

AVT and Technology

The digital revolution

The 1990s saw an increase in the pace of developments in the subtitling industry with concurrent technological advances. The rise in the use of Windows-type interfaces and word-processing programs was a turning point for the translation industry in its entirety, which evolved to the 'localization' industry as we know it today. Spell and grammar checkers were the first 'tools' translators ever used. Traditional translation agencies were transformed into Language Service Providers (LSPs), not simply translating, but localizing content, modifying it and adapting it to local requirements.

Audiovisual content explosion

Broadband Internet also had a direct impact on the amount of video content that could be made available to consumers, unleashing unprecedented volumes of material. Broadcast TV and Internet access was integrated through a single set-top box at the turn of the century through Internet Protocol (IP) and Video on Demand (VOD) was launched as a commercial service (Wikipedia, 2015), with Netflix being the prime example.

Audiovisual content explosion

As a result, traditional LSPs are adding AVT services to their offering in order to satisfy their client needs, to the extent that support of subtitle formats is added in TM software used to ensure such subtitle translations are consistent with the clients' other printed and online material (Smith, 2013).

For the first time in subtitling history, everyone is trying their hand at subtitling, in order to make this tsunami of videos accessible to a wider audience.

Audiovisual content explosion

Desktop subtitling and captioning software is mushrooming and becoming affordable for all types of budgets (e.g. Annotation Edit, Subtitle Translation Wizard, Movie Captioner), while open source subtitling software is now also available (e.g. Aegisub, Gaupol, Gnome Subtitles, Jubler, Subtitle Edit, Subtitle Editor, Subtitle Workshop)

In addition, online subtitle interfaces are making their appearance, either proprietary ones (e.g. iMediaTrans, Plint, Sfera, ZOOsubs) or commercially available (e.g. MediaWen, OOONA's production tools), while companies like Amara, DotSub and Viki make use of online subtitle platforms to offer accessibility and translation services through a streamlined process of collaborative subtitling.

Outsourcing

As the industry drew increasingly more on freelance translators and editors located anywhere in the world, the business was eventually outsourced to low-cost territories with multilingual capabilities. In the AVT industry, the outsourcing trend began at the turn of the century, when USA and UK companies had to find cheaper ways of producing English subtitling and captioning work: the volume of such work was increasing rapidly, while the prices offered for such services were steadily declining (Alberge, 2007).

Outsourcing

Countries like India, Malaysia and the Philippines were selected as the low-cost alternative for producing transcripts of English source video due to the availability of a cheap workforce and its familiarity with the English language. Such outsourcing solutions offered further positive side effects, providing USA- and UK-based companies with the scalability and flexibility to cater for increases in workload, as well as the possibility of a round-the-clock subtitling service by taking advantage of the time difference between Asia and America/Europe.

Outsourcing

This outsourcing of a flourishing skilled profession (i.e. English intralingual subtitling) to non-specialists that were unaccustomed to the slang, regional variations and cultural references used in filmic material, and viewed subtitling/captioning as just another type of transcription, originally met with strong opposition, especially in Europe—where verbatim transcriptions of the dialogue were avoided even for hard of hearing purposes. An increase in mishearings and comprehension errors were reported and professional unions condemned the practice (Nakata Steffensen 2007; Alberge 2007), but eventually workflows were ironed out and quality control measures by native subtitlers were put in place to correct such mistakes.

Crowdsourcing

One of the most innovative trends that emerged as a side effect of moving to cloud-based enterprise offerings is crowdsourcing as the next level of corporate outsourcing. Not only have crowdsourcing models provided a levelling field for the supply and cost of labour, in the translation and AVT field, they have also provided solutions to issues such as speed, volume and resource availability, allowing the practice to flourish despite the attendant legality and quality issues.

Fansubbing

Crowdsourcing in AVT first appeared in the form of fansubbing, i.e. the creation of subtitle files for (popular) audiovisual productions by fans, in a fashion that breaks away from the established norms of subtitling practice. It started in the 1980s but has truly spread since the turn of the century, and it differs considerably from established forms of crowdsourcing in that the crowd maintains complete control over the translation process and the content to be translated, as opposed to 'managed' forms of crowdsourcing, where such control is maintained by the originators of the work (European Commission 2012).

Enterprise crowdsourcing

As opposed to fansubbing, what has come to be known as Enterprise Crowdsourcing in recent years is an innovative approach to outsourcing by enterprises looking to benefit from ever ubiquitous and dependable Internet connections, the automation benefits of the cloud, and the billions of networked people around the globe. By putting to use their skills and availability, they are transforming them into an on-demand workforce that can complete from simple and repetitive to complex and creative tasks, for free or for a small fee.

Benefits of enterprise crowdsourcing

The benefits of such solutions are obvious: cost savings, scalability and better time-to-market through the simultaneous assignment of micro-tasks to a multitude of online workers, creating a dynamic for new business that is not viable with traditional models.

Criticisms to enterprise crowdsourcing

Solutions based on workflows powered by communities of amateurs are increasingly making their appearance in the translation market (Conyac, Gengo, Lionbridge Business Process Crowdsourcing, etc.). Amateur communities have attracted a lot of criticism, arising from concerns over their potential effect on the status of professional translation, the declining standards of translation quality and the ensuing blurring of the lines between professional and personal lives.

Examples enterprise crowdsourcing

Prominent examples of crowdsourcing from the AVT sector are Amara and DotSub, which host both amateur and professional solutions, while serving the needs of diverse communities, from non-profits, educators and governmental organizations, to entertainment, media and corporate clients, as well as individuals.

Crowdsourced subtitling services are also used by large streaming sites, such as Viki, 'the Hulu for foreign language content' (Lunden 2013), which uses its fan base to collaboratively subtitle videos wiki-style, with segments edited and re-edited on the fly,

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