

Is User-generated Content Translation a Potential Threat to Professional Translators?

Ying Wang

School of Foreign Languages, Baoshan University
yvonne0306@163.com

ABSTRACT

This paper introduces user-generated translation and examines the reasons for its emergence including the advent of new media technology, a new crowdsourcing business model for translating the user-generated content, and professional translators' lack of sufficient knowledge of the online culture. Meanwhile, professional translators all over the world have been expressing their concerns on the ethical problems and the translation quality resulting from the new business model, which may negatively impact the already-suffering industry. Therefore, this study will also compare and contrast the user-generated translation and professional translation to determine whether the former poses a threat to the latter.

Keywords: *user-generated content translation, professional translation, professional translators, comparison, contrast, threat*

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Drugan [1], translations have changed dramatically since the 1990s for manyfold and diversified reasons. First, with the emergence of the Internet and the rapid proliferation of globalization, the various translation tools have improved with professional and multifaceted functions, thereby promoting the market demand for translations. Furthermore, under these linked, interactional, and mutually beneficial developments, the high demand for translations could be satisfied with various hi-tech tools available on the market; also, the online translation tools can be optimized and refined with repeated production of information, thus transforming into the one accessible in different users' languages while at lower prices. Therefore, an unprecedented awareness of translation has been cultivated among individual users who actively participate in the online translation such as audio-visual translation, manga translation, and game translation in the forms of community forums or social media primarily due to their personal interests [2]. This has fuelled the creation of user-generated translation.

Another major recent transformation in translation is what gets translated [1]. User-generated content such as app-based, game-related, and audio-visual materials may pose substantial challenges to professional translators who are adept with linguistic and literary translation. As the translating software becomes more complicated, the

professional translators may be confronted with significant obstacles as they are required to familiarize themselves with the function when applying an innovative translating software so that it ensures the employment of appropriate terms in the target language. In addition, user-generated content also presents non-linguistic challenges to professional translators as accurate translation can merely be produced by those who are acquainted with language context and the embedded implications behind the textual information. In this case, these new translated contents render it challenging for professional translators to execute their tasks not only because the translated texts are neither stable nor finalized and are isolated from the language context but also because those translators may lack sufficient knowledge or personal experience about the contents, such as translating the design concepts of a game. Moreover, rather than enabling the publisher to determine the translational contents in advance, the emergence of user-generated content and localized approaches indicates new a business model in which the materials would be translated if the users' demand is sufficient. However, professional translators have been apprehensive about the ethical problems and the translation quality resulting from the new business model

This paper will demonstrate the respective characteristics of user-generated translation and professional translation. And it will then compare and contrast their disadvantages and advantages, which might

lead to the conclusion that instead of replacing professional translation, user-generated translation can complement it in a harmonious manner.

2. USER-GENERATED CONTENT TRANSLATION

The user-generated content refers to those media contents appearing in a range of modern communicative platforms which are available to the general public. It is widely acknowledged that user-generated content is created to disseminate information on diverse digital media technologies such as digital video, blogging, podcasting, forums, social networking, mobile phone photography, wiki, and so on. According to Battelle [3], the emergence of user-generated content marked a shift among media organizations from creating online content to endowing amateurs with the right to participate in conversational media and publish their own opinions. As a result, the passive audience on the Internet has evolved into an increasing number of participatory users [2] who are efficient at taking advantage of the interactive opportunities to create independent content. As Jenkins [4] suggested, this grassroots experimentation generated innovation in mainstream media which is associated with sounds, artists, techniques, and audiences. By now, these active and creative information recipients have prevailed in relatively accessible media, software, and platforms; the culture of participants may, in turn, exert a profound effect on mass media and audiences worldwide with varied linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Moreover, certain media companies gradually realized that most users can create attractive online contents that satisfy the requirements and pique the interests of a broader audience, which enables them to adjust their business models appropriately. Also, many emerging companies in the media industry, such as YouTube and Facebook, have foreseen the increasing demand for user-generated content. And as O'Hagan [5] correctly pointed out, the introduction of such key phrases as user-generated content and social networking has functioned effectively in promoting the second generation web technologies. Correspondingly, under the popular spread of participatory culture, user-generated translation has become an indispensable part of addressing the need of diverse users who speak different languages for sharing content.

While Google strives to address the challenges with machine translation, several online communities have formed to undertake the task of translating materials manually. Accordingly, it has become both inevitable and controversial to allocate the translation contents to unspecified individuals on the Internet [5]. Concerning the term community translation, Pym [6] assumed that similar to community interpreting, it primarily focuses on translating the public information in the textual and written form for an immigrant group. Despite the fact that

untrained individual translators are still strongly associated with "amateurism and ad hoc solutions" [7], these communities have been more professionalized and normal in the previous decade and have thus sprouted up all over the Internet, concentrating on translating films, TV program subtitles, popular novels, comics, and even games. Users participating in the communities are responsible for the translation of portions of the online communication or an entire project according to their own interests or their capabilities. After that, users who do not speak the source language are required to proofread and revise. It appears that the users conduct the translation tasks voluntarily instead of for utilitarian and lucrative purposes or for promoting in a large money-making entity.

With regard to the advantages for media companies, it is cost-effective as the users initiatively translate the contents without monetary reward [2] or at a relatively low price. On the other hand, translation tasks could be accomplished by either one person or a coordinated team efficiently in digital media spaces, such as fansubs and scanlation, within a short period of time. In this case, as long as the original source is available, the translated version can be made available online as quickly as possible to accommodate demand. Besides, the translation performed by those with sufficient relevant knowledge might be more understandable and communicative to the target audience.

To illustrate, Facebook is the most appropriate example indicating the tightly woven relationship between community translation and social networking. On that platform, a large group of self-selected Internet users translates the text fragments available on the Facebook website in different language versions, thereby synchronously meeting the communicative demand for diverse users. Being the frequent Facebook users, not only untrained volunteers but also professional translators who are familiar with the media environment might be involved in the translating program [5] to endow it with worthwhile significance as though it is cost-free. As a result, individuals or teams can be legally legitimate to conduct direct translations for various online content owners and subsequently publish the contents on the Internet, the mode of which is properly illustrated by Fansubs of Japanese anime. This translating project can be considered a coordinated undertaking, with each member merely completing one assigned task. Under some circumstances, different tasks or even the whole mission may be carried out by the same person [8], which may reduce the risks of human errors resulting from inaccurate communication between several participants. Genre expertise [2] and translators with abundant linguistic knowledge are crucial and complementary in fansubbing because the technical dimension could be reduced by a large number of computer-literate netizens with little knowledge of languages.

However, as open-source projects have increased in popularity, more community translation projects tend to be performed by untrained voluntary translators rather than paid professionals, which sparked off an intense concern about the quality and legality of the translation. It is common for most untrained voluntary translators who are deficient in linguistic knowledge to fail to successfully localize an appropriate language application into target languages. As Flarup [9] pointed, when localizing Netvibes from English to Danish, translators who are not aware of linguistic details or the art of translation may commit several typical errors including inconsistent and incorrect use of compound nouns and capitalization; inability to reconstruct the order of sentence in the target language; the employment of inappropriate and non-idiomatic terms; producing nonsense word-for-word translation; improper Danish grammar; erroneous spelling and inconsistent terminology. Other users are likely to notice these problems, which may impact the overall perception and reputation of the company. This is partially due to the increasingly growing crowdsource movement and online translation service where few translators, even the professional ones, gain money from the non-profit community translation projects. Smith [10] proposed that maintaining the non-profit nature of the groups can protect them from legal prosecution; however, translation communities have not been eliminated from legal woes. As Kettmann [11] observed, members of the community communicate their work merely with those who certainly engage in the translating and editing process solely by email in order not to be accused of infringing the author's rights [12]. After a 16-year-old French boy was imprisoned for publishing the translated contents on his website, J.K Rowling also expressed her concern and apprehension over the censorship issue of the community translations.

3. PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATION

Professional translators, as Sofer [13] suggested, should be equipped with ten essential criteria for developing into an expert translator, including the knowledge of language and culture, the ability to translate in more than one area, the ability to articulate quickly and accurately both orally and in writing, a high translation speed, being up-to-date, cultivating research skills, and being familiar with the hardware, software, fax, modem, the Internet, and the latest developments in all those media. Since human knowledge and language have evolved and changed at an unprecedented speed, well-rounded translators should gain penetrating insights into knowledge and language on a regular basis.

Owing to an increasing number of unethical practices brought up by crowdsourcing and community translation, professional translators and interpreters have been conveying their concerns over their negative

impacts. However, without years of training, it has been considered difficult to emerge as a professional translator who possesses extensive cultural accumulation and appropriate command of the source and target languages both in speaking and writing. Also, being bilingual is not qualified to be translating experts as their responsibilities are not merely locating a corresponding term in target culture situations but concentrating on transmitting meaning and concepts in general. On the contrary, untrained voluntary translators committing to crowdsourcing and community translation mainly translate the contents out of personal preference, thereby occasionally demonstrating utmost contempt and disregard for language and language professionals[5]. On the other hand, professionals are also likely to be offended by sites relying on crowdsourcing; for example, Facebook and Twitter require professional translators who are also their users to provide free online translating services but they neither ask doctor users to support the free medical services nor demand lawyer users to participate in free legal service online. Furthermore, these social networking platforms do not provide awards and recognitions to the most competent translators based on the existing ethical and professional criteria, whereas universities and professional associations have been issuing certificates to translators in order to raise industry standards and occupational requirements.

However, in terms of user-generated translation, professional translators may lack significant expertise in various emerging fields and exhibit little enthusiasm in these informal topics, such as anime and various popular massive multiplayer online games. They may find it demanding and strenuous to complete the casual translation within a limited time to accurately fulfill the enormous demand from users, and they can be hardly compensated fairly as well.

4. CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, user-generated translation poses little threat to professional translators in terms of the quality of translation, legal issues, and ethical concerns. Rather than a hobby or a pastime, translation is so professional that it might be preferable to be reserved to the relevant experts and compensate translators fairly for their work. Additionally, professional translators may break the stereotype of translation by covering more genres than merely fiction, poetry, drama, and the humanities in general, thus completing translation tasks efficiently.

With the rapidly growing demand for translation of various genres, the user-generated translation and the professional translation may not be able to completely replace one another; however, they could be complementary to provide better services accordingly.

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