Ukrainian culture fansubbed: Challenges of amateur subtitling

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Abstract. The research addresses the issues of rendering culture specific information in amateur subtitling from the Ukrainian into the English language. The fansubbing of proper names, culture-bound common nouns, formulaic sequences, sociolects and songs by the non-professional translators for whom English is a foreign language is the main focus of this study. Thus, the comparative analysis of the Ukrainian films *Chasing Two Hares* (1961), *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965) and *Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* (2001), and their English subtitles reveals the difficulties fansubbers may face, as well as discusses translations strategies and techniques employed. Moreover, the study delves into reasons underlying the choice of translation approaches by non-professional subtitlers, including the collaborative nature of the process, the lack of theoretical knowledge and practical skills, as well as the insufficient mastering of the target language. Therefore, being a comprehensive study of the ways to convey cultural connotations of the original text by means of a foreign language on the level of fansubs, the research gives insight into the interconnection between the translation techniques used to render cultural references and the effect a target text may have on the audience.

1 Introduction

One of the ways that contribute to the promotion of the Ukrainian culture worldwide is to acquaint foreign viewers with authentic films, since the latter can be considered 'a window into culture' [1]. Due to the lack of state financial support for the industry the number of films released in Ukraine is not large, and most of them are left untranslated. That is why the initiative to subtitle Ukrainian films into English has been taken by amateur translators, thus popularising Ukrainian culture abroad. The films, intended for foreign audiences, need an elaborate translation, as its quality affects the way viewers perceive and interpret visual and textual information. In this regard, the work of subtitlers comes to the fore, because their primary tasks lie in both familiarising people who possess little or no knowledge about the source culture with its values and traditions, and conveying the whole spectre of meanings in a comprehensible and easy to read form. Rendering cultural

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references is one of the most challenging tasks even for those translators who have their skills down to a fine art. Each time they face the so-called 'dilemma of accuracy', choosing between a faithful translation of a reference and the need to make it more intelligible for target audiences [2:404], which can result in a complete domestication of a source text [3:18].

In the process of fansubbing – the term that came to use to mark non-professional translation of subtitles – amateurs tend to employ a more creative and individualistic approach [4:27] that can impact their translation both positively and negatively. When translating mainly from English into local languages [5], fansubbers usually stay closer to the original text. This is one of the ways to protest against official over-edited texts [6], which adds to preserving the cultural potential of their translation. However, fansubbing is done by 'a pool of volunteers', who do not always possess a high level of language competence which may lead to the lack of quality of their work [5:14]. Furthermore, technical restrictions applied in subtitles are mostly ignored, which may slow down the process of reading, comprehending and interpreting key ideas of a film, as well as cultural information behind a text. Driven by the desire to promote their culture, fansubbers in Ukraine translate subtitles in reverse – from their native language into English, which results in extra challenges due to the lack of the native-like level of knowledge of the target language (TL). Therefore, this research is aimed at analysing the approaches and techniques amateur translators resort to while rendering cultural references (i.e., proper names, culture-bound common nouns, formulaic sequences, sociolects and songs) of a source language (SL) into a foreign language, and studying the challenges they may face in the process of subtitling.

2 Methods

2.1 Research materials

The current research has been conducted on the basis of the following Ukrainian films and their English subtitles applying the comparative translation analysis: 1) *Chasing Two Hares* (1961, directed by Viktor Ivanov, running time: 72 min.); 2) *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965, directed by Sehii Parajanov, running time: 97 min.); 3) *Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* (2001, directed by Yurii Illienko, running time: 154 min.). The subtitles are produced by the Ukrainian amateur translators for whom English is a foreign language.

2.2 Instruments and procedures

Being the means of embodiment and representation of culture on the semantic level, language conceptualises reality and contributes to the formation of a collective cultural identity [7, 8-13]. Thus, cultural references are the main channels of interaction between language and culture in a text. This study is based on the assumption that culture specific information is conveyed not only in phraseological units, which are the basic tools to reproduce the cultural mentality of a certain linguistic community, but also in proper names, culture-bound common nouns, sociolect forms, larger syntactic units, such as formulaic sequences, and even on the level of the whole text (songs).

As cultural connotation is the means of culture embodiment in a linguistic sign, and the degree of its realisation is the result of the linguistic and cultural interpretation of a text within the broader context of social and historical processes happening in a society, the first stage of the research presupposed the analysis of the Ukrainian films aimed at singling out culture-bound language units.

The comparative translation analysis served as the methodological basis for the next stages of the conducted research – 1) the investigation of the approaches to rendering the SL cultural references into a TL, as well as the degree of their correspondence to the internationally recognised subtitle guidelines, 2) the evaluation of fansubbers' success in achieving the cultural equivalence between the ST and TT, and 3) the study of the pragmatic effect the TT may have on viewers as compared to the pragmatic force of the original text. The analysis of semantic mistakes made by the amateur subtitlers also contributed to the research into the reasons underlying fansubbers' malpractices.

3 Research results and discussion

3.1 Fansubbing of proper names

Rendering of proper names into a TL is a strategic task due to both their cultural load and the overall pragmatic function of a TT. For this reason, the approaches to the proper names translation vary depending on their semantic significance in the context of a TT. Among the main strategies and techniques applied are the following: domestication and foreignisation strategies [3], transliteration, transcription [14-18], descriptive translation [19], substitution [14, 19-21] and omission [20, 21]:

(1) ST: *Дорога на Кожум'яки веде через базар.*
[*The road to Kozhumiaky goes through the market.*]
TT: *The road to Tanners' goes through a market* [22: 00:46].

The substitution of the original toponym *Kozhumiaky* (denotes the historical part of Kyiv inhabited by potters and tanners up to the beginning of the 19th century) by the lexeme *Tanners'* is an example of a successful application of the domestication strategy to the translation of proper names. By introducing the TL equivalent to the SL speaking name fansubbers managed to bring the Ukrainian culture closer to the foreign audience – the TT lexeme explicitly sets the context for the story and facilitates the process of its interpretation by viewers.

The data analysis shows that the preservation of the original proper name in translation (by means of transcription / transliteration) is not a prerequisite of correct understanding of a text by the foreign audience. In subtitling, restricted by temporal and spatial parameters, the ability to recognise and interpret culturally specific information depends greatly both on the background knowledge foreigners possess about the source language and culture, and subtitlers' skills to convey the key meaning in a simplified form. Therefore, the substitution or neutralisation of proper names not embedded with additional cultural meanings, are standard translation techniques, widely used by subtitlers, and fansubbers in particular. Consider the following example:

(2) ST: *... як я побачив тебе на Володимирській гірці, так просто, просто...*
[*... when I saw you at Volodymyrska Hill, I just...*]
TT: *when I saw you first time up there, I just...* [22: 22:58].

Volodymyrska Hill is a famous park located on the right bank of the Dnipro River in Kyiv. However, in the context of the conversation its only function is to provide a reference to the location where two people met for the first time. Thus, the substitution of the toponym by the prepositional phrase to denote a place of an action (*up there*) significantly facilitates the reading flow and interpretation of a subtitle.

Due to the technical standards of the audiovisual translation, omission of proper names is one of the most widespread techniques in subtitling:

(3) ST: *Постой со своими казаками под Москвой, в Лужниках.*
[*Stay with your cossacks near Moscow, in Luzhniki.*]

TT: *Stay near Moskow with your Cossacks* [23: 9:21].

(4) ST: *Татари підпалили степ від Кременя до Гнилої Дожані.*

[*Tatars set the step on fire, from Kremin to Hnyla Dozhania.*]

TT: *They had set the whole steppes on fire* [23: 11:20].

The toponyms omitted in the given fansubs (*Luzhniki*, *Kremin*, *Hnyla Dozhania*) lack cultural connotation and therefore, perform the only function – to locate an action / event within the spatial continuum of the story. In the context of the analysed conversations, these place names play a secondary role: *Luzhniki* is an area near Moskow, which is not brought to the forefront further in the story (the place name *Moskow* is preserved in the fansub), *Kremin* and *Hnyla Dozhania* are used to denote the large scale of the fire damage (in the fansub, these toponyms are skillfully substituted by the lexeme *whole*, which conveys the same pragmatic meaning in a form much more comprehensible for the foreign audience). The given examples clearly demonstrate that the omission of proper names in subtitling is a helpful tool of adjusting the pragmatic meaning of the original utterance to the technical norms of subtitles.

However, amateur translators may resort to omission because of the insufficient level of theoretical knowledge and skills needed to provide an adequate translation both on the level of form and content. Consider the following examples:

(5) ST: *Ведь тебя погубил наш великий крымский поход, и свалил на гетьмана Самойловича.*

[*Still you were shattered by our great Crimean campaign, but blamed hetman Samoilovych.*]

TT: *Condemned our great Crimean campaign and blamed our old Hetman for that* [23: 08:20].

Although Ivan Samoilovych is a prominent historical figure (one of the Ukrainian leaders in the 17th century), who appears and is referred to further in the film, his name is omitted in the fansub. The word combination *our old Hetman* may serve only as an indirect reference to a specific person, which is not enough regarding the overall context of the historical events described in the film. The fact that foreign viewers may experience difficulties in reading the Ukrainian proper name *Samoilovych*, transcribed into English, is not a defining one due to the culturally loaded connotative meaning of the given name.

(6) ST: *І тут така була студінь, і в Живні, і в Криворивні* [24: 46:53].

[*And it was so cold here, and in Zhyvnia, and in Kryvorivnia.*]

TT: *no translation*

The omission of the place names *Zhyvnia* and *Kryvorivnia* in the fansub is fully justified by the context of the conversation, where they serve only as references to locations, insignificant in terms of plot development. However, fansubbers left the whole utterance untranslated, which is unacceptable in professional subtitling. The lack of subtitles on screen may confuse the audience and add up to the feeling of disappointment with the audiovisual product, which may be detrimental to the overall impression of the film. '*It was so cold here*' could have served as a subtitle for the original utterance, keeping the audience aware of the events taking place.

Although the research results clearly demonstrate that the transcription and transliteration are the basic translation techniques used for proper names rendering, they may be rather unwelcome in fansubbing. The desire of amateur translators to bring the TT as close to the original as possible may have an opposite effect – the SL cultural references may be incomprehensible for the foreign viewers, having no background in the Ukrainian culture and history:

(7) ST: *Чому ти ся бай не жениш, високий Бескиде?*

[*Why don't you marry, high Beskid?*]

TT: *Why don't you get married, Tall Beskide* [24: 29:55].

The *Beskids* is the name of the mountain ranges in the Carpathians, which with time became deeply rooted into the Ukrainian culture and gained symbolic connotative meaning for the inhabitants of the Carpathian region. However, the foreign audience may be unaware of the cultural load of the given proper name and thus, its transcribed version in the fansub (*Beskide*) may confuse the viewers. Moreover, the fansubbers transliterated the name in the vocative case (*Beskid* – nom. case vs. *Beskide* – voc. case), which also distorts the perception of the lexeme by the English-speaking viewers whose native language does not have such a grammatical form. Therefore, the neutralisation of the given proper name or addition of an explanatory element (e.g. *Beskid-mountain*) would bring the text closer to the target audience and facilitate its interpretation.

Another technique fansubbers often resort to is the explanation of culture-bound terms in subtitles:

(8) ST: *Химко, сюди! Химко, туди!*
[*Hymka, come here! Hymka, go there!*]
TT: *Phimka [disparaging for Euphemia], here! Phimka, there!* [22: 06:55].
(9) ST: *Слухай, Голохвостий.*
[*Listen, Holohvostyi.*]
TT: *Listen here, Golokhvosty. [surname means Naked-Tail]* [22: 10:52].
(10) ST: *Пардон, я не Голохвостий, а Галахвастав.*
[*Excuse me, I am not Holohvostyi, I am Galahvastav*].
TT: *Pardon, I'm not Golokhvosty, I'm Golokhvastov, that's my name. [now it means Vain-Boaster]* [22: 10:55].

The comments given in square brackets are aimed at explaining the meaning of the original proper names to the audience. Although the reason for such a translation decision may be the unawareness of subtitling standards, as well as the insufficient level of the TL mastering by fansubbers, it may affect the overall impression of the film – longer subtitles require more reading efforts, and viewers may feel extra pressure trying to interpret the meaning of the SL proper names within time constraints.

The given examples (No. 8, 9, 10) clearly demonstrate the challenges amateur translators may face in the process of film subtitling. The lack of theoretical knowledge in the sphere limits fansubbers in the choice of translation tools and is the main reason of unawareness of their possible effects on the target audience. As the proper name *Phimka* has no connotative meaning and serves only as a reference to a minor character, being of little importance in the story, its substitution by a proper name common for the English speakers would facilitate the process of subtitles comprehension. On the contrary, *Holohvostyi* is the main character of the film, which requires a different translation approach – introduction of a new speaking name in the TL. However, this may pose difficulties for the non-professional translators lacking profound knowledge of English.

The research results show that amateur subtitlers may face challenges in conveying not only the cultural meaning of proper names, but also their grammatical form. For example, the vocative case, as well as diminutive forms may pose difficulties for translators.

(11) ST: *Синочку мій, Олексо, Олексику, синочку мій любий.*
[*My son, Oleksa, Oleksyk, my dear son*.]
TT: *My sun, Olekso, my darling son* [24: 02:11].

Instead of the nominative case form *Oleksa*, the fansubbers used the transcription of the given word in the vocative case – *Olekso*. As the vocative case does not exist in the English language, foreign viewers may get confused in the process of film interpretation.

The transcription of the diminutive forms of the proper names may also disorient the viewers, as such lexemes may be identified as independent names in no way related to the previously mentioned ones:

(12) ST: *Сохрани мені хоч останню мою дитину, мого Іванка.*

[*Save for me at least my last child, my Ivanko*.]
TT: *Please save at least my last child, my Ivanko* [24: 02:24].

Ivanko is the diminutive form of the main character's name *Ivan*. Although the visual information may help viewers correctly interpret the given fansub, the use of the name in the nominative case is more preferable than its direct transcribed version. This will make it easier for the audience to identify characters on screen and follow the plot.

3.2 Fansubbing of culture-bound common nouns

As culture-bound words are strongly rooted into the source culture and may have no equivalents in the target one, the approaches to their translation vary depending on the translator's goal and their cultural background, target audience and technical limitations of a target text. The latter is especially relevant to the process of subtitling, which is characterised by strict rules set to the layout, duration, punctuation and target text editing [25, 26]. The amateur nature of fansubs in many ways determines the choice of tranlation strategies, as creativity and disregard of professionally agreed conventions are among the most prominent features of amateur subtitling [27:231].

Previously conducted studies state that fansubs usually exhibit greater accuracy in rendering cultural references and show the tendency to foreignisation in translation as compared to professional subtitling [3, 27:231]. For this reason, the choice of alternatives for the transfer of culture-bound common nouns is usually limited to loan translation. As English is a foreign language for the Ukrainian fansubbers, and they do not possess a native-like level of knowledge of the target language necessary to render all shades of meaning of the original text, omission and explanation are also among the most widely used approaches in amateur subtitling. However, the use of omission may be explained by technical restrictions set to the layout and duration of subtitles. Consider the following examples:

(13) ST: *Боярин! Проснись! Беда!*
[*Boyar! Wake up! Trouble!*]
TT: *Boyar, wake up, trouble!* [23: 10:34].
(14) ST: *То позич мені ще й свою смерть, отамане!*
[*Then lend me your death too, otaman!*]
TT: *So lend me your death also, Otaman* [23: 17:50].
(15) ST: *Что? Что скажешь, гетьман?*
[*What? What can you say, hetman?*]
TT: *What will you say, Hetman* [23: 10:57].

The lexemes *boyar*, *otaman*, *hetman* denote the historical nobility and military ranks in Ukraine and the Russian Empire: 1) *boyar* – a member of the nobility in the Russian Empire during the 14th and 15th centuries; 2) *otaman* – one of the highest ranks in the Ukrainian Cossack military units; 3) *hetman* – the highest military rank in the Zaporizhian Host, and the head of the Ukrainian State in the 17th and 18th centuries. The use of these terms in the TT fully conforms to the norms of formal correspondence of the SL and TL linguistic units.

However, it is doubtful whether achieving the formal equivalence in translation is sufficient to produce the necessary emotional and psychological effect on mass foreign audience having limited or no background information about the Ukrainian history and culture. For this reason, the application of the dynamic equivalence, aimed at preserving the same impact of the TT on the target audience as the original text has on the SL audience [28], seems to be a better translation decision resulting in clear understanding of the message by the target audience. Therefore, neutralisation or substitution of the original culture-bound common nouns by those familiar to the target audience may have helped to

create a comprehensible and easy to read text. The principle of simplicity underlies quality subtitling, as fluent reading, which contributes to the better film understanding by the audience, is one of the key requirements set to the professional subtitling. On the contrary, the desire of amateur translators to preserve as many cultural references as possible, irrespective of the effect this may have on the target audience, may hinder the reading flow and irritate viewers while watching a film.

(16) ST: *А заспівай нам, Федоре, про що балакав ти із* <u>*паном осавулом*</u>*, Мазепою Іваном Степановичем!*

[*Sing to us, Fedir, about what you have been talking with* <u>*sir osavul*</u>*, Mazepa Ivan Stepanovych!*]

TT: *So, why don't you sing of what you have been talking about with Mazepa* [23: 19:38].

The abovementioned example clearly demonstrates that the omission of the culture-bound lexeme *osavul* (high military rank) lowers the subtitle-reading effort and makes it easier for the viewers to understand the main message of the film. Such sacrifice of a cultural reference for the sake of forefronting the key idea of the audiovisual product is inevitable in subtitling, strictly limited by temporal and spatial parameters. Although the proper names *Fedir* and *Ivan Stepanovych* are also omitted in fansubs, it does not distort the main idea of the utterance, as in the context of the conversation these names are not pragmatically loaded. Therefore, the given fabsub is a good example of conveying the key message of a situation in a concise form.

However, due to the insufficient knowledge of the English language and lack of the theoretical background in translation studies, fansubbers also tend to omit information, significant both semantically and pragmatically:

(17) ST: *А проміж ними ще й ти,* <u>*кошовий гетьман війська Запорізького, Сірко*</u>*.*

[*And you too among them,* <u>*Kish Hetman of the Zaporizhian Host, Sirko.*</u>]

TT: *And there is you between them* [23: 18:10].

The phrase *Kish Hetman of the Zaporizhian Host, Sirko* is missing in the English fansub, which may hinder the understanding of the situation by the foreign audience due to the following reason: Hetman Sirko is one of the key historical figures in the Ukrainian history, who influenced a lot the course of events described in the film. Thus, the given utterance serves an extremely important function – it presents Sirko to the viewers for the first time. As this phrase is omitted in the fansub, the audience may experience difficulties in following the plot. The word combination *Kish Hetman* (one of the highest military ranks in the Zaporizhian Host) may certainly be unfamiliar to the English-speaking viewers, and its substitution by a term common for the foreign viewers would have facilitated the information interpretation. Hence, the analysis of the given example clearly demonstrates that mere preservation of the ST culture-bound common nouns in the TT (foreignisation strategy), as well as their omission, is rarely a successful approach to subtitling. On the contrary, the use of neutralisation and substitution is more effective in rendering culturally specific information in a way comprehensible for foreigners. Consider the following example:

(18) ST: *Чистого золота – 35* <u>*пудов*</u>*!*

[*Pure gold – 35* <u>*poods*</u>*!*]

TT: *573 kg of pure* <u>*gold*</u>*!* [23: 07:18].

The original utterance contains the name for the unit of mass used in Ukraine and Russia up to the beginning of the 20th century – *pood*. Certainly, the foreign audience are unaware of the meaning of this term, which leads to the necessity to substitute the given culture-bound lexeme by a more familiar correspondent – kilogram. Such translation

decision is successful in terms of both preserving the original meaning of the utterance and facilitating the process of its interpretation by the viewers.

> (19) ST: *Тату, то щезник?*
> [*Father, is it a shcheznyk?*]
> TT: *Is it the Evil Spirit, dad?* [24: 05:23].

As in the previous example, the substitution of the culture-bound lexeme *shcheznyk* by a neutral phrase *Evil Spirit* is a correct translation decision. In the Ukrainian mythology *shcheznyk* is an evil spirit that can suddenly appear/disappear and usually calls all forest creatures to dance: Ukr. 'shchezaty' ('щезати') – Eng. 'to disappear', i.e. 'shcheznyk' – the one who disappears, hard to catch. The use of the original term in the subtitle would confuse the viewers, not familiar with the Ukrainian folk tales and legends. On the contrary, the concept of *Evil Spirit* is well known for the international audience and fully conveys pragmatic meaning of the original.

Being broadly divided into sentences (greetings, proverbs, sayings, prayers, etc.) and sub-sentential phrases (foreign phrases, comparisons, invariable expressions, etc.) [29], formulaic sequences are 'sequences, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which are, or appear to be, prefabricated: that is, stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation or analysis by the language grammar' [30:9]. As formulaic sequences are to be handled as single units [30-32] and processed without recourse to their lowest level of composition [30:4], their translation requires a profound knowledge of the SL and TL cultural conventions, as well as the native-like mastering of both languages. For this reason, the Ukrainian amateur translators may experience difficulties in rendering culturally loaded formulaic expressions into English. Consider the following example:

> (20) ST: *Слава Ісусу!*
> [*Glory to Jesus!*]
> TT: *Glory to Jesus!* [24: 04:32].

The substitution of the Ukrainian everyday greeting (rendered word for word into English) by its equivalent, common for the English-speaking community (e.g. *God bless you!*), would seem to be a better decision, taking into account the ritual nature of greeting as a speech act: the main function of a greeting as of a conversational routine [33] lies in opening a communicative act and establishing the relations between the interlocutors [34]. Therefore, being constrained by the time limits while reading subtitles, viewers may put extra effort into interpretation of culturally specific information, which is not justified by the overall context of the situation.

As with the translation of greetings, rendering the pragmatic and cultural load of sayings requires deep understanding of linguistic conventions of the target audience. According to the research results, the low level of English proficiency affects the quality of subtitles and may lead to the misunderstanding of the original text by viewers:

> (21) ST: *Як одяг жупан, то вже і пан.*
> [*Wearing zhupan (rich festive clothing) makes you a lord.*]
> TT: *Right, best bib and tucker* [22: 13:37].

In the context of the original conversation, the given saying is used ironically to show that a person should by judged not by their appearence, but by their deeds and actions. The provided fansub lacks this idea, and its function is reduced to mere stating the fact that the film character wore his best clothes. In this case, viewers may rely only on visual information (incl. gestures and mimics of the characters on screen) to recognise the pragmatic meaning of the utterance. Therefore, the given example clearly demonstrates that the ineffective use of translation techniques, as well as the insufficient knowledge of the TL (fansubbers failed to find the equivalent saying in the TL and did not resort to the neutralisation technique to render the pragmatic load of the utterance) have a significantly

negative effect on the quality of subtitles resulting in misinterpretation of the original message by the target audience.

(22) ST: *Я гадаю, що ви не будете водитись аби з ким.*

[*I think you will not spend time with anyone (people of lower social status).*]

TT: *They don't seem to be Tom, Dick and Harry [=undistinguished common persons]* [22: 15:44].

As in the previous example, the fansubbers did not manage to convey the illocutionary force of the original utterance to the fullest. Although the English idiom *Tom, Dick and Harry* refers to ordinary people, it does not denote people of lower social status, which is a key message in the context of the conversation (in fact, the whole story unfolds around the idea of the interconnection of a person's social standing, moral values, worldviews and life expectations). Moreover, this utterance is addressed to three women, which makes the idiom containing three male names inappropriate. The fansubbers also included the explanation of the idiom (*[=undistinguished common persons]*), which is highly irrelevant, as the subtitles are aimed for the English speakers supposed to know the meaning of this phraseological unit. Thus, the conducted analysis provides convincing proofs of the pivotal role of the TL proficiency in conveying the cultural and pragmatic load of the original text.

The research results also show that translation of nursery rhymes may pose significant challenges for fansubbers:

(23) ST: *Кум-кума, що варила, що варила? – Буряк-борщ, буряк-борщ, буряк-борщ!*

[*Kum-kuma (the double repetition of a noun denoting a mother of your godchildren), what did you cook, what did you cook? – Beet borshch, beet borhsch, beet borshch!*]

TT: *Godmother, godmother, / what did you cook, what did you cook? – Beet borscht, beet borscht, beet borscht!* [24: 13:58].

By resorting to the domestication strategy (aimed at conveying the meaning of an utterance as close to the original as possible) fansubbers failed to make the TT comprehensible for the audience due to the transliteration of the culture-bound common noun *borshch*. Although the word *borshch* denotes a soup typical of the Ukrainian cuisine being well known abroad, one cannot be sure that it is familiar to the film viewers. Moreover, in the context of the given nursery rhyme this lexeme has no specific connotation and is used only to preserve the rhythm and rhyme of the utterance. That is why the substitution of the original nursery rhyme by the English one would facilitate the reading flow and interpretation of the overall situation.

Some of the ST sayings are left untranslated, which may happen due to the following reasons, all of them being typical of the amateur subtitling: 1) insufficient knowledge of the English language by the Ukrainian fansubbers; 2) disregard of the editing stage; 3) recognition of an utterance as an insignificant one for the understanding of a situation.

(24) ST: *Най станеться їхній рід пустий!* [24: 06:34].

[*Let their family line end!*]

TT: *no translation*

(25) ST: *Ах ти ж! Свята та божа!* [22: 23:47].

[*Oh, you! Saint and holy!*]

TT: *no translation*

The lack of a subtitle on screen may confuse the viewers, who can hear a character speaking in a foreign language, but are unable to interpret the meaning of an original utterance. This can add up to the feeling of distrust and therefore, spoil the overall impression of a film.

However, the study also revealed successful examples of rendering the formulaic sequences on the level of fansubs:

(26) ST: *Нехай старенькі щось пригадають, а молоді на ус намотають.*
[*Let the elder people recall, and the young learn*.]
TT: *Let the elder remember what they might, and let the young get it right* [22: 00:37].

The fansubbers managed to convey not only the meaning of the original utterance, but also render its form – the rhythm and rhyme of the source utterance are preserved in the subtitle. Moreover, the Ukrainian idiom *на ус намотати* (meaning to learn how something should be done / to draw right conclusions from a situation) is rendered by means of the English equivalent set phrase *get it right*, which increases the quality of the subtitle and creates a positive impression of the TT.

3.4 Fansubbing of sociolects

To transfer specific features of a speaker into another language (e.g. accent, register, speech impediment, marked regional accent) may turn to be a challenging task for translators, especially if these elements are tightly linked to the cultural connotations of the original message [35]. The situation may turn to be even more complex due to the subtitling constraints (temporal and spatial parameters) and the unawareness of all possible translation techniques and approaches by amateur subtitlers.

Because of the sociolect (as well as dialect) non-standard grammar and specific lexical features, which may not be immediately recognisable and comprehensible by the viewers' eye [25:9], the subtitle guidelines recommend to avoid such forms in a TT, as they may hinder the reading flow and impose extra pressure on viewers. In case of fansubbing, the situation may be complicated by the inability of amateur translators to find proper sociolect / dialect equivalent in a TL. Thus, the films analysis has shown no cases of rendering sociolect / dialect forms in fansubs.

Nevertheless, the conducted research points at the undeniable connection between the sociolect forms used in the original and cultural load of the author's message. For example, the sociolect named *surzhyk* (the combination of the Ukrainian and Russian languages on the grammatical, lexical and syntactic levels) is one of the fundamentals of comical effect in the Ukrainian comedy film *Chasing Two Hares* (1961). Moreover, this sociolect performs a pragmatic function of distinguishing people of different social strata, worldviews and beliefs: surzhyk is used by people fighting for their place among the Russian-speaking population belonging to the upper classes of the society, but still being unable to learn the Russian language, while the Ukrainian language is used by people of lower social status, aware of their historical roots, values, and traditions. This polarity of ideas creates the comical effect by ridiculing the hollowness of false ideas and life goals. Thus, a significant part of the ST cultural load is lost in subtitles, which may deprive the target audience of full comprehension of the original message.

In the film *Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* (2001), some of the characters speak Ukrainian, others – Russian, which is an important clue to the understanding of their actions, morals and the overall plot collision. The antagonistic relations between Peter the Great, ruler of the Tsardom of Russia in the end of the 16th - first half of the 17th century, and Ivan Mazepa, Hetman of Zaporizhian Host and the Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, are revealed first of all on the speech level, i.e. languages, used by the film characters. The neutralisation of this feature in subtitling may significantly distort the way viewers perceive and interpret key messages of the film. The analysis of the fansubs shows that all cases of puns and wordplay, based on the differences between the Ukrainian and Russian languages, are lost in translation. Consider the following examples:

(27) ST: *Хоч наш <u>степ</u>, хоч ваш <u>стьоп</u>, а підпалили татари.*
[*Be it our <u>step</u> or your <u>stiop</u>, Tatars set it on fire*.]

TT: *The Tatars set it on fire* [23: 11:43].

The pragmatic function of the given wordplay lies in emphasising the antagonistic relations between charaters belonging to the opposing parties. However, the wordplay on *step* and *stiop* is rightly omitted in fansubs, as full comprehension of its meaning requires from the target audience the knowledge of both the Ukrainian and Russian languages – *step* is transcription of the Ukrainian word meaning 'steppe', while *stiop* is transcription of the Russian word denoting the same concept.

(28) ST: *Что значит ‘питьполили’? Что пить? Кого полили?*
[*What does it mean ‘pitpolili’? What to drink? Who is watered?*]
TT: *What do you mean ‘set on fire’? What to drink? Who's been fired?* [23: 11:38].

The original wordplay, aimed at creating comical effect by ridiculing the Russian count for his inability to learn / understand his Ukrainian subjects, is lost in translation. The lexeme '*питьполили*' (‘*pitpolili*') is an approximate Russian transcription of the Ukrainian word '*pidpalyly*' (Ukr. '*підпалили*') meaning '*set on fire*'. In its turn, the sounding of the lexeme '*питьполили*' in Russian resembles the combination of words meaning '*drink*' and '*watered*'. That is how the pun is created – instead of '*set on fire*', the Russian count hears two unrelated words – '*drink*' and '*watered*'. Although the pun is of little significance in terms of conveying the information important for the plot understanding, it is crucial for creating the ironic effect in the TT identical to the ST.

The fansubbers, however, substituted the ST wordplay by a new one, based on the difference in meanings between the homonyms '*fire*' (n.) and '*to fire*' (v.). At the same time, the phrase '*What to drink?*' seems to be out of context in the English fansub, as none of the previous or following subtitles refers to its meaning. The newly created TL pun, although being a praiseworthy fansubbers' attempt to preserve the comical effect of the original, does not convey the key message of the ST – the opposition between the Ukrainian and Russian mentalities, worldviews and values is insurmountable. In such a way, the loss of the ST wordplay based on sociolects or differences between languages may result in cultural lacunas in the TT.

3.5 Fansubbing of songs

According to the subtitle guidelines, the decision whether to translate a song or not depends on its pragmatic function and meaning within the context of a film [25, 26]. Thus, 'whenever the song includes a sentence, a reference or any other element linked to a part of the film which appears after or before the song, the translation should normally be the same so as not to mislead the audience. This criterion of maintaining the same translation depends on the level of importance of the element' [35:112]. The research results demonstrate a strong tendency of the Ukrainian fansubbers to leave the original songs untranslated – only one song was rendered in subtitles [22]:

(29) ST: *В небі канареєчка літає / І співає прямо в горизонт / А ми підем 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 dun is all we have in mind."*

The given song is highly important for the understanding of the key idea of the film, as well as the motives that lead main characters and define their actions. It is sung at the decisive moments of the plot development and therefore, gives viewers extra clues for film interpretation. As rhyme is generally not respected in subtitling [35], the fact that fansubbers managed to create the rhymed translation of the song makes much more

positive impression on the audience by entertaining them and invoking interest to the story and its characters.

Another song in the film is accompanied by the following subtitle: *[girls are singing Ukrainian folk song]* [22: 12:55]. As the only function of the song is to create the background for the unfolding events, such a decision is totally justified – reading of the song subtitles does not distract the audience from the main plot.

None of the songs in the films *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965) and *Prayer for Hetman Mazepa* (2001) are subtitled into English. However, most of them bear cultural connotations and are clues for deeper understanding of the key film ideas. As images on screen are not accompanied by the English subtitles, and some of the songs are quite long, the viewers may be confused by hearing a song in a foreign language, but being unable to understand its meaning. This may arouse the feeling of distrust and frustration while watching a film.

4 Conclusion

A natural desire to bridge the gaps between the representatives of different cultures, to exchange cultural achievements, and to get an insight into a foreign mentality prompted the emergence of fansubbing – amateur subtitling based on the human need for collaboration. This new phenomenon opened the gates for a wide array of studies into the nature, underlying reasons, accomplishments and challenges of non-professional translation on the linguistic and extra-linguistic levels. As rendering of cultural references is still the most demanding task even for professional translators, delving into the mechanism of the culture-specific information fansubbing may open new perspectives for understanding the overall process of subtitling. For this reason, the conducted research focused on the study of the translation techniques fansubbers resort to, and challenges they may face.

The in-depth comparative analysis of three Ukrainian films and their fansubbed English versions resulted in singling out the key difficulties fansubbers may experience while dealing with cultural references: 1) subtitling of proper names; 2) subtitling of culture-bound common nouns; 3) subtitling of formulaic sequences; 4) subtitling of sociolect forms; 5) subtitling of songs. Due to the low level of the target language mastering (English is a foreign language for the Ukrainian fansubbers), as well as the lack of practical skills and theoretical knowledge in the field of translation studies, fansubbers do not take advantage of the whole arsenal of subtitling tools available. By relying heavily on the foreignisation strategy, as well as transcription / transliteration, loan translation and omission, amateur translators tend to overlook the broader extra-linguistic context of the film director's intentions and pragmatic meanings. Instead of bringing the Ukrainian culture closer to the English-speaking community, this usually creates an opposite effect – the overwhelmed by cultural references subtitled version of the original may turn to be confusing and incomprehensible for the target audience.

However, the study also revealed the successful examples of translation decisions undertaken by the Ukrainian fansubbers (rendering the original cultural meaning to the fullest both on the level of form and content), which together with the determination demonstrated by amateur translators is a telling sign of the future advances of such projects. Therefore, being an effective tool of popularising the Ukrainian culture on the world arena, English fansubs deserve close attention of both film-lovers and translation researchers.

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