

Compliments in fansubs and in professional subtitles: The case of *Lost*

SILVIA BRUTI
Università di Pisa
silvia.bruti@unipi.it

ABSTRACT

This contribution aims to explore the occurrences of compliments and their translations in professional subtitles and fansubs, i.e. subtitles produced by non-professional translators. As an amateur phenomenon, fansubbing does not have to comply with the norms that govern professional subtitling and generally exhibits greater accuracy in rendering idiolectal traits, character identity and intertextual references. For this reason, a comparison between the translation of compliments in professional and non-professional subtitles seemed quite promising, as evidence from previous studies suggests that socio-pragmatic meaning often tends to be jeopardized in interlinguistic subtitles. Their different aims and requisites make it possible for fansubs to grant much more attention to these aspects of language, compliments included, as useful indicators of the social forces at play.

This paper offers the results of a linguistic comparison between these two types of subtitles for the American TV series *Lost* (2004-2010), a popular TV series around the world. The subject matter and the rapid rhythm of the series make the presence of ritual talk quite reduced and abrupt, but the analysis of the rendering of compliments in the DVD subtitles and in the fansubs produced by the two largest Italian fansubber communities, i.e. Itasa (<http://www.italiansubs.net>) and Subsfactory (<http://www.subsfactory.it/>) surprisingly shows no major discrepancies.

KEYWORDS

Compliments, subtitling, fansubs.

1. INTRODUCTION AND AIMS

The centrality of speech act research is testified by the plethora of studies devoted to this topic and compliments are without a doubt well represented in recent research, especially on account of their somewhat paradoxical nature. As Pomerantz highlighted in her seminal paper back in 1978, they pose a dilemma to the addressee, who must either violate the maxim of modesty and accept the compliment, or violate the maxim of agreement and reject it. As always in the domain of pragmatics, there are also in-between options, ways of downgrading or upgrading the intensity of the illocutionary force, that make it possible to accept compliments without boasting one's merits.

Research on compliments ranges from different perspectives of investigation, i.e. their nature and their most typical linguistic patterns, the sociolinguistic parameters associated with their performance (that is, the social actors of the compliment), or the second pair part, i.e. the compliment response, to different languages and also to their translation. In particular, in the subdomain of audiovisual translation, much research is devoted to the translation of pragmatic aspects, which, for different reasons, are often jeopardized in both subtitling and dubbing, the two main modes of translation of audiovisual products (Bruti 2006, 2009, Bączkowska and Kieś 2012).

Recent approaches are also concerned with new and hybrid genres such as social forums, chatrooms, and emails, which share features of written texts and spoken interaction and in which polite behaviour needs to be redefined (Maíz-Arévalo 2013).

In this paper, I would like to concentrate on the translation of compliments in professional subtitles and fansubs, that is, subtitles created by non-professional translators who work for free in order to promote translations of their favourite audiovisual products (cf., among many, Díaz-Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006, O'Hagan 2009, Bruti and Zanotti 2012 a and b). The implications of such an investigation are manifold: first of all, translating speech acts always entails moving across the border between different lingua-cultural sets and presenting the target audience with pragmatic routines that are often neither natural nor appropriate because they represent a different language and culture. The problem, as has amply been shown in the literature on interlanguage and acquisitional pragmatics (Trosborg 1995), resides not so much in pragmalinguistic competence as in sociopragmatic competence: speakers may in fact acquire target-like formulas quite easily, but tend to master the contextual parameters for their use later on and with greater difficulty (Bardovi-Harlig 2012). Secondly, translation

of sociopragmatic meaning in subtitles has been shown to be curbed in favour of informative content (Bruti and Perego 2005, 2008).

The comparison between professional and amateur subtitles has proven to be particularly interesting, as fansubs do not adhere to the rules of use of professional subtitles and grant more space to pragmatic aspects. This is because fansubbers either translate to give more access to products that are not available in translation outside the country of origin (which is the reason why fansubs were born, to make Japanese anime available to a wider audience), or because the available translations of their favourite product(s) are not satisfactory.

In this paper, I investigate the nature of compliments and their translations for the American TV series *Lost* (2004-2010), a popular TV series of the last decades, in two different types of subtitles, those developed by professional translators for the DVD version of the product, and those produced by amateurs and made available online for fans and TV audience through the two largest fansubbing communities in Italy, Itasa (<http://www.italiansubs.net>) and Subsfactory – sottotitoli per passione (<http://www.subsfactory.it>).

2. AN OVERVIEW OF COMPLIMENTS

As has been briefly hinted at in the previous section, research on compliments has attracted much attention, especially in some specific domains. There are three main strands that account for the majority of research on this topic. One of the most prolific is their realization patterns in specific language domains, such as, for example, the different varieties of English (research on variational pragmatics, i.e. pragmatic intra-lingua variation, as shown in Barron 2008 for requests in English English and Irish English or in Schneider 1999 for compliment responses, to name just a few) or contrastive studies that highlight differences between languages. Another very fertile line of investigation applies to the classification of compliments according to their illocutionary aims and linguistic forms. A third one instead addresses the sociolinguistic parameters associated with the use of compliments, i.e. “who uses compliments to whom on which occasions” (Jucker 2008: 165). Quite interestingly, Jucker recently proposed a new way of investigating compliments as one type of speech act. In his study, he compares and evaluates different research methods in pragmatics and their appropriateness to different research questions and aims. In doing so he shows how various linguistic methods, what he calls “armchair”, “field” and “laboratory”, all have advantages and shortcomings depending on the specific research question the investigator means to answer.

Compliments in interaction are primarily aimed at maintaining, enhancing or supporting the addressee’s face, and are used for a variety of reasons, the most significant of which is the expression of admiration or approval for somebody’s work, appearance and taste. As has been shown by numerous studies, they typically revolve around a few topics and tend to be formulaic in nature (Wolfson

1981, 1984, Manes and Wolfson 1980, Wolfson and Manes 1980, Holmes 1988 to name but a few), a feature which makes them eligible as one type of “pragmatic routines”, i.e. conventional expressions that are used on specific social occasions (Bardovi-Harlig 2012, 2013). One further aspect that has attracted much attention is the typology of compliments (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1987, Boyle 2000, Bruti 2006), i.e. the fact that their illocutionary point can be more or less direct, depending on a number of social factors and also on the cultural-ideological identity of a certain ethno-linguistic group. In fact, even though communicative functions appear to exist across languages, the ways in which a given function is fulfilled may differ from one language to another (Trosborg 1995: 39). Studies in cross-cultural pragmatics have tried to clarify the differences in the speakers’ attitudes, their hierarchies of values, and the way speakers construct their discursive identities. The cultural norms reflected in speech may differ or, as Wierzbicka said (1991: 26), “different speech acts become entrenched, and, to some extent, codified in different languages”. Trosborg (1995) explains that different pragmatic norms mirror different arrangements of values typical of each culture, or to borrow Brown and Levinson’s expression, dating back to Bateson (1958), they display different cultural “ethos”, i.e. different “quality of interaction characterizing groups, or social categories of persons, in a particular society” (1987: 243).

2.1. COMPLIMENTS IN A SPECIFIC GENRE

In this investigation, all of these aspects intersect with one crucial element: the genre of the text under analysis, TV fiction, although not totally remote from films, has had over the last decade a booming success, but has also become distinct from cinema for its own specific narrative, semiotic and linguistic features (Quaglio 2009; Piazza, Bednarek, Rossi 2011), which largely depend on its broadcasting time and modality. The language used in TV fiction tends to be less homogeneous and more varied than film language, although they are both planned beforehand. Its variety is due to the fact that each fictional subgenre has different communicative aims and textual and dialogic features. Television genres accommodate “texts that are characterized by formal to highly formal registers with a tendency towards standard and/or neo-standard language (mainly in TV fiction) [that] can be found together with texts which show (sometimes excessive) tendencies towards sub-standard varieties and features” (De Rosa *forthc.*). Furthermore, *Lost*¹ was and still is so popular because of its unusual themes (a plotline full of mysteries and twists) and its innovative narrative techniques and montage, which established new trends in the field of TV fiction. The story is told

1 The first season begins with a plane crash that leaves the survivors of Oceanic Airlines Flight 815 to Los Angeles on what seems to be a desert tropical island in the South Pacific Ocean. Their survival is threatened by a number of mysterious entities, including polar bears, and ominous, unseen creatures in the jungle.

in a heavily serialized manner and each single episode has a main storyline on the island and a secondary thread devoted to another time and place in the characters' life. These interpolations of time and space are one of the most distinctive components of this TV programme compared to any other show: not only are there flashbacks that portray what happened before the crash of Oceanic Flight 815, but there also flashforwards, i.e. interjections of a scene representing an event expected, projected, or imagined to occur at a later time, and flashsideways, fragments in which characters live out alternative scenarios. This heavily influences the language that is used, most of the times reduced to essential communication, at times completely devoid of conventional ritualized expressions and phatic language, but also distinguished by catchphrases associated to the most important characters, which gradually become their 'trademark'.

There are interesting differences among seasons, as, for example, in the first characters find themselves obliged to live together on an apparently deserted island after the plane crash, so they get to know each other and solidarity-enhancing talk is often resorted to. In season five, when events turn gloomy and menacing, the characters no longer indulge in politeness strategies or phatic talk. The exchanges are often brisk and targeted at the solution of some incumbent problem. Another interesting detail is that, while in season one flashbacks that portray episodes from the characters' previous lives are used sparsely to shed more light on the characters themselves, in season three the interpolations between past and present become central, so much so that it is sometimes difficult to locate events on the timeline.

3. TRANSLATING COMPLIMENTS IN SUBTITLES

Pragmatic topics have not received the lion's share in the domain of audiovisual translation studies, although much more sensitivity towards the area has been observed in the last decade. Although it has since long been recognized that the transformation from oral to written language implicated in subtitling makes wording more formal and neat, almost devoid of the many sociolinguistic and pragmatic markers that give spoken language its natural flavour (Kovačič 1996, Hatim and Mason 2000), studies on the translation of socio-pragmatic meanings in interlingual subtitles are not particularly numerous. Since the tendency in subtitles is usually towards reduction of redundancies and of modulating and pragmatic markers, whose meaning cannot always be recovered from the visual or the auditive non-verbal codes, Blini and Matte Bon (1996) pointed to the necessity of reaching a compromise in which "the illocutionary aspect of the text should [...] be privileged by trying to reproduce the same speech acts in the target language on the basis of a careful analysis of the [...] pragmatolinguistic elements" (1996: 328, my translation).

On the basis of the observations contained in the aforementioned papers and in other studies on subtitling, in recent years the following pragmatic is-

sues have been investigated: the speech act of advice in translation from Spanish to English (Pinto 2010), vocatives in Italian subtitles (Bruti and Perego 2005, 2008), the Gricean cooperation principle in Polish subtitles (Bączkowska 2012), the translation of the nuances of meaning contained in the T/V person pronouns into English (Guillot 2010), direct, indirect and implicit compliments in (Italian) subtitles (Bruti 2006, 2008). The range of topics becomes wider if studies on dubbing are taken into account, e.g. Chaume on discourse markers (2004b), Matala on interjections (2009).²

One further aspect that needs to be discussed is the relevance of an analysis of compliments in film language and translation. My specific interest in this and other papers is mainly focused on the problems of translating socio-pragmatic values in audiovisual texts, but in the course of my teaching experience I have had the opportunity of observing how the language of films might be successfully employed in language teaching. The use of films, television and other broadcast media in language teaching is quite widespread and popular (Cooper, Lavery and Rinvolucris 1991, Tatsuki and Kite 2006, Tatsuki and Nishizawa 2005), as many of these products depict plausible scenes of daily life and screenplay writers strive to create dialogue that is clear and understandable, yet also capable of creating the illusion of real conversation. The pioneering study by Rose on compliments (2001) validated the use of film materials as an authentic (or quasi-authentic) representation of actual language use, but more recently many other scholars have followed in his footsteps, recommending the use of film in both teaching and researching pragmatics (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig, Hartford, Mahan-Taylor, Morgan and Reynolds 1991, Rose 1994, Fernandez-Guerra and Martinez-Flor 2003). Even if the debate on whether film/broadcast materials may be considered a sufficiently accurate representation of natural discourse (Chaume 2001, 2004a, Quaglio 2009 to name but a few), or if they are feasible supplements to course texts, or even if they are pedagogically appropriate materials is still open, results from studies on compliments indicate that the syntactic forms of compliments, the topics and the ways they are reacted and responded to tend to occur with the same frequency in films as they do in ethnographic data (Manes and Wolfson 1981, Rose 2001). So, all in all, the differences tend to concern not so much the pragmalinguistic features of these pragmatic routines, but the sociopragmatic ones, e.g. the gender distribution of both complimenter and complimentee.

4. THE PHENOMENON OF FANSUBBING

The phenomenon of fansubbing can be included among the various different forms of what is known under the term of community translation, an emerg-

2 My focus is mainly on English and Italian but many more publications can be included in this group that deal with similar topics in Spanish.

ing phenomenon which has been gaining ground as a social practice over the last decade and, more recently, as an object of research. The term encompasses translation practices that are unfolding on the Internet. More specifically, it describes “translation performed voluntarily by Internet users [which] is usually produced in some form of collaboration often on specific platforms by a group of people forming an online community” (O’Hagan 2011: 14). Normally, community translators are volunteers who engage in translation of texts to be shared on the Internet on a voluntary basis, i.e. with no remuneration. Social networks are a privileged site for community translation practices, but there is an abundance of translation hosting sites also outside the domain of social networking.

Fansubbing is a subtitling practice developed by Internet users which is carried out by fans and for fans (Díaz Cintas and Pablo Muñoz Sánchez 2006): fansubbers carry out all the translation phases, as they translate the dialogues, synchronize the subtitles with the video and sound of the audiovisual text and make them available to the fan community by posting them on the Internet. The enormous expansion and availability of communication technologies have made it possible for fan translators to introduce subtitles with relative ease, enabling them to take care of the whole process, from translating to timing or spotting to Internet loading. This has undoubtedly favoured the dissemination of this translation practice, which has been described by Abe Mark Nornes (2007: 176-187) as “abusive” in that it challenges some of the conventional constraints imposed on subtitling.

The phenomenon of fansubbing should be interpreted as a response to the needs of groups of viewers who have different expectations in terms of audiovisual translation practices and often give vent to their dissatisfaction, especially with current dubbing practices, at least in Italy. Their work is thus destined for a targeted audience of which they themselves are members.

The subtitling strategies adopted in amateur subtitling can be ascribed to the fansubbers’ interventionist move and political agenda: their approach has in fact been described as “innovative”, “creative”, “subversive” and “abusive” (Nornes 2007, Pérez González 2007). The issue of fan translation as opposed to professional translation is, however, the object of debate, since, being an amateur phenomenon, fansubbing does not need to attend to the formal and linguistic norms and conventions that are requested in professional translation. The main differences between fansubs and professional subtitles apply especially to the following features: the number of characters per line and the subtitlers’ visibility (not only in terms of various glosses but also through their acknowledgement in the credits). The strategies of diamesic (i.e. the change of medium, from spoken to written) transformation are also different, as greater accuracy has normally been observed in fansubs. This is tightly interwoven with fansubbers’ expert knowledge and usually ensues in a better rendering of characters’ idiolectal traits and intertextual references. Generally, the translation approach is bent towards the source-text rather than the target-text, and the translating task is in the majority of cases the result of a joint effort of various fansubbers, each translating a part

of the whole (e.g. a part of a film or an episode of a series). This latter feature ensures immediate availability of the translated product, almost in real-time, to the wider community of Internet users.

5. AN ANALYSIS OF COMPLIMENTS IN *LOST*

This contribution investigates the translation of a very specific speech act, complimenting, in the subtitles produced by the Italian community of amateur subtitlers for the US TV series *Lost* (2004-2010) and in those produced by professional translators for the DVD version of the series. Although community translation is booming, at present there are two major fansubbing communities in Italy: *Itasa* (<http://www.italiansubs.net/>) and *Subsfactory* – *sottotitoli per passione* (<http://www.subsfactory.it/>). These communities are in constant competition in terms of both uploading time and quality standards. The whole *Lost* series can be found in their archives. Quite interestingly, the Subsfactory site reveals that their most downloaded text files are two *Lost* episodes. This work capitalizes on the results of several previous studies carried out with Serenella Zanotti (Bruti and Zanotti 2012, 2013, forthc.) aimed at investigating the phenomenon of fansubbing within the wide panorama of translation studies, concentrating in particular on its linguistic features and on the viewing habits of the Italian audience.

The analysis has so far been conducted on a number of episodes selected from three out of *Lost*'s six seasons: season one (episodes 1, 2, 5, 13, 17, 21, 23), season three (episodes 1, 5, 9, 13, 17, 18, 21) and season five (episodes 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13). The subtitles of the DVD version have been compared with those which have been translated and made available on the web by the above-mentioned Italian fansubbing communities, *Itasa* and *Subsfactory*.

As has been remarked by Bruti and Zanotti (2012: 174) on the basis of a word count for Pilot Part 1,³ a varying degree of textual reduction in the three sets of subtitles can be observed. Table 1 below shows the numbers of words and subtitles per set:

	N. OF WORDS	N. OF SUBTITLES
DVD	1645	288
ITASA	1833	378
SUBSFACTORY	1846	389

Table 1. Word count in professional and amateur subtitles (based on data from Pilot Part 1)

Some observations can be made with regard to text reduction. As can be seen in Table 1 above, a higher proportion of cuts can be detected in professional subtitles, as opposed to fansubs, which tend to minimal text reduction, thus produc-

3 Season one opens with a Pilot episode, which is divided into two parts.

ing rather long lines. Example (1) shows that both DVD and Itasa subtitles remain within the prescribed number of characters (using respectively 65 and 70 for a two-liner), whereas the subtitles produced by Subsfactory fansubbers are the longest and exceed the prescribed limit of characters⁴ (77 for a two-liner).

(1)⁵

ORIGINAL		
Jack: Stop! Her head's not tilted far back enough. You're blowing air into her stomach.		
DVD	Itasa	Subs
Fermo! La testa non è abbastanza indietro. Le soffi nello stomaco.	La testa non è abbastanza inclinata. Stai soffiando aria nello stomaco.	La sua testa non è abbastanza inclinata. Le stai soffiando aria nello stomaco.
[Stop! The head is not back enough. You're blowing into the stomach]	[The head is not reclined enough. You're blowing air into the stomach.]	[Her head is not reclined enough. You're blowing air into the stomach.]
Season 1, Pilot part one		

On the other hand, fansubbers seem to prefer translation strategies that result in greater textual fragmentation, with a larger number of subtitles per episode, but remaining, almost always, within the time requirements. It is quite common to find one-word subtitles, which may amount to a mere interjection (e.g. “Wow!”).

Also worthy of notice is the fact that linguistic choices in the original dialogues rest on the diegesis and the specific features of the series. In season one, for instance, the characters do not know each other and this is clearly reflected in their interactions. As will be shown in the following paragraphs, this strong dependence on the features of the genre, both narrative and cinematic, has a whole series of repercussions on the choice of compliments, on their scant frequency and on their translation.

- 4 Díaz Cintas and Remael point out (2007: 84-85) that there seems to be an evolution upwards, with a higher number of characters allowed, favoured by both higher quality projection and increased viewing experience. In the case of fansubs, expert knowledge of the programme also enhances reading speed.
- 5 Subtitles are numbered. Backtranslation from Italian into English is provided within square brackets at the end. Misspelt words in the subtitles were left as they were (e.g. wrong accents like “e” and not “é”, “perchè” instead of “perché”).

5.1. A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

In this section, a report on quantitative data will be followed by a qualitative analysis of some representative cases. In order to retrieve compliments from the *Lost* corpus it was not possible to exploit available concordancing software, as compliments often rely on a few predictable structures, mainly positive adjectives and verbs (cf. Manes and Wolfson 1980, Wolfson and Manes 1980, Holmes 1988), but very often use more implicit or indirect phrasing that would escape automatic queries (Bruti 2009b: 150), so the corpus was manually searched. The retrieved data are in any case just a few and they can only offer an overview of the speech act of complimenting in the series under investigation and of the tentative translating trends in the two different types of subtitles.

In the table that follows I indicate the overall number of compliments in each season and the number of translated compliments in the fansubs. Where there are discrepancies, i.e. compliments that are deleted, this is signalled in bold. The maximum and minimum number of compliments per episode is also signalled.

	Season 1			Season 3			Season 5		
Compliments in the original soundtrack	24			23			15		
Compliments translated in the subs per season	DVD	Itasa	Subs	DVD	Itasa	Subs	DVD	Itasa	Subs
	22	22	22	23	23	23	15	14	15
Maximum # of compliments/episode	7			5			3		
Minimum # of compliments/episode	1			2			0		

Table 2. Number of compliments in the three seasons of *Lost*

These figures are indicative of some of the features of the series and of the narrative differences between the seasons: the highest number of compliments featured in the first season is directly linked to the plot, as hinted at in section 2.1 above, because the characters get to know each other and use phatic talk, whereas in seasons three and five they have to face problems, so interactions become fast and focused on some specific situation-related topic. Furthermore, the role of flashbacks is also different, as in season one they recall episodes from the characters' previous lives, whereas in season three past and present are mingled and events are not always easily located on the timeline. The result is that in season one only 3 compliments out of 24 take place in flashbacks (12,5%), whereas in season three the percentage increases dramatically, with 14 out of 23 compliments belonging to past events

(60,9%). Although the time manipulations go on in season five, the occurrences of compliments in this season concern the *hic et nunc* of the narration.

To proceed to a qualitative analysis, the compliments have been classified into four different categories. In studies on the typology of compliments, the main distinction is that between direct and indirect (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1987), as well as explicit and implicit (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1987, Boyle 2000). Direct compliments are the most prototypical form of compliments, with the speaker paying the compliment to the addressee in a frank and outspoken way (e.g., “You’re special. You’re uniquely and miraculously special”, season 5, episode 1). This obviously makes acknowledgment and response almost necessary, as the wording of the compliment does not give rise to possible misinterpretations. In the literature, the label of indirect compliments is used to refer to compliments that need to be decoded through a more or less articulated process of inferring (they have, therefore, different degrees of implicitness). Some authors (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1987) employ the term “indirect” also to refer to compliments that involve a third party that is somehow related with the addressee. In other words, these compliments are still directed at the addressee, but focus more openly on someone who is related with him/her (“Well, he [=the addressee’s husband] sounds like a very smart man”, season 1, episode 1) or may report somebody else’s opinion. This latter case is well exemplified by example (2) below, taken from season 1, episode 23.

(2)

ORIGINAL		
Sawyer: And this guy, Christian, tells me he wishes he had the stones to pick up the phone, call his kid, tell him he's sorry, that he's a better doctor than he'll ever be - he's proud, and he loves him. I had to take off, but - something tells me he never got around to making that call. Small world, huh?		
DVD	Itasa	Subs
1 E il tizio...	1 E questo tizio...	1 E quest'uomo...
2 ...Christian...	2 Christian,	2 Christian...
3...mi dice che vorrebbe tanto avere il fegato	3 mi dice che vorrebbe avere le palle di prendere il telefono e chiamare suo figlio.	3 Mi disse che avrebbe voluto avere il coraggio di sollevare il telefono e chiamare suo figlio.
4 di sollevare la cornetta e chiamare suo figlio.	4 E dirgli che gli dispiace,	4 Per dirgli che gli dispiaceva.
5 E chiedergli scusa.	5 che è un dottore migliore di quanto lui potrà mai essere,	5 Che era un dottore migliore di quanto lui sarebbe mai stato.
6 Dirgli che è un medico migliore di lui.	6 che è orgoglioso di lui...	6 Era orgoglioso.
7 Che è fiero di lui.	7 e gli vuole bene.	7 Ti voleva bene.
8 E che gli vuole bene.	8 Ho dovuto alzare i tacchi, ma...	8 Me ne sono dovuto andare, ma...
9 Io me ne sono dovuto andare...	9 qualcosa mi dice che non si è mai deciso a fare quella telefonata.	9 qualcosa mi ha detto che non avrebbe mai fatto quella telefonata.
10 ...ma qualcosa mi dice che non l'ha mai chiamato.	10 Com'è piccolo il mondo, eh?	10 Il mondo è piccolo, huh?
11 Piccolo il mondo, eh?		
[And the guy, Christian, tells me he would like to have the guts to pick up the phone and call his son. And apologize. Tell him that he is a better doctor than him. That he is proud of him. And that he loves him. I had to go but something tells me that he never called him. Small world, isn't it?	[And this guy, Christian, tells me he would like to have the balls to pick up the phone and call his son. And tell him that he is sorry, that he is a better doctor than he will ever be, that he is proud of him and loves him. I had to go away, but something tells me that he never resolved to make that phonecall. How small the world is, huh?]	[And this man Christian told me that he would like to have the courage to pick up the phone and call his son. To tell him that he was sorry, that he was a better doctor than he would ever be. He was proud. He loved you. I had to go, but something told me that he would never make that call. The world is small, huh?]
Season 1, episode 23		

As the plot unravels, many of the survivors who happen to be together on the island discover that they have something in common; that they are somehow related through people they know. This is, for example, the case of Sawyer and Jack Shephard. Jack is unanimously recognized from the very beginning as the leader of the group of castaways, partly because - being a doctor - he can save their lives. Sawyer, on the contrary, thanks to his rural accent, his selfishness, machismo and rather rude name-calling habit, is at first envisaged as a villain, even though his gentle sides will become apparent in the unfolding of the plot in the following seasons. In the exchange above, he tells Jack that he met a guy, a doctor, who confided to him that he regretted not having had the courage to call his son, of whom he was proud, even though he had never admitted it. All the details make it clear that the guy Sawyer met was Jack's father. The compliment is of an indirect type, in that the positive image associated with Jack ("he's a better doctor than he'll ever be") is attributed to words his father pronounced and Sawyer makes no effort to show that he adheres to this viewpoint.

A second pair of compliments that partly overlaps with the first is represented by explicit and implicit ones. Explicit compliments are direct compliments, i.e. compliments in which the complimentee is praised openly and directly, whereas implicit ones are those where more obscure and covert strategies of praising are used (Bruti 2006, Maíz-Arévalo 2012). Example (3) below is a case in point.

(3)

ORIGINAL		
Kate: So how'd you come up with this? Jack: Wasn't me – it's all Hurley. I've been going crazy trying to make everyone feel safe. I haven't been sleeping because I want everyone else to feel safe. And he builds a golf course and everyone is safe.		
DVD	Itasa	Subs
1 Come ti è venuta questa idea?	1 Allora, come ti è venuta l'idea?	1 Così sei d'accordo per questo?
2 Io non c'entro. È stato Hurley.	2 Non e' opera mia.	2 Non sono stato io. È stato Hurley.
3 Ho cercato in tutti i modi di farli sentire sicuri.	3 È stato Hurley.	3 Stavo diventando matto cercando di far sentire tutti al sicuro.
4 Di notte non dormo. Mi preoccupa che si sentano sicuri.	4 Quasi impazzivo cercando di far sentire tutti al sicuro. Ho perso...	4 Non sto dormendo perchè voglio che tutti si sentano al sicuro.
5 Lui fa un campo da golf	5 il sonno perché volevo che tutti si sentissero al sicuro.	5 Ha costruito il campo da golf,
6 -e tutti si sentono sicuri. -Merda! Ripetizione.	6 Lui fa un campo da golf, 7 -e tutti si sentono bene. -Oh, merda!	6 e tutti si sono sentiti al sicuro. 7 Ah, tiro sfortunato! Rifaccio.
[How did you have this idea? It's not me. It was Hurley. I tried in any way to make them feel safe. I can't sleep at night. I'm anxious that they might feel safe. He builds a golf course and everybody feels safe. Shit! I'll try again.]	[Then, how did you have the idea? It's not my idea. It was Hurley. I was going crazy trying to make everybody feel safe. I couldn't sleep because I wanted everybody to feel safe. He builds a golf course and everybody feels ok. Oh, shit!]	[So, do you agree to this? It wasn't me. It was Hurley. I was going crazy trying to make everybody feel safe. I haven't been sleeping because I want everybody to feel safe. He built a golf course and everybody felt safe. Ah, bad shot, I'll try again.]
Season 1, episode 9		

Here, Kate is commenting on the newly arranged golf court, attributing the merit to Jack, who explains that it was in fact Hurley's idea. He adds that he himself went to a lot of trouble to make everybody feel safe and Hurley instead succeeded with the oddest idea, that of the golf court. It is at the same time a third-party compliment and a compliment 'in disguise', as neither positive elements are used, nor does it contain one of the typical syntactic formulas identified in the literature.

One further class is that of "dishonest" compliments (cf. Bruti 2009b: 154), i.e. seemingly praising acts "that are not immediately identifiable as such [= false],

because they often belong in complex and mixed sequences, where positive and negative appraisals are placed side by side". Their nature is intentionally deceptive and they are ambiguously worded, as they contain elements that point in different directions. In season one, episode five, for example, Sawyer comments on the fact that the transceiver they were looking for was finally found and Sayid volunteers to fix it. Sawyer's first comment is "Oh great. Perfect!", but it is followed by a more revealing aside, "Let's trust this guy", which clarifies the fact that he does not trust Sayid and projects an ironic light back onto his previous compliment.

Table 3 and 4 show the distribution of compliments in the three seasons of *Lost* analyzed. For the purposes of the present classification, the label "indirect" is used to indicate third-party compliments, whereas compliments that employ indirect wording that needs inferencing are accommodated in the category of "implicit" compliments.

	Season 1	Season 3	Season 5	
Direct	15 (62,5%)	17 (73,9%)	8 (53,3%)	Tot. direct 40
Indirect	3 (12,5%)	1 (4,35%)	3 (20%)	Tot. indirect 7
Implicit	4 (16,6%)	4 (17,4)	0	Tot. implicit 8
Dishonest	2 (0,83%)	1 (4,35%)	4 (26,67%)	Tot. dishonest 7
Total	24	23	15	

Table 3. Distribution of compliment types in the three seasons of *Lost*

Compliment types in all seasons

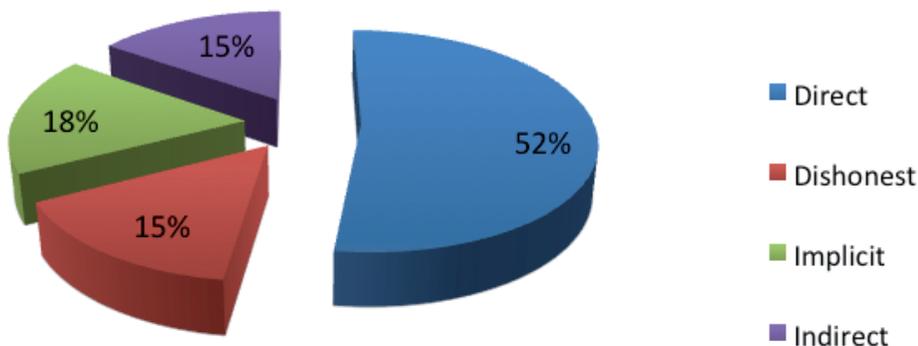


Table 4. Distribution of compliments in *Lost* (season one, three and five)

Quite predictably, direct compliments are the most frequent pattern throughout the seasons, with 52% out of the total. The other three patterns are overall rather uniformly distributed, with indirect compliments scoring 15%, implicit 18%, and dishonest also 15%. The most interesting trend, however, has to do with the different distribution of compliment types in the three seasons: in season five, for instance, false compliments are the second most frequent option, with almost 27% of the total, while implicit compliments are completely absent. In season three, instead, direct compliments score the highest, with almost 74% of all occurrences, whereas indirect compliments appear to be most numerous in season one. This patterning is, as shall be seen, related to the sometimes radical changes in the narrative strategy and in the different roles of some of the characters.

Let us now focus on dishonest compliments, which are the most interesting pattern, both because of their ambiguous nature, and because they are responsible for the most interesting changes in translation.⁶ As can be noticed in (4) and (5), apparently positive wording often reveals an ironic and provocative intention:

(4)

ORIGINAL		
Sawyer: So when are we now, whiz kid? Faraday: We're either in the past ... or we're in the future.		
DVD	Itasa	Subs
1 E ora in che periodo siamo, genio?	1 Dunque, in che "quando" ci troviamo, secchione?	1 Allora, in che periodo siamo, ragazzo prodigio?
2 O siamo nel passato...	2 O siamo nel passato...	2 O siamo nel passato...
3 ... o siamo nel futuro.	3 O siamo nel futuro.	3 O siamo nel futuro.
[And now, in which period are we, genius? Either we are in the past or we are in the future.]	[Then, in which "when" are we now, nerd? Either we are in the past, or we are in the future.]	[So, in which period are we, child prodigy? Either we are in the past or we are in the future.]
Season 5, episode 1		

6 In table 2 above figures show mismatches between compliments in the original and in the translated subtitles. Two instances are reduced in Season one and one in Season five. In Season one, one of the compliments that is omitted in translation is a direct one ("Cool"), which is omitted in all subtitles. The second case is more complex: it is a dishonest compliment that is made explicit as an overt form of criticism in both DVD and Subfactory subtitles. It is preserved by Itasa subtitlers, but the number of translated compliments is the same because Itasa fansubbers omit another direct compliment in episode 13. In season five, instead, only one compliment gets lost in translation: it is a dishonest compliment in episode 1, which is not translated as such by Itasa fansubbers.

In this example, the compliment revolves around the phrase “whiz kid”, which is used ironically by Sawyer to criticize Faraday’s supposed expertise. The expressions used in the DVD subtitles and in the subtitles composed by Subsfactory fansubbers are compatible with this strategy: both “genio” (= genius) and “ragazzo prodigio” (= child prodigy) are in themselves positive but also authorize an ironic interpretation. Itasa subtitlers, on the contrary, opted for the term “secchione” (= hard worker, nerd), which is undoubtedly derogatory and betrays the real illocutionary intent behind the utterance. This is in line with a tendency towards greater explicitation in subtitles in general, no matter whether professional or amateurish. Another similar example is (5).

(5)

ORIGINAL		
Shannon: I thought you said my money was no good here.		
Sawyer: I was negotiating. I can take an IOU. Something tells me you’re good ... for it.		
DVD	Itasa	Subs
1 Hai detto che i miei soldi non valgono qui.	1 Pensavo avessi detto che i miei soldi non valgono niente qui.	1 Pensavo che avessi detto che i miei soldi non sono buoni qui.
2 Cercavo di negoziare.	2 Stavo negoziando.	2 Stavo negoziando.
3 Puoi pagarmi in natura. Qualcosa mi dice che sei brava...	3 Potrei farti credito.	3 Potrei prendere un Te Ne Devo Uno...
	4 Qualcosa mi dice che sei brava.	4 Qualcosa mi dice che tu
		5 ci staresti.
[You said my money is no good here. I was trying to negotiate. You can you pay me in kind. Something tells me you’re good.	[I thought you said my money is no good here. I was negotiating. I could give you credit. Something tells me you’re good.	[I thought you had said that my money is no good here. I was negotiating. I could take an IOU. Something tells me that you’re an easy lay.]
Season 1, episode 5		

Here, the dishonest compliment is exchanged between Sawyer and Shannon towards the beginning of the series. Sawyer is the character that utters most of this type of compliments, as his nature is quite heated and aggressive. As can be observed in Table 3 above, out of the total of false compliments in the three seasons under investigation, which is 7, most of them, i.e. 4, are uttered in the fifth season, and, overall, 5 are uttered by Sawyer (of which 3 in season five). As the castaways begin to realize that life on the island is tough and they have access to few amenities, they try to bargain for some comforts. Sawyer looted the

items found in abandoned suitcases and on dead bodies and stocked them, to 'sell' them back later to his fellows. In the original he uses the expression IUO, an initialism which means "I owe you", usually found in informal documents that acknowledge some debt. What follows is a seeming expression of praise towards Shannon: "Something tells me you're good". Here, the only subtitles that preserve the dishonest compliment are those produced by the Itasa fansubbers. In the DVD subtitles, the explicitation occurring in the expression "Puoi pagarmi in natura" (= You can also pay in kind) makes the nature of the utterance clear, i.e. a provocation and offense. In the Subsfactory subtitles, the explicitation is instead in the second subtitle, "Qualcosa mi dice che ci staresti" (= Something tells me that you're an easy lay).

The most relevant observation on the translation of compliments in subtitles emerges from the most peculiar typology of compliments, i.e. dishonest compliments. Their nature being intentionally misleading, they contain elements that point in different directions. Although information from the visual (facial expressions, gestures, eye contact) and aural codes (mainly suprasegmental information, i.e. intonation, pitch, volume, etc.) may help disambiguate their true illocutionary nature, the tendency of translators is to make them clearer, thus turning the apparent compliment into what it really is. This is indeed the main factor responsible for a slightly reduced number of compliments in the translated subtitles (see table 1 above), a strategy that occurs once in each of three types of subtitles (in the subtitles for the DVD in episode 5, season one, in Itasa subtitles in episode 1, season five, and in Subsfactory subtitles again in episode 5, season one). This element is significant, but not indicative of relevant differences in translating strategies in professional and non-professional subtitling, which have instead emerged with clear evidence in other studies on the translation of often compromised orality phenomena such as vocatives, interjections and discourse markers (Bruti and Zanotti 2012, 2013 and forthc). The translation of vocatives, for example, is quite different in professional and amateur subtitles, both quantitatively and qualitatively, with DVD subtitles showing a general tendency towards reduction, which is not instead so marked in fansubs, which, on the contrary, often exhibit more narrative coherence in translating some idiosyncratic epithets (Bruti and Zanotti 2012: 186, cf. the case of *dude*, Hurley's favourite catchword).

The other instances in which the compliment is not translated apply to (6) below, which contains a very brief remark, half way between a compliment and an expression of thanks. The contextual situation shown in the images makes the presence of this conversational routine unnecessary in the exchange.

(6)

ORIGINAL		
Charlie: Does anyone have any sun block? Shannon: Yeah, I do. Charlie: Ah. Cool.		
DVD	Itasa	Subs
1 -Qualcuno ha della crema solare? -Io sì. [Does anybody have any sun lotion? I do.]	1 Qualcuno ha un po' di protezione solare? 2 Sì, io. [Does anybody have any sun block? Yes, I do.]	1 Nessuno ha della protezione solare? 2 Sì, io. [Does anybody have any sun block? Yes, I do.]
Season 1, episode 1		

6. CONCLUSIONS

The translation of compliments in professional subtitles, irrespective of the genre of the audiovisual products examined, has generally shown a widespread tendency towards reduction (Bruti 2009a, 2009b), but this is not the pattern that has emerged from the analysis of translated compliments in *Lost*, in both DVD subtitles and fansubs. Quite surprisingly and contrary to expectations, compliments are almost always translated, and with no differences in the strategy adopted by professionals or amateurs. The reason behind this result may be ascribed to the innovative narrative techniques of *Lost*. The number of compliments in the original dialogues is not particularly high, which is partly linked to the fact that there is little room in the series for phatic talk, and, when there is, it is kept to a minimum and to very brief, sometimes ironical, remarks. Compliments being sparsely used and very concise, often consisting of an adjective + noun or *to be* + adjective sequence, are practically always translated, thus obliterating the differences between professional and non-professional subtitles. The fact that this result partially contradicts the tendency observed in fansubs for the translation of other phenomena of oral speech suggests further investigation in two directions: first, extending the analysis of *Lost* to the seasons that have so far not been taken into account, as each season has its own different literary techniques, i.e. story and plot devices, catchphrases, framing devices, etc. The seasons that I have not examined so far might indeed offer interesting material for analysis. Secondly, by comparing results for compliments with those for other speech acts, e.g. offences, insults, or complaints, that are different from compliments in the illocutionary point but similarly rarely crucial to the unfolding of the plot.

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