

New trend in translation in the digital age: Participatory translation practices

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Over the past forty years, the professional translation and interpreting community has strived to establish Translation and Interpreting Studies as an independent discipline, differentiating its practices from those of the non-professional community (Kim 2016). Specifically, professionals have set up barriers to entry by establishing a formal education system, achieving academic recognition, setting up a standardized accreditation and evaluation system for professional services, and enforcing the code of ethics (Mikkelson 1996; Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012: 150; Olohan 2012: 194). In the current environment of enhancing professionalization, non-professionals, who have played an important role in facilitating economic, commercial, cultural, and religious exchanges throughout history (Pym 2000, as cited in Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012), have been perceived as the “poor relative” of Translation and Interpreting Studies (Antonini et al. 2017: 2) or a disruptive force of tension threatening the labor market structure and the livelihood of professional translators (Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012).

What has disrupted this trend is the digital age, which is centered on ubiquitous digital devices that connect people anytime, anywhere

(Cronin 2013). Armed with digital connectivity, as well as linguistic proficiency, technological competence, genre knowledge, and unparalleled devotion, a new type of user-translators that are engaged in the process of text production has emerged (O'Hagan 2009). One of the representative terms that demonstrates the implication of non-professional translation on not just ordinary users but on the translation world as a whole in relation to this technological development is Cronin's (2013) "wiki translation," explaining the trend that handheld devices allow the user to access relevant information in the language of his or her choice, allowing for a customized interaction rather than the static and serial presentation of information in a limited number of languages. Now, translation is making a transition from something available in one-direction and sequential manner to part of a networked system that is personalized, user-driven, interactive, and integrated into dynamic systems of ubiquitous delivery.

The recent trend of non-professionals involved in translation and interpreting is related not just to the aforementioned digital advancement but also to a participatory spirit and volunteerism: their activities include the development of "fansubbing" and fanfiction communities, the translation and distribution of news, mediation of religious services, the spread of social movements and social networking through the Internet and blogs, crisis and disaster management for humanitarian relief, war and conflict situation interpreting, and interpreting and language services in community settings (Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012). Surveys examining the motivation behind individuals' participation in various types of crowdsourced translation initiatives have demonstrated that they found these works worthwhile, beneficial to others, and intellectually stimulating (Dolmaya 2012).

Most noticeable early activities of non-professional translation were

done by Japanese anime fansubs back in the 1980s (O'Hagan 2009). These translators had mostly concentrated on adding subtitles to the content they enjoyed because of the sheer enthusiasm they had for sharing them with other fans or users; thus, their activities were mostly confined to small and exclusive online communities. This kind of practice led to the commonly-held stereotypes of fansubbers as unregulated intruders into the AVT industry. However, according to Jenkins (as cited in O'Hagan 2009), these activities have expanded to various media users in a much more active and deeper level to form a participatory culture; thus, these translations have become a global phenomenon, proliferating in the form of user-generated translations (UGT) in which translation consumers are increasingly becoming translation producers.

Another change in the perception of non-professional translation came when commercial enterprises like Facebook, Microsoft, Plaxo, and Sun took notice of the potential of these volunteer translators and started to initiate the translation process by soliciting people to engage in the translation of their web-pages, software, or production documents into languages other than English in a short amount of time (DePalma and Kelly 2008). DePalma and Kelly (2008) coined the term "CT3" (i.e., crowdsourced, collaborative, and community translation) to refer to the corporate harnessing of translations created by internet users in providing language services that would normally be assigned to professional translators. This trend has led to the commercialization and professionalization of non-professional translations as the companies put efforts in making a sophisticated translation platform. On their platforms, systemized translation and revisions are done in a collaborative way through first, a voting system in which translated texts are evaluated by others in an online community; second, discussion forums where participants can raise questions on translation-related issues or recruit team members; and

third, division of work wherein professionals and non-professionals work together, with professionals supervising the whole process and the editing/revising work done by non-professionals (DePalma and Kelly 2011). Of course the results of such quality evaluations done by active users who vote on proposed translations are not the same as those done by the established QA model (Jiménez-Crespo 2011). In addition, the translations of participatory translators utilizing digital devices are of lower quality. What is important is that they are much faster and cheaper than professional translations; at the same time, they are slower but far more accurate than free real-time machine translation, filling the gap between these two types of translation in terms of price, quality, and time (Kim 2017). These findings demonstrate that we cannot apply the same strict evaluation criteria to all texts as we have traditionally done; there is an increasing diversification of expected translation quality depending on the purpose and the target readership of a text. Now, a relatively small number of texts requires professional translation, while the majority need machine translation (with post-editing) or crowdsourced translation.

Even though there are still controversies surrounding ethical issues of non-professional participatory translation practices, such as copy-right infringement in the case of fansubbing, exploitation of labor in the case of for-profit corporate-initiated crowdsourcing user translation, and poor quality of output and lack of responsibility in general, there is an opinion that this model “seed[s] collaboration between amateur and paid professional translators, provide[s] a training ground for new translation graduates, [and] expand[s] the material that gets translated, broadening access to information, and exposing more people to the translation process in all its complexity” (Baer n.p., as cited in Dolmaya 2011: 98), which aptly demonstrates the current changing environment surrounding the translation and

interpreting community. The growing prevalence of online collaborative translation practices that are mediated by Web-based machine translation (MT) services even calls into question the traditional status of the professional translator and norms of professional translator training.

This special issue of *The Journal of Translation Studies* is an excellent demonstration of previously mentioned characteristics of non-professional translation and interpreting activities. **Hong** explores the challenges that professional news translators are facing from the emergence of non-professional news translators who are equipped with strong interest, online collaboration, digital literacy, and genre knowledge, and tries to find ways to cope with the challenges and turn them into opportunities. **Lee (Jimin)** explores the services provided by Flitto, a crowdsourced translation platform that has expanded into professional translation services and corpus data collection, and discusses its implications on the translation community: the imposition of literal translation strategies through admission tests and a translation style guide; the encouragement of more use of MT; a decline in professional translators' rates by offering much lower rates on their platform; the provision of intellectual property right clauses that might mislead the public. **Lee (Sang-Bin)**'s study on the AD (audio description) field broadens the horizon of audio-visual translation in the digital age by dealing with various issues such as the implication of technological development on translation, translation practices for minorities in society, and online non-professional translation activities. **Lee (Vivian)**'s pedagogical study well demonstrates the needs of today's students, who want to learn how to deal with various non-traditional texts in the digital world, including social networking site entries. The translation community is surrounded on either side by machines with deep learning capabilities and non-professionals collaboratively translating online with digital

devices; thus, the professional translation community's efforts to cope with the new challenges are vital. **Spolidorio** summarizes the current status of "fansubbing" in terms of the definition of "fans," its translation process, and the legality in relation to copyright infringement. Based on related research, the study successfully demonstrates fansubbing's distinctive features: its relationship with technological development, the creation of communities for interaction between fan producers and consumers, its importance as a social phenomenon, fans as active promoters of content, fans engaged in creative activities, fan activities in the convergence culture, and the collaborative nature of fansubbing.

I would like to give thanks to Editor-in-chief Yeong-Houn Yi for dedicating a special issue for papers on participatory translation practices. I hope that the papers in this special issue will give greater visibility to these translation practices and provide opportunities for academics to have in-depth knowledge of the rapidly changing environment in which they operate.

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