

# Translation on and over the Web: Disentangling its conceptual uncertainties and ethical questions

Special issue of *The Translator*

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Several relatively new forms of translation have emerged following the advent of the participatory Web 2.0. These include solicited forms of translation such as translation crowdsourcing used by for-profit companies like Facebook or Twitter. There are also other forms of translation like machine translation or self-translation occurring on social media platforms, especially on newer representatives like Instagram or TikTok (Desjardins 2019). Translation crowdsourcing is also employed by non-profit organizations like TED or Kiva. While these companies or organizations recruit voluntary and unpaid translators, there are also several translation platforms such as Gengo or Unbabel which employ paid translation crowdsourcing at below market rates (Jiménez-Crespo 2021). Furthermore, these relatively new forms of translation also include a wide range of unsolicited and self-managed types of translation such as interlingual knowledge-sharing through Wikipedia (Jones 2017, 2019; McDonough Dolmaya 2015, 2017) or Yeeyan (Yang 2020) as well as the various types of online fan translations such as fansubbing, fandubbing, scanlations or translation hacking (Fabbretti 2019; Lee 2009; Orrego-Carmona 2019; Muñoz Sánchez 2007, 2009).

Even though these more recent phenomena and the communities involved in the translation process have caught the attention of Translation Studies scholars and have been studied from multiple perspectives, two lacunae have been identified by Zwischenberger (2021). Firstly, there is no consensus as to what constitutes the most appropriate top-level concept for these translation phenomena. Several candidates are currently being used concomitantly, including online collaborative translation, voluntary translation, user-generated translation (UGT), and social online translation, to name but a few. Secondly, research into the ethical implications of these online translation practices is lacking in depth and number. Ethical issues are only rarely addressed directly in the relevant literature and if so they are addressed only in passing. The special issue will tackle these two lacunae, with the groundwork having already been laid by our one-day symposium *Translation on and over the Web: Disentangling its conceptual uncertainties and ethical questions*, held in November 2021.

Perhaps the most widely used meta-concept to define translation activities in Web 2.0 is *online collaborative translation*, which, as Zwischenberger (2021) postulates, encompasses all the above forms of online translation. The use of this concept also brings the transcultural dimensions of these practices fully to the fore. There is no other translation practice where dozens, hundreds or sometimes even thousands of translators and other actors contribute to a final translation product, thereby creating a highly hybrid and heterogeneous whole (Zwischenberger 2021). Désilets & van der Meer (2011) expand the concept even further to include various collaborative approaches such as agile translation teamware, collaborative terminology resources and post-editing by the crowd, among others. Jiménez-Crespo (2017)

distinguishes between solicited and unsolicited online translation practices that is between translation crowdsourcing and online collaborative translation. The latter concept, however, also acts as a potential top-level concept for Jiménez-Crespo (2017). Even though online collaborative translation seems to be the most widely used meta-concept, we still wish to question whether it is actually the best-suited one.

An alternative meta-concept is *user-generated translation*, introduced by O'Hagan (2009) to encompass fansubbing, fandubbing, scanlation, translation hacking and translation crowdsourcing. Taking the lead from social media studies, other possible meta-concepts employ the qualifier *social* to reflect the human-computer interaction resulting from Web 2.0. For example, building on *community translation*, another suggestion for an alternative meta-concept from O'Hagan (2011), McDonough Dolmaya & Sánchez Ramos (2019) coin the term *online social translation*, while Hebenstreit (2019) recommends *social-media-driven translation*. Another popular, albeit contested, core concept is *translation crowdsourcing*. Jiménez-Crespo (2017) considers a call to a crowd a sine qua non condition for crowdsourcing. However, McDonough Dolmaya (2015) suggests that Wikipedia translation also falls under this category because the translation is done by an anonymous, self-organised, unremunerated crowd. Pym (2011), however, views crowdsourcing as an equivalent to fan and lay translation and collaborative translation. He instead proposes *volunteer translation* to describe all unremunerated translation work performed online.

This diverse range of publications arguing for various different meta-concepts within Translation Studies shows an obviously pressing need to categorise these new online phenomena, but it also shows the clear lack of consensus. This raises the question of whether categorisation is needed at all. Furthermore, the meaning behind frequently used qualifiers such as *social*, *collaborative* and *user-generated* beyond Translation Studies has hardly ever been examined to determine if the meta-concepts employing them have the necessary conceptual foundations or if they serve merely as labels generated to satisfy the pressure towards innovation that exists within academia. The over-lexicalisation outlined above suggests that there are “competing ideologies” at work (Beaton-Thome 2013: 386). Ideologies are never neutral—they propagate a certain worldview and, consequently, a certain way of seeing, perceiving, and talking about a given phenomenon. Thus, the choice of a single top-level concept for representing the online translation practices has consequences that go beyond mere theoretical-academic implications. It also raises ethical questions as the qualifiers such as *collaborative*, *social*, *community*, *user-generated* already evoke certain connotations and also expectations, even though these are hardly ever addressed in depth in this field.

The most recent literature has focused on the ethical issues and on the concept of exploitation that surrounds translation crowdsourcing, whether for profit-oriented (Zwischenberger 2021) or for non-profit and/or humanitarian organisations (Piróth & Baker 2019).

Ethical issues have also been investigated indirectly from the perspective of the possible impact of online translation practices on the profession, such as introducing and adapting crowdsourcing workflows for the translation industry (Jiménez-Crespo 2021). Similarly, the growing employment of gamification in online translation settings in order to keep the translators' motivation high raises ethical issues. Some authors have highlighted the

consequences of this practice, such as profit-oriented companies making large amounts of money from volunteer work or the perception that professional translation is no longer necessary and does not need to be remunerated (Rogl 2016; Zwischenberger 2021). Ethical issues regarding self-organized forms of online translation, as in the case of Wikipedia, have also been addressed indirectly from the perspective of its lack of a language or translation policy, despite the fact that the knowledge-sharing processes that build the encyclopaedia are to a large extent dependent on interlingual translation (McDonough Dolmaya 2017). The ethical dimensions of the various forms of online fan translations—for example, the fact that fan labour heightens the revenue generated by a product but also gives fans an opportunity to showcase their labour of love—have not yet been evaluated by Translation Studies (Baym & Burnett 2009). All of this is closely related to the notion of free labour, as proposed by Terranova (2013), which points out the problematic capitalist acquisition and privatisation of labour happening in digital spaces. Labour, as opposed to work, creates surplus-value which is subject to capitalist exploitation (Marx 1867). Taking this into account offers new ways to gain insights into the ethical problems presented by online translation phenomena.

Considering the role that categorisation plays in constructing the way we discuss these phenomena and that all of these types of online translation can be viewed as prototypical forms of transcultural communication (Zwischenberger 2021), we wish to disentangle the conceptual uncertainties surrounding them and examine their ethical implications in this special issue. We therefore aim to address the following questions:

What is the most appropriate meta-concept for the online translation practices described above? How can we conceptualise the diverse types of translation underlying the various candidates for top-level concept? What are the ethical implications of employing and participating in these online translation phenomena? What about the ethical implications of categorising these phenomena? Do not qualifiers like *collaborative*, *user-generated* or *social translation* evoke certain connotations and expectations?

With these questions in mind, we welcome papers revolving specifically but not exclusively around the following topics:

- Best suited top-level concept(s), their subordinates and various other concepts related to online translation practice and the ideologies behind it
- Conceptualisation and characterisation of various online translation practices
- Advantages/benefits and disadvantages of categorisation related to the online translation phenomena outlined in the CfP and their possible ethical implications
- Ethical dimensions of unsolicited and self-managed online (collaborative) translations such as the various types of fan translations ('fan labour') or Wikipedia-translation
- Ethical implications of translation crowdsourcing for profit-oriented and non-profit organisations
- (Ethical) consequences of gamification
- Effects of online translation practices on the perception of translation as a profession

## SUBMISSION PROCESS

Abstracts should be 800-1000 words long (excluding bibliography) and should be sent to both guest editors, Cornelia Zwischenberger ([cornelia.zwischenberger@univie.ac.at](mailto:cornelia.zwischenberger@univie.ac.at)) and Leandra Sitte ([leandra.sitte@univie.ac.at](mailto:leandra.sitte@univie.ac.at)), no later than 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

- Author guidelines can be found [here](#).

If you have any questions, do not hesitate to contact the guest editors.

## IMPORTANT DATES

Deadline for abstracts: 30<sup>th</sup> April 2022

Notification of acceptance: 15<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Submission of full manuscripts: 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022

- Length of full manuscripts: **6000-7000 words** (including references)

Notification of results of internal vetting process and double-blind peer review: 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023

Resubmission of accepted manuscripts with corrections (to guest editors): 30<sup>th</sup> June 2023

Final submission of papers to chief editor (after final checks done by guest editors): 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023

Publication: December 2023

## EDITORIAL INFORMATION

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Cornelia Zwischenberger is Professor in Transcultural Communication at the Centre for Translation Studies at the University of Vienna. Prior to her appointment as professor at the University of Vienna in March 2020, she held a professorship in Translation Studies at the University of Graz in Austria. Professor Zwischenberger has published numerous contributions on both Translation and Interpreting Studies. She is co-editor of the scholarly book series *Transkulturalität – Translation – Transfer*, published by Frank & Timme in Berlin.

Professor Zwischenberger's current research focuses on the use of the translation concept beyond Translation Studies from a transdisciplinary/transcultural perspective and on online collaborative translation as a prototypical form of transcultural communication. She is the leader of the research group *Transcult.com*. Professor Zwischenberger's current research also revolves around scientific-theoretical questions such as the use of the appropriate concepts to narrate the evolution of the Translation Studies discipline.

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Leandra Sitte holds a BA in Transcultural Communication and an MA in Translation from the University of Vienna and is currently working as a research assistant at the Centre for Translation Studies in Vienna. She is also a PhD candidate at the Centre for Translation Studies. As part of the research group *Transcult.com*, she co-organised the digital workshop *Translation on and over the Web: Disentangling its conceptual uncertainties*.

Leandra's research interests include the impact of online collaborative translation on the translation profession, especially the use of translation crowdsourcing in professional settings and its ethical implications. In her PhD thesis, she aims to shed light on the design and role of translation platforms and to explore their usefulness and drawbacks for translators.

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