

Digitalizing Translation

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Computers, information and communication technologies (ICTs) and the internet have forced societies, professions, and disciplines to rethink human social relationships, human-technology relationships, epistemological frameworks, ethical issues, and the interrelated spaces that have emerged between the 'local' and the 'global' (Ash et al. 2019; Barney et al. 2016; Baumgarten and Cornellà-Detrell 2017; Brügger and Milligan 2019; Daniels and McMillan Cottom 2017; Floridi 2014; Goggin and McLelland 2017; Mosco 2017; Russell 2014; Van Dijck 2013; Wiberg 2018). The position of the 'translator' has been evolving and transforming as well within this networked 'digital world' (Cronin 2013; Desjardins 2017; Folaron 2012; Jiménez-Crespo 2017; Kenny 2017). Recent statements about machine translation published by professional translator associations reflect some of the uneasiness with which increasingly sophisticated automated translation and other technologies have taken on greater visibility and presence in professional translation work. By the same token, a clearer understanding of the trends and tensions within contemporary digital world activities overall allow us to decipher, interpret, and explain more coherently both how they relate to our own translator and translation practices, and how we can more effectively handle the transforming environment. The objective of this presentation is two-fold. While not based on an empirical case study designed for any one class year in particular, it will present some of the observations, insights and knowledge that have been gained through 12 years of teaching an interactive 'Web, technologies, translation: theoretical and critical reflections' class to university students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate translation programs. Relying on a significant body of concepts and writings (scholarly, theoretical, empirical) from the growing field of digital studies (Athique 2013; Kurbalija 2016; Miller 2011; Stalder 2018), the course reflects on the relationships that emerge from the interactions between translation (including machine translation, Poibeau 2017) and our contemporary lives mediated by technologies and the Web. What does digital communication in a globalized, multilingual world mean for us as translation practitioners, scholars, and human beings? How does a digital studies approach to thinking about translation potentially redefine translation studies research? By more deeply contextualizing the digital world in which translation practices (aided by CAT and MT translation technologies) take place, the more effectively translators are able to position themselves as one actor among many in this environment, and to understand and explain the value they bring to global communication.

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