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# Fansubbing Practices in Ukraine: Promoting National Culture Worldwide

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**Abstract**--This research focuses on the analysis of the English non-professional subtitles of the Ukrainian films, produced by the amateur translators for whom English is a foreign language. Such exploration in the nature of fansubbing gives insights into the basic principles that define the notion of subtitling, examines the standards set to the audiovisual translation, and outlines the challenges fansubbers may face in the process of subtitling. The study is based on the following Ukrainian films of the second half of the XXth – beginning of the XXIst century: *Chasing Two Hares* (1961); *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965); *Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* (2001). The analysis of the films is conducted on the syntactic, lexical, and grammatical levels, as well as on the level of fansubs screen presentation (spatial and temporal parameters). The study discusses fansubbers' translation decisions from the perspective of their correlation with the established subtitling guidelines, and their effect on the foreign audience.

**Keywords**--audiovisual translation, fansubbing, non-professional subtitling, subtitling guidelines, Ukrainian films.

## Introduction

In recent years, the democratization of technology has modified the ways Internet users receive, process and create information online. The technological advancements have turned national audiences into a global community, and endowed them with tools to modify the form and flow of audiovisual products (O'Hagan, 2009; Orrego-Carmona, 2016). Such new practices are challenging the established mechanisms of production-consumption interaction by introducing a new type of a technology-empowered consumer, interested in, and therefore, capable of creating new products by themselves. The emergence of user-generated content in such areas as media production, journalism and advertising has also impacted the sphere of translation as means of cross-cultural communication (Deuze, 2007; Orrego-Carmona, 2016). For this reason, user-generated translation, defined as “a wide range of translation, carried out based on free user

participation in digital media spaces where it is undertaken by unspecified self-selected individuals” (O’Hagan, 2009), has turned into a large-scale Internet activity of distribution of audiovisual content worldwide.

Being a non-professional and user-generated practice of collaborative subtitling by fans and for fans (Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006; Simó & Rosario, 2005; O’Hagan, 2008; O’Hagan, 2009; Orrego-Carmona, 2016), fansubbing remains for now one of the most active forms of popularizing media products on a global level. Although nowadays the contents in fansubbing are mainly adapted from English into local languages (Costales, 2012), this research is aimed at studying the fansubbing of Ukrainian films into English. Only during the last decade Ukrainian films have begun to gain popularity worldwide (among the best known motion pictures are *Homeward*, *The Rising Hawk*, *Atlantis*, *My Thoughts are Silent*, *The Tribe*). However, the films created earlier in this century and during the second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> century are still not translated into English or other most spoken languages in the world, as they have no financial value for modern film industry aimed at gaining profit from film distribution. That is why the subtitling of the Ukrainian films into English is done by amateur translators driven by the desire to bring the Ukrainian culture to foreign audiences (Wongseree et al., 2019; Wu, 2020).

As the wish to preserve the cultural heritage and improve the international visibility of media products created in low-dissemination languages is the main motivation for fansubbers (Costales, 2012), the investigation of non-professional subtitling from Ukrainian into English adds to the wide array of studies on the given topic (Bruti & Zanotti, 2015; Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006; Wilcock, 2013; Lepre, 2015; Massidda, 2015). The research focuses on evaluating the quality of English subtitles on the level of both form and content, and estimating whether translators for whom English is a foreign language may succeed in rendering cultural potential of a film.

## **Materials and Methods**

The study is based on the comparative translation analysis of three Ukrainian films (second half of the XX<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the XXI<sup>st</sup> century) and their English subtitles produced by amateur translators. The films chosen for this research are the following: 1) *Chasing Two Hares* (1961, directed by Viktor Ivanov, running time: 72 min.); 2) *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965, directed by Serhii Parajanov, running time: 97 min.); 3) *Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* (2001, directed by Yurii Illienko, running time: 154 min.).

As the main objective of the research lies in the evaluation of the level of fansubs compliance with the established subtitling standards, the Ukrainian film fansubs are analysed from the perspective of their correlation with the existing Guidelines for Production and Layout of TV Subtitles, which include recommendations on layout (position on the screen, number of lines, text positioning, number of characters per line, typeface and distribution), duration (duration of a full two / one-line subtitle, leading-in and lagging-out time, overlay), punctuation and letter

case, and target text editing (segmentation and line length, omitting and retaining linguistic items of the original, altering syntactic structures, rendering of dialects, taboo words, and culture-specific linguistic elements) (Karamitroglou, 1998; Mearns & Yule, 2009). In addition, the quality of fansubs under analysis is estimated according to the Code of Good Subtitling Practice endorsed by the European Association for Studies in Screen Translation (Carroll & Ivarsson, 1998).

The comparative translation analysis of the source text and its English fansubs is aimed at defining the main deviations from the established norms, as well as successful translation decisions (Xiu & Xeauiyin, 2018; Agustawan, 2021). The study of the discrepancies between the source and target texts seeks to identify the aspects of audiovisual translation that pose main difficulties for fansubbers, and to determine the degree to which they affect the rendering of the cultural potential and the main idea of a film to foreign audiences (Valdeón, 2020; Guillot, 2020).

## Results and Discussion

### Layout

The awareness and recognition of spatial parameters in subtitling results in higher reception capacity of the media product and lowers the subtitle-reading effort, which contributes to the better film comprehension by the audience (Suryasa et al., 2019). The study of fansubs shows that non-professional translators strictly adhered to the following subtitling rules (Karamitroglou, 1998; Carroll & Ivarsson, 1998):

- subtitles are positioned at the lower part of the screen, and the lowest line of subtitles appears at about 1/12 of the total screen height above the bottom of the screen;
- a subtitled text is presented centered on its allocated line(s);
- a maximum of two lines of subtitles are presented at a time;
- typefaces with no serifs are used (Arial or Helvetica typefaces).

Translators' compliance with these recommendations significantly increases the perceived quality of film fansubs and brings it closer to the standards set by the community of professional translators. However, the research showed the whole range of discrepancies between the standardised subtitles and the analysed fansubs, which contribute to the lower readability level of a subtitled text. Arbitrary line breaks are one of the underlying factors that may hinder the reading flow and irritate viewers while watching a film (Perego, 2008; Orrego-Carmona, 2016). Although the lines of equal length in two-line subtitles facilitate their perception by the audience, the following examples illustrate the violation of the abovementioned norm:

(1) ST: *Ти хотів, щоб я встав? Я встав.*  
 [You wanted me to get up? I got up.]

TT: *You wanted me to get up? / I got up.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 5:17-5:19).

(2) ST: *Іванчику! В церкві немає щезника.*

[*Ivanko! There is no demon in church.*]

TT: *Ivanko, there's no evil spirit / in church.* (Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors 1965: 5:28-5:31).

In both examples, the second line of a subtitle is much shorter than the first one, which makes the text imbalanced and may inhibit fluent reading. For this reason, a one-line subtitle might be more efficient way of text distribution.

(3) ST: *Забирай мерщій дочку і йди до воза.*

[*Take quickly your daughter and go to the cart.*]

TT: *Take daughter and go to the cart, / quick.* (Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors 1965: 7:38-7:42).

The second line of the subtitle consists of only one word (“*quick*”), which contravenes the general recommendations for the subtitling practice. Moreover, the lines of different length slow down the reading process and thus, should be avoided. A one-line subtitle of 39 characters would facilitate the perception of the information by the audience.

In addition, one of the factors that increase the readability of subtitles is the break of a line at a logical point. Breaking of this norm – splitting such parts of speech as article and noun, preposition and the following phrase, conjunction and the following phrase, pronoun and verb, parts of a complex verb (Subtitle Guidelines 2018) – may disrupt the reading process:

(4) ST: *Його трудовий день у розпалі.*

[*His working day is in full swing.*]

TT: *He's in the middle / of his business day.* (Chasing Two Hares 1961: 4:40-4:44).

The set phrase “*in the middle of*” is split into two lines, which may decrease the reading speed. A one-line subtitle would both facilitate the reading process and provide more space for the image on screen not occupied by the text. According to the research results, the number of lines in the fansubbed texts does not exceed two, while in non-professional subtitling it may expand up to four (Simó & Rosario, 2005). However, in fansubs, the two-line subtitles are used more often than the one-line subtitles, which often goes against the recommendations of the established subtitling guidelines (Williams & Thorne, 2000; Ávila-Cabrera & Esteban, 2021).

## **Duration**

The duration time for subtitles is limited by both the regular viewer reading rhythm and the length of film frames. The study of the fansubbed films shows

that the non-professional subtitles usually conform to the following standardized criteria (Karamitroglou, 1998; Carroll & Ivarsson, 1998):

- subtitles do not appear for less than one second or stay on screen for longer than seven seconds;
- the duration of a full two-line subtitle does not exceed 5 ½ seconds;
- the duration of a full one-line subtitle does not exceed 3 ½ seconds.

However, in the majority of cases the fansubs appear before the utterance is pronounced, which contradicts the recommendations for the professional subtitling:

“Subtitles should not be inserted simultaneously with the initiation of the utterance but ¼ of a second later, since tests have indicated that the brain needs ¼ of a second to process the advent of spoken linguistic material and guide the eye towards the bottom of the screen anticipating the subtitle” (Karamitroglou, 1998).

Moreover, the research demonstrates that fansubbers usually ignore the lagging-out time, as the subtitles may disappear before the end of the utterance. This may lead to the situation when the viewers would not have enough time to read a subtitle resulting in a lower level of information perception. In addition, no lagging-out time may generate the feeling of distrust and anxiety due to the increased time pressure on the reading process. The violations of standards set to the leading-in and lagging-out time may also invoke a discrepancy between what is said and what is written, which in its turn can worsen the quality of the whole product.

The overlay, which allows two – exceptionally three – turns appearing in the same subtitle but not at the very same time (Cintas, 2005), is not used in the fansubbed films under analysis. As this technique of presenting a dynamic text may be important only for dramatic considerations, i.e. revealing surprise information at the time of its actual utterance (Karamitroglou, 1998; Cintas, 2005; Baker et al., 1984), its application may turn to be problematic and therefore, inefficient for fansubbers due to the following reasons: 1) technical restrictions of software non-professional subtitlers may work with; 2) time-consuming process of adjusting a subtitle to the time of its actual utterance; 3) personal considerations on whether the information / utterance is dramatic enough to be revealed later. However, the study of the fansubbed films shows that the overlay technique may be useful in cases when the speech pace remains fast during a significant period of time, i.e. up to 3 minutes (*Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* 2001; *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* 1965) (in such situations the process of reading subtitles that appear for only one or two seconds may be stressful for the viewers), or when several people are talking simultaneously (in such situations fansubs present the words of only one of the persons talking, which may hinder the understanding of a film).

## Punctuation

Subtitles as a written text follow a set of typographical (incl. grammatical rules), which are familiar to the viewers (Cintas & Remael, 2007; Karamitroglou, 1998). Reading subtitles that appear and disappear at a given speed is a more demanding task than reading a novel or the newspaper (Cintas & Remael, 2007). Therefore, the punctuation rules serve an extremely important function – to facilitate the reading flow and perception of information by the audience. However, the analysis of the fansubbed films shows that fansubbers do not follow key punctuation recommendations set to the standardized subtitles (Baker et al., 1984; Karamitroglou, 1998; Cintas & Remael, 2007; Subtitle Guidelines, 2018):

1. No use of triple dots to indicate that a sentence / utterance will be continued in the next subtitle. Although fansubbers mostly do not consider each subtitle to be an individual and isolated item (formulated in a complete sentence), which means that one sentence may be split between a few consecutive subtitles, they usually overlook the requirement for the use sequence / linking dots that serve as a bridge between the first and the following subtitle.
2. Inconsistent use of a full stop in the end of a sentence. The presence of a full stop on the screen tells viewers that there is no continuation to the subtitle and sends them back to the image (Cintas & Remael, 2007). Thus, the absence of the punctuation mark in the end of a sentence may disorient the audience and make them concentrate on the subtitles more than it is required by the situation.
3. Inconsistent use of commas. As commas show the structure of the sentence and are intended to guide readers in the process of text interpretation, the disregard of the norms of their usage in subtitles may confuse the audience, hinder the reading flow and slow down the information interpretation. Consider the following example:

(5) ST: *Так слухай цар царя!*

[*So listen, Tsar, to the Tsar!*]

TT: *So listen Tsar! From a Tsar!* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 5:40-5:43).

The lack of comma in the fansub has turned the direct address into the object, which distorts the initial meaning of the utterance. In addition, the use of the preposition “*from*” instead of “*to*” makes the sentence even more opaque, taking into account the fact that subtitles also serve as a model for literacy (Carroll & Ivarsson, 1998), which brings the necessity to follow grammar rules to the forefront.

4. No use of dashes to indicate a dialogue exchange. Fansubbers tend to omit a dash at the beginning of the second line, which may hinder the correct interpretation of the information by viewers, as at some point it may be impossible to differentiate the words of one person from the words of another.
5. No use of capital letters at the beginning of a sentence / subtitle. Although the violation of this norm does not hinder the understanding of the information by the audience, it diminishes the credibility of subtitles, being a sign of their non-professional nature.

6. Disregard of the exclamation mark to indicate the emphatic nature of the utterance, and of the question mark to indicate a question:

(6) ST: *Петруша! Ти же обещал! Ти же клялся!*

[*Peter! But you promised! But you sworn!*]

TT: *You promised. You sworn.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 2:38-2:41).

(7) ST: *Произвести до генерала!*

[*Promote to General!*]

TT: *You are promoted to corporal.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 10:57-10:59).

As one of the functions of the exclamation mark is to indicate the command, the given subtitle does not convey the emphatic and pragmatic meaning of the utterance to the fullest (the imperative mood of a sentence would have also served the abovementioned function). The mistake on the lexical level – “*corporal*” vs. “*general*” – is also misleading.

(8) ST: *Что?! Что скажешь, гетьман?!!*

[*What?! What will you say, Hetman?!!*]

TT: *What will you say, Hetman.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 3:11-3:14).

As the main pragmatic function of this utterance is to convey anger and hostility of a speaker, the combination of exclamation and question marks would make it more emphatic and thus, would intensify the perlocutionary effect on the audience. As in the previous case, such deviations from the established standards do not distort the main idea of a film, but may significantly reduce the level of trust to the subtitles, and therefore, spoil the overall impression of an audiovisual product.

The research results also revealed the cases when the exclamation mark was substituted by the question mark, and vice versa, which can mislead the viewers:

(9) ST: *Петра вбито нарешили!*

[*Peter is killed at last!*]

TT: *Peter is killed, at last?* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 1:35:11-1:35:14).

In addition to the improper use of the question mark, the comma in the given sentence contradicts the original intonation of a speaker, and therefore, distorts the primary meaning of the utterance by focusing viewers’ attention on the last phrase “*at last*”.

On the whole, the study of punctuation in fansubs shows that the deviations from the established rules (which usually occur due to the insufficient knowledge of the English language by the Ukrainian fansubbers) are not the defining factor in understanding of a film, but the consistency in their use may significantly facilitate the process of watching and interpreting the information. No boldface and underlining in the analysed fansubs contributes to the better perception of an audiovisual product.

### Target text editing (lexical-semantic and syntactic levels)

The technical limitations of audiovisual translation define the basic norms of subtitling on the lexical-semantic and syntactic levels within the following frameworks: omission / retention of the linguistic elements of the original, alterations in syntactic structures of a subtitle, rendition of dialects, taboo words, songs and culture-specific linguistic elements (Karamitroglou, 1998).

1. *Omission of the linguistic elements of the source text in translation.* Being unavoidable in subtitling, omissions of words or even the whole phrases are an effective way to convey the meaning of the original text in a concise form. However, in case of fansubbing omissions may happen due to the amateur environment of the subtitle production, i.e. 1) insufficient knowledge of the target (English) language, 2) insufficient understanding of a source text, 3) inconsistent decisions of amateur translators on whether a certain word / phrase is important in terms of context interpretation, 4) lack of proofreading / editing phase.

1.1. *Omissions, justified by the technical standards and the film context.* The expressions “*you know*”, “*well*”, etc. are not semantically loaded (Karamitroglou, 1998) and thus, serve as functional elements of speech. For this reason, they may be omitted in subtitles to give space for more important information. Consider the following example:

(10) ST: *Заговоренный, говоришь?*

[*You say, bewitched?*]

TT: *Bewitched?* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 2:03-2:06).

The phrase “*you say*” is omitted in fansubs, as at first glance it bears no pragmatic meaning, but in the context of the whole situation, such a decision may turn out to be quite a contentious one. The given phrase focuses attention on the person to whom the words are addressed, which may be important in the context of a quarrel or an emphatic dialogue. This is exactly what happens in the film – a furious king addresses to a servant demanding for an answer. In addition, the whole subtitle consists of only 10 characters, which allows the retention of the phrase “*you say*” in the subtitle.

The words / phrases repeated in speech are usually omitted in subtitles, as they have no informative content – their function is merely emphatic:

(11) ST: *Никогда, никогда я не буду стоять в твоём присутствии. Никогда! Никогда! Никогда!*

[*Never shall I stand in your presence! Never! Never! Never!*]

TT: *Never shall I stand in your presence. Never!* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 7:32-7:35).

The repetition of the exclamation “*Never!*” is omitted in the fansubs, as it does not reduce the emphatic meaning of the utterance.

The omission of culture-bound words / phrases is justified if these linguistic units serve no pragmatic function, and may confuse the viewers who are not well aware of a source culture:



(12) ST: *За те, моя куріночко, що як я побачив тебе на Володимирській гірці...*

[*Because when I saw you, my dove, on Saint Volodymyr Hill...*]

TT: *When I saw you first time up there...* (Chasing Two Hares 1961: 22:58-22:61).

The following elements are omitted in subtitles: 1) the direct address to a girl “*my dove*”, and 2) the proper noun “*Saint Volodymyr Hill*”. Both of these alterations of the original are appropriate, as the meaning of the original utterance is preserved. The place name “*Saint Volodymyr Hill*” (a park located on the steep bank of Dnipro river) is skillfully substituted by the phrase “*up there*,” which makes it easier for the foreign audience to perceive the information, as this toponym has no specific pragmatic meaning within the given context, and is not widely known abroad.

(13) ST: *А заспівай нам, Федоре, про що балакав ти із паном осавулом, Мазепою Іваном Степановичем.*

[*Sing to us, Fedir, about what you have discussed with the osaul Mazepa Ivan Stepanovych.*]

TT: *So, why don't you sing of what you have been talking about with Mazepa.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 19:38-19:43).

The fansubbers omitted the following elements: 1) the proper name “*Fedir*” used as a direct address; 2) the word “*osaul*” – a high rank in the Ukrainian military units (used up to the 1920s); 3) the first and patronymic names “*Ivan Stepanovych*”. These linguistic elements may hinder the reading flow, as viewers can focus on the unfamiliar culture-bound terms that do not affect the overall comprehension of the main idea.

1.2. *Omissions that occur due to the fansubbers' insufficient knowledge of the English language.* The fact that analyzed fansubs are produced by the Ukrainian translators for whom English is a foreign language is crucial for the understanding of the mistakes and inconsistencies that may occur in the process of subtitling. Thus, due to the inability to provide an adequate translation non-professional subtitlers may resort to the omission of the whole sentences / clauses, important for the comprehension of the main idea of a film:

(14) ST: *Хоч наш степ, хоч ваш стьоп, а підпалили татари.*

[*It may be our 'step' or your 'stioп', but it was set on fire by the Tatars.*]

TT: *The Tatars set it on fire.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 11:43-11:46).

The part of the original utterance is omitted in the subtitles, as it includes the play of words, which may be incomprehensible for the foreign audience, but is still crucial for the understanding of the main message of the film. The word “*step*” is the Ukrainian transcription of the word “*steppe*”; respectively, the word “*stioп*” is the Russian transcription of the same word. In the context of the conversation between the Ukrainian and Russian rivals (the whole film is based on the idea of contrast between the Ukrainian and Russian mentality, values, and worldviews), this phrase acquires a special pragmatic meaning, which may be fully interpreted by those viewers, who have solid background in

the Ukrainian history and culture. For this reason, the decision to exclude this phrase from the subtitles aimed at mass foreign audience seems to be justified, taking into account the technical restrictions of the subtitling process (no footnotes / explanations shall be included into subtitles) and the inability of fansubbers to substitute this word play by an adequate equivalent in the target language.

(15) ST: *Ліва половина то твоя. Під московським караулом, у ярмі.*

[*The left part is yours, under the Moscow control, under the yoke.*]

TT: *The left bank is yours, under Moscow responsibility.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 1:28:14-1:28:17).

The phrase “*under the yoke*” is not included into the subtitles, although it is important in terms of understanding the political situation in Ukraine, which for centuries was under the control of the Russian regime. However, it seems to be reasonable to combine the phrases “*under the Moscow control*” and “*under the yoke*” into one, as it was done in the given fansub, but in this case the word “*responsibility*” is not suitable due to its connotative meaning.

1.3. *Omissions that occur due to the insufficient understanding of a source text.* The films *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* and *Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* include a lot of episodes with no subtitles at all, as they are highly emphatic and contain incomprehensible speech, which can hardly be deciphered without a transcript / scenario of a film. Of course, fansubbers do not usually have access to such data, which results in the incomplete audiovisual translation (Al-Sofi & Abouabdulqader, 2020).

1.4. *Omissions that occur due to the inconsistent decisions on the importance of utterances.* The research results demonstrate that all fansubbed films under analysis include non-subtitled scenes, which on the one hand, contain no information the lack of which may distort the meaning of the overall episode, but on the other hand, may cultivate the feeling of distrust among viewers, who hear the text in a foreign language, but cannot read its translation (Suryasa, 2016). Consider the following examples:

(16) ST: *Люди добрі, допоможіть! Боже мій!*

[*Anybody, help! Oh my God!*] (*Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* 1965: 6:42-6:44).

This utterance is not subtitled.

(17) ST: *І тут така була студінь, і в Живні, і в Криворивні.*

[*And it was so cold here, and in Zhyvnia, and in Kryvorivnia.*] (*Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* 1965: 46:58-46:63).

The omission of the place names *Zhyvnia* and *Kryvorivnia* in subtitles is justified, as these toponyms are not familiar to the target audience and are of no importance for the film comprehension. However, the absence of a subtitle on the screen may confuse the viewers and add up to the feeling of missing something important while listening to the Ukrainian text. Thus, the phrase “*And it was so cold here*” could have been used as a subtitle.

(18) ST: *А проміж ними ще й ти, кошовий гетьман війська Запорізького, Сірко.*

[*And you too among them, Hetman of the Zaporizhian Host, Sirko.*]

TT: *And there is you between them.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 18:10-18:13).

Ivan Sirko (1610-1680) was a legendary Ukrainian military leader who fought against the Russian, Polish and Turkish empires, having contributed a lot to the glory of Ukraine. He plays an important role in the plot line, but as he is not introduced to the audience on the level of subtitles, the role of the character on screen may not be clear to the viewers.

(19) ST: *Старый лис бежит вместе со шведским зайцем.*

[*The old fox runs together with the Swedish hare.*]

TT: *The old fox runs with the hare.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 1:41:59-1:42:03).

The word “*Swedish*” is omitted in the fansubs, which makes it impossible for the audience to understand the meaning of the metaphor – *Swedish hare* is the allusion to the King of Sweden Charles XII who made a deal with the Ukrainian Hetman Ivan Mazepa (“*the old fox*”) to fight against the Russian empire. Therefore, the shortened fansubbed version of the utterance distorts the original meaning, which should be avoided in the process of subtitling.

1.5. *Omissions that occur due to the lack of editing.* In some cases, the subtitles are missing due to the inattention of fansubbers or the ignorance of some stages of the subtitling process, i.e. proofreading / editing stage. Thus, there may occur the discrepancies in meaning and / or inconsistency of information presented in fansubs. Consider the following examples:

(20) ST: *Преображенского!*

[*Preobrazhensky!*] (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 3:08-3:10).

This utterance, not given in subtitles, is the answer to the question in the previous subtitle – “*What is your regiment?*” Although this conversation is not significant within the overall context of the film, the absence of a subtitle, which is a natural continuation of a dialogue, may still distract the viewers.

(21) ST: *Пусти, братчику!*

[*Let me go, brother!*] (Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors 1965: 1:14-1:19).

The utterance is not given in the subtitle, which may happen due to the following fact: as this utterance is repeated for several times, and its meaning is presented in the previous subtitle, the fansubbers probably did not want to include such repetition into the text. However, taking into account the duration of the scene (it lasts for more than three minutes) and the fact that this phrase is the only one that accompanies the images on the screen, the subtitles would have helped the audience follow the plot and get involved into the storyline.

(22) ST: *Так склоняетесь ви пані: раз, два, три, чотири.*

[*In such a way you should bow to the lady: one, two, three, four.*] (Chasing Two Hares 1961: 6:11-6:15).

The absence of the subtitle, which would correspond to the given utterance, distances the audience from the events that happen on the screen. Moreover, there are no restrictions that could justify the lack of a fansub – there is enough time to read a subtitle; it is the only person speaking; the utterance is pragmatically important in the context of the overall situation.

(23) ST: *Позволь служить верой и правдой долгие годы.*

[*Allow me to serve you with faith and truth for many years.*]

TT: *Allow me with faith and truth to always...* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 7:34-7:36).

The sentence given in the subtitle is incomplete and therefore, its meaning may be incomprehensible for the audience. This can evoke the feeling of anxiety and disappointment in the audiovisual product.

(24) ST: *Тринадцять років, як один день.*

[*Thirteen years – as one day.*]

TT: *You were driving us, boys and girls...* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 14:22-14:24).

The subtitled version of the original utterance is missing. Instead, the subtitle of the following utterance is given on the screen. Of course, such technical mistakes should be avoided in subtitles, as they diminish the credibility of the subtitlers and spoil the impression of the film.

2. *Alterations in syntactic structures of subtitles.* Numerous studies have proved that simple syntactic structures in subtitles are easier to understand and thus, should be preferred over the complex ones (Karamitroglou, 1998; Simó & Rosario, 2005; Cintas & Remael, 2007; Perego, 2008). However, this should not be done to the detriment of preserving the semantic and pragmatic load of an utterance. The analysis of the fansubbed films reveals numerous cases of altered syntactic structures. Consider the following examples:

(25) ST: *Солдат! Как тебя там?*

[*Soldier! What's your name?*]

TT: *Soldier! Name!* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 2:59-3:02).

The subtitled version of the original phrase (“*Name!*”) is a perfect choice in terms of both the established technical standards aimed at shortening the utterances on a syntactic level, and conveying the pragmatic load of an utterance. In a conversation between a furious king and an ordinary soldier, the command “*Name!*” is semantically and contextually justified, which is also supported by the intonation of the original utterance and images on screen.

(26) ST: *То не Дніпро тече, то шрам кривавий кровоточить.*

[*It is not the Dnipro River flowing, it is the bloody scar bleeding.*]

TT: *The Dnipro River is a bleeding scar.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 1:28:11-1:28:15).

The simplified syntactic structure given in the fansub is another example of a successful translator's decision. This one-line subtitle contains a complete simple sentence of 35 characters that fully conveys the pragmatic and semantic meaning of the original.

(27) ST: *Я пока тебе чекала, Иване, / ноги змерзли.*

[*While I have been waiting for you, Ivan, my feet got cold.*]

TT: *My feet got cold / while I've been waiting for you.* (Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors 1965: 54:23-54:59).

The original utterance (one complete sentence) is split into two subtitles: 1) “*Я пока тебе чекала, Иване*” (“*While I have been waiting for you, Ivan*”), and 2) “*ноги змерзли*” (“*my feet got cold*”), although it could also have been presented in the form of a two-line subtitle. Moreover, the fansubbers have changed the word order of the original, which resulted in the discrepancy of what is said and what is written: “*While I have been waiting for you, Ivan*” (ST) = “*my feet got cold*” (TT); “*my feet got cold*” (ST) = “*while I've been waiting for you*” (TT).

3. *Rendition of dialects.* As some dialect / sociolect forms are not immediately recognisable and comprehensible by the viewers' eye (Karamitroglou, 1998) due to the non-standard grammar and specific lexical features, which may slow down the reading process, the established standards recommend to avoid such forms in subtitling. The results of the conducted research also show no cases of rendering dialect speech in fansubs.

However, in certain cases, this may prevent viewers from understanding the cultural context of an action, which may be defining for the correct interpretation of the plot. For example, *Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* (2001) is a historical film that depicts the antagonistic relations between Peter the Great (ruled the Tsardom of Russia in the end of the XVIIth – first half of the XVIIIth century), whose policy was aimed at destroying the independent Ukrainian state, and Ivan Mazepa – Hetman of Zaporizhian Host and the Prince of the Holy Roman Empire – who strived to build prospering sovereign Ukraine. In the course of action, some characters speak the Ukrainian language, others – Russian, which is an important indication of a person's ideas, loyalty and worldview. Moreover, on the lexical level numerous cases of word play, based on the differences between the Ukrainian and Russian languages, reveal the cultural distinctions of two nations. All these features are lost in fansubs due to both technical limitations (there is no space to explain such cultural elements in subtitles) and the insufficient level of mastering the English language by the Ukrainian fansubbers translating into a foreign language.

Likewise, the sociolect named *surzhyk* (the combination of the Ukrainian and Russian languages on the grammatical, lexical and syntactic levels) is not rendered in the comedy film *Chasing Two Hares* (1961). However, this sociolect form also serves an important pragmatic function – it is used to distinguish between people of different social classes: in the film, the lower class speaks Ukrainian, while those striving for the upper class try to speak Russian, but due to the inability to learn a new language, mix it with Ukrainian. Here the

comical effect arises – people who cannot find their place in the world are guided by false ideas and desire for superiority. For this reason, the speech peculiarities (incl. dialects / sociolects) may provide information that is crucial for the correct interpretation of the key message of a film. This, however, would require translator's native-like knowledge of the target language, which can hardly be achieved on the level of fansubbing (Shafirova et al., 2020).

4. *Rendition of taboo words.* The research shows that amateur translators usually do not censor taboo word and include them into fansubs, as it is recommended by the subtitling guidelines:

(28) ST: *Она тоже – конь с яйцями.*

[*She is also a horse with balls.*]

TT: *She is also a horse with balls.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 9:38-9:42).

5. *Rendition of songs.* According to the subtitling standards (Carroll & Ivarsson, 1998), songs should be subtitled where relevant, taking into account their pragmatic meaning and function. In the films under analysis, the fansubbers show different approaches to songs rendering: some songs are left without translation, others – are subtitled. For example, in the film *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965), the fansubbers provided no song translations (there are 15 of them). Taking into account the significant number of songs in the film, it becomes obvious that these songs are pragmatically and culturally loaded, and therefore, crucial for the understanding of the main message. For this reason, the subtitled version of songs would definitely enhance the level of understanding of the Ukrainian film by the foreign audience. However, the film *Chasing Two Hares* (1961) contains one subtitled song:

(29) ST: *В небі канарєчка лїтає / І співає прямо в горизонт / А ми підемо вип'єм, погуляєм / В цьому все життя і весь наш резон.*

[*A canary flies in the sky / And sings at the horizon / And we'll go and drink, and have fun / In this lies the reason of our lives.*]

TT: *"High above my head a bird is singing," / "Flying to and fro, as does its kind" / "There's no reason why we shouldn't go drinking" / "Having fun is all we have in mind."*

As this song explains the motives that guide film characters and define their actions, it is repeated several times in the course of the film. For this reason, the decision to translate this song for the foreign audience is a correct one. Fansubbers even created a rhymed version of it, which definitely has a positive effect on the viewers and makes them more involved into the plot.

5. *Rendition of culture-specific linguistic elements.* Cultural references are an inalienable part of any film to a greater or lesser extent. Being loaded pragmatically and semantically, such linguistic elements contribute to the degree viewers can interpret the main message of a film. However, puns, poetry, allusions and culture-bound terms may pose challenges for translators, limited by the technical norms of subtitling. The situation can be even more complicated for fansubbers, who have little or no experience in the sphere and / or not skillful enough in dealing with foreign languages.

Scholars (Karamitroglou, 1998; Pedersen, 2005; Cintas, 2007; Bogucki, 2009; Pedersen, 2011) name the following alternatives to transfer the culture-bound terms: 1) compensation; 2) transposition; 3) explication; 4) neutralization; 5) omission; 6) loan; 7) calque; 8) substitution. The analysis of the Ukrainian fansubbed films shows that non-professional translators mostly resort to calque, omission and explanation. Consider the following examples:

(30) ST: *Не говори со мной на этом хохляцком наречии!*

[*Do not speak with me in this Khohol dialect!*]

TT: *Don't you speak your to me this Khokhol dialect!* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 11:33-11:36).

It is doubtful the English-speaking viewers know that “*Khohol*” is a humiliating name of Ukrainians used by Russians. Thus, *Khohol dialect* is an offensive term for the Ukrainian language used by those who do not consider Ukraine to be a sovereign state and Ukrainian – a separate language (some consider Ukrainian to be a dialect form of the Russian language). For this reason, the neutralization (i.e. replacement of “*Khohol dialect*” by “*Ukrainian*”) may be a better option than calque, as it would provide deeper understanding of the film context by the foreign audience.

(31) ST: *Бора, вона завжди так починає.*

[*Bora, it always starts like that.*]

TT: *Bora, it always starts like that.* (Prayer for Hetman Mazepa 2001: 11:08-11:10).

Although the word “*Bora*” (a strong cold northern wind / storm) is of Greek origin and exists in the English language, it may still not be widely recognised by the English-speaking community due to its limited usage. Therefore, the translators could have added the explanation to the given term (e.g. “*Bora wind*”) or substituted it by the word combination “*northern wind*”.

One of the challenges that fansubbers may encounter is the translation of nursery rhymes:

(32) ST: *Кум-кума, що варила, що варила?*

[*Godmother, what did you cook, what did you cook?*]

TT: *Godmother, godmother, / what did you cook, what did you cook?* (Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors 1965: 13:58-14:61).

Previously conducted studies demonstrate that fansubbing shows less a domesticating translational approach than professional subtitling (Bruti & Zanotti, 2015), which may happen due to the desire to render the specific linguistic and cultural features of the original with greater accuracy. However, such an approach may not be justified in cases when a film is heavily loaded with culture-specific information, which requires constant attention of the audience. That is why the substitution of the Ukrainian nursery rhyme by the English one is a possible solution in this case.

Translators' comments / explanations are one more distinctive feature of the analysed fansubs:

(33) ST: *Химко, сюди! Химко, туди!*  
 [Hymka, come here! Hymka, go there!]  
 TT: *Phimka [disparaging for Euphemia], here! Phimka, there!* (Chasing Two Hares 1961: 6:55-6:57).

(34) ST: *Слухай, Голохвостий! – Пардон, я не Голохвостий, а Галахвастав!*  
 [Listen here, Holohvostyi! – Pardon, I'm not Holohvostyi, I'm Halahvastav!]  
 TT: *Listen here, Golokhvosty. [surname means Naked-Tail] – Pardon, I'm not Golokhvosty, I'm Golokhvastov, that's my name. [now it means Vain-Boaster]* (Chasing Two Hares 1961: 10:52-11:00).

In the given examples, fansubbers include their explanations of the culture-specific proper names. However, the approach to rendering such names might be different in each of these cases. The proper name *Phimka* could be substituted by any English name, familiar to the audience, as it bears neither semantic nor cultural load. On the contrary, *Golokhvosty* is the main hero of the film and has a speaking name, which reveals his character and intentions. Instead of the explanations given in the subtitles one can also substitute the proper name *Golokhvosty* by a speaking name, which is more familiar to the foreign audience (this, however, may pose a problem for non-professional translators for whom English is a foreign language). Moreover, the phrase *'that's my name'* added by fansubbers (absent in the original) serves no pragmatic function and thus, can be omitted.

## Conclusions

The existence of a huge number of fansubbed audiovisual products marks a strong tendency towards the emergence of a new phenomenon in translation – non-professional subtitling, which now should be examined due to the need to outline new directions within the translation studies, the necessity to improve the ways translation is taught, and the demand for understanding the intentions of amateur translators (Frumuselu et al., 2015; Yang, 2021). The conducted research contributes to the analysis of both the mistakes fansubbers can do, and their successful, often intuitive, decisions.

The study of three Ukrainian films, subtitled by the translators for whom English is a foreign language, revealed the following features of fansubs: 1) the violation of spatial parameters, which may result in arbitrary line breaks and split sentences; 2) the disregard of leading-in and lagging-out time, which may distract viewers and generate the feeling of anxiety; 3) the inconsistent use of punctuation; 4) omission and fansubbers' comments are the most frequent translation devices; 5) dialects / sociolects are not rendered in fansubs; 6) the rendition of songs depends on the arbitrary choices of fansubbers; 7) the majority of culture-specific elements are omitted in fansubs.

Although the analysed fansubs in most cases do not conform to the recognised subtitling norms, they are still an effective tool of bringing the Ukrainian culture closer to the foreign viewers. With their help the huge cultural legacy of the



Ukrainian people, artistically presented in films, becomes available for the international community, who may simply have no other opportunity to watch the Ukrainian audiovisual products. For this reason, English fansubs may be an important step in bridging the Ukrainian art and culture with the European audience.

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