ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a qualitative study on the processes of user-generated crowdsourced collaborative translation in Yeeyan, China’s largest online translation community. Collaborative translation is still a relatively emergent area of scholarship and research so far has focused mainly on audiovisual translation practice. Studies which focus on the co-production of written texts mostly provide only a fragmented picture and treat collaborative translation as a linear process.

In this thesis, I examine the translation initiated and undertaken by two or more volunteer translators who collaboratively produce a translated text, focusing on how they interact with each other, who they are, why they participate, and what meanings they give to their behaviour. Adopting an ethnographic methodology, I have conducted longitudinal in-depth fieldwork in Yeeyan, using the methods of participant observation and interactive interview. Three types of data are collected: 1) fieldnotes; 2) the material resources archived on the Yeeyan website and the translation manuscripts; and 3) elicited interview data. After my preliminary thematic analysis, I undertake a micro-level discourse analysis, examining the participants’ behaviours, decision-making processes, emerging identity roles and perceptions on competence as they unfolded during the collaboration process.

Primarily informed by Wenger’s “communities of practice” theory (CoP theory), the analysis reveals that Yeeyan is first a participatory media platform which provides Chinese readers with access to knowledge and information not available in their mother language, as well as allowing its users to play an active role in the production and circulation of the media content. More profoundly, Yeeyan is an online CoP where a crowd of translators from different professional and disciplinary backgrounds interact with each other regularly for the shared practices they are passionate about and for the shared enterprises they care for.

The findings suggest that the process of collaborative translation in Yeeyan is de facto an experience of meaning negotiation. First, competence in a CoP is obtained through mutual recognition from other members as a result of their active and continuous participation. Second, meanings in Yeeyan are not static, but are dynamically negotiated between the participants, depending on the genre of the text being translated, which specialized expertise the translators possess,
how competent they are in the Yeeyan community, and what meanings they intend to give to their behaviours individually and collectively. Third, a CoP like Yeeyan is also a complex social learning system which consists of multiple interrelated sub-communities. Yeeyan members’ endeavour to solve translation problems and thereby increase their competence also contributes to forming a shared history of learning.

Beyond these findings, this thesis also makes broader methodological and theoretical contributions. It demonstrates how the use of an immersive ethnographic methodology, hitherto seldom applied in the TS field, can provide more holistic insights into translators’ interactions, translation manuscripts and the entire collaboration process. The use of CoP theory offers us a new perspective that explains collaborative translation as a social practice through which – and to which – the participants ascribe meanings in the process of translating and interacting.
# Table of contents

**Chapter 1. Introduction** ........................................................................................................... 1

1.1 An overview of human-to-human collaborative translation ................................. 1

1.2 User-generated crowdsourced collaborative translation:
   - key issues and existing scholarship ................................................................. 6
   - The impact of crowdsourced collaborative translation ....................... 7
   - The translation and revision process .............................................................. 9
   - Motives for participation ............................................................................. 11
   - Crowdsourced collaborative translation in China ..................................... 13

1.3 Research objectives, scope and research questions ........................................ 14

1.4 Overview of the chapters .................................................................................. 19

**Vignette: Yeeyan – from a media portal to a translation community** ........ 22

- A media portal (before 2010) ............................................................................. 22
- A translation community .................................................................................... 25
- Collaboration in Yeeyan ....................................................................................... 27
- Translators in Yeeyan ......................................................................................... 28

**Ethnography I: Carah tries her hand at her first collaborative translation task** ................................................................. 33

- The first step is always the hardest .................................................................. 36
- Collaboration takes longer than expected ......................................................... 41
- The translation attracts attention ..................................................................... 43
- A rewarding collaboration experience .............................................................. 44

**Chapter 2. Engaging, Negotiating and Performing in Communities of Practice** ................................................................. 46

2.1 The concept of community .............................................................................. 47
   - Conceptualizations of online/virtual communities ................................ 49
   - Yeeyan: an online translation community ............................................... 51

2.2 Communities of practice (CoP) ..................................................................... 54
   - Practice: a duality of participation and reification ................................ 54
   - Three dimensions of practice .................................................................. 57
2.2.3 Regimes of competence ..................................................64
2.3 Role performance in online communities of practice .................67
  2.3.1 Online identities and roles ...........................................67
  2.3.2 Realizing role performance .........................................68
Concluding remarks ..........................................................72

Chapter 3. Observing, Participating and Researching
Collaborative Translation in Yeeyan ........................................ 74
  3.1 A qualitative study adopting an ethnographic methodology .......74
  3.2 Participant observation: the core method ...........................76
    3.2.1 Locating the “field” and social activities .......................77
    3.2.2 Participating in Yeeyan ............................................78
    3.2.3 Interacting with Yeeyan translators .............................81
    3.2.4 Writing fieldnotes ................................................83
  3.3 Data description ..........................................................84
  3.4 Research validity .........................................................87
    3.4.1 Self-reflexivity ....................................................88
    3.4.2 Triangulation and member check ................................90
  3.5 Ethnographic narratives ...............................................90
  3.6 Data analysis: thematic analysis and discourse analysis ...........92
  3.7 Ethnical considerations ...............................................93
    3.7.1 Protecting research participants ...............................94
    3.7.2 Between covert and overt research .............................95
Concluding remarks .........................................................96

Ethnography II. Carah gains more experience in Yeeyan ...............98
  Translating on the Collaborative Editing Tool ..........................100
  TitanPad: the “real” collaborative experience ........................103
  Making friends and knitting a network ..................................114

Ethnography III. Carah becomes a competent member ..................116
  Initiating a collaborative task with Alex ..............................116
  A noisy Xiaoheiwu ........................................................122
  The ethnographer’s note .................................................129
Chapter 4. Rethinking Communities of Practice through Collaborative Translation in Yeeyan: Issues of Shared Repertoire and Discursive Competence

4.1 Yeeyan’s community structure and participatory mechanisms ………..134
   4.1.1 Community structure .........................................................135
   4.1.2 Parallel and hierarchical participatory mechanisms ....................137
4.2 Analysing shared repertoire in Yeeyan .......................................149
   4.2.1 Norm repertoire ................................................................150
   4.2.2 Genre repertoire ...............................................................152
4.3 Discursive competence in genre production .................................171
Concluding remarks ...........................................................................177

Chapter 5. Negotiating and Renegotiating during Collaboration Processes

5.1 Negotiation through collaboration ..............................................180
   5.1.1 Beginning with peripherality ..............................................182
   5.1.2 Recognizing each other .....................................................189
   5.1.3 Developing regimes of competence .....................................195
5.2 Renegotiating regimes of competence ........................................202
   5.2.1 Negotiation in sub-sub-CoPs .............................................203
   5.2.2 Contestation in the broad CoP of Yeeyan .............................210
Concluding remarks ...........................................................................221

Chapter 6. Creating a Shared History of Learning through Collaborative Translation

6.1 Situated learning and legitimate peripheral participation ...............224
   6.1.1 Informality ........................................................................225
   6.1.2 Situatedness .......................................................................226
   6.1.3 Co-participation ..................................................................227
   6.1.4 Sustainability .....................................................................228
6.2 Learning through collaborative translation in Yeeyan ....................230
   6.2.1 Engaging in Yeeyan for learning .......................................230
   6.2.2 Tracing learning history through text production .................233
6.2.3 Learning as being in the community ........................................... 236
Concluding remarks ........................................................................... 239

Chapter 7. Conclusion ........................................................................ 242
7.1 Collaborative translation in Yeeyan: an experience of
meaning negotiation in online CoPs ................................................. 242
7.2 Methodological and theoretical contributions .............................. 253
  7.2.1 Methodological contributions .................................................. 253
  7.2.2 Theoretical contributions ......................................................... 254
7.3 Limitations and future research ..................................................... 260
  7.3.1 Future research in Translation Studies ................................. 260
  7.3.2 Interdisciplinary implications and social impact ................... 262

Appendices ....................................................................................... 264
Appendix I: A sample of the collaboration arrangement on TitanPad ..... 264
Appendix II: Extract 5.8 Contestations in the broad CoP of Yeeyan .... 269
Appendix III: CoP’s life cycle envisaged by Wenger in the context
of Organization studies ................................................................. 274
Appendix IV: An extract used for the analysis of the revision
history ............................................................................................ 275
Appendix V: Interview consent form .................................................. 284
Appendix VI: Study information sheet ............................................... 285

Bibliography ..................................................................................... 288

Curriculum Vitae .............................................................................. 310