

Understanding the Dynamics of User-Generated Translation on YouTube: A Bourdieusian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a socio-cultural study of user-generated translation (UGT) mediated by YouTube, a video-sharing platform and a social network. It discusses the issues of the theoretical and methodological framing of UGT and online social media (OSM) research. The reported study attempts to uncover the mechanisms which engender and foster a new type of audiovisual-translation practice, specific to OSM. To do this, it employs the explanatory power of Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *field*, *habitus* and *capital* reframed for digital-media research. The empirical investigation concentrates on the phenomenon of translation-focused YouTube channels featuring user-generated or informal Russian-language voiceover renditions and versions of popular YouTube content with embedded subtitles. Based on longitudinal observation of the ten most popular UGT-focused channels, the study maps the user-translators' practices onto the structure of the online field. It uncovers a close link between translation and a YouTube-specific struggle for legitimization of derivative or remixed content. It also tracks how the pursuit of *attention capital* (measured in video views, comments and channel subscriptions) defines the strategies of user-translators as agents in the platform-wide online field. It is argued that translating already popular English language content serves as a springboard for user-translators who eventually start producing their own original, non-translated content.

KEYWORDS: online social media, translation studies, user-generated translation, field theory, YouTube

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, online social media (OSM) featuring user-generated content (UGC) have gained status as the most visited destination on the Web. With the digital environment gradually morphing into our everyday routines, novel ways of using the Internet are becoming dialectically engaged in the social construction of reality, while they enable new social formations and facilitate new forms of knowledge exchange (Song 2010:251). The layer of what Manovich (2008) cumulatively calls “cultural software” has added a whole dimension to our space and has reshaped myriad practices, with translation being no exception.

As the virtual world of OSM transcends geographical and cultural borders, it naturally engenders language contact and a continuing need for interlingual translation. For example, on average, two-thirds of every YouTube channel’s views come from outside the creator’s home country.¹ While platform designers address this situation by introducing built-in tools for crowdsourced subtitling, the variety of translation practices arising in this socio-technological ecosystem extends beyond the designers’ vision. Such translations produced by, for and in response to demand from members of online communities challenge our understanding of the nature of this socio-cultural practice and reshape discourses about translation (Gambier 2016:892).

The rise of the *participatory culture* (Jenkins *et al.* 2015) has resulted in large volumes of UGC accumulating in cyberspace, “with some becoming potentially subject to translation and translation itself becoming user-generated, with users acting as *ad hoc* translators of selected content” (O’Hagan 2016:930). This trend has inspired various directions of inquiry. In a recent comprehensive survey, Desjardins (2017) has shown that, so far, translation scholars have focused predominantly on platform localization and crowdsourcing mechanisms *per se*. Such lines of interest included the motivation of volunteer translators (Olohan 2014), the impact of online collaboration on the language service industry (Jiménez-Crespo 2017), the nature of fan translation communities (Pérez-González 2007, Zhang and Mao 2013), “playbour” and gamification of crowdsourced translation practices (O’Hagan 2012; Rogl 2016), and specific new types of translation, including audiovisual translation (AVT) (Nord *et al.* 2015).

¹ <https://creatoracademy.youtube.com/page/lesson/captions#strategies-zippy-link-1> (accessed 10 October 2017)

As Desjardins (2017:24) shows, other equally significant forms of OSM translation activity have not yet become a focal point of the discipline. In order to foreground how a *user-translator* has ability to fulfil their own agenda independently, she redefines Perrino (2009) and O'Hagan's (2009) idea of *user-generated translation* (UGT):

UGT can be done at any point, on any platform, whether there is a brief or not. [...] UGT encompass[es] translation activity that is prompted and motivated by the *users* themselves (i.e. translation of *their own* content, *their* UGC, by *themselves*, based on *their* understanding of what 'good' or 'effective' translation might be). (Desjardins 2017:24; original emphasis)

Such a reframing causes OSM translation studies to part ways with the established models which involve a commissioner, a brief and a relatively clear aim of translation. This article sets out to further refine the notion of UGT by positioning the figure of a translator as an agent in a specific socio-technological environment of the digital medium, first. Combined with insights from recent interest in the ethnographic traditions within translation studies, such a *media-centred* approach (Hepp *et al.* 2015) gives an opportunity to focus the inquiry on specific societal and cultural changes associated with a certain medium, offering a holistic understanding of the sources of influence involved in these processes. This methodological orientation is in line with the medial turn in translation studies advocated by Littau (2016a:83). Drawing on Gumbrecht and Pfeiffer's understanding of materialities of communication, as well as McLuhan's medium theory, she advocates a more central role for the material dimension, the media, which "are not merely instruments [...]; rather, they *set the framework within which something like meaning becomes possible at all*" (original emphasis).

Following the direction of research outlined, this article presents a socio-cultural approach to the study of OSM-specific translation practices. It adopts Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus, which acts as a common framework for inquiry both into the nature of translation practice and online landscapes. To define user-translators' place in the social network of YouTube, it utilizes the explanatory power of Bourdieusian concepts reframed for OSM research. As OSM translation practices challenge the dichotomies of so-called professional vs. amateur and individual vs. collaborative practices, as well as traditional translation models, the critical advantage offered by the Bourdieusian framework is its ability to construct an object of research afresh, focusing on interconnectedness of individual users'

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strategies and the logic of the online environment. It also helps find structure and meaning behind the overwhelming abundance of material which can be found in an online setting.

The article builds on empirical investigation of the top-10 most popular Russian language YouTube channels featuring UGT (dubbing and subtitling) of platform-specific videos. With this specific case study mind, the principal research question of the article is the following: *How does the medium of YouTube enable and foster the practice of user-generated translation?*

Before proceeding to the case in question, the article elaborates on the key methodological tools provided by the Bourdieusian framework, specifically *field*, *habitus* and *capital*, as they have been taken up in Internet research and translation studies. In what follows, it applies the framework to YouTube as an OSM to paint the backdrop for the study of the translation practices in question. Drawing on empirical data obtained in a 12-month longitudinal observation, as well as analysis of meta-translations, the study maps the position of user-translators as *agents* in the *online field* of YouTube and discusses the specific *capital-conversion mechanisms* related to this practice. Taken in the broader context of globalization, relocation of cultures and cultural homogenization, this exploratory study also takes a first step towards a larger-scale project aiming to understand the role of a user-translator as a *cultural mediator*, a gatekeeper in the target linguistic and cultural space of the Russian language Internet, often referred to as RuNet.

2. Field of Cultural Production, Online Social Media, and Translation

The work of Pierre Bourdieu is regarded as one of the most prominent influences on the sociological turn in translation studies. Compatible with the stance of the cultural approaches to translation, Bourdieu's model has received much attention in connection with rethinking the limitations of Toury's (1995) descriptive approach and the idea of norms (Simeoni 1998), as well as the re-evaluation of the polysystems theory within the framework of translation studies (Buzelin 2005). By adopting a Bourdieusian perspective, translation scholars can take a look "outside the 'field of discourse'" (Bourdieu 1985) and thus take into account the conditions of translation practice with a new emphasis on the interaction between agency and structure. This section introduces key analytical tools of the Bourdieusian framework. The

discussion focuses on their use in socio-cultural approaches to translation and digital sociology, which are further explored in light of their potential application to the study of OSM translation practices. In what follows, the challenges associated with adapting Bourdieusian methodology to translation and OSM research are also addressed.

2.1. Bourdieusian methodology and translation

A proponent of the “transgression of disciplinary boundaries”, Pierre Bourdieu is known for his harsh critique of micro-level approaches to the study of language phenomena (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:148). Therefore, any Bourdieu-inspired inquiry into translation starts with its contextualization within the totality of the socio-cultural space of its production.

The concept of *field* is usually regarded a starting point for the discussion of Bourdieu’s sociological model. It is defined as “a structure of *objective relationships* permitting the accounting for the concrete form of *interactions*” (Bourdieu 1985: 17). Agents’ perpetual *struggle* for a more advantageous position, manifested in various *stakes* in the game, results in the *hierarchy of domination* and the *interested* nature of any activity within the field (Bourdieu 1993:34). All fields, although autonomous, are submerged in the *field of power* and interconnected owing to structural and functional *homologies*, which allow the fields to influence each other (Bourdieu 1985:18). The structure of the field is “the structure of distribution of the *capital* of specific properties which governs success in the field” (Bourdieu 1993:30). Bourdieu introduces the “fundamental guises” of capital:

[E]conomic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalized in the forms of property rights; ... *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications; and ... *social capital*, made up of social obligations (“connections”), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of a title of nobility. ... The *symbolic capital* is apprehended ... in a relationship of knowledge, or, more precisely, of misrecognition and recognition (Bourdieu 2010:47-56; original emphasis).

The foundation of field theory lies in the symbiotic relationship between *field* (social) and *habitus* (individual). The notion of *habitus* ties the individual actions of the players in the

field to the rules of the game imposed by the field itself: the positions in the field condition individuals' embodied preferences or *dispositions*. The habitus is both structured and structuring; it tends to reproduce social order consistently with previous experience. The functioning of the field depends on the existence of *positions* and people, who have their habitus attuned to the "collective rhythm" of the field and who are prepared to occupy these positions (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:72).

It is often underlined by Bourdieu and his followers that *field* is in fact an analytic method, an instrument, rather than a ready-made model. Therefore, reconstructing, or mapping the field means empirically investigating the following objective relations: identifying the *agents* who produce effect within the said field; describing the *state of struggles* or the *boundary* of the field; defining *positions* in the space of possibles; and demonstrating the distribution of *capital* at stake in the field (Bourdieu 1993).

Among the first of Bourdieu's tools applied to study the nature of translators' behaviour was *habitus*. In one of the early works, Simeoni (1998: 17-20) defines a *translatorial habitus* as an adaptive specialized professional habitus, refined from the general social habitus. It is acquired, activated and governed *not* by a specific translation field but by a specialized field within a heteronomous field of production. He argues that because of its low status, it is challenging to theorize translation as a professional field, since a translation is a product not of a "field of translation, but that of heteronomous (literary, technical, legal, etc.) production" (ibid.). In a more restricted field, the habitus must be particularly attuned to the shared set of customs, regularities and beliefs of the field (*doxa*). In later studies, however, Simeoni's position was criticised, as a more expansive view of the translation field and translatorial habitus was developed (see overview in Hanna 2016:7-9; Inghilleri 2005; Vorderobermeier 2014).

All in all, applying the notion of habitus to translation phenomena opens a number of vistas for further investigation. It can help identify which social institutions are involved in constructing a translator's disposition, and how and under what conditions translational norms are rendered into a translator's strategies. It may also help uncover what makes the habitus of one translator generate dispositions that either comply with or challenge the pre-existing norms (Hanna 2016:201). Although translation practice takes a vast variety of forms today, in

the next section I will illustrate how Simeoni's stance is applicable in many situations, including OSM and UGC platforms, in which translation is functioning within a specific field of production and does not manifest its own rules as a field.

Early works applying Bourdieusian concepts to the study of translation were criticised for building on the existing assumptions about translation in reconstructing the field of translation and translatorial habitus (or refusing to do so). This may be considered one of the challenges, or rather pitfalls to avoid in further applications of the framework. As argued by Inghilleri (2005:129), translation theorists should enjoy painting an image of in-vivo translation in the broad strokes of a macro-level perspective "through the social practices and relevant fields in which they are constituted" (*ibid.*:143). Therefore, questions of whether translation can be conceptualized as a field, or how translatorial habitus is formed, have to be empirically investigated in each cultural and historical context. In order to configure the nature of OSM translation, we similarly thus need to focus on positioning this practice within the network of relationships engendered (or mediated by) by the functionality of Web 2.0 environments. This, in turn, may require a new look at the traditional Bourdieusian framework, which will be discussed below.

2.2. The theory of practice, technology and OSM

In recent years, Pierre Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus, which was originally designed to explore the dynamics of offline practices, has been widely applied to investigating the relationship between digital technology and the offline world, including studies of digital inequality (see, e.g., overview in Ignatow and Robinson 2017:956). However, as Di Stefano (2016:147) and Herzig (2016:113) note, relatively little attention has been paid to potential applications of Bourdieu's theory in its entirety in Internet research and social-media contexts, in particular.

While 'field' is a powerful tool for describing social stratification and the dynamics of practice, it premises as a terms are also believed to be the most challenging concept for the operationalization of Internet research (Herzig 2016:122). Since our perception of Internet phenomena is largely reliant on pre-constructed notions such as a website, a page, a network or a web-community, it entails a certain risk of deploying the concept of field intuitively, as a

metaphor, rather than a method. Accordingly, Herzig (2016:127) argues that research into the nature of online practices could benefit from ignoring the pre-conceived concepts of online and offline, site or social network. Constructing the object of research afresh could uncover the embeddedness of online practices in a variety of fields, instead of just one online or offline field (*ibid.*).

The next conceptual challenge is lack of clarity in the original Bourdieusian framework in the treatment of the status of non-human objects, including technology. On the one hand, not attaching *a priori* significance to the Internet, as suggested by Herzig, emphasizes the ability of Bourdieu's genetic sociology to overcome the binary division of society and technology. According to Sterne (2003), within this framework, technology can be denied ontological uniqueness, while it does not exist outside social practice. Instead, it should be treated as inseparable from the practices with which it is bundled. Being part of the 'habitus', technology becomes a way of experiencing and negotiating 'field', and is always implicated in the social struggle (Sterne 2003: 385).

On the other hand, the complexity of technological infrastructures, such as OSM, and the ability of design choices to determine users' behaviour are the key reasons why this argument can be questioned. As Prior (2008:314) notes, in contemporary contexts, technology should be treated as an active force in the field: consequently, the Bourdieusian framework should be complemented by a perspective which takes into consideration the relationship between human and non-human, such as the stance of Latour (2005) and Actor-Network theorists.² With reference to OSM research, Di Stefano (2016:156-162) admits that the application of the traditional Bourdieusian framework to the study of social media may be problematic, unless it is combined with other theoretical perspectives focused on social interactions and technological aspects in online environments. He introduces the notion of *weak field* and looks at technology in terms of new types of capital: *infrastructural*, *network*, *navigational* and *environmental*, which reflect and embody the relationships between various human, social and technological actors, infrastructure, network and user (Di Stefano 2016: 158).

² For a discussion of combining Latour's actor-network theory and Bourdieu's sociology in translation studies see e.g. Buzelin (2005)

Di Stefano's approach shares a number of characteristics with the theoretical model developed by Levina and Arriaga (2014). Both stances share the assumption that design of an OSM (in the latter case – UGC platforms) profoundly shapes online social dynamics: “each social network site foresees in its structure that particular dispositions, conditions, attitudes (doxa) and forms of capital could take place depending on different circumstances and events” (Di Stefano 2016: 159). However, Levina and Arriaga theorize a relationship between the social and the technological which is close to Sterne's (2003) position. Instead of considering infrastructure as an agent, or a type of capital, they refer to platform designers (or digital businesses managing and monetizing these platforms) as *agents* of the *online field*. Therefore, while the authors do not explicitly state their position on technology behind the social game on the platform, we may assume that this approach equates the use of OSM technology to an individual disposition, an extension of habitus, which comes into play within the *online field* and, in turn, influences the social game.

The online field (of practice) constitutes an analytical lens through which to study the production of social distinction on UGC platforms, introduced by Levina and Arriaga (2014). *Online field* is defined as “a social space engaging agents in producing, evaluating, and consuming content online that is held together by a shared interest and a set of power relations among agents sharing this interest” (Levina and Arriaga 2014:477). To characterize the key resource in the online field, a field-specific capital, they use the term *attention capital*, which is closely associated with the concept of “the attention economy”³ (Franck 1999). Attention capital refers to recognition within the field, or the weight of the act of consumer's evaluation of producer's work (Levina and Arriaga 2014: 477-479), or, as Franck (1999) puts it, “[t]he social crediting of somebody's earned attention”. We may assume that, analogous to *political capital*, *attention capital* is a type of *symbolic capital*. This model of capital accumulation illustrates that a UGC-based platform can be described as a field in the Bourdieusian sense. It proves to have explanatory power and, as the authors suggest, can be used to shape platform-design choices.

Another methodological challenge addressed similarly by both approaches surveyed is determining the location of OSM in the general field of (cultural) production. Conceptually, both approaches suggest that in order to successfully reconstruct the relations comprising the

³ Also see discussion in Cronin (2017).

field, the method of 'field', itself has to be revised. This means that both the weak field and the online field appear to be an iteration of the field itself as a tool. Levina and Arriaga treat online field as a particular type of field of cultural production, while they concentrate only on UGC-platforms. Thus, they argue that 'online field' will have the explanatory power to define the logic of practice in such social spaces as Wikipedia, Twitter, Flickr, Reddit or YouTube (which I will consider in detail in the next section). These networks are considered platform-wide online fields harbouring multiple nested subfields. At the same time, the authors assume that various online and offline fields do co-exist and overlap, and 'distinction' (or place in the social hierarchy) in the online field can be transferred back and forth from online to offline fields. Di Stefano (2017:158) argues, in turn, that, similarly to a journalistic field, social media occupies an ambiguous position in the field of power. And the entirety of the social networking sites, blogs, wikis and UGC sites reproduce (at least partly) some features of the cultural fields (similarly to media as a sphere of cultural production, which can be analysed both as a single field or a collection of fields, each with its own status production, values and patterns of prestige) (*ibid.*).

It appears from this short review that an exploratory study of a specific OSM-mediated translation practice could benefit from the following methodological strategies, which will be taken up in the discussion. First, orientation on the medium of YouTube will serve as a starting point for the discussion of UGT as a social practice. As it will be shown, position-takings of user-translators manifest their involvement in a variety of struggles which are not in fact limited to this specialized field. Second, for the purposes of the study, the infrastructure of OSM and UGC platforms will be equated with any other type of technology and will therefore be conceptualized as part of the agents' habitus activated by the online field. While approaches which attribute agency to technology present an elaborate way to break down the technological dimension behind the OSM and user relationship, in this study, I build on traditional Bourdieusian categorises as they have been reshaped in Levina and Arriaga's (2014) approach. The chosen notion of *online field* not only specifically targets UGC-based platforms, but it also concentrates on how content creation can beget status production. The following discussion aims to present a clearer picture of this model and describe the relations forming the field of YouTube to define the place UGT holds in its structure.

3. Exploring Translation Practices in the Online Field of YouTube

Currently, YouTube is a top online destination for creators, and a social media platform offering commercialization of talent. To put it in Littau's (2016a) terms, YouTube is also an instrument that mediates the translation process, encouraging the formation of new societal, as well as translation and language norms. Thus, an understanding of UGT practices on YouTube depends on comprehension of the internal logic of a platform, the general rules of the OSM game, and the external socio-cultural circumstances at the given historical moment in which they occur. This section attempts to create the backdrop for investigation of the relations which define the nature of user-generated AVT on YouTube. It overviews the social dynamics engendered by the platform and surveys a variety of translation practices on YouTube and their involvement in a variety of social games.

Each online field (of cultural production), as any offline field, has its own logic and structure in terms of agents and types of rewards for their actions in the field (Levina and Arriaga 2014:478). Van Dijck uses the term *video-sharing* to describe a range of social activities triggered by YouTube: “[v]ideo-sharing’ also means quoting, favouriting, commenting, responding, posting, downloading, viewing, archiving and curating videos on this platform – activities that are all equally fundamental to the site’s prolific usage, even if not all users engage in all these activities” (van Dijck 2013:150-151). Thus, as a platform, YouTube generates a specialized field of sharing and viewing videos, which is summarized in the platform motto: “Our mission is to give everyone a voice and to show them the world”.⁴

According to Wattenhofer *et al.* (2012), there is “a surprising dichotomy of content and social activities on the YouTube platform, indicating that YouTube is, distinctly, as much a social network as it is a content-diffusion platform”. This is in line with Burgess and Green’s (2009) view that it is important not to treat YouTube as a simple broadcasting platform. Content, nevertheless, plays a substantial part in the construction of YouTube as a digital environment and makes it “deviate significantly from traditional OSN [online social network] characteristics” (Wattenhofer *et al.* 2012).

⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/yt/about/> (accessed 10 October 2017)

As we have discussed earlier, the group of agents which is essential to the formation of this field's social structure are *platform designers* (or YouTube as an institution). They are granted a great deal of agency in the field, as they ultimately create the rules which are then internalized by the users' habitus. They define what the reputation markers are (displaying the number of views and introducing subscription mechanisms), how the infrastructure works and what type of content can and cannot be published (regarding issues of copyright, vulgarity, etc.). These choices are tied to external demand since their economic capital depends on the ability to attract sponsors and advertisers. As summarized by Morreale (2014:114), users "actively produce and share content independent of capital, while capital seeks to benefit from the social and material value that is produced". Hence, the OSM company seeks to create comfortable conditions with minimal control over the production process and functioning of the social game in the field (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010:31). Nevertheless, the designers do not directly influence and control "actions, norms and tastes which are key in producing social stratification online" (Levina and Arriaga 2014:474).

As interaction on YouTube is based on the *user-content-user* model, content acts as a gluing layer between direct user-to-user interaction (*ibid.*). This model also adds to "a democratic nature of content creation and the lack of formal monitoring and reputation mechanisms", which foster a self-regulating dynamic of social interaction (Sursala *et al.* 2012:23). To define this specificity, Burgess and Green (2009:57) introduce the notion of the "YouTube-ness of YouTube", which, as we may argue, embraces what Bourdieu (1990:66) calls the "feel for the game" possessed by the social agents in the field.

The key groups of agents in any online field are *producers* and *consumers* of content (Levina and Arriaga 2014:478). Although the creator of content, or the 'YouTuber', is a category that establishes the identity of the field, the notion that enables the existence of the field's dynamic is the consumer. Recognition in this platform-wide field is achieved as in any other online field: "through evaluation that occurs simultaneously with consumption of the content" (*ibid.*). Moreover, by displaying a view counter under each video and in each channel description, YouTube designers give agency to all types of content consumers, including passive viewers, or 'lurkers'. As field-wide distinction is contingent on the number of views (or *attention capital*) that a particular piece of content gets, non-contributing users gain considerable weight (Levina and Arriaga 2014:469). On YouTube, all consumptive activity is

therefore productive, and the label of hybrid produce/consumer or *prosumer* becomes especially relevant (for discussion of the concept see, e.g., Ritzer and Jurgeson 2010).

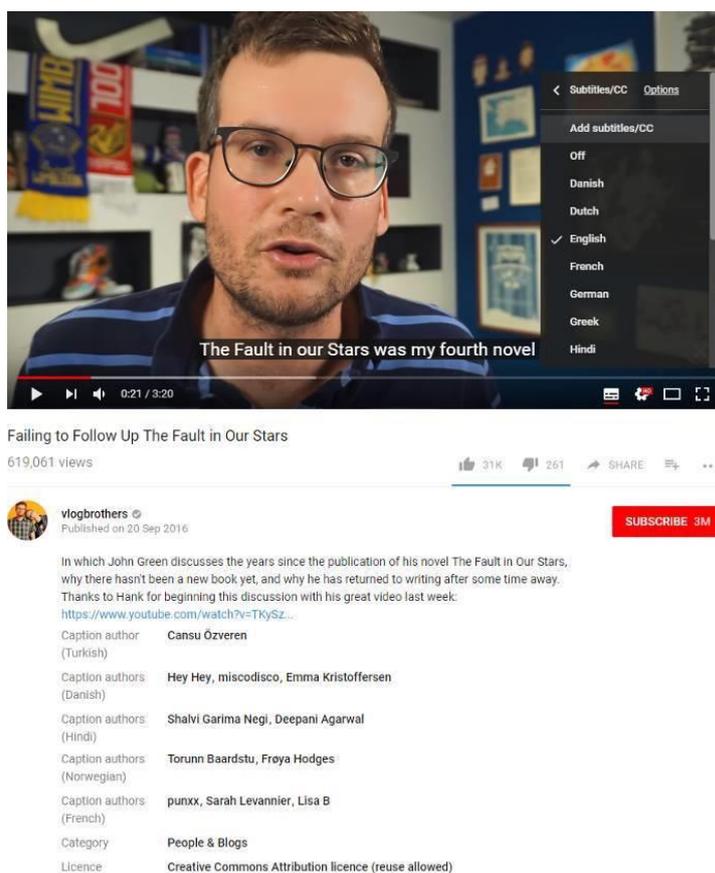
Overall, based on the type of motivation, three groups of YouTube users are defined in the literature. Among them are *passive users*, or viewers “who merely want to enjoy YouTube videos”. They greatly outweigh video content contributors. Another set of users are called the creators, the proverbial YouTubers, or the *content-contributing users* “who generate the site’s videos and are mostly motivated by the potential to increase their video and channel exposure” (Bar *et al.* 2009). A *channel*, a registered user’s personalized page, allows the user to share his or her own content, create public playlists of other users’ videos, and display their activity on the site, for instance, favouriting or commenting on videos. The third group of users are called *active users*. While they do not contribute video content, they aim to “obtain peer recognition ... from social interactions with other users” (Sursala *et al.* 2012:24). This category of agents is “mostly motivated by the chance of having their voice heard and are engaged on the YouTube site by commenting or rating” (Bar *et al.* 2009).

It could be argued that in 2016, with the launch of the beta version of the YouTube Heroes programme, a new type of active user emerged. These users are self-selected members of the YouTube *community* who are involved in monitoring the comment section, reporting violations of platform rules and engaging in other types of practices encouraged by the platform designers, including subtitling/translating content as commissioned by the video creators (see Illustration 1). The Heroes programme⁵ is “designed to recognise and support the global community of *volunteer contributors*”⁶ and involved training, interaction with the YouTube team and previews of new products and features on the platform, as well as a system of rewards, given to the most active contributors who comply with the platform guidelines introduced by platform designers.

⁵ <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/7124236> (accessed 10 October 2017)

⁶ As of October 2017, the page referencing the *Heroes* programme has been updated so that the programme was renamed *YouTube Contributors*, however, its original description is still available on the YouTube official blog post dated 22 September 2016 (<https://youtube.googleblog.com/2016/09/growing-our-trusted-flagger-program.html> (accessed 10 October 2017), as well as on the official Help YouTube channel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wh_1966vaIA (accessed 10 October 2017)).

Illustration 1: Screenshot of a description box of a video⁷ by John Green (YouTube channel *vlogbrothers*) featuring names of active users who worked on community-contributed foreign language captions.



In 2015, the platform announced a number of new translation features intended to “help creators make their content more accessible and understandable to an international audience”.⁸ The update included community-contributed subtitles and captions, options to add translated titles and descriptions, and a beta version of a translator marketplace. Since 2017,⁹ the creators can “tap” community contributions to have titles and descriptions to their videos translated, as well. Overall, this innovation followed a twofold agenda of supporting global marketing as well as the internationalization of creators’ audiences (Benson 2017:102).

Institutionalization of translation practices established the legitimacy of a volunteer translator as an agent and delimited the list of functions that she or he can perform. This situation is

⁷<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiX7fVkJTbzM> (accessed 17 January 2018)

⁸ <https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2015/11/found-in-translation-language-tools-for.html> (accessed 10 October 2017)

⁹ <https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2017/03/hello-world-how-to-translate-your.html> (accessed 10 October 2017)

directly connected with the tendency of gamification of crowdsourced translation (as well as other participatory practices) implemented by large social media companies, such as Facebook and Twitter (O'Hagan 2012; Rogl 2016).

In the case of YouTube, crowdsourcing mechanisms are introduced in the form of fan-made community contributions, as well as the Heroes programme. Although this initiative, like any other volunteer practice, “formed organically, representing an *ad hoc*, primarily volunteer workforce solicited through an open call” (O'Hagan 2016:930), the platform designers reframed it to engage volunteers in a competitive game-like atmosphere (O'Hagan 2012), catering to the platform's needs (Desjardins 2017:37-39). In other words, volunteer practices are being curbed by the institution in a specific subfield with its own social hierarchy. In Bourdieu's terms, they are *named* and made *interested*. The agents involved in this game seek *consecration* of their work through a specific reward system, but the rights to a translation belong to the owner of the video (“approved community contributions are owned by the video owner”).¹⁰ A contribution is recognized in the form of *credit display* (the main five contributors per language are listed in the description of an original video, see Illustration 1), which leads to an accumulation of cultural capital, which in the case of Heroes can be converted to material *perks*¹¹ on various levels of the programme, or the stakes in this game. For example, Level 5 lets the user try new features of the platform before they are released to the public and attend a Heroes Summit event.¹²

Concurrently with the introduction of translation-crowdsourcing mechanisms, YouTube designers attempted to give creators an opportunity to hire third-party professional language service providers (LSPs) to perform professional captioning and translation. In 2010, YouTube provided a help page¹³ for users who wanted to promote their videos internationally. In 2015, a beta version of the Translation Marketplace was introduced.¹⁴ As envisioned, Translation Marketplace was aimed to create an infrastructure, a platform, to connect LSPs and YouTube creators. In terms of translator visibility, LSPs habitually never gained public

¹⁰ <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/6054623> (accessed 10 October 2017)

¹¹ <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2016/09/growing-our-trusted-flagger-program.html> (accessed 10 October 2017)

¹² <https://thenextweb.com/apps/2016/09/22/youtubes-new-heroes-program-gives-volunterer-moderators-serious-perks/> (accessed 10 October 2017)

¹³ <https://youtube.googleblog.com/2010/06/professional-caption-services-get.html> (accessed 10 October 2017)

¹⁴ <https://youtube-creators.googleblog.com/2015/11/found-in-translation-language-tools-for.html>

recognition, as this type of practice is solely economically motivated and was open to a limited number of LSPs. With the introduction of the new gamified community translation mechanism, as well as the development of automated machine translation of subtitles, the need for professional services subsided: in June 2017, the Translation Marketplace was taken down¹⁵ due to low demand from content contributors.

While crowdsourced subtitling is the only type of translation practice directly enabled by YouTube infrastructure, it is in fact not the only practice of the kind engendered by the logic of the field. This article focuses on a specific type of agent whose translation practice is not as institutionalized and unfolds in the general field of YouTube “prosumption” (Ritzer and Jurgenson 2010). These agents are users who publish dubbed renditions and/or subtitled versions of already popular YouTube videos as their original content thereby creating specific UGT-focused channels, which will be discussed at length in the next section.

To summarize, currently, those who wish to perform translation on YouTube can join two different networks of positions, which exhibit two different social games with different types of capital: they can either join community contribution initiatives or pursue ‘distinction’ through translation practices in the general field of YouTube by creating UGT-focused channels. In other words, they can either join “the translator crowd”, or they can become a content-contributing *user-translator*, solely responsible for the type of content they choose to render into their language.

The case study described in this article focuses on a group of agents who are associated with the practices of running channels featuring AVT into Russian. While we have established the objective to refine the notion of a user-translator, it needs to be noted that in some particular cases the agency behind UGT-focused channels has to be extended. In some cases notions of agency have to incorporate producers and co-producers of UGT: moderators, voiceover actors and editors who are responsible for the final look and overall existence of translations in the new linguistic and cultural setting of RuNet. Nevertheless, only one third of the examined channels are the result of a collective effort and in the majority of cases all of the listed jobs are performed by just one person with little help from others.

¹⁵ <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/7379101> (accessed 10 October 2017)

4. The Case of Russian Language UGT-focused YouTube Channels

Building on the perspective of YouTube as an online field, this section focuses on the overall case study design and discusses how the agents who are producing content for the key Russian language UGT-focused channels play the social game and compete for attention alongside other content producers on YouTube.

4.1. Study design and data

Since UGT-focused channels on YouTube are a relatively underexplored phenomenon, longitudinal observation was utilized to examine and assess the practice under consideration. The underlying methodology is largely inspired by the framework of discourse-centred online ethnography (Androutsopoulos 2008), which, as a language-focused methodology, stresses the importance of “going beyond what is observable on the screen” (*ibid.*) by combining observation of selected sites of online discourse with direct contact with its social actors. Androutsopoulos (2008) suggests the following guidelines for systematic observation:

...to move from the core to the periphery of the field under investigation. ...to visit websites and discussion areas of interest repeatedly, in order to develop a “feel” for their discourses, emblems, and language styles. ...[R]esearch should attend to the openness and fluidity of online discourse. ...[T]he researcher should employ all technological resources that are available to participants to make sense of others’ displayed identities and participation patterns. ...[O]bservational data may also be used to provide guidance for further sampling.

Androutsopoulos admits that the sociolinguistic approach often favours detachment, in contrast to the active participation of a researcher in ethnographic tradition. Bourdieu himself objected to the method known in sociology as “participant observation” and insisted on the ethnographer’s acute awareness of framing in research: a researcher enters the field with certain dispositions and in certain conditions (Tyulenev 2014: 182).

One limitation of the study to be noted is the lack of personal contact with the user-translators.¹⁶ To overcome the bias of the researcher's frame, it is often suggested that the same object should be revisited, focusing on the search for driving principles – correlations, contrasts and forms of systematic coherence (Blommaert 2005: 225-226; Androutsopoulos 2008). In the course of this 12-month study, the YouTube channels of interest were continuously surveyed. The observation started with one of the major Russian UGT-focused YouTube channels, *TranslateItUP*, with more than 400,000 subscribers (see Appendix A for details). It was relatively easy to find through a simple platform search, as it was explicitly marked as a channel that formed and focused on subtitled content. Thanks to the YouTube suggestion mechanism, a number of related UGT-focused channels were also identified. Further search concentrated on the metadata that the creators used to define their most viewed content and make it searchable – tags, channel and video descriptions. Among the most popular UGT-related specific tags are *перевод* (translation), *озвучка/русская озвучка* (voiceover/Russian voiceover), *русские субтитры* (Russian subtitles), *на русском/по-русски* (in Russian) and *RUS SUB/RUS DUB* (Russian subtitled, dubbed videos). These tags are not visible to the viewer and therefore are often repeated in the searchable title, in combination with a description in Russian and a reference to the author of the original video. Some user-translators also credit their work by adding the name of their channel to the title of each video (see Table 1).

¹⁶ As a matter of fact, in the early stages of the research process a number of actors were approached via email and social media; however the outcome of the contact was either irrelevant to the aims of the study, or generally unsuccessful. Later in the course of the study, additional successful interviews with the actors were conducted.

Table 1: Examples of dubbed/subtitled YouTube video metadata in comparison to the metadata of the source videos.

Target Video Metadata	Source Video Metadata	Description
<p>TITLE: Расстрел бронированного оружейного сейфа за 9000 \$ Разрушительное ранчо Перевод Зёбры¹⁷</p> <p>TAGS: demolition ranch на русском, разрушительное ранчо, пуля, пуля, патрон, взорвался, пушки, стволы, винтовка, пистолет, 50cal, пятидесяти калибр, в упор, осколки, дробовик, трассирующий, зажигательный, под водой, 556, 308, сейф, оружейный сейф, соком, спрингфилд, расстрел сейфа, взлом сейфа пулями, бешеный пит, furious pete</p>	<p>TITLE: The Toughest Gun Safe with Furious Pete¹⁸</p> <p>TAGS: demo, demolition, demoranch, demolitionranch, ranch, vetranch, vet, offtheranch, off, the, gun, guns, safe, gunsafe, liberty, armory, vault, test, testing, torture, torture test, furiouspete, furious pete, furious, pete, 50, .50bmg, 50bmg, serbu, barrett, barett, barret, sniper, powerful, shotgun, pistol, rifle, handgun, bullet, bullets, armor, bulletproof, plate, metal</p>	<p><i>Zëbra</i> UGT channel adds information in the title (cost and characteristics of the safe not present in the original video title), does not build intertextual connection to Furious Pete, however, references the source channel name in Russian (<i>Demolition Ranch</i>), uses the target channel name (Translation by Zëbra) to identify the video as a translation, and adds a specific tag (demolition ranch in Russian) to the list of tags.</p>
<p>TITLE: Опаздываешь в Школу? ♡ Быстрые Идеи Причесок, Макияжа и Одежды <i>от Бетани Мота</i> ^^ МОЕ УТРО¹⁹</p> <p>TAGS: русская озвучка, перевод, озвучка, Бетани, Мота, Bethany, Мота, когда, опаздываешь, в школу, быстрые, идеи, прически, одежда, макияж, причесок, одежды, макияжа, когда опаздываешь в школу, канал, тэг, МОЕ УТРО, МОЕ, вей, maria way, maria вэй, УТРО, mw, makeup</p>	<p>TITLE: Running Late For School Quick Hair fixes, Makeup, & Outfit Ideas!²⁰</p> <p>TAGS: bethany, mota, bethanymota, running, late, for, school, work, routine, morning, hairstyles, quick, makeup, breakfast, ideas, recipes</p>	<p><i>Trudnosti Perevoda</i> UGT channel uses a specific title structure: most of the video titles reference its original author by their first name in Russian (or first name and surname, e.g. <i>by Bethany Mota</i>, by Joe, by Caspar). Every word in the title is often capitalized and additional symbols and information are added (? ♡ ^^ МОЕ УТРО / my morning routine). The first three tags in the list manifest the status of the video as a translation (Russian voiceover, translation, voiceover).</p>
<p>TITLE: <i>ISuperwomanII</i> - Три девушки, один лифт (Zendaya & Winnie Harlow) (Русская озвучка)²¹</p> <p>TAGS: озвучка, Лилли Синг, русская озвучка, юмор, смешно, Супервумен, funny, rus, voiceover, Lilly Singh, dubbing, humor, Superwoman, ISuperwomanII, Зендая, Винни Харлоу, девичья любовь, пончик, пончики, лифт, девушки, еда, прикид, ресницы, волосы, формы, каблы</p>	<p>TITLE: Three Girls, One Elevator (ft. Zendaya & Winnie Harlow)²²</p> <p>TAGS: iisuperwomani, iisuperwomenii, superwoman, superwomen, super, woman, women, comedy, comedian, funny, rant, skit, sketch, hilarious, humour, humor, stupid, silly, lol, joke, brown, indian, desi, punjabi, hindi, zendaya, winnie harlow, winnie, harlow, elevator, girl, girls, collab, lily, singh</p>	<p><i>GoolPictures</i> UGT channel uses a specific title model as well, which incorporates references to the source (<i>ISuperwomanII</i>), a mixture of translated and non-translated parts of the original title, and identifies the video as a translation (Russian voiceover). The same tag is repeated in the list of tags (voiceover, Russian voiceover).</p>

¹⁷ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S_7Ygy6cKrY (accessed 17 January 2018)

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Avd8xD-0pM> (accessed 17 January 2018)

¹⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVKEAh3jkzk> (accessed 17 January 2018)

²⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u60Pb8vd4rM> (accessed 17 January 2018)

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q4gNVozHDgw> (accessed 17 January 2018)

²² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4bGPF-8Syo> (accessed 17 January 2018)

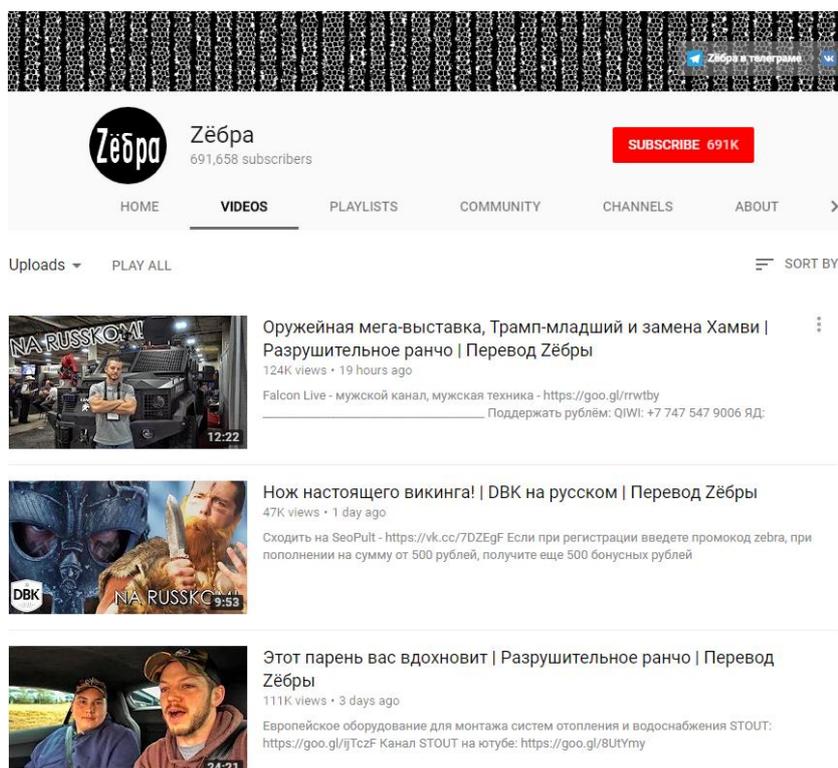
YouTube Data API explorer's *search:list* query²³ was applied to further refine the number of key nodes and key players in the social space. The service returns a collection of search results that match a required set of parameters. In December 2016, five lists of the most viewed UGT-channels were compiled in accordance with the following criteria: region code (Russia), language (Russian), type (channel/video), keyword (specified above) and order in which the results were presented (view count). Consequently, the relevant ten key nodes (or players), or the most viewed and most subscribed channels, were identified (see Appendix A).

The top ten Russian YouTube UGT-focused channels feature *hardsubbed* or *hardcoded* (with subtitles burned into the video), and *dubbed* versions of English-language videos produced for YouTube, which constitutes the main type of content in their content stream. In terms of topics and genres, 80 percent of the channels feature translations of YouTube-specific *homecasting* (van Dijck 2013) entertainment genres, or *snippets*,²⁴ including *vlogs*, *gameplays*, *challenges* and *tutorials* already published on YouTube (e.g. see Illustration 2).

²³ <https://developers.google.com/youtube/v3/docs/search/list> (accessed 10 October 2017)

²⁴ Snippets are “potentially ranging from several seconds to several hours, but the bulk of postings averages between three and six minutes” (van Dijck 2007).

Illustration 2: Screenshot of the front page of *Zëbra* UGT-focused channel.²⁵ This channel broadcasts dubbed versions of videos originally published by *Demolition Ranch* and other popular English-language YouTube channels conveying similar subject matter.



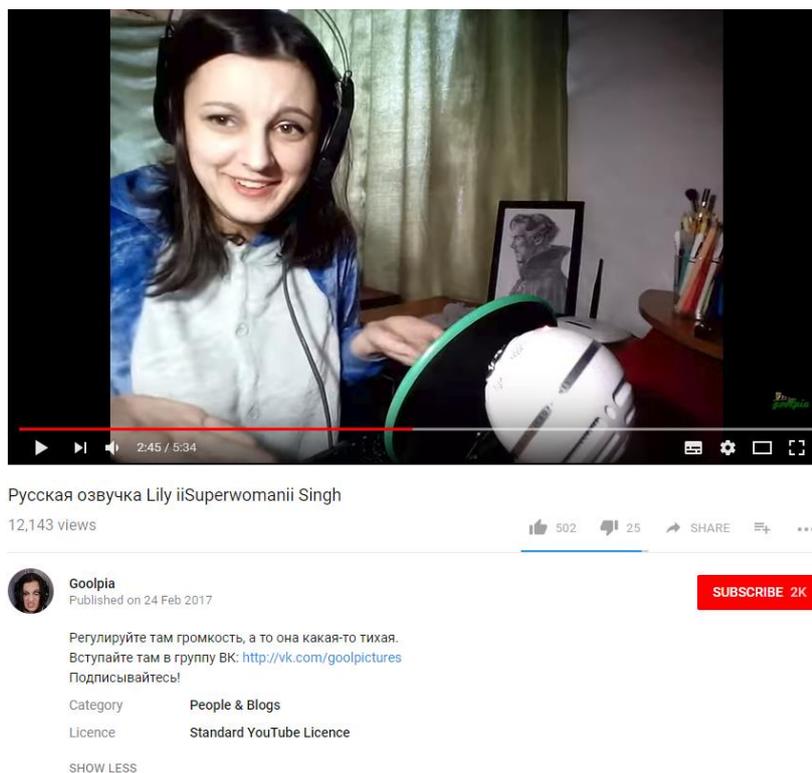
Another type of video present on UGT-focused channels is the first-person conversational *vlogs* and recorded *live streams*,²⁶ as well as *audio podcasts* featuring the user-translators themselves (see Illustrations 3, 4 and 5). Vlogs can be described as conversational videos “in which everyday people film themselves talking directly to the YouTube community about everyday topics” (Benson 2017:82). Vlog is a genre which carries special significance for UGT-focused channels, which we will focus on later in the discussion.

The original non-translated content accompanying translations in the channels’ content streams proved to be a unique material for analysis. From the point of view of translation studies, this type of discourse can be characterized as paratexts (Genette 1997), metadiscourse of translation, or meta-translation (Kashkin 2010).

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC32veIEjgFxiI08yXZOD22dg> (accessed 27 January 2018)

²⁶ <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2474026?hl=en> (accessed 10 October 2017)

Illustration 3: Screenshot of a video²⁷ posted on a separate vlog-centered channel (*Goolpia*) by user-translator Anya (*Goolpictures* channel). In this video, she introduces herself, captures her translation/dubbing process and answers viewers' questions.



From a research standpoint, these texts can help disambiguate a translator's decisions, shed light on the translator's ideology, and allow a mapping of the social field in which the practice takes place. Taken in a cultural-historical and social context, meta-translations may be considered "constructions of visions of the world ... carried out under structural constraints" (Bourdieu 1989:18). Therefore, meta-translations represent "discourse about the work of art [which] is one of the conditions of production of the work" (Bourdieu 1993:35). While, according to Bourdieu (1989:20-21; 1993:36), verbalized categories of perception construct the social reality as much as they express it, they are a stake in the struggle to impose the legitimate principle of vision of the value of a certain work of art. Along with the comments submitted by the viewers, meta-translations are woven into the fabric of the multimodal text of a YouTube page (Benson 2017) and become inseparable with the cultural product created by the user-translator (which will be discussed at length further). In the digital realm, the intricate interplay between paratexts created by the authors, audience, platform designers and

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0oY9yU7lFL8> (accessed 17 January 2018)

third parties creates a scenario of *increased paratextual relevance* (Tavares 2015). Based on a non-systematic look at meta-translations in question, we may assume that user-translators do embrace YouTube infrastructure and build paratextual networks to reframe the new versions of videos originally produced for the global English-speaking audience; they also construct the image of a user-translator as an agent in the social space of YouTube, unveiling the hybrid nature of informal social media translation.

Some of the key topics which can be traced in the meta-translation include: extension of translational agency to voiceover acting and its reflection in the naming practices and identity attribution (voiceover actor as a “translator”); homology of the sub-field of YouTube-specific AVT and the field audio-visual piracy; positing of translation/voiceover as original work and a legitimate mode of production on YouTube; dichotomy of *us* vs. *them* as in user-translators as members of YouTube creator community vs. recipients as passive viewers; juxtaposition of UGT and community-contributed subtitles commissioned by the authors of original videos; UGT on YouTube perceived by the viewers as non-translation; translation as a time-consuming task and hard work, for both an individual and a group; and power of a translator vs. volition of a viewer in the choice of material. While every topic listed above can become a separate direction of research, for the purposes of this article I only briefly touch upon some of them and limit my discussion to their role as a type of content.

Turning to the means of *guerrilla ethnography* (Yang 2003:471), monitoring of user-translators’ actions on YouTube, and in their satellite pages (or communities) on VK²⁸ social networking platform was combined with qualitative analysis of meta-translations.

This exploratory study is limited in many ways, since it draws only on the habitual practices of the key UGT-focused channels, while there are multitudes of lesser channels featuring curious translation-related phenomena, such as mixing translated and non-translated content within a content stream based on the ideas discussed, and even colour schemes of the visuals. Although gathered data allows us to draw a number of conclusions regarding the relationship of the online field and habitus of user-translators, a more comprehensive ethnographic study, including structured interviews of the agents, is needed to speak confidently of the user-translators’ specialized habitus and their positions in online and offline fields. Therefore, the

²⁸ <https://vk.com/about> (accessed 10 June 2018)

following discussion aims to illuminate the interaction between YouTube field and the user-translators' habitus as it is reflected in their discourses, and individual actions (position-takings).

4.2. Discussion

The ease of creating a channel on YouTube “blurs the boundaries between creators and consumers of content” (Sursala *et al.* 2012:24). Therefore, the habitus of a video contributor, as well as that of an active user, is formed in the “general” field of YouTube, which harbours numerous overlapping subfields. In this process, habitus is subjected to experience and incorporates the common field doxa, which justifies, supports and rationalizes it. Knowledge of the rules of the game, or the prosumer knowledge, constitutes an asset, a type of embodied cultural capital, which translating agents utilize to establish their position in the field. Any agent enters the online field with a set of offline capital, which may include video production skills, ability to analyze and utilize YouTube infrastructure (viewer statistics and metrics), and so forth. User-translators, in turn, bring along their knowledge of foreign languages and cultures as a type of offline cultural capital. We can compare their aptitude for rendering texts from one language into another, for example, to a singing talent or ability to play an instrument which likens user-translators to any YouTubers who publish their music videos on the platform. Both types of agents find themselves in the same social game with the same stakes, which determines the popularity of one type of producer, and the demise of others.

4.2.1. Surviving the fight for legitimacy

One of the key characteristics of YouTube social dynamics is grounded in the dichotomy of derivative and original modes of production. Translation is defined by the platform designers as a type of derivative work not covered by fair use rules.²⁹ Original content producers conforming to these rules are granted an opportunity to fight for recognition in the field, and eventually convert attention capital into economic capital via channel monetization.³⁰ At the same time, derivative content producers are stripped of this opportunity, which conditions the on-going struggle to oppose the rules enforced by the platform designers.

²⁹ <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2797449> (accessed 10 October 2017)

³⁰ <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/72857?hl=en> (accessed 10 June 2018)

Therefore, newcomer user-translators involuntarily get involved in the struggle for legitimization of derivative (or recycled or remixed) content as a mode of production, which, as van Dijck (2013:153-156) argues, is specific to the platform and needs to be theorized on its own terms as a unique cultural form rather than within the coordinates of the derivative vs. original dichotomy.

As user-translators posit themselves as legitimate content producers (which is evident from their self-presentation), they are renegotiating not only the secondary status of derivatives, but of the one of the translated content as well as of the “translator crowd”. For instance, this is how the owner of *Zëbra*, one of the UGT-focused channels, reflects on the fact that translations should be regarded as a self-sufficient cultural product:

...some of them [users who “steal”, or re-upload Zëbra’s dubbed videos to their channels to gain views] justify what they do by saying that it is no crime to steal from a thief. But my voice and my translation is my own content. I am the one who translates, dubs and produces these videos. I am the one who contacts Matt, the author of the original content, twice a week. And I am ready to delete all the dubbed videos of Demolition Ranch if he says so. However, this will be very unfortunate. But ... spoiler alert, he is not the only creator I have been in contact with, and one of them is about to approve my translating his videos. Soon enough, the translations will be legitimate. (From a first-person podcast on Zëbra YouTube channel, translated from Russian.)

According to the platform recommendation, to be able to use copyright-protected material in their works, users need to obtain permission by contacting the owner of the original video.³¹ Otherwise, a copyright owner may file an official complaint, and not only will YouTube remove a video violating copyright, but it will also place a *strike* against the channel containing the video. Platform designers may thereby exercise their power to deny an agent entrance to the field. However, those who publish translated versions are neither recognized by platform designers, nor are they penalized. So, derivative content is often kept in the field for a variety of reasons.

First, the power to remove the video from the site is also delegated to the original copyright owner. Unless the copyright owner claims drastic action, dubbed and subtitled videos are kept

³¹ See Appendix B for an illustration of a year-long struggle of a user-translator (*Zëbra* channel) to get the original content owner’s permission to publish dubbed videos on his channel.

available for viewing. It may be argued that in doing so, platform designers follow their own agenda: the larger the variety of videos, the larger the viewer crowd it attracts.

Two of the seven channels in the top-10 (*sndk/ozvuchka* and *BlackSerj Production/BSP Studio*) feature content that was originally produced for television and other platforms, which may entail copyright infringement. For example, the user-translator team behind *BlackSerj Production/BSP Studio* dedicate their channel solely to dubbed snippets of the Graham Norton Show, which has never been broadcast in Russia. As BSP Studio admit in their satellite community on VK platform, the team is devoted to developing its YouTube channel, and the choice of source material depends on the copyright policies of the original video owners:

...you have to know the rules. In short, many copyright owners do not allow reuploading of their videos to different channels – even of the dubbed versions [...]. The Graham Norton Show is quite lenient in this case. It monetizes the reuploaded versions, and the revenue goes to them. (From a discussion in the satellite community on VK, translated from Russian.)

So, the second reason why the dubbed videos survive is the fact that original producer can use it to gain both attention and economic capital: they may run ads on the video and benefit from doing so. This fact interestingly creates a specific relationship between the source and target videos and eventually results in a dynamic, different from the one of offline cultural fields. In other words, outside the online field, translation as a cultural practice strips the text of its original context, and all the intertextual links tying a cultural product to its field of production consequently dissolve. As Bourdieu (1999:221) states, “they [texts] don’t bring with them the field of production of which they are a product”, which may generate “formidable misunderstandings” on foreign readers’ part (which, in the case of the digital environment may lead to context collapse). Considering the transparency of the digital setting, we may argue that dubbed and “hardsubbed” YouTube videos (and their producers) stay in the same online field of production. They only change a subfield characterized by the language and cultural profiles of the agents. In our case, this process can be described as transporting the English-language content aimed at a global audience to the new locale of RuNet while remaining within the same platform-wide online field. In the transfer process, content retains links to its source, owing to the translated videos’ metadata (i.e., names of the authors of the

Ekaterina Krasnopeyeva, Understanding the Dynamics of User-Generated Translation on YouTube: A Bourdieusian Perspective, 38 – 83.

original as tags, hyperlinks in the description), which allows the YouTube suggestion mechanisms to lead the viewer to the original content.

So, thirdly, by saving a derivative version of their video on the platform, video creators also indirectly benefit from the promotion of their content in other languages. Since YouTube designers encourage the creators to build international viewership (cf. the Creator Academy recommendation to “consider making several versions of the same video dubbed over into languages that are popular in the countries watching your channel”³²), the derivative is legitimized, as the original producers are only “delegating” the task of dubbing to a UGT channel. Therefore, if perceived as a part of the platform-wide field, translated content can be theorized as a type of consecration of the original, which ties translators to the global YouTube field and gives them agency.

Consequently, UGT-focused channels exist and develop alongside the translation crowdsourcing mechanisms. More than that, UGT-focused channels can be conceptualized as defiance of the institutionalized “playbour”. This is how one of the creators of *TheRainbowFox*, a “PewDiePie fan YouTube channel”, reflects on this situation:

*To all of you who keep bugging me about the community-contributed subtitles on the PewDiePie channel: Yes, I am aware of the situation. And I am glad that PewDiePie has enabled [built-in] translated subtitles; I guess this is his way of appealing to all of us who are not native speakers of English. This is all good. But you just plainly can't wrap your head around what a channel dedicated to translated and dubbed content is, can you? This channel produces dubbed videos. Will the subtitles make all the YouTube dubbers disappear all at once? I guess not. If you can't understand this, please leave. (From a podcast “But subtitles are better... [A podcast] worth listening to” published on *TheRainbowFox* channel, translated from Russian.)*

As we can see, UGT channels are intricately woven into the fabric of the YouTube social game. Now let us take a closer look at the way the interplay of field logic and habitus is reflected in the user-translators’ actions as objectified in the characteristics of their content stream.

³² <https://creatoracademy.youtube.com/page/lesson/global-format?cid=global-channel&hl=en-GB#strategies-zippy-link-1> (accessed 10 January 2018)

4.2.2. Raising the stakes and moving up the hierarchy

A UGT-focused channel gradually gains popularity by drawing on the attention capital converted from the symbolic capital provided by the high status of the source material. This fact plays a part in constructing user-translators' motivation: as Bourdieu (1999:221) notes, agents who transport a cultural product to a new (sub) field retain the symbolic capital (recognition, celebrity status) associated with the source.

Therefore, regarding the choice of the source, seven of the top ten UGT-focused channels feature voiceovers of already popular English-language YouTube content. This influence of the field logic is quite evident. However, individual dispositions guiding the choice of particular source material are in fact too varied to generalize. Some users are guided by their affinity to the subject of translation in question, others translate specific videos for ideological reasons, and some of them employ translation practice for educational purposes. For example, a user-translator running *Zébra* UGT channel notes that for him translation is primarily a way to learn new things and advance his English language skills, and a user-translator from *TranslateITUP* admits to making subtitled content to help others learn the English language. In fact, on some channels, dubbed videos may feature local, embedded third-party advertisements, the revenue of which goes directly to the user-translator. Hence, the reasoning behind the video choice may be contingent on "offline" interests as well. At the moment, gathered data does not indicate specific patterns in the choice of source videos. This remains an open research question.

As the agents behind UGT-focused channels are tapping their expertise, they gradually move up the social hierarchy, which entails specialization of their habitus in the course of interaction in the field. Levina and Arriaga's (2014) model posits the interdependence of the status of a producer and constant adjustment of characteristics of the streamed UGC. In other words, an agent has to constantly adjust the characteristics of the contribution stream in order to appeal to their audience's taste and gain attention capital.

Because favourable positions are always at stake in the field, user-translators tend to progressively adjust the contribution stream to an original mode of content production in order to secure their status in the field. This process starts with raising the level of content stream *prototypicality* (Levina and Arriaga 2014:481), which is possible owing to

incorporated doxa, “prosumer” knowledge of what content is popular with the channel’s audience, whose characteristics are revealed as the user learns to track his/her channel statistics.³³ Ultimately, the higher tiers of the “prosumer” hierarchy correspond to high levels of attention capital, as well as cultural (ability to successfully attune their contribution to the audience’s taste), social capital (creating relationships with other agents in the field) and economic capital (revenue from advertising).

In many cases, prototypicalizing the content stream entails fostering strategic *authenticity* (Tolson 2010) and resorting to a *conversational mode of presentation* (Tolson 2010; Scolari and Fraticelli 2017) in their voiceovers. Both characteristics are underlined in the literature as a vital factor to achieve distinction in the “homecasting” field. This I also find to be the reason why quality voiceover close to free commentary is the key type of content for this group of rather successful channels (top-10). For example, in Illustration 4, the majority of viewers positively reflect on the quality of the translation and voiceover featured in the video. When asked his opinion on Comment 5, the user-translator admits the following:

Saw that comment and some of its clones . I tend to think this particular breed of comments regards a “cool manly voice”[...]. Though sometimes, in rare cases, I hope it may indicate my translation got so out of hand it made the video even better than it already was. As for the making the script sound natural – for me it goes along with the Russian text quality question. I try doing everything I can to make the text sound natural, as if Matt [presenter in the source videos] was your ordinary Vasya [common Russian name] playing with a slingshot in his backyard. (From personal correspondence.)

³³ <https://creatoracademy.youtube.com/page/lesson/using-analytics> (accessed 10 June 2018)

Illustration 4: Screenshot of opening titles and the first six most rated comments in the comment section of a video³⁴ on *Zëbra* channel. Comments and titles on the right are translated from Russian.



Оружейная мега-выставка, Трамп-младший и замена Хамви | Разрушительное ранчо | Перевод Зёбры

174,976 views

12K 153 SHARE

Add a public comment...



Pinned by Zëbra

Zëbra 1 week ago

МУЗЫКА ИЗ РОЛИКА:

В преролле - Mis-Teeq - Scandalous - <https://youtu.be/S1kE0MMfr20>
В мегамонтажиках - <https://soundcloud.com/coreygagne/pill-rb>

Read more

REPLY 73

View all 6 replies



PlanVgames 1 week ago

Атмосферный видос и сама выставка. И спасибо за перевод!

REPLY 198

View all 3 replies



Анархист Кошатник 1 week ago

Посмотрел всего 3 минуты, лицо заболело от улыбки. Мэтт и Зёбра это просто мегапозитивная смесь! Желаю развития каналу Зёбры! Ну и конечно, постоянный лайк от постоянного подписчика.

REPLY 196



Олександр Л 1 week ago (edited)

озвучка пьяного голоса словенов 10 с 10 Зёбр
а тип на 10:25, просто без комментариев

REPLY 375

View all 2 replies



Kirill R 1 week ago

Надо Вам по ходу и оригинал озвучивать! Здесь это реально кручи))

REPLY 12

View reply



Остап Ф 1 week ago

Очень крутой перевод

REPLY 159

Title in the TV screen: *Zëbra*

Caption: *Trump Jr. at 8 min, BearCat at 10 min. And plenty of cool stuff before that.*

Video Title (back-translation): *Arms mega trade fair, Trump Jr. and Humvee replacement | Demolition Ranch | Translation by Zëbra*

Comment 1:
Music used in the video

Comment 2:
Awesome video and awesome show. And thanks for the translation!

Comment 3:
My face started hurting from smiling after I watched just 3 minutes of the video. Matt and Zëbra together are beyond great. Good luck with the channel, Zëbra. And, of course, a regular thumbs up from a long-time subscriber.

Comment 4:
The Slovenes' drunken voices are a success. 10 out of 10, Zëbra. And a guy at 10:25. No comment.

Comment 5:
Your voice needs to be in the original video! This version is much cooler.

Comment 6:
This is a great translation.

³⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QAi_LQUvzFI (accessed 29 January 2018)

Zēbra's voiceover praised by the viewers resembles a vlogger's highly informal conversational mode of delivery, which shares vaudeville's emphasis on liveliness, immediacy, and conversation (Burgess and Green 2009:53-55). A vlog is a form which directly addresses the viewer, reminding us of the residual character of face-to-face communication (*ibid.*). It explicitly encourages participation and incites communication with an emphasis on an individualized contact (Scolari and Fraticelli 2017:10).

The quality of a user-translator's work is also constantly evaluated by the viewers in the comment section below every video (see Illustration 4). Therefore, user-translators have an opportunity to survey the tastes of the audience and even define their status as a translator as a legitimate content producer. To illustrate this observation, I make recourse to a video that caught my attention in the course of data collection. However, the channel featuring this video does not belong to the top-10 most popular UGT channels examined in the article. The video in question is a *seven hour-long* recorded live stream of a translation and subtitling process in action, which is intended, as the user-translator puts it, "to bring variety to the channel". The video features both a chat between viewers and the user-translator, and a screen capture of translation editing in progress. The top comment to the video is a token of appreciation of the translator work, which can be translated as "A colossal work!" From another dialogue below, we can assume that the viewer is criticizing the translator for not doing the translation as soon as its source was published on YouTube. The user-translator, in turn, greets his/her viewers, admits to doing translations in his/her spare time and being tired from his/her main job. We can also assume that translator replies to the viewer's critique admitting that he/she will not hurry because there is no competition, as he/she is the only one user-translator rendering this specific content ("I have no concurents" [= competitors]).

user-translator: *I have 6 hours // I do not mind interruptions* [from the viewers].

viewer: *kinda late*

user-translator: *Kinda I have work and tired stuff // And I have no concurents to late*

viewer: *keep on the hard work* (From a video published on *metalslayer777* channel.)

Although this excerpt presents a vivid example of creator-user interaction, in terms of the user's motivation, the picture it paints differs considerably from the situation on top-10 channels. Many of the top-10 channels deal with competition. While this lesser channel does not manifest all the strategies undertaken by the dominant agents of the top-10, the very

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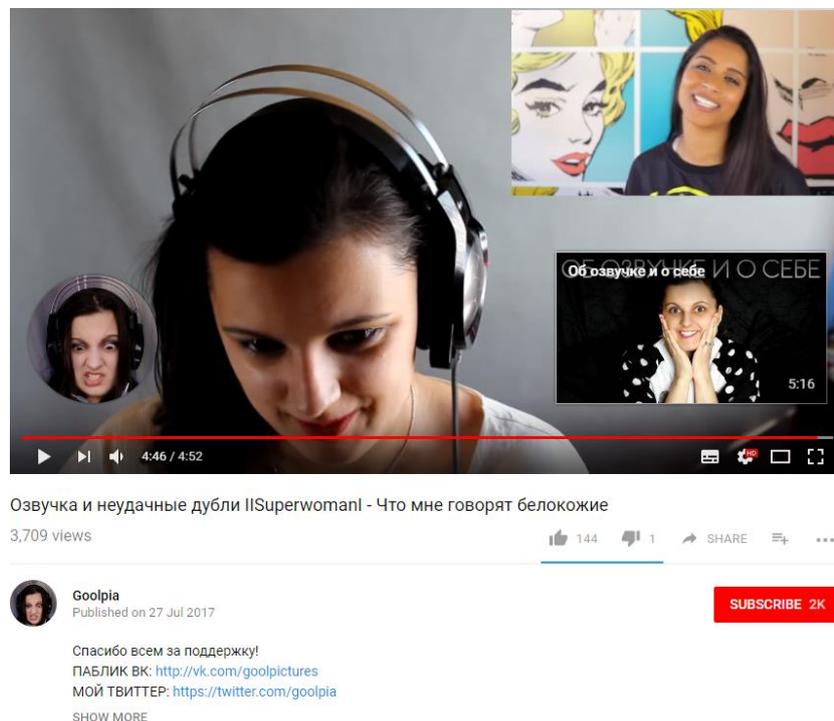
action of posting a proof of one's hard work may be regarded as representative of an effort to "humanize" the agency behind a UGT channel.

Even a non-systematic look at the comment section of the most popular dubbed videos shows that on numerous occasions, viewers find themselves in a situation where it may be hard for them to differentiate between the figures of the dubber, the translator and the presenter, who is appearing on the screen. Therefore, we often see comments directed at the presenter featured in the video in the following manner: "Why is your voice so weird?" (when a male dubber revoices a lady vlogger, or vice versa). The viewers who are aware of the secondary character of the video refer to its original author in the third person and to the dubber in the second, while in the case of original videos comments are often "direct responses" to the message in the video (Benson 2017:83). Overwhelmingly positive feedback from the viewers in the comment sections of popular dubbed videos (expressions of gratitude to the dubber for publishing the video, appreciation of translation quality) is also a point worth exploring systematically.

We may argue that in case of UGT-focused channels, a move up the hierarchy may be reflected in (and, concurrently, contingent on) the following actions: 1) choosing dubbing over subtitling; 2) turning dubbed videos into remixes by incorporating meta-texts in the form of snippets with translator commentary; 3) adding (personal) original conversational videos, audio and other meta-translations to the content stream; 4) actively participating in a dialogue with the audience via YouTube infrastructure (viewer-creator interactions in the comment section) and satellite communities. This kind of effort of a user-translator to secure their position in the field shows how invested he or she is in the pursuit of the stakes in the game.

The longer user-translators have played in the field of YouTube, the more they are able to adapt their content streams to the dominant mode of content production, which situates the content contributor, who identifies as a translator, or a dubber, in the same coordinates with the original content contributors. This circumstance may as well become reflected in the visual representation of a voiceover actor/translator in the UGT videos (see Illustration 5).

Illustration 5: Screenshot of a video³⁵ by YouTube user-translator Anya, the creator of *Goolpia* and *Goolpictures* channels, featuring herself (in the front) recording a voiceover of a sketch by Lilly Singh (in the corner), the creator of *ISuperwomanII* channel. Images at the bottom of the screen are hyperlinks to a first-person video “About dubbing and about myself” and the *Goolpia* channel, which focuses on Anya’s original video content.



Consequently, translated content often acts as a springboard for agents to climb up the “social ladder” and convert their online status into offline capital. Over the course of the study, I witnessed not only the gradual rise of non-translated content on UGT-channels, but also creators developing separate channels for featuring their original videos. In the case of *TranslateItUP* and *TheRainbowFOX*, vlogs in which the creators deliberated on the reasons why they decided to discontinue producing translations, were the last videos uploaded to their UGT-focused channels (see Appendix A).

To conclude, we may argue that it is the explanatory power of the symbiosis of field and habitus that can reveal why only certain numbers of users, out of myriad content uploaders, find themselves pursuing field-specific distinction. We may also say that it is the same mechanism that influences the motivation of a user-translator to shift their strategies: having

³⁵<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DY7OPXja3sE> (accessed 17 January 2018)

started as a seemingly purely altruistic fan translator, a user can eventually turn their YouTube channel into a small business.

5. Conclusion

The current study is inspired by the considerable popularity of dubbed platform-specific content in the space of Russian language YouTube. According to statistics, over the last five years, YouTube remains one of the top five most visited sites in Russia. As the country's OSM landscape is dominated by domestic social networks, YouTube appears to be the most popular international OSM platform in Russia. This makes it a truly unique space, a frontier, where RuNet meets the global Internet, resulting in a peculiar language and culture situation emerging on the platform. Therefore, we may argue that new user-generated practices mediated by YouTube may hold theoretical and practical implications for translation studies.

Building on the empirical investigation of this particular online phenomenon, the reported study has demonstrated how UGT can unfold in the socio-technological environment of an OSM. It argues that translation as a practice appears to be present in two different networks of positions in the online field of YouTube: the institutionalized crowdsourcing subfield and the general field of YouTube "prosumption". The co-existence of both community initiatives (enabled by YouTube) and UGT-focused channels (who seemingly enjoy creative autonomy) is conceptualized as grounded in the platform designers' and source content contributors' pursuit of attention capital and economic capital.

Despite translation being regarded as a derivative cultural product (hence a violation of copyright), its producers are often given an opportunity to circulate their creative works alongside other YouTubers. The study argues that creators running UGT-focused channels are ultimately competing for distinction in the field of YouTube and pursuing the same stakes as any other creators of YouTube. Therefore, mediated by OSM, translation practices are evolving in concordance with the rules of the environment. When playing the social game, user-translators' habitus incorporates doxa, the principles of operation in the field. Gradually, these agents convert their offline cultural capital of language and translation skills into the platform-specific attention capital. Although the derivative status of translations prevents them from monetizing their content, the recognition they get from viewers can eventually be

converted into economic capital (revenue from third-party ads) and cultural capital (recognition in other online fields, as well as in the field of professional AVT).

These findings have once again illuminated the socially-situated nature of translation: even if there is no commissioner or brief, a user-translator's ultimate decision to translate a certain piece of content is not made in a vacuum. The Bourdieusian methodology adopted in the study has made it possible to reconstruct the logic of the field, which may help disambiguate certain evident patterns of the translators' behaviour as an agent, a "prosumer", as they reflect the interiorized doxa. However, the decisions leading to the choice of specific source material and specific translation strategies are governed by the individual dispositions, which are the result of their trajectories. As I have argued, the question of whether the specific habitus attuned to a sub-field of UGT is rather challenging and remains an open avenue for further research.

Drawing on insights in the current study, we can say that the characteristics of a UGT channel's content stream are generally conditioned by the logic of the YouTube field. It appears that such a finding ties this particular study to a broader perspective of cultural globalisation touched upon at the beginning of the article. As the self-selected translators use YouTube infrastructure, they enjoy the power to speak globally. They specify the target language and the source material to transmit to the new linguistic and cultural setting, which will eventually be transformed by these translations. As evident from this study, if a user-translator is, in fact, striving for distinction, their individual preferences regarding source texts are likely to be trumped by the logic of the field, as they inadvertently pay attention to the numbers of subscribers, views and comments when choosing prospective source videos. This last factor, in a way, defines their profile as cultural mediators (Bayar 2012; Tyulenev 2010). Although, more insight into an individual agency, as well as a perspective informed by cultural studies, is needed to further the investigation of what original works are being transferred, how they are manipulated in the process of translation and inoculated into the target environment. In fact, this line of interest mirrors Bourdieu's (1999:222) proposal to investigate "the urgent and important area" of the "conditions and manner in which texts enter a field of reception". He proclaims a practical and theoretical need to "look at these selection processes and find out who these people doing the selecting [...] actually are" to facilitate and improve communication between countries. While this was said about the cultural products

belonging to the realm of intellectual life, this proposal does not sound less urgent and important when applied to the contemporary situation under investigation.

To conclude the discussion of the findings, let me note that the reported study has shed light on potential limitations which cannot be overlooked when these findings are explored in further research contexts. Whereas the application of discourse-oriented online ethnography has provided a specific reasoning for the material selection, YouTube content and its characteristics constitute a truly moving target for any researcher, due to new agents joining the platform every minute. That said, the full potential of the data used in this particular study has not yet been explored to its full extent. Therefore, let me focus on several interrelated lines of interest illuminated by the gathered data, which can potentially set out potential directions of future research.

So far, as explained earlier, this study did not set out to explore the links between YouTube-specific UGT and wider online and offline socio-cultural processes. As we have also discussed earlier, situating the inquiry of the OSM-mediated practices in the online world only is essentially quite limiting. To reconstruct the combination of dispositions which make a user-translator “feel at home” in the YouTube field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:128), we thus need to pay considerable attention to triangulating a quantitative survey of user-translators’ strategies with an in-depth qualitative ethnographic inquiry of individual subjects. Such a triangulated approach may in this way, help disambiguate the trajectories of individual user-translators as they move across a variety of offline and online fields. Comparing status markers of translators and other types of creators across a number and variety of OSM environments may possibly lead to a paradigm of the particular specialized habitus of a user-translator being configurable, and thus with potential to be theorised.

Turning to Bourdieu’s categories of agents’ trajectories and homologies in positions and fields can also help relate OSM UGT studies to an existing fan culture and fan activism research base. Here I would like to note that in the present study a fan culture perspective is applicable only in a few cases. In fact, *TheRainbowFox*, the third most popular UGT-focused Russian language channel, is explicitly marked as a fan page in its description: “PewDiePie fan YouTube channel (Russian voiceover)”. The creators of the other nine channels in the top-10 feature translations of various types of content and do not specify their status as fan

communities. I found the nature of YouTube-specific AVT, in general terms, different to the nature of fansubbing and fandubbing practices, as described by Zhang and Mao (2013), and activist amateur AVT, as argued by Pérez-González (2012).

Further research of YouTube UGT would also benefit from further studies focusing on a linguistics and discourse studies perspective. As YouTube rests on a user-content-user interaction model, the comment section of a YouTube page also proves to be a place for discussion of language, cultural and ideological issues. Gathered data allows us to hypothesize that since user-translators borrow the visuals from their fellow YouTube creators, they are obliged to rely on the linguistic profiles of their videos, among other factors, to generate attention. Therefore, combining a comparative study of source and target videos with an in-depth discussion of discourses in the UGT channel's comment section could reveal how instances of the translators' creative language use are picked up, circulated, recycled and recontextualized in the audience's responses.

Given the relatively short history of OSM-specific UGT as a practice, as well as an object of research, this study joins the discussion of theoretical and methodological grounds for its investigation. The complex relationship of technology, society and culture inherent in OSM-specific translation practices manifests the need for revision of existing theories and introduction of new interdisciplinary approaches to translation research. Hopefully, this exploratory study can help further the conversation in translation studies and other related disciplines on the nature of the new OSM-specific translation phenomena.

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Appendix A

Table 2 provides information about the 10 most popular Russian-language UGT-focused recourses on YouTube.

Table 2: Key nodes in the Russian-language UGT recourses on YouTube

<i>Name of a Channel</i>	<i>Number of subscribers/ views (August 2017)</i>	<i>Number of subscribers/ views (January 2018)</i>	<i>Type of AVT</i>	<i>Channel Description</i>	<i>Source language</i>	<i>Meta-translations</i>
1. Trudnosti perevoda (Трудности перевода)	707,137/ 81,157,452	↑ 847,637/ 111,086,843	V ^a /S ^b	Translations of videos by several popular YouTubers	English	Conversational videos
2. Citizen Cat Pranks	569,983/ 147,690,250	↑ 792,669/ 230,929,674	V	Thematic channel featuring translated prank videos	English	Conversational videos
3. TheRainbowFox [not active since October 2017]	491,234/ 100,480,630	↓ 485,761/ 103,680,193	V	“PewDiePie fan YouTube channel (Russian voiceover)”	English	Conversational videos / podcasts + Separate channel featuring original videos
4. Zyobra (Зэбра)	473,230/ 58,135,261	↑ 691,131/ 96,677,449	V	Translations of videos by several popular YouTubers	English	Podcasts + Thematic blog
5. TranslateItUP [not active since February 2017]	416,514/ 38,556,056	↓ 405,386 / 38,944,933	S	Translations of videos by several popular YouTubers	English	Conversational videos + Separate channel featuring original videos
6. sndk/ozvuchka (sndk/озвучка)	195,244/ 12,967,578	↑ 209,047/ 13,571,233	V	Channel run by a popular dubber Syenduk featuring a small number of translated videos	English	Separate channel featuring original videos
7. Prosto ozvuchka (Просто озвучка)	172,772/ 11,869,310	↑ 251,410/ 22,858,388	V	Thematic channel featuring translated short animated movies created specifically for YouTube	English	–
8. Burger Fifer (Бургер Фифер)	146,318/ 31,570,964	↑ 182,350/ 43,998,568	V/S	Thematic channel featuring translated football-related videos, as well as translations of videos by several popular YouTubers	English	Conversational videos
9. BlackSerj Production / BSP Studio	121,324/ 11,277,360	↑ 162,047/ 17,069,849	V	Thematic channel featuring translated Graham Norton Show snippets	English	–
10. Gool Pictures	96,550/ 10,687,551	↑ 116,751/ 15,644,461	V	Translations of videos by IISuperwoomanII	English	Conversational videos + Separate channel featuring original videos

^a Voiceover translations

^b Subtitling

Appendix B

Illustration 6: Screenshots user-translator Zëbra kindly shared with me to illustrate his year-long journey to seek permission to publish dubbed versions of Matt Carriker's videos.

