Researching Translation in the Context of Popular Culture

Theoretical and Methodological Perspectives

Kanaris Room, Manchester Museum
13 February 2015

Hosted by
Centre for Translation and Intercultural Studies
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Programme

9.00-9.25  Registration and refreshments

9.25-9.30  Welcome and Introduction to the event
Dr Rebecca Tipton (University of Manchester)

9.30-11.00 Session 1
Popular Culture and the Object of Study in Audiovisual Translation Studies
Dr Carol O’Sullivan (University of Bristol)

11.00-11.30 Coffee Break

11.30-13.00 Session 2
Transformative Work: Participatory Culture from Audience Engagement to Fan Productivity
Dr Heather Inwood (University of Manchester)

13.00-14.00 Lunch Break

14.00-15.30 Session 3
Investigating Digitally Born Translation Agencies in the Context of Popular Culture
Dr Luis Pérez-González (University of Manchester)

15.30-16.00 Coffee Break

16.00-17.10 Public Lecture
Mock Translation in the Blogosphere: The Creation of an Alternative Discourse
Prof Randa Abou-bakr (Cairo University)

17.10-17.20 Closing Remarks
**Abstracts**

*Popular Culture and the Object of Study in Audiovisual Translation Studies*

Dr Carol O’Sullivan (University of Bristol)

There are many different definitions of ‘popular culture’. It can be seen in quantitative terms, as culture that reaches a large audience; it can be seen in opposition to elite or high culture; it can be seen as something which is generated by ‘the people’ as opposed to what is sometimes popularly referred to as ‘the man’. The same cultural product can be popular at one stage of its history, and become part of high culture at another. At the same time, old distinctions between high and popular culture, or at least fossilized relative valuations of these, are now generally considered outdated. What implications might this have for translation studies, and in particular audiovisual translation studies? Film, television and videogames, the usual objects of study, seem easy to define as ‘popular’, in opposition to literary translation which has received a disproportionate amount of attention in translation studies. But how far can we assume that to work on film and television is to work with popular culture? My paper draws on case studies by myself and other scholars, and on models of genre in media studies, to review how we deploy the notion of popular culture in relation to audiovisual translation.

**Biodata.** Carol O’Sullivan was awarded her PhD in Modern and Medieval Languages at the University of Cambridge. She is currently a Senior Lecturer in Translation Studies at the University of Bristol, where she is programme director for the MA in Translation. Her research interests include literary translation, translation history and screen translation. Her monograph *Translating Popular Film* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2011. She was guest editor of Issue 5.2 of the journal *Translation Studies* on research methods in translation history in 2012. She is currently Associate Editor of *Translation Studies* and a Board member of the European Society for Translation Studies.

*Transformative Work: Participatory Culture from Audience Engagement to Fan Productivity*

Dr Heather Inwood (University of Manchester)

This session will explore some of the ways in which people transform texts through practices associated with participatory cultures and fandoms and the methodologies that can be used to make sense of such textual transformations. The prefix ‘trans’ serves as an entry point to consider the extent to which cultural boundary crossings and textual indeterminacies have become the new norm as digital media such as the Internet facilitate — and regulate — mass participation in culture. On the one hand, a theoretical emphasis on participation has strongly demotic overtones, suggesting that walls are being torn down between producers and consumers, authors and audiences, or between professional and amateur creators of culture. At the same time, fans have gone from being viewed as a site of interpretive resistance, offering responses to and repurposings of popular media texts that often defy the original producers’ intentions, to a source of cultural authority and/or economic productivity in their own right. This has led some scholars to suggest that fans are being incorporated into the commercial operations of media organisations and risk losing their potential for cultural subversion by reaffirming the authority of the ‘original work’ and the ‘auteurs’ who produce them. Examples of Chinese-language texts and media will be introduced to illustrate what is at stake in the transformative work of participatory cultures. Participants will share an interest in the interface between translation, popular culture and fan studies and should be prepared to discuss the textual transformations that participatory cultures produce, be they translingual, transcultural, transnational, transmedia, transgender, transhistorical, or even transhuman.

**Biodata.** Heather Inwood is Lecturer in Chinese Cultural Studies and Undergraduate Programme Director for Chinese Studies at the University of Manchester. She received her PhD in modern Chinese literature from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, in 2008 and was Assistant Professor of Modern Chinese Cultural Studies at The Ohio State University between 2008 and 2013. Her research spans the fields of Chinese literature, media and popular culture, with a focus on interactions between contemporary literature and digital media technologies. Her book, *Verse Going Viral: China’s New Media Scenes*, explores the fate of modern Chinese poetry in an age of the internet and consumer culture and was published by the University of Washington Press in 2014.
Investigating Digitally Born Translation Agencies in the Context of Popular Culture
Dr Luis Pérez-González (University of Manchester)

The impact of advances in information and communication technologies on the established cultural industries is receiving a growing amount of scholarly attention. As far as the translation of popular culture products is concerned, there has been a groundswell of interest in the processes through which some (hitherto) marginal cultural forms have been absorbed into the fabric of the cultural industries, and in the ensuing transformations of the social practices associated with the production and consumption of cultural content. Much scholarly work has thus addressed the emergence of cultural manifestations that have developed wholly or significantly through practices of self- or participatory mediation, with the involvement of non-professional translators either in an individual capacity or as part of various forms of virtual communities. This session focuses on the theoretical and methodological implications of this development, exploring the challenges entailed by the emergence and consolidation of digitally born translation agencies. Indeed, the translation of popular culture in the digital context steers us away from the translator as an individual or subject position, and towards collective discursive spaces of translatorship involving complex negotiations of cultural identity and citizenship. In this light, the various factors driving the interaction between translators and the wider audiences they are embedded in, and between members of a virtual community working on a collective translation, are now attracting as much attention as the study of the translated texts themselves. The (self-) mediated nature of participatory translation in the digital context provides unique insights into the translation process, including access to successive drafts and other forms of ‘avant-textes’. This session will explore the relevance of netnography and genetic criticism to the study of translated popular culture, as texts connected and concerned with the quotidian and ordinary experiences continue to move towards the core research remit of translation studies.

Biodata. Luis Pérez-González is Senior Lecturer in Translation Studies and Co-Director of the Centre for Translation and Intercultural Studies, University of Manchester, UK. His main research interests concern audiovisual translation, multimodal communication and, more recently, media sociology in the digital culture. Former Editor of The Interpreter and Translator Trainer, he is the author of Audiovisual Translation: Theories, Methods and Issues (Routledge, 2014). He has been guest editor of special issues of The Journal of Language and Politics 11(2) (Translation and the Genealogy of Conflict, 2012) and The Translator 18(2) (Non-professionals Translating and Interpreting: Participatory and Engaged Perspectives, 2012, with Şebnem Susam-Saraeva). He is a member of the Executive Council of IATIS (International Association of Translation and Interpreting Studies).

Mock Translation in the Blogosphere: The Creation of an Alternative Discourse
Randa Aboubakr (Cairo University)

Political humour has had a significant presence in public discourse in Egypt in the modern period, and particularly in popular journalism and caricatures, since writers like Yaqub Sannu’ and Abdullah al Nadim launched their sarcastic political publications during the last decades of the 19th century, and colloquial poets such as Badi’ Khairi and Bayram al-Tunsi produced their sarcastic social and political poetry during the first half of the 20th century. Until now, humour continues to be one of the most effective tools for expressing dissent, particularly in various forms of popular cultural production such as caricature, graffiti and billboards, street art, and the emerging field of citizen digital media.

My presentation will focus on the use of mock translation as a type of humour in the emerging blogosphere in Egypt, with particular reference to citizen media projects such as ‘Tammat al-Targama’ (Translation Done’), ‘al-Qarn’ al-Sha’bi’ (‘The Common Reader’), and al-Koshary Today. By ‘mock translation’ here I mean humorous translations which deliberately seek to render the source text into a literal, exaggeratedly foreignised, and highly idiosyncratic interpretation in Arabic. I will extend Mikhail Bakhtin’s concepts of parodic imitation, ambivalence, and spectacle in carnival (1941/1984) to address the use of mock translation as a means of combatting the hegemony of authoritative discourse. Since humour is in itself an ‘exclusionary’ strategy, as it requires and presupposes some shared knowledge between producer and recipient (Norrick 2003), humorous mock translation is a doubly exclusionary practice. By accentuating the ‘foreignness’ of the value system embodied in the source text, and foregrounding the new ‘ridiculous’ meaning, mock translation represents a strand of alienating ‘transformative imitation’ (Ashcroft 2001), which, like the language of carnival, promotes the
discourse of subaltern groups, pokes fun at hegemonic discourses, overturns power hierarchies, and contributes to the creation of a more egalitarian space.

**Biodata.** Randa Aboubakr is Professor of English and comparative literature at Cairo University, and founder and principal coordinator of Forum for the Study of Popular Culture (FSPC). Among her publications are *The Conflict of Voices in the Poetry of Dennis Brutus and Mahmud Darwish* (Reichert Verlag, 2004), and ‘The Role of New Media in the Egyptian Revolution of 2011: Visuality as an Agent of Change’, in *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa: A Postcolonial Outlook* (Routledge, 2013). She has translated some books of poetry from and into Arabic and English, as well as a number of books on Islamic feminism. Prof Aboubakr has been Research Fellow at University of Texas, Austin, USA, University of Leiden, the Netherlands, University of Florence, Italy, and Zentrum Moderner Orient- Berlin, Germany; she has been awarded research fellowships from the Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin, Germany, and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. She has been Visiting Professor at Freie Universitaet Berlin and the Jagiellonian University of Krakow.