Fansubbing and creative subtitling – How amateur approaches can help improve professional products

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Abstract

The advancement of technology in the last few decades has led to radical shifts in the way that audiences use and think about audio visual products. Audiences are no longer content to simply remain passive viewers on the side lines but have instead bloomed into an active audience who are equally invested in participating in the creation of meaning and content as they are with consuming it (Jenkins, 2006). One of the results of this *produsage* culture is *fansubbing* which is an umbrella term for any type of subtitling made by fans or amateurs without professional training (Díaz Cintas, & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006). This paper seeks to examine what professional subtitlers can learn from their amateur counterparts known as *fansubbers*. When examining any form of subtitling, researchers and practitioners tend to operate from the axiomatic position that professional subtitling offers the most 'correct' and least intrusive translation option. It is this type of reasoning that has kept the professional subtitling industry stuck with the same run of the mill subtitles while fansubbers have started to explore alternative approaches that have yielded both aesthetic and functional subtitles that push the boundaries of what audiences are used to. When not judged from the stoic perspective of industry 'best practice', an examination of fansubbing holds the potential to provide professional subtitlers with an insight into how these type of *creative subtitling* practices can offer audiences a richer viewing experience and involve them as active participants in the meaning making process. Creative subtitling may be described as subtitling practices that tailor subtitles in terms of their style, layout and choice of translation approach to the film and audience at hand (McClarty, 2013). In essence, this type of subtitling practice acknowledges that each film and audience deserves a unique translation style and approach instead of a one size fits all solution.

Introduction

With the advent of new technologies continuing at a breakneck pace, society has undergone quite a number of substantial changes that, amongst other things, have affected the way in which we process information and view media.

Despite this, the way in which subtitles (whether standard or same language) are incorporated into media as well as the approaches that are taken in subtitling have remained largely the same (McClarty, 2012: 136). The commissioners of subtitles, as well as the subtitlers themselves, continue to perceive their audiences as passive and, as a consequence, "lazy, lethargic, [and] unwilling to discover anything new" regardless of how accurate, or rather inaccurate, this may be (Barra, 2009: 514; Ortabasi, 2009: 287).

Unsatisfied with the current state of subtitling, some audiences have taken to the web to challenge the current status quo with a unique type of subtitling that defines its own version of best practice. This type of amateur subtitling, called fansubbing, acknowledges the audiences' active participation in the meaning making process and seeks to create subtitles that cater to the audiences' specific needs by being more functional and aesthetically pleasing (McClarty, 2012: 136; Pérez-González, 2012a: 7).

This paper seeks to explore the innovative practices of fansubbing as well as the suggestions for 'creative subtitling' put forth by McClarty (2012, 2013). These practices may offer insight into how more aesthetic and functional subtitles, that push the boundaries of what audiences are used to, can be applied in professional subtitling. In order to illustrate this, a number of innovative subtitling ideas for the film *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* will be presented.

'That's terrible. Someone should have told you.' – Understanding the lay of the land

> "In a hunting culture, kids play with bows and arrows. In an information society, they play with information."
> (Jenkins, 2006: 130)

Changes in technology today have become an almost inescapable part of everyday life especially to the millennial generation who have grown up with the constant accompaniment of technology. To these millennials, information has become a plaything of sorts and, in a sense, even a currency. The

main problem with subtitling today is that while generations and technology have come and gone, it has remained largely unchanged.

One of the most substantial shifts in our interactions with media is encapsulated by Web 2.0. Instead of simply being broadcast to, the audience has become an active participant and even a collaborator in the process of media consumption (Kawashima, 2010: 1).

Most people today are happily, and with fairly little effort, able to manipulate technology to suit their needs while many even go so far as to get actively involved in creating or supplementing the type of content they want. These prosumers embody the shift from a user who only uses a product to one that is adept at consuming media to the extent that they are able to alter the product to suit their needs (Bruns, 2008: 11)

At its core, produsage has to do with the shift in power from the media producer to the consumer-turned-producer. With regards to subtitling, the most prominent manifestation of this co-creative labour can be seen with the type of user-generated content called fansubbing in which prosumers create and share media content (Banks & Deuze, 2009: 419).

In its simplest form, fansubbing may be understood as an umbrella term for any type of subtitling not made by professional subtitlers and, as can be expected, it differs quite substantially from its professional counterpart (Díaz Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006; Wilcock, 2013). Although the term seems fairly straight forward, fansubbing is not a homogenous activity and different authors place restrictions on what qualifies as 'fansubbing' and what falls outside the scope of this term[1]. Orrego-Carmona (2014a: 77) employs a useful distinction for differentiating between the two overarching styles of fan-generated translations, namely pro-am subtitling, which resembles professionally created products, and innovative subtitling, which attempts to break away from the guidelines set by the subtitling industry. This paper focusses only on innovative subtitling practices that set fansubbing apart from professional subtitling.

Some of the features of fansubbing include, amongst others, the use of different fonts and colours in subtitles which are often associated with different characters to help the viewer more easily identify who is speaking, the use of subtitles which are more than the standard 2 lines to allow for more detailed translations, subtitles that can appear anywhere on the screen to suit the current scene, the use of subtitles that move to create a particular effect as well as the inclusion of source text words in the target text subtitles to underscore 'untranslatable' concepts (Díaz Cintas, J. & Muñoz Sánchez; 2006; Schules, 2012).

Although not all users will become actively involved to the extent that they create their own content, all prosumers are active to a greater or lesser extent and are, at the very least, accustomed to being able to alter a product to suit their needs. Despite the view of prosumers being active collaborators, statistically only around 1% of the consumers online are responsible for approximately 90% of all the user-generated content (Aris, 2011).The idea of produsage should, accordingly, not only be seen as the creation of separate or ancillary media, such as fansubs, but should also include the notion that media users actively piece together and produce their own understanding of a media text. It is this active engagement and understanding of the various layers of a text that professional subtitling is currently not taking full advantage of.

This type of prosumption falls within the scope of the Active Audience Theory and the Uses and Gratification Approach which posits that audiences are not simply receptacles to be broadcast to but are actively involved in the viewing process and do so to satisfy specific needs (Baran & Davis, 2012; Suojanen, Koskinen & Tuominen, 2015: 33). Fansubbers operate from the position that their intended audience want to be active participants in the meaning making process and, accordingly, feel free to make translation choices that require more from the audience. Professional subtitling, on the other hand, does not seek to challenge their viewers or acknowledge that the audience they are translating for today is different to what it was 20 years ago.

In today's information age, the desire to know more than the next person is insatiable and, in a sense, the surge in convergence culture and transmedia storytelling – where the audience has to draw

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[1] For a more on different terms for fansubbing and amateur subtitling see Dwyer (2014), Bogucki (2009), O'Hagan (2008), Pérez-González (2007, 2012), Pérez-González & Susam-Seraeva (2012), Sajna (2013) and Vellar (2011).

together information from varied sources in order to make sense of something – is directly related to this (Jenkins, 2006: 98, 118). Viewers enjoy gathering the intertextual knowledge[2] necessary to access the complete picture and fansubbing, which opens up a direct dialogue with the viewer – most poignantly via linear glosses – offers viewers a new space and, although this is not transmedia storytelling in the strictest sense, it does simulate a similar type of experience. Users have to engage with the subtitles and the linear glosses in order to access the full meaning of the text as a whole. Without them, the text is only understood in part and layers of meaning can become 'lost in translation' and it is exactly this hunt for meaning, that cannot necessarily be accessed by all and which requires active consumption and production of meaning, that audiences crave. Similarly, the occasional scattering of source text words in the target text subtitles found in fansubbing acknowledges that more information and deeper levels of understanding are available to users who are willing to actively seek out this information using other channels such as the internet.

In essence, fansubbing makes an attempt to feed into the way audiences interact with media today and, ideally, professional subtitling choices should also be guided by the way people prefer to interact with media.

'Just because you call an electric eel a rubber duck doesn't make it a rubber duck, does it?' – Why best practice is not necessarily best

However, when confronted with anything unfamiliar, humans' first instinct is often to respond with fear and mistrust – and fansubbing's innovative practices are no exception. Although the literature and research focussing on fansubbing has slowly and perhaps grudgingly, in the eyes of some authors, taken on a more positive view of its potential, the subtitling industry is a lot more hesitant to surrender to a different style of subtitling.

The most resounding argument that is raised against fansubbing's innovative practices, that require active meaning making on the part of the audience, is that the subtitles are intrusive and will distract the viewer. This type of reasoning stems from the belief that audiences are not capable of multitasking and being actively involved in the meaning making process when in fact they are not only capable but comfortable doing so. Fansubbers have been operating outside of the scope of the best practices of the subtitling industry for a long time with no ill effects being experienced by their viewers. Aside from this longevity which is an endorsement in itself, a study by Künzli and Ehrensberger-Dow (2011) also showed that fansubbing's practices do not have a negative impact on the audience's reception capacity.

Approached from a different perspective, the objection to fansubs does not stem from the style of fansubs themselves but rather from the way in which we think about professional subtitles as invisible. Professional subtitles function as speech in audiovisual texts and are therefore perceived as being near invisible but the reality is that all subtitles are visible (Thompson, 2000: np). Regardless of their format or the style in which they are created, subtitles distract and detract from the audiovisual product. Fansubbing simply chooses to acknowledge its own intrusion and make it a point of strength instead of weakness. If it is accepted that all subtitles are intrusive and that the audience is aware of their presence, what harm is there in deviating from the norm by trying new approaches? After all, whether it a distraction you are more familiar with or one you are not, both are still intrusive and, in that sense, neither one is better than the other. At least with innovative subtitling there is an opportunity to add something of value to the viewing experience instead of pretending the subtitles are not there.

Another cog in the works is the way in which research on subtitling is conducted. Generally, analyses of spoken source texts are compared to the written target texts from the perspective of the restrictions of the medium. On the face of it, this is not a problem in and of itself: translation in its many forms has always been judged based on the best practice of the field at a particular point in time.

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[2] Throughout this paper, the term intertextual knowledge and intertextuality are used to refer to the relationship that exists between information in different 'co-sources'. A co-source may be defined as all the official texts within a particular fandom that supplement one another. For instance, *The Mortal Instruments* books series, *The Shadowhunter's Codex*, the *Mortal Instruments: City of Bones* film and the upcoming *Shadowhunters* TV series can all be considered co-sources that deal with the same fictional universe. Using the term co-sources addresses the fact that depending on the entry point into the fandom, what a viewer considers the 'original text' will differ.

However, the problem is that these constraints, which are perceived as being an ineluctable part of the subtitling process, are actual imposed and not obligatory conventions. Moreover, subtitles which are analysed within the scope of audiovisual translation are often dichotomised into 'good' or 'bad' within these constraints and very little attention is actually paid to the function that the subtitles serve as a whole (Tang, 2014: 17). This stems, at least in part, from the pressure that researchers and translators often feel to adhere to the prescriptions and norms of the genre they work in and the consequent complacency that it results in (Chesterman, 1997: 68). However, judging fansubbing and innovative subtitling from this perspective does not make sense since these forms of subtitling choose to operate outside of the imposed constraints of the industry by creating their own guidelines of good usage (Tang, 2014: 17, Bogucki, 2009: 50, Pérez-González, 2012a: 8).

To illustrate, one of the motivations behind fansubs for many is the desire to access the authentic text (Caffrey, 2009). This does not necessarily stem from a debate about the loyalty of the target text to the source text but rather from an awareness of the imposed constraints that are placed on subtitling which often leads to the assimilation of the source text and source culture (Caffrey, 2009: 219). Fansubbing prefers to follow a more source text loyal approach that focusses on capturing as much of the source text information as possible. It presents this in as many lines as the fansubbers feel is necessary to carry across the information pertinently. However, when this type of practice is examined, it is often done from the perspective that a maximum of 2 line subtitles is the best option for audiences regardless of the function that this convention serves in fansubbing. Similarly, fansubbers sometimes incorporate subtitles that are dynamic and move across the screen in order to create a particular effect. Since they do not feel constrained by the medium, they are free to translate and style the subtitles in the way they feel serves their audience best. However, the fact that professional subtitles tend to be stationary is often taken as the starting point for examining this type of convention instead of rather looking at what it can offer the audience.

Along the same lines is the argument that film (and audiovisual texts in general) are art forms that have meaning built into every aspect and that subtitling should take this into account (Chaume, 2004:16-17). Every choice that is made – from lighting to camera angle and everything in between – has meaning or, at the very least, has the potential to carry meaning. By extension, every decision in subtitling influences and has an impact on how the viewer perceives and understands what they are seeing (Nornes, 1999: 17). In its current form, professional subtitling only seeks to communicate the linguistic aspects of a film and, in so doing, strips the film of most of its semiotic meaning all the way down to the bare bones of dialogue. Fansubbing, on the other hand, seeks to provide the viewer with a final product that has "more linguistic and cultural depth" by attempting to capture not only the dialogue but also aspects of the setting and culture it is embedded in often because they are concerned with providing an enriching viewing experience to the audience (Condry, 2010: 201).

To this end, McClarty (2012) and Chaume (2004) call for subtitling to be studied from the perspective of film studies. By taking into consideration the interplay between visuals and dialogue, a more comprehensive picture of subtitling can be gained and, accordingly, will encourage subtitlers to approach the process of subtitling from a similar vantage point. Language practitioners need to move beyond only addressing the language aspect of subtitling to actually addressing the interplay in meaning that happens between visuals and dialogue and how subtitling can help straddle this divide for audiences who may be removed from the film's original context.

For instance, often a viewer may be left in the dark when a specific aspect, often cultural or intertextual[3], is only addressed via the visuals and, as a consequence, is left entirely unexplained by the subtitles which are primarily focussed on the linguistic content of the text (Ortabasi, 2009: 279-280). Since fansubbers already bear this in mind, they are able to apply a creative solution to this type of problem by, for instance, using glosses or linear notes that become an integral and visible part of the film and facilitate understanding of the text on a deeper level (Schules, 2012: 93, 122). By reading denotative glosses, that explain translation decisions and nuances between words, or explanatory glosses, that situate the translation within the culture by explaining it, the reader is able to understanding the text more fully than they would have been able to without them (Schules, 2012: 96-

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[3] The term source text and target text are deliberately being avoided since there are a number 'co-sources' that all approach the same fandom from different entry points. Accordingly, no one text can be seen as the 'original' while the others are only seen as 'adaptations'. Instead, each text is regarded as being equal and supplementary to one another.

97). In other words, understanding of both the visual and verbal aspects of the text are facilitated because the importance of the visual is seen as being as sacrosanct as the verbal.

'Theoretically anything is possible' **– Examining suggestions for making the most of subtitles**

With the theoretical framework laid out, a more practical discussion of how to approach innovative subtitling can be undertaken.

One of the key authors to focus on how subtitling may be improved, who was also spurred on by her own observations of the fansubbing phenomenon, is McClarty (2012, 2013). She calls for so-called creative subtitling practices to be utilised by subtitlers.

According to McClarty (2012: 139), creative subtitles are tailored, in terms of their style, layout and choice of words, to the film at hand instead of taking a one-size-fits-all approach. In essence, creative subtitles acknowledge that each film is unique and merits its own unique approach that plays into its distinctive style and subject matter. If this type of approach is followed, the resulting subtitles will become an indispensable part of the film (McClarty, 2012: 146).

It is important to note that McClarty's 'creative subtitles' do not encapsulate all subtitles that deviate from the norm but rather only those that attempt to bear in mind the aesthetic value of the source text and source culture as well as the aesthetic value of the target text and target culture (McClarty, 2012: 139). From this it becomes clear that not all fansubbing practices, such as glosses and linear notes for instance, can be classified as creative subtitling.

Examples of creative and innovative subtitling in mainstream media are far and few between. Film examples include Austin Powers Gold Member (McClarty, 2012: 141), Slumdog Millionaire (McClarty, 2012: 140-143), Akira (Cubbison, 2005), Night Watch (Curti, 2008), Annie Hall, Mission Impossible 4, Man on Fire, Kickass 2, Bunraku and John Wick while series examples include BBC's Sherlock (Pérez-González, 2012a: 14-18), BBC's The Good Cook (McClarty, 2013: 4), iZombie and House of Cards.

Although these examples only contain a few innovative practices sprinkled throughout, the fact that the subtitles are used in a way that deviates from the norm without incurring the wrath of the purportedly 'underprepared' public serves as evidence that the public is not as unwilling or unable to accept new subtitling styles as the industry believes.

The ways in which subtitling can be creatively applied to a film, or any other video material, is limited only by the scope of the imagination. Once the conventions for subtitling are disregarded, the subtitler is free to create a visual masterpiece on the audiovisual canvas.

Firstly, they can be used to highlight the relationships between people (McClarty, 2012: 144). For instance, different colours or placements on the screen can be used in such a way that it tells the readers more about the relationships between characters. In fansubbing colour and font are often used to do this and is often also influenced by "variables of field (what is being talked about), tenor (the relationship between the interactants) and mode (circumstances affecting the material delivery of speech) in any given scene" (Pérez-González, 2007: 75).

Secondly, the way in which the subtitles themselves appear could be used to communicate something to the audience or could be used to reflect some of the emotions being conveyed by the films (McClarty, 2012: 144). For instance, less opaque subtitles could be used for someone who is tired (McClarty, 2012: 144). In fansubbing, punctuation is sometimes used in the same way to underscore what is being said as well as the emotions that underlie it. For instance, using all capital letters or excessive amounts of exclamation or question marks to indicate anger or confusion.

Thirdly, subtitles can be tailored to suite the rhythm of the film by, for instance, having slow shots feature relaxed subtitles while fast shots include unsteady subtitles (McClarty, 2012: 146). The length of subtitles can also be tailored to suite a particular purpose. For instance, it can be used to emphasise when someone is talking very fast or is talking a lot. To this end, Thompson (2000: np) indicates that three line subtitles, which are often found in fansubbing, can serve a particular function, such as indicating a sudden increase in information, when employed strategically and consistently.

In addition to this, the size of the subtitles can also be used to communicate something about the conversational exchange (McClarty, 2012: 146). For instance, shouting could be indicated with an increase in subtitle size while whispers are portrayed with smaller subtitles (McClarty, 2012: 148).

Lastly, the position of characters can be used as a factor in deciding the placement of subtitles (McClarty, 2012: 148). For instance, subtitles can be placed on the same side of the screen as the character who is speaking or they can be made to appear further away when the character is further away (McClarty, 2012: 148)

A technique used in fansubbing that particularly lends itself to works that draw heavily on intertextual references, or are intertextual in and of themselves, is the inclusion of glosses and linear notes. The most prevalent examples that come to mind are films or series based on literary works. Examples of these include Harry Potter, Divergent, the Lord of the Rings and the Hobbit, the Walking Dead, Game of Thrones, Vampire Diaries and the various audiovisual adaptations based on Marvel and DC comic books amongst others. These type of audiovisual translations are typically grounded in the literary work's own specific mythology and generally contain plenty of canon-specific information that can never fully be encompassed by the adaptation alone.

As a consequence of this, oftentimes there are a lot of intertextual references or elements that cannot be understood or appreciated to their fullest if the viewer has not engaged with the relevant intertextual materials. In other words, there is a lot of information that adds an additional dimension of meaning that, when understood, provides the viewer with a sense of satisfaction that they are 'on the inside' so to speak (Schules, 2012: 140). This plays into the notion that society views information as currency and, accordingly, that subtitles could be used to give viewers access to information they would otherwise not be privy to.

All of the suggestions discussed here inevitably require a change in the way that subtitling is viewed in the media industry. In order to make creative subtitling a feasible option, subtitlers would need to become an integral part of the film or series postproduction process instead of being an afterthought that stands outside of the creative process (McClarty, 2012: 149).

'I figured you'd be less cranky if you had something nice to look at' – **An illustrative application of innovative subtitling in the film *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones (2013)***

Although the above discussion provides several abstract suggestions for innovative subtitling, it is always more effective to see abstract ideas applied onto a tangible example.

In this paper, suggestions for creative subtitling will be applied onto the 2013 film adaptation, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones*, based on the first book in Cassandra Clare's *The Mortal Instruments* series of the same name. These texts were chosen since the books provide a wealth of additional information that may be used to guide creative subtitling choices in the film.

The South African DVD release of the film summarises the storyline as follows:

> *"A seemingly ordinary teenager, Clary Fray, discovers she is the descendant of a line of Shadowhunters, a secret cadre of young half-angel warriors locked in an ancient battle to protect our world from demons. After the disappearance of her mother, Clary must join forces with a group of Shadowhunters [Jace, Alec and Isabelle] who introduce her to a dangerous alternate New York called Downworld filled with demons, warlocks, vampires, werewolves and other deadly creatures."*
> (Mortal Instruments: City of Bones [Motion Picture], 2013)

Making subtitles dance to the beat

Subtitles that are created specifically with the audiovisual text in mind have the potential to become an integral part of the film and offer an enriching viewing experience to the audience. Emotional states, physical settings and even relationships can all be captured by the subtitles if they are used strategically.

For instance, after initially seeing Jace, Isabelle and Alec at the club while no-one else was able to see them, Clary is questioning her grip on reality somewhat and this comes through in her conversation with her best friend, Simon, in the café. In this scene, the subtitles could be used to illustrate or add emphasis to Clary's erratic state of mind and could underscore her seeming lack of control by, for instance, making the subtitles appear less solid and watery than they were before or having them dissipate almost uncontrollably. This could also be applied to her subtitles in the very next scene where she is yelling at Jace (who no-one can see) in the alley while two business men stare at her seemingly insane outburst.

Subtitles that react to their environment can add aesthetic value while also acknowledging the presence of subtitles as a part of the film. For instance, there are a handful of scenes where the characters are caught in the rain. In these scenes the effect of water dripping down the subtitles could be created or the subtitles could simply run down like water instead of disappearing instantaneously. In this way, the subtitles could become a part of the scene itself and are subject to the same conditions as the characters.

Similarly, when Clary is trapped inside Madam Dorothea's apartment and tries to yell through the window to Simon who is outside. The subtitles for this scene could be portrayed as being a bit hazy since the sound is not travelling through the glass very well. Alternately, the words can come forward and seemingly bounce off of the glass thereby making them only partly legible just as her voice is only partly audible to Simon.

Another instance where the subtitles could be subjected to the situation at hand is when Clary is taken to the Silent Brothers to have the block in her memory removed. Their voices are heard inside Clary's head and the subtitles could be styled to dance across the screen since it is not entirely clear which Silent Brother is speaking. Similarly, the subtitles could fade and then reappear when one voice stops and another starts speaking. The subtitles, in a sense, mimic the way the voices seem to come out of nowhere in her mind before disappearing. In this same scene, Clary enters a dreamlike state and the subtitles could be used to amplify this by being less opaque and slightly blurry around the edges to indicate that the scene playing out in her mind is part of a fuzzy memory she is recalling for the first time.

Aside from the setting, the relationship between characters can also be portrayed using subtitles. For instance, Jace and Alec are *parabatai* [4] and whenever their subtitles appear on the screen, the ascenders and descenders between their subtitles could intertwine with the other's subtitles to indicate the close bond that they have. Similarly, as Clary and Jace's relationship blossoms throughout the film, the subtitles can systematically start 'reaching out' more to one another.

For antagonistic relationships, such as those between Jace and Simon or Clary and Alec, the subtitles could be spaced a bit further apart than is the norm to indicate the emotional distance in their relationships. Alternatively, particularly for scenes where these characters argue, the subtitles could seem to try to 'push' the other subtitles off the screen or the subtitles could physically clash against each other before becoming stationary and legible to reflect the clash of egos and words happening on screen.

Characterisation via colour

In fansubbing, colours are sometimes ascribed to the subtitles of different characters and, in so doing, add another layer of meaning to the audiovisual text. For this film, the choice of colours for different characters could be guided by information contained in the book series. For instance, in the book series, Jace is always described or associated with the colour gold and, accordingly, it makes sense to have his subtitles be a gold colour or have a gold sheen. Similarly, Clary's fiery hair and nature could be represented by having fiery red subtitles while Magnus, who is so fond of glitter, could be represented with glittery subtitles.

Another option, that is more in line with what McClarty (2012, 2013) perceives as creative subtitling, would be tailoring the subtitles to match the aesthetic appearance of the film.In the film, the subtitles could subtly change as the environment and colour schemes do. For instance, since Madam Dorothea's home has many tones of green, all of the subtitles spoken in her house could take on a slightly greenish tinge or, alternatively, her subtitles could take on a greenish tint while Clary and Jace's subtitles in the house take on a slight golden sheen to foreshadow the fact that Madam Dorothea is a demon who Clary and Jace will later have to face.

Individualised translation approaches

Fansubbing places a lot of emphasis on following a translation approach that will serve the audience and this could also be adapted and applied onto professional subtitling.

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[4] When two Shadowhunters take an oath to fight together, lay down their lives for one another, travel where the other travels and be buried together (Clare & Lewis, 2013: 52). This bond allows them to draw on each other's strength in battle (Clare & Lewis, 2013: 52).

In terms of the approach that is taken to the translation of the subtitles for this film, Jace's dialogue should be translated in such a way that the eloquence of his speech (which is emphasised in the books) is carried across while Alec's speech, on the other hand, should only convey the most crucial information since he is described (in the books) as being rather succinct.

Another aspect of translation that fansubbers take into consideration, particularly for audiovisual adaptations, is that written translations may already exist in the target language (Švelch, 2013). For instance, *The Mortal Instruments: City of Bones,* has been translated into 30 language and, accordingly, it is important to take the translation decisions in these languages into consideration when translating the film adaptation (CassandraClare.com, 2015: np).

For instance, when translating The Mortal Instruments into French, the French translation, *La Coupe Mortelle - La Cité des Tènébres*, should be consulted to ensure that the translation decisions for the film are in line with those made in the book. Fans are often displeased when there is a mismatch between how aspects, such as the names of people or places, are translated in the written and the audiovisual versions of a text.

Accessing a deeper level of understanding with linear notes

Linear notes have the potential to provide viewers with a wealth of information that would otherwise be missed. However, when making use of linear notes it is important to carefully consider whether their use is actually providing relevant information and adding value. Below are a select number of elements whose explanation via linear notes could benefit the audience.

Near the onset of the film, Clary is attacked by a demon and, with some quick thinking, she manages to incinerate it. However, the demon quickly starts to reform only to attack her again. Jace then appears and stabs the demon with his seraph blade and it turns to ash. In the film, the reason behind this is never explained but in the books it is: demons cannot be extensively harmed by mortal weapons and only seraphic weapons can harm them significantly.

By the same token, the reason why some runes[5] are black and others appear as white scars is not explained. Only readers of the book will know that not all runes are permanent and that these fade into white scars. Including information such as this in a linear note would help viewers unfamiliar with the books, better understand the audiovisual text.

Similarly, although the film is entitled *The Mortal Instruments*, only the Mortal Cup is named while the mirror and the sword are left out of the discussion entirely. Adding information about the other two mortal instruments would offer more insight to the audience and help them better understand the mythology of the text.

Linear notes may also be used to clarify or explain aspects other than intertextuality. For instance, when the group goes to rescue Simon from the vampires at the Hotel DuMorte (which originally read DuMonte), Clary comments that it is the 'hotel of death'. However, viewers who do not speak French may not understand why 'du mort' is the 'hotel of death'.

Translating the visual

Although thus far the books have been discussed as being the source of information not found in the film, there is one unique way in which the film is the source of information not found in the books namely the visual representation of the runes. In the books, although the runes are mentioned, they are never really described or pictorially represented. When the film was made, Vaerie Freire, helped to bring the abstract runes to life.

The runes that appeared in the film as well as several not included in the film (but that were mentioned in the book series or in *The Infernal Devices*) were given legitimacy in *The Shadowhunter's Codex*: an ancillary companion to the book series compiled by Cassandra Clare and Joshua Lewis.

Since the Codex and the film were released in the same year, even fans of the book series would not be very familiar (if at all) with the meanings of the runes. As Shadowhunters are covered in many different runes, it is not practical to have characters explain each one. However, creative subtitles

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[5] Runes are marks that are put onto Shadowhunters using steles. Different marks have different effects. For instance, offering healing, agility, strength, etc. (Clare & Lewis, 2013).

could be used to concisely capture this information by, for example, having runes that appear prominently in a shot have a one word subtitle flow over it to quickly provide its meaning. This would simulate the experience of the Shadowhunters who can, on sight, identify the meaning of runes from the *Book of Gramarye.*

Another way in which the subtitles can be used to give more depth to visual aspects (in a style often found in fansubbing) is the inclusion of translations for written elements that appears in the background and may not necessarily be the focus of a shot. For instance, in the film, the inscription above the door to the City of Bones is *descensus averno facilis* (which may be translated as 'easy is the descent' (Clare, 2007)) and it is deliberately included in the shot but is never addressed in the dialogue.

All of these suggestions have the potential to make the subtitles more aesthetic and functional while at the same time enhancing the viewing experience for the audience. One way in which this may be presented to audiences of the film is by a treating the innovative subtitles as a feature exclusive to the DVD or online purchase version of the film or series. By releasing the innovative subtitles only to these versions, the overall sales for this content will be increased as the audience most likely to enjoy this type of additional input, particularly the linear notes, will be directly targeted. A similar type of strategy is used with the Lord of the Rings and Hobbit film trilogies – after their initial theatrical release, extend versions of the films are released to DVD to extend the viewing experience. This plays into fans' desire for the engagement with content to continue and creative subtitling could provide a similar benefit to audiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, just as stock images have not replaced the need for photography and e-pubs have not replaced the demand for hardcopy books, so too fansubbing is not likely to replace professional subtitling. However, this does not mean that language practitioners should be satisfied with run of the mill subtitles but should instead improve and adapt their styles and practices to give audiences what they want while at the same time giving fansubbers a run for their money.

Although the potential of fansubbing and creative subtitling have been briefly explored here, the goal of this paper is not to encourage all filmmakers and subtitlers to apply creative or innovative subtitling to every audiovisual text simply for the sake of being 'creative'. Instead, it is to embolden subtitlers and filmmakers to question the status quo and ponder upon the needs and desires of their intended audience. To question, in a sense, whether the methods that are currently being employed are truly achieving what it is believed they are achieving or whether other approaches could be more effective.

Acknowledgements

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