Non-professionals Translating and Interpreting
Participatory and Engaged Perspectives

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Abstract. Translation studies finds itself today at a stage where its traditional focus on translator and interpreter training and on the advancement of the status of translators and interpreters as professionals is no longer sufficient to address the complexity of real-life situations of translating and interpreting. As increasing numbers of non-professionals translate and interpret in a wider range of contexts and in more diversified forms, their work emerges not only as an alternative to established professional practice, but also as a distinctive phenomenon, which the discipline has yet to recognize as a noteworthy area of study. This article looks into the relatively uncharted territory of non-professional translation and interpreting, drawing mainly on Arjun Appadurai’s conceptualization of global transactions, and offers a number of insights into what these new developments might mean for the discipline at large.


Through their involvement in translator and interpreter training programmes, conceived as platforms for the professionalization of occupations that involve linguistic mediation, translation scholars have been able to access vital institutional resources, strengthen the discipline’s research base and secure academic recognition (Kelly and Way 2007). Indeed, the close relationship between disciplinary expansion and academic-led professionalization of translation and interpreting goes some way towards explaining why translation studies has so far focused overwhelmingly on professional instances of linguistic and cultural

1 Throughout this article, ‘translation studies’ is used as a generic term, covering both translation and interpreting studies.
mediation undertaken by individuals who designate themselves as ‘translators’ or ‘interpreters’ and are recognized (and paid) as such by their commissioners. Driven by their vested interest in the professionalization of translation, over the last four decades large sections of the community of translation scholars have thus tried to establish the importance of professional translation and interpreting expertise in the public consciousness by focusing on issues pertaining to translation pedagogy, translation quality assessment and criticism, as well as the observance of professional ethics and norms. Despite such efforts, various market surveys and the recent launch of initiatives intended to regulate the provision of professional services continue to suggest that the intrusion of unregulated outsiders into the translation industry remains rife.

The social recognition of translation and interpreting as professions – and, concomitantly, the exclusion of untrained practitioners from the labour market – has been traditionally hampered by two lay assumptions: that bilingualism is co-extensive with the capacity to translate, and that translation is essentially “an extension of monolingual linguistic and communicative abilities” (Muñoz Martín 2011:35). As Tseng (1992) contends in his study on the professionalization of interpreting, the public perception that translators and interpreters lack a systematic body of ‘exclusive’ knowledge remains a major obstacle for the social recognition of these occupations as professions. This has led to some interest in exploring the processes that enable bilingual individuals to develop meta-linguistic awareness and hone their intuitive ability to translate and/or interpret. Harris’ (1977) notion of natural translation, for example, designates a form of mediation undertaken by individuals who have had no formal training in translation and have rarely been exposed to other people’s translations. Arguing that the concept of natural translation brings to the fore a “distressing gap between the innateness hypothesis and the need to account for the emergence and development of translating as a skill” (1995:254), Toury proposes instead the notion of native translation, which acknowledges the capacity of individuals to pick up translation skills unconsciously from their cultural environment in the same way as they develop their monolingual competence.

Against the backdrop of these lay and academic premises, the notable increase in the provision of translator and interpreter training courses since the 1980s (Ulrych 2005) would seem to be implicitly predicated on the assumption that formally trained professionals develop specific forms of expertise that differentiate them from the natural or native translators who traditionally acted as the main providers of translation services before the advent of translator and

\[^2\] Schellekens’ market surveys (2004a, 2004b) of the UK’s workforce, for example, are among the most rigorous and detailed to have been published in the last decade. The EN 15038: 2006 Translation Services – Service Requirements produced by the European Committee for Standardization (Comité Européen de Normalisation, CEN), on the other hand, is an example of the industry’s efforts to formulate more strict requirements of professional competence that translators are expected to meet.
interpreter training programmes. Unsurprisingly, the very notion of expertise has become central to a great deal of recent research in the field, although the findings that have emerged so far from this growing body of cognitive studies have not contributed to advancing the social perception of translation and interpreting as professional activities. Though there is evidence which suggests that expertise, understood as the capacity to deliver a consistently superior translation/interpreting performance, is “primarily acquired through the engagement in designed training practice” fostered in translator training programmes (Ericsson 2010:231), other evidence indicates that even formally trained professional translators – with their over-reliance on routine approaches to problem-solving – occasionally fail to exhibit that level of superior performance. The fact that inexperienced bilinguals are able to achieve high standards of expertise when executing complex translation tasks that require non-routine mediation approaches (Jääskeläinen 2010:214) further undermines attempts to equate professionalization with the acquisition of expert-level skills through guided deliberate practice in the context of formal training programmes (Sirén and Hakkarainen 2002).

The division into native, natural and trained translators/interpreters, based on the different mechanisms for acquiring relevant expertise, is further complicated by the fact that any of these mediators can provide their services on an amateur or professional basis, as acknowledged by the remuneration they receive for their work. For decades, the translation industry has been organized along a ‘patronage’ model (Lefevere 1992) based on a clear-cut division between the commissioning and translating agents, with the former – whether individual or corporate clients, political or religious institutions, publishers or media – acting as initiators of the translation process. During the industrial era, patrons held the power to delineate the boundaries and internal dynamics of modern translation sites, deciding what was to be translated and conferring professional recognition on translating agents through specific frameworks and levels of remuneration. In this context, the co-existence of trained and untrained professional translators and interpreters has tended to be regarded by translation scholars as a disruptive source of tension. Professionals without formal training in translation have traditionally been more willing to work for lower translation fees, thus eroding the social recognition of translators’ professional latitude as an asset worthy of appropriate remuneration. But it is non-professional translators and interpreters, i.e. individuals not only without formal training in linguistic mediation but also working for free, who have always represented the biggest threat to labour market structures, as well as to the identity and livelihood of translation professionals.

Non-professional translators and interpreters have played a very important role in facilitating economic, commercial, cultural and religious exchanges throughout history (Pym 2000). This collection, however, sets out to examine the widening scope of non-professional translation and interpreting in today’s
post-industrial, informational society. Indeed, non-professional translators are no longer simply a cheaper alternative to their professional counterparts; as the papers in this special issue demonstrate, non-professional translation is being conducted by an increasingly heterogeneous range of agents, contributing to (i) the emergence of new forms of civic engagement in public life, at a time of declining welfare commitment and dwindling state-financing of public services in most developed nations; (ii) the re-configuration of the publishing and media marketplaces, against the ongoing shift from an electronic to a digital culture; and (iii) the consolidation of new paradigms of linguistic, cultural and religious mediation in new sites of cross-cultural contact and interaction – resulting from voluntary migration flows as well as the involuntary displacement and resettlement of populations affected by armed conflict or humanitarian tragedies.

A growing body of literature indicates that non-professional translators are actively involved in the translation and distribution of news (Salzberg 2008, Baker 2009); the mediation of religious services (Hokkanen, this volume); the development of fansubbing and fanfiction communities (Pugh 2005, Díaz Cintas and Muñoz Sánchez 2006, Hellekson and Busse 2006, Denison 2011, Dwyer, this volume); the spread of social networks and movements over the Internet and the blogosphere (Zukerman 2008, Pérez-González 2010, Susam-Sarajevo 2010, McDonough 2011, O’Hagan 2011); crisis and disaster management in situations of humanitarian emergency (Bulut and Kurultay 2001) and conflict (Baker 2010, Baker and Askew 2010; see also the websites of research projects such as Languages at War and In Search of Military Translation Cultures); and interpreting, culture and language brokering in a range of community settings (Edwards et al. 2005, Dorner et al. 2007, Hall and Sham 2007, Faulstich Orellana 2009, Antonini 2010). One of the central premises providing the impetus for this collection is that, as it diversifies and moves towards the core of economic and cultural activities, non-professional translation is increasingly bound to challenge our understanding of professional identities and the current organization of labour in the translation and interpreting industries.

1. Mapping the uncharted territory of non-professional translation

This collection of articles on non-professional translation and interpreting addresses instances of mediation in a post-industrialist, networked society shaped by global demographic and cultural flows. Although it predates the advent of digital technologies, Appadurai’s (1990:8-9) conceptualization of global transactions in terms of the interplay between five dimensions (ethnoscapes, finanscapes, ideoscapes, technoscapes and mediascapes) provides an appropriate framework for structuring our survey of non-professional translation practices.
The interface between ethnoscapes (pertaining to the shifting distribution and mobility of people), finanscapes (that is, the distribution of capital and commodities across individual countries) and ideoscapes (understood as the sets of political values and narratives that each community subscribes to) constitutes a productive site for the proliferation of non-professional translation and interpreting practices. For decades, poverty, political repression, religious discrimination and armed conflicts have prompted the movement of people across national borders, and host communities – often wealthier, secular, democratic societies – have been faced with the costs of providing immigrants with translation and interpreting services to facilitate their integration. Even before the onset of the financial crisis that is sweeping the world at the time of writing this article, however, most of these host communities had begun reducing the provision of translation services as part of the reforms of the welfare systems for their own citizens, moving away from a “redistributionist” to an “interactionist” welfare model (Tipton 2012:178). Under the latter, the state and the individual play the role of “active agents or ‘stakeholders’ in the processes of welfare” (ibid.), with citizens being expected to take on full responsibility for their life choices as a precondition to accessing welfare benefits. Given that, as Tipton explains, a high degree of linguistic autonomy and cross-cultural sophistication is required to participate in and benefit from the interactionist welfare system, the lack of translation and interpreting services could jeopardize not only the migrant’s early processes of resettlement and socialization, but also their long-term integration in the host community, with the resultant risk of rising social exclusion and alienation. It is therefore increasingly common in institutional settings (e.g. healthcare, educational and judicial settings, places of worship, etc.) either for in-house bilingual employees to be asked to aid colleagues by acting as interpreters, or for users to rely on friends or family as mediators (Alexander et al. 2004), a situation which provides a fertile ground for natural translation and interpreting to flourish (Blasco Mayor and Jiménez Ivars 2011). There are also other manifestations of the inverse correlation that exists between an individual’s or organization’s capacity to pay for professional translation services and the volume of non-professional translation activity taking place in their environment. The shortage of economic resources that certain ethnic or political collectivities require to be represented in local and global forums, either through the publication of translated texts or their interpreter-mediated participation in high-profile meetings, is an important drive for the emergence of engaged communities of volunteer translators or interpreters, some of whom have no training in the field. This “conversion of professional and amateur groups of translators and interpreters into political/activist communities” (Baker 2009:229) may arise, for example, from the group’s opposition to a specific conflict or a shared desire to contribute to a broader cause such as linguistic diversity.

The interface between technoscapes – understood as the level of technological development in each region of the world – and mediascapes – defined by
Appadurai (1990:9) as “the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate media content” – represents another productive context for the emergence of non-professional translation. The affordances of new digital technologies are “enabling consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate and recirculate media content in powerful new ways” (Jenkins 2004:33), ultimately giving them more control over their media consumption experience. This technological empowerment of citizens to actively take their place in society by assembling and distributing their own representations of reality through media has brought about a process of media convergence, understood as the blurring of the lines “between economics (work) and culture (meaning), between production and consumption, between making and using media, and between active or passive spectatorship of mediated culture” (Deuze 2009:148). As far as translation is concerned, the convergence process has brought about new forms of co-creational or participatory linguistic mediation which exceed “the collaborative creation and maintenance of multilingual wiki content” (Désilets et al. 2006:19). Non-professional mediation is proliferating primarily in the form of “user-generated translation” practices that harness “Web 2.0 services and tools to make online content – be it written, audio or video – accessible in a variety of languages” (Perrino 2009), paving the way for the consolidation of collaborative, “commons-based peer production” structures within the translation industry and, more widely, within the cultural and media marketplaces (Benkler 2006). A number of companies have been quick to harness the potential of this new context of production populated by non-professional translators (Jiménez-Crespo 2009:68):

This convergence process is common to all media industries. Whereas readers of established news media used to see their participation restricted to commenting on professionally published content, whether written or visual, participatory news media draw on user-generated information that does not always go through a formal editorial filtering process (Gillmor 2004, Pantti and Bakker 2009). News media no longer prioritize the longer term engagement of their readership in the form of sustained passive consumption; instead, their commercial emphasis is placed on nurturing and interacting with the communities of citizen journalists built around their brands as a means of securing a constant inflow of user-generated information (Beckett and Mansell 2008). Boundary crossing between professional and amateur journalists, i.e. media literate citizens with the capacity to initiate and contribute to the news flow (Livingstone 2004), results in the convergence of the traditionally different roles of news producers and news consumers (Atton 2004, Jarvis 2007). In the field of advertising and marketing communication, co-creation has translated into the rise of ‘interactive advertising’ (Pavlou and Stewart 2000), which recognizes the active role of the consumer in determining the effectiveness of advertising strategies through their interaction with producers, i.e. marketers and publicists. In the most extreme form of interactive marketing, consumers can take on the role of “prosumers, that integrates fan production, fan promotion and fan consumption” (Yang 2009: 527). Being highly motivated consumers, fan communities can become actively involved in the creative media-making process by identifying and articulating the needs of target consumers prior to the actual development of corporate commodities or services (Jeppesen and Molin 2003).
Companies such as Facebook, Microsoft or Symantec have already implemented novel ways to identify conventional features shared by target discourse communities. This is the case of “crowdsourcing”, or in other words, letting communities of web users [who double up as translators] decide and vote on the best translations for terms and phrases [produced by themselves or fellow users].

Crowdsourcing and other manifestations of the convergence between producers and consumers in the media professions that involve corporate appropriation of free translations have been criticized as forms of “aggravated corporate exploitation” (Yang 2009:527). Other scholars, however, regard the immaterial labour provided by creative citizens-consumers-translators as an instance of a “new humanism” capable of counterbalancing strictly corporate interests (Balnaves et al. 2004). At any rate, this form of consumerism by “neo-liberal working subjects” (Bank and Deuze 2009:423) is not the only mode of agency that emerges from the interplay between technoscapes and mediascapes, particularly when ideoscapes are incorporated into the equation. Indeed, in addition to translation conducted by consumers-workers, in recent years we have witnessed the emergence of non-professional interventionist audiovisual translators who capitalize on the empowering potential of new media technologies to invent novel discourses of aesthetic activism, counter-institutional subversion and political resistance (Pérez-González 2010).

Fan communities intervening in the global distribution of Japanese animation films (or anime) constitute the most prominent example of aesthetic activism through non-professional subtitling. The involvement of fans in the circulation of anime within the US market began back in the 1960s; amid growing concerns about the culturally insensitive translations commissioned by commercial distributors, fans organized themselves into networks to lobby the industry and sensitize distributors to their preferences and expectations (Cubbison 2005). The mobilization of anime audiences to demand the right to experience the cultural ‘otherness’ of anime films has been hailed as an early form of resistance to Western popular culture, as represented by mainstream media content (Newitz 1994). As communities of anime fans became increasingly engaged with this form of resistance, their strategy shifted away from promoting the circulation of original versions in Japanese within the American market to the production of ‘fansubbed’ (fan subtitled) versions – which were originally meant to facilitate the comprehension of the genre’s unique imagery and cultural references by fellow fans. The advent of the convergence era and the widespread availability of digital media technologies have provided fan communities with the tools for the appropriation and manipulation (through subtitling) of their chosen films as well as with avenues for the global circulation of their ‘fansubbed’ versions. But while early non-professional translators involved in fansubbing garnered subcultural capital through their opposition to commercial forms of mediation
and the adoption of experimental translation conventions, “anime fansubbing is becoming increasingly marketized, with groups behaving competitively and being encouraged to standardize (and professionalize) production to attract greater numbers of fan viewers” (Denison 2011:9).

As far as politically engaged audiovisual translation is concerned, non-professional subtitlers have also formed more or less stable networks of individuals who set out to resist global capitalist structures and institutions by intervening in the reception of their cultural products. This can be achieved, for instance, by appropriating television broadcasts that were intended for a specific linguistic or geographic constituency and releasing their subtitled versions in other regions in an attempt to promote the activists’ political agenda (Pérez-González 2010). Whether they are driven by aesthetic or political agendas, the “interventionist engagement of activist communities with the circuitry of the global audiovisual marketplace represents a challenge to the control that media corporations have traditionally exerted over the distribution and consumption of their products” (ibid.:269). In selecting what content to mediate and deciding how/where to distribute it, non-professional translators take on the role of translation commissioners and undermine the control that global capitalist structures had traditionally had on the context of reception.

On the basis of this survey of non-professional mediation sites, translators and interpreters would appear to work individually only when they are appointed as ‘ad hoc’ mediators by monolingual work colleagues or relatives (e.g. child language brokering in healthcare settings); or when driven by an altruistic spirit of voluntarism and solidarity with like-minded individuals (e.g. interpreting for fellow members of a religious congregation). In both scenarios, non-professional mediators fill the gap left by the retrenchment of the state as the default provider of mediation services, at a time when the funds required to facilitate social integration within our ever more multicultural and cosmopolitan societies are becoming depleted by global economic austerity. In the case of mediators working in other sites of non-professional translation such as associations of volunteer translators or interpreters, media co-creators or aesthetic/political subtitlers, the studies available so far suggest that they tend to form narrative communities based on “either interest or shared values, rather than shared attributes or even shared life experiences” (Baker 2009:229). In a growing number of cases, these collectivities, organized either in the form of stable groupings or fluid ‘ad-hocracies’ (Pérez-González 2010), consist of geographically distant individuals capitalizing on the affordances of networked technologies and their collective intelligence. The ‘affinity spaces’ articulated by these non-professional translators (Jenkins et al. 2006) become platforms for the expression of participatory cultures and empower untrained mediators to choose their elective belongings on the basis of affectivity – as in the case of translators participating in crowdsourcing translation initiatives – or shared political concerns – as in the case of activist subtitlers or engaged translators of journalistic texts.
2. Implications for the discipline

As we have argued above, translation studies has generally been regarded and presented as a discipline largely concerned with professional translation. This special issue argues otherwise. Translation studies potentially addresses a much larger conceptual and discursive area. One can even argue that it is professional – rather than non-professional – translation that should be taken as the exception within the wider context of translation. Looking at the issue from this angle, professional translation becomes merely one sub-type of translation, rather than the norm-setting, prototypical form. The terms used to address the phenomenon of non-professionals translating and interpreting (e.g., scanlation, romhacking, language brokering, etc.) are now highly varied and serve as a powerful reminder of the fact that non-professional translation and interpreting are as widely established and diversified, if not more so, than professional translation and interpreting.

Research within translation and interpreting studies has largely focused, until quite recently, on areas associated with translators/interpreters engaging in a given activity as a source of livelihood and in which it is possible to control quality by training these practitioners – for example, technical and legal translation, localization, conference interpreting and translating for the mass media. After all, the discipline has its roots in several historical events, some more dubious than others,\(^4\) which led it to a focus on utilitarian motivations, on what can be controlled and improved, not on what we can learn about translation in all the contexts in which it is encountered. At the same time, the traditional focus has been on literary translation, with the institutional and academic prestige attributed to it, even though those who translate literature do not necessarily enjoy any substantial financial gain. It is of course extremely difficult to pinpoint trends in major research topics within our discipline today. However, a snapshot of the recent issues (2011/2012) of five of the most established international journals within the discipline\(^5\) offers thought-provoking insight into the most up-to-date research in the field: 19 articles on literary texts, 4 on printed media, 4 on theoretical/meta-disciplinary issues, 3 on legal translation, 1 on online media, 1 on blogs, 1 on film, 1 on translator training, 1 on oral narratives, and 1 on simultaneous interpreting.

\(^4\) Examples include missionary endeavours, imperialist and colonial projects, World War II (code cracking, attempts to learn more about the enemy’s culture), and the development of language policies in the context of nation building. In later periods, translator training, especially for larger organizations such as the UN and the EU, has also played an important role in shaping the interests of the discipline.

\(^5\) The journals are *Meta*, *Target*, *Translation Studies* (Routledge), *The Translator* and *TTR*. The choice of journals was partly based on our own knowledge about the scope and reputation of these journals, but also on the recent ERIH (European Reference Index for the Humanities) ranking as INT1 (‘international with high visibility’) and INT2 (‘international with significant visibility’).
These results are rather surprising. One would expect to see, for instance, more on specialized translation, more on interpreting in all its forms, and more on audiovisual translation. The situation may be partially explained by the fact that the discipline has now matured sufficiently along different lines of specialism, and some of these areas have their own dedicated journals. Yet such specialized journals are still very few in number, compared to the number of journals focusing on translation and interpreting studies in general. What is more interesting is the emphasis on literary translation. A discipline that aspires to be comprehensive, inclusive and progressive cannot afford to restrict its focus to one type of phenomenon within its domain. Perhaps translation and interpreting studies have been looking at the tip of the iceberg for the last four decades.

The implications and consequences of limiting our disciplinary enquiries to economically and/or institutionally visible or academically prestigious forms of translation carried out by those who are referred to as ‘translators’, ‘localizers’, ‘subtitlers’ and ‘interpreters’, as opposed to those carried out by specialist non-professionals, are substantial. Translation and interpreting studies would do well to learn from the interlingual activities of non-professionals, instead of trying to control these activities, or focus excessively on the quality of output and/or perceived loss of status by translators and interpreters vis-à-vis non-professionals translating and interpreting. Otherwise, translation scholars will lose valuable opportunities for enhancing their scholarly knowledge, and translators and interpreters will miss valuable opportunities for professional growth. As Maria Tymoczko aptly observes (2009:419):

If the discipline does not meet … contemporary challenges adequately, then ironically students trained in translation programmes will be less able to innovate than intelligent, broadly educated people who know about the world, culture, politics, technology and language, even if they have no training in translation per se.

This is arguably what is happening to professional translators/interpreters vis-à-vis non-professionals. Non-professionals usually do not undergo professional training in translation. They are not ‘indoctrinated’, so to speak, into certain professional norms, such as those requiring close adherence to a source text (Pérez-González 2012). They are more prepared to ‘innovate’, play around with the material in hand, retell it in a way that is likely to be more interesting and intelligible for their audience – often because they are themselves part of the audience, as the papers in this volume demonstrate. This enhances their sense of initiative, authority and agency in reformulating the material as part of a clear project that they share with the audience.
3. This Special Issue

This collection explores the uncharted field of non-professional translation and interpreting with a view to learning about the individuals who take on translation/interpreting activities; the networks and organizations for which they translate and interpret; the media which facilitate the distribution of amateur translations; and the impact of these activities in the political, economic and social spheres.

Bearing in mind the need to gain a better understanding of the complex array of motives and circumstances behind the growth of non-professional translation, we open the volume with Julie McDonough Dolmaya’s study of volunteers who translate Wikipedia content. Here, the results of an online survey are analyzed to establish whether the involvement of volunteers in this crowdsourced translation initiative is informed by individual and/or collective perceptions of the social role of translation. A classification of crowdsourced translation initiatives into product-, outsourcing- and cause-driven projects allows McDonough Dolmaya to tease out the similarities and differences between the motivations of volunteer Wikipedians working within and those working outside the translation industry. Conflicting appraisals of which crowdsourced translation initiatives are worth supporting, and differing perceptions of amateur translation sites as opportunities for the expression of altruistic behaviour or profession-enhancing platforms – conceptualized as intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, respectively – emerge from the analysis of the responses provided by participants in this survey. McDonough Dolmaya’s study is a benchmark for future comparisons with the work and motivations of diverse ‘prosumers’ involved in collaborative practices in other domains of public life and raises important issues for further research in relation to the future growth and potential ‘institutionalization’ of non-professional translation.

Gauging the extent to which altruistic translation has contributed to the institutionalization and professionalization of other disciplines is one of the specific aims of Maeve Olohan’s article, albeit from a historical perspective. To account for the range of agendas intersecting around the non-professional translation site explored in her paper, Olohan draws on concepts of altruism developed within the field of behavioural economics. The differentiation between pure and impure altruism, which echoes McDonough Dolmaya’s distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, informs her analysis of the role that different volunteers played in the translation of Scientific Memoirs, including the small number of women involved in this instance of scientific endeavour. By choosing to focus on a historical case study, in the relatively under-researched area of scientific discourse, Olohan reveals the historical dimension of the volunteer translation phenomenon. The findings of her research, however, can be applied to the study of a variety of present-day forms of non-professional translating and interpreting that revolve around the presentation and circulation of knowledge as public good.
Altruism also features prominently in Tessa Dwyer’s article on Viki, a Korean crowdsourced Internet platform that broadcasts Asian fansubbed drama and seeks to foster multicultural understanding. Although fansubbing has received a significant degree of scholarly attention, Dwyer’s paper yields a number of novel insights into the evolution of this pervasive form of amateur subtitling. Viki’s approach to fansubbing, Dwyer argues, has left behind the formal strictures of the anime subculture and shifted the parameters of research on amateur subtitling in a number of ways. Unlike anime-centric fansubbing networks, ViKi makes available media content not only from Asian cultural ‘superpowers’ but also from small language-communities in developing countries – thus internationalizing translation discourse and practice and resisting the traditional geopolitics of the global media industry. Viki is also re-defining the relationship between commercial and profit-driven forms of translation. Through the ‘monetorization’ of its output and its growing collaboration with commercial broadcasters, Viki is contributing decisively to the formation of new hybrid communities of subtitling practice within the digital mediascape.

The notion of ‘community of practice’ is central to Robert Neather’s study of translation in Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau museums. Here, the museum community is conceptualized as a nexus of translation activity where translators and museum staff negotiate their respective ‘expertise deficits’ to produce satisfactory translated texts, both in terms of linguistic and substantive accuracy. Although most of the translators involved in the mediation of these texts are paid for their work, the fact that they are not always fully conversant with the terminology and subject matter of the museum texts undermines their status as professional mediators and calls for the involvement of staff with the relevant technical knowledge. Drawing on interviews with curators and museum translators, Neather identifies a series of ‘border practices’ that facilitate the exchange of different forms of expertise between translators and curators. Ultimately, the latter tend to claim ownership of the texts and genres around which the negotiation revolves, often imposing their discursive competence and terminological decisions on the translators, whether they are in-house or free-lancers. Neather addresses the interface between professional and non-professional translation identities, bringing to the fore the ‘perspectival’ nature of such categories.

In her eloquent account of the workings of activist interpreting, an area which has attracted considerable attention within translation and interpreting studies in the past few years, Julie Boéri focuses on Babels, the international network of volunteer translators and interpreters. Her contribution provides an in-depth case study of the politics and challenges of organizing interpreting in the context of the Social Forum. It demonstrates how volunteer interpreters in this context are vulnerable to the interplay between dominance and resistance that shapes the Forum itself, how their efforts simultaneously reflect and contribute to the Forum’s internal dynamics, and to a certain extent, how they are also open to pressures exercised by the professional
interpreting community. Boéri finally argues for establishing a principle of social responsibility to temper and complement the emphasis on the principle of impartiality in professional codes of ethics.

**Sari Hokkanen** provides a candid account of coming to terms with the disparities between her roles as a volunteer church interpreter and a researcher in translation and interpreting studies. Drawing on her study of interpreting in a Pentecostal church in Tampere, Finland, she distinguishes between the concepts of ‘volunteer work’ and ‘service’, and describes how volunteer church interpreters, as well as other members of the church, view their contribution to church life specifically as a form of service. Hakkonen questions the way conference and community interpreting are treated as ‘prototypes’ in interpreting studies, thus setting the norms and expectations within both practice and theory, and argues that non-professional interpreting practices inevitably challenge the taken-for-granted research premises in interpreting studies.

**Barbara Schouten, Jonathan Ross, Rena Zendedel** and **Ludwien Meeuwesen** set out to identify commonalities and differences in the experiences, attitudes and practices of informal interpreters in two very distinct settings: the Netherlands and Turkey. They explain the differences they identify in the light of the cultural backgrounds of the interpreters and the institutional and political frameworks within which they interpret. As a rare comparative study in the field, and one of the first to look at the interpreting provided for the Kurdish population living in Turkey, the contribution effectively demonstrates the possible pros and cons of non-professional interpreting in healthcare, most importantly from the point of view of non-professionals themselves and their families, without sliding into judgemental criticism of this rather contentious field of activity.

A comparative approach is also adopted in the final paper in this volume, where **Sue-Ann Harding** contrasts the original Russian online reportage and its English translations published by a mainstream Russian news agency and two non-professional independent media sites, following the Beslan school hostage-taking in 2004. Drawing on socio-narrative theory, Harding examines how the original reportage from each of these media sites constructs framing narratives (such as the war on terror or the Russian genocide of Chechens) into which the local narrative of the Beslan hostage-taking is embedded, thus resulting in simplistic accounts of the events. Harding’s analysis of the English translations made available by the two non-professional sites suggests that the limited availability of amateur translators effectively jeopardizes any attempt to challenge mainstream reductionist narratives and promote alternative multivalent ones. A more carefully targeted approach to translation, based on a critical selection of what should be made available in other languages, is advocated as a more effective strategy for political and ideological resistance.

We hope that, taken together, the articles in this special issue will contribute to expanding the boundaries of the term ‘translation’ itself, to making it more malleable and less rigid, so that it can cease to function as a straightjacket or
a yardstick and instead become available as an illuminating conceptual tool that can be fruitfully applied in diverse areas of research.

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