



Fan translation in the Vietnamese context: a preliminary study

Van Nhan Luong & Jonathan Evans

To cite this article: Van Nhan Luong & Jonathan Evans (2021) Fan translation in the Vietnamese context: a preliminary study, *Asia Pacific Translation and Intercultural Studies*, 8:2, 163-177, DOI: [10.1080/23306343.2021.1931782](https://doi.org/10.1080/23306343.2021.1931782)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23306343.2021.1931782>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 02 Jun 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 250



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Fan translation in the Vietnamese context: a preliminary study

Van Nhan Luong^a and Jonathan Evans^b

^aDong A University, Danang, Vietnam; ^bUniversity of Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland, UK

ABSTRACT

This preliminary study asks what genres and languages are translated by fans in the Vietnamese context, using a methodology based on distant reading of materials available on the Youtube website. While there is a growing body of work on fandom and fan translation, little focuses on postcolonial locations such as Vietnam. Due to its history of colonisation and the shifts in language use that have resulted from colonisation and independence, there is a long history of voluntary translation in Vietnam that has contributed to the development of a thriving fan translation culture in the Vietnamese language. After examining the postcolonial position of Vietnam and the history of voluntary translation in the country, this article examines the first hundred videos found on Youtube using the search term “Vietsub”. Youtube was chosen for its popularity and international reach, as well as the abundance of Vietnamese subtitled videos on the website. The findings show that many of the videos come from Asian countries such as Korean and China, questioning the hegemony of Anglophone text production seen in fan studies. Furthermore, the main genres for translation on Youtube are TV shows and songs, highlighting fan investment in popular media.

KEYWORDS

Fan translation; Youtube; Vietnam; popular media

Introduction

The changing nature of media consumption, from the age of broadcast television and radio to the current, post-broadcast moment of streaming media, has meant that it has become more common for media production to be watched internationally, in places where languages other than the one used by the media text are spoken. Indeed, as Tessa Dwyer (2017, 2) argues, most media are experienced in translation due to the market dominance of English language productions. Of course, media have always travelled: early newspapers could be physically carried over borders between countries and pre-sound Hollywood cinema was distributed internationally, earning up to 40% from world sales (Đurovičová 1992, 139). However, with the growth of home viewing formats and streaming, visual media (including TV and movies) have become even more likely to travel internationally. The title of Pico Iyer’s 1988 travelogue of East Asia, *Video Night in Kathmandu* (Iyer 1988), may have sounded exotic or even contradictory to a Western audience at that time, when knowledge and expectations of East Asian technology were lower in the West, but would now seem, if anything, a bit old-fashioned, given the

CONTACT Jonathan Evans  jonathan.e.evans@glasgow.ac.uk

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

ubiquity of mobile phones and streaming services. Research such as Koichi Iwabuchi's *Recentering Globalization* (2002) and the edited collection *The Korean Wave* (Kim 2014) has expanded the scholarly discussion of Asian media, highlighting the fact that contemporary media are produced in multiple locations and consumed in multiple others. In addition, audience and fan studies have increasingly developed a nuanced idea of how people use and – in fandom – reuse media, from pioneering studies by scholars such as Ien Ang (1991), John Fiske (1989) and Henry Jenkins (1992) to more contemporary research on Asian audiences (Huat 2012). Audiences are seen as discerning and capable of reading a variety of media; they are not just passive consumers of mass media texts. Fans go further than other consumers in their interaction with a text, often building an affective bond with it (Sandvoss 2005, 8) and developing their interaction with the text in a number of ways which may include discussion or writing fan fiction (see Jenkins 1992).

As this work in media studies has been developing, so has a discourse on amateur translation in translation studies (e.g. Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012; Orrego-Carmona and Lee 2017) that focuses on how non-professional translation differs from and affects professional practice. Not all amateur translation is fan translation, given that there are also forms of *pro-bono* translation for charities as well as non-professional translation and interpreting in a wide variety of settings, for example in medical environments or with immigrant communities. We use the term fan translation to refer to forms of unpaid translation of popular media texts by fans of those texts. We use the term “voluntary translation” to refer to other forms of unpaid translation, as discussed in the second section of the article. Fan translation is therefore a sub-group of voluntary translation, but with specific characteristics relating it to wider practices of media fandom (Evans 2019). Fansubbing (Díaz Cintas and Sánchez 2006) of popular media¹ can be understood in relation to fan productions of derivative works (see Jenkins 1992; Azuma 2009) and it seems necessary to consider fan translation in the framework of fan and audience studies as well as in the context of the linguistic and cultural issues well-known to translation studies. Fan translation offers one way of understanding how fans, and consumers more generally, deal with media produced in a language that is not theirs: one reason why these unofficial and amateur translators tend to be fans is that they are interested enough in the material (as fans) to seek it out and translate it in order to share with other people for no material benefit.² Indeed, in some cases, due to the lack of distribution of texts in the language that the fans want, they feel constrained to translate it themselves. We should stress that, while studying this topic, we are not endorsing copyright theft or media piracy; rather, we are noting that it is already a widespread practice and trying to understand the causes and effects of it.

In this article, we are concerned with fan translation in the Vietnamese context, asking what sorts of foreign media get translated by fans and what this can tell us about forms of cross-cultural fandom and translation in Vietnam. Our objective, therefore, is to analyse, using a quantitative methodology, the genres and languages translated into Vietnamese on Youtube in order to better understand how Vietnamese speaking fans are interacting with international media. The significance of this research lies in the expansion of the understanding of translation practices in Vietnam, beyond the work on the translation of classics and literature typically studied (as we discuss below). Our adoption of a postcolonial approach to fan translation also expands understandings of fan translation more generally. In addition, the research has significance for the study of the international flows of media. Our findings demonstrate the problems of focusing on the flows of

English language media and thus overlooking the flows between non-English speaking countries which also have an important effect on the mediascape in those countries.

Vietnamese language fan and media translation are areas which remain under-researched, with much of the existing work on translation in Vietnam focusing on the translation of classic works into Vietnamese, either from Chinese (Taylor 2007) or English (Luong 2014), with Pham (2011a, 261–293; see also Pham 2011b) offering a more contemporary perspective by analysing the translation of Annie Proulx's story "Brokeback Mountain" in Vietnamese. There is less discussion of the reception of popular culture or media, despite the increasing popularity and availability of foreign media in Vietnam and the widespread practice of amateur and fan translation in Vietnam (Shen 2017). However, the Vietnamese diaspora of overseas Vietnamese makes it somewhat difficult to locate all Vietnamese language fan translation or textual production in Vietnam itself: as Kieu-Linh Caroline Valverde (2012) argues, there are interactions between Vietnamese in Vietnam and abroad. Given the relative anonymity of the internet, especially in the social media sites we will investigate where people are known by "handles" or pseudonyms, then it is impossible to know where people are based. By focusing on how translation is used by fans using Vietnamese, we hope to shed light on how popular media is received in the Vietnamese context, and more widely, how postcolonial populations in countries that are peripheral to the media world system (typically the global south)³ deal with media coming from the centre (typically the global north), with the attending power relations that are implicit in this relationship. Given the history of colonialism in Vietnam and its continuing position in the global south, it offers fertile ground for such a case study.

Work on "global" and "intercultural" fandom has been turning toward questions of how historical and socioeconomic context affect fandom across borders (Harrington and Bielby 2007, 179–182; Chin and Morimoto 2013, 98), but as yet little has been written that focuses on fans in postcolonial countries such as Vietnam (or their attendant diasporas). Rukmini Pande (2016) highlights how the notion of "postcolonial" brings to light the negotiated spaces of fandom, especially in the context of the Indian fans she is studying, which remains a significant issue for fans in Vietnam and Vietnamese more generally. Fan translation, like other fan practices (Hills 2002, 27–45), both promotes the materials that fans are translating while allowing room for negotiating the texts and ideologies that are present in them. Analysis of which texts are chosen for translation and distribution as well as the methods used to translate them will shed light on how fan translators are negotiating these texts. These negotiations are likely to happen in all fan translation, but, given the postcolonial context of Vietnam, they demonstrate how fans and consumers in less economically powerful countries are dealing with international media.

We cannot examine in this article all the manifestations of fan translation in Vietnam. Bearing in mind that fandom scholar Cornel Sandvoss (2005, 8) has argued that "fandom [spans] the spectrum of popular culture" and it is, therefore, possible to find examples of fandom across all forms of popular media, from pop music and TV to sports, it is clearly impossible in one article to investigate in-depth all the possible forms of fan translation in Vietnam. We propose, therefore, to overview the variety of fan translation in Vietnam in a form of "distant reading," to use Franco Moretti's (2013) term, by looking at the sorts of texts and languages being translated by fans. We focus specifically on the use of the international social media site Youtube, partially for ethical reasons (which we will return to later), but also as it has global reach and thus allows for the sharing of media across

borders. Before beginning this analysis, however, it is first necessary to understand the theoretical and historical background to the study. In order to develop this understanding, we explore in more detail how fan translation mediates foreign texts, the power relations specific to fan translation in the Vietnamese context and also the historical context of amateur translation in Vietnam, which continues to have a significant influence on the practices of translation into Vietnamese.

Vietnamese postcoloniality, peripherality and the media

As we have noted, Vietnam is a postcolonial country that is peripheral in many ways to current global cultural production. Vietnam was a French colony from 1860 to 1954 and is a member of the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie; as such it does have a postcolonial relationship to the West and has been influenced by European colonialism (see Kiernan 2017, 295–394).⁴ French influence has diminished in the region since the 1990s (De Tréglodé 2018) and so the question of English-language influence, particularly from the USA, has become more important. As Bill Hayton (2010, xiii) notes, the country is most known in the Anglophone West for the Vietnam War (1955–1975), with the country itself becoming obscured in public discourse by its role in American politics in the 1960s and 1970s. Vietnam's relationship to the English-speaking world is not straightforwardly postcolonial: it has never been an English or American colony, even though the USA supported the Southern Vietnamese against the communist North in the Vietnam War.

These political histories of colonialism and war have some influence on the reception of foreign media. Given the importance of English as a lingua franca and as a global language (see, for example, Crystal 2003), the way in which Vietnamese consumers negotiate English-language media is important for understanding how they deal with the importation of ideas and their interaction with wider global media vectors.⁵ While the language on the internet is diversifying, English remains a key language (Internet World Stats 2017). In other forms of popular culture, from film to music, the importance of English language material is undeniable (Crystal 2003, 90–99), even if complemented by materials in other languages such as Japanese and Korean in Asia (Iwabuchi 2002; Kim 2014). While Vietnam may never have been a colony of an English-speaking country, in the spaces of global media, English language production is central and Vietnam much more peripheral. This implies a power differential between Vietnamese consumers and English-language media producers which, we argue, is visible in the use of fan translation to overcome non-distribution in Vietnam or to adapt and otherwise make meaning of foreign productions for a local audience. However, as we discuss, Vietnamese fan translation draws not only from English, but also from other Asian sources, suggesting that English-language media is seen as only one possible source of texts and culture and that Vietnamese fans are navigating a more complex mediascape than just the Anglophone one, mixing together texts and knowledges from several languages and locations.

Post-Independence Vietnam has not always been open to foreign media. It was only after the Sixth Communist Party Congress in December 1986 that the economy began to open up, in a process known as *doi moi* [renovation] (Hayton 2010, 4–9). Vietnam joined the World Trade Organisation in 2007, allowing it to trade more freely with the rest of the world, with the effect of increasing access to foreign media productions. In the last decade, the increases in various forms of the internet, and particularly mobile internet

on smartphones (Freedom House 2018a), have made it easier to access streaming services in Vietnam. Internet penetration is around 46.5% of the country (Freedom House 2018a) – compared to 94.8% in the UK (Freedom House 2018b) – meaning that there is reasonable access to the internet in the country. However, there is governmental censorship of media content in Vietnam, with selected videos being removed from Youtube (Freedom House 2018a); this obviously limits to some extent the sorts of texts that Vietnamese users will engage with. For example, media that is openly critical of the Vietnamese government will be censored; however, the sort of popular media texts that we are looking at in this article are less likely to directly criticize the Vietnamese government than political reports or political vlogging. Indeed, as popular culture texts produced in other national contexts, they rarely if ever address Vietnam directly and it would be reasonable to assume that they are not translated with a political intention in mind, but rather as part of fans' entertainment practices.

Fandom in these conditions can often take similar outward forms to fandom in other countries, e.g. the regular consumption and discussion of texts and related products, although the low average salary of Vietnamese workers (ca. 150 USD a month in 2015; Vietnam Online 2015) means that access to official texts and the sorts of official merchandise favoured by fans (e.g. t-shirts, toys) is somewhat more limited. This makes an opening for both piracy and fan versions of texts and merchandise as well as fan creations that derive from media texts, for example fan art, memes, homemade t-shirts, homemade cosplay costumes, and so on. In this article, we look at the presence of fans on the internet. This methodology loses some of the rich ethnographic material that one might find studying fans in conventions (see e.g. Geraghty 2014, 93–119), but at the same time, conventions require time, money and the ability to travel that may be beyond the reach of some fans, particularly in Vietnam, while access to the internet is more widespread. We do in addition recognise that fan activity requires free time and access to the internet in the first place; not everyone will be participating in these internet activities and so the study only represents fans that do participate on the internet.

Voluntary translation in Vietnam

It is widely agreed that fan translation is carried out by fans who do not have formal training as translators but who volunteer to participate in translation projects based on their interest in a specific audiovisual genre, TV series or movie (Pérez-González 2014, 83). In other words, regardless of financial remuneration, fans contribute significantly by introducing translations of text that interest them into their societies. Vietnam offers an interesting case study in this respect as its culture has developed in multiple ways through translation, even before French colonization (Pham 2011a, 88). There is a strong tradition of unpaid translation⁶ work by amateurs that parallels many of the structures of fan translation (by which, we refer to translation of media products by fans rather than other forms of voluntary translation; see the introduction to this article), and which we posit has influenced the development of fan translation in Vietnam. The linguistic changes and political environments in Vietnam's history, as we discuss, have created an environment where unofficial forms of translation have become accepted and common means of encountering texts. As such, it is important to review this history in order to understand the role of voluntary translation in Vietnam.

Vietnam has witnessed three systems of written language: *Han* (Kanji), *Nôm* (Vietnamese written using Chinese characters), and *Chữ Quốc Ngữ* (modern Vietnamese). According to Keith Weller Taylor (1991), *Kanji* (Chinese characters, known in Chinese as *hanzi*) came to Vietnam through cultural exchange at the beginning of the first millennium of the Common Era (C.E.). As Cordier highlights, Vietnamese used Chinese as its written form at this point (Cordier 1935, 115). During the period from the seventh century to the eleventh century CE, Kanji was increasingly used, due to increased commercial exchange between Vietnam and China. Kanji had such a great effect on Vietnamese culture that after the tenth century, when Vietnam regained its independence from the Northern (Chinese) dynasties, Kanji was still an important means of writing and communication. Following independence from China, the *Nôm* script was developed based on Kanji characteristics, features and structures.⁷ In other words, *Nôm* took the *kanji* characters and adapted them to write in Vietnamese, rather than Chinese. Cordier observes that a Chinese reader would struggle to decipher *Nôm*, even though the characters come from Chinese: he compares it to the difference between English and French (Cordier 1935, 119).

Before *Nôm*, there was no need for the translation of Kanji writings because the system of Chinese education and examinations in Vietnam meant that many Vietnamese were capable of reading literature and poetry in Chinese without language barriers (Lo Bianco 2002). In the early days of *Nôm*, some of the translations from *Kanji* to *Nôm* were made by Vietnamese Taoists, using informal and paraphrased forms in order to make it easier for common people to read them (Tran 1990). However, other translations, such as those of Quý Lu, were more politically motivated and served to help him consolidate power in the Trần court (Pham 2011a, 129–133), suggesting a link to nationalism and to a more active role for written Vietnamese (in the form of *Nôm*) in Vietnamese literary culture.

From 1632 onwards, *Chữ quốc ngữ*, based on the Roman alphabet, became more and more commonly used in writing Vietnamese. Following the important adjustments by Pigneau De Behaine in his *Dictionarium Anamitico Latinum* in 1773, the system of *Chữ quốc ngữ* was modernised and is the same as the one used in the present day (Nguyen 1997). From 1862, *Chữ quốc ngữ* was used by missionaries, but became much more widespread when the French (who colonised Vietnam in 1858) tried to popularise this writing system and reduce the use of *Kanji* and *Nôm*. The introduction of *Chữ quốc ngữ* had the effect of rendering much of the earlier writing and cultural legacy, written in *Kanji* and *Nôm*, inaccessible for even literate Vietnamese people. It was therefore necessary to translate these older written forms into *Chữ quốc ngữ* and, as Patricia Pelley (2002, 128) notes, in the nineteenth century, the translation of classical Vietnamese texts in the Chinese language and *Nôm* took place into *Chữ quốc ngữ*.

During the thirty years of war (1945–1975), Vietnam was divided into two domains: the North and the South. The influence of the two different governing modes, i.e. the Socialist North and the Capitalist South, led to different approaches to translation and to the selection of works to be translated. For instance, the translation of Russian literature mainly took place in North Vietnam because many North Vietnamese people at that time were sent to Russia to study and some schools in the North taught Russian as the second language. Before 1945, Russian literature had been introduced to Vietnam through unofficial channels when some Vietnamese patriots were trying to popularise the socialism of Marx and Lenin among workers and farmers (Phan 2017).

In a country that was affected by war, with poor living conditions, and subject to colonization, translation necessarily served multiple purposes. It introduced topics and narratives that were not being produced in Vietnam itself and allowed for the negotiation and spread of ideas from abroad. The shifting of written forms of Vietnamese has meant that much of Vietnam's own cultural legacy has needed to be translated (or at least transliterated) so that more recent generations can be read classical texts. Vietnam is not the only country which has undergone such experiences and changes in its history, and in many ways the shifting legacies of colonialism and independence are shared with many countries, as well as language and writing changes that can happen independently of such external influence. They result in translation being foundational for understanding the contemporary culture in Vietnam (and elsewhere) as so much of its own culture is translated and so much of its understanding of the rest of the world takes place in and through translation.

Research methodology and research ethics

Given this history of voluntary translation in Vietnam, it should be no surprise to find fan translation thriving in multiple domains, some of which we will analyse below (our analysis cannot be comprehensive as there is an enormous amount of material translated). Before we begin this analysis, however, we must first address questions of methodology and research ethics. The ethical elements of studying fan translation are somewhat more complex than the study of published translations for several reasons. First of these is that fan translations are not “published” as such: they are not put out by publishers in order to sell to the public. Some are not distributed in any significant way, e.g. handwritten translations of song lyrics passed from friend to friend. Analysing such translations would of course require not only acquiring them in some way, but also permission from the translator: this is closer to more established ideas of private/public than other forms of publication. As Lisa Sugiura, Rosemary Wiles and Catherine Pope (2016, 185) argue, older, print-based guidelines for research ethics are problematized by the more fluid environment of the internet. As they go on to discuss (188), even some ethical frameworks designed for internet ethnography, such as Robert Kozinet's netnography (2002, 2010), which require permission from all posters, can be too restrictive for research into larger online communities, even if they seem reasonable in closed communities (e.g. those that are password protected). In a large, open community, such as that of Youtube users, some users may no longer be using the same ID/handle, may not respond to messages, and may even have stopped using Youtube. The journal *Transformative Works and Cultures* also recommends getting the permission of content creators for any work cited and a full discussion of research ethics for using informants (Submissions n.d.). In our case, we are not working with informants as we are not approaching individuals in any form and we are working solely with data that is available to anyone using the Youtube site.

In the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) recommendations (Markham and Buchanan 2012), the same ethical issues are brought up as those addressed by Sugiura et al., namely the complexity of the internet as a space – the fact that it includes a range of levels of privacy and openness that confound print-based notions of those terms. The AoIR recommendations include the notion of “perceived privacy” (Markham and Buchanan 2012, 9), which allows for the variations in privacy experienced online. For

example, if people are posting on a password protected, members only forum, they would expect this data to be more private than publishing on an open and searchable forum such as Twitter. Users of Youtube, and content uploaders especially, have agreed to give Youtube a global licence to distribute their work and that each user of Youtube may also use and distribute that work (§8.1 of Youtube Terms of Service 2018). As such, Youtube content is understood as public and users will be aware of this, especially as the website (and associated app) can be accessed without a password or username. Indeed, Youtube has become a fairly standard location for research, with a *Youtube Reader* (Snickars and Venderau 2010) as well as the book *Youtube* (Burgess and Green 2009) analyzing the site and material on it.

Beyond these considerations, the concept of anonymity is compromised by the searchability of the internet (Markham and Buchanan 2012, 10; Sugiura, Wiles, and Pope 2016, 184): verbatim quotes and indeed usernames can be looked for using search engines such as Google or Baidu. As such, any verbatim quote can actually lead to the identification of the speaker. In the context that we are working in, i.e. fans of popular culture, there are limited risks associated with identification, especially when compared to researching hate speech or political activism. That said, to minimize the possibility of identification, we have chosen not to identify the uploaders of any videos that we discuss, including not using Youtube user names. This will minimize the chances of uploaders being identified, but will differ from standard citational practices for print media, where all texts should have clearly identifiable sources. However, we also do not plan to cite from the works themselves, which means we will not undertake close textual analysis of the translations, as our goal in this current study is to understand the sorts of texts being translated rather than the precise strategies being used. As such, there is no need to seek permission from individual uploaders (though it should be noted that by uploading on Youtube they are, in fact, allowing the production of derivative works, following §8.1 of the Youtube Terms of Use).

Our methodology, then, focuses on the use of Youtube to get an overview of the sorts of texts and languages being translated into Vietnamese. Rather than focusing in on any specific text, due to the scope of the study and the ethical issues related to consent, we are looking for patterns. We identified that the term 'Vietsub'⁸ was being used by a variety of Youtube users to "tag" their work as including Vietnamese subtitles. By focusing on "Vietsub" as a label and not individual users, we reduce the risk of identifying individuals who have uploaded using that tag as well as finding a broad range of texts using it. We used an Incognito tab in Google's Chrome browser to avoid the effects of our previous Youtube use on algorithms and to mimic the effect of someone using the website for the first time (Incognito tabs do not download cookies and ignore existing cookies on a computer, as well as not recording the sites browsed to the browser's history). However, due to constant uploads and Youtube algorithms, the results are contingent to the date and time we analysed, and another date and time might give slightly different results.⁹ The patterns we identify may then be different in the future or in the past, but a diachronic survey is beyond the scope of this article.

As Youtube does not sort results into pages, but makes visible more videos using the scroll bar on the right of the screen, it is impossible to ascertain precisely how many videos use this tag. No numbers are given for results by Youtube, in a move that makes it somewhat difficult to know what is on the site. However, we manually counted 100 videos and

performed an analysis on them based on what sorts of texts were represented, what languages they came from and any general features of the subtitles (positions, colours, etc).

Limiting the methodology to using Youtube, while allowing an ethical overview, does of course mean that translations that are not posted there, or that are not tagged with “Vietsub” (or “Viet Sub”), are overlooked in our analysis. A quick search on the Chinese video platform, Youku, showed that the tag “Vietsub” is also used on that site, but in this preliminary study we are choosing to focus on Youtube. There are numerous other websites in Vietnamese cyberspace that contain uploads of what appear to be fan translations, but in order to maintain the anonymization of uploaders and to avoid issues of consent from communities that may be somewhat nebulous and among whom it may be difficult to find out who is in a position to give consent, we are not analyzing them in this article; this remains a task for further research that is broader in scope.

Findings and discussion

Using this methodology, we looked at the first hundred videos on Youtube under the “Vietsub” search on 25 January 2019, searching from the UK (different locations and different times will produce different results). Due to the functioning of the Youtube algorithm, these may not be the most popular videos, and indeed, few had viewing totals in the millions, with most in the low tens of thousands. The algorithm also privileges recent uploads, with one listed as four hours old, but many being from the previous week. However, even with these biases inherent in the software, we think that the videos found offer an indicative snapshot of the sorts of videos being translated and tagged with the Vietsub tag.

Importantly, the range of languages was somewhat different from our initial expectations that much of this material would come from English, given the discussion of English as central to international media and a central language of the internet (see the second section of this article). Indeed, this is the breakdown of languages:

- 59 videos from Korean
- 19 videos from English
- 12 videos from Chinese
- 8 videos from Japanese
- 2 videos from Thai

By far the most popular language is Korean. Many of the videos were connected to the K-pop phenomenon (see Kim 2014). K-pop acts such as BTS, BigBang, Girls’ Generation and Super Junior, have been very successful in East and South East Asia, including Vietnam (Trolen 2017). Vietnamese fans of K-pop and K-film have organized societies and forums to keep up to date with their idols’ activities and products (Larissa 2015). Well known groups such as BTS (13 times) and Blackpink¹⁰ (3 times) appear among the hundred videos, demonstrating the popularity of K-pop in Vietnam.

Equally interesting are the genres being translated. While we recognize that there is some difficulty in deciding the exact genre of texts, we have chosen the following large and inclusive genres: Film, TV shows, Cartoons, Web shows (vlogs etc), Songs, Live plays of

video games. Even with this rather basic categorization, there are some fuzzy placements as songs may come from films, and material that is broadcast on TV may have come from the Web. However, these markers are generally indicative of the genre of the text being translated and viewed:

- TV show, 48
- Song, 34
- Cartoon, 7
- Web show, 6
- Film, 4
- Video game live play/esports, 1

TV shows were translated from all the languages found and included some edited clips from TV shows as well as full episodes. Again, many of these shows were connected to K-pop and the show *Idol Room*, a South Korean magazine show that heavily features K-pop, appears eight times in the 100 videos, but there were also historical Chinese dramas. Of the cartoons, the Japanese *Doraemon* is the most popular, with five episodes being translated in our sample. The other two cartoon translations come from Japanese and Chinese. English language cartoons are readily available in Vietnamese translation on broadcast TV (see e.g. Szalai 2016), albeit often using voiceover (a single voice speaking all characters' dialogue) rather than subtitling or dubbing, which means that fans can access them without translating them, unlike the K-pop texts seen here. In addition, there are licensing deals between American and European media companies that means that unofficial versions of their material may be taken down and Youtube's own Content ID system is likely to spot pirated versions (Gapper 2016), meaning that unless versions are heavily edited (as does happen with proprietary English language material on Youtube, by e.g. the reediting of videos so that they are shorter or longer, or by placing a small version of the video on a box on the screen) they may be removed.

The almost absence of full films is interesting, especially as some of the TV episodes are over an hour long, so the length is not necessarily a barrier to people using Youtube to watch films. Films may well be available in other media (DVD, VCD, broadcast TV, etc) or Vietnamese fansubbers may simply have a preference for TV shows and music. Of the four films here, one was a Chinese film that had Chinese and English subtitles but a Vietnamese voiceover, suggesting that it may not have been a fan translation, even though voiceover is well within non-professionals' technical competence, as it just requires the overlay of one voice over the soundtrack. This practice of fan voiceover has not been seen before (there is no research on this area) and it seems in contrast to the preferences of fans for more "authentic" texts (Cubbison 2005). One of the other films was the 1997 version of *Lolita*, which seems very out of place in relation to the other texts on the list. Given that the film is viewable by an English language audience, with Vietnamese subtitles, its popularity may not be among Vietnamese language viewers but actually English language viewers.

Songs are the second most popular genre translated here, and this usage fits with the use of Youtube as a jukebox and accidental archive (Burgess and Green 2009, 87). The artists featured include the already mentioned K-pop stars BTS and Blackpink, as well as popular American artists Taylor Swift and Justin Bieber, and the British singer Sam Smith.

The genre of all the songs in the 100 videos looked at is pop music, with no appearance of other forms such as rock or hip hop. Questions could therefore be asked about how taste works in fan communities, and what sorts of intersections there may be between fans of K-pop and other popular music. In terms of translation, it is notable that some, though far from all, of the songs were translated with the original language lyrics (Korean, English and Chinese, both pinyin and characters) in addition to Vietnamese. This would offer viewers the opportunity to develop their knowledge of these languages and to sing along.

Conclusions and ways forward

This short survey has not been able to cover all aspects of fan translation in Vietnam, a country where there is a strong history of voluntary translation due to changing language systems and the history of colonialism. It is clear, though, that fan translation is a lively activity in Vietnam, with translators working a variety of popular genres that come from multiple locations, including Asian neighbours and the Anglophone world. This mix of cultural influence is due to a combination of historical events and the popularity of media cultures from Korea, China, Japan and the Anglophone world. The openness of internet access in Vietnam (Giang 2017; though see Freedom House 2018a for discussion of the limitations of this openness) has no doubt made it possible to find out about and consume media from elsewhere. However, it should also be noted that Vietnamese television broadcasts include shows from around the world with subtitles, dubbing and voice-over (this in itself is quite uncommon and deserves further study). There is also a strong black market for pirated media in Vietnam (Kanellos 2003),¹¹ which, while illegal, does give viewers access to films and TV shows. As Dwyer (2017, 123) notes, fan translation is a “subset of pirate translation” and the fan practices discussed here need to be understood in relation to piracy and other forms of copyright infringement as well as in relation to fan cultures.

The focus on Korean and other Asian cultures seen here demonstrates the problems of Anglocentric approaches to media consumption: while there remains a strong presence of English language content in our sample, it is clear that viewers are equally interested in material coming from East Asia, a much closer neighbour to Vietnam, both physically and culturally. Here we would agree with Iwabuchi (2002) that understandings of global media need to be recentered, if not understood as polycentric. Our research, then, confirms previous research that has highlighted the popularity of Asian media. Further research on fan and other forms of amateur translation in Vietnam should take into account its position in relation to other East and South East Asian cultures, which are often seen as peripheral in discussions of international media.

While this study has focused on Youtube and aimed at providing a more general picture of fan translation in the Vietnamese context, further research in this area should expand in three ways:

- (1) look at more sites of translation, e.g. the use of other social media (Facebook, Youku), and how these shape the sorts of texts that are being translated and distributed.

- (2) analyse the strategies being used by fan translators in order to understand how these relate to professional practices in Vietnam. This could include consideration of linguistic practice as well as the presentation of the subtitles on the screen, as research on fansubbing in other languages has (e.g. Díaz Cintas and Sánchez 2006; Dwyer 2017, 135–163).
- (3) analyse the fan cultures around fansubbing through either netnographic or ethnographic methods in order to understand how fansubbers understand their practice and how they position themselves in relation to international media flows.

These suggestions also highlight the limits of this preliminary study, but, even from the small data set used, it has become clear that the position of fansubbing and fan translation in the Vietnamese context offers rich ground for understanding international media flows. It offers a specific incidence of media reception and negotiation in a postcolonial country, which can help better understand how international media are experienced in many spaces and question the typically Anglocentric approach to fandom that is seen in fan studies, where many case studies focus on Anglophone media or Anglophone fandoms.

Notes

1. We are not investigating in depth other forms of fan translation, such as the fan translation of popular fiction or comics, in this article.
2. As opposed to bootleggers and pirates, who will sell unofficial copies of copyright materials. For a discussion, see Crisp (2015).
3. We adapt the concepts of centre, periphery and literary world system from Pascale Casanova's *La République mondiale des lettres* (1999).
4. Patricia Pelley (2002, 1–17) discusses the difficulties of locating precisely when the colonial period ends and how these affect the status of Vietnam as a postcolonial state. See also Goscha (2001) for a discussion of “colonial modernity” in Vietnam.
5. We take this term from McKenzie Wark's analysis of global news media. See Wark (1994).
6. It is also true in the West that the profession of translation has only recently become professionalised. As Anthony Pym notes, until the twentieth century it was common to find translators undertaking multiple professions and acting in multiple roles (Pym 1998, 161–162). The concept of “fan” translation is complicated by such evidence of the non-professional nature of translation historically and one of our aims in this section is to demonstrate the fuzziness of the term “fan translation” and connect it to wider histories of unpaid and amateur translation practice.
7. Pham (2011a, 129) highlights that it is not known who invented *Nôm* or when precisely this took place. Indeed, one might speculate that it was more of a process than a moment of invention, but this remains beyond the scope of the current article.
8. Searching for “viet sub” brings up the same list of videos.
9. Indeed, we noticed a small difference between our initial search using the tag and when we undertook more thorough investigation a few days later.
10. At the time of writing, Blackpink's “Ddu-du ddu-du” is the most popular K-pop video on Youtube, with more than 625 million views, beating BTS's “DNA”, which has around 622 million views (Reilly 2019).
11. Dwyer's (2017, 124–126) discussion of what she calls “guerrilla” translation is based on a DVD sourced in Ho Chi Minh City.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Akiko Sakamoto, Sarah Berthaud and Ting Guo, as well as the journal's reviewers, for their comments on earlier versions of this article.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by a Newton Mobility Grant [NG160250].

Notes on contributors

Van Nhan Luong is Dean of the Faculty of English Language and Culture, Dong A University, Vietnam.

Jonathan Evans is Senior Lecturer in Translation Studies at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK.

ORCID

Jonathan Evans  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9913-8207>

References

- Ang, I. 1991. *Desperately Seeking the Audience*. London: Routledge.
- Azuma, H. 2009. *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. Translated by Jonathan W. Abel and Shion Kono. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Burgess, J. and J. Green. 2009. *Youtube*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Casanova, P. 1999. *La République mondiale des lettres* [The Global Republic of Letters]. Paris: Gallimard.
- Chin, B. and L. H. Morimoto. 2013. "Towards a Theory of Transcultural Fandom." *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10 (1): 92–108.
- Cordier, G. 1935. "Les trois écritures utilisées en Annam: chữ Nho, chữ Nôm et quốc ngữ [The Three Writing Systems used in Annam: Chữ Nho, chữ Nôm and quốc ngữ]." *Bulletin de la Société d'Enseignement mutuel du Tonkin* 15 (1): 113–122. Accessed 26 April 2018. <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5658111f/f119.item>
- Crisp, V. 2015. *Film Distribution in the Digital Age: Pirates and Professionals*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Crystal, D. 2003. *English as a Global Language*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cubbison, L. 2005. "Anime Fans, DVDs and the Authentic Text." *The Velvet Light Trap* 56 (56): 45–57. doi:10.1353/vlt.2006.0004.
- De Tréglodé, B., ed. 2018. *Histoire du Viêt Nam de colonisation à nos jours* [History of Vietnam from Colonization to the Present]. Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne.
- Díaz Cintas, J. and P. M. Sánchez. 2006. "Fansubs: Audiovisual Translation in an Amateur Environment." *Journal of Specialised Translation*, no. 6: 37–52.
- Đurovičová, N. 1992. "Translating America: The Hollywood Multilinguals 1929–1933." In *Sound Theory, Sound Practice*, edited by R. Altman, 138–153. London: Routledge.
- Dwyer, T. 2017. *Speaking in Subtitles: Revaluing Screen Translation*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Evans, J. 2019. "Fan Translation." In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, edited by M. Baker and G. Saldanha, 177–181. 3rd ed. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Fiske, J. 1989. *Understanding Popular Culture*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Freedom House. 2018a. "Freedom on the Net: Vietnam Country Profile." Accessed 1 November 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/vietnam>
- Freedom House. 2018b. "Freedom on the Net: United Kingdom Country Profile." Accessed 1 November 2018. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/united-kingdom>
- Gapper, J. 2016. "YouTube Is Big Enough to Take Responsibility for Piracy." *Financial Times*. Accessed 25 January 2019. <https://www.ft.com/content/e874d328-1c43-11e6-a7bc-ee846770ec15>
- Geraghty, L. 2014. *Cult Collectors: Nostalgia, Fandom and Collecting Popular Culture*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Giang, T. Q. 2017. "VNPT và 20 năm phát triển Internet tại Việt Nam [VNPT and 20 Years Developing Internet in Vietnam]." *Zing.vn*. Accessed 20 November 2017. <https://news.zing.vn/vnpt-va-20-nam-phat-trien-internet-tai-viet-nam-post797226.html>
- Goscha, C. E. 2001. "Le barbare moderne': Nguyen Van Vinh et la complexité de la modernisation coloniale au Vietnam [Modern Barbarism: Nguyen Van Vinh and the Complexity of Colonial Modernisation in Vietnam]." *Outre-mers* 88 (332–333): 319–346. doi:10.3406/outre.2001.3899.
- Harrington, C. L. and D. D. Bielby. 2007. "Global Fandom/Global Fan Studies." In *Fandom: Identities and Communities in a Mediated World*, edited by J. Gray, C. Sandvoss, and C. L. Harrington, 179–197. New York: New York University Press.
- Hayton, B. 2010. *Vietnam: Rising Dragon*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hills, M. 2002. *Fan Cultures*. London: Routledge.
- Huat, C. B. 2012. *Structure, Audience and Soft Power in East Asian Pop Culture*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Internet World Stats. 2017. "Internet World Users by Language." Accessed 1 November 2017. <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>
- Iwabuchi, K. 2002. *Recentring Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Iyer, P. 1988. *Video Night in Kathmandu: And Other Reports from the Not so Far East*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Jenkins, H. 1992. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Kanellos, M. 2003. "Pirate's Heaven in Vietnam." Accessed 23 May 2021. <https://www.cnet.com/news/pirates-heaven-in-vietnam/>
- Kiernan, B. 2017. *Việt Nam: A History from Earliest Times to the Present*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Kim, Y., ed. 2014. *The Korean Wave: Korean Media Go Global*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Kozinets, R. V. 2002. "The Field behind the Screen: Using Netnography for Marketing Research in Online Communities." *Journal of Marketing Research* 39 (39): 61–72. doi:10.1509/jmkr.39.1.61.18935.
- Kozinets, R. V. 2010. *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online*. London: Sage.
- Larissa, D. 2015. "8 Reasons Why KPop Is Big in Vietnam." *HelloKpop*. Accessed 18 April 2018. <https://www.hellokpop.com/list/8-reasons-why-kpop-is-big-in-vietnam/>
- Lo Bianco, J. 2002. "Vietnam: Quoc Ngu, Colonialism and Language Policy." In *Language Planning and Language Policy: East Asian Perspectives*, edited by N. Gottlieb and P. Chen, 159–206. Richmond: Curzon Press.
- Luong, V. N. 2014. "Translation in Vietnam: A Case Study of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet." PhD diss., University of Southampton.
- Markham, A. and E. Buchanan. 2012. "Ethical Decision Making and Internet Research: Recommendations from the AoIR Ethics Working Committee (Version 2.0)." Accessed 18 January 2019. <https://aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf>
- Moretti, F. 2013. *Distant Reading*. London: Verso.
- Nguyen, D. H. 1997. *Vietnamese*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Orrego-Carmona, D. and Y. Lee, eds. 2017. *Non-professional Subtitling*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press.

- Pande, R. 2016. "Squee from the Margins: Racial/Cultural/Ethnic Identity in Global Media Fandom." In *Seeing Fans: Representations of Fandom in Media and Popular Culture*, edited by L. Bennett and P. Booth, 209–220. London: Bloomsbury.
- Pelley, P. M. 2002. *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Pérez-González, L. 2014. *Audiovisual Translation: Theories, Methods and Issues*. London: Routledge.
- Pérez-González, L. and Ş. Susam-Saraeva, eds. 2012. "Non-Professionals Translating and Interpreting." *Special Issue of the Translator* 18 (2): 149–361.
- Pham, L. Q. 2011a. "Translation in Vietnam and Vietnam in Translation: Language, Culture and Identity." PhD diss., University of Massachusetts.
- Pham, L. Q. 2011b. "Western Others (And Other Westerns): Translating *Brokeback Mountain* into Vietnamese Culture." In *Re-Engendering Translation: Transcultural Practice, Gender/Sexuality and the Politics of Alterity*, edited by C. Larkosh, 111–126. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Phan, H. G. 2017. "Vài Nét Về Quan Hệ Văn Học Nga-Việt [Features of Russian-Vietnamese Literary Relationship]." *Viet Studies*. Accessed 29 December 2017. http://www.viet-studies.net/PhanHGiang_VanHocNgaViet.html
- Pym, A. 1998. *Method in Translation History*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Reilly, N. 2019. "BLACKPINK Break Record for Most Viewed Music Video by a K-Pop Group." *New Musical Express*. Accessed 25 January 2019. <https://www.nme.com/news/music/blackpink-break-record-ddu-du-ddu-du-viewed-music-video-k-pop-group-2438425#bA4X8ZZQxXkjvD.99>
- Sandvoss, C. 2005. *Fans*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Shen, P. 2017. "越南也有字幕组:中国“穿越剧”越南热播背后的推手 [There are Also Subtitle Groups in Vietnam: The Push behind China's "Through the Drama" in Vietnam]." *南方都市报*. Accessed 12 February 2019. <https://media.weibo.cn/article?id=2309351000204130456579752352&jumpfrom=weibocom>
- Snickars, P. and P. Venderau, eds. 2010. *The Youtube Reader*. Stockholm: National Library of Sweden.
- Submissions. n.d. "Transformative Works and Cultures." Accessed 18 January 2019. <https://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/about/submissions>
- Sugiura, L., R. Wiles and C. Pope. 2016. "Ethical Challenges in Online Research: Public/private Perceptions." *Research Ethics* 13 (3–4): 184–199. doi:10.1177/1747016116650720.
- Szalai, G. 2016. "Nickelodeon to Get Programming Block in Vietnam." *Hollywood Reporter*. Accessed 25 January 2019. <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/nickelodeon-get-programming-block-vietnam-911861>
- Taylor, K. W. 1991. *The Birth of Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Taylor, K. W. 2007. "Sino-Vietnamese Translation from Classical to Vernacular." In *Asian Translation Traditions*, edited by E. Hung and J. Wakabayashi, 169–194. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Tran, T. D. D. 1990. *Van Hoa Va Nghe Thuat O Mien Nam Vietnam 1954–1975 [Culture and Art in South Vietnam 1954–1975]*. Hanoi: Culture and Information Publisher.
- Trolen, J. 2017. "A Look into Korean Popular Culture and Its Tourism Benefits." *International Journal of Educational Policy Research and Review* 4 (9): 203–209. doi:10.15739/IJEPRR.17.022.
- Valverde, K.-L. C. 2012. *Transnationalizing Viet Nam: Community, Culture and Politics in the Diaspora*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Vietnam Online. 2015. "Average Salary." Accessed 8 September 2017. <https://www.vietnamonline.com/az/average-salary.html>
- Wark, M. 1994. *Virtual Geography: Living with Global Media Events*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Youtube Terms of Service. 2018. Accessed 18 January 2019. <https://www.youtube.com/static?gl=GB&template=terms>