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Introduction: Translation and streaming in a changing world

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Much of this special issue was written during the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated lockdowns in Europe and elsewhere. While it is still difficult to judge all of the effects that the pandemic has had, the accelerating changes to media space, in terms of the importance that streaming media came to have during the pandemic, are visible and tangible. The changes that have come from streaming media deconstruct and decentre how we produce, distribute, and consume media. Streaming services have increasingly overtaken satellite TV, particularly for the younger generation (Sweney 2022), and have further diversified. While over-the-top (OTT) media refers to the distribution of live streaming that requires an active internet connection, video-on-demand (VOD) is a broader term, referring to a service that allows users to watch pre-recorded media content as they want, which can be played back anytime (e.g., Netflix and Amazon Prime). VOD can further be divided into transactional VOD (TVOD), a streaming service where users pay per item watched (e.g., YouTube and Google Play Movies), subscription video-on-demand (SVOD), where users have to pay a set fee based on the subscription pack (e.g., Netflix), and advertising-supported video-on-demand (AVOD), which is completely free but users have to watch advertisements to access the content (e.g., YouTube). Such differences mean different translation services are preferred for each of these different forms. For example, translation services are provided in real-time for some forms of OTT, thus relying largely on machine translation (e.g., YouTube translation tools are provided by Google), whereas translations are either outsourced or done by the distributors for VOD content. Yet,

VOD services are also increasingly adopting machine translation and post-editing or using templates to speed up the process (Mehta et al. 2020), often resulting in alienating audiences, as can be seen from the example of Netflix's subtitles of *Squid Game* (BBC 2021; Groskop 2021).

Changing practices of distribution and consumption

Streaming has ushered in a new era of media content distribution, and has meant moving away from print and broadcast models of distribution, where content was distributed either as physical media, that is, vinyl records, CDs, DVDs, video cassettes, among other formats, or by a large, centralised broadcaster, such as the BBC in the UK or NHK in Japan. These forms of distribution required viewers or listeners to either find the physical objects and have the means to play them or have a receiver and watch or listen at the time when the media content was broadcast. Streaming changes this to requiring only a subscription to the streaming service and a way of accessing it, which can be any of a number of multipurpose devices, such as a computer, a tablet, or a smartphone.

This has led to a number of changes to the way in which media content is consumed. Streaming does not generate the more national scale audiences that came from broadcasting and "print capitalism" (Anderson 1991: 37-46), which could indeed create "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991). Instead, there is both a transnational and more local audience that is based on a more affective bond with the material, which is accessible by people in multiple locales at the same time, but not in patterns that map onto nation states. The group of people with Netflix or Disney+ subscriptions will not be all the possible users within a nation or locale, but will be self-selecting; those who can afford the subscriptions and are interested in the range of media available through that service. Viewing streaming services as either global or local is somewhat problematic, as Lobato and Lotz (2020) argue in relation to Netflix: the

catalogue is similar but not identical in each locale, creating slightly differing offerings and thus publics. Little of the research on the topic from media studies has addressed how translation affects these differences, despite it affecting not just access to but also the experience of media content.

In terms of consumption patterns, while there has been an ongoing shift toward 'timeshifted' media usage (that is, watched individually at times other than broadcast times), primarily through the general use of the video cassette recorder (Cubitt 1991), this is extended massively by streaming, which does not have a broadcast schedule to begin with and offers enormous catalogues of content. Indeed, streaming video has effectively killed off the video shop: what was once a familiar activity in the 1980s and 1990s, and even the early 2000s, of going to a video shop to rent a movie for a night or two now seems an outlandishly inconvenient way of accessing movies. Given the way in which streaming services have often made whole series of TV shows available, streaming has encouraged 'binge watching' – the consumption of large quantities of the same show in one session. As with other streaming trends, binge watching already began with DVD box sets, but it has become more common with streaming, to the extent that streaming providers are now returning to weekly releases of new content in order to maintain audience interest in products (Herman 2021). Other consumption patterns, such as personalised thumbnails on Netflix (Eklund 2022) and using the algorithms built into streaming platforms to find similar shows have questioned previous understandings of taste and culture (Hallihan and Striphas 2016). Azuma's (2009: 47-55) notion of "database consumption" describes the shift from more narrative and contextual approaches to media to gaining access through search engines and other interfaces that are common on streaming services. This leads to a loss of contextual information in streaming: it can sometimes be difficult to know when or where content is from, which alters the experience of viewing it. As with other work on the consumption of streaming media, the question of translation seldom

enters into the existing scholarship but it is clear that the translation of menus and interfaces as well as content affects how viewers consume media.

Concerns about the way in which consumption has been changing with the increased availability of the internet and the growth in bandwidth that allowed streaming movies have become increasingly common since the late-2000s. Carr's *The Shallows* (2010), based on the earlier essay "Is Google Making Us Stupid?" (Carr 2008), was not the first book to question the effect of the internet on perception, but was very visible and influential. Carr's argument focuses on reading and writing and the ways in which internet and screen use erodes deep reading, that is, paying close attention over time, as one typically does when reading print books. While Carr is writing about text, many of the same arguments can be asked about other forms of media streamed over the internet, and the similar kinds of attention that they create or encourage. Other scholars, including Citton (2017) and Crary (2013), have written about the ways in which new internet technologies, including streaming, have monetised attention and suggested ways in which this can be resisted or mitigated. The growing field of work on "slow media" (Rauch 2018) has reacted to this by suggesting a more mindful approach to media content, as well as questioning the less ethical and more environmentally damaging aspects of media production. Slow media models itself on 'slow food' practices and reflects a growing discontent with the current media landscape (Rauch 2018, 4). To an extent, Cronin's (2017) work on eco-translation addresses some of the same questions of attention and slow food, but not in the context of streaming. The questions of how these changes to consumption patterns and attention affect translation remain to be investigated in further depth; clearly, translation, through which much media is consumed, will be affected by these developments.

Changing media landscapes

Through translation, what had been marginalised cultures in the global media ecology, such as

South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Nigeria, are more accessible to global audiences, while streaming-service-platforms-turned-content-creators, such as Netflix and Apple, propel cultural mobility between dominated and dominating cultures, challenging Hollywood dominant media popularity, as *Squid Game* and other popular South Korean titles have demonstrated. This means that Eurocentric notions of popular media (Shohat and Stam 1994) need rethinking to consider the increasing circulation of media products from around the world and the shifting balances of soft power (Nye 2004).

The landscape of streaming media is also changing. There are new providers appearing and this is fragmenting the landscape. Users are becoming more cautious about which services they subscribe to as they can only subscribe to so many. Netflix, who used to lead the streaming industry, has lost subscribers for the first time in a decade (Hern 2022). In the first quarter of 2022, Netflix reportedly lost nearly 1.2 million subscribers, as newcomers in the market, such as Disney+ and HBO, continue to grow (Dellatto 2022). In the second quarter, Disney's bundle, including Disney+, Hulu, and ESPN+, ranked first in the global OTT market, beating Netflix for the first time in history (J. Yang 2022). The rapid rise of competing streaming platforms tangibly changes not only the global market but also national ones. South Korea, for example, is one of the first Asian countries where Netflix expanded its service in 2016, several months after Netflix's launch in Japan. Although, at the time of writing, Netflix Korea remains the leader of the South Korean market, holding 1.2 million monthly active users in August 2022, 27.90% of the total monthly active users, other South Korean OTT companies, such as Wavve, Tving, Seezn, Coupang Play, and Watcha, exceed Netflix Korea's market share in terms of monthly active users, holding 1.5 million monthly active users, 34.88% of the total (J. Yang 2022). This means that the streaming media landscape is in a constant process of reconfiguration as different agents emerge, rise to power or struggle to hold market share, not only in the global market but also in national ones.

Furthermore, what had originally seemed like an embrace of crowdsourced amateur translation has now been scaled back as Netflix has stopped its project Hermes, which it used to recruit subtitlers (Bond 2018). Rakuten Viki, which was originally known as a site that utilised amateur translation (Dwyer 2012; Kim 2017), does still have a community space that allows viewers to contribute translations, but the initial page of the site is more focused on facilitating viewing (Rakuten Viki 2022). On each of the webpages for the shows there is, however, the option to join the community and help subtitle, so it has not entirely lost the user-generated aspect, even if it is now less prominent for casual viewers. Rakuten Viki has become an outlier in its use of amateur subtitling and most streaming services appear to use outsourced professional translation as part of their global approach.

Previous studies

During the last decade, a number of studies have been carried out in relation to streaming (and Netflix specifically) in Media Studies, Economics, and Cultural Studies, focusing on how the new media paradigm of streaming is changing the current audiovisual markets and forms of production, exerting the power of imperialism, and how Asian culture (among others) influences and challenges the American entertainment industry through Netflix (Fagerjord and Kueng 2019; Kokas 2020; Kostovska, Ratts, and Donders 2020; Davis 2021; Noh 2022). Such global academic attention reflects the changing landscape of the media industry and capital and ideological impact of the streaming giant Netflix around the world.

The exponential growth of the streaming industry and its continuing expansion warrant more translation services that would allow streaming providers to reach wider communities in a short time frame. Translation scholarship has also turned its attention to this new way of consuming media and its impact on translation, although streaming has not always been examined in its own right and the term 'streaming' might not always have been explicitly used

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in the work. There is a growing body of literature in Translation Studies examining well-known streaming websites like Rakuten Viki or Bilibili, analysing, for example, crowdsourced translation (Kim 2017), fansubbing (Dwyer 2012), and danmaku subtitling (Y. Yang 2021), with some recent studies examining Netflix (e.g., Pedersen 2018). For instance, Oh and Noh (2021) have investigated subtitling translation strategies on YouTube and Netflix. Despite methodological limitations (such as randomly chosen films and an excessive focus on translation errors), they show that different translation strategies characterise YouTube and Netflix: subtitles offered by Netflix tend to be longer and dense, while YouTube subtitles tend to be simplified. The audience of the YouTube VOD tend to be more vocal in their criticism of the quality of translation as they buy paid videos. Hayes (2021) discusses some dubbing companies who took advantage of the largely convention-free English language dubbing industry and attempted to introduce linguistic variations for regional voices, while Kuscu-Ozbudak's (2022) study of the reception of subtitling on Netflix has shown that the decreased quality of the translation of media texts on the SVOD platform may lead to the cancellation of subscriptions. Streaming was also the central topic of the Media Translation and Digital Culture Summer School run by the Baker Centre for Translation and Intercultural Studies in 2021 (where two of the editors of this special issue taught).

This special issue

The changes to media distribution and consumption posed by streaming platforms are considerable. While they have received attention from within TV and media studies, relatively less attention has come from Translation Studies, despite the fact that many streaming sites show translated media content. It was with this in mind that we proposed this special issue; (audiovisual) translation has become crucial for the dissemination of streaming media content and it is time to review both translation acts and products from a Translation Studies perspective.

A number of questions animated our proposal: How, for instance, does access to Thai soap operas in translation affect the image of Thailand in the world and its soft power? How does streaming invert and alter previous cultural and linguistic hierarchies? At the same time, the massive abundance of available media around the globe is creating a scarcity of attention and affecting a new attention ecology (Citton 2017) which risks 'dominated' languages and cultures being overlooked in the sheer quantity of 'dominating' language production. How then do streaming and translation filter media for consumers? Are streaming services and video sites reinforcing, or challenging, existing inequalities of access and distribution through curation and selection of languages to translate into? What effect is this having on the dominance of 'global' English? Importantly, how does the curation of media content through translation and streaming promote or silence communities such as the LGBTQIA+ community, the Deaf, or ethnic minorities?

These questions link the social and political role of translation for streaming with more media-focused and linguistic issues, reflecting our own interests as well as the complexity of the global media landscape. The articles in this issue address only some of these topics, but we list them all as possible ways forward for research on the connection between translation and streaming media. We received many proposals in response to our call for papers, reflecting the importance of the topic, and it was difficult to narrow them down to a number suitable for a special issue. We feel that the selection here represents a variety of approaches to the field that should stimulate discussion for years to come.

In the special issue's first article, **Chiara Bucaria** focuses on the shifting understanding of the audience's agency. Through an analysis of the Italian translations of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, she analyses the way in which Netflix Italia engaged with users' comments and feedback. As she points out, this kind of interaction, and the audience's access to original dialogues, is a product of the affordances of streaming and digital distribution. The reaction to

the 2019 translation, which targeted changes to established translations for terms that were part of the show's mythology, led to a defence of the translation by the translator, who had retranslated his own earlier work. Bucaria argues that there was a mismatch in the popularity of the show and the more foreignising translation that resulted. The criticism led Netflix to change the translation; this move may, as Bucaria notes, have been intended to encourage brand loyalty through demonstrating that Netflix was listening to the fans. However, fans and the audience more generally may not be aware of conventions within audiovisual translation practices or have access to the original language, and Bucaria warns that following their advice too closely may override established professional opinion and have other negative consequences.

While discussions of streaming services and translation have largely been centred on audience, reception, and shifts in the current media landscape, as Bucaria's study is, the pedagogical potential of streaming and bilingual subtitling have so far received scant attention. **Katerina Gouleti**'s article fills this knowledge gap by discussing bilingual subtitling tools as a pedagogical tool for foreign language learners. She argues that bilingual subtitling and language learning tools offered by SVODs like Netflix, AVODs like YouTube, subtitling streaming services like Rakuten Viki, and video sharing websites like Bilibili can be a powerful language learning aid for those who feel comfortable in acquiring new knowledge and skills in digital spaces. She discusses how specific tools, such as *Language Learning with Netflix*, *Language Learning with YouTube*, and Rakuten Viki's *Viki Learn Mode*, which provide language study tips, exercises, interactive activities as well as bilingual subtitles and subtitles for the Deaf and hard of hearing, can be used not only for students but also by trainers in class.

The next two articles analyse specific cases of translation on streaming platforms. Examining the English and Mandarin Chinese subtitles of *American Factory*, **Bei Hu** discusses how translator intervention may shift the interpretation of intercultural interaction and

communication. *American Factory* is a documentary film streamed on Netflix that features bilingual dialogue-heavy scenes and intercultural encounters between American workers and executives from Mainland China, and was released from Barack and Michelle Obama's production company as an attempt to overcome the stereotypical binary of the US and China. Hu's comparative analysis of the featured Chinese dialogues and Netflix's English subtitles as well as English dialogues and Chinese subtitles reveals significant translator intervention that result in reinforcing the existing opposing tensions between American workers and Chinese management and leadership. Additions, explicitations, and omissions in English and Chinese subtitles amplify a more authoritative style of Chinese leadership, while the toned-down American workers' hostility towards China create a more sympathetic view for the Chinese audience, where the tension between Chinese leaders and American union supporters is interpreted as class conflict, not cultural confrontation. Hu thus argues that translator intervention has a significant impact on users' viewing experiences.

Employing nostalgia as a conceptual framework, **Iván Villanueva-Jordán and Antonio Jesús Martínez Pleguezuelos** offer an innovative approach to the analysis of subtitling and dubbing. They examine two English versions of *The Boys in the Band*, produced in 1970 and 2020, and their corresponding Spanish dubbed versions in 1987 and 2020. *The Boys in the Band* tells the narrative of a group of gay men in New York and is based on one of the first commercially successful LGBTQIA+ theatre plays in the US. Understanding 'nostalgia' as the 'imagined' that does not correspond to what actually happened in the past, their study examines visual and auditory modes as well as linguistic codes to identify the extent to which translation contributes to further cement the 'nostalgic' representation of the past, where it is rather a place to reveal such nostalgic representation and deconstruct the nostalgic past.

The last two articles focus on industry patterns rather than close readings. In their

research, **Susana Valdez, Hanna Pięta, Ester Torres-Simón, and Rita Menezes** use a questionnaire to find out how pivot subtitling practices challenge or reinforce current language hierarchies. Involving 370 subtitlers working in Europe, their study reveals that pivot templates are more commonly used in streaming platforms than other media environments, such as cable TV, cinema, and websites, and that streaming platforms reinforce traditional language hierarchies by consolidating the dominant position of English as a hyper-central language. This means that even though the original content is produced in a so-called peripheral language, and translated for a peripheral culture in the global media landscape (e.g., Korean into Danish), English remains the most common source language for subtitlers through the use of pivot templates, thereby reinforcing the dominant position of English in media industries.

Also focusing on working practices connected to translating streaming media, **Serenella Massidda** analyses the impact of the day-of-broadcast model, which aims at releasing audiovisual content 'now and everywhere'. She analyses workflows of OTT platforms drawing on a case study of Netflix's *Chelsea*, which was subtitled into twenty languages with a turnaround time of fourteen hours. Massidda explains how such fast production of encoding and localisation was made possible and points out the methods of respeaking and automatic transcribing technologies that sped up the whole process. However, she also notes that the second season of *Chelsea* went back to the traditional media localisation style in terms of turnaround times and workflow, unlike the first season. The article highlights some potential side-effects, such as the reportedly low quality of translation and translation flaws on Netflix when it adopts fast production models and new translation technologies, such as machine translation, in audiovisual translation.

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