

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 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