



## PROFESSIONAL VS NON-PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATION OF KOREAN TV DRAMAS

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### **Abstract**

Can non-professional subtitles be a successful replacement for professional subtitles? The purpose of this study is to examine the differences in the English subtitles of Korean TV drama series between those written by paid translators for Netflix, and those by volunteer fansubbers for Rakuten Viki. This study will explore the main differences between the two styles of subtitling, the potential reasons for these differences, and the reception of both kinds of subtitles among audiences by reviewing opinions shared on online discussion forums such as Reddit and Viki Discussions. These forums will also be used to explore online public opinions about the ethics of Viki as a fansubbing platform and the implication of unpaid translation for the industry.



## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Fansubbing

Fansubbing, short for fan-subtitling, is a unique style of subtitling in which overseas media content is translated by untrained fans over the internet. Fansubbing began in the 1980s with the translation of Japanese anime into English by fan groups in the USA due to a lack of access to content, as well as a desire for a more source-oriented approach to its cultural aspects (Perego & Pacinotti, 2020). Due to these origins, fansubbing has been most often associated with Japanese anime. In 2006, Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez defined fansubs as, “fan-produced, translated, subtitled version of a Japanese anime programme,” (2006:37). But as global interest and technology developed, the practice expanded to include other languages as well as other types of audiovisual content such as films, so that fansubbing now describes the unpaid creation of subtitles for films or TV series from or to any source or target language. Fansubbing is characterised by the distribution of audiovisual media content that has been translated by fans to the general public for free through the Internet (Díaz-Cintas, & Remael, 2014). This results in a ‘by fans for fans’ dynamic (Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006), where the audiences that watch fansubs are often a group with a particular interest in the source language and culture, and who are also interested in using subtitles as a means for learning the language (Wilcock, 2013). Fansubbers are audiovisual enthusiasts who have knowledge of a second language, but not necessarily any training in translation or subtitling, and who often work together in groups in online communities (Wang, 2014). The work is done voluntarily for a number of reasons including out of enjoyment for the content they are translating, a desire to improve their language skills, and/or a desire to share their beloved shows and films with a wider audience (Wang, 2014; Bold, 2011).

Fansubbing is possible due to advances in technology such as “faster broadband capability, greater connectivity, peer-to-peer computing, the democratisation of technology and the ready availability of video editing suites, subtitling freeware and cloud-based platforms” (Bogucki & Díaz-Cintas, 2020).

Fansubbing is now often considered its own emerging genre of subtitling, as fansubs are markedly different from professional subtitles, using strategies that are considered unacceptable in a professional context (Wilcock, 2013). While professional subtitlers are subject to norms and regulations in order to create subtitles that are consistent, high quality and easy to process, fansubbers do not have such restrictions, and are evaluated by other fans based on 'authenticity' rather than according to professional standards (Wilcock, 2013). As fansubs are characterised by audiovisual content being made freely available to the general public over the Internet, the legality of fansubbing regarding the copyright of the translated content is dubious (Díaz-Cintas & Remael, 2014). According to Lee (2011), fans get a hold of overseas audiovisual content through means such as downloading, recording from TV or buying, then translate these into their own language, and distribute the subtitled version to other fans through the internet without consent from the copyright holders. These fansubbed materials can be accessed for free by anyone over the internet and are easily shared through file sharing, downloading or streaming (Lee, 2011).

## 1.2 Viki

While the activity of fansubbing has traditionally been in conflict with copyright laws, its development and growth over the last few decades means that fansubbers are now finding legal online spaces, such as the streaming platform Rakuten Viki. Viki, which is a combination of the words 'video' and 'wiki,' is an on-demand video (VOD) streaming platform with a focus on Asian content. It streams licensed media content from around the world, and its users work together in teams to add amateur subtitles in more than 130 languages (Klinge, 2020). Fansubbers are usually untrained and do this work voluntarily, so while video streaming is free, the platform profits from advertising sales and optional subscriptions (Dwyer, 2017). Viki uses a tiered subscription system, from free access to content with ads to paid monthly subscriptions for advertisement-free viewing (Klinge, 2020). According to Dwyer (2017), Viki was launched in 2010, and developed out of a class project which focussed on language learning. It was then bought by the Japanese e-commerce company Rakuten in 2013 (Klinge, 2020). In recent times, there has been great growth in interest in Asian media content, causing Viki's popularity to increase such that the



site reports having over 15 million subscribers around the world after a 50% increase from the year before (Klinge, 2020). Viki fansubs are created by teams of untrained and unpaid subtitlers, segmenters, moderators, and one or two channel managers. Despite the content being moderated and edited, the team for each project is unique so naturally there is variation between projects, not only in conventions but also in quality. These teams can be formed of dozens of members from countries all around the world. After a product is translated, members of a fansubbing team and viewers can communicate through the Reviews and Comments section as well as the live comment section, a unique feature of Viki's where viewers comment on a show live and viewers can choose to have these appear on screen as they watch the show. Viewers use these spaces to discuss the shows and provide feedback on the translations.

### 1.3 Netflix

Comparatively, Netflix has over 195 million paid subscriptions worldwide as of October 2020 (Netflix, 2020), and is one of the largest VOD platforms in the world with a presence in almost every country in the world (Pedersen, 2018). According to Pedersen (2018), Netflix commissions its translation through several means. Among these is the now closed Hermes test system, which was used to recruit freelancers to work directly for the company. After Netflix expanded its service globally in 2016, the need to localise its content increased massively, leading to the launch of the Hermes recruitment drive in March 2017 (Bond, 2018). However, one year later, in March 2018, the program was closed, due to having "reached our capacity for each one of the language tests" according to the Netflix website (Bond, 2018). According to Pedersen (2018), other means used by Netflix include commissioning a large portion of its subtitles from independent subtitling companies, as well as occasionally purchasing used subtitle files from other distributors. However, irrespective of how the subtitles are acquired, they must follow Netflix's in-house guidelines, known as *Timed Text Style Guides* (TTSGs) (Pedersen, 2018). These guidelines specify Netflix's standards for line length (42 characters per line), as well as duration, reading speed, line treatment, timing, credits, etc. (Pedersen, 2018). This is in contrast to Viki, who impose no strict norms or guidelines about such conventions.



## Chapter 2: K-drama Case Study

### 2.1 K-dramas

Korean media, including Korean pop music (K-pop), Korean TV drama series (K-dramas), and Korean films, have been experiencing growing popularity and recognition among English speaking audiences in recent years. According to Klinge (2020), the demand for Korean media content in the U.S. has risen by 66% in the last year. Despite this, it is difficult to access Korean media in most traditional forms such as TV and DVD, but internet sites such as Netflix have seen an increasing number of K-dramas and films as Netflix began to expand its original and licensed Korean content after it launched in Asia about five years ago (Klinge, 2020).

### 2.3 Purpose of this study

According to Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez (2006, p. 51), “fansubs share some of the characteristics of professional subtitling, but they are [...] far less dogmatic and more creative and individualistic than that which has traditionally been done for other media like the television, the cinema or the DVD.” Wilcock (2013) explains that fans often feel a special attachment to the show or subject material as well as a particular interest in the source language and culture, meaning that fansubs are “often judged by their peers and viewers on the ‘authenticity’ of their translations, rather than by other professionals and their standards.” So far, studies of fansubbing have mainly focussed on Japanese anime (Massidda, 2015). Therefore, this study will investigate the differences between the volunteer fansubs provided by Viki and the paid subtitles provided by Netflix of Korean TV drama series into English.

Although the two streaming platforms share many similarities, subtitles created in an unprofessional setting such as Viki, appear to differ considerably in form and content from those produced in a professional setting such as Netflix. This study intends to investigate the question of whether fansubs could be successful replacement for commercial subtitles.



Episodes from Netflix and Viki will be compared in order to discover the extent to which professional and non-professional subtitles differ in their strategies and norms. The exact same episode from 20 Korean TV drama series will be examined in a side-by-side comparison in order to discover the differences in translation strategies and norms, and these differences will be discussed, along with some of potential reasons for these differences. Then public opinions shared on online discussion forums such as Reddit and Viki Discussions will be reviewed in order to explore the reception of each style of subtitles as well as the ethics surrounding them.

### **Chapter 3: Method**

This study will compare the English subtitles of Korean TV drama series from unpaid volunteers and paid professionals from the video streaming platforms Netflix and Rakuten Viki. This study will look at the first episode of a number of different K-dramas from a range of genres and from 2009-2020. The exact same episode of each TV series will be compared in order to contrast which strategies were chosen by each respective group.

The TV drama series episodes analysed for this study are the first episode of each of the following:

- *Boys Over Flowers* (2009)
- *Secret Garden* (2010)
- *Reply 1997* (2012)
- *Rooftop Prince* (2012)
- *I Hear Your Voice* (2013)
- *That Winter, The Wind Blows* (2013)
- *Birth of a Beauty* (2014)
- *Doctor Stranger* (2014)
- *Hyde, Jekyll, Me* (2015)
- *Oh My Ghost* (2015)
- *Cinderella and the Four Knights* (2016)
- *Don't Dare to Dream (Jealousy Incarnate)* (2016)
- *The K2* (2016)



- *My Sassy Girl* (2017)
- *Saimdang, Memoir of Colors (Saimdang, Light's Diary)* (2017)
- *My ID is Gangnam Beauty* (2018)
- *My Mister* (2018)
- *Doctor John* (2019)
- *Hotel Del Luna* (2019)
- *Oh My Baby* (2020)

The texts were chosen by first establishing which shows were available both on Netflix and Viki. This resulted in a list of approximately 50 titles. From these titles, 20 episodes were selected from a variety of popular K-drama genres and content subjects, such as action, fantasy, romance, medical, legal, historical, comedy, etc. By looking at a wide range of genres and content subjects, this study is more likely to represent general tendencies within fansubbing rather than the tendencies relating to the language used in any particular genre or subject. The two versions were watched side by side, alternating frequently, to compare the same translations for each section of text, and significant differences were recorded.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### 4.1 Main Differences

#### 4.1.1. Adhering to Korean word choice

This study shows that Viki subtitles were more likely to adhere more closely to the original Korean word choice than Netflix subtitles. In other words, Viki tends towards a more literal or word-for-word translation than Netflix.

For example, the Korean title 'jiltueui hwasin' (lit. "incarnation of jealousy") is translated as "Jealousy Incarnate" by Viki, but the title is completely rewritten into English for Netflix to "Don't Dare to Dream". Similarly, 'saimdang, bichui ilgi' (lit. "Saimdang, light's diary") is translated as "Saimdang, Light's Diary" by Viki, but translated to "Saimdang, Memoir of Colors" by Netflix.

Often, this more literal translation produced by Viki resulted in a subtitle that was more awkward or less coherent than the Netflix version, which was more likely to stray away from



direct translations to create something more natural, idiomatic or easier to understand. At times, Viki's more literal translation only causes the subtitle to come across as awkward in English, without impairing the understandability of the subtitle.

For example, in *Rooftop Prince*, Viki opted for the more literal translation "If you were there you should have said it.", while Netflix opted for the more natural translation "Don't sneak up on me." Similarly, in *Saimdang, Memoir of Colors*, Viki opted for the more literal translation "Did you hit the ball well?", while Netflix opted for the more natural translation "Did you enjoy your golf practice?"

At other times, Viki's more literal translations can potentially cause confusion and hinder understanding for the viewer.

For example, in *My Mister*, Viki opted for the more literal translation "Ji Seok's mom gave it to me. She said she can't come to the wedding.", while Netflix opted for the clearer translation "It's from my wife. She is sorry she can't come to the wedding." In the original Korean, the character refers to wife as the mother of his child, Ji Seok, which is reflected in Viki's more literal translation. While this custom is not unusual in Korean, it is not at all common in English, meaning that an English speaker reading Viki's subtitle may not reach the conclusion that the character is speaking about his own child's mother and wife, but may assume he is talking about someone else's child. Netflix avoids this confusion by using the translation "my wife". Similarly, in *Saimdang, Memoir of Colors*, Viki opts for the literal translation "Eun Soo's Dad?", while Netflix opts for the translation "Min-seok?", as the custom of calling a spouse by their first name is much more familiar to English speakers.

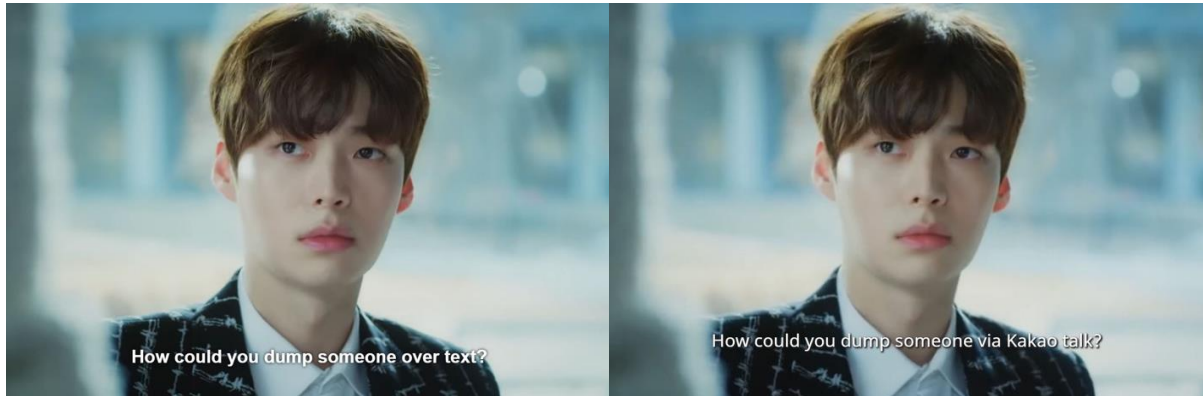
At times, Viki's more literal choices resulted in the preservation of a reference to an aspect of Korean culture, which is removed by Netflix.

For example, in *Oh My Baby*, Viki opts for the more literal translation "You only need to add one extra pair of chopsticks on the table, and check if he's feeding his kid well.", while Netflix opts for "We just have to add a chair to the table and make sure he's feeding the baby.", replacing "chopsticks" with "chair" to convey the idea of setting another place at the dinner table. Similarly, in *Birth of a Beauty*, Viki opts for the more literal translation "You don't want to stamp it?!", while Netflix opts for "You don't want to sign it?", since English speakers may not be familiar with the concept of using personal seals to sign official documents as is common practice in some Asian countries such as Korea, China and Japan.





Furthermore, in *Cinderella and the Four Knights*, while Viki opts for the more literal translation “How could you dump someone via Kakao talk?”, Netflix opts for “How could you dump someone over text?”, as English speakers may not be familiar with the popular Korean instant messaging app, Kakao Talk.



*Series: Cinderella and the Four Knights; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

However, at times, Netflix adhered closer to original word choice than Viki although this was not as frequent. This meant there were instances where the clearness and naturalness of Netflix’s subtitles was also hindered, as well as instances where a cultural reference was preserved.

For example, in *My Mister*, Netflix opted for the more literal translation “Don’t you hear the coins jingle every minute?”, while Viki gets the message across more clearly with the translation “Can’t you hear the money pouring down the drain minute by minute?” Also, in *Reply 1997*, Netflix opted for the more literal translation “It was sad to see our teacher in a portrait.”, while Viki opted for the translation “I was so sorry that our teacher passed away...” Netflix’s subtitle makes reference to the Korean funeral tradition of placing a portrait photo of the deceased in the centre of a funeral altar, but Viki opts to remove this reference to this aspect of Korean culture.

#### 4.1.2. Adhering to Korean word order

Not only was Viki more likely to adhere to the original Korean word choice, they were also more likely to adhere to the original word order. This usually results in Viki’s subtitles using more commas or ellipses, making their subtitles less easy to read in comparison to Netflix’s subtitles.



For example, in *Secret Garden*, Netflix uses a more fluent English word order translating “I don’t care what she says.”, while Viki adheres closer to the Korean word order, translating “Whatever she says, I don’t care.” Similarly, in *Oh My Baby*, Netflix uses a more fluent English word order translating “I’m kissing up to you so that you’ll agree.”, while Viki adheres closer to the Korean word order, translating “To get your approval, I’m kissing up to you like this.” Also, in *Doctor Stranger*, Netflix’s translation read “Mom lives in America.”, while Viki’s read “In America... Mom is there.”



*Series: Oh My Baby; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

Viki’s strategy of adhering closer to the original Korean word order may also cause confusion and hinder the viewer’s understanding.

For example, in *Rooftop Prince*, Netflix translates “The chairman... has decided to step down from her position.”, while Viki translates “She has decided to resign from her position. It seems like..” Viki’s choice of word order here may lead viewers to assume a new sentence has been started and left unfinished. However, “it seems like” is actually still referring to the previous sentence.

#### 4.1.3. Translator’s notes and additional information

One of the features that is most easily recognised as exclusive to fansubbing is the use of translator’s notes. Out of the 20 episodes included in this study, 18 had an instance of a translator’s note or additional information on Viki. In contrast, Netflix did not use any. Viki used either round brackets, square brackets, italics or a heading (such as Editor’s note:, T/N:, etc.) or a combination of these to introduce additional information or an explanation. This includes any information that was not explicitly expressed through verbal or visual text. Due to Viki’s tendency to translate closer to the original Korean word choice, these explanations are often more needed in Viki’s translations in order to help the audience understand.



The main types of translator's notes included:

- Translation of a transliterated Korean word such as food names or relationship titles.  
For example, in *Oh My Ghost*, where Netflix translated "It must be the *bossam* I ordered.", Viki translated "It's bossam. (Boiled pork eaten with a salty sauce and wrapped in greens.)" Similarly, in *Reply 1997*, where Netflix translated "Let's go in.", Viki translated "Hyungnim, let's go inside. (Hyungnim - how you call the wife of your husband's elder brother)"
- Conversion of Korean won into dollars.  
For example, in *Cinderella and the Four Knights*, where Netflix translates "I'm not asking you to do this for free. I'll give you one million won.", Viki translates "I'm not asking you to do this for free. I'll give you 1 million won. (About USD \$840)"
- To give additional information about how the text is being spoken.  
For example, in *My Sassy Girl*, where Netflix translates "Hey, long time no see.", Viki translates "Sister, it's been a long time. ( in Chinese)" Similarly in *Reply 1997*, where Netflix translates "You must be so happy.", Viki translates "You must be SO happy! [sarcastic tone]"
- To explain a Korean cultural concept.  
For example, in *Don't Dare to Dream*, Netflix opts to translate "What if this angel flies away?", while Viki opts to translate "So that our fairy-like sister-in-law doesn't go back up with her clothes (reference to Korean folktale A Fairy and Woodcutter)" Similarly in *Secret Garden*, Netflix opts to translate "Hey, do your promoting elsewhere.", while Viki opts to translate "Hey! Go do your publicity on Inkigayo. (TV music program)"
- To point out the use of pun.  
For example, in *Reply 1997*, Netflix opted to translate "Dan-ji, I love you", while Viki opts to translate "[Word play. The word "Danji" sounds like "Only" so he is singing "I only love you"]"

However, these notes also include information that is implicit from the context but not explicitly stated in the verbal or visual text.

For example, in *Oh My Ghost*, Viki opted for the translation "Right. You lit (incense) again. I knew it.", while Netflix opted for the translation "I knew you would burn those incense



sticks again.” Although the reference to incense is not made explicitly in the original Korean speech, it is inferred from the context, so Netflix integrates this information into the subtitle naturally, while Viki uses brackets to indicate that this piece of information has been added by the translator.



*Series: Oh My Ghost; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

Similarly, in *Hyde, Jekyll, Me*, Viki opted for the translation “Hey! He was almost about to cry, watching that (video).”, while Netflix opted for the translation “No way! That video almost made him cry!” Again, because the word “video” is not stated explicitly Viki uses brackets to indicate that this piece of information has been added by the translator.

Another interesting use of this type of additional information also occurs in *Hyde, Jekyll, Me*, where Netflix translates “He’s devoid of emotions.”, Viki translates “He has no emotions (he can’t be moved).” It seems that in this instance, for some unknown reason, Viki’s translators have felt the need to provide further explanation for their translation, while Netflix finds their translation sufficient.



*Series: Hyde, Jekyll, Me; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

#### 4.1.4. Transliteration of Korean words

Related to adhering to original Korean word choice is the use of transliterated Korean words. This is a feature that is almost entirely exclusive to Viki, although there are instances



where transliterated Korean words appear in Netflix's translations. These Korean words are carefully selected words, that Viki translators assume are widely recognised by their audiences, and mainly includes relationship titles, food names, particular cultural concepts, as well as certain exclamations.

- Relationship titles

Relationship titles are recognised one of the hardest parts to translate from Korean to English as they do not have any direct equivalents. They also tend to be some of the more recognised words by K-drama fans, so they are one of the types of words that are most likely to be transliterated by Viki. In contrast, Netflix tended to use a range of different strategies including omission, use of first names or similar titles, and, more rarely, transliteration.

In this example from *Rooftop Prince*, Viki transliterates the Korean relationship title: "I don't know, Unni. I don't know.", while Netflix chooses to omit the word altogether: "I don't know. I really don't."

In another example from *That Winter, The Wind Blows*, Viki transliterates the relationship title: "Hyung, I'm really sorry.", whereas Netflix replaces the title with the character's first name: "Soo! I'm sorry."

In another example from *Hyde, Jekyll, Me*, Viki transliterates the Korean title: "Ahjussi, save me! Save me!", whereas Netflix uses the similar English title, "mister": "Mister, help me!" Similarly, in *Doctor Stranger*, where Viki transliterates "Ahjusshi, you're so cool!", Netflix uses the English title, "sir": "You're awesome, Sir!"

The only instance in which Netflix chose to use transliteration was in *Boys Over Flowers*. However, in contrast to Viki, when Netflix transliterated a Korean word, it italicised the word. For example, where Viki translates "Noona, are you crazy?", Netflix translates "*Noona*, are you crazy?"







Series: *Boys Over Flowers*; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)

- Food names

Netflix and Viki both use a mixture of transliteration and translation when it comes to food names. Some more recognisable Korean dish names, such as bibimbap, tend to be transliterated by both sites. On the other hand, dishes with more established English names, such as seaweed soup, tend to always be translated. However, where foods are less recognisable, Netflix tends to transliterate the Korean name, and Viki tends to use an English name. If Netflix transliterates a food name, it will often occur in italics.

For example, in *Oh My Ghost*, Netflix opts to transliterate with italics: “We have to eat *naengmyeon* on a hot and humid day like this.”, while Viki opts to translate: “On a hot day like this, we should get a bowl of cold noodles.”

If Viki transliterates a food name, it is often accompanied by an explanation in brackets.

For example, in *Boys Over Flowers*, Netflix opts to use an English name: “Just like Korean pancakes.”, while Viki opts to transliterate with the English name in brackets: “Just like Bindaedduk (korean pancake).”

- Cultural Concepts

Viki also transliterated some cultural concepts (including Konglish words) that do not have direct equivalents in English, demonstrating their assumption that their audience is sufficiently familiar with these concepts to not need a translation or explanation to be understood.

For example, in *Cinderella and the Four Knights*, Viki transliterates “They’re all predictable third-generation chaebols.”, while Netflix translates “They’re all predictable third-generation conglomerates.” Similarly, in *Oh My Baby*, Netflix’s subtitle read “Come on. You have to touch him.”, while Viki’s read “Senior, skinship is just the basics.” Viki’s retention of the Konglish word ‘skinship’ (meaning physical touch or affection) demonstrates their confidence that the audience will already be familiar with this concept.

- Exclamations



Exclamations are never transliterated by Netflix, but Viki assumes that many exclamations will be recognised by viewers and are transliterated, such as omo, aigoo, eyy, ya and aish. Rather than transliterating, Netflix chose to omit the exclamation or use a similar English equivalent.

For example, in *Boys Over Flowers*, Viki transliterates the exclamation: “Aish, this isn’t it.”, while Netflix omits it: “This isn’t it.” In *Oh My Ghost*, Viki transliterates the exclamation: “Aigoo, it’s so loud.”, while Netflix uses a similar English equivalent: “Gosh, it’s so loud.”



*Series: Oh My Ghost; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

#### 4.1.5. Swearwords

While it may be natural to assume that fansubbers are more likely to use swearwords as they are not constrained by strict regulations, this investigation has found that Netflix was actually more likely to use swearwords, as well as use harsher swearwords than Viki.

For example, in *Oh My Baby*, Netflix opts to translate “At least that bitch has a conscience.”, while Viki opts to translate “At least she had a conscience. Wench.” In *That Winter the Wind Blows*, Netflix opts to translate “What the fuck?”, while Viki opts to translate “What the hell!”

Furthermore, one strategy which was used exclusively by Viki was the censoring of swearwords using an asterisk symbol.

For example, in *Boys Over Flowers*, Netflix opts to translate “Fuck off! Screw you!”, while Viki translates “[F\*\*\* off! Screw you!]”. Similarly, in *Don’t Dare to Dream*, Netflix translates “You son of a bitch!”, while Viki opts to translate “Hey, you son of a b\*tch!”



*Series: Don't Dare to Dream; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

#### 4.1.6. Errors

In accordance with previous studies of fansubs, this study also found that Viki subtitles were more likely to contain errors than Netflix subtitles. In general, the most common errors were grammatical, spelling and punctuation errors; timing errors; and mistranslations.

- Grammar, spelling, and punctuation

Both Netflix and Viki made a number of these types of errors. However, the frequency of these types of errors was higher for Viki than for Netflix. These errors did not generally affect the meaning or understandability of the subtitle.

For example, in *That Winter, The Wind Blows*, Netflix made a simple error “Do people get married just because their interested?”, whereas Viki doesn’t “Do other people get married just because they are interested in someone?” In *Reply 1997*, Viki makes a simple error “That’s is mine! That’s is mine!”, while Netflix doesn’t “That’s mine.”

- Timing

Viki was much more likely to make a timing error than Netflix.

For example, in *Rooftop Prince*, several of Viki’s subtitles disappeared from the screen well before the character had finished speaking, leaving the viewer insufficient time to read the subtitle. In one instance, while Netflix kept its subtitle, “You must keep in mind that if you become the princess, you carry our family name on your shoulders.”, on screen for the full 8 seconds that the character was speaking the line, Viki only kept its subtitle, “You have to remember that becoming the Crown





Princess means the honor of our entire family will be solely upon your shoulders.”, on screen for 3 seconds.

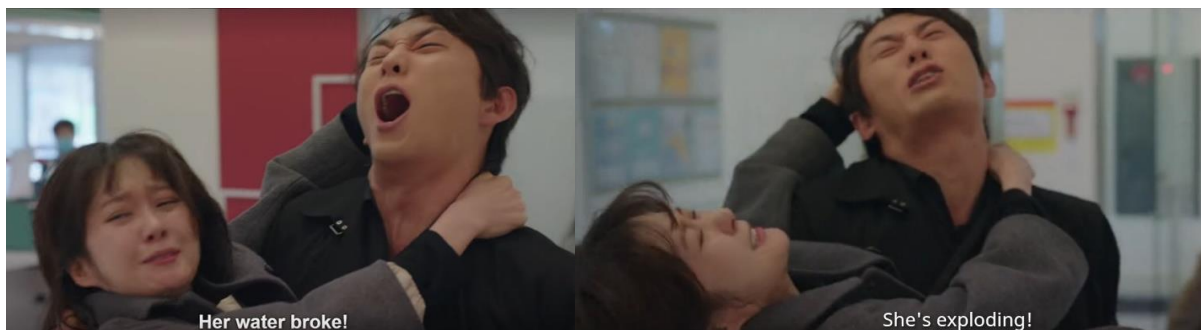
- Mistranslations

Both Netflix and Viki made mistranslations, but these occurred with a higher frequency in Viki’s subtitles than Netflix’s. These types of errors have a higher potential for causing confusion or misunderstanding from the viewer than the other previous types. The most common mistranslations from Netflix were those where a number was incorrectly translated.

For example, in *Cinderella and Four Knights*, Viki translated the correct measurement “Give me 270cm of this, please.”, while Netflix makes a mistake: “Can I have 27cm of this?”

The most common mistranslations from Viki were due to speech being misheard or misunderstood. These mistranslations may result in misunderstanding or confusion on behalf of the viewer as the meaning had been completely changed.

For example, in *Oh My Baby*, Netflix translates “It’ll be difficult to extract healthy, high-quality eggs from you.”, while Viki incorrectly translates “It will be difficult for you to find a young, good man.” This mistranslation by Viki has presumably occurred due to the similarity in pronunciation between the Korean word for man (‘nam-ja’) and the word for egg (‘nan-ja’). Similarly, in *Oh My Baby*, where Netflix translates “Her water broke!”, Viki translates “She’s exploding!” As the Korean is literally “Her amniotic fluid burst/exploded”, it can be assumed that the translator did not hear the word ‘amniotic fluid’, resulting in a humorous mistranslation.

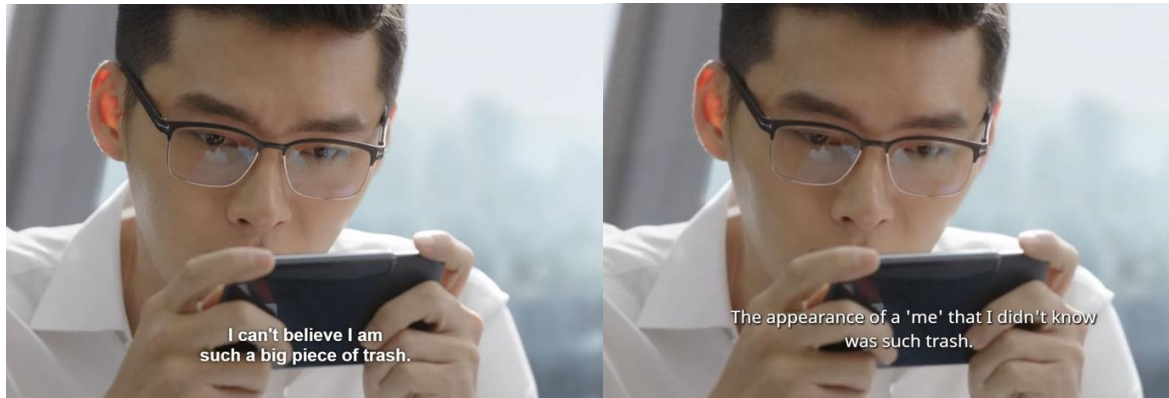


*Series: Oh My Baby; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*



Viki subtitles were also more likely to lack fluency in general. In cases where the subtitles were awkward, unnatural or difficult to understand, this tended to be due to a translation that was too literal.

For example, in *Hyde, Jekyll, Me*, where Netflix translated “I can’t believe I am such a big piece of trash.”, Viki translated “The appearance of a ‘me’ that I didn’t know was such trash.”



*Series: Hyde, Jekyll, Me; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

#### 4.1.7. Format differences

There were a number of differences between the formatting conventions for both sites. Subtitling conventions change over time with changes in technology and with the developments of new types of media (Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006). Within commercial subtitling there are a range of accepted formatting conventions so that generally there is no one set of guidelines that are considered more successful than another. Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014, p. 81) suggest that “future subtitlers should above all try to be flexible in their approach, gain an insight into the advantages and disadvantages of different practices, and be consistent when applying the conventions proposed by a particular subtitling company.” Although neither platform was completely consistent in its formatting across all the series studied, Viki showed more variation than Netflix in its formatting conventions between different TV shows. Some of the main differences between Viki and Netflix formatting conventions were in the number of characters, the number of lines, timing and line breaks.

- Timing



While Netflix subtitles strictly occurred only while the corresponding text can be heard or read on screen, Viki subtitles occasionally fell outside of this range. While Viki presumably uses this strategy to allow the viewer more time to read the subtitle, Netflix is more likely to use other strategies, such as reducing the length by condensing or omitting the subtitle.

For example, in *Hotel del Luna*, when translating an on screen letter, Viki's subtitles appeared on screen before the letter had been opened, so that viewers were able to read the subtitles while the letter was still in the envelope and its contents not yet visible.

Viki's translation read:

*"To Gu Chan Seong:*

*I am writing this to tell you that you will be employed at our precious Hotel Del Luna.*

*I hope you will come to work starting tomorrow.*

*From Jang Man Wol, the owner of Hotel Del Luna."*

In contrast, Netflix condensed the letter contents so that the subtitles were able to be read only as long as the letters contents were visible on screen.

Netflix's translation read:

"DEAR KOO CHAN-SUNG  
BE INFORMED THAT YOU'VE  
BEEN HIRED BY HOTEL DEL LUNA  
YOUR WORK STARTS TOMORROW"

- Line breaks

While Netflix uses line breaks in order to make its subtitles more easy to read, Viki is much less intentional with its line breaks, letting them occur automatically. Viki was also more likely to put several short sentences on screen at once if they are all spoken by the same character.

For example, in *Hotel del Luna*, Netflix breaks the lines up so that there is one line per frame, and they appear on screen in time with the character's speech. Netflix's translation reads:

"Detective Lee?

You died.



Don't come near me!

Get away from me."

In contrast, Viki does not use line breaks, but rather allows the viewer to read ahead, before the character has actually produced the speech. Viki's translation reads:

"Detective Lee. But you died. Don't come here. Don't come."



*Series: Hotel del Luna; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

- Number of lines

Netflix stuck to a strict maximum of two lines on screen at any one time. While most of Viki's subtitles were able to fit within one or two lines, there did not appear to be any constraint on this number, so that at times there could be three or four lines on screen at any one time. The highest number of lines Viki showed on screen at any one time was six, when in *The K2*, Viki subtitled a street sign in Barcelona, which was not subtitled by Netflix.



*Series: The K2; Platform: Viki*



#### 4.1.8 Credit

Netflix typically credits the translator of an episode once in a subtitle at the end of an episode (although in 3 out of 20 episodes there was no credit). In contrast, Viki provides much more thorough credit for its subtitlers. Each TV show includes a tab that lists all of the people that worked on the show, including channel managers, moderators, segmenters and subtitlers. The list shows each person's username, and (depending on their role) what country they are from and/or how many contributions they have made. Each show has a unique team that is named after the show they are working on, and this team is credited in a subtitle that may appear multiple times throughout each episode. For example, throughout *Hyde, Jekyll, Me*, the subtitle "Timing and Subtitles brought to you by the Don't Hyde From Me Team @ Viki.com" appeared on screen five times.

#### 4.1.9. Reduction strategies

This study also found that Netflix is much more likely to use reduction strategies such as condensing or omitting.

For example, in *I Hear Your Voice*, Viki's translation read "Park Soo Ha is only eight years old. He's in second grade.", while Netflix chose to translate "Park Su-ha is eight years old."

Due to its higher tendency to translate word-for-word, Viki's subtitles often contained repetition. In contrast, Netflix omitted the unnecessary repetition.

For example, in *Don't Dare to Dream*, where Viki opted to translate "Hey, hey! Pyo, Pyo, Pyo, Pyo! Hurry, hurry!", Netflix simply wrote "Na-ri!"



*Series: Don't Dare to Dream; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

Furthermore, Netflix does not tend to subtitle title sequences and episode numbers, non-Korean speech or text, or backtrack song lyrics. In contrast, Viki often tends to subtitle all of





the above, even resulting in instances where the subtitle becomes redundant as it reads exactly the same as the on-screen text.

For example, in *Hotel del Luna*, Viki subtitled the show title “Hotel del Luna” even when it appeared on screen in the Roman alphabet.



*Series: Hotel del Luna; Platform: Viki*

#### 4.1.10. Gender roles

Lastly, another unexpected but very interesting difference between the two sites was that while Viki was more likely to adhere to the original Korean word choice, Netflix was more likely to remove any reference to gender where the Korean made reference to stereotypical gender roles or qualities.

For example, in *Oh My Ghost*, while Viki’s translation read “Put some salve on it. It’s not good for a girl to have a scarred hand.”, Netflix wrote “Put on some ointment. You wouldn’t want a scar on your hand.” Similarly, in *Secret Garden*, Viki’s translation read “Sissy design for a guy’s room.”, while Netflix’s read “Just look at this place.”





*Series: Secret Garden; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

#### 4.2. Subtitle Overlap

Another unexpected find was that there for certain series, there was some overlap of the subtitles between the two platforms. At times the translations were so strikingly similar, they could not be put down to coincidence.

For example, in *Boys Over Flowers*, there were whole sections of text that were exactly identical except for line breaks.

Netflix:

“Madam Chairman,  
the Prime Minister is on the line.

Yes, sir.

Yes,

it’s getting interesting.

I was never cut out for hiding  
from the paparazzi!

What a tough delivery! Shoot!”

Viki:

“Madam Chairman, the Prime Minister is on the line.

Yes, sir.

Yes,

it’s getting interesting.

I was never cut out for hiding from the paparazzi!

What a tough delivery! Shoot!”



*Series: Boys Over Flowers; Platform: Netflix (left), Viki (right)*

This suggests that the two platforms have acquired the subtitles from the same source.

Although I cannot determine the original source of the subtitles, there are a number of indications that they were originally written by fansubbers and edited for Netflix.

For example, in *Boys Over Flowers*, Netflix subtitled the on-screen text while Viki didn’t, so it is more likely that these subtitles were added by Netflix rather than removed by Viki.



Furthermore, this is the only episode in this study in which Netflix used transliterations of Korean words such as “noona”, “sunbae” and “chaebol” which is a typical feature of fansubbing. According to Pedersen (2018), Netflix occasionally purchases used subtitle files from other distributors which is a likely explanation for the striking similarity between some Netflix and Viki subtitles. Furthermore, O'Hagan (2009) explains that at least for anime translations, fansubbing styles appear to be influencing commercial subtitles, and some trusted fansubbing groups are occasionally even hired to create the official subtitles.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

### 5.1 Reasons for being source-oriented

#### 5.1.1. Lack of training and the vulnerability of translation

There are a number of potential reasons for fansubbing being more source-oriented than professional subtitles. One potential reason is incompetency due to lack of training of fansubbers. They may choose these strategies out of ignorance of professional practices. Baer (2018) explains that new translation students tend to make mistakes due to bottom-up processing, including translating small units such as words or phrases “to the detriment of textual cohesion” and independently from context, as well as adhering to source-text syntax. According to Baer (2018), when reporting about their translations, students tended to report that they felt they were obliged to adhere as closely as possible to the source text word choices and syntax. This shows that although the source-oriented strategies (such as adhering to the original word choice and order) chosen by fansubbers are common mistakes made by new translation students and therefore may be due to lack of training. Furthermore, as Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014) point out, subtitling is a “vulnerable” form of translation, referring to the fact that both the original text and the translation are simultaneously available to consumers, making them easy to compare. Viewers with some knowledge of both languages but with no experience or training in subtitling may be unsatisfied if what they hear and what they read do not match up as they believe they should. Díaz-Cintas and Remael (2014) point out that when viewers recognise a source-language word, they expect a direct word-for-word translation or else the viewer might





perceive the translator as unskilled or inept. Viki tends to attract viewers with an interest in learning languages and also gives viewers the opportunity to write feedback, making this site particularly vulnerable to this phenomenon. Fansubbers get much more feedback from the viewers than professional translators, and if viewers can tell that subtitles have strayed from the original wording, they may complain about it, meaning that fansubbers are probably more likely to stick to the original wording because: (a) they are less experienced/untrained; and (b) they are more likely to receive feedback in which viewers express a preference for more literal translations.

### 5.1.2. Authenticity

Another reason for the more source-oriented approach of fansubbing is the desire to remain faithful to original text. Wilcock (2013) describes how fansubs are judged on their authenticity, and this results in a more source-oriented approach. According to Massidda (2020), fansubbing approaches are caused by their dissatisfaction with and resistance to domesticated, manipulated and overedited official translations. O'Hagan (2009) explains that the norm breaking translation strategies used by fansubbers appear to be a result of fans' search for "authentic text". Fansubs that are considered to be good quality by both viewers and subbers are those that are truer to the original source (Ito, 2017).

### 5.1.3. Different audience

Fansubs are aimed at a specific audience with more cultural exposure. They are created for fans, by fans. Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez (2006) discuss how one of the principal factors that cause fansubbers of Japanese anime to preserve linguistic and cultural elements of the source text is that fansubbers are aware that their target audience has a passion for anime and Japanese culture. The same can be said for Viki users. Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez (2006) also state that fansub audiences are likely to have a higher level of exposure to the source culture than general audiences. Evidence for this high level of interest in and exposure to Korean culture can be found in Viki's many fan centred community features. K-drama related articles are advertised on Viki after the website bought the English-language Korean pop culture news site *Soompi* in 2015 (Dwyer, 2017). This along with the community timed comments feature and the reviews and comments section provide evidence that the



audience is highly involved in the media they consume and are participants of a specific fan community.

#### 5.1.4. Different purpose

Another reason for the source-oriented nature of fansubs is the fact that the audience often use the media content as a tool for language learning, therefore giving the subtitles a different purpose. According to Dwyer (2017), Viki was created with language learning in mind. Evidence of this includes the fact that there is a 'learn mode' feature which shows the source and target language subtitles to appear on screen simultaneously and allows users to easily go back and replay segments of speech. Additionally, users can click on a particular word in the source language subtitle to hear its pronunciation or see the definition in their selected language. Bellos (2011) points out that word-for-word or literal translation is not effective as a translation, as it can only be understood when it is converted back into the source language, defeating the purpose of the translation. However, if the purpose of the translation is not to make the text accessible to people who do not know the source language, but to be used as a tool for language learning, Viki's more literal style of translation may be considered more acceptable. However, Viki's word-for-word translations can sometimes result in a confusing and incomprehensible rendering into English, so while this strategy combined with the 'learn mode' feature (which allows users to see each word translated individually) may help viewers learn source language idioms and expressions, it may ultimately obscure the meaning of the text and inhibit rather than help learning.

#### 5.2 Reasons for errors

Although errors inevitably occur in both Netflix and Viki subtitles, they occur more often in Viki's subtitles than they do in Netflix's. There are several reasons this may occur. Firstly, because they typically work directly from the audio, rather than receiving a transcript to work from as many professionals might (Wang, 2014). Secondly, fansubs may be more likely to include more errors because fansubbers also experience a more intense time pressure than professional translators (Wang, 2014; Massidda, 2020). One of the main motivations for fansubbing is to get access to content faster than would have traditionally been available



and pressure from waiting fans might cause translators to rush (Bold, 2011; Ito, 2017). According to Wang (2014), fansubbers are aware that their audiences are waiting for the release of their translations, and therefore different fansub groups will compete with each other to be the first to release their version as the first version to be released always has a larger market.

### 5.3 Reasons for credit

While Netflix is first and foremost a video streaming site, translation and community are central aspects to Viki. It is perhaps for this reason that it is much easier to find information about the translators that worked on Viki content than it is for Netflix.

### 5.4 Reasons for use of reduction strategies

Viki's subtitles tend to contain more characters than Netflix's subtitles. Viki uses up to 6 lines and presumably does not use character or word limits. Meanwhile, in accordance with its guidelines, Netflix subtitles must be limited to a maximum of 42 characters per line, and a maximum of two lines (Pedersen, 2018). Therefore, Netflix translators are more likely to find they must use reduction strategies in order that their translations fit these constraints.

### 5.5 Reasons for omission of reference to gender

The fact that Netflix often omits references to gender related stereotypes in the English subtitles of K-dramas may reflect the fact that Korean society tends to be more conservative in regards to gender roles than English-speaking countries (Palley, 1990). It appears that Netflix translators are consciously adapting this cultural aspect for a more global audience.

### 5.6 Public reception of fansubs

This study intends to investigate the question of whether fansubs could be successful replacement for commercial subtitles. In order to answer this question, it is important to



understand the public's perceptions of fansubs and whether they could be acceptable to general audiences. Public opinions shared on online discussion forums will be reviewed in order to explore audience's perceptions of the differences in subtitling styles.

Reddit users discuss which platform provides the best subtitles in a thread prompted by the question "Which K-drama website has the best subs?" asked by user Jaqnae 5 years ago.

Users discuss the pros and cons of using fansubbing streaming sites such as Viki and Dramafever. (Although Dramafever was shut down in October of 2018, this thread gives us insight into how consumers feel about the different styles of subtitling.)

User typecfl expresses that "I've found that Dramafever tends to Americanize dialogues and some very small parts of the speech are omitted but for the most part they convey the same thoughts as the original script in Korean. Viki has much better quality overall as they tend to explain stuff more." This comment suggests that Dramafever subtitles were probably more likely to domesticate and use reduction strategies, whereas this consumer prefers subtitles that foreignise and do not reduce. This comment also suggests that this consumer prefers the additional notes that Viki occasionally adds to explain culturally specific references. User HorcruxDestroyer explains that "If you are learning Korean, I think you will prefer Viki's subtitles. They leave a lot of Korean words that are somewhat "common knowledge" such as oppa, unnie, sunbaenim, etc." This comment shows that this Viki subtitles are preferable for language learners because they are more likely to transcribe specific recognisable Korean words, rather than omitting, replacing or translating the words, which are more common strategies for Netflix. However, this user also acknowledges that Viki tends to have more mistakes due to the voluntary nature of the work. "Keep in mind Viki has volunteers sub, so very rarely you may see a mistake or two, but someone usually corrects it quickly." User gr1zzlybear agrees that Viki subtitles often contain errors "I find that Viki has a lot of mistakes though?...I'm aware that there are many different subbing groups subbing different shows but many times they would get the tone of how things are said incorrectly or just throw in swears when the character wasn't even swearing." Interestingly, this user finds that Viki uses more swear words, despite my findings that they tend to use less swearwords and less harsh swearwords than Netflix. User lynnb496 acknowledges that there is a wide variation in quality on any fansubbing website due to the fact that each drama is subtitled by different groups. "I don't know if there's a good answer to this



question, since most websites use multiple groups to subtitle. It varies widely from show to show on just about every site I've used.”

Overall, Viki viewers seem to like Viki subtitles for the main reason that they perceive them to include cultural information that other subtitles do not. Viki often includes cultural information in brackets making it obvious that information has been added by the translator. However, this study shows that while it is certainly the case that Viki was more likely to contain references to and explanations of aspects of Korean culture, there were also many instances where the information contained in brackets would be naturally integrated in professional subtitles. Therefore, it is possible that Viki viewers overestimating the amount of additional information they are receiving from fan subtitles just because it appears in brackets, whereas this information would actually be integrated into professional subtitles.

In a Reddit thread started 7 months ago by user hakvri titled “Viki Disgusts Me”, various users discuss their opinions of fansubbing compared to professional subtitling.

The user kaydenceee argues that Viki provides better subtitles than Netflix, commenting “And it is with this ease of collaboration in the Viki subbing community that I feel makes Viki subs much better, compared to other sites like Netflix, where usually its just one person subbing entire episodes. The subpar subtitles on other sites clearly shows that a sole person paid to sub an episode doesn’t produce quality subs. Whereas Viki has an entire community that does it, and subtitles often go through multiple edits and revision to include cultural context, make subtitles sound more natural etc.”

Many users such as sharjoy3 preferred the use of transliterated Korean words and translator’s notes: “I also really appreciate the correct honorifics ("unnie," etc.) rather than the name of the person, as Netflix does. I like those little parenthetical explanations of the culture.”

However, other users did not appreciate the additional information that Viki often provides and therefore preferred Netflix’s subtitles. The user Kujaichi shares “I gotta be honest though, I prefer Netflix subtitles. There's just such an obvious quality difference... Yeah, I like it when they leave stuff like "unni" or whatever in, but subtitles are exactly *not* the place for translator's notes, I hate that...”



The user thepurplethorn agrees commenting “To be honest some of the subs are not that great on Viki. Explaining everything in parentheses is not always the best imo, takes too much to read when the same meaning can be conveyed in less wording”

When prompted by the question “What makes Viki better than other streaming services?” asked by the user pahaonta, the user my\_guinevere responded “The subtitles are great. A whole lot better than Netflix, for sure.”, while the user hakvri argued “It’s honestly about access to legal content in the west, not about it being better.”

Therefore, although there was a mix of opinions, the opinions about fansubbing were overwhelmingly positive and most commenters preferred Viki subtitles to Netflix subtitles. However, the opinions expressed are likely to represent a biased population of those who not only watch K-dramas but participate in online discussions about fansubbing sites. Therefore, this bias is to be expected as it is highly likely that those participating in the reddit threads of r/KDRAMA are those who are involved in the fan community and are therefore that particular audience that has an interest in Korean language and culture.

## **Chapter 6: Implications**

### **6.1 Legality of fansubbing**

Different countries have different copyright laws so the legal status of fansubbing at the global scale is very complex, although the activity is often illegal (Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006). But despite the dubious legality of fansubbing, at first many anime copyright holders allowed the illegal free distribution of fansubbed works as it benefitted them by building a larger fanbase (Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006; O'Hagan, 2009; Massidda, 2020). Fansub groups often self-regulated by self-imposed ethical guidelines that demand that the free distribution over the Internet of a particular show should stop once it has been licensed for commercial distribution (Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006; O'Hagan, 2009). However, after demand for anime grew and fansubbing was no longer needed to promote anime to expand the market, anime copyright holders were no longer happy with fansubbing (Díaz-Cintas & Muñoz Sánchez, 2006). Consequently, over the last few years there have been an increasing number of campaigns fighting against online piracy



all over the world (Massidda, 2020). Due to this increase in action taken against fansubbing, Massidda (2020) predicts that in the future this action will eventually stamp it out. However, Viki provides a solution to this problem by providing a legal space for the activity, so it may be just as valid to predict that fansubbers will find legal ways they can continue to carry out the activity.

## 6.2 Public opinions of the ethics of Viki

Translations which are produced voluntarily and without financial compensation “raise issues relating to quality, ethics and the very survival of the Translation profession” (O'Hagan, 2009). In the thread “Viki Disgusts Me”, hakvri laments the fact that “despite expecting users to pay for services, [Viki] still relies on free labor from fans for subtitles.” Some users have argued that as Rakuten is a multi-billion dollar corporation, it can afford to pay its subbers, but chooses not to and thus exploits the hard work of subbers for profit. Others argue that since these subbers choose to work for free, there is no problem. The user it-s-luminescent claims that “Viki is a for-profit corporation that harnesses the generosity and goodwill of all these volunteers with a manipulative scheme that "rewards" these volunteers with essentially meaningless incentives and empty social rewards. The (galactic) power differential between a large multinational corporation and one individual volunteer is...what makes it exploitative.” The user myweithisway disagrees, arguing that this view is “demeaning to translators in the sense that you are trying to dictate what things are considered "rewards".” They argue that fansubbers do the work for their own personal rewards such as community engagement and the joy of being able to spread kdramas- ultimately, for fun. They argue that it is up to the individual to decide whether the rewards are worth the work, and fansubbers “can stop any time. Chances are they feel that what they gain from their volunteered time is worth it to them to keep doing it.”

The user GuineaFowlItch argues that there is no differential of power as people are free to leave whenever they wish. They comment “Rakuten is not forcing anyone to volunteer. So please stop this narrative of the poor translator being exploited.”

The user fudgeywudgey99 points out that if it weren't for sites like Viki which provide a legal space for fansubbers, they would just continue their activities elsewhere.



The user \_kinfused explains that they are satisfied with the compensation of a free subscription that Viki provides some of its most active subbers. “These days I only contribute enough to maintain my QC status, which is about ~10-15 hours of work per year. To me, the offsets the subscription fee, so I’m okay with it.”

Some users have discussed the fact that they do not wish to support Viki due to the exploitation of its subbers. The user hakvri states in their initial post that “There are pros of fan subs, like the fact that they include cultural context and seem to fit the mood more (whoever subs for netflix needs to learn from viki subbers). But I still rather the hardworking fans who take the time out of their days to add subs to dramas are at least being paid, even if it isn't much.” This comment points out that although they prefer the fansubs to professional subtitles, they prefer to use sites where translators are paid for their work for ethical reasons. The user shiningtwentyfive agrees, commenting “I try my best to consume kdramas through Netflix as I know they are subbed by paid professionals. However, my preference is for the subs on Viki as the subbers do an amazing job of providing context. They often explain the references to other dramas, the different puns and idioms, and elaborate on jokes that I wouldn't understand as a non-Korean. I only watch kdramas on Viki when they aren't available elsewhere, and even then, I only pay for it a month at a time and cancel my subscription as soon as I'm done.” The user OsananajimiShipper adds that they do not have a subscription with Viki “because they're not willing to hire professional subbers...But I worry for those who does subbing for a living, and all I can do as one person is vote with my wallet.” However, the user fudgeywudgey99 argues that “if Viki switches to pro subbers, fansubbers will just move elsewhere to sub content they themselves want people to see!”

The user EmmaPoppitz argues “The problem is that there are professional subbers out there that actually studied translation and provide a quality service. People who volunteer to sub are hurting a whole industry. I am thankful for everyone that volunteers their time to make dramas accessible to international fans, but in the future, a shift towards paid professional subbers should be encouraged both to discourage the use of unpaid labour by big companies, and to establish kdramas as a serious form of media entertainment. I could see the shift in perception of kdramas in international audiences when netflix started to offer more dramas, as the professional platform and professional subs made people that would





otherwise not necessarily watch these shows take them more seriously. Which is a win all around!" This comment points out that perhaps the commercial standards of professional subtitles attract a wider audience than fansubbing does, so by using professional translators K-dramas have more potential to become mainstream which would ultimately be better for K-drama fans.

### 6.3 Motivations for fansubbing

A key question in relation to fansubbing is that of why fansubbers work for free. Translation work requires effort, skill and time, which fansubbers willingly contribute without financial compensation, in contrast to professional translators who expect payment. There are many reasons someone may participate in fansubbing besides commercial incentives. Dwyer (2017) states that motivations to fansub include to pass time, for social belonging, improve language skills or other subtitling related skills, give back to community and counter media distribution inequalities. Bold (2011) points out that some fansubbers are after recognition of their skills and the work put into a project. Some fansubbers are highly excited by the instant positive and feedback they receive for their work (Ito, 2017). Fansubbing also provides many people with a sense of community and social belonging, and fansubbing communities are spaces for people to talk about things they enjoy (Ito, 2017). Fansubbing also allows people to contribute and give back to the community they enjoy being a part of, and take a more active rather than passive role in the group (Ito, 2017). Furthermore, according to Ito (2017), fansubbing not only helps to improving language or subtitling skills but also helps to build a personal sense of achievement from that improvement. Other motivations include a desire to ensure the quality of product as well as to expand the audience of the particular content (Ito, 2017). Therefore, fansubbers are ultimately happy to do the work for free and do not require compensation. They see it as a hobby, or something to do for fun, not as work (Ito, 2017).

The above reasons were all reflected in public opinions shared on websites such as Reddit and Viki Discussions. On May 2016, on the website Rakuten Viki Discussions, the user sara\_gerling88\_116 asks "I was just wondering what motivates you guys to subtitle? What are your incentives?" Some users expressed that it was an enjoyable and productive way to



pass their free time. The user fulko states “I started my journey in subtitling through boredom. I’ve had a lot of free time. So I decided to try this. And after a year I am happy. It’s enjoyable stuff.” Users also expressed that fansubbing provided social belonging. The user ajumma2 commented “It was actually fun and I ended up meeting a lot of wonderful people through Viki. Sometimes, I’d sub for a drama that I didn’t care for just because of the friendship I had formed with the fellow team members.” Users like sophie2you and seoyeonnie94 explained that one reason they subbed was to improve their language skills, particularly their listening skills. Moreover, subbing also allows users to use other relevant skills. The user icedthy explained “My goal, overall, is to keep improving my Korean, to practice Vietnamese so I don’t forget it, and to put my editing skills to work.” Another motivating factor expressed by a number of users was the enjoyment of receiving recognition for their work from viewers and peers. The user sophie2you states “...insightful comments on the episode along with glowing reviews and adulations of the subs keep me going!!!...I can...be adored by my fellow editors/senior editors/senior vikians and swell with pride.” Some users are motivated by the desire to be an active participant in, and give back to, the community. The user christina\_ writes “I feel I have to return some subtitles to the world (I have watched countless gigabytes of free subbed material over the years)”. Another motivation expressed by some users was the desire to put out a quality product. The user sophie2you comments “I enjoy knowing that the viewers will have an excellent experience too because the subtitles are the best that they can be.” Many users also expressed that they were motivated to introduce Korean content and culture to a more global audience. The user ladyvillegas writes “I think that the most important for me is that someone else would enjoy the drama, movie, etc. in my mother tongue, Spanish. I have friends and family that watch dramas on Viki and only know Spanish, so it’s for them too.” The user ajumma2 adds “I wanted to help those viewers and help globalize part of Korean culture, by providing accurate translation with informative editor’s notes.”

Other reasons mentioned in the Viki Discussion forum included a sense of commitment or obligation. The user sophie2you comments “...the commitment drives me to sub. To go yes, check. I did my contribution today. When I start a drama I keep at it until my part’s done.” The user moonandstars comments “...for some reason, I seem to be the main Chinese-



English subber...if I don't sub, then the progress is left more or less stagnant. And some of those viewers are horribly impatient."

Therefore, there are a large number of incentives which are not commercial for Viki users to fansub. However, Viki is a somewhat different case from other types of fansubbing, as it does offer compensation in the form of Viki "perks" such as a free VikiPass subscription in return for a certain number of contributions (Rakuten Viki, 2015). According to Ito (2017), fansubbers are not driven by commercial incentives, and some may actually be opposed. Many of the users responses coincided with this idea. The user *ajumma2* points out specifically that they do not participate in order to receive any of the rewards offered by Viki, including the ad-free viewing, free membership, QC gifts, or certificate, illustrating that the rewards offered by Viki do not factor in to the decision at all for some users. Most users appeared to view these rewards as an added bonus, rather than one of the main motivating factors. The user *christina\_* comments "Also, subtitling is a way to get the QC perks, so why not?" However, in the Reddit thread "Viki Disgusts Me", the user *Namiemore* expresses that the main or sole reason that they fansub is for the "perks" provided by Viki, writing "I do it because I want the free subscription and I don't feel exploited. I write about 500 subtitles each 3 months to maintain my subscription and that's it." Therefore, this shows that while some users such as *Namiemore* may sub solely for the benefits Viki provides, most users appear to see subbing as a hobby with Viki rewards as a bonus, and would likely do this work anyway were it not for the rewards.

#### 6.4 Crowdsourcing

Developments in technology have also allowed the proliferation of crowdsourcing since the 2000s (Jiménez-Crespo, 2019). Organisations began to take advantage of already established online communities to utilise the collective intelligence of the crowd to crowdsource translations (Jiménez-Crespo, 2019). According to Rosen (2011, p. 309), "crowdsourcing is a way of outsourcing tasks to communities of Internet users, typically for little or no compensation". Viki's system of user participation resembles crowdsourcing more than fansubbing in several ways. In contrast to fansubbing, which involves self-organized online communities, crowdsourcing is characterised by "participants responding



to an open call by a particular organization or institution that sets a task and initiates a dedicated platform where the translation process takes place” (Perego & Pacinotti, 2020, p. 47). Its users are not subbing entirely for free as Viki offers compensation in the form of certain “perks” and rewards in return for a certain number of contributions (Rakuten Viki, 2015). Viki also monetises fansubbing which “flouts the ‘not-for-profit’ spirit of most fansubbing ventures” (Dwyer, 2017). The platform offers tiered paid subscriptions (known as VikiPass) in return for ad-free, HD quality viewing and access to members-only content and previews. However, it is also not unlike usual fansubbing in that subtitles are created on a volunteer basis by fans with no training in translation (Dwyer, 2017). According to Dwyer (2017), crowdsourcing is hard to define and it is difficult if not pointless to distinguish between crowdsourcing and fansubbing. While crowdsourcing may sometimes offer some form of compensation, the work is often unpaid. Rosen (2011) discusses some of the motivations for people to participate in crowdsourcing, including learning and developing skills, receiving recognition from the organisation or peers, being creative, and being involved in hobbies or work that they have an interest in. Therefore, many of the reasons to participate in crowdsourcing are similar to the reasons people participate in fansubbing. But, crowdsourcing also shares similar problems with fansubbing. Firstly, the biggest concern for technology-driven translation is that of quality (O'Hagan, 2019). The majority of crowdsourcing participants are untrained and the work they produce tends to be of poorer quality than that of trained professionals (Rosen, 2011). Skilled professionals and experts tend to avoid crowdsourcing as they are able to find higher paid opportunities outside of crowdsourcing (Rosen, 2011). Secondly, participants are often not compensated for their work. Many times, crowdsourcing is used in the form of a competition where only a few winners are compensated and the majority of participants receive nothing (Rosen, 2011). This results a pay which is highly disproportionate relative to the work produced, and participants are inevitably paid far less than professionals would be for the same work (Rosen, 2011).



## 6.5 Implications for translators

Rosen (2011) points out that the cheaper labour cost of crowdsourcing is putting pressure on professionals in a number of creative industries including advertising, journalism and photography. According to Di Giovanni (2018, p. 25), “while the volume of subtitles produced worldwide increases and subtitling rates paid by large, multinational companies to professional translators hit bottom level, occasionally forcing them to a take-it-or-leave-it choice, fan communities expand in several directions”. Unsurprisingly, this has led to many translators to oppose crowdsourcing as they perceive that it could drive down the price of professional translations, threatening their jobs (Dwyer, 2017). Some members of the professional translation community have objected to the use of crowdsourced translation by companies such as LinkedIn and Facebook, leading to the creation of a group within LinkedIn called ‘Translators Against Crowdsourcing for Commercial Business’ (O’Hagan, 2009; Dwyer, 2017). However, Kelly (2009) argues that this objection may be misguided as crowdsourcing is merely another tool in the advancement of technology, similar to machine assisted translation which is now used widely by professionals but was once considered a threat. Kelly (2009) claims that crowdsourcing does not actually cost less, and the primary benefits include speed, quality improvement and reach rather than cost saving, meaning that translators should not be afraid that more crowdsourcing will drive down rates or take work away from translators. On the contrary, Kelly (2009) argues that crowdsourcing actually creates more work for freelance translators in areas of traditional projects, as well as post-editing and proofreading of crowdsourced content by creating opportunities in new markets previously not open to companies. Therefore, this research indicates that crowdsourcing should be embraced by the translation community rather than protested. However, crowdsourcing also raises other issues. Rosen (2011) points out that there could be legal issues with ownership of the ideas generated, ethical issues regarding using volunteers to replace paid employees, and privacy issues regarding keeping information safe from competitors (Rosen, 2011).

Recent advancements in technology have already had an immense impact on the way translators work (O’Hagan, 2019). Translation will continue to change in ways that we do not yet know as technology advances further (O’Hagan, 2019). To ignore these changes and



try to hold on too tightly to old traditions would be to encourage the 'demise' of the translation profession (O'Hagan, 2009). As García (2010) points out, these technologies are already here, and we must be able to embrace them and adapt to them.

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

### 7.1 Conclusion

Fansubs have both strengths and weaknesses. While they are more prone to errors, they are also produced and consumed by fans with high levels of genre knowledge and familiarity with the specific demands of the target audience (O'Hagan, 2009; Dwyer, 2017). However, as predicted, fansubs do not meet traditional commercial standards, with translations often erring too far on the side of literalness, resulting in subtitles that are too source-oriented for commercial use for a general audience that is unfamiliar with Korean language and culture and word-for-word translations that are unnatural or make little sense in English. By looking at public opinions shared on online discussion forums such as Reddit and Viki Discussions, it was found that many consumers of fansubs highly appreciate the source-oriented nature of the translations and additional translator's notes, while others find these irritating. It is likely that these strategies would lack appeal to a wider audience outside of the fan community which has a higher investment in learning Korean language and culture (Díaz-Cintas, 2005).

Therefore, the style of fansubs may not be a successful replacement for mainstream commercial subtitles. While there is evidence that Netflix sometimes uses fan translations, showing that fansubs are sometimes carried over to a professional environment, these subtitles were also heavily edited, proving that fansubs are not acceptable in a commercial environment as they are. There are many significant differences between the two styles that make fansubs unsuitable as commercial subtitles. These differences are due to a number of reasons, the biggest of these being the different purposes and target audiences of the two styles. As O'Hagan (2011) notes, it is not appropriate to apply the same standards of quality when comparing the two styles as they do not share the same goals or purpose. Furthermore, as Di Giovanni (2018) points out, the idea of what is erroneous depends on



audience type, knowledge and expectations, so while fansubbing style may be successful for its specific purpose and audience, it is likely to be less so in a commercial setting.

Viki is a commercial, for profit enterprise and provides its most active contributors with some form of compensation, meaning that its contributors walk a line between fansubbing and crowdsourcing. Crowdsourcing is opposed by many in the translation community, and there are still many problems with crowdsourcing translation including legal and quality issues. However, fansubs and crowdsourced translations have become possible with advances in technology, and others argue that these developments should be embraced. Whether professional translators are happy about it or not, the practice of crowdsourcing is growing, and fans will continue to fansub. However the ways of producing translation change as technology advances, we must be able to adapt to it.

## 7.2 Limitations of this study

This study has several limitations. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that my data collection was likely to be influenced by certain previous biases, such as the expectation that fansubs would have a higher frequency of errors. Secondly, I have knowledge of Korean, and therefore my perception of the subtitle quality may be skewed as I do not rely on subtitles to understand the content. Finally, all episodes were searched manually for significant differences so there likely to be a high rate of human error in my data collection, meaning that important information may have been missed.



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