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Translation and New(s) Media: Participatory Subtitling Practices in Networked Mediascapes

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Abstract. This chapter sets out to investigate the role that amateur translation plays in the process of media convergence and gauge the extent to which the proliferation of co-creational practices pertaining to the production, translation and distribution of subtitled media content blur the distinction between the roles of producer and consumer in political news interviews. I begin by exploring how the role of translation within global news media has been theorized in recent years and teasing out the implications of technological changes for the blurring of news production, consumption and translation. I then focus on the social processes that have prompted the emergence of amateur communities of journalists/translators, whether in the form of structured activist networks or fluid groupings of engaged citizens, as influential agents in the digital mediascape. The chapter then articulates the implications of these developments for the discipline of translation studies, including the shift from referential accuracy towards narrative negotiation and the politics of affinity as the main drives informing amateur news mediation. The issues raised in this essay are illustrated with a case study involving the subtitling of a political news interview by amateur mediators.

1. Introduction

Advances in communications technology over the last two decades have led to the proliferation of 'self-mediation' (Chouliaraki 2010), as individuals increasingly turn to 'computer-mediated forms of production, distribution, and communication' (Manovich 2001: 19) to share cultural practices and experiences. The implications of this shift for the emerging global media ecology can be articulated in terms of two conflicting yet complementary trends. On the one hand, the widening range of channels available for the distribution of media content and the growing fragmentation of audiences have precipitated the concentration of mainstream commercial media in the hands of a few powerful global corporations. By diversifying their revenue streams and strengthening their presence in different segments of the marketplace, most of the global media players emerging from these processes of corporate consolidation have thus managed to enhance their economic efficiency while increasing viewers' choice (Compaine 2005). On the other hand, the affordances of new communication technologies – particularly the lowering of production and distribution costs – have become a growing threat to the commercial interests of mainstream media. By enabling 'consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate and

recirculate media content in powerful new ways' (Jenkins 2004: 33), digital media give viewers more control over their user experience.

The capacity of communications technology to reinvigorate old business models, while at the same time facilitating new forms of viewer engagement in the production and consumption of media content (McChesney and Schiller 2003), reveals the co-existence of 'a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process' at the heart of media industries known as 'media convergence' (Jenkins 2004: 37). This participatory context of cultural production, where media professionals and their creative audiences 'co-create' media content, has 'a cultural logic of its own, blurring 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). To date, the study of media convergence has largely focused on the economic implications of co-creation – understood as a symbiotic process whereby businesses provide their 'reflexive' or 'creative clients' (Meikle and Young 2012) with a personalized experience of their services or products, in exchange for customer feedback that may enhance the company's brand value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000, Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2004, Grabher *et al.* 2008). In the case of news media, the economic logic of convergence no longer prioritizes the long-term loyalty of their readership or audiences – as measured in terms of sustained and passive content consumption (Atton 2004, Jarvis 2007). More decisive to the commercial performance and visibility of digital media is their capacity to secure a constant inflow of user-generated content (American Press Institute 2005, Beckett and Mansell 2008) through 'demotic' participation (Turner 2010).

The impact of media convergence on the production of media content, however, cannot be measured exclusively in terms of economic impact (Hartley 2009, Green and Jenkins 2009). Unlike their mass-media predecessors, collaborative technologies foster interactivity through 'the combination of intense local and extensive global interaction' (Wellman 2002: 11). In the era of networked digital media, citizens are able to reach beyond their immediate personal and professional environments and become active members of transnational, geographically dispersed collectivities seeking to promote shared cultural values and practices. This new 'paradigm of civic engagement' (Pérez-González 2012) is often articulated through online networks of individuals bound together by mutual affinity and shared aesthetic, ideological and political affiliations. Indeed, it is through assembling, annotating and distributing their own experiences and representations of reality through media that such affiliations are negotiated and cultural and political discourses are articulated (Kuntsman 2012, Pérez-González *ibid.*).

Against the backdrop of these developments, studies on media convergence have begun to address the involvement of ordinary people 'in the process of making media as co-creators of content and experiences across professions as varied as journalism, advertising, public relations, marketing communication, television and movie production, fashion, game development' (Banks and Deuze 2009: 420) and translation (Barra 2009, Pérez-González 2012). This paper sets out to investigate the role that amateur translation plays in the process of media convergence and gauge the extent to which the proliferation of co-creational practices pertaining to the production, translation and distribution of subtitled media content blur the distinction between the roles of producer and consumer in political news interviews. My argument develops as follows. Section 1 explores how the role of translation within global news media has been theorized in recent years and teases out the implications of technological changes for the blurring of news production, consumption and

translation. Section 2 focuses on the social processes that have prompted the emergence of amateur communities of journalists/translators, whether in the form of structured activist networks or fluid groupings of engaged citizens, as influential agents in the digital mediascape; their contribution to the consolidation of non-linear models of media consumption is addressed here in terms of cultural and economic significance. Section 3 moves on to articulate the implications of these developments for the discipline of translation studies, including the shift from referential accuracy towards narrative negotiation and the politics of affinity as the main drives informing amateur news mediation. Finally, section 4 illustrates the issues raised in this essay with a case study involving the subtitling of a political news interview by amateur mediators.

1. Translation and news production/consumption in networked digital media

The dialectic between globalization and technological change has become central to most research on news translation published over the last decade, with the ‘transworld simultaneity’ and growing ‘instantaneity’ of media flows emerging as prominent themes (Scholte 2005). In this context, the study of ‘the rapid and extensive juxtaposition of, and comparison between, different cultures and spaces’ (Lash and Urry 1994: 243) that technological and corporate changes enable has moved up the agenda and shifted attention away from traditional concerns over ‘the complexities involved in overcoming cultural and linguistic barriers’ (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009: 18). For some scholars (e.g. van Leeuwen 2006), it is the status of English as the *lingua franca* of global news media that makes it possible to minimize or even belittle the scope of such linguistic and cultural differences. From this standpoint, it is often assumed that news stories circulating across linguistic constituencies through networked digital media will have been previously translated from other languages or specific local varieties of English into a more neutral, often hybrid, variety that is equally accessible to all language communities (Taviano 2010).

Monolingualism is also at the heart of other scholarly strands that account for the global flow of news in terms of a ‘universal’ digital language – used as a loose synonym of the notion of ‘digital media literacy’ (Livingstone 2004) – that underpins the increasingly interdependent production and consumption of digital media content. As globalization theorist Manuel Castells (2000, 2007) notes,

[w]e are indeed in a new communication realm, and ultimately in a new medium, whose backbone is made of computer networks, *whose language is digital*, and whose senders are globally distributed and globally interactive. True, the medium, even a medium as revolutionary as this one, does not determine the content and effect of its messages. But it makes possible the unlimited diversity and the largely autonomous origin of most of the communication flows that construct, and reconstruct every second the global and local production of meaning in the public mind (2007: 248; my emphasis).

In the context of commercial news outlets, the growing emphasis on instant linguistic and/or cultural juxtaposition, whether facilitated by a shared *lingua franca* or a common digital literacy, to the detriment of translation between different linguistic and cultural groupings, is blurring the boundaries between the roles of news producers and translators. A significant development on this front has been the globalization of business models prevalent in leading news agencies worldwide – involving, among other trends, the generalization of homogenizing writing conventions to facilitate the traffic of news stories

across languages. As ever more strict style sheets constrain and downgrade the impact of translators' professional latitude, a growing number of journalists without formal training in interlingual mediation activities is engaging in the translation of their own news stories, thus further eroding the social recognition of translators' contribution to the global flow of news reporting (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009). But over the last decade, emerging forms of strongly collaborative journalism, where professional journalists and amateurs work together, have come to mount an increasingly strong challenge to traditional news media. As Beckett and Masell (2008: 93) explain, the co-creational nature of collaborative networked journalism involves crossing boundaries

within the production process as a means of sharing facts, raising questions, producing answers and ideas, and challenging differing perspectives ... [E]ach boundary that is crossed in the production and consumption of networked journalism enables an increasingly wide range of different viewpoints, languages, cultures, values, and goals to be encountered. As they are encountered, they are likely to affect people's everyday lives and their perceptions of distant others in ways that are increasingly unpredictable.

Resistance against simultaneity and instantaneity as the main forces behind news production and distribution is particularly significant in certain segments of networked journalism. 'Citizen journalism' (Gillmor 2004) or 'indymedia' (Deuze 2006) websites, for example, rely on and actively encourage horizontal structures of plurality and democratic participation that traverse new configurations of citizenship, public space and online communication. Within these websites, groups of like-minded individuals capitalize on the potential of network communication and exploit their 'collective intelligence' (Levy 2000), including their language skills, to provide (i) news coverage of local or less mainstream events and issues that would otherwise not have attracted the attention of commercial news organizations; (ii) grass-roots reporting of issues advancing the agendas of these collectivities (Christensen *et al.* 2011). Yeeyan¹ or Indymedia², for example, have fostered a participatory, non-hierarchical reporting culture where individuals translate news items featured on their respective organizations websites. Their involvement in the activities of these online communities puts 'user-translators' – often lacking formal training in translation – on an equal footing with other content providers, with their translations often becoming news stories in their own right within their respective target *locale*.

This enhanced convergence between news producers and translators, which is redefining the place of language mediation in the process of news production and dissemination in the era of networked digital media, is particularly salient in the case of activist collectivities. Unlike Baker (2012), I am not using the term 'activist' here to refer to

¹ Yeeyan (<http://www.yeeyan.org>) is an online community of over 150,000 Chinese volunteers who read and, in some cases, translate into Chinese selected news stories originally published in English by international news media. Yeeyan volunteer translators are driven by a commitment to provide their fellow citizens with access to foreign perspectives and viewpoints on current events – as reported outside China. Ultimately, Yeeyan volunteers are 'pioneering cost-effective solutions to a major global problem: the ghettoization of information by language' and bringing to the fore potentially new business models for news companies in the era of the digital culture (Stray 2010).

² Indymedia (<http://www.indymedia.org/en/static/about.shtml>) is structured as 'a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth', where activists freely create and disseminate new language versions of selected news stories through the organization's 'democratic open-publishing system'. For a detailed explanation of different participatory translation models run by TED and Al Jazeera, see Pérez-González (2012).

translator communities embedded in the culture of collective movements whose members “identify themselves as translators and interpreters, and hence position themselves explicitly within the professional and scholarly world of translation” – and whose “positioning is strongly signalled in the names of the groups (*Translators* for Peace; *Translators* United for Peace (TUP); *Translator* Brigades; Tlaxcala: The International Network of *Translators* for Linguistic Diversity; ECOS, *traductores e intérpretes* por la solidaridad)” (Baker 2012: 3). Instead, by ‘activist collectivity’ I refer to communities consisting mainly of engaged citizens without formal training in translation, who don’t identify themselves as translators, and who publish (translated) reportage and translations of certain types of material to effect political change.

As was also the case with more established forms of networked journalism, these participatory networks of activists seek to deliberately widen the range of perspectives offered, and voices heard, in the content they produce, translate and disseminate. Similarly, they also work to ensure that transnational communities of individuals clustered around certain sets of shared values are alerted to local issues neglected by traditional media. As Pérez-González (2010: 269) explains, ‘the interventionist engagement of activist communities with the circuitry of the global [media] marketplace represents a challenge to the control that media corporations have traditionally exerted over the distribution and consumption of their products’. In the pursuit of wider global resonance, the very selection of reportage material and the production of different language versions of certain news stories constitute instances of political positioning, undermining the capacity of news corporations to retain control over the reception of news by different constituencies.

There are two broad types of activist communities of citizen journalists/translators. The first type consists of long-lasting networks of amateur reporters/translators built upon regular and sustained interaction between their core members, either through their participation in acts of collective action and resistance or their involvement in computer-mediated communication – whether synchronous or asynchronous. While their activities rely heavily on the translation and ‘re-mediation’ (Deuze 2006) of written and audiovisual material via websites and mailing lists, established activist communities occasionally reach out to their ‘glocal’ constituencies to promote their activities in more traditional ways. Take, for instance, the case of Mosireen,³ a Cairo-based non-profit media collective born out of the explosion of citizen media and cultural activism in Egypt during the revolution in early 2011. ‘[F]ounded in the wake of Mubarak’s fall by a group of film makers and activists who got together to found a collective space dedicated to supporting citizen media of all kinds’, Mosireen members aim to ‘film the ongoing revolution’ and ‘challenge state media narratives’ (Mosireen website). To support the creation of citizen media content, Mosireen organizes workshops, making spaces and specialized equipment available for the training of fellow activists and like-minded media-makers; similarly, the organization of regular screenings to showcase the footage produced by Mosireen members provides further opportunities for interaction between core network members and their extended constituencies.

These stable groupings of activist reporters/translators straddling both the virtual and physical spheres illustrate the processes of democratized innovation and peer production that have brought about the departure from previous notions of readership and media spectatorship. The networked publics that activist communities of citizen

³ <http://mosireen.org/> (last accessed 15 November 2012).

journalists/translators serve 'are communicating more and more through complex networks that are bottom-up, top-down, as well as side-to-side' (Ito 2008: 2-3). In this context of production, '[p]ublics can be reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange' (*ibid.*). By interacting under this new set of rules, media users find their own voice, develop common interests and ultimately pioneer new forms of collective resistance.

But not all instances of unsolicited, collaborative translation seeking to effect social and political change are the work of stable activist networks. As the affordances of communication technologies develop and 'virtual communitarians' (Castells 2001: 54) become increasingly involved in the appropriation, re-making and re-distribution of media content, less structured communities of engaged citizens are emerging in the digital mediascape. It is to these spontaneously formed groupings that my attention turns in the next section.

2. Structure versus agency in amateur news translation

The mediation of news content by activist journalist/translators is increasingly being undertaken by 'ad-hocracies' of amateur translators, a notion proposed by Pérez-González (2010). Unlike their counterparts involved in stable networks, members of these ad-hocracies are 'brought together because their diverse skills and knowledge are needed to confront a specific challenge and then dispersed onto different clusters ... when new needs arise' (Jenkins *et al.* 2006: 41). In Pérez-González's case study, the term 'ad-hocracy' designates a fluid virtual grouping formed by readers of a Spanish progressive blog. After posting a series of comments under a specific blog entry, and having established their shared political affiliation, these individuals join forces to subtitle (into Spanish) a controversial interview which Spain's former Prime Minister, José María Aznar López, gave to HARDtalk (BBC News) against the backdrop of the 2006 military conflict between Lebanon and Israel. During this interview, Aznar expresses unreserved support for the neoconservative narratives circulating during the Bush years and makes contentious proposals to strengthen the relationship between NATO and Israel. At the time, these were issues that progressive constituencies in Spain were keen to capitalize on, hoping to further undermine public perception of the conservative views espoused by Aznar.⁴ As it became apparent that none of the main Spanish TV channels would broadcast the full translated interview, and in view of the Spanish conservative party's attempts to 'reframe' Aznar's interview statements, this spontaneously formed network of engaged individuals decided to produce and distribute a subtitled version in Spanish.

Processes of negotiation of narrative affinity – as defined by Baker (2006) – between members of ad-hocracies are central to the formation of these communities of engaged citizens. As these groupings normally lack organizational or institutional support or even a collective manifesto, exploring fellow members' affiliations and identifying narratives that most members of the community subscribe to is crucial to build a platform for collective intervention in the media marketplace. Studying ad-hocracies thus involves looking at the dynamic construction of a narrative community, placing particular emphasis on the role played by the Internet in the spontaneous process of network formation and, hence, paying

⁴ See Pérez-González (2010) for an account of Aznar's last years in power and the events leading to the defeat of his party in the polls in 2004.

less attention to the use of the Internet as a medium for the circulation of activist-mediated messages. Ultimately, ad-hocracies represent 'extreme manifestations of dynamic identity generation, where individuals [may, although not necessarily] take on an activist role during a single episode of mediation' (Pérez-González 2010: 264).

The emergence of these fluid networks of mediation powered by advances in communication technology is a reflection of wider changes in the organization of social life and collective sites for interaction, as well as of the scholarly developments seeking to theorize those organizational changes. Drawing on Luhmann (1984), Austrian sociologist Christian Fuchs (2001) accounts for the proliferation of social processes of 'self-organization' – of which spontaneously formed ad-hocracies of engaged citizens are an example – as the result of a dialectical relationship between society and human 'agents'. Society, Fuchs and Schlemm (2005: 120) argue, 'reproduces man as a social being and man produces society by socially co-ordinating human actions. Man is the creator and created result of society. Society and humans produce each other mutually'. The interplay between the downward process of domination whereby social structures constrain and influence individual actions and thinking, on the one hand, and the upward process of 'agency' (Fuchs 2002: 38) through which new individual qualities gain prominence and emerge at the structural level of society, on the other hand, represents the primary impetus behind the proliferation of self-organizing communities. Of particular relevance to the topic of this essay is the 'knowledge' (*ibid.*) generated through the interaction between bottom-up agency and top-down social pressure. From the standpoint of self-organization studies, ad-hocracies of journalists/translators can be best conceptualized as socio-technological systems where the technological infrastructure enables and shapes certain forms of communication and cooperation among members of the community. It is precisely the mutually constitutive relation between this structural dimension of technology and the generative potential of human cognition that generates 'collective knowledge' – for example, in the form of a specific set of subtitling practices within a virtual network. As independent agents from diverse backgrounds come together for a shared purpose and engage in interaction through a common technological platform, their shared communicative practices contribute to developing a sense of community and to articulating a collective identity. Although virtual, fluid communities are 'seen as less bounded social networks of relationships', they do 'provide sociability support, information, and a sense of belonging' (Wellman 2002: 2031).

Ad-hocracies of activist journals/translators illustrate how individuals engage in participatory media practices to build networks of affinity within society, however transient these may be. By prioritizing the agenda of a small collectivity over the stability of traditional social structures, ad-hocracies play an important role in the consolidation of non-linear models of communication in the media marketplace (McNair 2006). Being demand-driven, non-linear models challenge and undermine the traditional organization of the media industry in the form of elite-controlled structures, where corporate and institutional agents dictate the terms under which media content has been traditionally produced, distributed and consumed. In non-linear contexts of production, the top-down control over audiences is hardly feasible, as consumers take on the role of co-producers and the range of channels for the distribution of media content grows exponentially. Seen against these transformations, participatory practices developed by transient communities of amateur mediators represent 'unpredictable eruptions and bifurcations' leading to a 'scenario of unprecedented diversity' (*ibid.*: 3).

More importantly, the emergence of non-linear models of communication has also had implications for audiovisual translation practices. By intervening in the co-creation of media content, amateur collectivities have widened the range of audiovisual genres that are now circulating globally, whether through mainstream or non-commercial channels. The next section therefore focuses on the genres of audiovisual content that activist ad-hocracies choose to mediate – which often include some of the less established types of media flows. It illustrates how some of those choices represent a major departure from the conventional associations between audiovisual genres and specific forms of screen translation that the media industries forged during the second half of the twentieth century – thus providing further evidence of the tension between agency and social stability at the heart of cultural industries in the digital culture.

3. Subtitling political news interviews: disciplinary implications

The rapid expansion of networked ‘mediascapes’ (Appadurai 1996) and the ensuing exponential growth of transnational media flows define a critical juncture that is bound to increasingly disrupt the one-to-one mapping of media genres and modalities of audiovisual translation. The use of subtitling – a form of audiovisual transfer traditionally associated with fictional dialogue – to mediate political news interviews is a case in point. As discussed in the following paragraphs, in approaching media broadcasts as sites for the re-negotiation of individual and collective identities, amateur translators are acting as agents of hybridization of communicative practices on a number of fronts.

Political news interviews have traditionally been regarded as broadcasts of ephemeral interest only to a core audience represented by and speaking the same language as the interview participants themselves. In global online mediascapes, however, the subtitling of political news interviews allows engaged mediators to reach out to peripheral constituencies that may share their narrative location but are unable to understand the original interview. Given that amateur engaged mediators cater for the needs of viewers on the same ideological wavelength, the ‘recipient design’ principle at work in this genre and the role which audiences play in the co-construction of meaning in these subtitled broadcasts require further investigation. As Pérez-González (2010) argues, communicative-genre and media-event specific constraints dictate that the study of political news interviews subtitled by amateurs should address the interplay between social, conversational and individual roles played by the participants at different stages of the encounter; and explore the ongoingly negotiated relations between the participants, who constitute the ‘first-frame’ interaction, and the intended audience, or ‘second-frame’ co-participants (Fetzer 2006). As they navigate their way through the interview they chose to subtitle and re-circulate, amateur subtitlers ultimately make choices as to whether and how to promote factional allegiances at the expense of the factual narratives that media discourses have traditionally purported to propagate.

The unprecedented use of subtitling to mediate naturally occurring interaction is also stretching the traditional confines of audiovisual translation scholarship. Over the last decade, research on the mediation of conversational interaction has made great strides within interpreting studies, as specialists have come to draw on increasingly sophisticated conceptualizations of context and begun to examine conversation from a widening range of socio-pragmatic angles. Outside the bounds of interpreting studies, however, research on

translated interaction has often been articulated as a stylistic investigation of fictional (literary or filmic) dialogue – mainly with a view to explore its (lack of) naturalness or achieve a better understanding of its wider function in dramatic characterization. The subtitling of political news interviews marks a new research direction traversing these disciplinary boundaries. News interviews feature episodes of authentic, pragmatically complex interaction – as opposed to the sort of fictional, often streamlined conversation serving an aesthetic purpose that lies at the heart of films or television drama. The subtitling of political news interviews, however, is difficult to study drawing on theoretical insights developed within interpreting studies for, unlike interpreting, subtitling entails a shift from a spoken to a written medium.

The remainder of this paper sets out to gain a better understanding of the role that engaged audiovisual mediation, in the form of subtitled political news interviews, plays in the digital media industry as the latter gradually shifts towards non-linear forms of distribution. It illustrates how virtual collectivities of engaged citizens without formal training in translation select, subtitle and distribute news interviews that can reinforce their own narratives on international policy pertaining, in this case, to the relationship between the West and the Arab world. My analysis focuses on a single episode of mediation by a network of amateur subtitlers and the re-mediation practices that they engage in (i) to enhance their own sustainability as a narrative community; and (ii) to explore their place within the blogosphere, in terms of their connections with a wider constituency subscribing to a range of intersecting narratives.

4. Remediation, bricolage and shovelwaring in amateur subtitling

Ansarclub is a network of amateur subtitlers that emerged in July 2006 as an ad-hocracy of engaged blog-readers (without any formal training in translation) to subtitle a controversial interview originally broadcast in English, and to distribute a Spanish version through different self-broadcasting platforms (see section 2). Between 2006 and 2010, Ansarclub developed into a relatively stable network of 11 engaged subtitlers based in Spain, Venezuela and Argentina. Most of the 27 projects undertaken during their lifetime revolved around Spain's former Prime Minister José María Aznar López. Indeed, their determination to negatively frame Aznar's persona, whether in relation to his record in office or his personal weaknesses, acted as the driving force that brought this community together.

This section reports on Ansarclub's second subtitling project, an interview broadcast by Sky News and featuring presenter Anna Botting and British MP George Galloway.⁵ Although this second subtitling project does not feature José María Aznar himself, it is also set against the background of the invasion of Lebanon by Israel in the summer of 2006 and was broadcast more or less at the same time. Ansarclub's involvement in the second project was also prompted by the opposition of network members to Western policies towards the Middle East, including their unconditional support for Israel. As was also the case with the

⁵ Until November 2010, most of Ansarclub's projects could be accessed via the network's website: <http://ansarclub.blogspot.com> (last accessed 15 November 2010). An embedded clip of the interview subtitled into Spanish was also available until very recently via *Macromundo*, the personal blog of one of Ansarclub's members (*Alxemi*). While the blog entry on Galloway's interview, including a screenshot featuring the initial frame of the subtitled version, remains available online (<http://www.macromundo.com/2006/08/george-galloway-en-sky-news-sobre-el.html>, last accessed 15 November 2012), the Youtube account hosting the interview itself is no longer active.

first interview, the Sky News broadcast acts as a catalyst for the building of affinity, with collective subtitling enabling the clustering of the network members around a set of intersecting narratives. The Sky News interview thus provides a strong thematic continuity that should facilitate the analysis of Ansarclub's evolution from ad-hocracy (when subtitling the HARDtalk interview) to stable network of amateur subtitlers (at the time of subtitling the Sky News interview).

The Sky News interview follows Hezbollah's rocket attack on northern Israel in early August 2006, approximately one month after the beginning of the fighting. Botting's framing of Galloway at the outset of the interview as a supporter of Hezbollah and its leaders – specifically, as 'a man not known for sitting on the fence', who 'passionately opposed the invasion of Iraq' and believes that 'Hezbollah is justified in attacking Israel' – sets the tone for a very tense interview. In his responses, Galloway tries to construct Hezbollah's attack as a response to Israel's aggression, and goes on to accuse Botting personally of believing that 'the Israeli blood is more valuable than the blood of Lebanese or the Palestinians'. Overall, Galloway's stance was a clear reflection of his hard-line stance against the 'War on Terror' narrative (Baker 2006) and Israel's foreign and security policies vis-à-vis neighbouring Arab countries.

The power of the narrative on Western military intervention in the Middle East and the relationship between Israel and its Arab neighbours that Galloway constructs during the interview clearly had the power to resonate with a range of transnational constituencies.⁶ At the time the interview was originally broadcast, for example, large sections of the public in Spain were particularly receptive to Galloway's stance, regarding the Madrid 2004 train bombings by Islamist terrorists as 'a direct result of Spain's decision to send troops' to Iraq in support of the USA in 2003 (Govan 2009). Although the interview was not televised in Spain, the Sky News broadcast was widely circulated (in English) on the Internet and through a number of blogs written by influential left-wing journalists,⁷ thus coming to feature prominently on the political debate during the summer and autumn of 2006. From Ansarclub's stance, the subtitling and distribution of a Spanish version of the Galloway interview could contribute to further eroding the domestic perception of former Prime Minister Aznar for two reasons. On the one hand, Aznar was personally responsible for the politically and socially contested decision to line up with the Bush administration and Western intervention in the Middle East – a policy that Galloway severely criticizes in the interview. On the other hand, the narrative on the Israel-Palestine conflict that Galloway

⁶ Unsurprisingly, the interview was subtitled into a number of languages by individuals or activist communities and widely circulated via Youtube and other similar platforms. This is the case with *Craino0*, a Saudi Muslim who frames the Arabic subtitled version of the interview available via his Youtube account as follows: 'George Galloway, member of the British Labour Party, known for his honourable stances with Arabs and Muslims, attacks Israel, describes it as terrorist [unclear, presumably state], and wages a strong attack on Sky News channel and its owner' (video description). Galloway's pugnaciousness in the Sky News interview also led activist community *SubtUtiles* to include a Spanish subtitled version among their selection of '100 videos for change' (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d32MbbAjNCg>, last accessed 15 November 2012). Indeed, Galloway, who is presented as a 'great activist for peace and mutual understanding between the West and the Arab and Muslim world' (video description), provides sufficient material for a 15-video playlist entitled 'Thank you George Galloway' (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d32MbbAjNCg&list=PLC08855B807A3D3E3>, last accessed 15 November 2012).

⁷ Examples include Hernán Zin's *Viaje a la Guerra* (Journey to War, <http://blogs.20minutos.es/enguerra/>, last access 15 November 2012) and Manuel Rico's *Periodismo Incendiario* (Incendiary Journalism). *Periodismo Incendiario* was closed and later reopened as *Trinchera Digital* (Digital Trench, <http://trincheradigital.com/>, last accessed 15 November 2012).

articulates in his interview is radically different from the one promoted by Aznar in *HARDtalk*.

The process of 'remediation' (Deuze 2006) whereby Ansarclub appropriates, annotates – in the form of subtitling – and circulates the Sky News interview brings into sharp relief the interventionist agenda that underpins the amateur subtitling phenomenon. The subtitled clip hosted in the community's website is framed using the same strategies as in the other subtitled interviews surveyed in footnote 5. The title and description of the clip in both Ansarclub's website and Youtube account, for example, highlighted Galloway's affinity with Muslim countries; foregrounded the bashing that Murdoch's Sky News got in trying to undermine Galloway's stance; and referred to the MP's political 'incorrectness' in the way he deals with Botting's questions. Ansarclub's intervention displaced the Galloway interview from the context of reception that Sky News originally envisaged and created the conditions for an asynchronous and 'iterative consumption' of the programme through alternative media (Crewe *et al.* 2005). But the group's tampering with the broadcast not only sought to solicit alternative practices of consumption. It also set out to delineate and co-construct a site of narrative affinity with their online viewers, explicitly orientating their mediation to the set of intersecting narratives to which their audience was supposed to subscribe.

An obvious lack of concern over their perceived objectivity is exhibited by Ansarclub in their subtitling work. Unlike commercial subtitlers, Ansarclub members often opt for mediation strategies that prioritize the collective affirmation of their narrative location over an accurate rendition of the English spoken text. Figure 1, displaying a screenshot of the subtitled interview, illustrates this point. Unlike commercial subtitles, which may consist of up to two lines of text, this specific subtitle consists of four. The top and bottom lines ('Miles de prisioneros Libaneses ... han sido secuestrador [sic] por Israel': 'Thousands of Lebanese prisoners ... have been kidnapped by Israel') correspond to Galloway's speech; lines 2 and 3 ('... ????? de estas ultimas [sic] resoluciones de la ONU ...': '... ????? of these recent UN resolutions ...'), on the other hand, convey a translated version of the interviewer's question.

Figure 1 shows how the constant overlap between the interviewer and interviewee provides Ansarclub subtitlers with ample opportunity to flaunt their subjectivity, pander to their viewers' expectations, and promote a mutual perception of collective recognition among community members on both the production and reception sides. Subtitles like the one represented in Figure 1 do not only convey the content of the interview, but expressively and affectively reciprocate it through pulses of tension, as the fight for the interactional floor between interviewer and interviewee is performed in front of the viewer's eyes. Faced with the 'unmanageable surplus of meaning' arising from the interactants' struggle to hold the floor (Cazdyn 2004: 405), Ansarclub subtitlers privilege Galloway's voice at the expense of Botting's. The use of a four-line subtitle allows for the visual portrayal of the MP as the legitimate speaker (his speech is represented in the top and bottom lines), relegating Botting to the role of hostile usurper in the central lines. Her words are partly redacted using a series of question marks and placed between brackets – as if trying to contain the scope of her intrusion. In the context of amateur subtitling, subtitles cannot always be evaluated in terms of their degree or referential integrity vis-à-vis the original speech, but of their contribution to the subjective spectatorial experience.

*Figure 1. Screenshot of the Sky News interview:
Galloway and Botting fight to hold the interactional floor*

As is also the case with members of other amateur groupings involved in the remediation of news content, whether it involves translation or not, Ansarclub members engage extensively in 'bricolage' practices. Alxemi, one of the group subtitlers, for instance, is an active 'bricoleur-citizen' (Deuze 2006: 70) around whom a range of other politically engaged communities and narratives appear to cluster. His blog Macromundo (<http://www.macromundo.com>) contains a range of entries and remediated materials (previously linked to his personal Youtube account) reflecting his critical stance against mainstream press, global capitalism, and Western (including Spanish) meddling in developing countries, to give some examples. Macromundo thus acts as a repository of links to and resources on these issues, and the comments posted under the different blog entries provide evidence of this site's capacity to act as coalescing agent at the interface of similar narratives and the communities supporting them. By way of example, the comments posted under the blog entry hosting an embedded video clip of the subtitled Galloway interview (i) refer and link to other blogs and virtual sites from which the raw footage of the Sky News broadcast was appropriated; (ii) acknowledge the inspiration provided by citizen journalism sites that inform Alxemi's politics. Of particular interest is the cross-reference to another subtitled version of the Galloway interview published in a collective blog⁸ and the series of posts that Alxemi and the authors of the second subtitled version publish to report on their experiences as amateur translators.

Although the Ansarclub's website is no longer available online, Alxemi's personal blog serves to illustrate one final feature of amateur subtitling networks. The featured links available on the lateral navigation menus and the very content of most blog entries suggest

⁸ This subtitled version is still available online via Cuaderno de Campo at <http://www.trebol-a.com/2006/08/11/585/> (last accessed 15 November 2012).

that copyright infringement ranks low on Alxemi's list of concerns. His blog features – or, in some cases, used to feature – part of Ansarclub's subtitled output, but also provides blog visitors with links to downloadable software applications, codec packs, raw video files, video embedding codes and other tools to create and/or consume media content produced and distributed outside commercial circles. In doing so, Alxemi fosters the generalization of 'shovelwaring' practices, i.e. the 'repurposing or windowing of content across different sites, media and thus (potential) audiences' (Deuze 2006: 70). The combined use of remediation, bricolage and shovelwaring is enabled by the hypertextual environment in which Ansarclub operates. Within this environment, their subtitled output was complemented by working materials used during the mediation process, such as transcripts, earlier translation drafts, or practical information on how to access or circulate the translation. More importantly, hypertextuality also allows for the direct interaction between translation producers and users, who often provide feedback on the quality of the subtitled work. Capitalizing on the affordances of hypertextuality enhances the visibility of Ansarclub members as mediators and empowers them to frame audiences' interpretation and, ultimately, reinforce the subtitlers' and viewers' mutual recognition of each other as members of the same community of interest.

5. Concluding remarks

This chapter has attempted to bring to the fore the generative potential of socio-political engagement through subtitling and explore the different ways in which that involvement can be articulated. It has also foregrounded the centrality of chosen social affiliations – vis-à-vis their structural or pre-determined counterparts – to the amateur subtitling phenomenon. While the process of narrative negotiation underpinning the formation and, in some cases, the dispersal of these interventionist communities is ultimately facilitated by technology, it is the political dimension of collaborative subtitling that defines the shift from an electronic towards a digital culture – which, according to Schudson (1995: 27), involves a change 'in the identity of citizens ... from a rather passive informational citizenry to a rights-based, monitorial and voluntarist citizenry'.

Collaborative subtitling, as illustrated by the case study presented in this chapter, raises important issues that are bound to attract considerable scholarly attention in years to come. Such issues include the impact of amateur translation on the social recognition of professional translators' expertise and discretion; the growing orientation of amateur mediators towards collective recognition at the expense of referential accuracy in carrying out their translations; their lack of concern about copyright or neutrality; and finally their active contribution to the hybridization of communicative practices. But the political dimension of this form of interlingual and intercultural mediation also raises important questions pertaining to what translation scholars regard as disciplinarily sanctioned research agendas and methodologically orthodox approaches to the interrogation of data.

Traditional or 'structural' (Pérez-González 2010) conceptualizations of political engagement and activism 'through translation and through translation studies' (Simon 2005: 9) postulate that translators should indeed "adopt advocacy roles in situations of socio-cultural inequalities" (*ibid.*: 11). For the proponents of this stance, however, the pursuit of progressive agendas by translation scholars should be subordinated to their compliance with the 'principles of scholarly solidarity' (*ibid.*: 9). Acceptable scholarly

activism, according to Simon, may therefore involve questioning and denouncing the imbalances of power in any given social encounter as well as stimulating public debate through 'theoretical interventions'. But when forms of intervention by academics in pursuit of these goals have the potential to jeopardize the continuity of 'intellectual conversation' among scholars, on the other hand, activism becomes objectionable. In practice, this means that '[t]he professor in contemporary society can become an 'activist' [...] by using 'prestige' from one realm to speak in another, a kind of 'abuse' of power which can be put to different uses' (2005: 11). Ultimately, however, translation scholars need to ensure that their discourse and praxis – as far as their interaction with fellow academics goes – remains within the bounds of traditional scientific detachment. Proponents of what Pérez-González (2010) labels as 'generative activism', on the other hand, do not attempt to differentiate between activism through translation and activism through translation studies. Baker (2009), for instance, criticizes the tendency among translation scholars to avoid 'serious political controversy' in their own research. Having argued against the interculturality narrative, which regards translators as inhabitants of the interstitial spaces between discreet cultural communities and mediators entrusted with the bridging of the resulting intercultural gaps, Baker vehemently defends the scholar's right to conduct committed research and ignore fellow scholars who admonish others for being 'ideologically motivated' in their research or practice (*ibid.*).

Altruistic movements seeking to configure new balances of power through translation, whether within or across linguistic constituencies, will thus require a retheorization of the place of engaged translation in society and in academia. Depending on how engaged translation evolves within the digital cultural industries, it may be difficult for scholarly discourses on translation to remain within the bounds of orthodox scientific detachment.

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