

Evolution of User-generated Translation: Fansubs, Translation Hacking and Crowdsourcing

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Abstract

Most conspicuous initially with Japanese anime fansubs, fan-based translation has been developing since the 1980s. In the advent of widespread availability of Web 2.0 platforms, fan translation has become a global phenomenon despite its dubious legal status. Extending the emerging interest in fansubs and scanlation in translation studies to the little discussed translation hacking by video game fans, this article brings readers' attention to participatory culture manifest in user-generated content in the field of translation and localisation. The article describes the evolution from unsolicited fan translation to solicited community translation now called crowdsourcing and considers them in the framework of user-generated translation (UGT). The article provides interdisciplinary perspectives, drawing on insights from media and game studies to address UGT which could profoundly impact the profession of translation and localisation as new technological environments unleash the technical competence, genre-knowledge and unparalleled devotion of the otherwise untrained Internet crowd as translators.

Introduction

The birth of localisation in the early 1980s signalled the beginning of a new era of translation in the transition to the digital age (O'Hagan & Ashworth, 2002). The requirement to translate digital content such as computer software had a profound impact on translation. Translators still translated words, but translation now needed to be formulated and coded in a specific form suitable for a given digital platform, in turn demanding new techniques and processes of localisation. The term "localisation" was introduced to signify the extra dimensions required to incorporate the translator's work into digital products. This also meant new ways of working with Computer-aided Translation (CAT) tools which have now seeped through to other areas of more conventional translation. While localisation has become a well established industry today, the conceptual boundary between translation and localisation has remained unclear and theorisation of localisation is still ongoing in the field of Translation Studies (TS) (Pym, 2009). For this reason, the term "Translation" with a capital T is used in this article to encompass both translation and localisation where appropriate. Such an ambiguity also reflects the fluid nature of the domain of localisation which continues to expand its boundary in the tide of globalisation of an increasing range of digital media. For example, video game localisation has added new dimensions to utility software localisation. Modern video games are interactive multimedia systems, with their rich content comprising written text, graphics, cut-scenes (movies), sounds, etc realised in a highly complex technological system. Game localisation is an emerging area of study within TS (see Bernal, 2006; Mangiron, 2007; O'Hagan, 2006) and the topic of fan translation of games is even less explored. Game localisation involves techniques used for software localisation and also elements of audiovisual translation where translated

words in different modes are integrated into the electronic medium. It belongs to a highly specialised area of translation, requiring special training designed for interactive multimedia applications for entertainment. Given the specialised nature of the tasks involved, it is doubly surprising that some gamers tackle the challenge without formal training or provision of technical support. They seem to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills through online collaboration with like-minded gamers and knowledge-bases created by the game community in addition to their own game playing experience and often extensive research.

Following the recent deployment especially in localisation of user-based crowdsourcing model, this article discusses the phenomenon of user participation in otherwise highly specialised areas of professional Translation practice. Media and cultural studies scholars such as Henry Jenkins (2006) see the trends of various media users extending their involvement in media to a much more active and deeper level to form a “participatory culture” facilitated by new media technologies. Progressing from the first generation Web, Web 2.0 ushered in the age of users as producers who freely contribute a wide range of content for public consumption as exemplified in *Wikipedia* and *YouTube*. In this context, the concept “user-generated content” (UGC) has become highly resonant with today’s Internet which itself is considered as user-generated at one level (Flew, 2008: 35). Without the Internet’s extensive and ubiquitous coverage albeit still excluding many developing countries, UGC would never have reached the level of significance we are witnessing today. It was indicative that *Time* chose “you” the user as the Person of the Year in 2006 (Grossman, 2006), marking the special and unprecedented role played by users. *Time*’s cover read: “Yes, you. You control the Information Age” (Time, 2006, December 13). With the focus on users in today’s media landscape, this article examines Translation which is

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also coming under the increasing control of users as global electronic communications leverage the collective intelligence of users or the Internet crowd in a completely new way, forming, in the best case scenario, “the wisdom of crowds” (Surowiecki, 2004).

For the purpose of this article the meaning of the key term “user” needs to be clarified in relation to the ideas behind UGC. From a media studies perspective, Flew (2008, pp. 35-36) explains UGC as “the way in which users as both *remediators* [original emphasis] and direct producers of new media content engage in new forms of large-scale participation in the digital media spaces”. Drawing on this description, I use the term “user-generated translation” (UGT) in this article to mean a wide range of Translation, carried out based on free user participation in digital media spaces where Translation is undertaken by unspecified self-selected individuals. The user in UGT therefore is somebody who voluntarily acts as a “remediator” of linguistically inaccessible products and “direct producer” of Translation on the basis of their knowledge of the given language as well as that of particular media content or genre, spurred by their substantial interest in the topic. In the context of game localisation performed by users, the term “gamer” is used to mean users/players of games involved in Translation as it also connotes committed game players who tend to have amassed the necessary knowledge to undertake the often technically intricate task of game localisation. DePalma & Kelly (2008) use the term CT³ in reference to “community translation”, “collaborative technology and processes” and “crowdsourcing” which are all merging to create “translation that is generated of, by, and for the people”. Such characterisation underpins the central concept behind UGT aligned with social networking – a buzz word publicised by new communications platforms such as *Facebook*, *Second Life* and *Twitter*. Implicit in social networking platforms is their recognition of the inherent human nature

to socialise and interact, which will also facilitate tasks to be performed in different professional areas, including Translation.

UGT provided in a voluntary manner without monetary reward raises issues relating to quality, ethics and the very survival of the Translation profession. Drawing on insights from media and game studies to understand the implications of technological developments affording UGT and also taking a sociological approach to shed light into the nature of social interactions among gamers in the game community, this article attempts to make sense of UGT from interdisciplinary angles. Taking the cases of a number of prominent fan translation practices to date and linking them to the recent crowdsourcing model, the article highlights the significant changes that could potentially transform the whole profession of Translation.

Developments of User-generated Translation: Fan Translation

In order to provide a historical perspective it is relevant to discuss earlier forms of UGT of note and how they have developed. In the advent of mass-scale connectivity on web-based platforms, like-minded people are able to congregate and work together on self-selected projects forming what Rheingold (1993) had earlier called the “virtual community”. In the wake of the new generation of Internet with Web 2.0, members of the virtual community also came to gain access to a better and wider range of tools required for producing various content in electronic form while collaborating with virtual community members. In this environment, Bey et al. (2006) note that two types of volunteer translator networks arose: (1) mission-oriented and (2) subject-oriented. The former refers to highly-coordinated groups mainly engaged in technical translation of documents related to open source software products whereas the latter refers to translations of online documents performed by individuals chiefly to advocate certain points of

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view such as support of humanitarian causes. Both these examples seem to be motivated by the general spirit of free sharing of material by like-minded people for which self-appointed volunteer translators are willing to lend hands, be it further distributing of open source programs or pursuing various topics which strongly concern them. An argument often put forward in support of such volunteer networks especially for translation within technical domains is an alleged lack of sufficient subject knowledge on the part of professional translators to be able to translate specialised documents such as those related to open source software. The issue of domain-knowledge is a significant factor behind the development of UGT and also relates to fan translation networks especially conspicuous in popular culture genres, which can be considered as a third category of volunteer translators (O'Hagan, 2009).

Among the early adopters of new collaborating possibilities on the Internet have been various fan groups. The availability of the Internet and collaboration tools gave such fan groups means to express a collective voice irrespective of their physical location allowing their presence to become much more visible, and leading to the formation of global “fan cultures” (Hills, 2002). Furthermore the nature of fandom changed from that of passive spectators to active “prosumers” who are producers as well as consumers of products (Tapscott & Williams, 2006). Fan translation fits well in the category of prosumers where potential consumers of translations double as translation producers. The most well-established early form of UGT was fan translation of Japanese animation now widely known as anime. Fan-produced subtitles for anime, called fansubs, are circulated worldwide in media spaces. This UGT is produced chiefly by fans for fans (Díaz-Cintas & Muños Sánchez, 2006). Despite its relative long history the phenomenon of fansubs has only recently begun to be recognised in the field of TS (Munday,

2008, p.190) mainly by scholars working in the field of audiovisual translation (e.g. Díaz-Cintas & Muños Sánchez, 2006; Pérez González, 2006). Fansubs' tendency of not conforming to norms of audiovisual translation and their often experimental nature gave rise to the concept of "abusive subtitles" (Nornes, 1999/2004, 2007) in reference to their translation strategy which, Nornes claims, directs the audience to the original by way of challenging some of the conventional constraints imposed on subtitles.

Such norm-defying translation strategies seem to stem from fans' search for "authentic text" (Cubbison, 2005). The approach is closely linked to the original motivation behind the development of fansubs which emerged as a protest against the official often over-edited versions of anime typically aired in dubbed form on television networks outside Japan. The early appearance of fansubs goes back to the 1980s with the use of VHS tapes which imposed cumbersome and expensive processes of private subtitling. In contrast today's far more efficient and cheaper fansub productions are sometimes called "digisubs" as the latter mainly rely on digital technology (Leonard, 2005, p.11). Digisub practices leverage technological environments, ranging from file sharing in order to share raw content for translation and to distribute the finished product to chat rooms for discussion as well as multimedia authoring and subtitling tools. There is also a more recent phenomenon of fan translation referred to as "scanlation" of mainly Japanese comics called *manga* (O'Hagan, 2008). The term derives from "scanning" of raw material comprising printed pages of original *manga* and "translating" them. Similar to digisubs the whole process takes advantage of digital production and communication environments. Both digisubs and scanlation today seem to be mainly motivated by a desire to fill in the gap or delay in official translations since the worldwide recognition of anime in

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particular seems to have moderated some of the most radical editing strategies of the early days. Both forms of UGT voluntarily undertaken by fans leverage global connectivity and online collaboration to produce and deliver translations and make them available in media spaces. As well noted by observers of fan translation (Cubbison, 2005; Pérez González, 2006), one of the defining characteristics is fans' savvy use of technology both to produce UGT as well as to manage their workflow shared among different team members who are normally located in different physical sites. While fans' non-conformity and their very existence may be frowned upon by the professional translator community, fan translation approaches seem to be gradually seeping through to commercial productions in the area of anime subtitles (Caffrey, 2009), including cases where well-reputed fan translation groups are sometimes hired to produce an official version. The quality of fan translation can be variable (Díaz-Cintas & Muños Sánchez, 2006), but there are instances of fans' apparent lack of formal translator training being compensated for by their genre-knowledge (O'Hagan, 2008).

Drawing on prior study of fansubs and scanlation as fan translation networks, key aspects of fan translation relevant to the present discussion can be summarised as: (1) collaboration afforded by technology allows fans to form purposeful task groups to undertake a project and achieve a production often in a manner comparable to professional production in terms of the workflow process and the timeframe¹; (2) despite the dubious legal status copyright holders have largely condoned the practice, partly due to the fact that fan productions can facilitate the exposure of the given product to a wider target language public, thus in effect providing considerable free pre-publicity; (3) fan translators willingly undertake a translation project

¹For a fan translation of an episode of TV anime the timeframe is usually set within one or two days of its original broadcast in Japan whereas for a chapter of manga in scanlation the deadline is set within the same day of release (O'Hagan, 2008, p.165).

without remuneration, indicating a strong motivational factor and (4) domain-knowledge possessed by fans may in some cases compensate for the lack of formal translator training .

These key characteristics will be revisited in the final section on crowdsourcing.

The Video Game Fan Community and UGC

This section first looks into wider activities within the video game fan community that are relevant to the current discussion on UGC. The video game community can be seen as a prime example of a UGC contributor, demonstrating the gamers' devotion and creativity, their subject and technical knowledge and the level of collective intelligence gathered as a group. The depth and breadth of fan activities leading to UGC in the game field have reached the level of a metaculture where "players construct elaborate out-of-game meeting places" as they "bring a game beyond screen" (Nielsen, S.E., Smith, J.H. & Tosca, S.P., 2008, p.157). One type of UGC within the game community relates to a practice broadly known as "poaching" where "fans creatively re-use content from other media" (ibid, p.158), creating so called "fan art or fan work". The term poaching itself suggests these fan activities often border on the legal breach of intellectual property and raise copyright issues. Opinions are divided even among fans and certain poaching activities are "not always supported by their fan community" (Burn, 2006, p. 102) even though the game industry has embraced rather invasive fan activities such as "modding" as discussed later. This is also something in common with anime fansubs where ethical issues are addressed differently from group to group and often condoned by the industry (Leonard, 2005). Despite the questionable nature of some fan activities, their participatory level seems to be on the rise judging from the increasing volume and visibility of fan produced materials available on the Internet. This is possibly due to benefits of fan activities perceived by

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IP holders in the game industry. One pragmatic example is a “walkthrough” which provides a detailed step by step player guide in a manner of enactment of a particular game. Walkthroughs are created based on the contributor’s experience of the given game, showing a certain mastery of the game, which may or may not be endorsed by other players. They transfer a multimodal game to a form of procedural text typically written in imperative mood devoid of representational aspects of the game (Burn, 2006, p. 90). Burn further observes that these walkthroughs may read like a dispassionate factual text, but, in fact, are full of the passion of the authors (ibid, p. 91) who are driven to serve their fellow fans by helping them complete the game apart from some gamers’ exhibitionist tendency for the demonstration of expertise.

Walkthroughs can be considered to function as a “help file”, albeit unauthorised, for less experienced gamers. In this way, while legally dubious, some of the fan activities could be actually beneficial rather than detrimental to game publishers. The game industry generally seems to acknowledge such positive dimensions of active fan participations.

On further scrutiny into the video game fan activity of poaching, Burn (2006, p. 88) argues how such fan work can both “revere the original text, seeking to remain as true to it as possible” and at the same time “dramatically alter the original text, adapting it to express the particular interest of the fan or fan group”. These two opposing approaches are useful in contextualising the nature of fan activities in the video game domain and relevant to discussing game fan translation practices in particular. One of the prevalent forms of poaching is fan fiction commonly known as *fanfic* which is developed based on a range of media texts, including video game narratives. *Fanfic* has also extended into the audiovisual sphere where fans produce animated films to re-create elements of the original game in terms of story, characters, settings,

etc usually “for humorous or ironic purpose” (Nielsen et al., 2008, p.159). This type of fan work may be developed as a mockery or parody of the original. One of the best known examples is redistribution of blatant translation errors typically attributed to earlier Japanese video game localisation. For example, the translated phrase in the game *Zero Wing* (1991) “all your base are belong to us” has become so widely circulated on the Internet via various forms of fan work that it has reached legendary status with the game community. There are many more similar examples where translation errors have brought the game to wider public attention through *fanfic* movies, texts and online discussion sites. By comparison, some other *fanfic* activities reveal their concerns to ensure that their fictitious renditions remain consistent with hard facts based on the original “canon” (Newman, 2008, p.59). While *fanfic* entails a creative extension arising from the original game, there are tendencies to follow the authentic information even by distinguishing the canon from non-canon versions among the same game series based on the involvement or the absence of the original development team. Fan message board discussions often reveal the considerable research the fan community is prepared to undertake and how fans construct legitimate arguments based on their research. Even official information may not be taken at face value and fans may insist on referring back to the original game source when arguing about localised games. Newman (2008) provides an illustrative example where such debates involved discussions on the original versus localised versions with Sega’s popular game title *Sonic the Hedgehog* originally released in 1990.

Elsewhere in the analysis of the same issue, fans return to what they consider to be trustworthy ‘original’ (that is, the Japanese manuals that accompany the canonical games that are provided in translation by one of the community who lends his intensive knowledge to the

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group). The authority of these materials supersedes even the official Sega of America (SoA) and Sega Europe materials which are discarded as disloyal as they frequently invent new narratives and explanations rather than faithfully translating and duplicating the canonical Japanese materials (Newman, 2008, p. 61).

This stance is sometimes reflected in the fan translation approach which seeks to replicate the original voice similar to fansubs. This, in turn, highlights the different focus fans may have from the goal of commercial game localisation. The latter puts priority on adapting the game to the target market requirements so that the product is received as if it is a locally produced game, not a translation (Mangiron & O'Hagan, 2006). Newman observes (2008, p.65) fans' collective intelligence about certain game titles to have reached the extent that they are able to discern "those that are genuine inconsistencies in the authorially authentic narrative and those that are the products of poor or insensitive translation". These examples provide relevant background to understanding some fan perspectives on officially localised games. Fans' knowledge on the topic supported by their extensive research can be contrasted to the diminishing timeframe and lack of context under which professional translators and localisers are often forced to work in the field of game localisation. Furthermore, the situation can be frustrated by the fact that some official European language versions of Japanese games are derived from the games' English versions, leaving more room for loss of the original intent. These may have led to a degree of scepticism about some of the official versions by fans as they observe: "those involved with the official translations either take liberties with or are simply insufficiently well versed in the minute detail of the canon to produce a sensitive English language version". With some game series fans are more sensitive to "the lack of care in preserving the continuity and integrity of the

canon as envisioned by the originators” (Newman, 2008, p.61). Such critical attitudes of some fans arise from their knowledge and mastery of specific game titles, which must feed into how they undertake translation and localisation. Similarly these observations serve to explain how, in some cases, fans are compelled to undertake game localisation as part of fandom and extended participatory engagement with the medium. The breadth and level of engagement and collective knowledge accumulated by the video game fan community is apparent in the vast range of online activities and resources such as discussions in message boards and fan work creations. UGT by these fans often entails a depth of commitment on the part of the contributor which commercial Translation is rarely able to match. This seems to have resulted in the trust of fans being placed more on translations that “emerge from within the trusted community of gamers rather than those of regional marketing departments” (Newman, 2008, p. 64).

Of various activities by video game fans, a practice which best highlights the blurring boundary between the producer and the consumer in terms of UGC is the phenomenon known as “modding” in reference to modification of games. A “mod” ranges from a light cosmetic touch to a complete overhaul of the original game and is a further testimony to the extensive technical knowledge acquired by some fans. Interestingly mods are not only condoned but are endorsed by the game industry as a way to enhance the appeal of the original game and gather wider gamer community attention and extended engagement in the game. This is accommodated to the extent that some game developers officially make available development kits to facilitate the modding process as well as designing original games in such a way as to avoid any harmful impact of modding on the original game code by separating the main program from media files (Nielsen et al., 2008, p.161). The best known and by far the most successful example to date is

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Counter-Strike which appeared in 1999 as a mod of *First Person Shooter* (FPS) game *Half-Life*.

The way modding has been harnessed by the game industry is by controlling it under official agreement of EULA (End User License Agreement) which curtails any profit gained on the part of the modifiers from their activities. Modding exemplifies how the game industry dealt with UGC whereby user expertise and creativity are encouraged to the advantage of the industry. The next section homes in on game fan activities directly in the area of UGT.

Fan Translation of Video Games: Translation hacking

Unlike business software development which is centred mainly in the USA and thus originates in English, one of the major game developing countries is Japan, adding Japanese to main source languages of game localisation alongside English. There is a close link between anime fansubs and fan translation of video games, both sharing Japanese as a major source language where the initial goal was to make Japanese exclusive materials accessible especially to the English-speaking world. Today fan translation is performed into many different languages. Newman (2008, p.156) notes a limited availability of localised versions in the early days of Japanese Role Playing Games (RPGs) due to their especially “copious quantities of text”, signifying a considerable investment for game publishers. With the tendency of RPG titles to pack in game play times which may stretch to over 100 hours, the volume of game content subject to localisation is increasing. The decision on whether to localise thus has greater cost implications, and means that some territories are left out in the cold with some games unlocalised. Faced with the lack of localisation typically, but not exclusively, of Japanese RPG titles, some dedicated fans have come to organise their own translation, referred to as “translation hacking” which is a type of “ROM-hacking”. It entails modifying the binary ROM (read-only

memory) image of the game. Translation hacking involves a hacker and a translator working together to extract the relevant text from the ROM and to replace it with a translated script.

While the motivation and the level of enthusiasm can be comparable to those found in fansubs and scanlation activities, the fan undertaking of video game localisation entails significantly more time-consuming and technically challenging tasks (Newman, 2008, p. 158). It is this technical knowledge and intensive interest in the game development process by some gamers that characterise the unique nature of fan translation of games.

To further explain the technical background to translation hacking, it is relevant to point out the distinction between PC games and those played on dedicated consoles such as *PlayStation*. Games played on PCs have been more amenable to making changes as computer programs more readily allow external modifications, for example, with patches to update or debug the programs. By comparison, console games represent a tightly sealed closed system, making external changes more difficult. For this reason while PC games have been subject for a long time to user modifications, this is a newer development with console games (Taylor, 2007, p.234). Translation hacking for console games is closely linked to the availability in the late 1990s of console emulator software which turns a PC into a virtual game console. ROM hacking, as explained by the practitioner (Mandelin cited in Parkin, 2008), involves a hacker locating the game's font to produce what is known as a table, which in turn allows text data to be identified and then to be copied ("dumped") in a file for translation. The translation is released as a ROM patch applied to the original ROM to effect the translation and is played on a console emulator. This process is highly technical, sometimes involving such tasks as changing the original (Japanese) font to include English letters and for large projects the hacker may even

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create a special program to make the translators' tasks easier (Mandelin cited in Parkin, 2008).

In addition to the increasing volume of text to be translated, the complex game structure provides further challenge even to identify all elements which need to be localised.

The most recent high-profile fan translation example is that of Japanese RPG title *Mother 3* (2006) originally released for *Nintendo Game Boy Advance*. The English fan translation was made available in October 2008 after nearly two years' worth of work. The series has had a serious following by overseas fans who produced a copious amount of *fanfics* and *fanart* and yet the game had not been localised probably because of poor sales of *Mother 2* in the US (Newman, 2008, p.157). The scale of popularity of the fan translated version can be gauged by the number of translation patch downloads exceeding 100,000 during its first week of release (Parkin, 2008).

In an interview by the game website *Gamasutra*, the main fan translator involved in the project Clyde Mandelin, a professional translator working in the game localisation industry, responds to the question regarding the legal issue by stating: "we were fully prepared and willing to stop our work immediately if there had been any word from the game's IP owner" (Parkin, 2008, p.2).

True to his words, the project's official website "Mother 3 Fan Translation"

(<http://mother3.fobby.net/faqs/>) has the following declaration:

As we've mentioned throughout the history of the project, our team has agreed that this translation project will come to a full stop if/when we hear that *Nintendo* has chosen to pursue an official translation of the game. Our only goal is to get MOTHER 3 in the hands of the fans.

Mandelin stresses how fan translation is a "hobby" undertaken as "out of love" and generally there is a mutual understanding of fans' intention between fan translators and the IP owners

(Parkin, 2008, p. 2). Feedback from fans on the fan translated version seems to assume such an amicable relationship whereby many of them openly voice their hope that *Nintendo* will notice such fan endeavours and be encouraged to localise their games (see *Siliconera Speaks Up: The Mother 3 Fan-Translation*, 2009). While the profile of a fan translator is by definition not a trained professional, Mandelin is an example of a fan translator turned professional yet still retaining his former role. Mandelin maintains that the experience gained from fan translation has been invaluable to his profession and adds: "every pro translator I know is/was a fan translator" (Parkin, 2008, p.2). This points to a close linkage between fandom and professional translation in the field of game localisation and implies the benefit of working as part of fan translation communities. The latter seem to be able to provide, if by accident, a situated authentic learning environment, likely boosting the process of preparing trainees for the game localisation industry. As such fan translation networks can be seen as an unlikely but perfect example of a social constructivist approach applied in translator training outside the formal translation school" (O'Hagan, 2008). The phenomenon of fan translation illustrates how technological environments have provided a solution, albeit legally questionable, to the lack of availability of official translation allowing user-translators to step in and showcase their domain-specific knowledge and technical skills. In this way today's enhanced Web 2.0 environments are harnessing UGC and UGT. What is particularly new, however, is the trend where these mostly unsolicited and often legally illicit user-based translation activities are now turning into solicited legitimate activities developing as an increasingly accepted business model.

Crowdsourcing: Legitimatising UGT

Most forms of UGT discussed above stand on legally shaky ground regardless of whether their original copyright holders are likely to take legal action. Leonard (2005) argues that the dismissive attitudes towards fansubs by Japanese copyright holders of anime in the early days have, in fact, served them well by benefitting them in the long run by facilitating a “demand formation” of anime at the time of relative obscurity of the genre in the US and elsewhere. Similar to fan translation of games, many fansub groups profess to work on the principle that when an officially translated version comes out in the market, they will retrieve their fan translated version although in reality such actions may make little difference once the materials have been circulated online. Digitisation of products and the availability of ubiquitous broadband communications networks have created an increasing difficulty in quashing digital content piracy notably suffered by the film and music industries, leading to closing of some file sharing sites. The popularity of UGC and now the rise of UGT appear to be adding to the continuous problem which arises from the very nature of going digital where users control information as observed by *Time* (Grossman, 2006). The term “translation hacking” used to describe fan translation of video games is also indicative of the breach of legality relating to computer hackers. Nevertheless the instances of UGT discussed so far show how powerfully motivated users will engage in laborious time-consuming tasks in the spirit of sharing, which, in turn, is more or less accepted in the otherwise fiercely commercially-oriented, litigation-bound game industry.

A new business model which has recently come to be known as crowdsourcing takes a step further the trend of leveraging free labour of love. Howe (2008, p.6) explains his choice of

this naming in 2006, sensing the unprecedented impact of combined dynamics arising from UGC as something which is rapidly shaping our culture and economy. Taking advantage of its core-business expertise of social networking, *Facebook* launched crowdsourcing in 2007 to let their users translate selected parts of the *Facebook* website into different language versions. It provides one of the first full-fledged cases allowing us to observe how this model works in the field of web localisation. As of September 2008 *Facebook* had involved over 30,000 users around the world in their project of translating its website into 16 launched languages (Losse, 2008). *Facebook* uses the Internet crowd to translate selected strings which form part of their websites. By developing a user-friendly translation application, called *Facebook Translations*², *Facebook* leverages their users' enthusiasm and mass collaboration also to evaluate the contributed translations by a user voting mechanism (see Figure 1). The results of the voting in turn feed into translator leader boards, publicising and recognising the level of activity of top contributors both quantity- and quality-wise. This clearly provides the contributors with a motivational factor, showing the number of positive votes they received for their translation. While other unsolicited forms of UGT discussed above leave translation quality as an open question that other users may or may not comment on, this model directly elicits user comments on quality. According to *Facebook* their motivation for using a crowdsourcing model is primarily not a matter of cost saving. It points out that most savings which may have been made on translation in fact have been spent on developing its technology platform with the translation application. Furthermore they engage commercial translation service providers for translating

² At the time of writing *Facebook* is awaiting the outcome of its patent application for "techniques for translating text in a social network" filed in December 2008 with the US Patent and Trademark office. The full application is accessible at: <http://appft1.uspto.gov/netacgi/nph-Parser?Sect1=PTO1&Sect2=HITOFF&d=PG01&p=1&u=%2Fnetahtml%2FPTO%2Fsrchnum.html&r=1&f=G&l=50&s1=%2220090198487%22.PGNR.&OS=DN/20090198487&RS=DN/20090198487>

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more than half of *Facebook* content in its supported languages and also for evaluation of translations done by the users, validating the users' own democratic method of quality control (DePalma & Kelly, 2008, p.15).

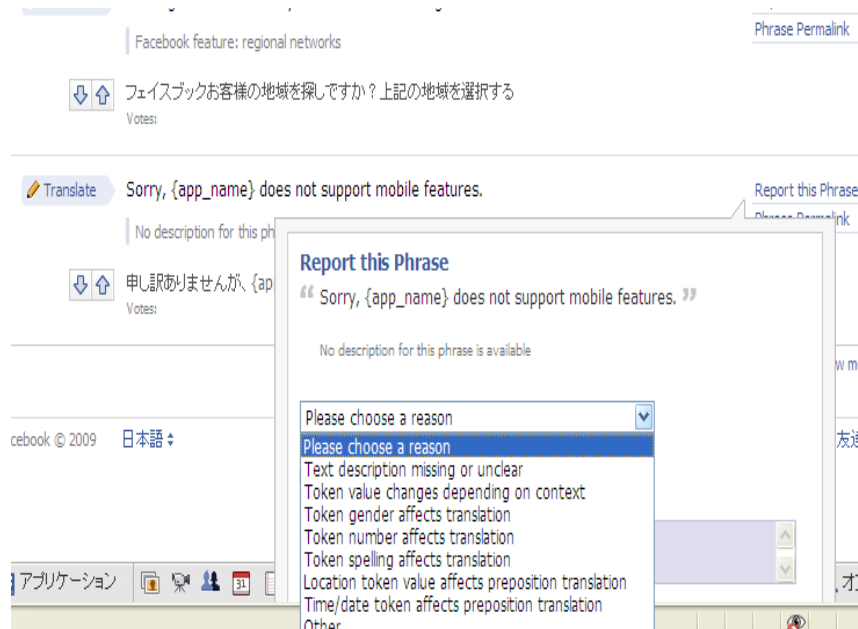


Figure 1: Translation Quality Feedback by User Voting on Japanese *Facebook* (source: www.facebook.com)

The crowdsourcing model as applied by *Facebook* confirms some of the prior findings on the characteristics of fan translation: the successful deployment of a well-motivated collaborative community for a purposeful task. *Facebook* leveraged the inherent interest of the site's users to make the social networking website accessible in a wide range of languages and also provided a mechanism to formally recognise their contributions using the leader board concept which in turn is supported by the crowd's opinion about the quality of contributed translations. Both these approaches seem to serve well to encourage further user participation either as translators or translation reviewers. Another aspect identified by prior study regarding users' domain-knowledge was also recognised by *Facebook* where the user group was reported to have

outperformed the professional translators with certain translations due to the former's familiarity with the inner workings of *Facebook* (Losse, 2008). This is presented as part of the argument by *Facebook* to legitimise the use of the crowdsourcing model whereby pointing out shortcomings of professional translators who had never used *Facebook* before (Losse, 2008).

This leaves us with one further issue regarding the ethical question of for-profit business ventures seemingly taking advantage of free labour of users. A recent case in point is the outrage expressed by its professional translator members when *LinkedIn*, a high-profile social networking site designed for professionals, in effect, asked how they would like to participate in crowdsourced translation of the *LinkedIn* website for free (Kelly, 2009). The translators' negative reaction was such that it led to the formation within *LinkedIn* of the group "Translators against Crowdsourcing for Commercial Business". Reporting this strong reaction Kelly (2009) argues that this is due, in part, to a lack of understanding by translators of what crowdsourcing entails as she argues that "it is simply another method of working in the digital age". Kelly further compares this new phenomenon of crowdsourcing to the emergence of computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools which are widely accepted and leveraged by the professional translation community today and yet may once have been considered as a threat by freelance translators who were not familiar with the technology. This case illustrates how UGT is likely to shake the profession further as more businesses become interested in trialling this model, especially if more, albeit variously qualified, users are prepared to participate in crowdsourced translation and start to undercut professional translators.

Conclusions

Based on observations of the evolving fan translation phenomenon including the highly technical translation hacking of video games and the emerging crowdsourcing model, this article argued that the concept of user-generated translation (UGT) is likely to have far-reaching impacts on the Translation profession. The digital revolution has come to empower mere “users” in an unprecedented manner whereby enabling them to contribute their genre-knowledge and to become part of a community of practice of a new kind. The technological advancements which are increasing the demand for Translation are now also masking the highly specialised nature of the work of translators and localisers. While professional language services are being sought by businesses to compete in global markets, users help translate *Facebook's* website into Spanish and German in just one week with its French version taking only 24 hours (DePalma & Kelly, 2008, p.12). Casual observers of crowdsourcing may have indeed reached the conclusion that translation and localisation are something freely and readily achievable by the Internet crowds where the boundary between the professional translator and the amateur is no longer clear. Today's rapidly transforming technological environments are challenging professionals in various fields. As the UGT phenomenon starts to enter into professional and academic discourses, we all need to engage in the debate with open mind and endeavour to understand the emerging contexts by establishing the facts so that we can critically assess the situation. There are unanswered questions of ethical issues and quality concerns which arise from the new model of crowdsourced translation. At the same time, there are also questions relating to genre-knowledge and general motivation of professional translators and localisers, which may stem from increasingly squeezed working conditions. The new digital world which favours openness,

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collaboration and sharing calls into question perhaps some of the hidden issues which are already plaguing the current work mode of professional translators and localisers. The new rules being established by the world of Web 2.0 are forcing the Translation profession to confront the new and the old issues. Perhaps a fresh insight may come from the process of reflection so that the unfolding changes can be leveraged to further enhance and progress the profession, and not bring about its demise. A clear way towards the decline will be to ignore the changes and insist on forever keeping the old way of working.

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