing was “to release a translation conceived as a personal interpretation of a TV programme in order to share it with fellow fans” (Massidda 2015, 22).

activity: 21 students (47%) claimed to be aware of the motivations, while 29% were not sure and 24% had no idea. Q5 seek to find out whether students had some knowledge of how fansubbing communities work (i.e. workflow and internal organisation): 12 participants (27%) stated they were familiar with this aspect, while 15 (33%) were not sure and 18 (40%) did not know anything about the internal organisation of fansubbing communities. As emerged in Q6 and Q7, three of these students had taken the entry test and joined a fansubbing community. Q8 aimed at finding out whether the students would be interested in joining a fansubbing community: of the 42 students who replied to this question, since the other three were already fansubbers, ten (24%) showed a positive inclination to become fansubbers, six (14%) were negative, while the other 26 (62%) were not sure. Finally, Q9 was meant to investigate participants' perception of the overall quality of fansubs. Only the 42 students who had previously used them replied to this question. The majority (19 students, 45%) gave a medium score of 3, while 12 (29%) rated fansubbing with a score of 2 and 11 (26%) awarded a higher score of 4. Neither the lowest (1) nor the highest (5) scores were chosen, which seems to indicate that nobody completely disliked this form of translation but, at the same time, they were all aware of its flaws.

3.2.2. Activities

Once the preliminary questionnaire had been completed, the instructor opened a discussion in class to compare the students' opinions and to stimulate critical reflection, focusing mainly on Q4 and Q9. Regarding the motivation behind the work of fansubbing communities (Q4), most students seemed to be aware that fansubbers' activity "is rooted both in the will to make up for the absence of official translations, and in the dissatisfaction with the poor quality of mainstream audiovisual translation" (Massidda 2015, 36). When asked about their perception of the quality of fansubs, those who had

given a higher score explained that, in their opinion, fansubs are sometimes better than professional subtitles and dubbing in terms of rendering cultural references and other challenging aspects such as slang and taboo language. Those who had given a lower score were more concerned about technical flaws such as the excessive length of fansubs, linguistic inaccuracies and mistranslations. The students who had indicated an average score were uncertain about the quality of fansubs and while they appreciated their typically source-oriented nature and foreignising strategies, they were also aware of translation mistakes and readability issues.

After the discussion, students were encouraged to do some research on fansubbing, by searching for academic articles and material on the web, such as interviews with fansubbers and blogs or videos dedicated to the world of non-professional subtitling. Interestingly, a documentary entitled *Subs Heroes*, directed by Franco Dipietro, was released in Italy in January 2018. An independent production recounting the story of Itasa, one of the most popular Italian fansubbing communities, the film shows the sociocultural pervasiveness and effects of this phenomenon in a dubbing country like Italy. Thanks to this material, students had access to detailed information about the workflow and hierarchical organisation of the fansubbing machinery.

The subsequent phase took place outside the classroom and fostered students' direct experience with the fansubbing world. At this stage, they were not given any specific instructions, but were simply encouraged to familiarise themselves with these communities. After this exploratory phase, students were asked to recreate a fansubbing community within the AVT classroom and, in line with fansubbing practices, they established some general criteria for the translation, which had to keep as much as possible of the source text, especially in terms of cultural references, special jargon, slang and taboo language.

Each week, the class-community was in charge of translating one episode from a TV series, chosen by one of the students acting as a project manager (PM). This approach, which gives trainees freedom as well as responsibility in selecting the audiovisual material to subtitle, is not only learner-centred but it also reflects the very nature of fansubbing, whose members “voluntarily translate the audiovisual programmes in which they are interested” (Díaz-Cintas 2018, 131). Depending on the length of the episode, from 20 to 50 minutes, the PM divided the group into a number of different teams so that they could finish the task within two hours, the duration of a lesson. The longer the duration of the episode, the higher the number of teams and segments. Tight deadlines are not only a distinctive feature of fansubbing, since fansubbers want their translations to be available as soon as possible, but also of the work of professional audiovisual translators, who increasingly need to meet shorter deadlines.

During the translation process, trainees could communicate with their own team members as well as with the students in other teams and the PM. The latter was also responsible for the quality of the final product, which had to follow the community guidelines. Each translation task thus hinged on collaboration and hierarchical organisation.

The role of the PM was rotated and, as the project involved the translation of five episodes, five different students had the opportunity to act as PMs. The three fansubbers volunteered for this role, while the other two were elected by the class-community. This kind of internal organisation, based on fluid communication and leadership, is typical of fansubbing communities but also bears some resemblance to professional translation environments (Orrego-Carmona 2015, 226), which can be a valuable experience for learners. A crucial phase was the final editing: after collecting the different translations done by the various teams, the PMs not only checked the consistency and fluency of the

whole, but they also provided feedback to the translators so that they could improve in the next task.

The instructor did not intervene in any decision-making and left all the responsibilities for the translation process to the pupils. In this learner-centred approach, students had the opportunity to make their own choices and to select the TV series that they preferred. This fundamental aspect of fansubbing communities, who are “amateur experts” (Massidda 2015, 36) willing to work for free because of their personal interest in the material they translate, can be exploited in translator training in order to foster student motivation. The episodes selected by the student-PMs came from TV series of different genres and, as a result, posed a variety of challenges to the student-translators: *Younger* (Darren Star, 2015–, comedy), *Grey’s Anatomy* (Shonda Rhimes, 2005–, medical drama), *The Big Bang Theory* (Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady, 2007–2019, comedy), *How to Get Away with Murder* (Peter Nowalk, 2014–, crime) and *Stranger Things* (Matt Duffer and Ross Duffer, 2016–, science fiction). While translating, students exploited their linguistic and socio-cultural knowledge (Díaz-Cintas 2008) as well as their fan knowledge. Participants’ expertise varied depending on the TV series being subtitled, which is why collaboration among the different teams and translators was a fundamental aspect of the project.

3.3. Results and discussion

3.3.1. Final questionnaire

At the end of the AVT module, students filled in a final questionnaire consisting of nine questions in which they were asked about the project as well as the simulation of non-professional subtitling methods in the classroom (Table 2). All 45 students completed the questionnaire. The first three questions were very similar to those in the first poll and

were included in order to verify whether students' perception of non-professional subtitling had changed after the fansubbing experience. Some of the questions were open-ended in an attempt to garner more detailed feedback. After completing the questionnaire, the students further discussed some of their responses in class.

Q1. Have you ever taken the entry test for a fansubbing community? YES (29%) NO (71%)
Q2. Would you like to become part of a fansubbing community in the future? YES (33%) NO (9%) NOT SURE (58%)
Q3. On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the overall quality of fansubs? 1 (0%) 2 (18%) 3 (49%) 4 (33%) 5 (0%)
Q4. On a scale from 1 to 5, how do you rate the fansubbing experience in class? 1 (0%) 2 (0%) 3 (0%) 4 (53%) 5 (47%)
Q5. How would you describe the fansubbing experience in class? Use one adjective.
Q6. What was the most useful aspect of the experience?
Q7. What was the most challenging aspect of the experience?
Q8. Do you think your translator competence has improved? YES (100%) NO (0%) NOT SURE (0%)
Q9. Which skill do you think you have improved most? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in teams (33%) • Meeting tight deadlines (18%) • Communicating with other members (22%) • Meeting the target audience's expectations (27%)

Table 2. Final questionnaire on non-professional subtitling in the AVT classroom.

As can be seen in Table 2, the number of students who had taken a fansubbing community's entry test rose from three (7%) to 13 (29%) and the percentage of students wishing to join a fansubbing community also increased from ten (24%) to 15 (33%). These students explained during the in-class discussion that they were interested in

exploring first-hand the world of non-professional translation as well as curious to see how the fansubbing entry test was structured. Since not all the students enrolled on this course pursue a career in AVT after finishing their studies, this exposure gave them an opportunity to gain practical experience outside the academic environment. After coming into contact with the world of fansubbing, the students' perception of fansubs quality changed slightly, with more of them giving higher scores (3 and 4). Yet, as in the first questionnaire, nobody awarded the highest score of 5. Students showed awareness of the most common issues impinging on the quality of fansubbing, such as typos, grammar mistakes and disrespect for certain subtitling conventions (e.g. number of lines and characters per line). However, they also acknowledged the fact that the target audience would probably be more permissive towards these mistakes, since fansubs are not produced by professional translators but by amateurs whose first motive is to share their passion and interests with other fans.

Q4 was aimed at measuring students' evaluation of the fansubbing experience in class, which was very positive on the whole since no-one gave scores from 1 to 3. Additionally, most students contributed positive comments during the final in-class discussion, foregrounding the highly engaging nature of the subtitling tasks. Q5, Q6 and Q7 were all open-ended, so that respondents could express their opinions in their own words. All the adjectives given in response to Q5 were positive, and included *enjoyable*, *fun*, *amusing*, *pleasant*, *interesting*, *stimulating*, *motivating*, *exciting*, *innovative*, *amazing*, and *great*. As regards the most useful aspect of the experience (Q6), many students emphasised the value of collaboration during the subtitling process (comment 1) and the fact that translating material that they liked was very motivating (comment 2). Some students also underlined the effectiveness of obtaining feedback from someone who is not the instructor (comment 3):

Comment 1: The most useful aspect was to work with other team members. I think this kind of collaboration helped us to produce better subtitles and we all worked towards the same goal.

Comment 2: I really liked that we could translate episodes from our favourite TV shows. We had fun and we were more motivated to translate well. I agree with the fansubber in the documentary who said that if you do something because you like it, you do it better.

Comment 3: The feedback from the revisers was very useful. I didn't feel judged but I wanted to do better in the following task.

Some students also commented on the fansubbers' dedication:

Comment 4: I think that the passion and investment that fansubbers put in their work can be an inspiration for professional translators. Maybe this need to help the audience is the best attitude a translator can have.

As for the most challenging aspect of their experience (Q7), many participants highlighted the fact that meeting deadlines was often quite difficult. Some thought that working in teams helped them to improve communication and exchange useful ideas for the translation they were doing, but this could also slow down their work when they spent too much time discussing different translation options, as acknowledged in comment 5:

Comment 5: Sometimes it was difficult to respect the deadline, because translating as a team means making choices together and finding an agreement was not always easy or quick.

Some students emphasised subtitling's vulnerability and the importance of meeting the audience's expectations (comment 6):

Comment 6: With subtitles you have to be very careful when you translate because the audience may make comparisons with the original text. In the case of TV series or programmes that you really like, you understand it better because you have the same expectations.

Q8, centred on students' perception of their translator competence, showed that they were convinced that they had somehow improved after the fansubbing experience. More

specifically, in terms of skills (Q9), the majority (15, 33%) felt they had improved their ability to work in teams, while 12 (27%) thought they had primarily developed their ability to meet the target audience's expectations, ten (22%) believed to have enhanced their communication skills and, finally, eight (18%) felt they had improved their ability to meet tight deadlines. On the whole, respondents emphasised two aspects in particular of translator competence, namely collaboration (comment 7) and awareness of the target audience's expectations (comment 8):

Comment 7: I have understood that translation can be a team effort. It is important to be able to collaborate with other people.

Comment 8: When you translate for an audience that share your same interests, you pay attention to the quality of your work and you do your best to help them understand their favourite programmes.

What clearly emerged from the final questionnaire as well as from the discussion in class was that students felt highly motivated and engaged in a context where they worked cooperatively with others and where they received feedback from their peers. An internal organisation based on fluid communication and leadership proved to be a valuable experience for learners. In addition, students were not focused on the instructor's expectations but, rather, on the needs and expectations of their intended audience, that is, the fan community at large, including not only their peers but also the entire fanbase of the programmes they had chosen to translate. From this viewpoint, the non-professional subtitling experience contributed to increase their awareness of some of the skills which are typical of translator competence.

4. Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to explore the pedagogical possibilities offered by non-professional subtitling in the context of translator training, as part of a project carried out

in an undergraduate translation course. The students participated actively and responsibly in all the tasks, taking decisions and sharing the same goal, i.e. the production of subtitles that would satisfy the community they had built in class. This is in line with the social constructivist approach, which promotes “a maximum degree of authentic, real-world complexity in learning situations” (Kiraly 2000, 104) and according to which “we learn to communicate, and then to think, by sharing and contrasting perspectives with other members of the communities to which we belong” (*ibid.*, 34).

Student participation, in-class discussion and the answers to the final questionnaire showed that the incorporation of practices inspired by non-professional subtitling in the translation classroom was not only feasible, but also particularly valued by all the participants. The main results of the experiment can be summarised as follows:

- The integration in the classroom of fansubbing methods based on collaboration and team organisation increased students’ awareness of what translator competence entails and helped them to develop other skills needed by audiovisual translators in addition to purely linguistic and technical competence (translation competence). More specifically, participants were able to hone skills such as working in teams, meeting the audience’s expectations, keeping to tight deadlines and communicating with colleagues.
- Students particularly emphasised the importance of collaboration and communication within the community. Their comments highlighted their active involvement in the tasks and their sense of belonging to a community of amateur experts.
- Respondents’ comments also underlined their enhanced reflection on the needs of their intended audience, with whom they share their fan knowledge and expectations.

In terms of the potential implications for translator training in general, the use of activities inspired by non-professional subtitling may be beneficial in the following areas:

- The collaborative framework inspired by fansubbing practices and based on the social constructivist approach allows for a greater degree of freedom and autonomy for students. In this learner-centred context, the instructor only offers support and assists students through “scaffolding”, which is “a form of coaching toward the construction of the students’ own viable interpretation of an event” (Kiraly 2000, 47).
- By creating a community of translators within the classroom, students can share their interests, collaborate to disseminate their outputs, share responsibility and feel the authenticity of the activities, which ultimately enhances their motivation. The fact that the materials are selected by the students themselves and taken from their favourite TV series, greatly encourages them to produce satisfactory subtitles in order to obtain good feedback from the revisers and to meet the audience’s expectations.
- The recreational side of community translation, based on collectivism, reinforces the idea of “translating for fun” and “the sense of translation as a human activity” (Fernández Costales 2012, 127), which is typical of fandom culture and contributes to stimulate students’ motivation.

In general terms, the exploitation of activities inspired by fansubbing can promote the acquisition of specific transferable skills pertaining to translator competence while at the same time bridging the gap between professional and non-professional fields. Notwithstanding the controversial nature of non-professional translation, which clearly cannot substitute the role of the professional translator, it is undeniable that fansubbing has had an enormous impact in the promotion of collaborative forms of translation,

addressing the needs of a new kind of audience as well as altering audiovisual distribution practices. In this fast-changing scenario, translation teachers should guide their students through the complexity of translation, including the interrelation between non-professional practices and professional translation. I would argue that, in order to prepare students to enter the ever-changing translation market, this approach could contribute to foster their awareness of the different contexts in which translation takes place as well as of the undisputable impact that non-professional translation is enjoying in today's society.

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