

Między Oryginałem a Przekładem  
2022, no. 1(55), pp. 117-139  
<https://doi.org/10.12797/MOaP.28.2022.55.06>  
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# **Blurring the Line between Professional and Amateur Subtitling**

## **The Case of Thai TV Series, English Subtitles and Spanish Fansubs**

### **1. Introduction**

As opposed to professional translation, amateur practices are generally characterized by the translator's lack of guidelines and remuneration, resulting in translations that do not conform to professional standards. However, the reality in the media setting indicates a more complex scene that points to an overlap between professional and non-professional practices [Antonini and Bucaria 2016: 9]. The surge of global consumption of digital audiovisual content and the consequent demand for subtitling and dubbing do not match the insufficient availability of professionals in some languages [Díaz-Cintas 2018: 127]. Meanwhile, the advent of technology brings a rapid flow of digitized media, and enables viewers to manipulate and circulate their own versions, shifting their role from passive consumers to “prosumers,” or consumers who are also producers

[Denison 2011]. This complex media scene leads to novel and diverse forms of subtitles on the Internet, termed “cybersubtitling” by Díaz-Cintas [2018]. They range from subtitles produced out of fans’ affection for the show, subtitles that respond to political causes, to subtitles that no longer serve translational purpose, but create new meanings through parody.

One of the best-known forms of cybersubtitling is fansubbing. From subtitles created “by fans for fans” among Japanese anime lovers, fansubbing has expanded to numerous genres and languages and has become a practice better defined as “by fans for all” [Díaz-Cintas 2018: 133]. As a disruptive, grassroots phenomenon, fansubbing is characterized by norm-defying, creative textual features, and is often viewed as a sharp contrast to mainstream professional subtitling. Dwyer [2017: 135], for instance, conceptualizes fansubbing as “an errant or improper form of AVT that is currently reconfiguring the paradigms and politics of the screen and translation industries.” However, the growing body of literature on the topic suggests exceptions and diversity among fansubs across different languages and genres.

From the concern in early studies regarding fansubbing’s inferior quality, frequent translation errors, and dubious legality [Bogucki 2009; Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz-Sánchez 2006], recent research has pointed to an increasingly blurred line between fansubbing and mainstream practices, instead of sharp contrasts. Italian fansub groups, for instance, adopt style guides that are similar to mainstream subtitling conventions [Massidda 2015: 50-55], and Swedish fansubs hardly present textual evidence of creativity [Pedersen 2019]. Some fansub communities also operate within tight deadlines to compete against other groups for higher views and downloads, to the point that nudged the professional subtitling to shorten their turnaround time [Díaz-Cintas 2018: 131-132].

Regarding the translation process, large fansub communities such as the Argentinian aRGENTeaM operate with complex hierarchy, assigning well-defined roles and ranks to each participant, and even created an internal training system [Orrego-Carmona 2016: 220-221]. Instead of allowing anyone to participate in the translation, screening new potential contributors with admission tests has become a trend for various fansub groups [Díaz-Cintas 2018: 137]. There has also been evidence of fansubbers that were eventually hired and therefore converted into professional subtitlers [Casarini 2014], implying the fluid shifts from amateur to professional. Conversely, professional practices also seemed to be influenced by

amateur translation. Pérez-González [2014: 270-275], for instance, resorts to the term “cross-fertilization” to define the incorporation of performative onscreen texts, a typical feature in fansubbing, into a mainstream media production. Along the same line, the use of subtitles for parody in fake subs made its way to a traditional show in the form of “honest subtitles” [Díaz-Cintas 2018: 135].

Considering these changing traits, it might be necessary to re-evaluate the binary perception that strictly separates the professional and amateur subtitling. This paper will add to the discussion the case of the Thai show *Diary of Tootsies* (2016)<sup>1</sup> with its subtitles into English and Spanish. The fuzzy border between the professional and amateur subtitling practices in this case is highlighted as it involves both types of practices in the translation chain. The official version of English subtitles was selected by the fansubbers as a pivot to create their own version in Spanish.

Using the translations of *Diary of Tootsies* as a case study, this paper draws on comparative analysis of the texts in the translation chain to investigate the textual evidence of possible line blurring between the professional and the amateur subtitling. The professional subtitling conventions will be reviewed and applied as parameters, in order to detect the correspondences and deviations in the English official subtitles released by the producer, and the Spanish subtitles produced by the fans. Thanks to the collaboration with the fansubber who translated the series and other members of the group, it was possible to obtain the pivot version, the subtitle files, and the complete videos with hard subtitles in Spanish, as well as information from the interviews that complement the textual analysis.

## 2. Professional and Amateur Subtitling for Thai Media

For Thai TV shows, it is the piracy and the amateur translation initiatives that have played a key role in the outward media transfer. For decades, audiences in Laos, Cambodia, and parts of Myanmar bordering Thailand were able to view Thai soap operas thanks to spillover signals, and VCDs and DVDs containing illegally dubbed shows into local languages [Jiratitorn 2021: 129]. Official exports of Thai TV shows for telecast in South-east Asian countries began to gain presence only in the past decade, and the quantity and diversity of the shows were limited due to copyright

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<sup>1</sup> *Diary of Tootsies* [2016], directed by Piyachart Thong-Uam.

issues and restrictive media policy in the target countries [Jirattikorn 2016: 49]. In English-speaking and Spanish-speaking territories, the presence of Thai media is even more scarce. There seems to be no record of Thai TV shows broadcast on television channels whether in Europe, the US, or Latin America.

Consequently, fansubbing became a significant mechanism that introduced a wide range of Thai TV shows to the audience worldwide. The situation is comparable to the case of *anime* fansubbing in the mid-1990s, when fansubbing proved beneficial to the industry as it contributed to locate potential markets beyond the domestic one [Denison 2011: 450]. For Spanish-speaking viewers, fansubbing was probably the only channel that allowed them to experience Thai shows in their own language.

The arrival of Thai TV shows and films to Netflix in 2018 marked the beginning of an official distribution that brought Thai content to audiences worldwide. Subscribed viewers in Spain and Latin America are now able to access Thai content with the professionally subtitled version, and in dubbed version for certain shows. Netflix also began to collaborate with local production houses to create original content in Thai. *The Stranded*, the first Netflix original series in Thai was released in 2019, followed by *Bangkok Breaking* in 2021. Still, the number of Thai titles available on the platform is quite limited (less than 40 shows accessible from Spain as of 2021), and most of them were produced under the same Thai media conglomerate, GMM Grammy. Thus, fansubbing is still a significant channel that responds to the demand of Spanish-speaking viewers who seek content by other production houses, other genres, or those launched before 2018.

For the Thai>English>Spanish screen translation, Netflix's subtitles can be taken as the closest to professional subtitling counterpart. At extra-textual level, the professional and amateur translation practices coincide in various aspects. Netflix's initiative to offer more and more non-English content<sup>2</sup> hints at the trend to cater for niche audiences and the media decentralization that shifts the focus away from Hollywood-centric, unidirectional flow in the international mediascape. This seems to resonate with one of the causes of fansubbing in the beginning: the attempt to fulfil a gap for niche audiences. Moreover, in Netflix's ongoing production inspired by the world-famous Thai cave rescue event, the "culturally correct" point

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<sup>2</sup> <<https://www.cnet.com/news/netflixs-plan-to-get-everyone-watching-foreign-language-content/>>, visited 10 November 2021.

of view in the narration is emphasized.<sup>3</sup> The media streamer's position seems in line with the many cases of fansubbers who strive to provide an "authentic" and "more accurate" experience of the foreign through their source-oriented translations [Dwyer 2012: 229].

Similar to the fansubs, Spanish subtitles of Thai content offered by Netflix are produced as an indirect translation via English. This may have to do with the company's policy and workflow rather than the scarce cultural contact between Thailand and Spanish-speaking world. In any case, the reverse flow in the professional settings – the subtitling of Spanish films into Thai – was also carried out using English pivots [Kerdkidsadanon 2015].

### 3. Mainstream Subtitling vs Fansubbing

The notion of professional translations is closely linked to the practitioner's expertise, which ideally results from formal training. Other indicators include the working dynamic that involves commissioning agents who acknowledge and maintain the translators' status, and the financial remuneration the translators receive for their work [Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012]. Consequently, translations produced by untrained, unpaid practitioners who operate according to their own initiatives are regarded as non-professional or amateur practices. While it is generally acknowledged that the working process and the formal training contribute to ensure quality in professional translations, the amateur nature of their counterpart does not necessarily imply the lack of such mechanisms, as exemplified by exceptional cases of fansubbing in Section 1.

In subtitling, mainstream professional practices are characterized by the rigid conventions which were well-established in the Western world, to the extent that they became the standard which determines the quality of the subtitles.

As subtitling modality deals with a shift from oral to written, the time and space constraints are essential factors that shape the exhaustive subtitling conventions. Although details in formal aspects such as the number of characters and the maximum duration of subtitles on the screen may vary, they are specified to allow viewers enough time to read the subtitles comfortably while enjoying the visuals. Mainstream subtitling conventions seem to associate subtitles with "graphical disturbance," and most

<sup>3</sup> <<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/30/arts/netflix-thai-cave-boys-rescue.html>>, visited 10 November 2021.

subtitling guidelines indicate that good subtitles should pass unnoticed by the viewers [Massidda 2015: 59]. They also call for fixed placement of the subtitles and the use of only one color and font, possibly to prioritize legibility. In linguistic aspect, indispensable strategies for subtitling include text reduction, condensation, reformulation, and simplification for optimal readability within the constrained time [Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2020].

Apart from the general professional subtitling conventions, Netflix's timed text style guide will also be taken into account in this analysis, as it represents the mainstream subtitling counterpart in the Thai>English>Spanish language combination. Moreover, in the surge of subscription video-on-demand (SVODs) platforms that allow digital content to be viewed in all sizes of screens, Netflix's guideline is also a reference of prescriptive professional subtitling norms that are highly relevant and influential at present.

Fansubbing, on the other hand, seems to be situated at the opposite end from mainstream professional subtitling. In fact, the creative, norm-defying characteristics of fansubbing were the quality that initially attracted scholarly attention [Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz-Sánchez 2006; Ferrer Simó 2005]. As mentioned in the introduction of the paper, the heterogeneity of fansubs across languages and genres has been evident, with indication of influences between the professional and the amateur spheres. Still, fansubbing continues to be regarded as a disruptive phenomenon, with prototypical features that are recurrent in literature.

Based on characteristics widely recognized in *anime* fansubbing, Dwyer [2012: 226-230] proposed a model of four “overarching traits” of fansubs: formal innovation, collaborative methods, foreignization, and genre expertise. The formal innovation involves creative features that are distinctive from professional subtitling, such as the use of various fonts, colors, text size, the free positioning and movements of the (sub)titles, and the additional headnotes that foreground the translator's visibility as opposed to the preference in professional conventions to pass unnoticed. The collaborative methods allow fansubbers to distribute work online and contribute in the production flow according to their expertise. The foreignization approach in the translation, although not always adopted in all genres and languages, is mostly associated with fansubbing, as the phenomenon initially represents a resistance force of the audiences against a “culturally ‘deodorizing’ function” adopted in professional subtitling of *anime* [*ibid.*: 229]. Lastly, fansubbers hold greater expertise in the material

they translate than the professionals. The first and the third traits coincide with Pedersen's observation [2019] of three main common characteristics of fansubs when compared to professional subtitles: fansubs are less norm-governed, more creative, and more source-oriented.

Taking into account the expected contrast between professional subtitling and fansubbing, the subtitling conventions which are the common standards in the Western mediascape will be used as parameters for the comparative analysis of the subtitles in the translation chain in this study.

#### 4. *Diary of Tootsies* and Its Subtitles

*Diary of Tootsies* is a comedy TV series that was broadcast originally in Thailand during 2016-2017 on GMM 25 digital television channel. In Thai, the term “Toot” and “Tootsies” refer to effeminate gay men who may cross-dress and use female speech markers, although they may or may not desire to become women. The series was inspired by anecdotes based on true story, previously posted in a nationally famous Facebook page บันทึก ขອງตุ๊ด [Bunthuek Kong Toot, translated as “Toot's Diary”].

The series comprises two seasons in total. Following its success, a film sequel *Tootsies & The Fake* was released in 2019.<sup>4</sup> The plot revolves around a group of four queer friends: three “tootsies” Gus, Kim, Golf, and one lesbian, Natty. After three of them face a coincidental breakup with each one's boyfriend, they all agree to embark on their quest for new love in the busy city of Bangkok. The series seeks to create humoristic effects mostly by exploiting the stereotypes of “tootsies” that have been perpetuated in Thai media: the main characters are funny, loud, dramatic, and explicit about their sexuality, or even their promiscuity. Nonetheless, it also incorporates the realistic dimension of their day-to-day struggles against the bias and discriminations that still linger in the Thai society.

After the broadcast, the production house made the series available on their official YouTube channel “GDH.” Each episode was cut into four or five videos according to the initial breaks for advertisement. All episodes in the first season were uploaded with English subtitles in YouTube's closed caption format, which allows viewers to choose whether to activate them or not. As it was released by the production house via its official account, this version of English subtitles is considered in this study as professional

<sup>4</sup> *Tootsies and the Fake* [2019], directed by Kittiphak Thong-uam.

subtitles, as opposed to those made by fans and circulated freely over the Internet.

This version of English subtitles for *Diary of Tootsies* was selected by a group of Spanish-speaking fansubbers as a pivot version to translate into Spanish. The group, with the name “Thai Underground Fansub,” focused on subtitling only Thai TV shows and films into Spanish. The group made explicit the fact that their subtitles are indirect translations and mostly mentioned the English subtitles source, which could be fansubs or official subtitles, in their videos or in their platforms, although for *Diary of Tootsies* the credits for the English subtitles were not given. Thanks to the interview with the fansubber who subtitled the show, it was confirmed that the intermediary text was the official English closed captions, and that the group prioritized using the official version as a pivot whenever they could obtain it. The group’s website lists pseudonyms of a total of fifteen fansubbers from Spain (5), Argentina (3), Mexico (5), Colombia (1), and Ecuador (1). Nevertheless, the interview reveals that only four fansubbers, most of them from Spain, were offering consistent contributions. This fansub group ceased all of their activities at the end of 2017, although their website is still available, as well as the entries that allow access to the videos with their Spanish subtitles.

In *Diary of Tootsies*, the fact that the indirect translation chain involves both official subtitles and fansubs foregrounds how closely professional and amateur translation practices coexist, interact, and potentially influence each other. GDH 559, the company that produced the show, was founded as a successor to the film studio GTH, which had already witnessed the tremendous impact of international fansubs with the phenomenon of *Hormones the Series* (2013–2015). The teen drama gained popularity in Southeast Asia even before its official export thanks to fansubbing into various languages. In the *Hormones* special episode which gives closure to the first season of the show, the producer seemed to hold a positive attitude towards fansubbing and even included screenshots of the fansubs in English and Vietnamese.

Whether it was intentional or not, GDH’s decision to upload *Diary of Tootsies* in its entirety in high quality video format on such a platform as YouTube, with subtitles in closed caption format, evidently facilitated fansubbers’ operations. The high-quality videos could be used directly as the raw video file, and the soft subtitles, with the timecode already



incorporated, can be extracted easily, and used as a template without the need to transcribe.

The analysis in this paper draws on the first season of *Diary of Tootsies*, which contains twelve episodes of approximately 25 minutes each. It is the only season of the show that was subtitled by this Spanish-speaking fansub group. The material for the textual analysis in this study includes all the three version of the texts in the production chain: the ultimate source text with Thai audio, the English pivot subtitles, and the ultimate target text which is the version with Spanish fansubs.

## 5. Findings

The findings indicate that several textual features that are commonly attributed to fansubbing are also present in the official English subtitles of *Diary of Tootsies* (2016). On the other hand, there are instances in which the Spanish fansubbers did not follow the translation choices employed in the English pivot and, instead, opted for a solution that adheres more to the mainstream professional pole in the corresponding subtitles.

It should be mentioned that a variety of creative features was detected in the Spanish fansubs of *Diary of Tootsies*. These features include the addition of explanatory headnotes to point out cultural references, as will be shown further in section 5.3; various fonts, colors, and placement of titles are employed to distinguish dialogue subtitles from song lyric subtitles, or to integrate as part of the visual aesthetics of the scenes. There are also several (sub)titles containing the fansub group's name and a link to their platform, an addition that "allows fansubbers to maximize their own visibility as translators" [Pérez-González 2007: 76], a degree of visibility rarely observed in professional subtitling. Surprisingly, the results of the comparative analysis in this paper reveal that certain unconventional features found in the official English subtitles are not adopted in the corresponding Spanish version. Instead, in many instances, the reverse trend is found: the Spanish fansubs display a translation strategy that is more aligned with professional subtitling conventions.

Using examples from the texts, this section will demonstrate the unconventional features in the English version and the way they are rendered in the Spanish fansubs.

### 5.1. Unconventional Use of Orthotypography

In professional conventions, “subtitles should not be cluttered with unnecessary punctuation that does not carry any added value and is pleonastic,” as excessive use would only take up space and convey the information viewers already perceive via the images and the sound [Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2020: 123]. The use of double or multiple exclamation marks or question marks, and the mix of the two punctuation marks in the same subtitle is frowned upon. The same convention is reflected in Netflix’s style guide for Spanish subtitles: “[d]o not use exclamation and question marks together (?!), please pick the one that suits the intonation or the meaning best.”<sup>5</sup>

However, this rule of thumb does not seem to apply to the English subtitles of *Diary of Tootsies*. Unconventional punctuation is used in several ways to convey paralinguistic information. Double and triple exclamation marks are used for dramatic effects when the character shouts or screams. Upper-case letters are also used to indicate when the character is shouting or speaking with emphasis. In these cases, similar punctuation is adopted in Spanish fansubs.

TABLE 1. Unconventional Use of Orthotypography

Episode	English Subtitles	Spanish Fansubs
E1	Huh!? Snake!?	¡¿Eh?! ¡¿Serpiente?!
E6	Give it to me!!!	¡¡¡Dámelo!!!
E6	I CAN’T HOLD IT ANYMORE!	¡YA NO PUEDO AGUANTAR MÁS!

Other forms of unconventional orthotypography in the official English subtitles include the use of repetitive consonants and vowels to reflect long sound. This practice seems to stem from the influence of the Thai language. In informal contexts such as social media posts or text messages, it is common for Thais to repeat the last letter in the word to imply one’s surprise, emphasis, shock, or even to make the sentence sound less curt. This feature has been found in various scenes throughout the series. In one of these, the lengthened pronunciation was deliberately used as a resource to build a stereotypical character and create humoristic effects. The scene depicts Natty,

<sup>5</sup> <<https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/217349997-Castilian-Latin-American-Spanish-Timed-Text-Style-Guide>>, visited 23 October 2021.

the only lesbian in the group, during her working hour as a promotional model in a trade show. In Thailand, promotional models usually employ a high-pitched voice, repetitive phrases, and lengthened pronunciation to attract people to their booth or to invite them to participate in any activity hosted onstage. The actress who plays Natty deliberately exaggerates these characteristics, marking a sharp contrast from how she normally speaks in other scenes. In fact, the participant in the game Natty hosts on stage later makes fun of Natty's prosody because of how annoying it is.

While the lengthened and exaggerated pronunciation is emphasized in the English subtitles through the repetition of the last letter of the words, the unconventional spellings were not transferred into the Spanish fansubs version. They maintain standard writing without any excessive letter. Natty's interventions and the corresponding subtitles are listed in Table 2 as examples.

TABLE 2. Repetitive Consonant Use

<b>Episode 8</b>		
<b>Thai Audio [back translation]</b>	<b>English Subtitles</b>	<b>Spanish Fansubs [back translation]</b>
เรายกกองทัพกันมาเรียกได้ว่ายิ่งใหญ่อลังการ [You can say we have brought a great huge army.]	We brought an army we can say is sooo big and sooo marvelous.	Trajimos un ejército que podemos decir que es muy grande y maravilloso. [We brought an army that we can say is very big and marvelous.]
สวัสดีค่ะ [Goodbye]	Thank youuuu.	Gracias. [Thank you.]
คุณที่พร้อมนะคะ [Miss, are you ready?]	Miss, are you readyyy?	Señorita, ¿está lista? [Miss, are you ready?]
คำถามต่อไป พร้อมนะคะคุณที่ [Next question. Ready, Miss?]	Are you readyyy for the next question, Miss?	¿Está lista para la siguiente pregunta, señorita? [Are you ready for the next question, miss?]

In mainstream subtitles, foul language is often toned down or omitted, and for telecast, swear words might be censored using asterisks, abbreviations, or grawlixes, especially in the cases that the expletives are bleeped out [Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2020: 189-190]. However, censorship may

no longer predominate when it comes to SVOD platforms. For Netflix, the style guide for English subtitles states that “dialogue must never be censored.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, for Castilian and Latin American Spanish, it is specified that “expletives should be rendered as faithfully as possible.”<sup>7</sup> Use of an ellipsis to censor the words in the subtitles is only adopted to reflect the utterances that are already bleeped out in the audio of the source text.

In *Diary of Tootsies*, swear words are perfectly audible in the Thai audio track, but they are censored in the English subtitles. While the decision to censor expletives is in line with mainstream subtitling, there is an inconsistency that seems to be more identifiable in amateur practices than professional, standardized ones. Instead of implementing a specific and repetitive punctuation pattern, at least four different punctuations are used to censor the same swear word. Conversely, the Spanish fansubbing fits Netflix’s prescriptive guidelines in spelling out all expletives and prioritize readability of the subtitles.

TABLE 3. Various Punctuation Patterns for Censorship

Episode	Official English Subtitles	Spanish Fansubs [with back translation]
E2	Then you f#ck.	Luego te lo tiras. [Then you fuck him.]
E5	Can friends f*ck with you?	¿Pueden tus amigos follar contigo? [Can your friends fuck you?]
E6	F’ my new car!!	¡¡Que le den a mi coche nuevo!! [Fuck my new car!!]
E7	I’m gonna F* her!	¡Me la voy a tirar! [I’m going to fuck her!]

Of the various types of unconventional orthography found in the official English subtitles, only the use of several exclamation marks, sometimes mixed with question marks, and upper-case letters to convey paralinguistic information are adopted in Spanish fansubs.

<sup>6</sup> <<https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/217350977-English-Timed-Text-Style-Guide>>, visited 24 October 2021.

<sup>7</sup> <<https://partnerhelp.netflixstudios.com/hc/en-us/articles/217349997-Castilian-Latin-American-Spanish-Timed-Text-Style-Guide>>, visited 23 October 2021.

## 5.2. Informal Abbreviations

Abbreviation use is not encouraged in professional subtitling, unless necessary to comply with space and/or time constraints [Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2020: 137]. In that case, subtitlers should make sure that the abbreviations they use are well-known among the audience to avoid confusion. The official English subtitles of *Diary of Tootsies* do not conform to this convention. Acronyms that are uncommon such as “K.I.A.” for “killed in action” and colloquial “B.O.” for “body odor” were found. Informal abbreviations, the type widely used in text messages and chats such as “OMG” and “Cuz” were also used.

Considering that the overall register of the show is casual, with occasional expletives and abundant slang expressions that are common within Thai queer community, these abbreviations may be used to deliver a register fit for the tone of the show.

TABLE 4. Informal Abbreviations

Episodes	Thai audio	English subtitles	Spanish fansubs
E6	Yoshi: หาคะไรครับ [What are you looking for?]	What are you looking for?	¿Qué estás buscando? [What are you looking for?]
	Golf: เต้า อู๋! [Turtle, oops!] ทำของตกคะ [I dropped something.]	<b>B.O...</b> Oh! I dropped something.	B.O. (Olor corporal) ¡Uy! Se me cayó algo. (N/T: Golf quería decir «Nada», la pronunciación es similar a «B.O.» las siglas de olor corporal en inglés.) [B.O. (Body odor) Oops! I dropped something.] Headnote: (Translator’s note: Golf wanted to say “Nothing,” the pronunciation is similar to “B.O.” the abbreviation for body odor in English.)

E7	ทหารที่ประมาทเนี่ย ผลลัพธ์คือ ความตายคะอิติม [A reck- less soldier will face death as a conse- quence, Kim.]	A soldier who isn't careful deserves to be <b>K.I.A.</b>	Un soldado que no tiene cuidado, merece ser eliminado de inmediato. [A soldier who's not careful, deserves to be eliminated immediately.]
E11	(speaking in English) Oh my God, I don't want to die!	<b>OMG!</b> I don't want to die!	¡Dios mío! ¡No quiero morir! [My god! I don't want to die!]
E11	นี่ไง ก็เป็นแบบนี้ ใครจะคบ [See? Being like this, who would want to be her friend?]	<b>Cuz</b> she is this way, nobody wants to be her friend.	¿Ves? Como es así, na- die quiere ser su amiga. [See? She's like this, no one wants to be her friend.]

As shown in Table 4, most of these abbreviations are not transferred to the Spanish version. The Spanish fansubs seem to give priority to the full spelling. In the example from Episode 6, which is the only case that an abbreviation is maintained in the fansubs, the acronym “B.O.” is accompanied by an explicit translation into Spanish and an explanation of the word play. In the scene, Golf and Kim are whispering to each other under the table because they suspect that an unpleasant smell they notice earlier is Yoshi’s body odor. Yoshi, who is sitting across them, peeks under the table to ask what they are looking for. Golf, caught by surprise, says: ต๋า [tao], which literally means “turtle” in Thai, and is slang for body odor. The subtitler into English might have chosen “B.O.” to maintain the colloquial register, although the context does not necessarily require an abbreviated word.

When rendered into Spanish, the fansubbers maintain the abbreviated form, but they also add a translation in the parentheses, plus a headnote to explain the situation, resulting in a foreignizing approach complemented with nondiegetic explanation that is in line with prototypical fansubbing. Their approach reflects the fansubbers’ concern to make sure their viewers understand the message, although it should be mentioned that the attempt to describe the word play is erroneous. The word play in this case has to do

with the double meaning in Thai, not a similar pronunciation of the word in Thai and the word “B.O.” in English.

### 5.3. *Translator’s Notes or Glosses*

In mainstream subtitling, one of the ideal goals is to pass unnoticed by viewers. On the contrary, fansubbers often deliberately draw their viewers’ attention by using translator’s notes or glosses. These result in interventionist comments that introduce additional non-diegetic information. However, the official English subtitles of *Diary of Tootsies* present deviations from this professional subtitling convention, as additional comments can be detected. These comments are not presented as separated headnotes, possibly due to the restriction of YouTube’s closed caption format. Still, in a few subtitles, non-diegetic information was added within parentheses for a similar purpose: to help a non-Thai viewer better understand instances of word play or cultural nuances. These notes usually complement source-oriented translation choices.

In the first episode, there is a scene when Tee, Gus’s boyfriend, breaks up with Gus. As soon as Gus begs him to stay, the shot changes to a medium close-up shot of Tee who repeatedly mouths the word “Toot.” His voice is substituted by the sound of telephone busy signal, which is subtitled into English as:

Toot. Toot. Toot. Toot. Toot... (Gay – in Thai slang)

The word “ต๊อต” [toot] in Thai, apart from a term for effeminate gay men, is also the onomatopoeia of the busy signal. The double meaning is used in this scene as a humoristic element. To let non-Thai viewers capture the word play, the English subtitle adds the translation of the word in parentheses. This subtitle also demonstrates another trait that does not conform to mainstream subtitling conventions: the lack of reduction. The word “toot” is written almost as many times as it sounds. In Spanish fansubs, the same word is written without reduction, similarly to the English subtitles, and the non-diegetic information is translated and presented separately as a headnote, placed at the top of the screen.

Subtitle: Toot, toot, toot, toot, toot, toot...

Headnote: (Toot: Significa «gay» en jerga tailandesa.)

Another example is a scene in the gym, featuring Gus, Kim, and Golf. Kim finds a match nearby in a dating application and the man walks over

so they can meet in person. The three friends look in horror as the man in a flowery pink crop top introduces himself.

TABLE 5. Examples of Non-diegetic Additions

Episode	Thai Audio	English Subtitles	Spanish Fansubs
12			
	ปอเอง [It's me, Por.]	It's me Por.	Soy Por. [It's Por]
	เรียกแมงปอก็ได้ [You can call me Mang Por.]	You can call me, Mang Por (Dragonfly)	Puedes llamarme «Mang Por» (Libélula).

“Por,” which can refer to either dragonfly or jute, is a common gender-neutral nickname in Thai. “Mang por,” on the other hand, tends to be a female name. It is common for effeminate gay men and transgenders in Thailand to modify their names or change them completely to build a more feminine identity. In this scene, Por’s display photo in the dating application shows only his bare muscular torso, which creates an expectation that contrasts with his effeminate demeanor and clothing. The visual is even more emphasized by his soft voice and his cute “dragonfly” nickname. For this reason, the subtitlers might have felt the need to convey the meaning of the nickname within parentheses. And the Spanish fansubs did not miss the opportunity to render this additional information.

The English subtitles also exploit non-diegetic space to indicate the dialects in the audio. In Episode 12, the use of dialect is the key to create humor. In several Thai shows, the Isan dialect, which is spoken in the north-eastern region of the country, is associated with a stereotype of working-class people who are poorly educated. On the other hand, people who speak English fluently are often viewed as well-educated and upper-class. The portrayal of Peary in Episode 11 and 12 is based on this stereotype. The woman frequently throws in English vocabulary when she speaks Thai and pretends that she does not understand a word of Isan, the dialect spoken in Khon Kaen province where the two episodes take place. Nevertheless, after the chaos at a local concert, it transpires that Peary speaks Isan fluently, which makes Gus and his friends suspect that she might not come from the kind of fancy background she hinted at.



TABLE 6. Examples of Non-diegetic Additions

Episode 12	Thai Audio	English Subtitles
	คือมันมีคนปาก [Why isn't anybody saying anything?]	(Dialect) Why isn't anybody saying anything?
	ปากก็กั้นดี [Are you all mute?]	Are you all mute!?

In this scene, Gus, Kim, Golf, Natty, and Peary follow a local who leads them out of the concert area in which gunshots are constantly heard. The local asks in Isan where they are staying, to give them directions, but no one replies as they do not understand the dialect, until Peary loses her patience and starts replying in the same dialect. The indication of dialect use is crucial in this scene because it is the revelation moment of Peary's identity. After she speaks Isan for the first time, other characters look at Peary in astonishment while a surprise sound effect is added. In English subtitles, the dialect is marked with the description in the parentheses, as an additional part within the subtitle. The Spanish fansubs offer similar information, but with a more creative strategy: the subtitles in these episodes are color-coded according to the distinction between standard Thai, English, and Isan. The phrases spoken in Isan are written in green, in contrast to the regular yellow when the audio is in standard Thai. The official English subtitles and the Spanish fansubs give viewers similar information of the dialect, although the strategy to mark it is different.

#### 5.4. Addition and Lack of Reduction

As mentioned in section 3, text reduction is a key characteristic of subtitling, as it is necessary to maintain the synchronization between the audio and the written translation. In mainstream subtitling in which subtitles are limited to a maximum of two lines within a strict time constraint, strategies such as condensation, reformulation, and omission are necessary [Díaz-Cintas and Remael 2020: 146-168]. Addition within the subtitle can be used, for instance, to give viewers a better understanding of a cultural reference they are not familiar with, although evidence from empirical studies has shown that it is not a common strategy in mainstream subtitling [Pedersen 2011]. In *Diary of Tootsies*, reduction is not strictly implemented in the English subtitles. Repeated words and phrases are often reflected in the subtitles, as shown in Table 7:

TABLE 7. Examples of Reduction Avoided

Episode	English Subtitles
E7	Down it! Down it! Down it! Down it!
E7	Kill it! Kill it! Kill it! Kill it!
E11	Oh my god! Oh my god! Oh my godddd!

Moreover, some subtitles contain additional items that are not mentioned in the spoken dialogue.

TABLE 8. Additions

Episode 2		
สงครามยกที่สอง เริ่ม! [Second round of the battle. Go!]	<b>Queer</b> war, Round 2. Fight!	Guerra de maricas, segunda ronda. ¡A luchar! [Queer war, second round. Fight!]
Episode 5		
อย่าหวังว่าคุณจะจ่ายเงินเพิ่ม [Don't expect me to pay more money!]	Don't expect me to pay <b>even a Satang</b> more.	No esperes que pague ni un sólo satang más. [Don't expect me to pay even a Satang more.] Headnote: (100 Satang = 1 Baht)

In the second example in Table 8, the addition contains a cultural reference “Satang” which is the smallest unit of Thai currency. This addition of the cultural reference that is not very well known outside of Thailand may be problematic as it could cause confusion for international viewers. The Spanish fansubbers seemed to detect this potential problem. While they chose to retain the item in the subtitles, a decision in line with the source-oriented approach typical to fansubs, they also felt the need to add an explanatory headnote to clarify the meaning.

While the Spanish fansubs do display a tendency towards source-oriented translation and resort to formal innovation to deal with translation problems, they do not always follow the unconventional features in the corresponding English subtitles, as shown in section 5.1 and 5.2. Furthermore,

textual evidence shows instances in which the source-oriented translation choice employed in English subtitles is reversed in Spanish fansubs.

One example is the translation of the word “เท” [tay], which is a Thai slang used mainly in gay community. The term, which means to dump or to leave someone, is written in Thai on the screen when it appears for the first time in the first episode. The narrator proceeds to explain its definition, and the characters keep using the slang throughout the episode as the show reveals how the three main characters are left heartbroken at the same time. In all instances that this slang appears, it is rendered into English by transliteration into “tay,” followed by the meaning in English within parentheses in the same subtitle. On the contrary, in the Spanish fansubs, the transliteration is used only in the moment when it was introduced. In subsequent scenes, they simply use the word “dejar” which means “dump” in Spanish. The back translation from Thai conserves the slang word using transliteration “tay” to mark its use in the context.

TABLE 9. Reversal Trend in Spanish Fansubs

Episode 1 Thai Audio	English Subtitles	Spanish Fansubs
พวกมึง พี่แฉคเทกูแล้ว [Folks, Hack “tay” me!]	Girls, Hack ‘tay’-ed me!	¡Chicas! ¡Hack me ha «tayeado»! [Girls! Hack “tay”-ed me!]
มันเป็นคำกริยา แปลว่าทิ้ง [“Tay” is a verb, means “to dump.”]	Tay’ is a verb that means to ‘dump’.	«Tay» es un verbo que significa «dejar» o «deshacerse de algo». [“Tay” is a verb that means “to dump” or “to get rid of something.”]
สามารถใช้กับเรื่องเล็กๆ อย่างเทเพื่อน [It can be used in simple situations like “tay” friends]	It’s used in everyday situations like ‘tay’ (ditch) your friends	Se usa en situaciones cotidianas como cuando te «deshaces» de tus amigos. [It is used in daily situations like when you “get rid of” your friends.]

ไปจนถึงเรื่องใหญ่ๆ อย่าง ถูกแฟนเท [or in serious matters like get- ting “tay” by the boyfriend.]	or in more serious matters like your boyfriend ‘tay’-s (dumps) you.	<i>O en asuntos más serios, como cuando tu novio te «deja».</i> [Or in more serious matters like when your boyfriend “dumps” you.]
ห้าปีแล้วมาเท [Five years and now he “tay” me.]	5 years and now he ‘tay’-ed (dumped) me!	¡5 años y ahora me deja! [Five years and now he dumps me!]
จะเทมันก่อนที่มันจะเท [I will “tay” them before they “tay” me.]	And I will ‘tay’ (dump) them before they ‘tay’ me.	Y les dejaré antes de que ellos me dejen. [And I will dump them before they dump me.]

It is undeniable that in this case the translation decision adopted in Spanish fansubs results in smoother, better readable phrases, which is more inclined to the mainstream conventions than the source-oriented approach in the English subtitles that attempt to retain and highlight the Thai slang term.

## 6. Conclusions

This case study of *Diary of Tootsies* (2016) and its subtitles offers textual evidence of the complexity and the fluidity between professional and amateur subtitling. The official English subtitles released by the show producer contain various features that are generally attributed to fansubbing. Conversely, while the subsequent Spanish fansubs display creative textual features of their own, several of those from the English pivot are discarded instead of being adopted in the corresponding subtitles. These findings bring to the fore the notion that, in the era of digitalization that has enabled potential consumers-turned-producers and the myriad forms of media translation, the dichotomy between the professional and the amateur practices might be too simplistic.

The fact that unconventional features associated to fansubs are also observed in official subtitles implies that amateur practices are, to some extent, creating an impact in the media, and that the experimental, norm-breaking features that used to be ruled out in professional practices may also prove to be useful for mainstream viewers. On the other hand, as shown by this study and a few others [Massidda 2015; Dore and Petrucci

2021; Orrego-Carmona 2016], fansubbing is also influenced by certain subtitling conventions similar to the ones employed in mainstream subtitling.

Considering the limitation of the case study, further research using a larger corpus will be necessary to determine whether similar findings are recurrent in AV texts of other genres, of different producers, or those available in other platforms, within the same Thai>English>Spanish media transfer. On the other hand, as a case of an underrepresented language combination that enables the scarce media flow from Thailand to the global English-speaking public, this study also raises the question whether and to what extent the subtitling conventions that are widely used and accepted in Anglocentric mediascape are applicable in professional practices in other parts of the world.

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### **ABSTRACT**

Fansubbing has generally been characterised by particular features that deviate from professional subtitling conventions; however, recent research begins to show the complexity of the phenomenon and hints at how the line between the professional and the amateur practices is blurring [Dore and Petrucci 2021; Massidda 2015]. The case of *Diary of Tootsies*, a Thai comedy series and its translations is another representative example of the interconnection of professional and amateur AVT and the need to question the dichotomy between the two practices. This paper revisits professional subtitling conventions and the unconventional features typically associated with fansubs, and then maps them onto the subtitles in the indirect translation chain: the official English subtitles, used as a pivot, and the fansubs created by Spanish-speaking fans. The findings reveal several textual features that are usually attributed to fansubs can also be detected in official subtitles, for instance, unconventional uses of orthotypography, informal abbreviations, and additional explanations. Textual evidence indicates further blurring as these distinctive traits are not always adopted in the corresponding Spanish fansubs. In some cases, fansubbers opt for translation decisions more typical of what might be expected in professional subtitling.

**Keywords:** Fansubbing, Thai-Spanish, amateur translation, audiovisual translation, indirect translation