Translation Studies:
Shifts in Domestication and Foreignisation in Translating Japanese Manga and Anime (Part Four)

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Abstract: Like manga, there are anime series covering just about anything you can imagine, and after humble beginnings outside of Japan, it is now a booming international industry that rakes in billions of dollars each year. The way anime has been viewed and translated has changed dramatically over the last few decades.

Key Words: ［Anime］［Censorship］［Fan-subs］

Anime

This chapter will seek to examine anime and how it is translated and localised into English. It will look at the evolution and translation techniques of fansubs and their sometimes extreme levels of foreignisation. Then examine official licensed translation, looking at the Subs vs. Dubs debate, the heavy domestication and editing of anime and how the opinions of fans, the changing marketplace and the effect of fansubs have all forced companies to rethink the way they translate.

Beginnings

Japanese anime started in the early 20th century, where the so called ‘3 fathers of anime’ Ōten Shimokawa, Junichi Kōuchi and Seitaro Kitayama began to adapt and experiment with the animation techniques from the West[1]. Anime continued to evolve through the 1920s and 30s and was actively used during WW2 by the Japanese imperial government and military to produce propaganda films. However, it was the post-war period where the modern idea of anime really began to take shape. During the 1950s and early 60s Japanese anime films were still very Western in style and story. However in the late 60s and 70s a new generation of animators, such as Osamu Tezuka and his famous anime *Astro Boy,* began

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to take Japanese anime away from Western Disney style productions and start producing unique distinct films and TV series around new genres like action, fantasy and mecha/robot[2]. Anime continued to find mainstream success in Japan through the 1980s with popular series like *Gundam, Macross, Dragon Ball* and Studio Ghibli films, with this period often being referred to as a golden age[3]. Now hundreds of TV series and full length anime films exist and cover numerous genres from comedy and slice of life dramas to science fiction and adventure and even pornography.

Anime in the West

During this time anime also began to make its way into America and the West where it was adapted and changed to fit the idea that like cartoons, anime is for children. However, the international success of the 1988 dystopian sci-fi action film *Akira* with its very adult content and imagery started to slowly challenge this viewpoint. With shows like *Sailor Moon, Neon Genesis Evengelion and Pokémon in* the 1990s and through the rise of the internet and fan-subs, anime became one of Japan's main cultural exports and spread across the globe[4].

Like manga, the introduction of anime into the West has been a slow process, with originally only a small number of official English releases that were often several years behind the original Japanese release. The sales licensed English anime industry has also had its fair share of ups and downs but it still remains a popular form of entertainment in the West, in Australia alone, most, if not all DVD stores have a section devoted entirely to anime releases. Also like manga, the way anime is translated into English, its distribution methods and levels of domestication and foreignisation have changed over the years in order to meet demands of anime fans and an overall changing marketplace.

Fansubs

As previously stated, fansubs began in the late 1970s and has continued to have a great effect on how anime is consumed in the West. While early fansubs attempted to copy the methods of official translations with a more localised, domesticated style, this quickly changed with the introduction of the internet when fansubbers switched to a more foreignisation approach to anime translation. This change and the ongoing tendency for fansubbers to follow the foreignisation approach likely stems from the fact that their target audience is made up of those people who interested in both anime and Japanese culture itself. Also, due to their approach of 'by fans for fans' there is much less time and care taken to initiate any new comers to the world of anime. This means they will leave things like attack moves, honorific suffixes and characters names in their romaji form, also fansub groups never cut or edit the original work in anyway believing it would change the original

creators vision. They also frequently add translation of the opening and ending songs of anime series in a karaoke format[5]. Like scanlations, fansubbers also frequently add extra explanatory notes at either the opening of the anime or during the program itself usually at the top of the screen. These extra notes are used to explain things like cultural points, social nuances, or the English translation of a place or attack and which are often then left out later. This practice not only adheres to the ideas of Venuti but also to the professor/subtitle professional Abé Markus Nornes and his research into what he calls 'corrupted' subtitles[6]. Nornes believes that subtitles are often corrupted through domestication and praises fansubs for highlighting the foreignness of anime through their use of 'abusive subtitles' such as footnotes, explanations and different coloured fonts to indicate linguistic features in the dialogue foreignness of a program should be highlighted to the viewer[7]. Fansubs use these approaches in creating a translation that shows the foreign elements and takes the audience on a journey into both the story and Japanese language and culture.

However, the increased number of fansub groups and subsequent competition to see who can release a new episode first or who had the better understanding of Japanese led to frequent translation errors as well as the abusive subtitling being taken to an extreme level. Some groups would adhere too much to a literal approach to translation creating English sentences that were stiff and difficult to understand. Over use of abusive subtitles could produce a translation that was too distracting and hard to read and groups began to leave in increasing, often unnecessary, amounts of Japanese words in their romaji form adding far too many explanatory notes on the screen that would disappear without leaving time for the watcher to read it.

In recent years the fansub translations have undergone a change. With the recent copyright crackdowns by governments around the world and the emergence of legal anime streaming sites, many of the big fansub groups have disbanded leaving mostly smaller groups who have now moved away from flashy translation and moved to a more balanced approach but still with strong foreignisation leanings. However, fansubs still remain as the primary way that fans view anime.

Official Releases, Subs vs. Dubs

The way anime has been officially licensed, translated and distributed in the Western world has changed quite dramatically over the last several decades. Fan opinions, pressure from fansubs and a change in the overall understanding of anime itself have led to shifts in the levels of domestication and foreignisation.

Unlike a written media such as manga, translation of anime can be done one of two ways, either through subtitles or dubbing. Both subs and dubs have their own strengths and weaknesses. Subs are quicker and cheaper however can also be distracting for the

viewer. Dubs allow the viewer to concentrate on the visuals but are far more expensive and time consuming[8]. Both can suffer from a loss of meaning in regards to such things as cultural identity, role of identifying accents, and subtle social dialects[9]. These issues can be seen in anime translations, for example the easily identifiable Kansai dialect would be lost in both subs and dubs without extra explanation. The subs vs. dubs debate in the world of anime is long and often heated, however the general consensus among anime fans seems to be that subs are the better option because they retain the original soundtrack and so are seen as being the closest to the original with a high level of foreignisation[10]. Dubbing, when done right, can sound very natural even giving the impression that it is an original production rather than a translation, very much in line with the ideas of Nida. This type of domestication is not necessarily a bad thing in the world of anime with all its fantastical themes and worlds that are easily translatable, however dubs get their bad reputation due to the fact they are seen as the cause of modification and censorship of anime[11]. Fans will also often cite their dislike for dubs due to the fact that the lack of quality of the English voice actor, voices not matching the characters mouth movements, voices not matching with a certain character showing a lack of understanding of the source material or using specific voices or dialects of English in order to Americanise the story[12].

While the introduction of DVDs allowed for both subs and dubs to be available giving the viewer the choice of what version to watch, there have been some cases where the DVD production company has used dubtitling. Dubtitling is the term used for the practice of using a transcript of the English dubbing track for the subtitles instead of a proper translation of the original Japanese script and leads to many easily apparent inaccuracies[13].

Domestication of Anime

Censorship, editing and domestication of anime began with the small amounts of anime being released in West in the 1960s and 70s, such as a localised version of the before mentioned *Astro Boy* with changed names and stories to fit American conventions tastes and broadcasting standards[14]. This domestication continued as anime began to move beyond small clubs and into the mainstream through 1980s, 90s and 2000s as American companies began to license more and more anime properties. During this time companies, such as 4Kids Entertainment, produced heavily domesticated translations and edited the visuals of several extremely popular anime series and movies, such as *Sailor Moon, Dragon Ball, Cardcaptor Sakura, Pokémon, One Piece and Naruto,* to meet the standards they judged as more marketable[15]. Their translation approach displays Venuti's stance that domestication assimilates the source material and alters it to what is safe, intelligible and interesting for the receiving culture[16].

On the visual side of things several direct cuts and changes were made to a vast

number of anime series due to cultural differences between Japan and America in regards to issues like race, religion or things deemed unknown or too hard for Western audiences to understand.

Imagery of violence, death and weaponry were also removed or edited to fit with social and broadcasting standards. Imagery of guns has even led to whole episodes of series being banned from broadcast even though this may lead to considerable confusion for the viewing public. Anything to do with alcohol, drugs or tobacco was removed and edited as not to promote them to children. Beliefs towards nudity and sexuality have always differed between Japan and America and so any hints of these in anime where either removed or changed.

These edits, cuts and censorships also carried over to the translation of the stories and scripts as well. Anime was altered significantly to fit the belief of the time that anime was meant for only children and so must be changed to ensure it conforms with American conventions and moral standards, filtering out anything that was deemed too confusing, offensive or unnecessary for young audiences. Examples include the series *Gundam* and *Dragon Ball Z* where the word 殺す or kill in English was translated as 'defeat'or 'destroy' and in the anime version of *Naruto* お酒/alcohol was translated as 'elixir'. With an extreme example being from an early English dub of Studio Ghibli's *Kiki's Delivery Service* with the original Japanese line of '神様か誰かがくれた力なんだよね'/ Its power given by the someone or God right? being translated as 'But we need to find our own inspiration' since references to God were deemed unfit for audiences[17]. Character names, places and even the anime's title itself where also routinely changed for the benefit of young audiences with the original Japanese dialogue in anime constantly being translated into very Americanised versions often containing 'cool'or 'in'words of the time. This domestication in the English translation led to some pretty extreme differences and deviations from the original Japanese version.

Some examples of this include the famous dubbed version of Hayao Miyazaki's 1984 classic *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Released by New World Pictures under the title *Warriors of the Wind,* it had over 21 minutes of footage cut, with many character names changed and an overly simplified plot that removed the film's important environmentalist message[18]. In fact it has been recorded that the English voice actors at the time were not even told of the film's plotline and characters[19]. This extreme domestication through change of story message can be seen throughout domesticated anime even in hugely popular shows like *Pokémon*, whose first movie was cut almost as extensively as *Nausicaä* and had its underlying message changed from 'all life is equal' in the original to 'fighting is wrong' in the English dub. *Warriors of the Wind* and the extreme alteration of their work shocked Miyazaki and the rest of Studio Ghibli and directly led to the introduction of their 'no-edits'policy for all future foreign releases of its films and the famous story of Ghibli producers sending

the chairman of Miramax Films a katana with the message 'no cuts' attached to it after hearing they wished to edit their new film *Princess Mononoke* to make it more marketable to children[20].

The anime series *Sailor Moon,* a story of a young high school girl and her friends who battle evil as magical Sailor Scouts, became quite popular during the mid 1990s and was heavily edited for Western audiences. The original dubbed version, released by the company DiC Entertainment, saw the character's names either changed or edited to a much more Americanised version. Entire episodes where removed or merged and references to characters dying where changed to them just being kidnapped. In addition, an entire new segment not present in the Japanese version was added to the end of each episode. Called 'Sailor Says' this segment featured clips from that episode and a voiceover in which members of the English dubbing cast would give the viewers educational, moral and environmental advice, such as instructing them to always do your homework, eating right, always believe in yourself and the importance of friendship and family. *Sailor Moon* also had several homosexual characters who, since they played major parts in the story and hence could not be simply cut out, where completely changed in the English version. The first season featured a pair of homosexual henchmen of the villain that where both animated in the classic anime androgynous way. DiC Entertainment made use of this anime trope of the beautiful androgynous male and changed one of the characters into a girl complete with a female voice actor and extensive changes in the translated script. This change went largely unnoticed until in a later series when two lesbian characters were introduced, DiC Entertainment faced the problem again. This time however both characters where clearly female and neither one could simply be changed to a boy, so the decision was made to make them into cousins instead. Many scenes between the two that could not be changed were cut, however this became increasingly difficult and actually led to minor hints of incest, clearly a much more concerning issue[21]. Censorship and alteration of homosexual and transgender characters in anime can also be seen in several other series and make clear the different way that Japan and America/Western world view these issues.

The anime *Cardcaptor Sakura,* renamed *Cardcaptors,* with its story about a young girl collecting magical cards is an example of a series which has been heavily modified by either adding or removing elements that increase or decrease the series appeal to a target demographic that coincides with American audience stereotypes. *Cardcaptor Sakura* in Japan was aimed solely at young girls and dealt with issue like growing up, love and friendship. However female target anime in America was seen as unmarketable and along with the usual Americanised name changes the series was heavily edited to appeal to a male audience[22]. The story was modified so that a male background character was promoted to equal status with the original female lead, with any episode that did not feature him enough being cut. Romance, cute imagery and dialogue deemed too 'girlish' was also removed[23].

These examples, show that just like manga, highly domesticated/Americanised versions of anime were being produced during this period that were in line with Venuti's English hegemony with translators imprinting anime with the canons and taboos, its codes and ideologies of Anglo-American society[24]. However times have changed.

Changes and Translated Anime Today

The domestication and censorship of anime through the 1990s and 2000s by companies upset many fans believing they had the right to choose what to watch. This was made worse by the rise of the internet where information about what was being cut and the vast differences between the English and Japanese versions became more abundant driving many people to illegal fansubs. To counter fansubs and to answer the demands of fans, companies were forced to change how they translate and localise anime. Several companies like 4Kids Entertainment and DiC Entertainment who failed to change quickly enough began to lose the rights to their anime properties and eventual collapsed. Then new companies with a more faithful foreignisation approach to translation like FUNimation came in to acquire the rights[25]. This led to the introduction of uncensored or uncut versions of long running anime such as *Dragon Ball Z, Pokémon, One Piece and Naruto* on DVD. These versions contained the original scenes and episodes that had been cut out as well as the reintroduction of the original music, Japanese language tracks with proper subtitles and sometimes new un-domesticated English dubbing tracks that more closely matched the original Japanese dialogue. Many classic anime movies such as *Akira and The Castle of Cagliostro* were also redubbed with the overly Americanised dialogue being replaced with a translation that better resembled the original. New versions of *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind* and the rest of Studio Ghibli films were released through Walt Disney Pictures that were far more faithful to the original and kept with their no-edits policy. Recently VIZ Media acquired the rights to *Sailor Moon* and intend to re-release all T.V episodes, movies and specials uncut with all new dubs and subs in keeping with the original Japanese version[26]. Due to popular demand *Cardcaptor Sakura* was also re-released uncut with the original Japanese and unedited English audio tracks for English audiences[27]. Now anime translated in the West is left uncut and unmodified for its DVD and internet streaming release. Anime on T.V, especially shows aimed at younger audiences, are still edited lightly but this just comes down to broadcasting rules and social difference between countries. Also, many Japanese anime companies now cooperate with Western companies when producing translations or bypass them entirely and offer same day global releases of both Japanese and English versions of a new series or movie themselves.

All of these examples show how the effect of fansubs and the demands of fans have caused a shift from domestication to foreignisation when it comes to translating anime in

the West. English versions of anime are now much closer to the original Japanese and the creator's vision and message. They provide entertainment but also an insight into another culture different from our own and it is no wonder why anime plays a major part in the promoting of Japan throughout the world.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the translation strategies domestication and foreignisation and what role they play and the effect they have had on the translation of Japanese manga and anime into English. Through the examination of the works of scholars such as Lawrence Venuti and Eugene Nida it is clear that foreignisation is all about reminding the audience that what they are viewing is different and exposing them to something different from what they know, preserving this foreignness even at the expense of grammatical and social conventions. Whereas domestication is all about trying to hide these differences and produce a translation that is safe within acceptable language and cultural standards. There are good points and bad points with both sides and they are actually a part of a greater social and cultural conflict revolving around the idea of an English hegemony. The decision of which technique to use often comes down to circumstance, translator/company preference and intended use of the translation. However, as this study has proved, in the world of manga and anime translation foreignisation is now king. Scanlations and fansubs with their speed, made by fans for fans mentality, devotion to subject matter and allover, albeit sometimes extreme, foreignisation translation approach have really resonated with the Western fan bases becoming a main way of consumption and having a huge effect on the official distributors. Official English licensed anime and manga in the last few decades have gone from extreme domestication in both language and visual areas that imposed the values and beliefs of Western culture onto the translation, to a more foreignisation approach that is much closer to the original and now values the differences in Japanese culture and language. Consumers of anime and manga want to see something different from what they know and their continued dislike for domestication through editing, censorship and inaccurate translations as well as the existence for scanlations and fansubs continues to push the way companies translate and even make anime and manga towards a far more foreignisation approach.

While debates over domestication and foreignisation, subs vs. dubs, official vs. fan made will continue to rage, they will also force translators and translation studies as a whole to evolve and encompass more than just words, benefiting the people of the world by bringing their language, art and culture closer together.

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