Digital objects: Characterising translation and translators on social media

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Abstract

This article characterises translation and translators on social media as highly interactive and networked data. While translation and translators on social media are relatively less discussed. Previous studies of translation in digital contexts tend to over-emphasise translators' online identities such as fans or users along with their online collaboration, overlooking the fact that in most cases translators and their works only become meaningful through the existence of social media platforms, and vice versa. Considering what Karin Littau (2016a) has called the 'materialities of communication', I discuss translation on social media through the lens of Yuk Hui's (2012; 2016) 'digital objects'. I will show that Hui's proposed viewpoint of *digital, objects* and *networks* can better understand translation on social media. With reference to a number of translation-related examples from *Bilibili*, which is one of the most popular Video-sharing platforms in China, I argue that translation and translators on social media exist as freely circulated data that is perceived as approachable objects and figures, such as 'Barbecues' and 'porters'. Meanwhile, translation and translators are networked on social media via both manual connections such as hashtags, and algorithms mostly represented by the 'You may also like' function. By showing how translation, and translators, on social media can be understood as digital objects, this article highlights the usefulness of applying interdisciplinary, especially digital humanities theories in conducting translation studies in the digital era.

Biography

Mr. Jincai Jiang is a PhD candidate in Translation studies at the School of Modern Languages, University of Bristol. His PhD thesis explores the translation of user-generated content on China's social media, specifically on Bilibili.com. He is interested in translator studies, translation in digital context, and anthropological methods in translation studies.