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# Crowdsourcing translation

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# **CROWDSOURCING TRANSLATION**

May 2012

The present paper does not represent a final position of the Commission; its only purpose is to encourage discussion on the topics covered.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The advent of the Internet and its rash development in the past few decades have revolutionised our habits and patterns of behaviour. It offers huge opportunities for communication or access to information, but is often blamed for disrupting human relations. We all — and especially young people — spend more and more hours in front of the screen. An increasing number of tasks, which in the past involved direct human contacts, are now performed through a machine — from carrying out banking transactions or buying plane tickets, to playing interactive games with people living thousands of kilometres away, or even donating money for a worthy cause.

However, new forms of communication are emerging thanks to the Web, notably the Web 2.0 — web applications that facilitate participatory information sharing, interaction and collaboration among users and creation of user-generated content, like social networks, blogs, and wikis. Among these applications, crowdsourcing deserves great attention. The term crowdsourcing was created at the end of the 1990s to indicate a new way of getting work done, by involving the ‘crowd’. It is constantly gaining ground and has by now penetrated a wide range of highly diversified areas. And yet, it remains for many an obscure concept. What does crowdsourcing exactly mean and what does it imply, notably in translation where it has lately become a hot topic?

The idea behind crowdsourcing is that ‘the many’ are smarter and make better choices than ‘the few’, and that the ‘crowd’ has a huge potential for which they often find no outlet. There are more and more people who have knowledge and competences but do not have the chance to use them in their professional lives. Now, crowdsourcing offers them the opportunity to pursue their interests at amateur level. And indeed, its growing popularity shows that many are willing to provide their skills, time and energy without expecting any financial compensation in return; the possibility of cultivating their interests and passions, and the appreciation and recognition they get for their work are sufficient rewards.

Secondly, the explosion of content to be processed and tasks to be carried out is not matched by a similar increase in resources, which, on the contrary, seem set to decrease as a result of the current economic crisis. According to its supporters, crowdsourcing is the way out of this impasse because it taps a huge reservoir of skills and competences which would be lost otherwise and, in this way, it helps to match needs and resources. The challenge is how to harness and channel the wisdom of the crowd.

On the other hand, opponents of this evolution warn that not all that glitters is gold and urge not to underestimate the risks inherent in this approach: the risk that businesses exploit free labour to increase their profits, that qualified professionals are deprived of their source of revenue because they cannot stand the competition of the crowd and, last but not least, that quality standards decline when tasks are carried out by unqualified amateurs without any control. Furthermore, worries are voiced about the impact of this new approach on society and our way of living more in general, with boundaries between working and leisure time becoming blurred and crowdsourcers spending too many hours on these activities at the expense of their family or social lives.

This phenomenon has penetrated very diverse fields, ranging from photography to marketing and from science to the non-profit sector — notably citizen journalism and humanitarian projects — and new applications appear all the time. Regardless of the kind of projects it is applied to, however, the characterising features of crowdsourcing tend to be the same: resorting to the crowd to get a work done more rapidly by a large number of people who dispose of the relevant skills and knowledge but would not be reachable otherwise; tapping into a wider reservoir which often helps to come up with more

efficient and creative responses; creating a strong bond among all those involved, who perceive themselves as a community sharing interests and objectives and are willing to work collaboratively towards a common goal.

Among the areas affected by this new way of doing things, translation is worth mentioning. Crowdsourcing is radically transforming translation as we have known it up to now. New applications are appearing every day and all those involved in this activity are faced with new challenges in order to adapt to and keep pace with these evolutions.

As happens in other areas, in translation crowdsourcing is raising not only interest and enthusiasm, but also harsh criticism and serious worries, notably about the adverse effects it has on the prospects and status of professional translators. Gloomy scenarios are sketched according to which the very survival of the category would be at stake, while amateurs dump the prices on the market without being able to guarantee high quality standards.

However, crowdsourcing appears to be well established in our society and set to stay. For this reason it is necessary to try and look into its features and its impacts in detail and with an open mind. This is the objective of this study, which aims at exploring crowdsourcing in translation, but also at a more general level, to better understand the context where it has developed.

In this perspective, the first part of the study is devoted to an overview of crowdsourcing in general, identifying its basic features, to see how it started, in which areas it is most successfully employed and how we can expect it to develop in the future, which risks it entails, but also which opportunities it opens up.

The second part of the study focuses more specifically on the applications of this new approach in translation. Following the same lines as the first part, it starts with an overview of the main areas of translation where it is employed, without forgetting applications which do not deal purely with translation, but are somehow related to it and to languages in general. The objective is to see how the features already identified for other applications of crowdsourcing apply to crowdsourced translation as well, but also to identify the elements which are specific to this area.

The changes brought about by this new and highly innovative way of working concern all facets of translation. Crowdsourcing does not affect merely the practice of translation, but has an impact also on the theories of translation and on the way this activity is perceived. In particular, since it involves a large number of people in an activity usually regarded as quite invisible, it may help promote its recognition and visibility, and raise interest about it and about the importance of multilingualism in general. Last but not least, as is happening in other fields where crowdsourcing is taking ground, by transforming the way in which work is performed, it will inevitably affect the professional prospects of translators. However, this does not necessarily mean that it will jeopardise the very survival of this category, as some fear, but obliges translators to face the challenge and take on board the positive aspects of these changes in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their work and of the services they offer to their customers.

Finally, international organisations should not be forgotten. They are often regarded as something apart. Though they work according to specific rules and procedures and to fulfil specific needs, however, they do not exist in isolation. Therefore, they too must confront and come to terms with developments occurring in society at large — and crowdsourcing is one of these. With all caveats, there are certainly lessons a large translation service like the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation can learn from these developments in order to make its workflow more efficient and to better involve its staff, promoting collaboration and stimulating exchanges among



translators. And indeed, though — like similar institutions — it tends to be more rigid and to react to changes more cautiously, something is changing at that level too. More collaborative ways of working are now being promoted and voices are being heard inside the European Commission's translation service spurring it to accept these changes, learn from them and introduce innovative approaches, both to help the staff and convey the EU political message to the public more effectively.

There is, by now, large agreement at all levels — amateurs, non profit, businesses and also institutional organisations — that crowdsourcing is not a transient phenomenon; it is a reality we have to come to terms with. It offers great opportunities but it also entails serious risks and both sides of the same coin must be carefully taken into account without prejudices or easy optimism. In order to promote the practice and status of translation, which plays an essential role for the advancement of society, it is vital to master these developments and steer them for the benefit of the professionals and also of the citizens at large.



## 2 CROWDSOURCING: WHAT IS IT ABOUT?

### 2.1 A definition

In order to better understand what we mean by ‘crowdsourcing’ and to outline its scope more precisely, the first step is to define the peculiar features of this rather elusive concept.

The term ‘crowdsourcing’ was coined by Jeff Howe as a portmanteau of ‘crowd’ and ‘outsourcing’ in 2006. He used it for the first time in his *Wired* magazine article ‘The Rise of Crowdsourcing’. As he recalls in the best-selling work he devoted to this topic a few years later, *Crowdsourcing*,<sup>1</sup> he came up with this term to define a new phenomenon which, in his view, would revolutionise a wide range of fields, and primarily the way of doing business as we know it. Howe argues that, thanks to the technological advances which have made cheap consumer electronics an everyday reality, the gap between professionals and amateurs has shrunk, allowing companies to take advantage of the talent of the public. This, in Howe’s words, ‘is not outsourcing; it’s crowd-sourcing’.

More and more often, however, crowdsourcing strategies are applied outside, or even in conflict with, the business world in areas as varied as software development, humanitarian aid or the audiovisual sector. For this reason, the definition proposed by Henk van Ess in September 2010 might be a better starting point for understanding the various facets of this phenomenon: ‘Crowdsourcing is channelling the experts’ desire to solve a problem and then freely sharing the answer with everyone’.<sup>2</sup>

And yet, if we forget about the word, and look instead at the concept behind it, crowdsourcing, which relies on the work of amateurs, is nothing revolutionary. The work of amateurs has always been essential for the advancement of science and culture. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many scientific activities were left to passionate amateurs from the upper classes, notably the aristocracy, who could afford to devote their means and time to intellectual activities without seeking any economic reward. Indeed, while the pursuit of money through labour was despised by the aristocracy, who considered it as strictly confined to the lower classes, the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake was held in high esteem, and it was necessarily their prerogative.

Besides focusing on the figure of the amateur — i.e. the non-professional — these definitions of crowdsourcing emphasise the role of the community. By working as a community, amateurs make a distributed problem-solving and production model possible. The idea underlying this approach is that ‘the many are smarter than the few’ and that ‘groups are often smarter than the smartest people in them’.<sup>3</sup> This is the argument developed by James Surowiecki in his bestseller *The Wisdom of Crowds*.

To support his assumption, he starts by recalling an anecdote about the British scientist Francis Galton. In 1906, while visiting a county fair, Galton came across a contest where the public were invited to guess the weight of an ox. Attracted by the prospect of winning a prize, over 800 people tried their luck. Not one guess was right but, by examining the mean of the guesses of the individual participants, Galton made an interesting discovery: the average of all the guesses was 1 pound less than the actual weight of the ox.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Howe. 2008. *Crowdsourcing, Why the power of the crowd is driving the future of business*. New York: Crown Publishing Group.

<sup>2</sup> Henk van Ess. *Crowdsourcing: how to find a crowd* (Presented at ARD/ZDF Academy in Germany on 17 September 2010) <http://www.slideshare.net/searchbistro/harvesting-knowledge-how-to-crowdsource-in-2010>.

<sup>3</sup> James Surowiecki. 2004. *The Wisdom of Crowds*. London: Abacus, p. XIII.

The story is related by Surowiecki to support the assumption underlying his book, i.e. that a crowd can be much smarter than any one of its members, even if — or especially when — they are not working together: ‘under the right circumstances, groups are remarkably intelligent, often smarter than the smartest people in them. Groups do not need to be dominated by exceptionally intelligent people in order to be smart. Even if most of the people within a group are not especially well-informed or rational, it can still reach a collectively wise decision’ (p. XIII).

The anecdote also shows that contests to solve specific problems, open to anybody wanting to participate — which have become one of the most typical tools of present-day crowdsourcing — are not something radically new either. The literature mentions contests very similar to the present ones dating back as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In 1706, the British Government launched the Longitude Prize (which is usually regarded as the first example of this kind) to devise a simple method to determine a ship’s longitude. Though the crowd could not solve the problem and the major prize was never awarded, smaller prizes were offered to reward significant contributions and support relevant work.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, through the rise of the middle classes — who drew their wealth from paid labour and imposed a radical change in attitude towards living through earning — and the development of universities as the main centres for research, a class of professional researchers emerged, which guaranteed more rigorous methodologies and fostered merit and specialisation. As a result, amateurism started to decline and lost its prestige.

Crowdsourcing can be seen as reversing this trend and making amateurism fashionable once again, though in a completely changed context and with radically different features, which reflect the social and economic conditions prevailing in our society:

1. Over-education of the middle classes. The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw a dramatic increase in the number of university graduates. However, not all of them — and this is becoming ever truer as a result of the current economic crisis — manage to find employment in their field of specialisation and put what they have learnt to use. Crowdsourcing offers them an outlet for their talents and interests.
2. Technological development. The IT revolution has made it easier to tap this human capital regardless of geographical distribution. Easy and cheap access to technological tools allowing information to be transmitted quickly, no matter where the people involved are located, is a precondition for crowdsourcing to flourish. An eloquent example is ‘citizen journalism’, where the work of amateurs communicating through the Internet allows an almost instantaneous flow of information worldwide.
3. The emergence of the open software movement, whose offspring includes major products like the Linux operating system, but also the free encyclopaedia Wikipedia. The effort to develop 100% free computer operating systems software was initiated by computer scientist Richard Stallman at the beginning of the 1980s as a reaction to the excessive power and stifling control of the big corporations, first and foremost Microsoft. To guarantee that no company would appropriate and impose copyright on his free software, he launched the GNU General Public License (GPL), which specifies that everything that is released under it is freely available and can be freely distributed and incorporated. This also applies to any software or product incorporating material released under the GPL.
4. Thanks to all these factors, well organised and enthusiastic communities have emerged, based on affinities only. These new communities are not subject to the constraints proper to traditional communities, notably physical proximity. Nowadays this is no longer necessary. A common interest and goal, on the one hand, and easily available and cheap technological tools, on the other, are enough to integrate a very

These new on-line communities share a number of features which set them apart from any other type of community and differentiate this new form of amateurism from the traditional one:

- 1 The communities are radically democratic. While in the past amateurism was the prerogative of the wealthy and leisured classes, nowadays it is open to everyone. Indeed, through crowdsourcing everybody has the opportunity to share their knowledge and talents, while devoting time and energy to tasks they are interested in and which would be out of their reach in a traditional environment.
- 2 In these communities, motivation and personal involvement are the main drivers, which is not always the case in professional contexts.
- 3 Since the communities are not paid, or receive only a token payment, for their efforts, they are completely free to choose their topics and tasks. Recognition and respect being their main reward, it is much more difficult, if not impossible, for the economic powers to control and impose something on them.
- 4 Through crowdsourcing a new way of working is emerging, widely based on collaboration, self-initiative and peer reviewing, where the exchanges among the members of the community become a further binding force. Since the objective is to tap the largest possible capital of skills and competences, tasks are broken up into small chunks which require a limited amount of time to be completed. This makes it possible to further widen the number of potential contributors and involve people who may have brilliant ideas but very little time to spare for their passions. It also increases the chances of coming up with better solutions in a much shorter time.
- 5 Finally, a striking difference between crowd-sourcing and traditional problem-solving approaches is that solutions are often devised by non-experts in the specific field, thus further expanding the reservoir of potential solvers. This is one of the elements which make crowdsourcing appealing to large corporations, which increasingly turn to this method even when they have highly qualified experts in-house. Through crowdsourcing they can reach a very diverse group of potential solvers, who approach problems with a fresh mind, from a different perspective and, as a result, often come up with more creative solutions.

The growing success of crowdsourcing for the solution of business problems should not overshadow other applications. In the natural sciences, for example, crowdsourcing has proved a very effective way of collecting extensive raw data, and in journalism the posts of amateur bloggers are sometimes the first source of information on events which professional journalists are prevented from attending or cannot cover as rapidly.

In this respect too, crowdsourcing is increasingly seen as a powerful political tool promoting democracy, because it can boast the freedom that traditional media do not enjoy. The recent upheavals in the Middle East have shown the impact of bloggers on the coverage of these events as they leak across borders information which the regimes in power were trying to stifle. Simple and widely available technological tools, a simple smartphone, were enough to show the whole world shocking images which an experienced news photographer with professional equipment may not have been in a position to catch and circulate.

The Internet and the social media have proved essential to help the crowd organise the revolutions, allow their supporters to communicate quickly and freely, transmit their message to the world and gain international support, showing the violence and sufferings

the citizens had to endure. The decision taken by the Egyptian Government at the beginning of the turmoil in January 2011 first to block social media like Facebook and Twitter, and then to black out the Internet, thus isolating the country from the rest of the world, clearly shows the role of the Internet in the unfolding of the revolution, but also the authorities' awareness of its impact. And precisely because the Egyptian revolution was also a digital one, the imprisonment and trial of numerous Egyptian bloggers caused such a great stir and turned them into the very symbols of the revolution.

## **2.2 Examples**

On the previous pages we have tried to draw a general picture of crowdsourcing in its present form, and identify the elements which, broadly speaking, are common to all its applications. A closer look at a few successful cases of crowdsourcing will show more clearly how it works in specific cases and which traits it acquires in different contexts. These examples cover a wide spectrum, from open-source software, notably Linux, through Wikipedia and citizen journalism, to business applications and 'crowd-funding', i.e. crowd-sourced financing.

### **2.2.1 Linux**

The open-source software movement is one of the most conspicuous examples of the deep impact crowd-sourcing can make when it is supported by a well-organised and motivated community, and Linux, the open-source computer operating system, is without doubt one of the most impressive success stories in this respect.

Linux was created in 1991 by the Norwegian hacker Linus Torvalds as a free version of the Unix operating system. Torvalds publicly released the source code of his system and attached an on-line message asking for assistance, additions or comments. And, indeed, about half of the first users who downloaded the system, proposed improvements to it. In the meantime this has become standard practice. Over the past 20 years, thousands of programmers have contributed, fixing minor or major bugs and making the system ever more reliable and efficient.

Torvalds built on the model of Unix — which grew out of small discrete programs and later allowed hundreds of programmers to work together in a totally decentralised way on individual problem ,— as well as on Richard Stallman's fight against the software industry, which started at the beginning of the 1980s when, mainly as a result of the introduction of personal computers, big corporations were starting to seize the market and replace the original programmer culture, marked by competitive but also cooperative interactions among programmers, and open access to information.

Operating under Stallman's General Public Licence, Linux managed to guarantee that no single company can appropriate it; improvements can be introduced by the whole community and, whenever a problem arises, it remains there until somebody solves it. It may seem a somewhat awkward method, but, since people work on what they are interested in — and the efficiency of the operating systems they use is a case in point —, up to now this working method has proved efficient and has made Linux a major competitor of Microsoft.

Nowadays, it powers all kinds of electronic devices, and is chosen not only by private users and politically minded programmers, but even by institutions. For example, the Indian Government recently proposed to adopt Linux and open-source software in its e-governance projects.

Big corporations are starting to be attracted to this model too. Its efficiency has induced commercial companies like IBM, Microsoft and Symantec to acknowledge its success and

relent somewhat their insistence on keeping their source codes secret in order to take advantage of the opportunities offered by crowdsourcing. They have realised that what they risk losing by making their data accessible is more than offset by the value of the inputs and suggestions they get from expert users. In a nutshell, what attracts these companies is not the egalitarian and democratic outlook of the open-source movement, but the possibility it offers of tapping a huge capital of creativity and skills, thus improving efficiency and reducing costs.

Linux shows all the features which have been identified as characterising modern crowdsourcing: it is decentralised, it relies on the free involvement of users, and it is democratic. It has succeeded in triggering a virtuous circle, where the better and friendlier it becomes, the more people use it, and the more people use it and improve it, the better it becomes. All this makes it probably the most striking success of the open-source software movement, but it is by no means the only one.

The success of Linux has drawn attention to the open-source software model in general. In its wake, several platforms hosting open-source projects have burgeoned. A pioneering example is Sourceforge, which aims to 'create the leading resource for open source software development and distribution' thriving on community collaboration, and, according to their own data, provides tools to 3.4 million developers to create powerful software in over 324 000 projects.<sup>4</sup>

### **2.2.2 Wikipedia**

Wikipedia is another striking example of crowdsourcing, probably the one with the biggest impact on the daily lives of the largest number of people. In spite of the criticism it attracts, it has become an indispensable resource for millions of people, many of whom may not even be aware that what they are using is crowdsourcing. The name 'Wikipedia' is a portmanteau word of 'wiki' — a Hawaiian word meaning fast, which was adopted to designate a technology for creating websites collaboratively — and 'encyclopaedia'.

The website was launched following the limited success of the first on-line encyclopaedia, Nupedia, which was still designed along traditional lines with articles being written and formally reviewed by experts in the relevant fields. In 2001, Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger, the creators of Nupedia, decided to launch Wikipedia as a complementary site where the community could make suggestions and propose content to be fed into Nupedia. Experts were anything but enthralled, whereas the general public responded enthusiastically.

Wikipedia grew out of the same climate as Linux. Like its precursor Nupedia, it was created under Richard Stallman's GNU Free Documentation Licence, which allows users to copy, distribute and modify Wikipedia text.

Wikipedia was officially launched on 15 January 2001 as an English-language project offering a neutral point of view. Other language versions were added soon after, increasing from 18 at the end of 2001 to 161 by the end of 2004, to reach 283 versions today. Wikipedia currently contains some 20 million articles (of which over 8.3 million are in English), has an estimated 365 million readers worldwide and about 100 000 regular contributors, and is ranked 6<sup>th</sup> among the most popular websites in the US. It is peer reviewed, and the various language versions operate under separate administrative control, which allows them to modify their reviewing policy as they wish.

The organisation and working methods for contributors to Wikipedia are based entirely on wiki technology, which allows even a very large number of users to create and edit text on a single web page.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://sourceforge.net/about>.

Everything is peer-reviewed. Even policies and guidelines are written and revised by the Wikipedia community. All content, however, must comply with Wikipedia's five pillars:

- Wikipedia is an encyclopaedia.
- Wikipedia is written from a neutral point of view.
- Wikipedia is free content that everyone can edit, use, modify and distribute. (However, measures are taken to ensure that copyright laws are respected and that plagiarism is avoided. Since everything is under free licence, editors are not the owners of the articles, which can be freely edited, modified and redistributed).
- Editors should interact with each other in a respectful and civil manner (conflicts are discussed on the talk page and dispute resolution indications should be followed).
- Wikipedia has no fixed rules (the principles and spirit of Wikipedia's rules matter more than their literal wording) and sometimes improving Wikipedia requires making an exception to a rule (contributors are encouraged to be bold and not afraid of making mistakes: they can always rely on the community to repair them).<sup>5</sup>

In spite of its enormous success, which makes it a deep-rooted element of our life, it is also the object of harsh criticism. The arguments against Wikipedia are summarised very clearly in the question that Andrew Keen asks in his best-selling work *The cult of the amateur*:<sup>6</sup> Why should we consult Wikipedia, when we can have access to such prestigious and high-quality resources as, for example, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*?

Because of its open structure, Wikipedia cannot guarantee the reliability and validity of its content. However, according to a report published by the journal *Nature*<sup>7</sup> in 2005, Wikipedia comes close to the accuracy of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (a result which is contested by the latter). It is increasingly accepted as a reference tool at official, and even academic, level: an increasing number of researchers cite Wikipedia and it is mentioned even in legal textbooks and academic syllabi as a general source of reference. Many scholars admit using Wikipedia to look up definitions and descriptions of concepts, as well as encouraging students to use it as a starting point and for general information.<sup>8</sup> Wikipedia is highly valued because, although its content is not original, it presents multiple points of view and, above all, it is always up-to-date: major events are integrated into Wikipedia within hours, something no traditional encyclopaedia, no matter how high quality it is, will ever manage to achieve.

### 2.2.3 Citizen journalism

Rapid and efficient communications worldwide have become one of the pillars of our globalised world. Disseminating information in (almost) real time without hindrances and restrictions is the big challenge traditional media are not always able to take up successfully. In this context too, crowdsourcing has succeeded in filling some gaps. The development of and easy access to the Internet has had dramatic repercussions on journalism and the media as well.

Thanks to new technologies, bloggers from all over the world make their voices heard on the most diverse topics almost instantaneously. They generate an enormous mass of

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<sup>5</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five\\_pillars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Five_pillars).

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Keen. 2007. *The cult of the amateur*. New York: Doubleday.

<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:External\\_peer\\_review/Nature\\_December\\_2005](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:External_peer_review/Nature_December_2005).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g. Firat Soyulu, 'Academics' Views On and Uses of Wikipedia', in *Gnovis*, Volume IX, Issue II, Spring 2009, <http://gnovisjournal.org/2009/05/13/academics-views-and-uses-wikipedia/>.



information and images which flow quickly and freely, and which cannot be blocked by political powers, notably totalitarian regimes, in spite of their attempts to extend their censorship to the Internet. In the recent past, thanks mainly to the technology of smartphones and to very fast-reacting social media like Twitter, the coverage of protests and revolutions in totalitarian regimes has been much more comprehensive than it used to be, offering images and stories that the same regimes often manage to conceal from professional journalists. The immediacy of this information makes it more effective and open, with a stronger emotional impact on wider sections of the world population.

Thousands of blogs on the broadest range of topics have drawn attention to alternative information and allowed the crowd, made up of average citizens, protesters or supporters of different causes, to communicate and organise themselves through the Internet.

The very success of this channel of communication has, however, rapidly brought to light the need to structure it to some extent. A telling case is the site Global Voices, which was launched in 2005 as an experiment in new media and a multiplier to make blog entries 'usable' as a basis for news items.

As they state in the presentation of their site, 'millions of people are blogging, podcasting, and uploading photos, videos, and information across the globe, but unless you know where to look, it can be difficult to find respected and credible voices. Our international team of volunteer authors and part-time editors are active participants in the blogospheres they write about on Global Voices'.<sup>9</sup>

While the interest of the media is normally driven by economic interest, Global Voices mainly covers geographic areas and topics not connected to economic interests and therefore normally ignored by mainstream media. The underlying idea is to take advantage of the possibilities offered by Web 2.0 to foster inclusion and participation, and to help marginalised people, particularly from developing or outlying countries, or people living in areas where censorship exerts strong pressure, to be heard using citizen media.

Based on the assumption that 'in the next century, as countries increasingly trade more in information than hard goods, the definition of proximity changes from geographic to linguistic: two countries border one another if and only if they have a language they can use in common',<sup>10</sup> they also emphasise (as we will see in more detail later on) the role of translation to reach the widest possible number of potential contributors and readers.

The way the project is organised is quite different from traditional media, but similar to other crowdsourcing projects. Except for a small team of editors and technical staff working on a part-time basis, and being paid for their work, it relies on a large number of volunteers (over 500 bloggers and translators according to their own estimates), all operations are virtual and carried out on-line, and roles are much more flexible than in traditional media, with borders between the various tasks (editing, translating, localising) being somewhat blurred.

As they state on their website, the goals of Global Voices are to:

- call attention to citizens' media,
- facilitate the emergence of new voices,
- advocate for freedom of expression.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/about/>.

<sup>10</sup> Clay Shirky, 1999 [http://www.shirky.com/writings/language\\_networks.html](http://www.shirky.com/writings/language_networks.html).

Contributors blogging from regions and about topics ignored by traditional media are invited to contact the relevant regional editors to submit ideas or participate as translators or proof-readers.

The reliability and standard of the news they disseminate is ensured by the experience of regional editors, who check all the news they receive. Anonymous blogs are accepted in order to give everybody the possibility of speaking up, even people living in totalitarian countries for whom operating publicly would be too dangerous. Global Voices even proposes a guide to reduce the chances that the bloggers' identities are disclosed; at the same time, they encourage those bloggers to get in touch with the editors privately.

The case of Global Voices clearly brings to the fore the 'accretive' character of crowdsourcing (which adds to, but does not replace, traditional media). Its aim is not to displace mainstream media but rather to draw their attention, and as a consequence that of the general public, to issues which are normally out of their scope. The quality and relevance of Global Voices' action is shown by the acceptance Global Voices has gained among professionals and the collaboration they have managed to establish with them. The links to their blogs on the websites of established mainstream media witness their success in filling existing gaps and building bridges between user-generated content and professional journalism;— for example, there are links to the Italian version of Global Voices on the site of *La Stampa*, one of the most reputed Italian newspapers.

#### **2.2.4 Crowdsourcing for business**

All cases mentioned so far have shown how crowdsourcing has spread outside the business world, or rather as an alternative to paid activity. The open-source software movement strives to limit the power of big software companies, Wikipedia offers free knowledge to anyone having access to the Internet, and citizen journalism aims at drawing attention to communities and groups excluded or ignored by traditional media.

However, the potential for crowdsourcing in business and the interconnections between the two are enormous, and this is what most researchers currently focus on — some of them even identify crowdsourcing exclusively with its commercial strand, reserving the term 'open-source' to the other applications.

Successful examples can be found in very different areas, ranging from design to the solution of scientific problems, from marketing campaigns to financing micro-enterprises and start-ups.

An inspiring example of the solution of scientific or business problems — which is mentioned by Jeff Howe and often relayed in contributions on this topic — is InnoCentive, a company created in 2001 to tap talented scientists who, for various reasons, cannot make use of their skills and knowledge in traditional ways. InnoCentive defines itself as 'the open innovation and crowd-sourcing pioneer that enables organisations to solve their key problems by connecting them to diverse sources of innovation including employees, customers, partners, and the world's largest problem solving marketplace'.<sup>11</sup> They post scientific challenges on their site on behalf of companies, which in most cases have in-house research departments but address themselves to InnoCentive for the solution of problems they could not solve internally. Up to now, InnoCentive has solved in this way over 50% of the problems posted, through a community of millions of problem solvers working on a cloud-based technology platform. In this way they manage to deliver rapid solutions. The effectiveness of their problem-solving methodology has attracted both large enterprises and non-profit and government organisations, including NASA, nature.com, Procter & Gamble, Roche, Rockefeller Foundation, and The Economist. They offer the successful solvers small rewards for their efforts.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.innocentive.com/about-innocentive>.

What they have to offer amateur scientists, however, is not merely or mainly the possibility of earning some extra cash, but, as the solvers themselves state, above all the possibility of devoting time and energy to something they are passionate about, having fun and finding a useful outlet for their skills and knowledge.

What they have to offer their clients is profit (according to Howe, even if they reward the solvers, they earn from a successful solution about 20 times the fees they pay), rapid results, and the possibility of proposing a problem they are not able to solve in-house to a community of potential solvers comprising the most diverse profiles, which has proved a key to successful solutions. In Howe's words, 'one revealing MIT study into InnoCentive revealed that solvers were more successful when they had *less* experience in the relevant discipline. In other words, chemists were better suited to solving life biology problems, and vice versa. ... The untrained are also the untainted. Their greatest asset is a fresh set of eyes, which is simply a restatement of the truism that, with many eyes, all flaws become evident and easily corrected. But that concept was not always clear. It took a handful of renegade computer programmers to show just how powerful the play of large numbers could be' (p. 46).

It is probably difficult to pass a clear-cut judgment on InnoCentive or other similar platforms. Many point to the exploitation of cheap labour they allow. At InnoCentive, however, they stress the democratising force of their action. For them, nationality or qualifications play no role, merit and effectiveness being the only requirements for success.<sup>12</sup> Their clients are more than satisfied with the results: many clients praise this problem-solving model for its efficiency more than for the possibility it offers of saving money, while for others — e.g. universities and research centres — it is the only available solution, given the limited amount of funding they can count on.

As for the solvers, they stress how important it is for them to have the chance of doing some kind of research, regardless of the financial compensation on offer. When asked what motivates them to work for almost nothing, the amateur scientists mention above all the possibility of making their contribution and are thankful to InnoCentive for this unexpected opportunity, while none of them complain about feeling exploited. The desire to be involved in a project and contribute to its success is cited as the main reason for the success of crowdsourcing in all fields.

The sense of involvement and belonging is also what makes crowdsourcing successful as a marketing strategy. 'Participative marketing' is experiencing growing success as a strategy to ensure the loyalty of customers or clients, and to transform them from passive users into co-creators and active members of the community of fans of a specific product.

Pioneers among the companies which have created web platforms where surfers can submit their proposals for new products, new features for existing products, clips, slogans or packaging designs include big multinationals like Pepsi, one of the first to experiment with this method when they launched a campaign for the design of a new can. Other successful cases which have become a reference in this field are Danone, which has asked its users to vote on new flavours for one of its desserts, and Nespresso, which has allowed users to choose between different scenarios for their advertising campaigns. Another interesting example is IdeaStorm, the platform set up by Dell as a link with their user community and the main tool of the 'direct business model'. They designed this new model in the 1980s in order to listen to their customers and offer them what they actually need, as well as reduce prices by reducing the number of intermediaries. Another strategy devised by companies to promote customer loyalty is to allow them to personalise the product they are offered — the success obtained by

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<sup>12</sup> To guarantee this absolute 'democracy' InnoCentive has a policy of anonymity. The solvers do not know who asks for a certain solution and the clients do not know anything about the solvers until they have accepted their solutions.

Heineken in the Netherlands by offering their customers the possibility of personalising their can or bottle clearly shows the potential of this strategy.

In the field of marketing, crowdsourcing is increasingly being used to stage contests aimed at involving the community in decisions taken by the companies and creating a stronger link between the company (known as the 'seeker') and the people, notably the solvers.

This idea, however, is not restricted to commercial actions. Other organisations have had recourse to such contests in order to establish the same kind of emotional link with their public and generate a sense of belonging to the same community, while at the same time tapping into a much wider reservoir of skills and ideas. In 2011, the European Central Bank staged a contest to choose the design for a €2 commemorative coin to be issued by all Member States in 2012 to commemorate 10 years of euro banknotes and coins. The design competition was open to all citizens of the euro zone, and a professional jury selected 5 designs from among the proposals submitted. These five were put to a public web vote among citizens and residents of the euro area to choose the winning design.<sup>13</sup> This contest is an example of action taken by the European institutions to respond to widespread criticism of being far removed from and inaccessible to the people. Such initiatives should make the citizens feel closer to Europe, they should feel that they *are* the EU and can contribute to its growth and development — in short, passive citizens should be transformed into active ones.

The active consumer/user is indeed the pivotal element of every crowdsourcing initiative. And indeed this model is constantly expanding into new areas and functions. This drive is reflected in the language and the plethora of neologisms generated to describe particular types of crowdsourcing. Some of them may prove ephemeral, while others are probably here to stay because the concept they refer to is taking root, as is the case, for example, of crowdcasting, crowd-funding, and crowd-voting.

Crowdcasting, created from 'crowd' and 'broadcasting', is often used in connection with prediction markets, especially with reference to the private sector. Hewlett Packard, for example, has crowd-sourced sales forecasts of a range of their products, instead of entrusting them to their analysts as is the rule. Crowdcasting, however, can also refer to strategies to engage an audience and build a network of participants. In this sense it partially overlaps with crowd-voting or tele-voting. It is used in show business — though it is by no means limited to it. Crowd-voting is regularly used in TV contests, where the viewers can vote by SMS or electronically and their votes are then combined with those cast by professional juries to determine the winners. Other applications, however, should not be disregarded: a recent example in the field of marketing which shows very clearly the popularity of this strategy is the voting campaign launched by Toyota to crowd-source the plural nomenclature of its hybrid vehicle Prius, with 1.8 million votes cast over a 6-week period (the winning word was Prii).

Last but not least, crowd-funding is gaining ground in the non-profit sector, in particular to micro-finance humanitarian projects, but also in business (e.g. in the audiovisual sector).

A telling example of micro-funding through the crowd is Kiva. According to their own definition, Kiva is a 'non-profit organisation with a mission to connect people through lending to alleviate poverty. Leveraging the internet and a worldwide network of microfinance institutions, Kiva lets individuals lend as little as \$25 to help create opportunity around the world'. They work in order 'to provide loans to people without access to traditional banking systems'.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> It is worth noting, incidentally, that the winner, an Austrian citizen, is a professional mint designer.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.kiva.org/about>.

In his analysis of Kiva's action, Howe points out the similarities between Kiva and other crowdsourcing projects, regardless of their specific goal: 'Kiva applies the global connectivity of the Internet to make it even easier to harness spare capital and route it to those who need it most. Just as other forms of crowd-sourcing capitalise on our excess capacity to design new products, tweak a scientific formula, or rate the latest clips on a video-sharing site, crowd funding taps the collective pocketbook, allowing people to finance projects they believe in with just a few dollars here and there ... Kiva used the democratic nature of the Internet once again in creating a mechanism to guard against ... malfeasance: field partners are now rated based on past performances, allowing lenders to evaluate the risk level of working with them' (p. 249).

Kiva's success is demonstrated by the data about their activities published on their site. Since its creation in 2005, Kiva has attracted 688 551 lenders, allowed over \$283 million of loans, with a repayment rate of over 98%, reaching over 700 000 entrepreneurs, with an average amount of less than \$400.

Besides humanitarian aid, crowd-funding has proved promising in the arts. Through crowd-funding, artists can appeal directly to their consumers, who, being fans, tend to be more willing to support their musical groups or filmmakers, regardless of the profit involved. In this way, even independent and not yet established artists can bypass the often insurmountable obstacle represented by the big studios or labels, which previously dominated the market.

A successful example of crowd-funding in the arts is Sellaband. Launched in 2006, it presents itself as the site 'where fans invest in music'. In little less than 5 years, they have coordinated recording sessions for over 80 artists and have gathered over \$4 million to be invested in independent bands. Their pioneering approach appeals both to the artists and to the fans that support them.

Sellaband is a profit-making enterprise. A 'success fee' (a percentage of the total amount raised) is deducted from the artists' revenues. This, however, is more than compensated by the possibility artists get of being funded, while working in complete freedom and retaining ownership of their works and control over their careers. To fans, Sellaband offers the possibility of giving concrete support to the groups they love and participating in their success and also, in some cases, in the profits. Supporters — 'believers' in Sellaband terminology — can contribute and retrieve their money until the funding goal fixed by the artists is reached. After that, they cannot withdraw their money, but are rewarded with downloads and goodies offered by the artists (who may also, but are not obliged to, share their profits with them).

This fund-raising model is increasingly applied in other sectors as well. New companies are being set up which allow web surfers to invest in innovative start-ups and, if they are successful, be rewarded for believing in new ideas. At the same time, they offer entrepreneurs with a brilliant idea but no or little money their only chance to raise the funds they need to carry out their projects.

As with other crowdsourcing projects, the aim of these platforms is to create opportunities to match ideas and funds, no matter where they are located and no matter how substantial individual contributions are — even very low investments can make the difference once they are put together. Once again, the result should be to widen the reservoir of potential funders, who can choose the projects they believe in, and allow innovative ideas to be implemented, which would not be fit for funding by traditional financing institutions.

### **2.3 *Is all that glitters gold?***

The concept of 'crowdsourcing' is spreading to a rapidly growing range of sectors, acquiring new nuances in the process: the idea of involving the 'crowd' or the community to make choices, create new products, produce information, etc. is definitely fashionable.

No matter what goal it is used for, its supporters agree on a number of common features which would make it a major breakthrough in today's world:

- Crowdsourcing is radically transforming the profile of 'consumers', and more generally 'users'. It turns them into active members of a community who can contribute to the development of products they like or to the advancement of ideas they believe in, and find their main reward precisely in this feeling of belonging to a community and making their contribution. Even when a financial reward is offered and welcomed, it is not the main driver.
- Crowdsourcing raises and emphasises the importance of commitment within communities, showing that individuals do not always behave merely according to self-interested patterns, as we might expect.
- Crowdsourcing is a powerful democratising agent. It makes 'amateurism' fashionable again and offers everybody the possibility of cultivating their interests and sharing what they know with others, even if they are not specialists or professionals, based exclusively on merit. In this way it taps into a huge potential, which would not be reachable otherwise.
- Crowdsourcing changes the organisation of labour. Thanks to the Internet, it allows unprecedented decentralisation, reaching the right people no matter where they are located. By breaking up each activity or problem to be solved into small chunks, it mobilises energies and ideas which would be lost if the requirements were heavier.

Howe, one of the first and staunchest supporters of crowd-sourcing, goes as far as stating that 'crowd-sourcing paints a flattering portrait of the human race. We are more intelligent, more creative, and more talented than we tend to give ourselves credit for. ... Crowdsourcing, with its uncanny tendency to draw gifted people from the most unlikely nooks and crannies, is like an immense talent-finding mechanism. ... crowd-sourcing also cultivates and nurtures that talent. In this way, crowd-sourcing adds to our culture's general store of intellectual capital' (p. 16).

However, is all that glitters really gold? Crowdsourcing is a revolutionary model and, like all revolutions, it raises concerns and claims casualties. Indeed, the whole-hearted enthusiasm which shines through the testimonies mentioned so far is not shared by everybody. Many point to the risks inherent in this form of work and urge not to underestimate them.

A radical rejection of this approach has been voiced by Andrew Keen in his book *The cult of the amateur*, in which he calls into question the reliability and value of crowd-sourced work, compared to work carried out by skilled and knowledgeable professionals. Even among those who acknowledge the potential of crowdsourcing, many point out open issues which need careful consideration.

The lack of accountability is often emphasised as a serious draw-back of crowdsourcing compared to traditional methods. Since everything occurs through the web, it is sometimes difficult to trace the sources of, for example, a piece of information and obtain

guarantees about their reliability and identity, or even about their existence. As we have seen, anonymity may serve to protect sources and induce them to disclose information which would otherwise not be shared, but it can also be used for less noble purposes, like divulging false information in order to bias public opinion, and in extreme cases the risk of actual sabotage cannot be entirely ruled out.

When it comes to crowdsourcing for commercial purposes, other concerns are voiced regarding the labour market, and the new organisation of labour it entails. As we have seen, crowdsourcers mainly work for passion, but this may lead them to work extremely long hours, dangerously blurring the distinction between leisure and work, with negative impacts on their non-work life.

Furthermore, crowdsourcers voluntarily offer their work and are happy with the recognition they get from it. However, they may not be aware that for companies this can become an easy way to save money and secure valuable work at very low rates. As a result, specific markets are disrupted and long-established and experienced professionals are made redundant and deprived of their source of income. Crowdsourcers can afford to release for free the products of their hobbies because they do not depend on such activities for a living, which is not the case for professionals.

In his article 'Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving', Daren Brabham effectively highlights the ambivalence inherent in crowdsourcing. He states that 'proportionately, the amount of money paid to the crowd for high quality labor relative to the amount that labor is worth in the market resembles a slave economy. Similar to the ways commercial video game developers use 'modders' to develop new games, crowd-sourcing companies hope to use the crowd for their own profits. ... this process manages to harness a skilled labour force for little or no initial cost and represents an emerging form of labour exploitation on the Internet'.<sup>15</sup> He continues maintaining that 'crowdsourcing can be quite empowering indeed, a hopeful reunion of worker and product in a post-industrial economy of increasing alienation of labor ... crowd-sourcing necessarily involves casualties, as any shift in production will. ... On the micro-level, crowd-sourcing is ruining careers. On the macro-level, though, crowd-sourcing is reconnecting workers with their work and taming the giants of big business by reviving the importance of the consumer in the design process' (p. 84).

The claimed 'democratisation' of crowdsourcing also requires some qualification. In practice, crowdsourcing may suffer, to use Brabham's words, from 'lack of diversity of opinion' and 'lack of diverse identity'. Though, in theory, easy access to the internet offers everybody the possibility of participating in this phenomenon, the reality is different. The digital divide is a fact and it should be taken into account. Brabham describes the typical web user as 'white, middle- or upper-class, English speaking, higher educated, and with high-speed connections. Moreover, the most productive individuals in the crowd are likely to be young in age' (p. 86). As a consequence, 'crowd-sourcing applications that do succeed through the might of a homogenous crowd are reproducing the aesthetic and values of white, straight, middle-class men'. As he pleads, 'a constant eye on who is missing from the crowd must remain' (p. 87).

Crowdsourcing is a relatively new model which is imposing or has already imposed itself in many contexts: that we must accept. Whether we like it or not, it is certainly here to stay. We can share, at least to a certain extent, the enthusiasm of its supporters about the changes it brings about in a growing number of fields, the commitment it raises, its efficiency in matching tasks and skills, and the opportunities it offers users to exploit their skills and competences, to devote their spare time to their interests and get recognition and also some financial reward, while creating a sense of community with

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<sup>15</sup> Daren C. Brabham. 2008. 'Crowdsourcing as a Model for Problem Solving', in *Convergence: the International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*. Volume 14(1), p. 83.

like-minded people with whom they can have stimulating and meaningful exchanges. However, there are caveats which justify Brabham's words that 'we should remain critical of the model for what it might do to people and it may reinstitute long-standing mechanisms of oppression through new discourses' (p. 87).



## 3 CROWDSOURCING TRANSLATION

### 3.1 *Examples of crowdsourced translation*

As we have seen, crowdsourcing is developing fast and expanding to a rapidly growing number of areas, which also include translation where it has lately become a hot topic. Though this process is less striking in translation than in other fields, the changes it is bringing about are as radical, and reflect to a large extent the features identified for crowdsourcing in general.

This evolution adds to the radical changes that are affecting the way the profession is perceived, and even more, the way it will be performed in the future. While crowdsourcing is blurring the boundaries between amateurism and paid work, and between working and leisure time, increasingly powerful and well-performing technological tools — machine translation systems and other CAT tools — are appearing. All these changes are often frowned upon as jeopardising the very survival of the translation profession. On the other hand, the demand for translation and language services in general is exploding and the resources available cannot keep up with it. These new tools, together with the other changes and developments connected to the new Internet culture, therefore, appear as the only viable option to help translators cope with the pressure they are to work under. The new developments will not sweep away translators, but it is a fact that they will impose far-reaching adaptations in the way the profession is conceived and performed.

Crowdsourced, amateur, collaborative, volunteer translation — the most widely used labels for this new phenomenon — shows, broadly speaking, the same features and objectives already mentioned concerning crowdsourcing in general: the idea of a piece of work carried out collaboratively by an enthusiastic community of users, willing to devote their time and energy to help other members of their community — whatever it is — to profit from products they would be excluded from for linguistic reasons. Money not being the main motive for participation in these projects, rewards of other kinds are expected, like recognition, awareness of being an active part of a well-integrated community, doing something useful for the benefit of others, or fostering democracy and inclusion by channelling the surfeit of skills and competences which would otherwise remain unused.

At the same time, the criticism and concerns which are raised about crowdsourcing in general also apply in the case of translation. Worries are voiced both as concerns the profession and the status of professional translators, on the one hand, and the quality of the work done in this way, on the other one. The fear is that, should the practice of crowdsourcing gain ground, serious disruptions on the market of translation should be expected with a significant number of professional translators being out of work and deprived of their main source of income. In addition, this trend might further weaken the status of the profession and reinforce the misperception that translation does not require specific skills and competences, but can be performed by anybody having even a scant knowledge of the languages involved. In this way, besides stifling the market, crowdsourcing would further reduce the negotiating power of professional translators and their prospects of getting fair reward and recognition for their work. Secondly, this new, and to a certain extent still untested, method raises doubts concerning the standard of the output: how can, for example, quality and confidentiality be ensured when authorship becomes a vague concept and traceability is difficult to enforce?

In spite of these caveats, however, crowdsourcing in translation is well established and keeps expanding. It has become a reality which raises great interest, and its vitality and potential cannot be underestimated. In order to harness and steer it to the advantage of the whole translation community and of the users of translation as well, a thorough

debate on the impact of this new phenomenon is necessary, which encompasses both issues connected with the actual practice of translation and its theoretical implications, but also with the perceptions and attitudes of the public towards this discipline.

The areas where crowdsourced translation is used are increasing at a steady pace, even though some of them appear more promising and more attractive for crowdsourcers than others. The audiovisual sector, where fansubbing (from 'fan' and 'subtitling') has become a well-defined practice with specific rules and codes, is a case in point. Other interesting examples are crowdsourced journalism and the non-profit sector. As concerns the former, crowdsourcing is not used only to gather information, but also to translate them in order to spread noteworthy content among as large an audience as possible. In the non-profit sector a similar approach is applied, whereby crowdsourcing is used to collect information and funds, but also, through translation, to raise awareness about projects and attract volunteers and donors.

In other cases, where the limit between non-profit and commercial applications is less clear-cut, reactions to projects of collaborative translation are mixed and the allegation of exploiting free labour to make profit is constantly looming, as is shown by the harsh response to the attempt by the professional network LinkedIn to have their interface translated by professional translators who were also members of the network.<sup>16</sup> LinkedIn is probably the most striking failure story in this area, which should be carefully taken into account when designing a crowdsourcing project. It reflects very well the concerns of professional translators regarding the exploitation of their work for commercial purposes, on the one hand, and the non-recognition of their efforts and of their professional status, on the other one.

An important lesson to be learned from this experience is that it is important to inject the right motivation in the crowd, while at the same time proposing something they can find attractive and interesting, which is particularly evident when comparing commercial enterprises and non-profit initiatives. This is what emerges most clearly when comparing LinkedIn's experience with successful projects of crowdsourcing — e.g. projects in the non-profit sector or in borderline areas like Symantec's crowdsourcing translation of freely released products (see Fred Hollowood's interview attached here below). As a spur for amateur translators to embark on such efforts, all these experiences rely on high motivation and on the sense of belonging to a community which you contribute to shape, of opening up new horizons to others sharing the same tastes and interests, and of helping one's monoglot families and friends profit from interesting products from which they would be excluded if they were available only in English.<sup>17</sup>

The encouraging results obtained by most experiences of crowdsourcing seem to have set into motion a sort of snowball effect, whereby this approach is no longer confined to entirely spontaneous initiatives, like fansubbing, but is slowly penetrating more official and structured spheres as well.

A more detailed analysis of various applications of crowdsourcing to translation will help draw some, at least, preliminary conclusions about this new phenomenon and how it is impacting on and transforming the translation profession and, at the same time, influencing the attitude toward translation in general.

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<sup>16</sup> Following the example of Facebook, in June 2009 LinkedIn launched a survey among its translator members asking whether they considered volunteering to translate the site into other languages and which incentives they would prefer, proposing five non-monetary choices. The reactions were very negative and a translator started a group on LinkedIn itself, called 'Translators against Crowdsourcing by commercial business', which gathered very rapidly over 450 members.

<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that — as Hollowood states — in the case of Symantec the results were so promising as to induce this company to apply the same strategy for commercial products as well.

### 3.1.1 Social media

When thinking of social media, popular projects like Facebook, Twitter or Google immediately come to mind. They are the most evident products of the Web 2.0 — i.e. collaborative and participatory Web applications — and it is therefore only too natural that they should make massive use of, among other things, crowdsourcing. Indeed, they have all used crowdsourcing to localise and make their sites as multilingual as possible.

Facebook, in particular, has developed a very efficient and advanced strategy to get the site translated, exploiting the possibilities offered by the new technologies. They use crowdsourcing for the translation of their metadata (for the translation of posts or other public material loaded by the members of Facebook, they propose machine translation, notably through the translation tool of Microsoft Bing). To this purpose they have developed a specific page where everybody can register and propose translations or revisions of the entries they choose. A forum for discussion is also provided where the various solutions are discussed, compared and voted upon by the participants. The objective is to improve these translations and guarantee a high quality standard through peer-reviewing; indeed the result is usually regarded as satisfactory. Thanks to this method, Facebook can boast over 60 linguistic versions, including less-spoken languages, which would not be feasible through machine translation due to lack of adequate corpora.

Now Facebook has moved a step beyond. In 2011, a new in-line application was launched, based on the interaction between machine translation and crowdsourcing — which is largely regarded as the future of translation. This new application offers the possibility of translating comments on public pages into the language marked as native in the user's profile. The text is machine-translated and can then be improved and revised by the user. When the translation of a comment is requested, a pop-up window opens where the user is asked to improve the text, if necessary. If the suggested translation gets enough positive votes from other users, it replaces the Bing translation.

When Facebook launched the request for the French translation of its site, the response was so enthusiastic that in 24 hours the job was done. They were successful twice, in that they got the work done, but also because they strengthened the link with their users and increased their loyalty, involvement and pride for something they had contributed to, something they were not mere users of, but partners: 'In January 2008, we introduced the Translations application, effectively turning the translation process over to our users — the people who understood Facebook and their languages best. We were blown away by its success. The site was translated into Spanish in two weeks and French followed soon after and was translated in just 24 hours. Now, less than two years after introducing the app, Facebook is available in more than 65 languages, all translated by our users using the Translations application'.<sup>18</sup>

Twitter started its language crowdsourcing project in 2009 and in 2011 decided to expand it and open a new Twitter Translation Center, building on the results obtained. Translation crowdsourcing has by now become their standard approach, aimed to localise more features and increase the linguistic offer, with plans to extend it to Russian, Turkish and Indonesian.

Google too has set up its own translation project, Google Translator Toolkit, which was launched in 2009 and proposed translation from English into 47 languages; today it can process translations from and into 345 languages. It allows users to edit and revise translations automatically generated by Google Translate, and also to work collaboratively inviting other users to edit or view one's translations.

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<sup>18</sup> <https://developers.facebook.com/blog/post/308/>.

The success obtained by the Translations application of Facebook's, but also by Twitter's and Google's projects, is a result and at the same time a proof of the power of a well-motivated and efficiently managed community. For Facebook users, this is an opportunity to share something with others, to improve a tool they love, and feel like active developers instead of passive consumers — 'prosumers' with the neologism created to refer to the new users of the Web 2.0 who are also active creators of the product they use —, while helping people who share their interest and attitudes but cannot rely on the same competences.

### **3.1.2 Information and non-profit sector**

Similar drivers are at the basis of the policy of platforms like Global Voices or TED conferences, in the field of citizen journalism and politics, and Kiva as concerns the humanitarian sector, which rely on the organised help of volunteers to translate pieces of news, speeches or announcements originally delivered in English.

As concerns Global Voices, their policy and objectives, as well as their overall working methods, have already been mentioned. Translation is part of this general strategy aimed at spreading and sharing information about groups neglected by mainstream media, while at the same time helping excluded groups to make themselves heard and be involved in what goes on in the world at large.

To attain these aims, translation — which for them covers and overlaps with localisation and editing — is recognised as a fundamental tool. Thanks to volunteer translators/proofreaders, the stories on Global Voices can be disseminated in multiple languages, including lesser spoken ones like Aymara, Macedonian or Serbian. Interested people are invited to join or even start a new website, if their language is missing from the list of already covered languages.

The translations are managed through the Lingua translation project, which, as stated on their website, 'amplifies Global Voices stories in languages other than English with the help of volunteer translators. It opens the line of communication with non-English speaking bloggers and readers of Global Voices by translating content into other languages'.<sup>19</sup>

This approach shows their awareness about the importance of multilingualism. Even though English is the basic language since most of their posts are originally created in that language, they acknowledge that it is not enough. To foster the diffusion of their material they need translation. Furthermore, as the project's success increases and its scope widens, the site grows really multilingual: besides news created in English and translated into other languages, it now publishes also a growing number of posts originally drafted in Spanish, Portuguese, Russian and French and then translated into English.

The Lingua project shows all features already identified for crowdsourcing: it relies on the work of volunteers, takes into account and is tailored to their constraints, notably in terms of time — deadlines are flexible and no minimum commitment is required. This, however, does not mean that the issue of quality is neglected: the sites in the various languages can choose their own strategy to evaluate new volunteers — in some cases they have to pass a test, in other there is a probation period, but in most of them they simply join. In all cases, however, quality control is ensured through the work of experienced editors and supervisors.

Through a careful management of their project, crowdsourcing offers Global Voices the possibility of profiting from the pluses of human translation. As stated on the site itself,

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<sup>19</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/lingua/>.

human crowdsourced translation is privileged over raw machine translation on the ground that ‘translation machines are great tools to give you a sense of what a webpage is about and can be very helpful indeed if you just need instant access to web content. However, it is not the most recommendable tool for those who really want to deepen their understanding of the world, learn about the beauty of other cultures and would like to understand the nuances of a different language, not to mention that these translation tools are not available in some languages, such as Bangla or Aymara. We prefer to offer our readers a translation we did with love!’<sup>20</sup>

As we see from this declaration, at Global Voices crowdsourcing translation does not mean sending something into the cyberspace and waiting for it to come back worded in a different language. Quite the opposite. It is a well structured exercise, where each contributor has a specific role, like a well-oiled machine. For a non-profit site it is the only way to offer multilingual material, but everything is done to ensure quality and the need to match the requirement of the platform with what potential contributors can offer without renouncing quality. That crowdsourcing does not mean a casual and uncontrolled exercise is further shown by the fact that the Lingua project offers opportunities for traineeships for students in translation or modern languages.

Along the same lines as Global Voices, TED has set up a project specifically devoted to translation, the Open Translation Project. TED is not, strictly speaking, citizen journalism, but shows common features with it. It is a non-profit organisation and works to raise a debate about a wide palette of topics of relevance for today’s world and spread independent ideas. It defines itself as ‘non-profit devoted to Ideas Worth Spreading’. It started in 1984 as a conference bringing together people from technology, entertainment and design. Since then, it has broadened its scope to include other initiatives, including the TED Open Translation Project. Its objective is ‘to bring TEDTalks beyond the English-speaking world by offering subtitles, timed-coded transcripts and the ability for any talk to be translated by volunteers worldwide’<sup>21</sup> and made available for free well beyond the English-speaking world. The project was launched with 300 translations, 40 languages and 200 volunteer translators; after one year, more than 21 000 translations had been completed by a community consisting of thousands of members. The project greatly enhances the accessibility of the talks — for the hearing-impaired, for those who speak English as a second language, for search engines (the full transcripts can be indexed), and of course for the vast audience of non-English speakers worldwide.

As has happened in the case of Global Voices, as the scope and amount of material available on the site grows, so does the wish to further increase the diffusion of their contents and, as a consequence, the awareness of the importance of multilingualism to make these ‘ideas worth spreading’ available to a wider and more diversified public. Today, thanks also to its translation project, TED is best thought of as a global community, welcoming people from every discipline and culture who seek a deeper understanding of the world.

The success of crowdsourcing projects in the field of the media is starting to draw the attention of major mainstream media as well, like The Economist — which, together with other prominent English-speaking publications, has some of its contents translated into Mandarin in this way<sup>22</sup> — or NewsHour,<sup>23</sup> a major US TV news programme. At the end of January 2012. NewsHour asked its viewers and social media followers to translate President Obama’s State of the Union Address relying on a free tool used to translate videos on the Web.<sup>24</sup> The call was launched the day after the speech was delivered and got an enthusiastic response: in 24 hours the programme got eight full translations and

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<sup>20</sup> <http://globalvoicesonline.org/lingua/lingua-volunteer-faq/#Q3>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.ted.com/pages/287>.

<sup>22</sup> <http://ecocn.org/bbs>.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/>.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2012/01/translating-the-state-of-the-union-with-your-help.html>.

partial translations in several other languages, including Korean, Arabic, Chinese and Esperanto. This effort was also meant as a test on the feasibility of crowdsourcing the translation of videos covering major events. Thanks to its success, NewsHour now plans to cover the whole election season in this way and to extend it also beyond elections coverage. They see it as the beginning of a new phase. As Hari Sreenivasan, PBS NewsHour correspondent said, 'it gives viewers an opportunity to be part of spreading content to more people, and gives public media organisations a way to engage with their communities in a deep and ongoing way'.<sup>25</sup>

In the non-profit sphere, The Rosetta Foundation and Kiva deserve a special mention. The Rosetta Foundation was launched in 2009 with the mission to 'relieve poverty, support healthcare, develop education and promote justice through access to information and knowledge across the languages of the world'. Based on the assumption that access to information is a fundamental human right and that often the problem is not that information does not exist but it does not exist in the language of the recipients, they encourage translators, both professionals and people interested in translation in general, to volunteer. Volunteers are asked to translate materials of other not-for-profit organisations or NGOs in order to 'provide equal access to information across languages, independent of economic or market considerations, including localisation and translation companies, technology developers, not-for-profit and non-governmental organisations'.<sup>26</sup>

As concerns Kiva, besides its success in crowdsourcing microfinance, it has also developed a well-structured and efficient translation project,<sup>27</sup> through which they invite interested and motivated people to work and help spread the stories for which Kiva seeks support. More precisely, they seek for collaborators to edit, translate, and thoroughly review loan profiles<sup>28</sup> from around the world into English (the language of their site) to ensure that each profile is understandable to lenders and complies with Kiva's policies. At present there are volunteer teams for translation from French, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. Differently from other translation crowdsourcing projects (which involve all those who are willing to cooperate and then adapt the system to take into account their preferences and availabilities and to ensure satisfactory quality standards), Kiva imposes considerable constraints on volunteers, as concerns both their qualifications and time requirements. They offer flexibility in that volunteers can choose where and when to work, but they cannot choose the profile they want to translate (they have to stick to the order of priority based on when the profiles have been received), have to pass a test to demonstrate their native or near-native English competence and high-level proficiency in a foreign language, possibly be able to demonstrate translation experience or studies, be familiar with the required technological tools and commit to a minimum of 2 hours per week for a minimum of 6 months. In spite of all these constraints, Kiva has managed to involve about 300 translators whose only reward is the chance to use their language skills to help create opportunities around the world.

The success of Kiva with professional translators (since they are their preferred target) shows clearly that crowdsourcing and non-profit are not restricted to amateurs, but can, and often do, involve professionals. The issue is not so much contrasting professionals and amateurs or profit and non-profit, but rather setting the right objectives and raising awareness and motivation. Professional translators, who felt exploited by LinkedIn's proposal and refused to give away their work for free to a commercial enterprise, prove willing to work without compensation and under rather strict constraints when it is for a worthy cause they believe in and where they feel that their work can make the difference.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.poynter.org/latest-news/top-stories/160702/president-obama-state-of-the-union-translated-pbs-news-hour/>.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.therosettafoundation.org/index.php/en/ourmission>.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.kiva.org/about/translationprogram>.

<sup>28</sup> Profiles provide a brief overview of the entrepreneur's background and their microloan use.

### 3.1.3 Audiovisual

The audiovisual sector is another area which has proved very open to innovation, including methods and technologies allowing for collaborative contribution, to such an extent that fansubbing, i.e. collaborative subtitling, is defined as ‘the most important manifestation of fan translation’.<sup>29</sup>

More than in the examples of crowdsourcing we have looked at so far, fansubbing is a case of 100% collaborative work. The previous examples can be defined as forms of ‘managed’ crowdsourcing, in that the project is inspired by an identifiable entity that makes an appeal to the crowd for their translation needs. Even when the whole work, from translation to revision and editing, is carried out by the crowd, the originators of the work both retain control over the translations and the content to be translated, and set requirements their collaborators have to fulfil. In this sense, to a certain extent, these projects still follow a top-down model. In the communities of fansubbers, on the contrary, the crowd is entirely in charge — from the choice of the material to be translated to the organisation of the work and the management of the technical aspects, down to the revision and the quality control. Every task is carried out according to a clear allocation of roles and functions and according to a well-structured plan, but without any external control. The only form of control is peer-review. It sprouts directly from the ‘crowd’ for the ‘crowd’ — in this case the fans — without any external top-down input.

Fansubs started as fan-produced subtitled versions of anime, Japanese animation films, in the 1980s and developed mainly in the mid 1990s thanks to the advent of cheap computer software and the availability on Internet of free subtitling equipment. The objective of the first fansubbers was to provide fellow fans worldwide access to anime, when this genre was starting to enjoy strong appreciation by a growing number of fans in the West but was hardly available outside Japan and in languages other than Japanese.

Functioning as a real community cemented by a common passion, the members with some knowledge of Japanese did the subtitling to help the others enjoy the products they all loved and ‘provide fellow fans worldwide with the fullest and most authentic experience of anime action and the Japanese culture which embeds it. Unsurprisingly, some of the subtitling strategies developed for this purpose are at many removes from their mainstream counterparts’.<sup>30</sup>

The technology used in the initial stage of fansubbing, based on tapes, was rather cumbersome and the result was of low quality. Thanks to the advent of the new technological development, however, fansubbing has become a viable alternative to commercial releases.

As this method has become more efficient and popular, it has been adopted for series others than anime, mainly to diffuse American TV series in non-English speaking countries. The first striking case has been the US series *Lost* which has paved the way for further experiments in this area. Its first season went on air in the United States in 2004 and continued for six seasons; as a result of its success, a dedicated fan community emerged both in the US and abroad. Outside the US the episodes were released either dubbed or subtitled with considerable delay, which induced international fans, eager for ever more episodes, to look for them on the net as soon as they were broadcast in the US. The original version, however, was not accessible to large sectors of the international public who did not know English or not well enough to fully appreciate the dialogues. It is against this backdrop that groups of fans, profiting from easily accessible open-source

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<sup>29</sup> Jorge Díaz Cintas, Pablo Muñoz Sánchez. ‘Fansubs: Audiovisual Translation in an Amateur Environment’, in *Jostrans. The Journal of Specialised Translation*. 7/2006, Issue 6, pp. 37-52.

<sup>30</sup> Luis Pérez Gonzáles, ‘Fansubbing Anime: Insights into the ‘Butterfly Effect’ of Globalisation on Audiovisual Translation’, in *Perspectives: Studies in Translatology*, Vol. 14, N. 4, 2006, pp. 260-277.

software, started to organise themselves and upload files with the subtitles of new episodes as fast as the day after they were broadcast in the US.

Fansubbing is a borderline activity, constantly on the verge of falling into illegality. With González' words, 'fansubbed products have always been a technically illegal activity on which copyright holders have consistently cast a blind eye. But despite fansubbers not holding the copyright to the products they choose to translate, the volume of anime released by fansubbing groups and the number of viewers continue to rise steadily in size with increasingly easier and affordable access to technology that characterises the new audiovisual scene'.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of the initial subtitling of anime, fansubbers were not competing with commercial enterprises because they offered something which was not available through other channels and they exchanged it for free. Indeed, it was tacitly acknowledged that this practice had a positive impact on promoting these series, some of which, as a result of this success, were subsequently broadcast outside Japan through commercial channels. Copyright holders, therefore, accepted fansubbers and these latter stuck to the general rule of stopping the distribution on the Internet once a commercial version became available. This tacit agreement is no longer so well accepted by companies, as this practice is growing and now includes other languages and genres. In spite of this, however, the popularity of fansubs continues to grow.

Besides offering products not available otherwise, fansubbing, which is carried out by fans who know the series in question inside out, fulfils different needs, often not taken into consideration by professional subtitles. For this reason, even when their favourite programmes are commercially available, many fansubbers feel that a non-commercial version is still necessary to better satisfy the expectations of fan communities. Especially when dealing with a distant culture like the Japanese one, they aim at offering the audience — which is very interested in the series but also in its cultural context — tools to fully understand the source text, not only linguistically but also culturally. Fansubbing tends therefore to endorse and even exhibit the cultural 'otherness' or idiosyncrasies of the original product and rejects the tendency of commercial subtitling/dubbing to 'normalise' it. As González remarks concerning the anime, 'the fans' wish to enjoy the essence of anime was [...] articulated in terms of their right to experience the cultural 'otherness' underlying the anime films, a development which some specialists have described as a form of resistance to Western popular culture'.<sup>32</sup>

For this reason, fansubs tend to be as faithful to the original text as possible and even keep some of its idiosyncrasies. In order to preserve certain cultural references, they add notes and comments, and to convey further nuances of the text, they use tricks like combining several colours or different positions or movements of the text. These conventions, which make the reading quite challenging, are not normally accepted by professional subtitling which, according to the established approach, should be as invisible to the viewers as possible.

Now that fansubbing has become a rather widespread phenomenon, well beyond the translation of anime and more and more used for popular US TV series, there are additional reasons for its success, even when the commercially translated version exists. Besides being more faithful, in countries like for example Italy and Spain where dubbing is the standard practice and subtitled versions are not commercially available only fansubs cater for the tastes of fans, who privilege the original version with subtitles in order to hear the real voices of their heroes and get the feeling and rhythm of the original language. Secondly, it is popular in fan communities because it makes subtitling available more rapidly than mainstream channels, and allows the viewers who do not

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 263.



know the original language to follow the latest episodes of their favourite series immediately after their first release in the United States, while they should wait months or even years for the commercial release.

In some cases, the demand for and success of fansubbed versions of cult TV series is the result of a conflict between the fan community and the distributing company, when the low quality and superficial rendering of the commercial version does not come up to the expectations of the fans and their knowledge of the specific universe of the series. A striking example of the success of fans in influencing copyright holding companies is the Italian version of the US TV series *The Big Bang Theory*. It is not one of the most popular ones in terms of the size of its audience, but it is a niche product, with very specific features, followed not so much by casual viewers as by a community of selected fans who, as a rule, are real experts about everything concerning the series and share the same tastes and culture as its protagonists.<sup>33</sup> This puts them in a position to appreciate all the references and peculiarities of the characters' speech, precisely what is lost in the Italian version where the dubbing tends to simplify and streamline the dialogues and the cultural and textual references — even when a precise equivalent is possible — thus destroying the puns and missing the flavour and the comic effects of the original. In this specific case, besides producing a fansubbed version, the fans reacted so strongly through their blogs, forums and fansites, even threatening to boycott the commercial version, that they managed to induce the Italian copyright holder to choose a new dubbing team, more faithful to the source language text and more respectful of the original spirit. This case shows the possible interactions and cross-fertilisations between the two fields. Indeed professional dubbers and subtitlers already admit visiting communities of online fandoms to get information about the style and context of the series they are working on, the universe of the characters and hidden quotations.

Another aspect to be highlighted in the activity of fansubbers, from which input can be taken for the translation profession in general, is the way they organise their work. Not doing it professionally does not mean that they do not work in a serious and professional way. In fact, in the groups of fansubbers tasks are precisely allocated, from those in charge of technical aspects to translators, revisers and editors who have the final responsibility of ensuring quality and putting the files online. The individual competences and expertise are recognised and a well-defined hierarchy is spontaneously acknowledged so that the decisions of the more experienced members prevail. As González points out, 'contrary to the norm in the mainstream film and television industries, anime fans interact within their Internet-based networks in their uniquely multifarious capacity as patrons, producers, distributors and viewers of the subtitled product'.<sup>34</sup> This way of working collaboratively and the strong motivation prove extremely efficient and effective, to the point that, when a new episode is broadcast in the US, the morning after it is already online in Europe subtitled in the local language.

Finally, the new view of consumers as active agents in shaping the product is particularly powerful in fansubbing, as shows the controversy over the dubbing of *The Big Bang Theory* into Italian. The fans reject the role of passive consumers. Being confident about the contribution they can make, they demand the right to make their wishes heard and get a product which reflects such wishes, instead of merely being the result of the industry's choices. They feel that they have the right to have their say on the series they love and know so well, often better than the professionals paid to do the work. In this way they contribute to shape the new consumer, the 'prosumer', and blur the boundary between producer and consumer in favour of a collaborative method based on a circular flow of different skills and profiles and the interaction among them.

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<sup>33</sup> The main characters of *The Big Bang Theory* are two roommates who work as physicists at the California Institute of Technology (Caltech), and a blonde waitress and aspiring actress who lives across the hall. The geekiness and intellect of the guys is contrasted for comic effect with the girl's social skills and common sense.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

### 3.1.4 Other applications

The areas examined so far are probably those where crowdsourcing is more advanced and its impact stronger. New applications of crowdsourcing somehow connected with translation and languages; however, more are springing up all the time. Some of them look quite promising, while others are probably bound to fade away rapidly, but can, nevertheless, pave the way for further, less transient developments.

Though still very limited, there are experiments even in the crowdsourcing of literary translation, notably in China, where the huge demand for the translation of bestsellers can hardly be matched by the resources available: Yeeyan, a collaborative translation website, posted the prologue and first two chapters of *The Lost Symbol* by Dan Brown with the objective of organising Chinese Internet users to produce a Chinese version before its official 2010 release.<sup>35</sup> Previously Harry Potter books had been translated in this way.

Closer to us, the sixth volume of Harry Potter was translated into German by the fans, who were not ready to wait for the official German translation to be released. Besides posting a provisional translation two days after the release of the original, the objective of the site Harry-auf-Deutsch.de,<sup>36</sup> was to offer, at a later date, a more refined version made by the fans. The use of tools already available on the site, like a lexicon of Harry Potter terms and concepts, and the fans' thorough knowledge of that universe would, in their view, provide a better product than the official one.

It is highly likely that these attempts will remain mere experiments and will not bring radical changes to this specific field of translation. However, they are a further testimony of the urge for a more active involvement and the willingness to collaborate, which, in turn, become a spur to devise new projects and channel this potential toward an increasingly diverse range of applications, from online dictionaries (Wordreference), to language learning through translation (Duolingo), or virtual participation in the activities of the European Parliament (Citizalia).

#### 3.1.4.1 Wordreference

One of the most successful crowdsourcing projects dealing with languages — and one of the most consulted website of the world — is Wordreference.<sup>37</sup> Launched in order to provide free online bilingual dictionaries and tools, it has constantly grown in size, popularity and quality, and now covers over 10 language pairs.

Convinced that 'the Internet has done an incredible job of bringing the world together in the last few years', but aware also that 'one of the greatest barriers has been language [since] much of the content is in English and many, many users are reading English-language Web pages as a second language', Michael Kellog 'started this site in 1999 in an effort to provide free online bilingual dictionaries and tools to the world. The site has grown gradually ever since to become one of the most-used online dictionaries ... It is consistently ranked in the top 500 most-visited websites in the world'.<sup>38</sup>

In the perspective of crowdsourcing, the most interesting part of the site are the language forums. Whenever a user cannot find the answer to their doubts or the translations they are looking for, they can consult past discussions or open a new thread, eliciting proposals and comments from other members of the community. The threads complement the online dictionaries published on the site and suggest translations and

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<sup>35</sup> <http://archive.psfk.com/2009/09/chinese-literati-crowdsource-translation-of-dan-browns-the-lost-symbol.html>.

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.harry-auf-deutsch.de/>.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.wordreference.com/>.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.wordreference.com/english/AboutUs.aspx>.

explanations for idioms, neologisms, words or phrases in context — the kind of information which traditional dictionaries do not provide. By asking the crowd, the users can get answers and proposals that are more up-to-date than traditional dictionaries, and better take into account the evolution of the language.

The site relies on the work and contribution of volunteers, who, in addition to participating in the forums as regular members, are involved in their administration and help ensure their correct and orderly functioning. Professional and amateurs cannot be distinguished on the forum; it is therefore up to the reader to judge on the value and the trustworthiness of the suggestions. The success of the site, however, clearly shows that the users find it useful and its contents satisfactory.

### 3.1.4.2 Duolingo

A most recent and utterly innovative project drawing on the opportunities offered by crowdsourcing and translation is Duolingo;<sup>39</sup> it was launched on 30 November 2011 and, by 22 December 2011, it had already translated 24 000 sentences. Duolingo has been created by Luis von Ahn, as 'a free language-learning website and crowdsourced text translation platform, [...] designed so that as users progress through the lessons they simultaneously help to translate websites and other documents'.<sup>40</sup>

The idea behind Duolingo is getting double profit from a certain activity without doubling the effort.<sup>41</sup> the users learn a language and at the same time do real translations. As von Ahn himself explains, he tries to use free translation as a language learning method.<sup>42</sup> However, if the sentences used were artificial sentences created only for learning purposes, the efforts and time of the learners would, to a certain extent, be wasted. When, on the contrary, the sentences used come from real material which needs translating, the result is double profit, without increasing the effort of the learners.

The first two languages available on Duolingo are Spanish and English. The tasks users receive include translating written sentences from web pages and rating the accuracy of translations done by others. After being translated, the web material is uploaded in the English version of the original web page. In order to make good for the learners' mistakes, several people work on and revise each sentence. The system also allots the sentences according to the level of the learner, more complex sentences to more advanced learners, and provides tools like online dictionaries.

When launching Duolingo, von Ahn claimed that he could translate the whole of Wikipedia from English into Spanish in just 80 hours. The aim of the new service, however, is to provide commercial translations. Reactions have been quite mixed. On the one hand, the idea raises interest and curiosity. On the other one, however, several concerns are voiced. Would customers be prepared to pay for a service performed by students? Being a commercial service, is it acceptable that the web site makes a profit from the learners' work delivered for free? How reliable can the translation be when more complex sentences, idioms or nuances are at stake? Can a text be reduced to a sequence of sentences?

What is interesting about this project, however, is the innovative attitude towards learning, combining it to another activity so as to double the 'profit', and the idea of

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<sup>39</sup> <http://duolingo.com/>.

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.elearningeuropa.info/fr/node/112542>.

<sup>41</sup> This idea had previously been developed by von Ahn with ReCaptcha, a test used on Web sites to ensure that the response is generated by a person, where users are asked to type words that come from old books that are digitised in this way.

<sup>42</sup> This is also innovative in that it partially reverses the prevailing trend in language learning strategies during the past decades, where translation had virtually disappeared from language learning curricula, replaced by the communicative method.

combining learning and translation in an innovative framework. For the time being it is hard to say whether Duolingo will be a success, but what we can be sure of is that it keeps the debate about learning and translation alive, that it brings new and innovative input, that it acknowledges the importance of translation and multilingualism on the web and that, one way or the other, it may be an impulse to further ideas and innovative developments.

### 3.1.4.3 Citzalia

Another new crowdsourcing project which is not entirely devoted to, but includes, translation is Citzalia.<sup>43</sup>

Citzalia is a new project partly sponsored by the European Parliament to raise the citizens' awareness about its activities and policies, bring them closer to its decision-making process and involve them in its everyday life in an interactive way. It has been developed in answer to a call by the European Parliament's Directorate-General for Communication as a virtual parliament 'to generate interest and raise awareness about the role of the European Parliament'.

As the developers of Citzalia themselves declare, 'Citzalia is democracy in action. It is an animated and interactive social networking platform that captures the essence of the European Parliament', where anybody can create an avatar and 'walk around, interact, network and debate the issues of the day in the corridors of the European Parliament' in order to better understand how it works. Through participating in debates, writing articles, and even drafting virtual legislation on issues relating to the European Parliament and EU policy, participants can gain insight into and expertise on how democracy works in the EU, but, at the same time, also help shape that world and inhabit it. Equipped only with a Web browser, they can create an avatar with which they walk around, interact, network and debate the issues of the day in the corridors of the European Parliament.

Though partly designed as a tool to discover the European Parliament while having fun, the idea behind Citzalia is also to use it as a platform to exchange ideas and interact with other citizens, but also with policy makers. For the creators of this site, for example, it could be envisaged that members of the European Parliament use it to have real exchanges with the citizens on topics of interests, or that it becomes a platform where the European Parliament or other EU institutions communicate with the public and centralise important information which, at present, is spread through a number of different channels.

Citzalia is available in all 23 official EU languages, thus stressing the importance of multilingualism and the multilingual character of the EP. While the site has been translated by professional translators, all virtual visitors can go, among others, to the 'translation room' and register as translators, chief translators or revisers. When registering, virtual translators must provide information about their training and professional qualifications (e.g. EU official, professional translator, etc.); the site managers have the last word on their level of competence (translator, chief translator, etc.), which can subsequently be changed on the basis of the work they perform on Citzalia.

Visitors to Citzalia can post articles or information they find interesting, and then ask for their translation, usually a combination of machine translation and human revision. The virtual translators can freely choose the contents they want to translate or see posted in various languages. Translation on Citzalia is a transversal task and the 'translation room' can be accessed from all other rooms (e.g. the press room or the offices of the members

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<sup>43</sup> <http://www.citzalia.eu/>.

of the European Parliament). This reflects well the role of translation in the European Parliament — but also in the other European institutions— where translation is an essential element of their policies and everyday activities.

### **3.2 Impacts of translation crowdsourcing**

As we have seen, the innovations brought about by crowdsourcing and the collaborative approach it entails are affecting all facets of translation; in addition, they also present it under a new light. As a consequence, this new way of working will not influence merely the practice, but also the theories of translation and the way it is perceived. Furthermore, even though crowdsourcing is still a niche activity and affects the sector only to a limited extent, its influence is bound to grow and there are useful lessons on good practices to be learnt also for professional translators.

#### **3.2.1 Theoretical impact**

As concerns the impact of crowdsourcing on translation theories, fansubbing in particular can provide interesting input. As we have seen, besides making new subtitled episodes available more rapidly and widening the range of available material, from the very beginning one of the main drivers for fansubbers has been translating in such a way as to fulfil the expectations and requirements of fans. They aim at providing a version which is as accurate and faithful to the original as possible and conveys jokes, quotations, word-plays, textual references, and the culture of the original, without trying to disguise the intervention of the translator, as is the case in traditional subtitling/dubbing. In this way fansubbers appear to privilege what, in translation studies, is usually considered an 'elitist' approach, supported by academics, notably Lawrence Venuti in his work *The Translator's Invisibility*,<sup>44</sup> but regarded as hardly viable for commercial products.

Venuti objects to the common assumption that a translation should sound like an original and that, when it sounds like a translation, then it is a bad translation. This approach, that has been developed, among others, by Eugene Nida with his theory of dynamic equivalence, has been the most successful for the last decades and is usually adopted in commercial products.

Venuti, together with others, rejects this approach, which he defines 'domesticating', in favour of 'foreignisation'. According to him, translating a text means also transferring the culture where it was originated and conveying its linguistic norms, cultural values and textual references to the reader of the target language. The translator carries the ethical responsibility to signal, rather than assimilate, the difference and peculiarities of the source culture. In order to attain this end, he admits deliberately breaking the conventions of the target language to preserve the meaning and the nuances of the original — and even encourages doing so.

This theory, however, though influential among scholars and on a theoretical level, is usually regarded as far removed from the actual practice of translation, especially when the translated work should not be confined to a restricted circle of conscious and well-informed readers — in this sense Venuti's approach may be regarded as elitist.

At first sight, this should be particularly true in the case of popular TV series, and indeed the industry aims at offering localised versions which sound as natural and easy as possible for the public of the target language. And yet the choices made by the communities of fansubbers contradict this. Offering versions which are very faithful to the original, both from a linguistic and a cultural point of view, and subtitles on markets where dubbing is the rule, fansubbers translate into practice, at least to a certain extent,

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<sup>44</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, Routledge, London and New York, 1995.

Venuti's foreignising approach and reject domestication as an impoverishment which does not allow appreciating the original to the full.

On the axis domestication-foreignisation, therefore, we can place fansubbing on the foreignisation side, on the opposite of commercial dubbing/subtitling, which tends towards radical domestication. In this way, fansubbing reverses, at least partially, the widespread idea that the easiest solution is the one favoured by the public and shows that foreignising strategies are not merely a theoretical option devoid of practical applications and unpalatable for the public. The viewers are in many cases more demanding than the industry seems to believe and open to solutions which require more effort on their part, but enhance the pleasure they get from the product they are offered.

### 3.2.2 Impact on perception

The success of crowdsourcing projects in the field of translation testifies and contributes to the growing interest raised by this activity among the general public. Translation is most often an 'invisible' activity and does not attract much interest or enthusiasm among non-professionals. The enthusiasm raised by the projects examined so far draws attention to the fact that a different perception of translation is possible and, being addressed to a wider public than the restricted circle of professionals, these projects can help raise awareness about the importance of translation and multilingualism, thus starting a virtuous circle and boosting the status of translation.

This shows that there is a great potential, but the issue is how to mobilise that potential and motivate the crowd. As Fred Hollowood states in the interview attached at the end of this study, when the people feel the need of having information — no matter which kind of information — in their own language, they are willing to devote time and energies to do that. This is particularly evident in the non-profit sector, where participants, including skilled professionals, accept quite strict constraints when they feel that their work can help save lives or improve the standard of living of disadvantaged populations, and become aware that one language, notably English, is not enough to reach the widest possible strata of the relevant population and to exploit existing potential to the full, and that translation and multilingualism are therefore essential tools for the success of these initiatives.

Crowdsourcing can become a precious support to multilingualism in two ways: on the one hand, it can help raise awareness about the importance of multilingualism and, as a consequence, of translation, and show that it is an inescapable reality; and on the other hand, it can give an essential contribution to making the web more multilingual, notably saving and reinforcing less spoken and endangered languages and languages not connected to strong economic interests.

The success of social media like Facebook with the translation of their interfaces into a large number of languages, including languages with very few speakers, is an interesting signal in this sense: the Internet has been defined as a 'lifeboat for endangered languages'.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it was born in English and this is still the language of about 50% of its content. However, the amount of content in other languages and the number of languages used are growing steadily. As Daniel Prado states in an inspiring article, the rise of the Internet might spur linguistic diversity and allow 'some languages [to] resuscitate, or even be reborn'.<sup>46</sup>

By promoting linguistic diversity on the Internet, notably giving access to information in languages usually disregarded for lack of economic impact, crowdsourcing favours

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<sup>45</sup> [http://www.euractiv.com/culture/internet-lifeboat-endangered-languages-news-509285?utm\\_source=EurActiv+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=1ca9969ed1-my\\_google\\_analytics\\_key&utm\\_medium=email](http://www.euractiv.com/culture/internet-lifeboat-endangered-languages-news-509285?utm_source=EurActiv+Newsletter&utm_campaign=1ca9969ed1-my_google_analytics_key&utm_medium=email).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

inclusion and opens the Web to ethnic and social groups which would otherwise be excluded, thus fostering its democratic character.

Secondly, we can expect — and hope — that crowdsourcing, with communities gathering around a common interest or passion, will help dispel the common perception of translation as an invisible and rather dull activity we become aware of only where there is a problem, a chore carried out in dusty offices by isolated individuals always on the verge of losing contact with the world and their fellow individuals. The collaborative way of working highlights that, also in translation, constant sharing of ideas and experiences is essential to obtaining good results. Crowdsourcing can help raise awareness about the role of translation for the success of any initiative aimed at a large public. It can contribute to discard the perception that it is merely a sterile and repetitive task with no creativity involved, unclear purposes and doubtful usefulness, and show on the contrary that it is an essential tool to foster democracy and inclusion, offers great reward, helps break isolation and enables integration into a motivated and well-organised community, favouring contacts and exchanges with other people involved in the same activity and sharing the same interests and goals.

All these novelties give rise to many questions, most of which do not have, or at least not yet, a clear-cut and definitive answer. However, the positive impact they may have on the general perception of translation deserves being further explored in order to raise awareness about all issues connected to multilingualism and language use as a fundamental factor to foster democracy and social inclusion, and involve the 'crowd' in this process, thus responding to their wish of being more active and taking part in shaping contents they are interested in.

### **3.2.3 Impact on the profession**

Finally, the rapid penetration of crowdsourcing in many areas of translation and the new working strategies it introduces, notably the massive involvement of amateurs, are exerting ever stronger pressures on translators and on the way they perform their profession.

As has been highlighted with regard to other economic sectors, crowdsourcing certainly opens up new opportunities and revolutionises the way content is created and processed, but it also risks disrupting business relations as we have known them up to now, involving casualties in the process.

In this context, serious concerns and fears are voiced both about the status and prospects of translators in the future, and about the quality of the work carried out by amateurs. The first concern is that translators will lose their source of income if translations are done for free by enthusiast amateurs. Secondly, many professionals blame crowdsourcing for being a weapon in the hands of companies to exploit and make profit from free labour. Finally, the issue of quality is regularly raised: how can we ensure high quality when the work is done by a crowd of non-professionals who most often than not lack specific qualification and expertise, are not clearly identified and, as a consequence, cannot be held responsible for what they publish on the net?

The supporters of crowdsourcing deem these concerns groundless. They insist that crowdsourcing, even if it continues to grow, will never be a threat to highly qualified professional translators. On the contrary, it is the only way to make good, at least partially, for the disproportion between resources and content to be translated at a time when the mass of material to be translated hugely exceeds the working capacity of human translators.

Furthermore, in spite of the penetration of crowdsourcing in an increasing number of areas, the fields where it can be applied and those which are and will remain the

prerogative of professionals are quite distinct, and overlaps are limited. Where confidentiality and accountability are required, the use of qualified professionals is a must. In other cases, however, the choice is between nothing and some sort of translation allowing at least for comprehension (even if not at top level): there, crowdsourcing can be an effective option, often improving on the products of machine translation.

As is the case of other innovative methods and technologies, notably machine translation, translators should be open and take advantage of the opportunities they offer, instead of being afraid. Indeed, the translation profession is undergoing radical changes, required by the need to adapt to the new technological developments and working methods, but also by the increasing demand for fast translations from and into an ever widening range of languages, as an effect of the explosion of exchanges and the parallel drives toward globalisation and localisation.

There is wide agreement that professional translation will always be needed and that the new methods and technologies that are emerging will boost that need, rather than destroy the profession. Greater specialisation will be required of translators, who, in many cases, will become editors and managers of translations done through these new methods. As we have seen, to be successful, innovative projects need to be carefully designed and managed, and it is in this respect that the involvement of qualified professionals is essential.

This does not mean underestimating the risks inherent in these developments. However, once we realise and accept that crowdsourcing, like other innovations, is here to stay and is set to expand further in the future, the issue is no longer whether we want it or not, but rather how to best manage it and how to exploit it to the advantage of the profession and of the users. Indeed, the new opportunities it opens up should not be underestimated either and the great potential of the collaborative way of working should be further explored with a view to applying and adapting it to professional and not merely amateur translation.

### ***3.3 Applications in an institutional context***

As we have seen, the collaborative approach to translation typical of crowdsourcing has expanded well beyond non-profit or amateur projects, with growing impact on professionals and business as well. But what about institutional contexts? Translation services in big institutional organisations like the EU fulfil specific needs which differentiate them both from the amateur and non-profit sectors and from the business world. They are not affected by the logic of profit — though efficiency is a must — and need a very well-structured workflow to cope with the amount of documents to be translated and the number of languages they work with, while ensuring high quality standards, uniform approaches and full accountability. This is particularly true in the case of the EU where over 500 language combinations are used and the most prominent part of the work consists of legal documents, which require clear ownership and confidentiality, as well as staff with specific and precisely tailored skills and qualifications.

As a consequence, the workflow in big organisations tends to be more rigid and less open to innovation, and specific procedures must be developed to take into account both their mandate and their internal needs. Experiments with innovative working methods usually take time and start to be debated and envisaged only when sound and consistent data about their efficiency and security are already available. However, no matter how big and how strong they are, these organisations are not self-contained. They do not exist in isolation and are inevitably affected by changes occurring in society and in technology, and have to find a way to come to terms with them. On the other hand, thanks to their strength and the means at their disposal, they have all the credentials to become drivers



of innovation. They can help steer and influence change instead of passively suffering its consequences. Indeed, there are timid signals that the challenges and opportunities of these new methods are starting to be explored inside big organisations as well.

The World Bank, for example, is experimenting with crowdsourcing at different levels. Besides completing a project to map locations and infrastructures in South Sudan with the help of members of the Sudanese diaspora, the possibility of crowdsourcing their translations has also been envisaged, triggering an animated debate with professional translators worried about the possible outcome of this kind of development.

As a world organisation promoting development worldwide, the World Bank must offer information to a large public globally, and to this purpose disposing of a multilingual website is a top priority. On the other hand, as has been highlighted for other projects, the enormous amount of information to be translated largely exceeds the resources available — and this disproportion seems set to increase owing to the current economic crisis and the resulting cuts in resources. Against this backdrop, the feasibility of introducing crowdsourcing as a way out of this deadlock has been brought up and a project along the lines of the TED's Lingua Project mentioned above has been envisaged. This idea has triggered a lively debate on the Bank's blogs stressing the swing between concern for the working prospects of professional translators and the advisability of opening up to innovation. Besides helping it to cope with a workload which cannot be managed by relying on more conventional working methods, this would also allow it to reach a more diverse public, offering additional languages besides English, French, Spanish, Russian and Chinese. No matter what the outcome of this debate will be, it is interesting because it overtly raises the topic of working collaboratively and with the 'crowd' within a big international organisation. A taboo has been broken and this may pave the way for further debate in other international organisations as well.

As concerns the European institutions, and notably the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission, this topic is not on the agenda. And yet, even though it is one of the biggest translation services in the world, its staff work under great pressure to cope with the increasing demand and the parallel cuts in resources. There is therefore scope for exploring whether, and possibly how, crowdsourcing — which taps the crowd to get more work done than would otherwise be possible, creates involvement in the community, and raises awareness about specific projects — could offer valuable tools to increase the efficiency of its workflow internally and promote its political message externally.

Indeed some attempts to support more collaborative working methods and promote contacts among translators are being made. Unfortunately they are not always very successful and are blamed for not being carefully tailored to the actual needs of their users. A good example of this top-down attempt to bring the internal working methods of the EU translation services up-to-date, without effectively serving their needs, is the note Elise. It is an application aimed at fostering communication among translators from different languages and from different EU institutions working on the same file, as well as between translators and their 'customers'; it allows them to post comments or information, ask for clarifications, or point out mistakes of various kinds.

In spite of the efforts to induce translators to integrate this tool into their workflow, its use has remained up to now quite limited. The translators of the European Commission, in particular, claim that it does not fulfil their actual needs in terms of communication and sharing of information. All information sent to Elise is linked exclusively to the specific file it is attached to. As a result, it is virtually lost when that file is completed, and can hardly be retrieved for further use, even though its interest is not necessarily confined to that particular case.

Side by side with these top-down tools, however, there are smaller scale tools which have been spontaneously developed by specific groups of translators and have become good practices, often taken as a model by other 'communities' inside the Directorate-General for Translation. An inspiring example in this sense are the two wikis created by the French department (one of them is devoted to translation files and the other to terminology) where the translators can discuss and post information they consider useful for sharing concerning either specific translations or terminological issues. The wikis of the French department allow the translators to share and retrieve information very easily with immediate feed-back, and favour a more collaborative way of working. Their success (while about 10% of the French translators actively contribute to them and another 10% occasionally participate, it can be estimated that they are consulted by approximately two thirds of them) — has led other language departments to create similar tools.<sup>47</sup> More in general, the great success enjoyed by wikis at all levels — both inside and outside the EU institutions — has led the European Commission's translation service to officially promote and generalise their use. Starting in 2013 all language departments will dispose of such a tool, which they will be free of using and organising according to their specific needs.

The success of the terminological wiki of the French department highlights the importance and the potential for collaboration when it comes to terminological issues. The most striking case in this respect is IATE, the EU interinstitutional terminological database and the main terminological tool used by the EU institutions. It has been developed to gather in one single database the contents previously owned by the various EU institutions which, in this way, are made available to all users inside the institutions — and also to the general public through its public version launched in 2007. In spite of all efforts, however, IATE remains rigid and hierarchical, and only to a limited extent has it succeeded in overcoming the previous fragmentation. Each entry belongs to the institution which created it and only the native speaker terminologist of that institution can modify it. When non-native speaker terminologists or terminologists from other institutions come across errors, or want to complete an entry created by another institution or merge similar entries belonging to different institutions into one single entry, they must first propose the change to the owner, who has the exclusive right to validate it. This makes the management and improvement of the database lengthy and cumbersome, in particular when it comes to correcting and improving already existing entries. Furthermore, IATE has no easy tool allowing for direct communication among the users, among its managers and between the two groups, who often have to resort to e-mail messages to communicate. E-mails, however, remain private exchanges between the sender and the addressee, and do not involve the whole community of IATE users, who cannot profit from them nor provide additional input.

A more collaborative approach based, for example, on the model of Wikipedia, might help overcome these shortcomings and make it a real forum where information and suggestions for improvement can be easily shared among all IATE users. The urge to involve the 'community' would be all the more justified because, in the case of IATE, 'community' means a well-defined group of EU linguists who use IATE in their daily work. In this way they could be encouraged to share their experience, competence and ideas to the advantage of their colleagues, but also of the general public that uses IATE outside the EU institutions.<sup>48</sup> In this respect, Wikipedia can teach inspiring lessons. Everybody can contribute to Wikipedia but this does not mean uncontrolled anarchy. Contributors have to stick to a set of rules and everything is peer-reviewed by the community both to improve, complete or correct new entries, and to check for inappropriate contents. Crowdsourcing IATE in this perspective would not mean abandoning it to the users without any control, but rather giving voice to a qualified community worth being trusted.

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<sup>47</sup> The Finnish, German and Bulgarian departments are creating wikis based on the French model, while the Portuguese have developed a similar tool for terminology, though it is organised in a more centralised way.

<sup>48</sup> I would like to thank Tim Cooper, head terminologist of the English department, who has accepted to share his vision about a more flexible and innovative management of IATE.

Up to now IATE managers have justified their policy of strict top-down control with the need to ensure the highest quality standards. The model of Wikipedia, however, might offer inspiration in this respect too. Broadening the content and publishing also the material which is not validated does not necessarily mean offering low quality information. Provided that the status (validated, non validated) of each entry is clearly indicated — as happens on Wikipedia — even non-verified content can be useful for the users. This would allow offering more content, while allowing the users to make an informed decision on whether, and to what extent, they should use or trust such content.

Furthermore, giving the users the possibility of improving, correcting or in any way completing the entries would also raise their commitment and motivate them to share their knowledge; this in turn might encourage other users to intervene in this process, thus starting a virtuous cycle of involvement and mutual inspiration. Allowing all users to contribute to IATE, whether they belong to the institution owning a specific entry or not, would also boost the interinstitutional character of IATE and ease the issue of ownership by a specific institution, which is at the moment perceived by some as one of the main obstacles to a more flexible and efficient management of the database.

As is the case for other crowdsourcing projects, involving the community does not mean getting work done for free. It is a way of tapping a broader reservoir of knowledge and competences to keep improving the database in an efficiently managed way and to everybody's benefit.

Besides the introduction of collaborative strategies to foster the commitment of the staff and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their work, a second strand of applications of crowdsourcing could be envisaged to reach the general public. This might help respond to two issues usually addressed by this method: cope with the disproportion between workload and resources thus improving the offer of translation, and raise the citizens' awareness about issues connected with translation and multilingualism, and, more in general, foster their involvement in and commitment to the European project.<sup>49</sup>

A few years ago Margot Wallström, Vice President of the European Commission for Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy from 2004 to 2010, pointed to the serious communication and information deficit as one of the reasons for the failure of the EU institutions to raise support for the European project among the general public. It is to bridge this gap that she launched a new communication strategy, making better use of new technologies, notably the Internet. One of the actions foreseen by the new strategy was the in-depth revamping of the portal Europa to give the citizens easier access to information about the Union, its policies and its projects; in that context full multilingualism was acknowledged as an essential facet of this strategy. In practice, however, it was different: actual multilingualism is rather limited and most pages on the Europa portal are available in English, or English and French and, to a lesser extent, French, English and German, while only a very limited portion of the site is in all official languages. This becomes particularly evident as surfers proceed in their search. The more specific the pages, the more limited the number of linguistic versions.

In spite of these shortcomings, Europa offers a huge amount of highly valuable and constantly updated information. The resources which would have to be deployed to fulfil the engagement to make it fully multilingual, however, largely exceed those available, and the prospects for future improvements in this state of things are rather bleak. To find a way out of this impasse — explosion of content and cuts in resources — and fulfil the citizens' information needs, therefore, innovative ideas are necessary. In this context

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<sup>49</sup> On this topic, see the interview with Josep Bonet, Head of the informatics unit of the EC Directorate General for Translation, published at the end of this study.

successful crowdsourcing projects might offer some inspiration. In particular, experiences like TED's mentioned above, might be a model for similar initiatives at Commission level.

As is the case with TED, tapping into the wisdom of the crowd would be an effective way of offering the public more information in a language they understand, but also — which is probably even more relevant — to bring the institutions closer to the citizens and raise their motivation and commitment toward the European project.

A project involving some sort of crowdsourcing, if successful, would help broaden the offer of multilingual content on the Internet, but, above all, it would stimulate in those willing to collaborate a stronger feeling that they are an active part of the EU, have the possibility of taking part in its development, and can do something to help involve their fellow citizens as well. Secondly, such an initiative would create greater awareness about the importance of translation and multilingualism for the success of the European integration and, more in general, to promote social inclusion and democracy worldwide. Finally, it is worth underlining that, like all initiatives based on the web and the new technologies, experimenting with crowdsourcing would greatly help create commitment among young people, since they are the most familiar with the new technologies and the most active on the Internet, and raising awareness among them is of paramount importance for the future of the European integration and democracy.

Though promising, however, such an approach also involves serious risks for an organisation like the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation, and they should not be underestimated: first and foremost, the risk of being criticised for exploiting free labour. It would therefore be imperative to convey the message that the European Commission does not exploit free labour nor stifle the translation profession, but deliberately chooses this strategy to involve all Europeans and make them active and conscious citizens. It should be clear that the goal is not to find a way of getting things done at low cost, but of getting them done in a different way which better fulfils real needs and wishes.

Most of the contents translated by the Directorate-General for Translation do not lend themselves to be processed in this way, notably legislative or official administrative documents, where confidentiality, specific and specialised knowledge and, above all, clearly stated authorship and accountability are essential. However, innovative approaches might prove effective for other typologies of texts like information material, notably web pages which now play a pivotal role in the communication policy of the Commission and where there is much scope for improvement. These are the documents with which the public most often comes into contact and which therefore they need to understand and read in their own languages, but which, in many cases, are available only in a limited number of language versions. At the same time, since they provide information on topics of general interest with a direct impact on the everyday life of European citizens, they might be the most suitable to raise the interest of the 'crowd' and motivate them to put their knowledge and skills to the service of their fellow citizens, while, at the same time, contributing to the advancement of the European integration. It is therefore in this area that there might be scope for experimenting with the novelties offered by the Web 2.0 with a view to improving the relations with the public, creating commitment toward the European project and motivating the citizens to participate more actively in this process.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

### \* *Crowdsourcing: the new frontier on the Internet*

Collaborative and participatory approaches to communication and information sharing are the new frontier on the Internet. After a phase where the users searched the Web for information or services that were offered to them, we have now entered a new era where users have become 'prosumers' and can access the web also to actively create or modify content. An increasing number of people, especially among the younger generations, feel that they have a lot to offer. They are no longer happy with being passive and invisible users, but want to share their ideas and competences, and make their contribution. And the Internet and the easy and efficient tools it now provides make this possible.

It is in this context that social media have radically transformed our way of communicating, making friends and establishing working relations. It is also in this context that crowdsourcing has emerged as a revolutionary way of creating and sharing content in areas as diverse as science and microfinancing, journalism and marketing, the arts and show business or the humanitarian sector.

It is something radically new, so much so as to generate the need for a new word to describe it. The underlying concept — i.e. to tap the human capital wherever it is found and not merely among professionals to get something done — however, is not as innovative, and a forerunner of today's crowdsourcing can be found in amateurism, which was held in high esteem until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when specialisation and professionalisation started to gain ground and replace it.

### \* *Crowdsourcing: a new way of working and establishing relationships*

Nowadays, crowdsourcing is fostering the comeback of amateurism, but a new form of amateurism that profits from the social and economic conditions prevailing in our society: an overflow of skills and competences that people often cannot channel and use in their professional lives; easily accessible technological tools, including open-source resources, that can tap this potential wherever it is located regardless of geographical proximity; the exponential increase of work and tasks to be carried out, which is not matched by a similar increase in professional resources; and the emergence of well organised communities integrating widely dispersed but motivated members who share common interests and goals, and manage to communicate and collaborate effectively no matter where they are located.

Crowdsourcing communities share a number of features that, according to the supporters of this new approach, set them apart from any other type of community: their drivers are motivation and personal involvement and the expected reward is recognition and respect, whereas financial compensation, if any, plays only a minor role; they promote a new way of working based on collaboration, self-initiative and peer reviewing and also on the involvement of the largest possible number of interested people. In this sense, these communities are also intrinsically democratic in that they allow everybody to collaborate and share their knowledge and talents, irrespective of formal qualifications or professional activities.

The effectiveness and potential of crowdsourcing are shown by the widening range of fields where it is used. Commercial applications range from marketing campaigns to the contests for the solution of business problems, with corporations resorting to this system even when they have qualified experts in-house. What they expect from non-professionals — and often get — is that they approach problems with a fresh mind and thus come up with more creative solutions.

\* *Crowdsourcing: a tool for democracy*

Business applications, however, should not overshadow other areas, ranging from the natural sciences, where crowdsourcing is used to collect raw data, to citizen journalism or the non-profit sector, where it is regarded as a powerful tool to promote democracy. The potential of crowdsourcing to give voice to wider strata of the world population, for example, has been highlighted by recent events like the revolutions in the Middle East where social media like Twitter and Facebook or amateur blogs allowed the people to bypass their regimes' censorship and inform the world at large about events which professional journalists were prevented from attending or could not cover as rapidly.

Among the most significant success stories in this field, cases like the open-source software movement, notably Linux or Wikipedia, are worth mentioning. The open-source operating system Linux has managed to become a major competitor of Microsoft's and now powers all kinds of electronic devices, while the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia has become an indispensable resource for millions of people, to the point that it is ranked 6<sup>th</sup> among the most popular websites in the US.

Other noteworthy examples of the democratising power of crowdsourcing are sites like Kiva or Sellaband which finance micro-projects in developing countries or allow fans to invest in music, respectively, in order to grant access to credit to groups which would otherwise be excluded from it. In this way they promote a new business model and work to break the monopoly of big financial institutions.

The importance of involving the crowd is shown also by other applications, e.g. in marketing, where businesses give the crowd the last word on marketing campaigns, or in crowdvoting, which is regularly used in TV contests and allows the viewers to vote and choose the winners.

\* *Crowdsourcing: benefits and drawbacks*

These successes raise great enthusiasm and lead the supporters of crowdsourcing to see it as a major breakthrough which:

- transforms the notion of 'consumer': passive consumers are replaced by active 'prosumers' who contribute to developing products they like or promoting ideas they believe in;
- fosters the development of communities where members do not behave merely according to self-interest;
- is a democratic tool, where the only criterion for evaluating contributors is merit;
- transforms the organisation of labour, favouring decentralisation and mobilising a wider spectrum of energies and ideas.

However, crowdsourcing also raises objections and concerns:

- the reliability and value of crowdsourced work is often questioned, compared to work carried out by skilled and knowledgeable professionals;
- the lack of accountability is emphasised, since it is often difficult to trace the identity of the source on the Internet. And, while in some cases, e.g. in totalitarian regimes, anonymity may serve to protect sources and induce them to disclose information which would otherwise not be shared, in other cases it can also help divulge false information or inappropriate content.

In particular, serious risks are evidenced when it comes to commercial applications:

- crowdsourcers, who work for passion, risk ending up working long hours and blurring the distinction between leisure and work, with negative impacts on their non-work life;
- businesses can easily exploit crowdsourcers and make undue profit from the work the latter are happy to carry out for free or at very low rates. The consequence is that specific markets are disrupted, and skilled professionals, who cannot stand the competition of crowdsourcers, are deprived of their source of income.

On the other hand, the supporters of crowdsourcing insist that it is not — or at least not primarily — a way of saving money, because a well organised and successful crowdsourcing project requires a lot of work, competence and time to be carried out and supervised in an efficient way. It should rather be seen as a new way of doing things with its own peculiarities that make it a problem solving model different from any other.

\* *Crowdsourcing: a tool to foster motivation and involvement*

In translation, rapid technological changes — notably increasingly powerful machine translation systems and CAT tools — but also the exponential increase of contacts and exchanges involving people speaking different languages and the parallel increase in the demand of translation oblige us to devise new ways of working, which integrate these developments and allow us to cope with the huge mass of content to be processed. Crowdsourcing, often combined with machine translation, is welcome by many as *the* solution.

Broadly speaking, crowdsourced translation shows the same objectives and goals which are typical of crowdsourcing in general: it is collaborative work carried out by non professionals — or by professionals as volunteer work — to make material they find interesting or useful more widely available. Since, in the case of translation as well, personal motivation is one of the main drivers, it is difficult to influence the crowd as concerns what material they translate. They choose freely and spontaneously, and this is one of the reasons why in certain areas this type of translation appears more promising than in others.

It is by leveraging on motivation that social media like Twitter or Facebook have managed to have their metadata translated and peer-reviewed by their members rapidly and in a very large number of languages, including lesser spoken ones. Motivation is also the key to the success of sites in the non-profit sector or of information platforms. The microfinance platform Kiva mentioned above is a very good example as concerns the translation of their projects as well. Though they impose on their collaborators strict constraints and privilege professional and experienced translators over amateurs, they manage to attract a significant number of volunteers, who accept these constraints to promote a project they believe in.

A case like Kiva's shows very well the importance of motivation, especially when we compare its work and policy with initiatives like LinkedIn's. The call launched by the professional network to its translator members to translate the site against non-monetary compensation ended up as one of the worst failures in the history of crowdsourcing. It met with strong reactions from translators who felt exploited and refused to give away their work for free to a profit-making enterprise — the same translators who are willing to work for free when it is for a worthy cause.

An area deserving a special mention when talking about crowdsourcing and translation is fansubbing — i.e. collaborative subtitling — which has been described as probably the most important form of crowdsourcing. It is a case of entirely collaborative work, without

any external stimulus, where the fans of successful programmes, mainly US TV series, set down to subtitle the new episodes in order to make them available on the Net more rapidly than the commercial versions. It is worth mentioning, however, that, besides rapidity, in many cases fansubbers also aim at producing versions that are more faithful to the original and convey as many of the idiosyncrasies of the source text as possible, as well as its cultural and textual references, thus allowing the viewers to enjoy the programme in full.

Besides applications of crowdsourcing focused purely on translation, furthermore, new experiments should be mentioned where translation is not the main objective but is however an important tool. An interesting case in this respect is, for example, the online dictionary Wordreference, one of the most visited websites of the world, which offers a forum where everybody can ask for or propose suggestions concerning the translation of specific words or phrases. Duolingo, a very recent application offering free online language courses based on translation, might also be a promising evolution and, in any case, is an interesting signal of the interest raised by translation outside the usual circles.

These evolutions will inevitably transform translation as we have known it up to now and will have a deep impact on all its facets, from the practice to the theory and the perception the people have of this activity.

\* *Impact of crowdsourcing:*

a) on the practice of translation

As concerns the actual practice, a lot can be learnt from the way in which these communities work. They are usually very well organised with clearly allocated tasks, so as to ensure that all steps of the work, from translation, through revision to the technical tasks, are carried smoothly and efficiently. As a consequence, the increasing success of these new approaches will inevitably force professional translators to change the way of working they are accustomed to. These new developments will not jeopardise the very survival of the category, as many claim. On the contrary, they might even improve the working conditions and the status of translators in the future, as others maintain. What is indisputable, however, is that translators will have to take these new approaches into account. In many cases, this will mean that professional translators will have to become even more specialised and focus on the areas where specialisation, confidentiality and accountability are required — and which will therefore always remain the exclusive sphere of competent human professional translators. In other cases, they will have to turn into post-editors of texts translated by machines or by the crowd. In still other cases, finally, they will have to abandon certain areas where comprehension is the main objective and the level of accuracy allowed for by alternative methods like machine translation and crowdsourcing is satisfactory enough.

These promising prospects, however, should not induce us to let our guard down and underestimate the risks inherent in this evolution. It will inevitably involve casualties — as all far-reaching transformations inevitably do — but it is necessary to stimulate reflection and develop strategies to reduce such casualties to the minimum, protect competent and skilled professionals, who risk being thrown out of the market if they cannot stand the competition of the crowd, and guarantee quality, especially when sensitive information is at stake. In fact, devising ways to guarantee quality and ensure accountability and traceability are still hot issues if we want that this new method may be used reliably.

Besides the practice, the new way of working developed by crowdsourcers is also impacting on the theory and, what is probably more important, on the perception of translation.



## b) on the theory of translation

Concerning translation theory, the work of fansubbers for example, with their emphasis on conveying the nuances of the original text, disavows the generalised assumption that everything has to be done to bring the text close to the target language users and to facilitate them. This reverses, at least partially, the widespread assumption that theories that privilege the opposite approach and demand that target language readers make an effort to move closer to the original text are too elitist and, therefore, not suitable for the actual translation of products meant for a large public.

## c) on the perception of translation

Finally, concerning perception, collaborative methods based on the work of volunteers can foster the visibility of translation, which is most often an 'invisible' activity and does not attract much interest or enthusiasm in non-professionals. Crowdsourcing projects, which manage to involve a wider public than the restricted circle of professionals, can help raise awareness about the importance of translation and multilingualism, thus starting a virtuous circle. Greater awareness about the importance of multilingualism and translation and the increased visibility and recognition of this activity might prompt more and more people to participate in translation projects; this, in turn would contribute to making the web more multilingual, and notably to saving and reinforcing less spoken and endangered languages, or languages not connected with strong economic interests.

### \* *Collaborative approaches in the European institutions*

#### a) Wikis

Finally, there appears to be a potential for collaborative and participatory approaches in institutional contexts too. Translation services in big institutional organisations like the EU fulfil specific needs which differentiate them both from the amateur and non-profit sectors and from the business world, and must stick to very strict requirements in terms of skills, ownership and confidentiality. As a consequence, they tend to be more rigid and slow in taking up innovation. In spite of this, there are timid signals that the challenges and opportunities of these new methods start being explored inside such organisations.

As concerns in particular the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission, one attempt to promote collaboration has been made through the note Elise, a tool aimed at allowing all people involved in a specific translation file to exchange doubts and ideas, point to problematic issues or ask for clarifications. Furthermore, to facilitate communication and exchange, the wiki technology is being promoted. From 2013, all its units will have their own wikis which they will be able to organise as they think best. These new tools are the official response to an existing need, as shown by spontaneous initiatives launched at language department level and shaped by the users themselves according to their needs.

#### b) Crowdsourcing and terminology

In particular, it is worth mentioning that the wikis launched at language department level point to terminology as an area where the need of, and the potential for, exchange and discussion are particularly evident. And indeed they can be seen as a tool to make good for the alleged weaknesses of IATE, the interinstitutional database of the European Union and its main terminological tool. Created to replace and integrate the terminological databases of the individual institutions, IATE remains, in spite of all efforts, rather rigid and hierarchical, and only to a limited extent has it succeeded in overcoming the previous fragmentation. For these reasons, there are calls within the Directorate-General for Translation to build on the example of successful projects like Wikipedia — the online encyclopaedia entirely fed, revised and managed by the crowd — and allow a larger circle

of users to participate in IATE. In the present version of this database, each entry belongs to the institution which created it and only the native speaker terminologist of that institution can modify it. Up to now this rigidity has been justified with the need to guarantee the highest quality standards. The supporters of a more flexible and modern way of working, however, object to this position because it implies that the users cannot profit from a lot of potentially useful material. They stress that an evolution along these lines does not necessarily mean lowering the quality, as many seem to believe, but rather trusting the users — who in the case of IATE are expert users — and motivating them to contribute to a tool which they use in their daily work and which is essential for them. Choosing an approach of this kind would mean abandoning an old-fashioned idea of quality, and Wikipedia could indicate the way in this respect. On the online encyclopaedia, nobody can claim ownership of any content and everybody is allowed to participate, but at the same time there are clear rules making the users aware about the reliability of each entry. And yet, compared with other traditional encyclopaedias, it offers approximately the same level of correctness as the others. In this perspective, therefore, crowdsourcing IATE would not mean abandoning it to the users without any control, but rather giving voice to a qualified community worth being trusted, and also increasing the responsibility of the users. If more data and entries are published, even if they do not fulfil all quality criteria presently adopted, and the users are correctly informed about the status and the level of reliability of such entries, they will have the possibility of making an informed choice on whether to use that information or not, but, at least, they have access to it and can still get useful input and stimuli.

c) Crowdsourcing a new tool to involve the citizens in the European project?

Besides fostering communication and exchanges among the staff and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of their work, introducing some form of crowdsourcing at the Directorate-General for Translation to reach the general public could be envisaged. This option could raise the public's awareness and commitment; at the same time, it would also help the service to cope more effectively with the disproportion between workload and resources. The Europa portal is a case in point: it was created to provide the citizens with reliable and updated information about the European institutions in their mother tongue, but most of the information it offers is in a limited number of languages, since it is hardly conceivable to translate all content available on Europa into 23 official languages with the current resources. It is against this backdrop that it might be envisaged to start exploring the option of crowdsourcing, which, besides improving the offer of translations, might prove effective to foster the citizens' commitment to the European project and also raise their awareness about issues connected to translation and multilingualism. A similar initiative would certainly be quite revolutionary for a body like the Directorate-General for Translation, or more generally the European Commission, and should be carefully designed and marketed in order to dispel any possible accusation of being merely a way of profiting from free labour, especially since the Commission disposes of one of the largest translation services in the world.

In spite of these caveats, there might be some scope for translation projects involving crowdsourcing at the level of the European institutions. For example, as Josep Bonet imagines in the interview published at the end of this study, the translation of one page of the Europa portal could be crowdsourced, choosing one that is not politically sensitive and, at the same time, can appeal to a well targeted public and spur them to collaborate. Once again, it should be emphasised that such a project would not be synonymous with uncontrolled anarchy or cheap work. On the contrary, it would require careful planning, on the one hand, to convey the objective of the initiative in a clear and effective way and, on the other, to steer and control the crowd in order to ensure that no unwanted or inappropriate results are published on the Net. Furthermore, technical issues should also be carefully tackled in order to provide a suitable and user-friendly technical environment. In this respect, a platform like Citzalia, the virtual European Parliament, which has been launched precisely to make European citizens more familiar with the

work of the European Parliament and increase their engagement in the European project, might offer interesting stimuli.

Such ideas raise doubts and objections, but they might also send a signal, both inside and outside the institutions, that even in an organisation like the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation it is possible to work in an innovative way, when innovation means more efficiency and effectiveness. Furthermore, they help convey the message that, provided we steer these developments and do not accept them passively, there is no reason to be afraid of them, as many still are. This does not mean downplaying the risks inherent in this approach, but accepting that crowdsourcing, like other developments we are currently facing, is already a reality, whether we like it or not. The question that we must ask is how we can best make use of the opportunities it offers to the advantage of both translators and the public at large.

Like other innovative approaches and technologies, crowdsourcing should not be idealised nor regarded as a panacea, and the risks it can imply for the translation profession should not be underestimated. However, its potential should also be acknowledged: it makes it possible to translate a lot of material which would otherwise not be translated at all, thus also making it available to people with limited or no knowledge of foreign languages, and, at the same time, it can raise awareness about the European project and also about the importance of translation and



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## **ATTACHMENTS**





## Interview with Mr. Josep Bonet

**During a conference in Luxemburg at the end of January 2012, you mentioned crowdsourcing as an option the Commission should explore. What is your general view about crowdsourcing?**

Well, I think that crowdsourcing is a very powerful tool for translation, because it is obvious that with professional human translators, especially professional, paid human translators, we can only cover part of the needs, and the needs are getting bigger and bigger. As I said at the conference, we need machine translation to complement the work of professional human translators. Machine translation, however, has a problem. When documents are to be published, they must be improved and polished to a professional level. However, 'crowds' are interesting because, if they really want access to information, then they are ready to spend their spare time on, for example, improving translations to make it easier for other members of the 'crowd' to understand. We have seen this in specific domains, for example in the localisation of certain kinds of products, especially in the open source movement, but also in the case of more commercial translations. Some companies rely on crowdsourcing for translation. The reason is simple: either you do it like this, or you have nothing. If the alternative is not having anything, and you allow the crowd to translate something and make this translation available to other members of society, there are many people who are ready to spend some time helping the community. You can see this in cases like Wikipedia or Facebook. I know that Adobe is using it extensively for translating manuals and the like. I think crowdsourcing is something we can use much more.

There is one experience which shocked me, or rather which impressed me. There are languages in Europe which do not have official status, but their speakers would like them to. Probably the best-known of these is Catalan. Well, a young guy decided to translate the site of the European Parliament into Catalan, keeping the same appearance, the same look and feel as the original site. He did a wonderful job in translating everything. You might think that he would receive a medal ... no, he was sued.

### **Why was he sued?**

He was doing something illegal. He was counterfeiting the Parliament's site. I was very much impressed by how some people were ready to translate for the community and how sometimes the community is not ready to accept this translation. I think that we should do something to facilitate the work of crowdsourcers. It could help, for example, to have information in regional languages, and to have things translated that, as an institution, we cannot translate. I know this requires some infrastructure. But I would like to reflect on whether or not this is possible. Obviously, it is not as simple as: 'I let you translate and you do it'. Let us talk, for example, about the translation of Europa: this is one area where I can imagine that many things could be done. Of course, we must guarantee a certain level of quality, we need somebody to review, at least very quickly, and verify that everything is OK and that the message is correct. So, it is not so simple. It calls for

thorough reflection, but I think it could be interesting in many instances, especially if you combined it with machine translation.

I would like to give you another example, which in my view is very interesting. It is an example put forward by a company selling machine translation. The company is called Asia Online. They are based in Bangkok and produce machine translation, especially into South-East Asian languages like Thai. They noticed that Wikipedia, for example, had very few entries in Thai. So, what did they do? They provided a machine translation of all English entries on Wikipedia into Thai. Then they gave it to the community in Thailand to correct with a view to developing the presence of Thai on Wikipedia. It was quite a success.

**What do you think about peer-reviewing? Would it be acceptable for the European institutions or should there be some sort of revision and control by the institutions themselves? Should crowdsourcing be accepted one day?**

Peer review is already a major step in the right direction. Now, the problem is: who is the peer here? It could be a solution even if it stays within the community. What you need is a clear statement that this is not necessarily supported, or better it is supported, but is not necessarily endorsed, by the European Commission, that it is something undertaken by individuals with the permission of the European Commission and so on. I think that, in practical terms, peer review might give better results than revision by professionals in the Commission, among other things because members of the 'crowd' have the time and commitment. We do not have so much time. Peer review could be a solution, but it should be clearly stated. I think users can accept many things. What users cannot accept is being cheated. That is why it should be clear what is what: what is human translation, what is crowdsourced translation, what is machine translation.

**Do you not see any risks for the status of translators, for the profession, in crowdsourcing? This is one of the issues that are often raised.**

Yes, I have a clear position there. I have always thought that the work to do is so huge that there will never be a risk for translators. We tend to consider that the mass of documents to be translated is what we do. But this is not the mass of documents to be translated — there is much more. The typical example given in all the presentations is that of an iceberg. You have an iceberg where you see the top, which is the top-quality translation. There, you need human translators, and more and more good specialised translators. But then you have all the rest. There you could use human translators, but it would be more efficient to use machines or crowdsourcing or other methods where quality requirements are lower. Contrary to belief, I think that the more we address this in the right way, the more work good human translators will have, probably with better pay and better conditions. So, the struggle in future will be for entry-level translators or those offering low-level quality, who, sometimes, will be competing with crowdsourcing. Competing does not mean getting out of the market, it probably rather means low wages. But I think that high-quality translators will be even better paid in the future.

**So, more specialisation for professional translators and more work for the crowd and for machines?**

That is it.

**Another risk often mentioned concerning crowdsourcing, if it were adopted by an institution like the Commission, is that it might be badly perceived and seen as a way of exploiting cheap or free labour. What do you think about that?**

There is always a risk that it will be perceived like this. There have been collaborative undertakings on the internet, there are experiences considered to be exploiting cheap

labour. I tend to see this in a different light. I would insist on the difference between not having information because it is not available in my language — but in that case we remain pure — or getting a bit impure but providing people with access to information. For me, the latter option opens up a wealth of information to citizens. Moreover, it allows citizens to collaborate, to be part of the process — indeed, we must not forget that the fact of having members of the public translating our documents makes them part of the process. They get some ownership of the process, they are more involved in the things that are going on. If they are not interested they do not translate. There is a clear example I remember from Facebook. A couple of years ago, I attended an introduction on the Facebook experience concerning the crowdsourcing of their documents. They did not crowdsource all their documents. They only crowdsourced the documents that people were interested in translating. Not the legal documents, for example — either because they required strict quality control (you cannot leave it to the crowd when you want to be sure that the result is what you want) or because the crowd was not interested in them. If you allow the crowd to translate, this does not mean that they will start translating everything. They will only work on things that they are interested in. So, by allowing crowdsourcing you can generate interest and also support for a project. This, I think, is an important issue.

**Do you think that this could be done mainly for regional languages or for the official languages as well?**

I think more and more that the difference between a regional language and an official language is diminishing (by the way, I do not like the expression ‘regional languages’ or ‘minority languages’, I prefer the neutral ‘non-official languages’). There are more and more regional languages that are getting some kind of status in their countries. Crowdsourcing can be useful for all languages.

**With this approach, the institutions could have websites in many more languages, all on the same level.**

I do not know whether this is desirable or not from a legal or political point of view, but you could have a kind of extension and you could allow for the presence of other languages on the internet. And this could create a kind of ‘proximity effect’.

**Are you aware of experiments along these lines, for example in other international organisations or other EU institutions or services?**

Personally, I have never come across any such example. It is more in the field of corporations and software communities. Up to now, it has been used as a business model on the road toward internationalisation or globalisation of business.

**In the case of the business world, is there not a risk of exploitation of labour? The companies make profit from something they have not paid for.**

This risk is obvious, but in any case the advantage compared to other kinds of exploitation of labour is that in this case the workers are volunteers and are happy to do the work. So, if this is exploitation, it is exploitation accepted by those being exploited. It is interesting to note that some of those who are willing to put in this kind of unpaid effort are not ready to pay, for example, for cultural content — they prefer to download it for free. So, we are probably before a change in models. The old models no longer work, but we are not sure yet what the new models will be like.

**Based on open source in both directions?**

Based on open source, based on a different way of making money. In fact, the model is an economic model. How do you make money? For example, if you look at cultural

content, money used to be made, for example, from packaging music, from packaging books and selling them. Now this is no longer considered the way of making money. Probably, the new way is more through live concerts or the actual use you make of the content: you use the content, but you don't own a copy. In fact, we have already had this mix in the past with, say, the radio, which is a channel for distributing cultural content where no user pays. It is the people selling advertisements who pay. What I mean is that we need to find a suitable economic model for crowdsourcing as well, and it has to be a different model. That is all I can say. Where it will lead us, whether this will be the main component in translation, I am not sure. I think that it will remain confined more to the informal part of translation. The more formal part will remain structured the way we know it now.

**And how could we combine crowdsourcing and machine translation? They are considered to be the new technologies that will completely change our way of seeing translation. Do you think they can be combined? Will they come into conflict?**

I think that they should be combined. Where crowdsourcing translation is concerned, translation can start from scratch but it is better to start from something. We already have publicly available translation memories. This is something that already exists and which should be part of the mix. However, translation memories do not cover all the ground. Many sentences are not translatable with translation memories. Machine translation gives you a starting point in such cases. My view has always been that if machine translation is very bad you throw it away and start from scratch. But there are parts that are useful as a starting point. I do not see them as two conflicting solutions. I see them as different tools that you combine to have the best result.

**Do you think that crowdsourcers would be willing to use machine translation?**

I think so. I think that crowdsourcers already use machine translation.

**As far as you know the crowdsourcing environment, do they have experience in translation? Are they interested in the translation profession, in translation as an activity, or do they just want to have a product in their own language?**

As far as I know, most of them are not particularly interested in translation. Some of them may be translators, but they are mainly people interested in the results. They are people interested in the products, whatever they may be. It can be any kind of information, a technical manual or whatever. They are people interested in having the product in their own language. They need translations as instruments, they do not do it for the sake of translation. They do it for the sake of the product. In many cases it is because they feel there is a need to have some kind of document in a specific language. But the interest is not in the translation per se.

**Do you not think that this could have a bad impact on quality, if they are just interested in having something they can understand, that can be usable, without much interest in high-quality results?**

Not necessarily. When you see, for example, projects like Wikipedia, there is no control, no high quality standards, but people produce quality because they want to produce things they can be proud of. Especially because they do it in their own interest, they want to do a good job. Talking about quality, I must say that I am very much concerned when I read the newspapers. There I am really concerned because you have all these correspondents, in London, in Washington, in New York, who translate directly and introduce a lot of bad terminology into my language, and it is terminology that sticks. I am concerned by how people, native speakers, write their language. I do not think crowdsourcers could produce something worse than what people are writing every day.



Therefore, I am not so worried. Obviously, we must be aware that crowdsourcing is not meant to translate Shakespeare's works, for example.

**Even though there have been attempts to translate literature by crowdsourcing. For example, *Harry Potter* has been translated into Chinese and into German in this way.**

Yes, translations into some languages have been like this. Yes, some attempts are being made. I have also seen anecdotal things like translations into Spanglish as a recognised language. This is anecdotal. I do not think that this is the reality.

**Let us come back to our institution. Do you think that there is scope for launching some sort of experiment or pilot project with crowdsourcing at the Commission? Are we ripe for something like that?**

I come back to what I said before. I think that we should at least try and open a debate there. I cannot say we are ripe or we are not ripe. The Commission is sometimes very slow in adopting things. Some concepts are difficult to get through, especially concepts like participatory democracy. Something, however, is moving. Let's take, for example, the European Citizens' Initiative. This is a perfect example where citizens from different countries unite to propose a legislative initiative, and all translations are to be produced by the initiators. Or let's take, Citzalia, the virtual European Parliament where everybody can take part in the everyday life of the institution. This is crowdsourcing at work!

It is difficult in an organisation which is very hierarchical, very rigid, where we produce formal quality, we produce things which are authoritative and so on. So, mixing with the public is a bit complicated, but I think that it could be possible, especially under certain circumstances. I would not like to start with a big thing, but you could take a site with a clear population, a clear constituency. Let's say for example, the scientific community. This is perhaps a bad example because they are used to complex English. But a kind of constituency like this which is very well controlled, where you can define some methods and have some kind of control over who can get in or not. Indeed this could be used as a test to see whether it works or not.

**Do you feel you are alone here in supporting this or not?**

I do not know. The problem is that I have not voiced my concerns and my ideas very much. I have only been talking with a few people. I know that this may be a bit radical as an idea. You do not often get into discussing this ...

**And you are not a translator ...**

Not any more. I used to be a translator, but not a trained translator.

**And now you see things from a different perspective ...**

Now I see things from a different perspective, yes. But I still consider myself a translator in many regards. I think it is nice to go in this direction. However, I must say that my contact with crowdsourcing has been through the industry, and I know that the drivers in the industry are different from the drivers for institutional translation. In institutional translation we go for fidelity, for the accuracy of translation. We do not care so much, in principle, about the outreach of our message. But I think that we should. I share very much the standpoint of Margot Wallström when she wanted to go for communication. This should be our work right now. That is why I have been pushing for machine translation for the last few years.

**So, for the time being you are happy with machine translation ...**

Yes. I find the work very satisfactory.

**Have you heard about Duolinguo?**

Duolinguo? No.

**It is a new experiment on the web to use translation to learn English and other languages. They propose sentences. You are expected to translate them and the results might then be used to translate Wikipedia, the whole of Wikipedia. So, the objective is combining crowdsourcing and language learning and translation.**

It looks interesting, but there I would be careful. It reminds me of an old practice of some translation agencies — some crook translation agencies — which, to recruit people, gave full paragraphs to different applicants to translate as a test. In the end, they did not recruit anybody, but got a translation for free. So, it has to be looked at very seriously, but it could be interesting, why not?

**And they say the same thing as you have said before. It is not possible to translate the whole of Wikipedia into all languages, so this might be a way of having at least part of it translated. Here, they would not be competing with professionals.**

If they translate Wikipedia, for example, it is clear that you do not charge for this service, so it should be legitimate. If it is other things, you can always raise some doubts, but this looks very, very nice. I think that in general we tend not to consider very seriously the communities, but the communities are much more serious than we tend to think. Probably you would not be surprised, but many would, to see how many people are willing to devote one hour, two hours, three hours a day, just for nothing, for the sake of the community and for something they believe in. I really think that we should leverage this potential, and, if we can, leverage it for Europe rather than for a company.

**Just one last question. Do you think that we could learn something from the way crowdsourcers work? I mean, as Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission, as translators, as professional translators, is there something that we could learn from them?**

Probably we can learn. In my view these kinds of things always teach me about how people think, how people react. So for me it is mainly as a manager that I can learn from this. It shows that everything is about commitment. You do not get commitment by giving instructions or by telling people 'Do this and shut up'. You get commitment by rallying people around the right idea, and that is a great challenge in our service and in the Commission in general. I think that we must learn from them. Having great ideas, we can stick together. We have a lot of capacity and people can do many, many things, good things. Or maybe not many, many things all the time, but we can do many great things if we are convinced of what we do.

**Is there anything else you would like to add or any thoughts or any suggestions or hopes you would like to share?**

I think this is an interesting subject and deserves some exploration, so I am just very happy that you are doing this interview.

**Thanks a lot.**

You're welcome.



## Interview with Dr. Jorge Diaz Cintas

**Today I would like to talk with you about crowdsourcing and audiovisual translation as one of the sectors where this collective approach is more developed. How do you think this is impacting on professional translation?**

I'll tell you from the perspective of audiovisual translation which I know best, is that ok?

**Yes, that's fine.**

You've got all these people who are doing subtitles on the web for free and I think it is having an impact on the way the profession is conducting itself. Some of these amateurs, or fansubs as they are known on the web, started subtitling Japanese anime and manga, and later they moved on to translate also TV series, particularly from the USA. What you get these days (because they are so fast doing their translation), is that as soon as the material has been broadcast in the USA, it is virtually at the same time circulating on the internet, subtitled into other languages. This situation is having an impact on audiovisual translation in two ways. Firstly, given the speedy way that people do these translations some companies are tightening their deadlines to try and beat them. Secondly, some companies, and I would say the least professional ones, make use of these same subtitles for the commercial distribution of their DVDs, for which, of course, they charge

**Do you mean that those companies are trying to exploit the free work of the people working on the internet?**

Yes, exactly. Fansubbers are doing it for free for everybody, and then those companies do minimal changes to their subtitles and use the translations for distributing on their DVDs, and sometimes also for TV broadcasting. What some fansubbers do - because they are aware that their translations are used commercially in the media - is to deliberately incorporate mistakes into their translations so that when they see them on the commercial circuit they can recognise them.

**Can they take companies to court in that case?**

No, I wouldn't think so because, in the first instance, they are already doing something that is not legal and they know it. They are using material that hasn't been distributed commercially in other countries and they are distributing it for free on the internet, without considering copyright issues. Given how murky the landscape is, it's no surprise that everybody is exploiting these practices and trying to make the most of them to suit their interests.

**Can you see any other changes taking place?**

The second way these practices are impacting on translation is reflected in the fact that sometimes people who are doing these subtitles on the internet are much more into

those particular TV series than professionals. Of course, they are not translators but they know the series inside out, they know the characters, they know the jokes, and they have the luxury of time. They are cult viewers and discuss their favourite topics with other similar people on dedicated forums. In this way, what they are doing is putting pressure on the accuracy of the translation and sometimes forcing the translation to be redone because they consider that the one that has been distributed commercially is not good enough. Some companies and distributors are taking notice of this and, sometimes, they are changing their translations because of the lobbying by these groups of amateurs. So, the situation we find ourselves in is that, on the one hand, the least scrupulous people are using those translations for commercial purposes, whilst on the other hand some companies are taking notice of these people and are slightly changing their attitude to translation, making modifications to the actual target text to reflect what these people want.

### **So they are actually better than professional translators?**

On some occasions it can be argued that they are, particularly when it comes to using the appropriate terms. But in my opinion, they still lack the basics of translation and can commit serious mistakes when dealing with other areas such as syntax, false friends, accuracy, etc. There hasn't been a proper study done on this but what they tend to be better at is when it comes to some of the gimmicks and idiosyncrasies of the series. They might know that a given sentence is the one that a particular character uses throughout the film or throughout the series or they may be privy to a particular reference that can be a little bit too obscure for the non-initiated; or an ironic statement that they know is referring to another character or another episode. In that sense, they can be said to have insider's knowledge but what they really lack is a flair for the actual translation. They may not know English that well, sometimes even their own language given the typos that can be spotted, but they know exactly what the reference is referring to. Conversely, a good translator might know the English but they may not be aware of what that reference is making an allusion to because it's too obscure or cryptic. Or the professional translator may have been working only on the third series and the reference concerns the first season or the pilot. So that's what fansubbers tend to add: the knowledge of the series rather than the linguistic competence.

### **I see. What is, normally, the attitude of companies towards fansubbing?**

Companies find it rather difficult to position themselves on this topic. Some of them are trying to find some sort of synergy with these amateurs. There is an international company, with offices in London, that came to a conference in Berlin and acknowledged that they were trying to establish links with fansubbers in an attempt to try and produce translations of audiovisual programmes that otherwise wouldn't be translated at all and see whether there was some commercial mileage in that approach. I don't know if you've seen projects like TED ([www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)) or Universal Subtitles ([www.universalsubtitles.org](http://www.universalsubtitles.org)), which are online resources where anyone can produce their own subtitles for programmes that otherwise wouldn't be translated at all. The idea behind is that in that way everyone can then have access to information that otherwise would be beyond their reach. You've also got the case of Facebook where people were asked to produce their own translations so that they can improve the whole system.

So, that's the sort of collaboration that some companies are trying to promote: involve people in crowdsourcing by providing their translations for free, usually subtitles, and at the same time find a way to make this output commercially available and profitable. Not a small achievement! Of course, this sort of hybrid approach is a bit risky because some people, including some companies, see it as a form of exploitation. Some don't want to see it that way, and prefer to say that this is an efficient way of translating videos that otherwise wouldn't get translated. Apparently, of the vast amount of audiovisual material that gets uploaded onto YouTube every day, commercial but also user-generated, more

than half is not translated at all. The question here is that this material will never be translated commercially and the only way for it to reach a wider audience is if it's translated by amateurs or fansubbers. It's simple: "either is done this way, or it will never be translated".

In my opinion, most companies are keeping a close eye on what's going on but are still reluctant to interfere. They are not fostering any contacts or relationship with these people and don't fancy being linked to these practices.

### **How about subtitling standards and conventions?**

The standards and conventions that are applied in professional subtitling are fairly traditional. They've been applied for many decades now without changing. You can find the odd small company that is doing something innovative, or at least different, in terms of subtitling, usually imitating what we can see on the internet. But these are not big companies. They are not the ones that have an impact on the industry or can be considered a mirror of professional practice.

### **What do you think will happen in the future?**

Well, in my opinion, what we can see now is that people working on the internet are a lot more creative in many respects. As I was saying earlier, subtitling was invented obviously after cinema, which is not that old, just over a century. Basically, subtitles are still done pretty much in the same way now as they were at the beginning. The first book that was ever written on this subject was by Simon Laks, a Polish guy living in Paris. The book was called *Le Sous-titrage de films* and appeared in 1957. If you read it, you would swear blind that it was written the day before yesterday. The conventions, the translational strategies, the way of presenting the information on the screen are virtually the same as the ones applied nowadays. That is obviously very surprising in some respects because clearly we don't communicate audiovisually as we did in the 1950's, never mind before the 1950's. We don't produce audiovisual material in the same way. Filmmaking changes constantly, and media professionals are always on the lookout for new approaches and ways of communicating through the audiovisual media. The range of programmes distributed has also grown exponentially. You've got cookery programmes, sit-coms, corporate videos, videogames, and so on. There is a wide spectrum of material that is now being done audiovisually. However, the guidelines seem to be, on the whole, fairly close to the old ones. Perhaps, too close for comfort. That's the reason why there's lots of scope for people to come up with new strategies and new conventions. Then, what you find on the internet, for instance, is people changing colours, displacing the subtitles. And rather than having them at the bottom of the screen, they appear in the middle or on the top of the screen. They are projected little by little onto the screen and disappear also little by little, as in karaoke. And it is all this potential that fansubbers are exploring on internet. But very little is being done or taken on board in the industry.

It is obviously difficult to see into the future, but what I think is going to happen is that some of these changes will have to be considered. Companies will have to start acknowledging that, for certain programmes, not for all of them, these new conventions could be appropriate for selling the product. For example, if you translate a book or poetry, you can resort to a footnote in order to explain whatever you think it's appropriate. This is normal practice in translation. However, in the case of audiovisual programmes we have always said that it isn't possible to use footnotes in subtitling because of the space and time limitations. Now, some people are precisely doing that: incorporating footnotes with information that explains some of the plays on words or the cultural references that are considered to be too cryptic for the target audience. And, technically speaking, this is perfectly feasible. The problem is that some viewers are not familiar with this approach and are adamant to watch films that make use of it. But the possibilities are there, and since more and more people are resorting to this strategy on

the internet, it is becoming fairly popular. Think, for instance, of the mainstream TV series *Heroes*. There are some Japanese characters and when they speak in Japanese, the subtitles just fly all over the screen, increase and decrease the font size, change the place where they're coming from... And this way of presenting the subtitles has become very popular precisely because they are atypical subtitles.

**You mean they are popular among those who are passionate about this series or are they popular among the general public as well?**

I think they are popular with the people who like these series. The general public might like it as well, but I think that the general public is less vocal. It is very difficult to gauge their likes or dislikes. The people that like the series write on the forums, on the internet, send emails, and so on. They are much more outspoken. In my opinion, the general public is much more reluctant to take part in all these things and, hence, it's difficult to know whether they like it or they don't like it. I don't think any reception projects have been done on the issue. There is a project going on in Italy looking into dubbing and how Italians receive dubbing and "dubbese". However there is very little about the reception of subtitling that we could take as solid research and use as a basis for the interpretation of what the general viewers like. My impression is that the general viewers, the sort of standard viewer in Italy or in Spain, don't like it because it is a little bit too innovative and disruptive. They're not used to this type of subtitling. They may find it a bit unusual, and like it here or there but not as standard practice. The problem is that they may find it too obtrusive and wouldn't like it all the time. That's why I said that some of these innovations may be appropriate for certain genres, for certain audiences, for certain TV series but not for all. For example, the television version could be done in one way and the DVD version – for people who really like the series and are willing to pay for it – could follow other conventions and be more innovative and daring. In this sense, one could venture that the industry might get fragmented in the future and use different approaches depending on the sectors of the audience they want to target.

**So, in your view, there might be several markets, that will become more flexible.**

That's what I would imagine. But then again, there is always the issue of money. To what extent are companies going to be willing to have for instance two sets of subtitles and pay for them? It would be unthinkable now with the financial crisis, of course. But in the future, who knows. Companies will go down this avenue only if they can get enough money, enough revenue from what they are selling. For the time being, I think there will be just one set of subtitles and the way that they are presented on screen will change slightly, depending on whether it is a classical film, a blockbuster, a NGO video, or a sitcom like *The Big Bang Theory*.

**Do you know whether this way of working on the part of the fansubbers is also impacting on translation studies? I was thinking for example of Venuti's distinction between foreignisation and domestication. We have been driven to think of foreignisation as a sort of elitist concept while normal translation should be more domesticating. Overall, fansubbers seem to prefer foreignising translation.**

I'm not a big fan of these concepts of foreignisation and domestication, but I do think that the new practices that we can see on the internet, generally speaking (again, more research has to be done to quantify how often they use this technique), tend to be clearly foreignising. Sometimes, fansubbers will keep the cultural references in the subtitle, literally, and then provide a footnote that they usually position on the top of the screen, explaining what the meaning of the reference is. If it's some type of food, they will keep the foreign term in the subtitle and then on the top of the screen they will add information along the lines: "this food is eaten at Easter", or "is made of", or "is typical

from the north of the country” or whatever they think is relevant. In that sense they allow themselves to be much closer to the original. The tendency is to take this ‘foreignising’ approach when dealing with far afield or less well known cultures, such as Japanese. Fansubbers can afford being adventurous with their translations because they know that the audience are pretty much into Japanese manga and anime. They are dealing with people who are hungry for new information from other countries, and that's why they allow themselves to be so forthcoming with the information and use terms that are totally opaque for anybody who is not familiar with the Japanese culture. Even then, they are aware that some terms may be difficult to follow and that's why they add extra information. In that sense, fansubbing allows for prominent foreignisation, bringing the other culture to the viewer. Nonetheless, it can be argued that any subtitling is foreignising because viewers are always listening to the foreign language.

Incidentally, for good or evil, we translate mostly from English. As everybody seems to know a bit of English, they can follow the original and understand some of what the characters are saying. To avoid any conflict between the original soundtrack and the subtitles, some companies ask translators to be ‘literal’ and follow the soundtrack as close as possible, so that people watching the programme cannot tell of any discrepancies between what is being said and what they are reading. This can, of course, have a very negative impact in the quality of the final subtitles.

Perhaps, foreignisation is more acute and prominent in the case of the new subtitling practices, but I think it's always been part of subtitling to some extent because of the unique situation of having the soundtrack and the original text always present.

**I was thinking of countries like Italy or Spain where subtitling is not so widespread and dubbing is usually preferred by the standard viewer. In this case, is fansubbing having an impact?**

I think it is, actually; particularly on the younger generations. What has happened these days is that the process has sped out dramatically as amateurs, as I mentioned earlier, will subtitle the programmes straight away. The TV series are usually broadcast first in the USA and the fans round the world know that if they want to watch it as soon as possible it has to be with subtitles because the dubbed version will take much longer to be produced. Most likely the dubbed version won't be posted on the internet, at least not immediately, and fans will have to wait until it is broadcast on television, or until it comes to the cinema in the case of films. This is why many people are resorting to watching their favourite programmes with subtitles, simply because it's the only translation that is available really fast and quickly. And we are talking here of 2 or 3 days after the first broadcast. That fast!

When the last episode of the series *Lost* was broadcast, the TV channel in Spain, Cuatro, knew that viewers would end up watching the episode illegally on the internet, with fan subtitles, if they weren't to provide them immediately. The media hype preceding this last episode was enormous and everybody wanted to know how the series unravelled in the last episode. This forced Cuatro to broadcast the episode at the same time as in the USA and, obviously, the only possible way to do this was with the help of subtitles.<sup>1</sup> It was the first time that they tried to get one up on the fansubbers by producing subtitles straight away. The experiment didn't go according to plan, or at least not as smoothly as they would have liked. Some viewers complained because there were some technical hiccups and the final output wasn't as good as some people would have liked. In any case, what is important here is the fact that it proves that the industry is taking measures to try and bypass the impact of fansubbing. Media distributors are aware that

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<sup>1</sup> [www.todosobretv.com/avances/la-television-espanola-emitira-el-final-de-lost-en-simultaneo-con-estados-unidos/](http://www.todosobretv.com/avances/la-television-espanola-emitira-el-final-de-lost-en-simultaneo-con-estados-unidos/)

viewers want to watch their favourite programmes as soon as possible after their release in the USA and one way of speeding the process is by using subtitles, not dubbing.

### **What is the profile of the typical fansubber, if there's one?**

This is very difficult to pinpoint. Usually, they are young, or at least one imagines that they are in their teens or early twenties. The ones I've met personally tend to be in their mid or late 20s, early 30s also; although I've been talking to people who are older, people in their late thirties and forties. Not long ago, I was talking to a fansubber from Brazil, in her forties, who translated French films into Brazilian Portuguese. She said, "If we don't do it, it's not done commercially because most French films are not considered profitable. I teach my students how to subtitle the films and then we post the subtitles on the internet".

Given the appealing nature of subtitling, some academics like using it for foreign language teaching and learning, as a way of getting the students motivated. Coming back to your question, I think, in general, the fansubber profile will be that of a young person, good at technology. They spend a lot of their time on their computers and the internet, they know how to get hold of a subtitling programme, how to put the times in and out in a film, etc. What I find remarkable is the very efficient way in which they organise themselves. Usually, there is always somebody who is technically gifted and takes care of the technology, capturing the actual programme from the television and distributing it to the rest of the people involved in the process. Then, those who are good at languages translate, mostly using one of the many freely available subtitling programmes. Some other people will check the quality, and others will distribute the final product. To some extent you could argue that they operate like a company, with a clear division of work that is being taken care of by several people.

As for their interest in subtitling, some of them decide to improve on their technique and do a formal subtitling course, usually at university. For instance, the girl who interviewed me in JoSTrans - The Journal of Specialised Translation,<sup>2</sup> mentioned that she had been a fansubber in the past but at the time she was doing a Master's in audiovisual translation, because she wanted to know more about how to do it 'properly'.

### **According to you, could there be synergies among fansubbers and professionals?**

Yes. I think that some of those who start as fansubbers might easily end up being professionals.

### **Is this one of the reasons why they start fansubbing, or is it rather that, when they start doing it, they discover they like it and want to go on doing it as a career?**

My feeling is that they first start fansubbing because they just like watching these programmes and then, at a later stage, they discover that it may lead to a potential professional career. They realise that some people are doing subtitles for commercial purposes and that they get paid for it and then some start considering the possibility of doing it as a professional activity rather than a pastime.

### **Do you think that fansubbing might be a model for other sectors in translation?**

Well, I'm not really sure. Nobody really knows who started this trend of amateur subtitling on the internet. I know that fansubbing has been going on for quite a few years now but I couldn't tell you if it's fansubbing that has had an impact on other areas or

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<sup>2</sup> [www.jostrans.org/issue17/int\\_cintas.php](http://www.jostrans.org/issue17/int_cintas.php)



whether it was the case of other translation practices on the internet having an impact on subtitling. I'm not really sure. One of the most exciting things about subtitling is that you are always working with audiovisual programmes, and that is very attractive to some people. To some extent what you get in those programmes is real life. Furthermore, the language used in many of these programmes is the language that many youngsters use in their daily conversations. Just look at The Big Bang Theory, for instance, that's the sort of language they use with their friends, and that's the reason why working with this material is so appealing, unlike translating medical reports or users' manuals. Arguably, younger generations don't read many books, which would explain why many of these people will not be inclined to translate a book because that's not the sort of thing they are interested in, unless it's something like Harry Potter, of course.

### **What about the translation of software documentation or other material?**

The translation of software is slightly different; if manuals, for example, are not translated correctly, some consumers might try and sue the company. At the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, they have been conducting research on the translation of user agreements and contracts, and particularly on the legal implications that could derive from faulty translations. Companies must therefore be careful and double-check whatever is crowdsourced for translation, since authorship of the final product tends to stay in the hands of the companies. All this considered, I am not sure how successful amateur translation would be in this environment, or whether other sectors might have the appeal of the audiovisual. I know there is quite a bit going on in the field of videogames, where amateur practices are known as 'ROM hacking'. This is similar to fansubbing though the task of the hackers may also involve the change of images, for instance. And both Twitter and Facebook rely on the work of volunteers for the translation of some of their pages. So, it may well be that the fansubbing approach to translation may actually catch on in other fields.

### **Is there something in fansubbing or, more generally, in crowdsourcing, which might be used as a model for a larger organisation like the EU?**

I personally do not think so. I cannot see the EU resorting to crowdsourcing, not only because of security and privacy reasons but also because of its social connotation. TED<sup>3</sup>, a site where you can find numerous talks by people from all over the world, translate their audiovisual material through crowdsourcing in the first instance, and then they claim it goes through a quality control check. They operate on a NGO basis and do not do it for profit; rather, it is an attempt to allow "speakers of less-dominant languages an equal opportunity to spread ideas within their communities". If large organisations with less philanthropic aims followed the same route, there could be the risk of being perceived as exploiting people. Whereas it may be OK for TED because of their social awareness and their non-for-profit attitude, for an international body like the EU would remain risky. The EU has always relied on professionals and a change to use the work produced by amateurs could easily be perceived as an attempt at exploiting other people's work. Besides, from a logistic point of view all translations should be double-checked by professionals to verify that the quality is up to scratch and that nothing inappropriate has been inserted in the text. Imagine, for example, having an amateur translation into Estonian which nobody has revised, and which turns out to be of very bad quality or contains unwanted messages: it is simply too risky. And then again, there are areas that you simply couldn't leave in the hands of amateurs, like legal texts.

### **Is there anything else you would like to add?**

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<sup>3</sup> [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com)

I'd only like to stress the fact that everything is changing so rapidly in our field that in a few months I might no longer agree with what I've just said today. Things are changing at the speed of light!

**Thank you.**

Thank you too.



## Interview with Dr. Fred Hollowood

**Today I would like to talk with you about crowdsourcing and how it is transforming translation. To define the transformations translation is presently undergoing you have spoken of “a tale of two technologies”, machine translation and crowdsourcing.**

Following my talk this morning on the content explosion, I believe that only machine translation offers us a technology that will allow us to efficiently and cost-effectively translate the volumes of content, for which we would be expected to provide translations in the future. It is also my hope that the community through the social web will be one of the means which will allow us to improve that machine translation content through post-editing services, delivered by the ordinary citizen in the street, in subject areas where they consider themselves expert.

**You mean that it would be for the community to post-edit machine translation and this would be the link between machine translation and crowdsourcing?**

I think the community is skilled to do lots and lots of things. The community is skilled to do translations, when the community wants to do translations. There are many more monolingual speakers than there are bilingual speakers, so my expectation is that if we can develop monolingual post-editing technology, the community will also engage in monolingual post-editing. Yes, the community will do everything from quality assurance to consultation to engineering. The community holds of all the skills of the citizens. It's *how* you ask these people to do what is the right thing for them to do. So, if you can present a case to them whereby they see common interest between them and you, then they will actually perform those tasks for which they have the skills.

**And is this your experience in Symantec?**

Our community behaves as a technical support community, i.e. it is a community of people providing advice to other customers about problems they have experienced.

**Nothing to do with translation, then?**

Nothing to do with translation at all. But then we asked a subset of that community if they would be able to help us with a translation project. Lo and behold a few people said “I could translate that” or “I would be interested in translating that.” Some of these people were linguists, some of them were not linguists but were subject-matter experts and translated a software product for us. It was a free software product so that we would not be accused of abusing them for commercial purposes. We took the texts to be translated, we made language packs so that people could download the translation packs

and convert their English software to Turkish or Albanian or Chinese software. They saw this as a community effort where they helped their fellow consumers. These were the first two projects where we deployed formally untested translators and actually they did a very good job because they were power users of the product they translated. This is an example of leveraging specific skills within the community to do a specific project. Our community of translators would be tiny compared to our community of people interested in technical support issues, but that is a matter of development. We need to make these communities grow, monitor them and see how far it goes.

**Had you already experimented with crowdsourcing on technical support before?**

We have a technical support community that grew up practically of its own volition. There are other communities where the company provides the platform for the community to engage with us. There are also communities that are completely independent, where our products are discussed. We monitor those communities as third parties. So the community of communities, that discuss our products, is only partly influenced by the corporation.

**What about commercial products which are not free (from the point of view of translation, I mean)?**

We are about to launch our first project where translation is sought for a commercial product. I cannot disclose what that language set is going to be, but hopefully in three months time we will be able to say how it was implemented and how well received it was. Key to our free product work was the ability to put a link in the product itself saying "Are you interested in translating this?" Then prospective volunteers do only the part which appeals to them. This is perhaps how we sourced the majority of our translators. We seeded the activity with a few active members and then grew that community basically by references from the product. We hope that for our more popular products, even though they are commercial, paid-for products, we will likewise attract people who have bought a more common language variant to volunteer and do minority languages. Our goal is to enable users to create a free language pack which works on an already purchased product.

**Do you not envisage using machine translation for these products?**

We already use machine translation for the main languages for all the technical documentation. We use it for some of the software as well, all post-edited. Machine translation is an everyday occurrence for our technical products across seven languages. I must admit I do not think about that process anymore. It just happens.

Whether we use machine translation as our starting point for product language packs is still an open question, and probably a question of community translator preference.

**Are you not afraid that, in the case of commercial products, you might be accused of abusing and exploiting the community?**

Well, I think that the community is going to have to decide on that. There will always be someone who has a different opinion. The thing is supposed to be voluntary. It is supposed to be of mutual benefit to the company and the person performing the translations. If it is leverage, it is voluntary leverage. If somebody gets what they want out of this exercise and they are happy to do the translations, happy not just willing, I do not really see that as a bad thing. I think we need to find a new word to classify what it is.

**Why do you think they are happy to work for free?**

Usually they want to make a contribution to their own society. In our case, our first two languages (indeed completed in less than 48 hours) were Albanian and Turkish. Our software products are not available in those languages. These very enthusiastic users thought it would be great if they were available in those languages so that their friends and family would be able to comprehend the software and have their assets protected. So they got down to work and translated the material. We give them kudos, we give them certificates. We actually try to send them branded material. Some people have even refused to accept branded material. People are motivated by whatever personal motivation drives them along. We have learnt not to try and second guess what this might be. It is not a behavioural study. You ask them, they say yes, they do it. As to why they do it in their heart of hearts, that is entirely up to them.

**It would be interesting to understand why they do that, to understand the mechanisms and drivers behind crowdsourcing compared to the ways of working of professional translators.**

Some of them like to be at the top. It is recognition. To be able to say “You know, I did the most translations.” Some of them are students. They get practice in doing a real software product and can write on their CVs that they made a contribution to a real software product. Some of them will not tell us why they do it. Admittedly some of them do it because their friends are doing it and they want to see what it is like. Some do a little and some do a lot. There is a ratio of roughly ten to one. You usually find that 1-2 percent of the people do most of the work and 8-12 percent of the people do about 10 percent of the work, while the rest of the community watches and downloads. There are similar dynamics across the open source movement and community activity. It is not a novel circumstance. Some people are active in a certain area and some people are on the fringes and some people watch. That seems to be the pattern.

**There have been cases where the attempts to use crowdsourcing while commercial interests were involved were not positively received.**

I think, there have been a few unfortunate experiences. But the open source community – and I would mention Sun Microsystems and Novell – have successful open source products that are built and maintained with open source resources. The companies did make money, but they made money out of the support and distribution rather than directly from those products. It is not a huge jump from that recognition of what people are willing to do to make a contribution to open source (and at the same time allow a company to derive a revenue from supporting that open source) to having a free product that someone makes a free translation contribution to. To me it does not seem to be a great difference. When we move to more commercially centred things, then we may possibly find more criticism or reluctance. We may find recognition, we may find that people realise that minority markets are never going to be served on a commercial basis and basically a community contribution basis is fine.

**All in all, you feel that crowdsourcing is not competing with professional translators.**

Not at all. If the amount of translation in the world were a conserved entity, people might have a concern. There is more material that could be translated than translators could ever translate and that any economy could ever pay for. So what we are actually trying to do here is to find an economic way of doing translations that would never be done otherwise and provide them to the community. Some of this material is very transient. It has the lifespan of a couple of hours or days or maybe weeks, and the costs involved in translating that material using traditional methods would be unbearable for any organisation, whether publicly funded or commercial. So, really, what we are looking at here is an ultimate set of technologies that will bring the general public a mass of written information currently held by corporations and government entities in a mono-lingual

form. Information that translators do not have the capacity to deal with and that enterprises do not have the financial resources to support. I think that, if the people recognise that, they will make a contribution and if the people do not recognise that, well, they will not contribute and possibly complain. In corporations 80 or 90 percent of the material is not translated as no one is going to get ten times as much budget. If we want to provide the best possible service to everybody, we have to take that material and get it translated somehow.

**Do you think that crowdsourcing is a good alternative to machine translation for minority-languages, or that there is not a clear-cut division of the market?**

It is a complicated question. Machine translation of minority languages faces two issues. It is the chicken and the egg problem, which comes first. If the commercial market was there, someone would make the engine. If someone had the engine, then you could translate the materials in order to train the engine. Somewhere along the line, a translation has to happen or a coding project has to be initiated in order to make an engine, a rule-based engine or a statistical engine. Once that process is kick-started and you have enough material, or enough technology to make translations, then you can reasonably do more and post-edit more. You have to build enough critical mass for the technology to get an opportunity to grow. You can use the community to do some of the translation. You can then train engines or build engines and then use the community to post-edit the translations. Then, once you get this process kick-started, you can hopefully make better engines and more narrow-domain engines. The reason why you class something as a minority language or a minority interest is that it is a niche. In order to get out of that niche, you have to generate enough material to break from the gravitational forces that make it a niche and then get out there and avail yourself of different technologies that make things better. I have a lot of sympathy for languages that have only 1 million to 3 million speakers and are a developing economy, because it is very hard to justify the money to do translations in those languages. If communities can provide some of these translations, fine. As a result of our efforts, we have now a few tens of thousand words of Albanian that we did not have before. Actually, we did not have any before.

**Crowdsourcing could therefore help minority languages survive.**

Yes. If people are using their language on the social web and it is of appreciable quality, then that can be used to train engines, hopefully. Then it grows from there. I think there is scope for it. The technology has to be very efficient because you are dealing with small numbers of people and small amounts of money. If people are concerned about the lack of commercial interest in something like this, they are effectively smothering the whole thing before it can start. I do not know what the exchange rate with the currency in Albania is, but I am sure the Albanians cannot afford English to Albanian translators at Western rates. So what can they do?

**Do you think that this method could be applied to all fields, all sectors of translation, or for crowdsourcing to be effective you need a well-structured community equipped with good software?**

I was amazed that there was a community of people who cared about software security. You know I am always amazed, I am innocent in this. If people can care about software security, they can care about most things. It must be one of the most obscure niche markets that one can find. When you compare its popularity with something like fast cars, there must be about one to a thousand. I think communities can be found for any narrow domain and any minority language. The skills in finding those communities and how to provide not nourishment, but the right environment to flourish, are the things that interest me.

### **What about confidential documents or legislative documents?**

That's what a paid translation by a translator with an Masters degree is for. If you have legal or commercial documents that require translation, you get the certainty that you need, when you pay a translator and seal the deal with a non-disclosure agreement.

### **So, there is still work for professional translators.**

Professional translators will be busier than ever because now they have the opportunity to do a greater number of professional jobs. The professional translator is the bilingual person who can understand both sides of the problem under examination. They have the opportunity to move into any number of technical jobs because they understand what is going into these MT engines and what is coming out of them. Translation studies has become a much broader area thanks to these new technologies. I think the translators of the future will be taught more about system engineering and they will have different jobs open to them. One of my young PhD students is fluent in German, has a first degree in IT, a second degree in translation studies and now is doing a PhD in linguistics. These are the bright young people of the next decade. These are the new opportunities, a very different palette of opportunities that will be available to translation talent.

### **Should translators not be afraid of these technologies?**

No. Translators should embrace these technologies and hence the opportunities that these technologies will bring. I am always humbled by the multilingualism that I see all across Europe, especially in situations like in the Commission (my own is very limited). Multilingualism is going to become a core skill. As we promote these technologies, the multilingual people are going to be the people who say "that's appropriate" or "that's not appropriate," "this is the right thing to do here," "that's the wrong thing to do there." And this not through fear, but through knowing their customers, knowing what quality levels are expected in various places and being very clear about making sure they are met. I have often complained about the translators being in charge of quality, but they are going to be in charge in a different way. They are not going to tell us how many grammar mistakes are in somebody else's translation. In future they are going to say "that is the appropriate content for that audience," which is a much higher-level skill.

### **According to you, will this have some impact on our attitude towards quality?**

Quality... I always think about shoes. You buy a pair of shoes. You do not go into the shop and buy a random pair of shoes, you buy a pair of shoes for something. You buy them for walking, you buy them for dancing, you buy them for a purpose. There is no single translation quality. The quality is for a specific purpose, or for a certain market segment or for a particular customer. Some people may not care that you have got two spelling mistakes per thousand words. I do not, as long as I know what the words are. I think this is where we find ourselves today.

### **What could be, according to you, the impact of these developments on the workflow of a big organisation like the European Institutions? What could we learn, for example, from the way crowdsourcing communities work?**

I think your workflow should reflect the process that you are doing and I think you need to re-examine your process periodically. The workflow for professional translation is one circumstance, the workflow for a machine-assisted translation is slightly different. The workflow for a community translation is very different. It is much more of a star flow than a sequential flow. Do not be afraid to experiment with different workflows in order to find out what works best for your community because this will be largely community-driven.

**We are a community in a way. We are a big community.**

A big community of translators. It is going to be driven by the people doing the work and what is easiest for them and how they will interact best. Not how someone sitting in their offices is going to say “I think this is the best thing” or “This is what I want.” One has to give up this notion of control and go into observation and find out what works and then implement that on behalf of your community. There is a *quid pro quo*; there is a cost, because translators give their time to do these translations. So likewise we have to give you time to understand what environment they need to be efficient. If you can’t adapt your current workflow quickly you may lose them. They will go and give their free translation time to someone else.

**The last question I would like to ask you is about the voluntary sector. It is growing quite rapidly and there seems to be a close link with crowdsourcing. In certain cases it is very open to crowdsourcing and can profit from it.**

I think that the voluntary sector, once they make their case clear to people, will benefit hugely from community translation. If you are able to translate and the voluntary sector can make a case that your translation is going to save lives, then how could you not give your time freely and perform this function and serve this end? I have two friends working in two different institutions which bring community translation to NGOs and charities to provide improved access to information on health and food and medicine. In the same way that Kiva does such a good job in micro-loans in the third world. We should be thinking about not just translation but all the other things that the community could do so that these NGOs could focus their limited resources on delivery, rather than generate things that people in the West can generate for free.

**Duolingo was mentioned this morning. It is a new project through which Wikipedia should be translated by people learning languages. In this way no energy or time would be wasted.**

Why not.

**Could it work?**

Of course it could work. In a similar fashion to people volunteer to translate the software. If you are an expert in that area, then you could take your English source and you could do two things. You could either machine-translate it and subject matter experts could fix that translation, or you could say “how many translators can I find?” and have them post-edit. You know it would be interesting to find out who did the better job, because there is nothing like the enthusiastic expert. And what is Wikipedia? The enthusiastic expert! There is every chance that this is entirely doable. If Facebook was doable and LinkedIn was doable, why should Wikipedia not be doable? And it does not have to be an aligned translation. As long as the same information is carried in the articles, would the readers of Wikipedia care if there is perfect alignment across language versions?

**From a linguist’s point of view, the idea is to preserve standards in language use and if you offer methods where there is no control over poor language....**

I am not saying the language is poor. All I am saying is that it is not pair-aligned. What is happening now, I do not think it will be bad. I think if locals really want this to happen and they have their name associated with it, then they will make it suitable. If something bad is presented, somebody else will fix it. That is how it goes.

**Are there problems with intellectual property?**



You just have to get the people to recognise what they are doing at the outset. You know, naturally, the first thing that came to our mind when we proposed this was intellectual property, which went straight to our legal department. So we have to say "Ok, this is the paragraph that people accept and sign off." They either own it or they do not own it, or they are giving it away or they are not giving it away. It does not matter what the IP agreement is as long as it is clear and then you work on that basis. The problem with intellectual property is only clarity about what you want and its presentation to the community. Then they can accept or not accept it. If they accept it, they have signed, they have ticked the legal agreement. It is the same as a software licence.

**Do you think that we should try to control these developments and would this have an impact?**

People will get round things. If we turn out to have a double-decker Internet, I think this activity will appear on both decks. I think enterprises will continue to have it on the top deck. Others will have it on the bottom deck. I do not think it will pose a problem for very long, people will work round it. The Internet came into being because people wanted it and it will remain available. People love it too much to let that escape.

**Is there anything in your personal experience with languages - different ways of working with languages - that you think of particularly?**

I am always amazed at how different all the linguists I have ever met are. I believe that linguists, as everyone else, are a very diverse and talented bunch of people and I do not think there is any way to guess what they might or might not do.

**Thank you very much.**

Thank you!