

Pirates (!) Strike Back: Turkish Fansubbers Standing up for Fansubbing*

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Abstract

This study is primarily intended to describe Turkish fansubbers' efforts to exist as professionals rather than incompetent amateurs and fansubbing in Turkey and to draft a non-exhaustive fansubber profile on the basis of a corpus mainly consisting of interviews with "famous" Turkish fansubbers, who have been invited for an interview to defend themselves against explicit and implicit allegations and to explain their undertaking. The corpus comprises two types of data source, i.e. print and online media. Drawing on the views of the interviewees, the corpus analysis has assured that the present study can be built on such parameters as legality/ethics, professional recognition, visibility, censorship, quality, motives of fansubbing, remuneration, linguistic proficiency, fansubbing skills and demographics. Together with the literature review, the analyses have shown that the most serious accusation brought against fansubbers is copyright infringement (Hatcher, 2005), i.e. "pirating", whereas the mildest is mistranslation. Although legal concerns are generally thought to stand out as the severest matter, it is interesting that almost no confrontation exists between fansubbers and copyright holders (Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez, 2006) but it does exist between colleagues and subtitling critics (viewers, columnists or scholars). Thus, it can be speculated that professional recognition is the primary concern of fansubbers although their undertaking is a non-profit voluntary work.

Keywords: Turkish fansubbers, pirating, professional recognition, legality, defence

Korsanlar (!) Kendilerini Savunuyorlar: Türkiye'deki Amatör Altyazı Çevirmenliğinin Betimlenmesi

Öz

Bu çalışmanın başlıca amacı, amatör altyazı çevirmenlerin yetersiz amatörlerden ziyade profesyonel altyazı çevirmenleri olarak var olma çabaları ve Türkiye'deki amatör altyazı çevirmenliğini (fansubbing) betimlemek ve belirtik ve örtük suçlamalara karşı kendilerini savunan amatör altyazı çevirmenlerinin küçük kapsamlı bir profilini oluşturmaktır. Bu amaçla "ünlü" amatör altyazı çevirmenleri ile yapılan görüşlerden oluşan bir bütünce kullanılmıştır. Bütünce, basılı ve çevrimiçi medya olmak üzere iki tür veri kaynağından oluşmaktadır. Görüşmelere katılan çevirmenlerin görüşleri göz önünde bulundurulduğunda, bütünce çözümlenmeleri; çalışmanın yasallık/etik kurallar, mesleki tanınırlık, görünürlük, sansür, kalite, çeviri işine güdüleyen etmenler, ödeme/ücret, dilsel yeterlilik, altyazı çevirisi becerileri ve demografik bilgiler üzerine kurgulanabileceğini göstermiştir. Çözümlenmeler, alanyazın taraması ile birlikte en ciddi suçlamanın telif hakkı ihlali (Hatcher, 2005), başka bir deyişe "korsanlık"; en hafifinin ise yanlış çeviri yapmak olduğunu göstermiştir. Yasal kaygılar genel olarak en ciddi konu gibi görünse de çevirmenler ve telif hakkı sahipleri arasında hiçbir yasal karşılaşmanın yaşanmaması (Díaz-Cintas ve Sánchez, 2006), buna karşın tartışmaların daha çok meslektaşlar arasında ve eleştirmenler (izleyiciler, köşe yazarları veya akademisyenler) ile gerçekleşmesi ilgi çekicidir. Bu nedenle, yaptıkları iş kar amacı gütmeyen bir uğraş olsa da mesleki tanınırlığın amatör altyazı çevirmenlerinin başlıca amacı olduğu söylenebilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Türk amatör altyazı çevirmenleri, korsanlık, yasallık, savunma

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INTRODUCTION

With the advent of the internet, soft material and information sharing have exponentially increased and become one of the most controversial issues of the 21st century. Although the digital world did not start information sharing, it certainly revolutionized it. It has also brought along the discussions on the legality of this act (Bayar, 2012: 5), which is obvious from the amount of research on legal issues concerning the sharing of “media products varying from music to films and TV shows to literature and so on, on peer-to-peer networks sites” (Bayar, 2012: 5; O’Hagan, 2009: 12; Sajna, 2013: 15; Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez, 2006: 45; Condry, 2010: 193). Visual products are among the most shared products. For example, according to *Time*, “*Game of Thrones* has claimed the distinction of being the most illegally downloaded show in the world for the third year in a row” and “was downloaded an estimated 8.1 million times via *BitTorrent*” (Fritzell, 2014). Allegedly, more than 7.1 million people legally watched the show’s fourth season finale, which is “still fewer than the show’s total downloads via *BitTorrent*” (Fritzell, 2014). According to Orrego-Carmona (2014: 77), “half the episode downloads occurred during the first week after the release, reflecting the audience’s unwillingness to put up with extended delays in international releases”. However, because such products are downloaded illegally, way before their legal introduction to the audience and before legal subtitling or dubbing, they need to be customized to appeal to the audience. “Under these circumstances, subtitling is an essential requirement for international audiences since not everybody can consume the content in its original language” (Orrego-Carmona, 2014: 78), and this essential need for subtitling is met by fansubbing.

Despite its importance as a linguistic medium of access to non-subtitled videos, it seems that fansubbers’ contribution to cultural interaction is underestimated, their practice is belittled and they are called “pirates” because of the alleged illegality of their undertaking. The aim of this paper is not to defend fansubbers, but to describe how they think about and defend themselves against such allegations and their efforts to exist as non-professional professionals. Accordingly, the present paper discusses fansubbing in Turkey in terms of such variables as legality, visibility, censorship, professional recognition, motivation to fansub, remuneration, and quality of fansubs. Thus, the paper firstly attempts to define fansubbing and discusses the above variables building on views on fansubbing in the related literature. Then, it provides the views of Turkish fansubbers on fansubbing based on the interviews with them and analyzes the legality, visibility, censorship, professional recognition, motivation, remuneration, quality concerning their practice drawing on these interviews. Lastly, it presents the findings in relation to these variables as well as demographics and fansubbing competence, and discusses the conclusions drawn from the analyzed interviews.

The author believes that the paper is highly important in that it describes fansubbing in Turkey, on which there is exiguous research, and it provides a glance into a scholarly neglected ramification of translation.

1. DEFINING FANSUBBING

Fansubbing is short for fan subtitling and referred to as **subtitling by fans for fans** (Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez, 2006), **fan-based translation** and **fan-produced subtitles** (O’Hagan: 2009), **community translation** and **fan translation** (O’Hagan: 2011), **amateur subtitling**

(Sajna: 2013) (For more variants of the term, see Bold [2011: 5]). It can be inferred from these coinings that fansubbing is a form of subtitling produced by amateurs and fans for fans at a near professional standard. Zhang (2013: 30) defines fansubbing as “the process by which fans translate and subtitle various types of audiovisual material into a language other than that of the original”. O’Hagan (2011: 14) refers to fansubbing as “translation performed voluntarily by Internet users and is usually produced in some form of collaboration often on specific platforms by a group of people forming an online community”. The product of fansubbing called a fansub, which used to be “a fan-produced, translated, subtitled version of a Japanese anime program” (Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez, 2006: 37) and “began with the creation of the first anime clubs back in the 1980s” (Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez, 2006: 37; O’Hagan, 2009: 94). Yet as Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez (2006: 45) put it, the concept of fansubbing started “growing wider and encompassing other language combinations and genres” and expanded to include “a wider range of digital content” (O’Hagan, 2011: 13) and “fansubs of all types of audiovisual works” (He, 2014: 310).

As aforementioned characteristics of fansubbing suggest, it is a voluntary undertaking, which connotes that it is performed free of charge and therefore professional codes which typically apply to professional translators are believed not to be binding for fansubbers. Wang (2014: 1904) claims that “since most translators in the fansubs are not professional translators, their translation[s] are not restricted by orthodox translation standards. The professional translators always talk about those translation principles to follow, or what kind of methods to use. But the fansub members seldom think about that, they just translate any way they want as long as it is ‘suitable’”. Bruti (2015) corroborates Wang’s point of view by saying, “fansubs do not adhere to the rules of use of professional subtitles” (Bruti, 2015: 15) and “fansubbing does not need to attend to the formal and linguistic norms and conventions that are requested in professional translation” (Bruti, 2015: 19). “Fansubs share some of the characteristics of professional subtitling, but they are clearly more daring in their formal presentation, taking advantage of the potential offered by digital technology” (Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez, 2006: 51) and some of their subtitling techniques have been adopted in the professional domain (Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez, 2006: 47).

There is a considerable amount of research comparing fansubbers and professional subtitlers, and this research has revealed that one of the main arguments in these academic studies is that in contrast to professional subtitling, legality and ethics are among the major concerns related to fansubbing. Although O’Hagan (2009: 12) and Sajna (2013: 15) view that fansubbers’ legal status is “dubious”, Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez (2006: 45) express that “regardless of ethics, or motive, fansubs are technically illegal”, which is supported by Condry (2010: 193), who notes that “the anime fans who participate in this world, either by making, downloading, or watching fansubs, widely acknowledge that the practice breaks copyright law”. Similarly, Hatcher (2005: 554) suggests that “copyright law does not condone [fansubbers’] activities”. However, instead of filing lawsuits on fansubbers, companies avail themselves of the effortless promotion of the introduced media and enjoy easily obtained publicity offered by fansubbers (Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez, 2006: 44-45, O’Hagan, 2009: 12) and this condoning process is governed by “unwritten rules [which are] followed by companies and fans alike [and] are based on

what is considered mutually beneficial or at least acceptable” (Mäntylä, 2010: 10). Despite the advantages companies enjoy, fansubs are labeled as “pirates” by many (Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez, 2006: 45) and accused of “piracy” (Wang, 2014: 1909). Therefore, in order to clearly express their non-commercial intentions and avoid probable allegations of copyright infringement, they are by default expected to insert a disclaimer reading “Not for sale or rent” and “Cease distribution when licensed” (Leonard, 2004: 5) and “this is only for study and communication, please do not use it for commercial purpose” (Wang, 2014; 1909). Although the legal basis of and discussions on the legality of fansubbing are beyond the scope of this paper, it attempts to reveal the stance of Turkish fansubbers on the legality of their undertaking.

Leonard (2004: 5) claims that it is because of legal concerns that fansubbers typically use pseudonyms, although they “usually add credits or identifying marks to their works”. This suggests that they act carefully and go in disguise so as not to expose their true identity but on the other hand they do not want to remain uncredited owing to “[the] substantial amount of energy and [the] significant time commitment [even though it] does not lead to any economic reward” (Zhang, 2013: 31) and due to their strong motivation without expecting any remuneration (O’Hagan, 2009: 102). This foregrounds such issues as visibility, recognition, popularity, underlying motivation and remuneration.

Being a free service leads to another critically discussed issue, which is the linguistic proficiency of fansubbers, for they do not pass through an elimination process based on professionally accepted (linguistic) standards and they are not expected to rigidly observe the (linguistic) rules that apply to commercial subtitles. Although “commercial, subtitled versions of anime shows are generally considered to be of higher quality, both technically and linguistically, than fansubs” (Díaz-Cintas and Sánchez, 2006: 44), Condry (2010: 201) advocates that “fansub translations are generally more detailed [...] and they provide more linguistic and cultural depth than the commercial releases”. Moreover, because they can “impose their own linguistic and cultural mediation strategies” (González 2007: 270), they can also provide a linguistically more diverse content than trimmed and censored subtitling renderings. As stressed by Bold (2011: 15), “fans have the freedom to be as close as possible to the source text register, whereas professionals tend to use more ‘sanitized’ translation alternatives or even omissions (either due to self-censorship or, in most cases, impositions by channels or video producers/distributors)”.

In consideration of the aforementioned statements, the present paper essentially intends to answer the following research questions raised for the purpose of the study:

1. Do fansubbers think their practice is illegal?
2. Do fansubbers wish to be visible?
3. How do they think about censorship?
4. Do fansubbers want to be professionally recognized?
5. What motivates fansubbers to translate?
6. Do fansubbers really translate free of charge?
7. Do fansubbers think that their productions are inferior to commercial subtitles?

The following sections discuss whether these seven items apply to Turkish fansubbers and what they think about the allegations of illegality.

2. METHOD

This empirical research builds on content analyses of a corpus of online and print interviews with fourteen Turkish fansubbers and one administrator (Henceforth “admin”) of a fansub-providing website, *www.divxplanet.com* (discontinued), which were analyzed on the basis of demographics, legality/ethics, professional recognition, visibility, censorship, quality assurance, fansubbing knowledge and skills, motives, remuneration.

3. ANALYSIS

TV series like *Heroes*, *Lost*, *Prison Break*, *House*, *Grey’s Anatomy*, and *Nip/Tuck* became popular first in the US, where they first are aired, then in Turkey. People downloaded them but they faced a problem: the linguistic barrier (Gence, 2009; Diaz-Cintas: 2005: 16). To overcome this barrier, they looked to fansubbers as the quickest subtitle providers. Over time, fansubbers came to the fore and to be best known for the subtitles they provided for particular TV series. This part of the paper attempts to describe fansubbing in Turkey and to create a profile of Turkish fansubbers based on online and print media featuring interviews with fourteen fansubbers and one fansub-providing website admin.

3.1. Demographics

This part is intended to provide some demographical facts on the fansubbers whose interviews have been included in the corpus of the study. Table 1 presents the data on their pseudonyms/names, real professions or specializations and the series they are known for. According to the table, only two of the fansubbers, namely Emre Bekman and Pınar Batum, use their real names, while the other twelve use nicknames. This finding corroborates the claim above concerning fansubbers’ use of pseudonyms for legal reasons (Leonard, 2004: 5). The table shows that only one, Pınar Batum, translates for a living, while the others’ specializations are quite irrelevant to language, let alone translation and subtitling. This finding may support the assumption that fansubbers have different motives to translate/fansub from earning a livelihood because their primary employments are not related to translating or subtitling. Some answers as to what motivates them to fansub are provided further in the paper. Table 1 also shows what the TV series they are famous for (some for more than one). Sometimes viewers are so obsessed with the subtitles translated by some particular fansubbers that “they even refuse to watch a new episode if not fansubbed by the fansubber associated with that particular series” (Gence, 2009).

Table 1. Fansubbers, Their Actual Fields of Specialization and TV Series They Fansubbed

	FANSUBBERS	REAL JOB/FIELD	FANSUBBED SERIES
1	Doctor Jivago	IT worker	Lost
2	Eşekherif	Physicist (then studied Translation)	Game of Thrones
3	Emre Bekman	Electronics engineer	Fringe
4	Batigol7	IT advisor	Caprica
5	Nazo82	Accountant	How I Met Your Mother
6	Pınar Batum	Translator	Lost
7	JnRMnT	Undergrad	Hunger Games
8	Kont Dracula	Highway construction engineer	Grey's Anatomy
9	Darkopal	Graphic designer	Heroes
10	Zeroethh	Bank clerk	Jericho
11	Oezel	Retired	--
12	Takaya	Mechanical engineer	Prison Break
13	Shagrathian	Unemployed	True Blood
14	Kastore	Architect	--

3.2. Legality

The legality of fansubbing has been discussed for a long time and it is indicated by the abovementioned scholars that the practice is illegal. This part tackles the issue of legality without meaning to justify the legality or condone the illegality of fansubbing but by offering the fansubbers' opinions about the legality of fansubs.

NeOttoman (as styled by himself) is the admin of the leading fansub-provider www.divxplanet.com. In 2015, the website had about 55 thousand subscribers, 150 to 200 thousand netizens a day visited the website and millions of subtitle files were downloaded from it (DixPlanet ile Röportaj, n.d.). About legality, NeOttoman says in the interview published in the newspaper *Hürriyet*, "*divxplanet* is a legal website. If not, big film producers and distributors would block access to our servers abroad. However, because communication law is not fully fledged yet and this is a quite recent issue, there is an ambiguous side to it. Copyright laws do not allow sharing and distribution [of intellectual properties] without the producer's permission. After all, we do not share movies. What we have on our website is subtitles and these are scripts which can be found by a Google search and on the most frequently visited websites like *imdb.com*" (Gence, 2009). He claims that *divxplanet* and similar websites do not commit copyright infringement:

The issue is disputable because there is a concept called "right to distribute", held by the owner of the intellectual property and the parties duly authorized by the owner. From this viewpoint, websites streaming movies and series absolutely infringe copyright. However, *divxplanet* and similar websites do not stream movies and do not store them on their servers. Besides, [translation and distribution of] subtitle files do not constitute a copyright infringement because they are just for reading. However, they lend themselves to being used with legally or illegally procured video files. Here the issue gets more complicated. A movie is a solid one-piece body, and because we and similar websites do not distribute the "whole", it cannot be construed as a violation. (Kavuşan, 2012).

It can be inferred from NeOttoman's remarks that fansubbing cannot be labeled as "illegal" since the sites do not stream or share movies or store them on their servers but only distribute subtitles translated from original subtitles already available on several websites. He also advocates that the fansubs they provide are for reading not for use with videos legally or illegally acquired, which may suggest that it is not the websites but people who use the fansubs with movies who are violating copyrights. He also brings forward a controversial issue: he says that they do not offer the entire movie, in other words, all of its components, so he believes that their undertaking cannot be considered as a copyright infringement. In contrast to NeOttoman's claim and in response to a pirate labeling in a website interview with himself (titled "*Interview with a real 'pirate': Doctor Jivago, the subtitler of Lost*"), Doctor Jivago, a founding member of ADME (Professional Society of Subtitlers and Dubbers) (Doktor Jivago'dan haber var..., 2009), writes to the interviewer, "I found being called 'pirate' very offensive as I highly value the sanctity of private property. Because we apparently translate a part of a copyrighted work (i.e. the subtitle), what we do can be counted as piracy, but since we don't get paid for these translations and we don't earn money from someone else's private property/good, one must think twice before labeling us pirates" (Doktor Jivago'dan haber var..., 2009). This shows that NeOttoman and Doctor Jivago (with the highest number of fansubs on NeOttoman's *divxplanet.com* [DixPlanet ile Röportaj, n.d.]) have opposing views on copyright violation. Cönk, a fansubber, supports Doctor Jivago's view by saying, "What we do is illegal, can also be construed as piracy. All in all, we provide subtitles for people to see pirated works" (Cönk'e Sorduk, Cevapladi!, 2012).

It is a noteworthy finding that NeOttoman, Doctor Jivago, Batigol7 and Emre Bekman adopt different viewpoints about copyright infringement. Emre Bekman asserts that their translations have been used on DVDs circulating in the market. Batigol7 supports Emre Bekman saying, "Many of my subtitles have been used on media like CD, DVD, BluRay, on national and even on Azerbaijanian TV channels and I haven't claimed a dime" (Kavuşan, 2012). Likewise, Doctor Jivago claims that subtitlers working for DVD companies have stolen/plagiarized the subtitles on *divxplanet.com* and they have detected those plagiarized subtitles on tens of DVDs. He also says, "On a show of a very famous digital TV channel, subtitles originally translated by *divxplanet* translators have been used" (Doktor Jivago'dan haber var..., 2009). NeOttoman expresses that hundreds of their subtitles have been used not only on "pirated" but also original DVDs (Gence, 2009; DixPlanet ile Röportaj, n.d.) and claims that since people have become accustomed to high-quality products partly thanks to his website and "people download movies from the internet and the subtitles from [his] website to be able to watch these movies" (Gence, 2009), the illegal DVD sector has shrunk, almost to disappear (DixPlanet ile Röportaj, n.d.).

In a joint press release in response to the allegations based on an interview by a magazine, *Tempo*, Divxplanet administrators say, "Turkish cinephiles, who do not consider the US cinema sector as the sole proprietor of the sector, can watch the exclusive and prominent films of the globally trending Far East (Japanese, Korean and Chinese) cinema thanks to the subtitles offered by our website and many others across the world (LOST-Tempo Dergisi-AÇIKLAMA, n.d.).

To the author's best knowledge, there is no academic research on professional subtitlers plagiarizing from fansubs. According to NeOttoman, Doctor Jivago, Batigol7 and Emre Bekman, professional subtitle translators use fansubs without seeking to obtain

permission from fansubbers, who have spent hours and a great deal of energy on translation without receiving any payment. This finding reveals that “piracy” is a two-fold issue in terms of fansubbing: fansubbers as pirates and professional subtitlers as pirates, and may raise questions about the linguistic proficiency of fansubbers. Relatedly, it may also make one think that the subtitling service by fansubbers is not worse and even better than the professionals. Therefore, what fansubbers think about their linguistic proficiency, how important it is, and how they assure quality must be discussed. But before that, responses as to what has motivated them to translate could be helpful to better appreciate the discussion of linguistic competence and quality given that only one of the fansubber included in the present study is a translator by profession. This may suggest that the others have received no formal translation or subtitling education.

3.3. Motivations to Fansub

As indicated in Table 1, only one fansubber translates for a living, while the others seem to translate as a pastime. Considering that fansubbers do not translate for money, research-wise it would prove highly fruitful to delve into their motivations to fansub.

Doctor Jivago is a high school graduate and he recounts how he started to fansub as follows: “No subtitle was available for the movie *1984*. I translated its subtitle into Turkish and then went on translating subtitles. I said, ‘Well, I know English, why shouldn’t I translate the subtitles of this movie?’” (Gence, 2009; Akkoca, 2010).

As to how she started to translate subtitles, Nazo82 says, “I suffered from insomnia for a long time, which made nights boring and unbearable. Taking up such a hobby ended that boredom” (Kavuşan, 2012). Emre Bekman and Batigo17 took up fansubbing to improve their English competency. Emre Bekman says that it all started when his instructor assigned him to translate a movie subtitle. Batigo17 began fansubbing thanks to a friend’s suggestion and it became his hobby as he received positive feedback about his first translation and thanks to the pleasure originating from the feeling of being helpful. JnRMnt too started upon a request from his friend and later on to improve his English (Kavuşan, 2012). From a counter point of view, Cönk claims that fansubbing hones primarily your native language skills as well as helping you improve your English language proficiency (Cönk’e Sorduk, Cevapladı!, 2012).

As Eşekherif explains it, what motivated him to translate was boredom, and he says, “It was the very beginning of the period when people started to download movies from the internet and I was just a high school boy who used to watch TV series like a nut. It was just out of curiosity. Once I wondered ‘who translates these subtitles?’ and began to translate subtitles without doing some research. I knew English as much as they taught me at high school. If I saw my first translation now... It was so embarrassing. But I held onto it, never gave up because it was amazing to help people who cannot otherwise watch [a TV series], to be thanked for my translations and to touch the lives of other people whom I didn’t know” (Altyazı çevirmenliği: Cem Özdemir ile röportaj, n.d.).

Kastore states that he started to fansub as a hobby and for self-satisfaction. “We just wanted to translate and to be appreciated. It is beyond individualism and it helps people who don’t know and understand English. Thus, we get a lot of feedback, which makes us feel good” (Kastore ile Röportaj, 2011).

The aforesaid statements reveal that three factors stand out as leading motivations: fansubbing (1) to improve language proficiency, (2) as a pastime activity, and (3) to help others watch visual media whose language they cannot understand. Many research studies have revealed similar results in different countries. For instance, in the study carried out by Luczaj, Holy-Luczaj and Cwiek-Rogalska (2014: 186) on 40 and 68 fansubbers in Poland and the Czech Republic respectively, they employed a questionnaire containing items concerning the subtitlers' motivations to translate and found similar results to those provided by the fansubbers above. While almost 90% of the respondents in Poland "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement "Subtitling helps me to improve language skills", 75% and 23,5% of the Czech respondents "agreed" or "disagreed", respectively. Similarly, Bayar (2012: 32) found in the study on fan-based subtitling in Turkey that while 18 and 24 out of 89 participants considered fansubbing to improve language proficiency as "the most important" and "important" motivation, respectively, 30 of them stated that this drive had an average effect on their desire to fansub. Liu and de Seta (2015: 126) report "improving language proficiency and translating competence" is one of the rationales behind fansubbing in China, and as reported by Liu (2014: 102), "fansub practices help improve language proficiency". Chu (2013: 268) provides a substantiating finding. She expresses that 32 out of 80 participants fansub to "practice and learn the language they like". Kerb (2011: 38) reveals in the study carried out on 35 Dutch, 19 Belgian and 1 Spanish participant that 14 participants do fansubbing to improve their language skills. Orrego-Carmona (2014: 59-60) revealed through interviews with 52 participants that "most of the participants, regardless of their level of English, assumed a direct relation between subtitling and language learning" and "in general pointed to the benefits of subtitling for vocabulary learning and for becoming familiar with the foreign language". Interestingly, Wang (2014: 1908) suggests that there is evidence to show that subtitles improve the native and foreign reading skills and foreign language skills.

The second prominent drive is to fill up spare time. The fansubbers herein express that they pursue it as a hobby. Luczaj, Holy-Luczaj and Cwiek-Rogalska (2014: 187) also found out that 20% of the Polish and 47.1% of the Czech respondents regarded fansubbing as a pastime. 58% and 24% of Bayar's (2012: 32) participants stated that fansubbing as a hobby is their "most important" and "important" motivation, respectively. Chu (2013: 267) found in her study on fansubbing in China that 36 of her 80 participants identified themselves as hobbyists and states that "as a hobby fansubbing provide[s] pleasure for its participants". Chu (2013: 267) also reports that 55 of them "practice fansubbing as a form of serious leisure". Similarly, Kerb (2011: 38) discovered that 26 of them "like the activity/hobby", which marks the most frequently selected item.

The feeling of being helpful is also reported by the fansubbers as a motive to translate subtitles pro-bono and they state that this makes them feel good and pleased. O'Hagan (2009: 99) notes that this is one of the primary motives to fansub. This parameter is considered as "the primal reason" (Bold, 2011: 6). Kerb (2011: 38) found out that 13 participants "enjoy giving something to others" and 5 "want other people to be able to watch the same series [sic] that [they] enjoyed", which adds up to 18 out of 55 participants who fansub to help others.

The above findings indicate that fansubbers are motivated to fansub for several reasons. Although the drive to fansub is of utmost importance to start fansubbing, fansubbers would need some skills and sets of knowledge to translate subtitles. The following title provides skills and knowledge required to fansub.

3.4. Fansubbing Competence

Competence is the ability to do something properly. As the underlying system of knowledge and skills required to be able to translate is referred to as translation competence (PACTE, 2000: 100; 2005: 610), then fansubbing competence can be defined as a joint body of knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to fansub. The foremost and indispensable building block of translation/fansubbing competence is bilingual competence. As indicated below, it is not only a foreign language but also the mother tongue that a fansubber is expected to have a proficient command of. NeOttoman claims that “not the knowledge of a foreign language but a high competency in the mother tongue is a sine qua non of translation. One with a good command of Turkish can render good translations with a little bit of care and effort. Of course, she/he needs to know a minimum level of foreign language. But one who is not proficient in her/his native language may not produce proper translations even if she/he is a professor of that particular language...” (DixPlanet ile Röportaj, n.d.). Batigol7 corroborates what NeOttoman suggests and he too considers that a good command of both the source and the mother tongue [sic] and a translational aptitude are necessary for a good translation.

Emre Bekman and JnRMnt explain the importance of cultural adaptation based on the translation of swearing. The former says “A balance should be observed when translating swear words”, and the latter states that only when a translator can understand the exact meaning of a swear word and appreciate its location can she/he render a good translation appealing to the audience” (Kavuşan, 2012). For NeOttoman, the job of translators is “to turkify [make it more compatible with the Turkish culture]” what they read or see. In doing so, their interpretive additions make them extraordinary” (DixPlanet ile Röportaj, n.d.).

It can be concluded from these remarks that it is very important for fansubbers to observe the norms of the target culture and to make translation decision in line with those norms. Nevertheless, they seem to have problems with cultural transfers from time to time. In response to a question whether he faced any difficulty transferring into Turkish when fansubbing for *The Big Bang Theory*, Eşekherif says, “Pretty much [...]. If I get stuck, I search about the problem. There is not a single episode that I haven’t done research for. When translating for *The Big Bang Theory*, I open a lot of tabs on the browser. I mostly allocate the tabs for Google, some for Wiki[pedia], some for Urban Dictionary. But I have no difficulty anymore. Yet I still search for idioms” (Karataş, 2012). In accord with Eşekherif, Emre Bekman stresses the importance of preparation by saying, “For movies based on books or some other works, some prior research can be done” (Kavuşan, 2012). It is obvious that fansubbers are really aware of and care about the cultural preferences of their audience and attempt to live up to their expectation by resorting to several information sources. However, errors, failures, and penitence are inevitable. Doktor Jivago says, “I made many mistakes in my previous translations (and they were obvious) (Doktor Jivago’dan haber var..., 2009).

One of the ways to provide a high-quality fansubbing service is to work in groups. Nazo82 is among the fansubbers who have collaborated with other fansubbers and produced fruitful results. She reports that she and MONA worked together for a long time (Akar, 2011). Shagrathian says that he was a member of a translation/fansubbing group once, spent his novice stage there, but had to leave the group due to disagreements (Uslu, 2012). While working alone, in pair, or a small group to fansub may sound plausible, it may not be for the translation of scripts of games because the localization of such games is cumbersome and exhausting for a single translator. Cem Filiz of *Skyrim Project* states that the project group consists of over 40 translators and at least 40 more for dubbing (Karaş, 2014).

The knowledge and skills mentioned in this part roughly draw a picture of what fansubbing competence should be and what kind of components it is composed of. These sub-components can be listed as follows:

1. Strategic competence to be able to orchestrate the sub-components, to ensure the efficiency of the fansubbing process, and to offer high-quality fansubs.
2. Bilingual competence to be able to understand and interpret the source subtitle and translate it into the target language in consideration of the norms of the target culture.
3. Extralinguistic competence to be able to properly render cultural and social loads.
4. Research competence to be able to sort out linguistic and extralinguistic problems.
5. (Self-) editing competence to improve, grammatically or semantically, their translations based on either their own editing skills or feedback provided by viewers.
6. Psychological components, e.g. aptitude to translate, humbleness to appreciate criticisms and feedback, attention, curiosity, creativity and the like (cf. Psycho-physiological components in PACTE [2003: 59]).
7. Management skills to be able to collaborate with other agents of the fansubbing sector.

This list is not meant to be exhaustive and was drafted based on the views of Turkish interviewees above. The first 5 components are related to the fansubbing activity itself, whereas the sixth and seventh are the components which a fansubber would need for interacting with other fansubbing stakeholders and completing a fansubbing task. These two sub-competences can be considered as constituents of a fansubber competence which can be accounted for in consideration of the translator's competence model of Eser (2015: 11), who categorizes the first 5 skills as technical skills of a translator. He lists two other skill types, namely conceptual skills and interpersonal skills. Management skills in the present study are related to "conceptual skills, i.e. planning, organizing and leading" and "interpersonal skills" (ibid.). Conceptual skills are needed "to see an organization/a project as a whole made up of constituents and to manage it", whereas interpersonal skills are required "to work with other people" (ibid.).

3.5. Quality Assurance

Quality of fansubs is a major concern (O'Hagan, 2009: 98), and while some fansubbers do not seem to care about quality as they fansub for different purposes such as "to gain scores in forums" and to increase "the amount of their translation" (Wang, 2014:

1909), some really do seem to care (Luczaj, Holy-Luczaj and Cwiek-Rogalska, 2014: 191) because, as Orrego-Carmona (2014: 62) evidenced in his study built on 52 interviewees, viewers “are aware of variations in terms of quality”.

In this case, NeOttoman lists the standards of a high-quality fansub as decent intelligibility, strong narrative characteristics, and proper Turkish grammar, and claims that “the combination of these three aspects makes flawless subtitles” (DixPlanet ile Röportaj, n.d.). Emre Bekman believes that fansubs on the internet – except for unaccredited ones - have a higher quality than the ones on DVDs (Kavuşan, 2012). Doctor Jivago, who suggests that the feeling of quality of one’s own translation may change over time, says, “You can find an entirely different equivalent for what you call this and that today” (Doktor Jivago’dan haber var..., 2009). Eşerherif express how meticulous about quality by stating that mediocracy is unacceptable for him and says, “If I won’t be able to do it with high quality, I had better not do it.” (Aymete, 2016).

These statements show that fansubbers pay intense attention to the quality of their fansubs, as also indicated in the previous part as, if they sometimes fail to do so, fansub downloaders provide feedback about their translations, which allows them to revise their fansubs. JnRMnT lists another quality assurance mechanism in addition to self-assessment and individual audience feedbacks. JnRMnT says, “Some websites categorize subtitles into three color-based categories: red (unsatisfactory), yellow (moderately satisfactory) and green (highly satisfactory). Unless you use red-labelled subtitles, then you’ll have no problem” (Kavuşan, 2012). Verbal and non-verbal feedback on the quality of the contributed fansubs seems to be influential in fansubbers’ pre-operational and operational translation decisions. This finding substantiates what O’Hagan (2009: 112), who provides an account of a voting application, called *Facebook Translations*, in which *Facebook* users can vote for user-generated translations of selected *Facebook* strings into 16 languages. She expresses that “the results of the voting [...] feed into translator leader boards, publicizing and recognizing the level of activity of top contributors both quantity- and quality-wise. This clearly provides the contributors with a motivational factor, showing the number of positive votes they received for their translation” (O’Hagan, 2009: 23). These findings are significant not only to show how quality check is performed but also to reveal how importantly the target audience serves as stakeholders of a quality assurance mechanism because they can provide direct feedback about the fan-produced translations, in contrast to the commissioners of the professional subtitling sector who evaluate the translated subtitle on behalf of the viewers, thus disregarding what viewers really want, in order to conform to the related laws.

González (2007: 267) states that quality assurance in a fansubbing group is mainly entrusted to the editor, who “is expected to (i) ensure that the subtitles read naturally and idiomatically; (ii) check for errors in grammar, punctuation and timing; and (iii) conduct any additional research required to confirm that the interpretation and manipulation of cultural references on the part of the translator is adequate”. Likewise, Luczaj, Holy-Luczaj and Cwiek-Rogalska (2014: 191) found out in the study they conducted on Czech and Polish fansubbers that “subtitlers frequently asked someone to revise the prepared subtitles. As much as 64% of the entire Czech sample and 55% in the Polish sample ask someone to revise their subtitles”. In these two cases, it is obvious that editing by a third person(s) is a common practice to assure quality. The findings of the present study

revealed that Turkish fansubbers self-edit their translations based on their own revising skills and viewers' direct and indirect feedback and take similar steps to those González lists above. However, it seems that they do not seek the assistance of a third party for revision as indicated by González and Luczaj, Holy-Luczaj and Cwiek-Rogalska.

3.6. Visibility and Censorship

Since fansubbers offer a pro bono service in contrast to professional subtitlers, their undertaking is not restricted by commissioners nor are they expected to abide by strict subtitling codes and civic laws governing commercial relations. Wang (2014: 1904) advocates that "the influence of patronage can nearly be [ignored], since the translation activity is spontaneous by the audiovisual fans. Apart from that, the influence of censorship on the fansub translation is not very strong due to its special features. Since the fansubs always keep a low profile, and the subtitled videos are not for commercial use, the censorship of it is not extremely strict". Thanks to this loose regulatory system, fansubbers can act more freely, which directly contributes to their visibility. Apparently, fansubbers render themselves visible in three ways: by means of their translation decisions, insertion of credits, and insertion of ideology.

In the Turkish case, in response to a question whether he is offered professional subtitling jobs, Eşekherif says "We could never reach an agreement that would satisfy me. Considering the censorship they impose, I wouldn't like to work with any of those commissioners. My priority is to exactly transfer what scriptwriter and director want to communicate to the audience. We cannot disappear what is already there by pretending it's not there." (Aymete, 2016).

Nazo82 too advocates the preservation of the stylistic characteristics and register of the source text. She says, "As we have heard from our professional friends, they translate like that [by censoring] because they have to. If they didn't, the network would be shut down, they would lose their jobs. I believe they don't like it either. Actually, it is not me who swears, but Debra Morgan [a fictitious character]. It sounds weird that people cannot understand the difference. When the character is spitting out hard core swear words, if the translator translated it into a milder tone, then she/he would spoil the pleasure I get while watching it. [...] I'll go on translating as it is." (Akar, 2011). If a film is abridged, "there are not many people willing to watch such a film" (Lu, 2011: 28). Similarly, Shagrathian's reply to the question as to how slang should be translated is as follows: "The right way is to keep the original. In translation of movie subtitles, it's all up to the translator. I have never been pro-censor. Actually, most of the audience watching foreign series/movies is university students like us (Uslu, 2012). It is evident from these statements that they do not want their translation decisions to be censored, and even may go as far as refusing professional offers just because of possible censorship. Based on the statements about the translation of swear words, it can be concluded that no or minor censorship allows fansubber to take freer translation decisions, which renders them more visible. This finding substantiates Erguvan (2016: 164), who remarks that "certain state agencies (for instance, RTUK) and company executives (for instance, the manager of CNBC-e or the manager at the Department of Dubbing and Subtitling) may govern the decisions of professional subtitlers, fansubbers are free to make their own decisions in translation".

They adopt another stylistic method to become even more visible. As Leonard (2004: 5) states, fansubbers “usually add credits or identifying marks to their works”. They insert their names or pseudonyms in the subtitle text, so that when a video is run, their names or pseudonyms appear at the very beginning of the played video. For example, “Enjoy the movie! Doctor Jivago” (Akkoca, 2010) or “Translated by Eşekerif - Enjoy it!” (Karabacak, 2014).

Absence of censorship also lets them exhibit their political attitude. Some cases are so popular and influential that the fansubbers’ presence is highlighted by mainstream newspapers at times. One proof of this premise is the presence of interviews by some mainstream newspapers, e.g. *Hürriyet*, *Akşam*, *Radikal*, in the corpus of the present study. For example, a headline of *Radikal* reads, “Eşekerif writes ‘Turkey protests’ in *Game of the Thrones*” in relation to an anti-governmental protest. Eşekerif writes, “Partisan, toadying media shut up! We will make ourselves heard anyway. [...] We don’t plan to tumble anybody down. We just want that people hear our voice. Believe me, this is not a rebellion; only freedom do we want (Ocak, 2013). A similar finding can be found in Wang (2014: 1905 and 1907), a translator “can never avoid putting their own ideology into their translation no matter whether they meant to or not, [and] the translation of the fansubs is manipulated by the ideology of the mass audience, the ideology of the translators and the social ideology”. Thus, it appears that fansubbers are self-authorized to include ideology in translated subtitles particularly thanks to their capability of non-adherence to professional subtitling codes.

It seems that visibility and censorship are closely interrelated. Because fansubbers are almost free from rigid rules and censors governing the professional subtitling sector, they are able to render themselves more visible by taking self-governed translation decisions, inserting credits in the fansubs, and accentuating their ideology in their final products.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The present study attempts to describe Turkish fansubbers’ efforts to exist as professionals rather than incompetent amateurs and fansubbing in Turkey based on a corpus of interviews with Turkish fansubbers in terms of demographics, legality/ethics, professional recognition, visibility, censorship, quality assurance, fansubbing knowledge and skills, motives, and remuneration.

The findings of the study showed that fansubbers usually prefer to use pseudonyms to avoid legal charges, and only two of fourteen fansubbers, namely Emre Bekman and Pınar Batum, were observed to use their real names. Another demographic data is the fansubbers’ specialized areas. Only one of fourteen fansubbers was found to work as a translator, while the others work in non-linguistic areas.

The study also revealed, as discussed in previous research, that legality is a major concern among fansubbers and they have contradicting views about the legality of fansubbing. Moreover, the findings indicated that fansubbers discuss legality from two different perspectives: fansubbers as pirates and professional subtitlers as pirates. On one side, fansubbers are accused of pirating intellectual property rights which are supposed to be distributed in accord with legal regulations; on the other, they accuse professional

subtitlers of plagiarizing their fansubs. This finding suggests that they are highly competent in subtitle translation and that although fansubbing is done free of charge, its quality can be so high as to satisfy, even excel, professional requirements. The analyses revealed three prominent parameters driving people to fansub, i.e. (1) to improve language proficiency, (2) as a pastime activity, and (3) to help others watch visual media whose language they cannot understand. It is interesting that these three almost non-professional factors kickstart the fansubbing process and make them produce high-quality subtitling texts comparable to professional products. The findings showed that the interviewees in this study are aware of and sure about the quality of their translations. To assure quality, they critically self-revise their translations or perform the editing based on viewers' feedback. However, they sometimes regret their translation decisions and sigh over their mistakes.

Mistakes may be considered as one of the most prominent phenomena which may create the only moment when viewers think about the translator, thus making translators more visible. Yet fansubbers have their own means to become visible. Even though they enjoy being in disguise, they still like being in the public eye. The results showed that their translation decisions, insertion of credits, and insertion of ideology helped them become more visible as fansubbers, which allows viewers to associate certain shows with certain fansubbers and even to relate to them. It was figured out that it was the lack of strict professional rules and censorship that let them get in touch and get close to viewers. They seem to like this bond, and because of that they do refuse professional offers.

It can be suggested that they get professional offers because they have been able to practice and hone their skills by fansubbing. These skills, which were picked out of their statements above, are as follows: (1) strategic competence, (2) bilingual competence, (3) extralinguistic competence, (4) research competence, (5) (Self-) editing competence, (6) psychological components, and (7) management skills.

In conclusion, fansubbing is mistaken for a mere hobby. Even so it aspires to transcend the capabilities of professionals. It is an undertaking shaped by fansubbers themselves and the viewers, and fansubbers are unwilling to allow third parties in, which enables them to form a special bond with the audience, one that is unlikely for a professional to achieve.

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