Social Media Translational Action: Translation Activities by K-Pop Fans in Twitter

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ABSTRACT

Internet application advancement has enabled Korean pop culture (K-Pop) to rapidly spread worldwide. However, technology alone is insufficient in delivering k-pop content to K-Pop fans because of language barriers. Hence, the translator’s role is pivotal in decoding these data. Realising this crucial need, fans have acted as translators in interpreting enormous data file that have been improperly translated or unavailable in the original file. This research examined the translation process occurring in Twitter microblogging environment which is rarely analysed among linguistic scholars. the translation style of fan translators was identified, and the translational action involved discussed. K-Pop group, Bangtan Sonyeondan’s (BTS) twitter account was selected as the main data source and Korean-English fan translation of the content distributed in the account was collected. The microblogging interface is equipped with the latest technology that supports multimedia data form, resulting in more dynamic translation work which needs to be highlighted in translation studies.

KEYWORDS

Domestication, Fan Translators, Fansub, Foreignisation, Multimedia Translation, Pictorial Translation, Prosumer, Text Translation, Translational Action, Twitter Translation

1. INTRODUCTION

Originating from South Korea (hereafter, Korea), Korean wave which is known as Hallyu (in romanised Korean pronunciation) has escalated in its popularity around the East and Southeast Asian regions since the 1990s and has continuously extended its influence on other parts of the continent (Jin & Yoon, 2016). The first Hallyu effect was mostly derived from the television broadcast of Korean Drama (K-Drama) such as Winter Sonata (Jung, 2011), resulting in Korean Drama fever and later spreading into other genres such as songs, music (Lee & Nornes, 2015) and even television variety shows (i.e. Running Man), leading to the birth of Hallyu 2.0 generation (Jin, 2016). This term was initially coined in August 2010 by Japanese media while covering the Girls Generation showcase to market the popularity of the Korean entertainment industry including Korean pop music (hereafter K-Pop) (Lee & Nornes, 2015). Compared to the first wave, the remarkable influence of Hallyu 2.0 has been greatly distributed through new internet technologies (Jin, 2016). Jin (2016) remarked that
Psy, a Korean singer, marked his popularity and presence in the digital world through his “Gangnam Style” song in the year 2012 via the YouTube platform where it garnered over 1.6 billion views on its official music video (MV). To date, the MV has gained approximately 3.1 billion views (as of 1st June 2018).

In the current Hallyu 2.0 phase, numerous digital contents of Korean popular culture such as K-Pop can be easily consumed by netizens. Even though these contents are made available through the internet, the source of the information is still in its original language which is the Korean language with the majority of the source not translated. Amidst the language barriers, K-Pop content still managed to penetrate the global audience thanks to the fans who put in the effort to translate almost everything about their favourite K-Pop idols such as news reports, live videos, pre-recorded video content and also social network service (SNS) messages. Fans who act as the mediator between the K-Pop idols and their global fans undeniably play an important role in spreading K-Pop news and content and this has helped boost the accessibility of K-Pop content to the fans internationally. Today, people in every corner of the world are easily connected to the vast expanse of the social networking platform. Thus, this phenomenon has catalysed the translation activities of K-pop content since K-Pop fans come from various backgrounds and are proficient in different languages.

Translation activities among fans are often seen in various online platforms (Jenkins, 2006). The audiovisual translation subtitling activities performed by fans (fansubbing) have been widely discussed, starting with the massive translation trend of Japanese animated series which are uploaded to the internet (Jenkins, 2016; Díaz-Cintas & Sánchez, 2016). At present, apart from translation of anime that is presented in audio-video form, fan translation activities are also actively performed through various mediums. Social media has opened a new path for digital users to obtain or produce translated content in a much easier manner. Desjardins (2017) mentioned that crowd sourcing translation activities in online social media (OSM) are in demand even though they integrated automated translation features in OSM. This phenomenon is also in line with Lim and Fussell’s (2017) findings where social media users reported making the effort to obtain the translated version of certain posts without relying solely on machine translation applications.

Machine translation cannot cater to the nature of social media linguistic elements that are often incorporated together with the background information of the posted texts or captions (Lim & Fussell, 2017). Machine translation can probably offer correct grammatical translations; however, it has shortcomings in describing the contextual portion attached to the original post which lead to inadequate translation (Lim & Fussell 2017). In the interviews conducted by Lim and Fussell (2017), their respondents explained that apart from machine translation, they often tried to comprehend the original post in the foreign language by looking at the cues in the information (such as happy faces, emoji etc.) when faced with language barriers. Some of them tried to hunt for extra information by browsing the internet in order to understand the context of the posted text before taking the action of “liking” the posted text as it might contain sensitive threads that may be offensive to other people. The effort in trying to understand the language of others and its culture has indirectly created a virtual learning environment among these social media users.

The emergence of social media has given rise to a new paradigm in translation activities that may help to minimise language barriers experienced by digital users. Desjardins (2017) views the act of translation as a means of communication, and crowd sourcing translation in social media has reformed social communication behaviour. Social media users who act as the translator (user generated content, UGC) has definitely accelerated the accessibility of the translated text (user generated translation, UCT) to the readers compared with traditional offline method (printed text or document) (Desjardins, 2017). Desjardins (2017) added that professional translators also have to cope with changes in advanced technology as fans translators who happen to be bilingually literate seem to be dominating the social media platform. However, research related to fan translation activities via social media medium such as Twitter, Facebook and Instagram is still scarce and there is a lot of scope to be covered; thus, future research on the topics related to this area is important as linguists, professional translators as
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