

A Sword-Day, a Red Day

A Comparative Study on Community-Generated Subtitling

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Abstract

The study compares the Finnish DVD-subtitles of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* with the community-generated subtitles by the divxfinland.org community. The aim is to broaden the view of 'amateur' subtitling by contrasting it with the commissioned subtitles and explicating on their problems and accomplishments.

The most notable issue with the community-generated subtitles was mishearing the dialogue. Otherwise the subtitles are of comparable quality in areas like target language grammar and accuracy of interpretation. The paper also explores the translation of poetic language: the DVD-subtitles reusing the book translations and problems resulting from it and the varying quality in the community-generated ones.

Keywords: subtitling, subtitles, community-generated subtitling, amateur subtitling, digisubs, audiovisual translation

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1. Introduction

Community-generated subtitling, or the legally dubious practice of producing and sharing unauthorized translations of foreign films and TV shows, is a little researched phenomenon in the field of audiovisual translation. Originating from the lack of exported anime in the late 1980s, community-generated subtitling has later expanded to include western material. With illegal copies of the video material often being available online right after the premiere or even before it, community-generated subtitles are certainly in demand.

Providing an insight into the differences between professional and community-generated translation, a study like this has a number of uses: If community-generated subtitles are of equal quality with the professional ones, what are the implications for a 5-year, university level translator training? Could a translation company start recruiting community-generated subtitlers? In what ways does the translator benefit from his/her formal training?

Empirically assessing the quality of translation is not easy, especially with material that contains relatively little straightforward mismatches in content or grammatical errors. Given the fact that there are no translation theories specifically for the purpose of assessing the quality of subtitles, this paper will attempt to provide insights into the translation process and hopefully reveal patterns on both translations, instead of comparing them to a (non-existent) standard. Whether the findings are generalizable features of either community-generated or commissioned subtitling is a matter of further study.

One way to approach the comparison of community generated subtitling and commissioned subtitling, as done by Meriläinen, would have been to label every line of both subtitles according to translation strategies used (omission, compression, expansion, generalisation, specification etc.) and compare if the distribution of different strategies is different for either type of subtitling.

Despite the extensive analysis, no such connection could be accurately identified, thus encouraging me to find a new way to approach the comparison.

This research is motivated by the will to see what kind of differences there are between the two translations. Do the translations achieve an effect equivalent to the source text? Do the translations fill their purpose in the target culture? What is that purpose, and is it different for the two?

After my initial analysis of the corpus, focusing on the differences between the dialogue and both of the subtitles, I was able to categorise most of what I found in five sections of the analysis part: errors resulting from the lack of a dialogue list or a transcript, problems of interpretation, problems with target language, the translation of poetic language. Additionally, section 4.4.5 will discuss the degree of domestication and foreignisation in both subtitles.

2.1 Description of data

This section will detail the data used in this thesis and includes some relevant technical information about digital subtitle files.

My data consist of two main pieces of corpus, both of them subtitles for the 2003 *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. One of the subtitles is the official Finnish DVD-subtitles for the film, commissioned by Broadcast Text, while the other one is an unofficial translation, provided by the Finnish online subtitling community *divxfinland.org*. The crucial distinction to make between the two is of course the fact that the first one was translated by a person who makes a living from audiovisual translation, i.e. a professional translator, while the other one is made by a volunteer who may or may not have a background in translation.

The community-generated subtitles were not released until 28 Jan 2004, almost two months after the original premiere on 1 Dec 2003. It is reasonable to assume that at least a month was used for the actual translation process, which would suggest that it was not a rushed release. The unofficial translation was the only

way to watch the film with Finnish subtitles outside of cinemas for three months until the DVD/VHS-release of the film on 26 May 2004.

Since community-generated subtitling has not been sufficiently studied as a phenomenon, it is difficult to say with any accuracy, what exactly motivates the volunteer-subtitling community. According to the divxfinland.org website, it was founded in 2003 (making *The Return of the King* one of the first subtitles to be released by the newly founded community) by hobbyists interested in subtitling foreign films and TV-series. The short introductory text implies that the main motivation for the members would be to improve their language skills, but motivations of course vary by the individual and information on the subject is scarce and unreliable at best.

The commissioned subtitles provided with the DVD-release of the film were translated by Outi Kainulainen, working for Broadcast Text Helsinki Oy, a subsidiary of Broadcast Text International, today known as BTI Studios. As a resource for the translation, Kainulainen has utilized the Finnish translations of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy of books. The first two parts, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (*Sormuksen ritarit*) and *The Two Towers* (*Kaksi tornia*), were translated by Kersti Juva and Eila Pennanen, with poetry and songs translated by Panu Pekkanen and the final part, *The Return of the King*, by Kersti Juva and Panu Pekkanen (lyric). The authors of the book translations are all credited at the end of the subtitle file.

The DVD-subtitles were ripped with the open source program SubRip. The resulting file is a SubRip .srt format file, which is unfortunately not the same format used for the community-generated subtitles (.sub). Thus it is not possible to directly compare some of the technical features such as whether the community-generated subtitles require a higher reading speed because of the lack of supervision and technical limitations, although this seems to be the case based on my subjective experience with the subtitles.

As is characteristic to the phenomenon, the community-generated subtitle is made by more than one people: the translator, known by his username *Dille*, and the proofreader, username *BlueNun*. The names are credited at the beginning of the subtitle file and displayed during the opening credits of the film. After the subtitling process is finished, the subtitles go through a review process, where the senior members of the website (known in Finnish as the *sisäpiiri*) get access to the subtitle file, review it and suggest improvements for a period of 3-5 days.

This is rare in the professional circles of film translation: usually the translator is the only person responsible for the whole project (except in bilingual subtitling to produce subtitles that display two languages simultaneously, such as Finnish and Swedish), or the only person besides the technician who times the subtitles and adds them to the film reel (Hartama)

Because of the connotative nature of the terms ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’, I have to opt for more neutral terminology: *community-generated* and *commissioned*. This is to emphasise the fact that I aim to work without the presumption that the commissioned subtitles are inherently more professional, i.e. of higher quality, than the community-generated ones. Despite the terminology, some assumptions can be made: it can be assumed that the commissioned translation is made by a translator who has a university level education in translation, linguistics or philology. Nothing certain can be said about the community translator, but given the fact that, with the proper education, the translator could turn the hobby into a living, a university degree is unlikely, although not impossible. Neither of the subtitles is of prominently low quality, which allows for a closer inspection beyond a simple list of translation errors.

2.2 About subtitle files

This section briefly explains how to examine subtitle files. As an aid to verifying my claims about the subtitles, the syntax of both types (SubRip .srt and MircroDVD .sub) is also clarified.

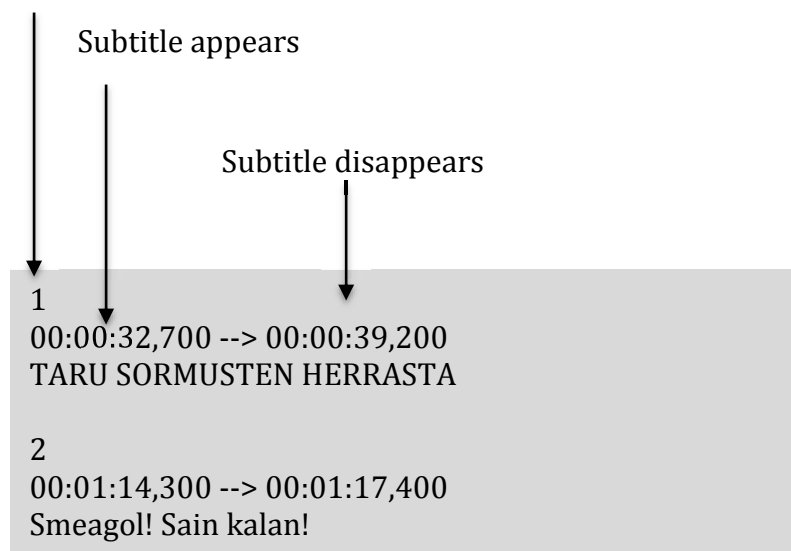
The community-generated subtitles are distributed in the .sub file format. This is a *plain text* file, meaning that it can be opened and viewed with basic text editors such as Notepad (Windows) or TextEdit (Mac OS X). The file has a straightforward syntax:

```
{4470}{4590}Koska on minun syntym%00p%00iv%00ni,|ja min%00 haluan sen.
```

The brackets contain the running number of frame the subtitle will appear and disappear from the screen, respectively. The two lines of subtitles are separated by the vertical bar "|". Note also the false decoding of "Ä" and "Ö"; these are, for the sake of clarity, amended in future examples.

The DVD-subtitles are examined in a ripped .srt file format. The format of the subtitle is described below:

Subtitle number



Being a plain text file (as opposed to *rich text* or *formatted text*) it is only possible to format the text, for example, italic or bold with the html tags `<i>` and `` (.srt) or control codes `{y:i}` and `{y:b}` (.sub), though neither of the files takes advantage of this feature. When watching the actual DVD though, italics are used as is common in Finnish subtitling: to indicate that the speaker is off-screen or that a

word is a foreign one. The lack of italicisation in the ripped file is due to the fact that SubRip, the program used to 'read' the subtitles from the DVD and write the subtitle file, does not support automatic recognition of text formatting, leaving the time-consuming task of reviewing the formattings and manually adding them in to a dedicated end user. The software also lacks support for accents, as can be seen in the example above (Sméagol being rendered as Smeagol despite the fact that the subtitles on the DVD use the accent). To avoid confusion, I have added correct accents and formatting back when quoting lines containing such features.

3. Theoretical background

As a result of a translation process, studying subtitles draws from the field of translation studies and audiovisual translation in particular. Yet, most of the general translation theory is applicable to audiovisual translation, if the special nature of subtitling is properly taken into account. This section will briefly discuss the theories in translation studies applied in my thesis and explain the status of audiovisual translation. I will also discuss the nature of community-generated subtitling as a phenomenon.

3.1. Translation studies

In this section, I will briefly explain the history of the two theories used in the analysis: the equivalency theory and the *skopos* theory.

Before the twentieth century, the main debate about translation concerned the translation of religious texts and the recurring theme of the period was the debate between literal and free translations, that is, 'word-for-word' vs. 'sense-for-sense'. Despite being terms that are still commonly found in (mostly non-academic) discourse, a more systematic approach was obviously needed for serious discussion of translation. (Munday 28–56)

An attempt at such an approach came in 1964 with *Toward a Science of Translating* by Eugene Nida. As the title implies, the theory is heavily based on

linguistic concepts from fields like semantics and pragmatics. The key concepts proposed in Nida's paper are the two types of *equivalence*: *formal* and *dynamic*, the latter being an important step away from word-for-word equivalence and instead focusing on equivalent effect on the reader/receptor. (Munday 57–83)

Nida's approach proved to be quite influential, with researchers like Peter Newmark and Werner Koller proposing similar theories based on the idea of equivalent response while addressing some of its shortcomings. The problem with this approach, as noted by House, is the difficulty of empirically testing whether the response to the target text is equivalent or not (House 4-9).

Eventually, different kinds of approaches to translation were proposed. Moving yet farther away from word-to-word level and even beyond sentence-to-sentence level, the *skopos* theory ('aim' or 'purpose') focused on the *function* of the target text in the target culture. It puts distinctively little value on the original: the source text is merely the subject matter of the target text, which may not even try to fill the same function in the target culture as the source text did in the source culture, thus allowing for greater divergence from the source text. Though the internal coherence of the target text is given a higher priority, the theory does state that there must be coherence between the following: (Munday 123)

- I) the ST information received by the translator
- II) the interpretation the translator makes of this information
- III) the information that is encoded for the TT receiver

The *skopos* theory emphasises the audience of the target text. If a 'direct' translation, be it word-for-word or sense-for-sense, would be difficult to understand for the target audience, it should be more clearly explicated in terms the audience can understand without knowledge of the source text culture.

Though there has been much debate about whether a translation should be recognizable as such, it can be argued that in the case of subtitling, the

translation should be as invisible as possible due to the fact that the recipient will always have the original audio to compare the translation to. The purpose of the subtitle is usually not to draw attention to itself, but rather to compensate for the lack of proficiency in the source language. In an optimal scenario, the recipient loses awareness of the fact that he/she is reading a translated script of the spoken dialogue (a phenomenon that is an actuality in countries where subtitling is the norm as opposed to dubbing or voice-overing). As the recipient regains awareness of the translation, the illusion of understanding the source language is broken. After all, as humorously noted by Vertanen, people do not turn on the TV to watch subtitles (169).

Another noticeable aspect of Venuti's work is his discussion of the techniques he refers to as 'domestication' and 'foreignisation'. In the case of translating a work based on J.R.R. Tolkien's extensive mythology of the Middle Earth and its various languages and cultures, the concepts gain another dimension: whereas Venuti endorses the practice of foreignisation by telling how foreignisation can 'send the reader abroad', in the context of fantasy literature, foreignisation as a literary method can help the reader feel immersed in the fictional world. This is a method that is quite central to Tolkien's work in the form of diverse cultures and peoples (as well as hobbits, elves and dwarves).

3.2 Subtitling

Subtitling is the dominant mode of audiovisual translation in several European countries, including Finland. The special nature of subtitling arises from the change of semiotic channel from the source's spoken dialogue to a written target text. Additionally, the target text is synchronised to the rhythm of the original speech, imposing a time limit on the subtitle, in addition to the limitations of restricted space.

Audiovisual subtitling is often considered a restricted form of translation. González, for example, notes that "subtitles can only aspire to deliver a very condensed version of the spoken dialogue" (335-352). Indeed, an audiovisual

translator cannot possibly translate the whole of the spoken text due to space and time constraints, and sometimes it is difficult to even sufficiently include what is absolutely necessary for the understanding of the source text. On the other hand, the different semiotic channels can aid the translator in deciding what to leave out: An unnecessary crude word can be omitted when the recipient can see the character's facial expression and hear the tone of his/her speech (Vertanen 152).

Much has been written about audiovisual translation, with subtitlers discussing their suggested practices, research being done into reading speed and other psycholinguistic aspects, as well as special focuses on things like humour, idioms or culture-specific references (Gambier 88-89). Thus, the focus has often been either on the special nature of audiovisual translation or some very specific feature of language, not on the translation itself. This is the reason my main theoretical framework comes from translation studies, not audiovisual translation.

3.3. Community-Generated Subtitling

The community-generated subtitling scene, though quite flourishing, is a phenomenon that has unfortunately been largely ignored by the academia worldwide, but especially in Finland. The little discourse that exists is mostly focused on translation of *anime*, and how amateur subtitling caters to different niches not covered by traditional mediums or stretches the concept of subtitles by, for example, adding cultural information in headnotes (Pérez-González 335-352). The current discourse practically ignores the translation that imitates the subtitles the audience would expect to find in cinemas or on a home medium.

One of the rare studies on community-generated subtitles in Finland comes from Meriläinen. His thesis is a quantitative analysis of the distribution of translation strategies in *Stargate SG-1*. Despite a decent analysis of the distribution of translation strategies (omission, compression, expansion, generalization, specification and neutralization) the one distinctive feature was the source text

orientation of the community-generated subtitles (Meriläinen 80-82).

This paper will look at community-generated subtitles that are trying to adhere to the norms of subtitling, as opposed to being a part of 'cultural resistance' against the norms of subtitling.

4. Analysis of corpora

In this section I will look at the corpora, dedicating each section to a specific feature of the subtitles. Rather than choosing these features with some artificial criteria, I analysed the dialogue chapter by chapter, noting interesting translations in either subtitle file, whether they be word-level errors, register mismatches or mere inconsistencies. Based on this initial analysis, I have chosen to discuss several phenomena that I subjectively consider to most affect the overall experience with the translation: problems resulting from the lack of a dialogue list available to the community translator/proofreader, problems of interpretation, problems with target language, the translation of songs and poems and the degree of domestication and foreignisation.

4.1 Lack of transcript as a source of error

As discussed in the theory section, the basic requirement for translation according to the skopos theory is the coherence between the translator's interpretation of the original and the target text. In the case of community-generated subtitling, where there is often no transcript available (as opposed to commercial translation (Hartama 190)), the question of how a translator should cope with mishearing the source text, i.e. getting an incomplete and inaccurate interpretation of the source text, arises.

Whether this inability to acquire the correct interpretation of the original is attributed to weak listening comprehension skills, low-quality or heavily compressed audio (in a copy of the film recorded in the cinema, for example) or

simply unclear pronunciation in the film, the translator may need to produce a translation based on little more than a guess.

This leads unavoidably to a lack of coherence between the source text and the target text. This section will discuss the different ways the community-generated subtitler has dealt with the lack accurate interpretation of source text. My assumption that the community-generated subtitler has worked without a transcript is based on several translations that are most easily explained by phonetic similarity with a back translation of the subtitle. For example, there is evidence like the following phrase from Théoden’s motivational speech before the battle of Pellennor fields:

English captions	Divxfinland.org	Back-translation of CGT
...a sword-day, a red day...	Lyhyt päivä. Suuri päivä.	A short day. A great day.

This specific example is an interesting one, since it also highlights the fact that Finnish only has one sibilant, as opposed to the English high pitched [s] and lower pitched [ʃ], making it harder for native Finnish speakers to distinguish between /sɔːd/ and /ʃɔːt/.

In the absence of solid evidence for the causes of these types of mishearings, the fact that it happens is, in this thesis, attributed to the lack of transcript of the spoken dialogue. The norm in the commercial subtitling practices is that the translator receives a list of dialogue, on which to base the translation, practically ensuring that mistakes are non-existent at this level (Hartama 190).

In the table below, more instances of incoherence directly attributable to source text’s phonetic similarity with another expression in source language that is clearly more coherent with the target text. Occasionally, it is not clear exactly what has not been heard or has been misheard. In these cases, I have tried to provide commentary on what I believe to be the connections between the source text and the target text. The table is also not a comprehensive list, but rather a

lengthy example to support the argument that the lack of transcript is a hindrance to achieving an adequate translation specific to community-generated translation.

English Caption	CGT	Back translation
In Ithilien	Pohjois-Ithilienissä	In North-Ithilien
<i>Comments: The sequence of /n/, vowel and /θ/ is misinterpreted as /nɔ:θ/</i>		
Now that I'm here, [...]	Olen vielä tässä.	I'm still here.
<i>Comments: There is no obvious phonetic connection, but Frodo is speaking fast and whispering.</i>		
No veil between me and the wheel of fire.	Ja kaikki ne tulet...	And all those fires...
I can see him...	Näen ne jo hereilläkin.	Now I see them even when I'm awake.
...with my waking eyes.		
<i>Comments: Frodo is having difficulties breathing and is speaking in short pulses. Apparently the only thing the translator has heard in the first phrase is 'fires' and tried to deduce what might've come before it based on what is said afterwards. Unfortunately, Frodo is not talking about 'the fires', but rather about Sauron. The pronoun 'him' (/hɪm/) is of course easy to confuse with 'them' /ðɛm/.</i>		
By all that you hold dear on this good earth...	Uskon, että pidätte puolenne tällä hyvällä maalla	I believe, that you will ~'stand your ground' on this good earth.
... I bid you stand, Men of the West	Uskon teidän voittavan, Lännen Miehet	I believe you will win, Men of the West
<i>Comments: Théoden is yelling hoarsely. 'By all that you' (/baɪ 'ɔl 'ðæt jə/) could have been confused with (/brɪ'liv ðæt jə/). The word 'hold', together with 'earth' and possibly without context, is likely interpreted to mean something similar to 'stand one's ground'.</i>		

4.2 Problems of interpretation

If one considers the translation as a process and mishearing (or not hearing at all) the first level of source of error, problems of interpretation would be the next level. In this thesis, the term refers to cases where the source text has been fully received in its original form, but its intention has not been fully understood, and thus has been incorrectly rendered in the target text. Using the terminology of the *skopos* theory and the basic requirements of coherence it proposes, the problem would be categorised as lack of coherence between the source text and the translator's interpretation of it. This can of course radically change the way the receiver experiences the film. Coupled with the fact that, based on my initial analysis of the data, problems of interpretation are by far the most common type of issue in both subtitles, I consider it to be the most important factor affecting the overall quality of translation.

As said, unlike the lack of transcript and the problems resulting from it, problems of interpretation can be found in both types of translation instead of being restricted to just community-generated translation. Sometimes the different interpretations are not a problem per se, as can be seen in the wildly different interpretations of the piece of advice Gandalf gives to Aragorn:

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
Seuraa jokea. Pysäytä mustat laivat.	Seuratkaa jokea ja mustien laivojen vanaa.	Follow the river. Look to the black ships.

Given the fact that most of Aragorn's story line was cut from the theatrical edition of the film, this line may prove to be difficult to interpret. The scene where Aragorn, Legolas and Gimli capture the Corsair ships with the Army of the Dead happens off-screen. Fortunately neither of the translations, though wildly different, contradicts these off-screen events. Gandalf's intention was to prevent the Corsair from participating in the Battle of the Pelennor Fields, leaving the execution to Aragorn. Thus, he could have told him to stop the black ships (like in

the DVD subtitles) or even to just follow them, and, implicitly, observe (community-generated subtitles).

Unfortunately, the dialogue is often not that open to interpretation. For example, when Merri tells Pippin that he needs to leave because Sauron thinks he is in possession of the One Ring, Pippin, assuming that Merri will come with him but at the same time being afraid that he will not, asks him whether he will join him.

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
Ja sinä... tulet mukaani.	Tulethan sinä mukaani?	And you...? You're coming with me?

The intonation of the utterance implies a question, yet the professional subtitle uses a declarative, with an ellipsis marking the hesitation. Otherwise the DVD translation is a pretty straightforward, almost word-for-word translation, but it does not capture the essence of the source text, the fear and doubt in Pippin's voice and expression, the way the commissioned translation does. The Finnish enclitic *-han* in the community-generated subtitle not only makes the phrase sound much more natural and fluent, but also expresses the doubt in Pippin's voice. It is almost as if the commissioned subtitler has based the translation solely on the transcript and disregarded the actual source material.

This is also a great example of how the community-generated translation often goes beyond word-level equivalence and manages to capture the whole message of the source text perfectly in a very natural sounding construction in Finnish. To me, this is expressly a matter of deep understanding of the source text and an accurate and creative interpretation of it in Finnish.

Examples of differing interpretations are numerous in the data, and sometimes bring attention to the fact that the commissioned subtitler has falsely understood an expression or a word:

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
Olen palveluksessanne sellaisena kuin olen	Tarjoan teille palveluksiani, näiden tapahtumien varjossa	I offer you my service, such as it is.

In this example, the logical connections of the phrase ‘such as it is’ have been falsely interpreted to refer to the events that led to Pippin offering his services to Théoden, i.e. the pronoun ‘it’ referring to ‘the situation’ or something similar. This can only happen in the case that the translator is not familiar with the way the expression is used, in this case apologising for the imperfect state of what precedes the phrase.

A similar misunderstanding has happened with the word ‘nonetheless’:

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
Mutta käymme silti taisteluun	Mutta taistelemme silti täydellä teholla	But we will meet them in battle nonetheless.

Here, the translator has assumed that ‘nonetheless’ refers to the degree of battling, that the manner in which they meet their enemies in battle will not be any less. This can be attributed to the same reason as the previous example, unfamiliarity with the expression.

Fortunately, mistakes resulting from the lack of proficiency in the source language are rare and do not contradict what is being said in the film. They are easily outnumbered by the more general errors of interpretation detailed above that appear in both subtitles and therefore do not negatively affect the overall experience with the community-generated subtitles. The distribution of interpretation errors between the subtitles seems to be rather even, but without a quantitative analysis, it is not possible to say for certain.

4.3 Problems with target language

Practically all modern translation theories emphasize the naturalness of the target language. This section discusses problems with the target language grammar.

Teitittely (the polite form of speech akin to German *Sie* or French *vous*) is arguably a slowly disappearing feature of Finnish. Nevertheless, both translators have considered it the natural way to translate Sam's fawning form of addressing Frodo. Using the third person pronoun would have been another option for historical reasons, but *teitittely* is definitely sufficient. The problem is the correct form: It has been argued that the younger generation is so unfamiliar with this form of speech that they confuse it with the plural form (*te olette olleet* vs. *te olette ollut*). The community-generated subtitles (assuming it is the work of a younger person) would certainly support that view.

DVD	Dixvfinland.org	English captions
Ettekö te nukkunut yhtään, Frodo-herra?	Ettekö ole nukkuneet lainkaan, Frodo-herra?	Haven't you had any sleep Mr. Frodo

The problem is the form of the participle (nukkunut/nukkuneet), which should be in singular, despite the plural-like construction with *te*. It can of course be argued that Gollum's grammar is broken in English, too, which would validate the use of a broken construction in Finnish.

Another problem in the community-generated subtitles is the use of the debated future construction with 'tulla'. Originating from the influence of Swedish, many have argued that the construction should not be used at all. Although arguments have been made for and against, and its 'unnecessary prominence' in translated texts has been noted, there is no general consensus on whether its use is acceptable or not (Kolehmainen). Because many consider it an unnecessary and foreign sounding construction, it would have been wiser to use the more

common present tense construction, especially considering that the risk of misunderstanding is minimal:

Divxfinland.org	English captions
Keihäitä tullaan käyttämään. Kilpiä tullaan särkemään.	Spears shall be shaken, shields shall be splintered...

One issue with the professional subtitles is the omission of personal pronouns. This can be done because the conjugated verb forms alone communicate the omitted information unambiguously. This is done in order to make the translation fit within the character limit imposed by the commissioner, a restriction not present in the community-generated translation where the only limitation is the width of the screen area. Though understandable, it is by no means a common practice to drop pronouns other than the 1st or 2nd person pronouns. In the following examples from the DVD subtitles, I have added in the 'missing' personal pronouns in parentheses:

126
00:15:05,500 --> 00:15:08,000
jossa rosvot juopottelevat
löyhk&n keskellä -

127
00:15:08,200 --> 00:15:11,400
ja (heidän) kakaransa pyörivät
lattioilla koirien joukossa?

[...]
513
01:00:06,500 --> 01:00:08,500
(He) Eivät tule pohjoisesta.

[...]
534
01:06:02,800 --> 01:06:05,500
(He) Taistelevat rinnallanne

kuolemaan asti.

[...]

562

01:10:54,700 --> 01:10:58,500

(He) Mursivat puolustuksemme.

Valtasivat sillan ja länsirannan.

The veteran translator Kai Laine criticises this practice (and coincidentally mentions the special edition release of the trilogy as a high-profile example of it) and refers to it as “taking the easy way out” of a situation where the character limit would otherwise be exceeded and calls for more creative solutions (Laine 269). Indeed, leaving out an ‘unnecessary’ pronoun such as ‘heidän’ can effortlessly net the translator seven more characters (counting the space that follows) for the rest of the translation, but with the trade-off of sounding awkward.

Besides these persistent issues, problems with target language grammar are fortunately rare in both subtitles and are limited to occasional oversights. For example, in the DVD subtitles there is a curious choice of grammatical case, implying that the movement is restricted in *time* and not *space* like in the original:

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
Tuletteko mukaamme? – Vain leiriin asti	- Ratsastatko kanssamme? - Vain leirille asti.	-Will you ride with us? -Just to the encampment.

4.4 Translation of poetic language

This section will discuss the ways poetic language is treated in both subtitles.

The nature of poetic language decrees that the process is necessarily more creative and time-consuming than that of dialogue or other prose. Perhaps for

this reason, the DVD subtitler has decided to re-use the book translations by Panu Pekkanen. Another reason could be the *skopos* of the translation: the subtitler has chosen to “stay true” to the book translation in order to not upset the fans of the book, who are expecting to see their favourite poems appear on-screen. The book translations are used whenever possible, sometimes to a comic effect.

The community-generated subtitle treats poetic language quite differently: although the translator has added rhymes to poems, the translations do not have a clear poetic form. Again, the *skopos* of the translation should be considered: the translator likely sees that the purpose of the translation is to help people understand the foreign-language dialogue, and that is certainly achieved. The poetic form does not need to be repeated, for the receptor can hear the rhythm of the original text and read the semantic content in the subtitles. Therefore, in a way, the poetic form is not lost, even though it is not present in the subtitles. One could argue that even though the translation does not achieve an equivalent effect per se, the combination of the original audiovisual material and the subtitle might.

Considering the curious legal situation of the entire concept of community translation, it might be surprising to consider the possibility that there might be moral obstacles to reusing the book translations in the community-generated subtitles, but this is the most probable reason, I argue. There are several reasons for my stance: the self-proclaimed motivation for subtitling (honing one’s language skills), the translator’s self-commission (implies fandom, and by extension familiarity with the source material) and finally and most importantly the respect for colleagues’ work. One could argue that the time-consuming process of checking if a piece of text originates from the books would be a deterrent from attempting; that a new translation would actually be the easier way. This would imply that the translator is not willing to make the effort, which is hard to believe if one considers the generally high quality of the translation. The availability of information through Internet also renders the point that it would require too much effort moot.

That said, it is quite obvious that the community-generated translations of the poems are not on the same level with those translated by Pekkanen for the books, making the translation of poetic language one of the factors that most clearly distinguishes the two translations. I will now look at the different instances of poetic language in the film and consider both translations from the points of view of the equivalency theory and the *skopos* theory.

4.4.1 The Green Dragon

The Green Dragon is a song sung by Merry and Pippin at the victory celebration in Edoras. It is a song as a tribute to the pub it is named after. The lines are sung off-rhythm and on top of each other to give the image of an unrefined hobbit song, thus allowing for a more unrefined form in the translation too.

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
Voit kaukaa ja etäältä etsiä, Voit kaupungin tyhjiin ryypätä	Minä harjoituksissa lyön, ja juomme läpi yön.	Oh, you can search far and wide You can drink the whole town dry
Vaan olutta niin tummaa löydä et Kuin on kotikylämme antimet	Olutta ei löydy ruskeaa näin, eikä olutta löydy ruskeaa näin.	But you'll never find a beer so brown But you'll never find a beer so brown
Voit juoda jaloa juomaa Vaikka pääläristä	Ja olutta ei löydy ruskeaa näin, niin kuin löytyy meiltä päin!	As the one we drink in our hometown As the one we drink in our hometown
Vaan ainoan oikean oluen...	Voitte juoda pilsnereitänne, voitte juoda niitä vaikka kääreestä.	You can drink your fancy ales You can drink them by the flagon
Vaan ainoan oikean oluen Saat Vihreästä Lohikäärmeestä	Mutta rohkeiden ja rehellisten juomat tulevat Vihreästä Lohikäärmeestä!	But the only brew for the brave and true Comes from The Green Dragon

The lack of coherence with the source text in the first line of the community-generated translation can be attributed to the low volume in the beginning of the

song due to it being overlaid with the previous scene. Thus it is part of the same problem discussed in section 4.1.

The translation of a song like this allows for a lot of freedom: the semantic content is completely irrelevant to the rest of the film and the form is probably also not an important aspect to be reproduced in the translation since it varies wildly in the original too. The paramount feature of the song is the rhyme scheme, which makes it feel like a simple drinking song. Both translators have reproduced the rhymes quite admirably and the overall effect of both translations is equivalent to the original; they are light-hearted tributes to the hometown beer in the form of a drinking song.

This song is one of the two examples of where the commissioned translator has not been able to use the book translation. It is worth noting how the translations are now on a much more equal level of quality with each other.

4.4.2 All That is Gold Does Not Glitter

Arwen's recital of the second verse of the poem "All That is Gold Does Not Glitter" (originating from the first book, the Fellowship of the Ring), foretelling Aragorn's ascendance to the throne, is not treated as a poem in the community-generated subtitles at all, while the professional subtitles have reused the book translation. Whereas the book translation replicates some features of the poem, such as the rhyme scheme, the community-generated subtitler seems to have translated the lines of the poem as if they were isolated phrases, as indicated by the full stops at the end of each sentence and the lack of a clear poetic form:

DVD	<i>Tuli tuhkasta jälleen pilkahtaa</i> <i>Valo varjoista syttyvä on</i> <i>Terä miekan murtunut yhteen saa</i> <i>Ja kruunataan kruununon</i>
Divxfinland.org	Tuli herätköön tuhkastaan. Valo levitköön varjoista.

	Taottakoon särkynyt terä jälleen uudeksi. Tulkoon kruunuttomasta jälleen kuningas.
English caption	<i>From the ashes a fire shall be woken A light from the shadow shall spring Renewed shall be blade that was broken The crownless again shall be king</i>

Given the loose spacing of the poem in the film (pauses between the lines) and the way it is read without unnecessarily stressing the rhythm, it is possible that the poetic form has simply gone unnoticed by the community translator. The resulting translation has all the semantic elements and the general feel of the source text, and does indeed read like the prophecy it should be. If the skopos of the original is seen to be a prophecy, that function is certainly fulfilled even without the rhymes, but if one wants to consider the status the poem might have as a part of the oral tradition in the fictional universe, the easy-to-recall and easy-to-recite form of the prophecy would be a crucial part of the text and thus worth replicating in the translation.

4.4.3 Naughty little fly

Naughty little fly is a short taunt by Gollum as he succeeds in tricking Frodo into Shelob's web. Only four lines long, the song has a meter reminiscent of common children's taunts like *na-na, na-na, boo-boo*, evoking the idea of Gollum as an immature and spiteful creature. It does not originate from the books, therefore being an original translation:

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
<i>Tuhma pikku kärpänen</i>	Pienen pieni kärpänen,	Naughty little fly
<i>Miksi itkee pikkuinen?</i>	Miksi päästää kyynelen?	Why does he cry?
<i>Se jäi verkon ansahan</i>	Kiinni sen verkossa	Caught in a web
<i>Pian sinut... ahmaistaan.</i>	Pian hänen mahassa	Soon you'll be... Eaten.

The joke in the English original is of course in the receiver's expectation to hear "dead" at the end of the last line to form a (slant) rhyme with "web", a joke that is not reproduced in either translation. The DVD subtitle, does in fact not have a rhyme in the last line, but the word that is expected to rhyme with "*ansahan*" is not as clear as in the original, if there even is one. The community-generated subtitle, on the other hand, lacks the un-rhyme completely.

In order to achieve an equivalent effect in the target language, a structure reminiscent of a common taunt in Finnish is needed. This is a great example of a case where an appropriate amount of domestication can be argued to benefit the translation, despite the general consensus being that foreignisation is the more appropriate approach to translation in many cases.

The community-generated subtitles' two first lines are in an appropriate form, scanning like a nursery rhyme, or, indeed, a taunt. Coincidentally or not, this is in the exact same meter used in the DVD-subtitles. For some reason the meter is changed for the two lines that follow: the 3rd line is in much more rare dactylic feet, breaking the allusion to children's taunts. The 4th line is then in a yet different metre, which can be seen as proof that the translator has not considered the metre worth the effort and being content with the rhymes.

4.4.4 Edge of Night

Despite showing interest in translating poetic language, the community translator has decided to not translate the song Pippin sings at Denethor's request, commonly known as *Edge of Night* or *A Walking Song*. The reasons for this can only be speculated, but the song is certainly not a crucial part of the story and only thematically linked to on-screen events. The DVD reuses the book translation, but without anything to compare it to, the song will not be further discussed in this paper.

4.4.5 Théoden's pre-battle speech

As with the poetry translations, the DVD-subtitler has decided to reuse the translation of Théoden's pre-battle speech, as that too is identical to the one found in the book. I argue that these translations have expired, or at least do not fit the new context. The medium has changed: what on the pages of a book look like poetry do not have the same effect when they are yelled to lines of soldiers as a pre-battle motivational speech. Thus, reusing the same translation breaks the coherency of the target text and creates an unintentional comic effect.

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
Eteenpäin!	Eteenpäin!	Forth, and fear no darkness!
Pois pimeänpelko!	Älkää pelätkö.	Arise, arise, Riders of Théoden!
Te ratsaille nouskaa, Théodenin miehet!	Nouskaa, Théodenin ratsumiehet!	Spears shall be shaken... Shields shall be splintered...
Käy tanaan peitsi ja pirstoutuu kilpi!	Keihäitä tullaan käyttämään. Kilpiä tullaan särkemään.	a sword-day, a red day...
Miekan punainen päivä on kajossa aamun!	Lyhyt päivä. Suuri päivä. Ja aurinko nousee!	and the sun rises!

The parts lifted from the book translation are markedly so: poetic in form, not just archaic. The reused translation on the DVD has a word order usually only found in poetry. This alone can create a 'poetic' feel to language, but the translation also has a clear rhythm of iambs and anapests to it after the initial encouragement ("fear no darkness"). Also, the addition of the unnecessary pronoun 'te' at the beginning of the third line of the translation seems to only serve the purpose of making the naturally trochaic Finnish with its first syllable stresses sound iambic.

The problem of the book translation is therefore a case of equivalent effect. Even though the source language speech has some qualities of poetry, such as its use of the aesthetic qualities of language like alliteration, it does not have the clear and somewhat artificial metre of the translation.

The community-generated translation obviously has problems of its own (mishearing, discussed in section 4.1, and debatable grammar, discussed in section 4.3) but overtly poetic language is not one of them. In fact, the community translator has not attempted to reproduce the aesthetic aspects of the speech at all, which I believe are not necessarily needed in the context of the film adaptation.

4.5 The degree of domestication and foreignisation

This section will discuss the domesticating and foreignising practices of both translators. The degree of domestication and foreignisation can be seen in the explication of foreign words and constructions, as well as how idiomatic the resulting translation sounds like to a native speaker. Overall, the community-generated translation seems to favour domesticating practices over foreignising one; they aim for as idiomatic expressions as possible, sometimes even with the cost of accuracy, as will be explained later.

The community-generated subtitles often choose a word or a phrase that is more natural and idiomatic to a native Finnish speaker.

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
Sméagol! Sain kalan!	Sméagol!	I've got one!
Minä sain kalan, Sméag! - Vedä se ylös. Vedä.	Minulla tärppäsi! Sain kalan, Sméagol! Vauhtia nyt, vedä se ylös!	I've got a fish, Sméag. Sméagol! Pull it in. Go on. Go on. Go on. Pull it in.

“Minulla tärppäsi” is the common phrase referring to fish biting in Finnish. It is not the exactly the same as the source text “I’ve got a fish” (or the DVD translation, for that matter) in meaning, but based on what is happening in the screen, it is the more natural phrase to say at the moment the fish bites. The difference in meaning compared to the original has therefore made the translation *closer* to the source material and not farther from it. This is an example of a beneficial domestication; it makes the text more natural without losing anything.

Domestication happens not only on word or concept level, but also on a structural level. Consider Gandalf’s response to Aragorn:

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
Frodo lähestyy päivä päivältä Mordoria.	Joka päivä Frodo siirtyy lähemmäksi Mordoria.	Every day, Frodo moves closer to Mordor.
Tiedämmekö sen?	Mistä tiedämme sen?	Do we know that?

The DVD translation is the simplest possible word-for-word translation, questioning the truthfulness of Aragorn’s statement. The word-for-word translation does not cause any confusion and is definitely a sufficient translation, but nevertheless perhaps not the most natural way to frame the question in Finnish. The community-generated translation’s change of perspective to ‘how do we know that’ is a move closer towards more natural and idiomatic Finnish.

The commissioned translation is less domesticating than the community-generated one, but is not necessarily very foreignising either. It does, however, retain the amount of foreignisation already in the source text:

DVD	Divxfinland.org	English captions
Kutsu <i>rohirrim</i> koolle.	Kerätkää ratsumiehet!	Muster the Rohirrim.

Here, the term *Rohirrim*, which originates from the books, refers to the people of the land of Rohan. Despite the morphological similarity, the logical connection between Rohan and *Rohirrim* might be lost to the viewer and is not explicitly stated in the film either.

The translation of Rohirrim as *ratsumiehet* (*cavalry*) is a logical one based on the fact that the verb 'muster' is a military term and the *rohirrim* are known for their mounted soldiers. It is also factually correct since the next scene shows the cavalry riding to war. This is also a justification for keeping *rohirrim* in the translation; the audience will understand what was meant as the next scene unfolds.

5. Discussion

In this section, I will discuss the results of my analysis and consider the integrity of both subtitles from the points of view of equivalence, skopos and the level of domestication and/or foreignisation.

Attempting an effect equivalent to spoken word in text is naturally extremely difficult, if not impossible. However, there are at least two points to consider.

First, it can be argued that many attitudes and emotions expressed through intonation in languages like English are expressed in words in the fairly monotonic Finnish with its always-falling intonation. This would imply that the written form of Finnish could be nearly as expressive as its spoken form, which is of course beneficial to the translator. Both of the subtitles contain examples of the translator adding lexemes or morphemes to express the intonation of the source text. For example,

“You’re coming with me?”

is translated in the community-generated subtitles as

“Tulethan sinä mukaani?”

The word-for-word translation would have been 'sinä tulet mukaani' but because of the hesitation in the actor's tone, the community subtitler has added the *-hAn* enclitic implying that Pippin is waiting for a confirmation, exactly like the hesitant intonation of the source text.

A similar example from the commissioned translation:

"But... But we'll see each other soon."

is translated as

"Pianhan me taas näemme."

Again, the hesitation in the actor's voice has prompted the translator to add the *-hAn* enclitic to ensure that the hesitation comes through to the receiver. In this case, the hesitation comes from the surprise that Merry wants to give the rest of his tobacco to Pippin, as if it was their final parting. Again, the rather versatile enclitic *-hAn* can communicate the surprise to the Finnish speaking receiver.

Coming to my second consideration, the original source text, the spoken word, is not lost to the receiver of the localised film; the subtitles do not exist in a vacuum and are practically never examined without the original audiovisual material. The receiver of the localised film is, in addition to reading the translation of the dialogue, exposed to the same information from other semiotic channels as the original target audience, such as hearing the changes in the speaker's tone and volume and see the facial expressions, body language and all the other extralinguistic aspects of communication. Even the non-diegetic information, such as the soundtrack or composition of the picture, could theoretically supplement the translation. A good example of this, as discussed in section four, is the translation of poems in the amateur subtitles, where only the basic idea of the source text is translated and the aesthetic and rhythmic qualities of the language are left for the auditory sense.

This is closely connected to the *skopos* of the translation: if the purpose of the subtitle is not to provide the whole experience, but only act as a lingual guide to it, how necessary is it to pay close attention to the form, as long as the message stays true to the original source text? Is the attention paid to the form of a poem, for example, a wasted effort if it is never read aloud? Can the spectator appreciate the effort that has gone into the translation without being able to re-read it like a printed poem?

In addition, the *skopos* of the translation decrees what is adequate or acceptable. People watching the heavily compressed video files secretly recorded in the cinema with a camcorder are already settling for an inferior experience and it is unlikely they mind the occasional untranslated song or a rushed translation of a poem. On the other hand, if the *skopos* is not to translate for a specific audience, but rather for the amusement of the translator himself, the lack of attention would likely lie in the translator's disinterest in spending his free time on poetry translation.

The errors in community-generated subtitles were mostly due to not having access to a transcript (and thus confusing 'sword' for 'short', for example), instead of lack of proficiency in the source language. Minor problems with the target language are present in both subtitles, although slightly more prevalent in the community translation. The translation of poetic language is treated with different, though similarly neglectful approaches: the commissioned translator has reused the book translations wherever possible, whereas the community translator only does the bare minimum to communicate the idea of the original.

6. Conclusion

If one wanted to 'measure' the quality of subtitles by counting errors and mistakes, the DVD-subtitles would most definitely stand on top of such a comparison. However, the comparison would not be a fair one: had the community translator had the transcript available to the commissioned

translator, the numbers would be much more even. What if the community translator had the dialogue list? What would the DVD-subtitles look like if the translator did not have to worry about character limits?

The 'hobbyism' or 'amateurism' of the community-generated subtitles is most prominent in the translation of poems. It is obvious that the translator has not found the translation of poetic language interesting or enjoyable and thus skipped them or translated only the content, with the exception of *Naughty Little Fly*. Then again this may be true for the commissioned translator, too, who had the option of reusing the book translations.

Unfortunately, the nature of Bachelor's thesis limits the scope of this study, severely; there are still several points to discuss. I originally wished to discuss the differences in the translation of several characters, especially Samwise and Gollum. It would also be interesting to do an analysis of the psycholinguistic aspects of subtitling, such as the required reading speeds. The lines in community-generated subtitles are noticeably longer than on the DVD; would this cause a more casual viewer trouble keeping up with both the film and the subtitles?

Without an analysis of these features, it is not possible to say whether the commissioned subtitles would gain more of an edge against the community-generated ones. However, the fact that the biggest differentiating factor between the community-generated and commissioned subtitles are errors that could have been easily avoided if a transcript or a dialogue list had been available to both translators and not just the commissioned translator speaks volumes about the overall quality of the community-generated subtitles.

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