Iuliia Glushneva

TRANSLATION (DIS)JUNCTIONS, OR POSTSOCIALIST CONNECTIVITY: NETWORK LANGUAGE TRANSFER AND CYBERDUBBING ON THE RUNET

Abstract

This article focuses on language transfer as a fundamental factor in the construction of postsocialist network technosociality. By looking at the early days of the Internet in Russia and the current landscape of the Russian-language cyberspace, it demonstrates that excessive translation activity becomes an essential tool of postsocialist integration with global network economies and cultures. At the center of this activity is voice-over, a form of "half dubbing" and a dominant screen translation practice on the Runet. While this article explores the histories and defining features of performance and labor of this practice, it argues that the voice-over translation is a mode of connectivity that exposes the centrality of asynchrony and distortion to postsocialist networking as well as to the network as such.

APRJA Volume 9, Issue 1, 2020
ISSN 2245-7755

CC license: 'Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike'.

Introduction

In the 1980s and 1990s, the network imaginary, as an essential resource for the post-Fordist information economy and knowledge production, produced a potent repertoire of narratives to guide our understanding and experience of global connections and exchange. By focusing on the global network as a "communication system, increasingly speaking a universal, digital language" (Castells 2), these early narratives foreground the image of fluid connectivity without limits and technological monoglossia of the networking world. Meanwhile, what is seemingly absent or, rather, bracketed off in this account is the immense cultural complexity and linguistic diversity underlying the paths of network adoption and usage, on the one hand, and the network communication on a global scale, on the other. Although not always overtly expressed, this account continues to inform corporate and public discourses surrounding the network technologies, policies, and cultures. Today, it is precisely the search for the universal language code or "interlingua" that guides and dominates the development of communication tools and technologies such as, for example, Google's Natural Language Processing or Neural Translation System (Johnson).

The idea of the global networks as operating through universally shareable protocol and code stands in direct relation to what Michal Cronin calls the "neo-Babelianism" of the current information age and defines as "the desire for mutual, instantaneous intelligibility between human beings speaking, writing and reading different languages" (*Translation and Globalization* 59). The expression and fulfillment of this desire are linked to a range of tactics such as linguistic segmentation of informational flows, politics of translatability that favors easily adaptable and transferable knowledge, and concealment of translation. On the network, while concealment of translation is manifested in the utopian rhetoric around machine translation that seemingly enables momentary and painless communication, it also represents obscuring the conditions of translation labor and lived experience of those who translate. The network explicitly utilizes translation for self-preserving, whether we talk, for instance, about the accumulation of users' linguistic data by memory networks or the volunteer labor for "massively open translation" projects developed by media giants such as Facebook or Wikipedia (O'Hagan 930). Yet, the mundane translational activity remains treated as peripheral in the knowledge production and distribution, translators are subject to the imperative of self-erasure in linguistic transfer, and translations have to be unobtrusive and unnoticeable.

But what happens to the network, this article asks, when these conditions are not met? What senses of translation open up when the politics of concealment fails, and the awkwardness of linguistic transfer breaks through to the network surface? What are the socio-economic lives of communities that consume knowledge and experience the network through haunting translations on an everyday basis? In addressing these questions, this article draws attention to the translation culture developed around and on the Russian internet or Runet. Since the mid-1990s, 'Runet' has been coined as the term used by the general public, academia, and official institutions in Russia in referring to both a "national domain" of the internet and a "language domain, open to Russian-speaking people from all over the world" (Asmolov and Kolozaridi 56). Whereas the analogous "emotive labeling is not common in other national segments of global networks," the introduction of the abbreviation 'Runet' after the dissolution of the Soviet

Union in 1991 suggests the break of Russia with the state socialist governance of network culture (Konradova and Schmidt 35). Currently, the widespread adoption of the term by politicians and legal entities to refer to the websites registered on the territory of Russia points to the growing investment in protecting, administering, and policing the domestic network infrastructure and market. At the same time, the Runet more commonly designates "a social and cultural phenomenon of post-Soviet online communication in Russian, with neither fixed geographical nor technological parameters" (ibid.). Viewed as the Russophone "deterritorialized transnational realm" (Strukov 28), the Runet marks not the break but continuity with the Soviet politics that promoted the Russian language as a lingua franca of most of Eastern Europe and Central Asia and a communicative tool for building the international socialist community. In this way, the Runet also stands for the Russian-language web space(s) to network different parts of the ex-Soviet region as well as Russian-speaking users across the globe.

Nevertheless, the Runet is neither nationally centralized nor linguistically hermetic. It has been inextricably tied into the global network infrastructure and knowledge circulation, which is particularly evident in the centrality of interlinguistic translation to the histories and experiences of the Runet. While this article employs the term 'Runet' to denote both a national and linguistic segments of the internet, it discusses the pivotal role of the Russian-language translations in shaping the extension of network technology in Russia in the 1990s and online distribution of media content on the Russophone web in the 2000s to present. In using the Runet as a case study, the article emphasizes intensive cultural and linguistic translation as an essential factor and effect of networking under the impact of the postsocialist condition. Postsocialist networking, as I define it, represents a highly diverse set of regimes of connectivity that emerge through the complex confluence of socialist legacies/contemporary politics and market liberalization in the post-Cold War era. As we shall see below, the Runet embodies a specific modality of postsocialist networking characterized by the persistence of Soviet cultural practices and by the enhanced need for synchronization with advanced capitalist economies. In the context of the Runet, this need results in acceleration and amplification of translation activity that seems very difficult or impossible to conceal. The translations surrounding the Runet are those intended to guarantee junction and inclusion in the global knowledge culture. Yet, these are translations whose hasty and careless performance also points to the pressure of enduring disjunction and socio-cultural disparity in postsocialist networking.

As this article aims to demonstrate, what reveals the deepest symbolic and material implications of translation (dis)junctions mediating postsocialist connectivity is the phenomenon of voice-over translation, a dominant translation practice deployed to distribute foreign-language video content on the Runet. Called "half dubbing" or "non-synchronized dubbing" (Franco et al. 31), voice-over represents a technique in which the spoken translation is recorded over the original language, such that both language tracks can be heard. Asynchronous and error-prone voice-over, a hallmark of media cultures of the former Eastern bloc, has been seen as an eccentric by-product of the postsocialist socio-technological backwardness. A "farcical and surreal" phenomenon (Chion 145), "a form of cultural barbarism" (Chistruga and Svaneeng) or "translational pornography" (Berdy et al. 58) are the ways to describe postsocialist voice-overs.

Unlike the Web subbing scene that is today considered "a new frontier for transcultural engagement" (Dwyer and Lobato 128),

online voice-over culture and other practices of “cyberdubbing” (154), to borrow Rocío Baños’ term, have received scarce scholarly attention. This, in turn, does not correspond to ordinary experiences on the Runet, where, contrary to the majority of global networks, subtitling seems to play an accessory role. On the Runet, it is the noise of numerous split voice-overs that circulates across torrent websites, legal and semi-legal streaming services, and social media. Although the voice-overs are carried out and distributed by multiple actors such as official translation companies, pirates, fans, and random users, it is a particularly difficult task to distinguish between professional and amateur voice-overs as well as between legal and pirate translations. Due to the easy access to sound-editing software and advanced online translation tools, the quality of amateur translations does not significantly deviate from the norms of professional voice-overs. Interestingly, the Runet audiences often prefer amateur voice-overs to professional translations ridiculed by users for ubiquitous distortions and comic localization decisions. Moreover, it is a common practice for translators to independently distribute their translations online and simultaneously work for professional translation companies. Many of these companies, that today regularly hire popular amateur voice-over translators and participate in both official and informal media circulation on the Runet, emerged and flourished as informal translation collectives and agents of pirate distribution. In terms of local copyright culture, it is particularly noteworthy that voice-over translation in itself seems to legitimize informal media sharing. Colloquially known as ‘authorial’/‘auteur’ translation, voice-over is considered as a particular mode of authorship and creative practice that removes the aura of piracy and endows the ‘stolen’ content with originality. This perception of voice-over translation has a profound effect on the audience’s experiences, leading users not just to tolerate the asynchrony, noisiness, and errors typical of voice-over but to find them aesthetically pleasurable and essential for engagement with foreign-language culture.

By looking at the histories, infrastructure, and labor of voice-over translation, this article argues that the Russian-language voice-over culture represents a specific mode of connectivity that stands in conflict with the representation of the network as an agent of fluid and intelligible communication. As a manifestation of the accelerated postsocialist integration with dominant knowledge economies, this culture exposes the mechanisms, effects, and failures of network synchronization. It exposes the centrality of asynchrony and disjunction for the network that operates and expands in the conditions of socioeconomic imbalance, cultural asymmetries, and linguistic hierarchies.

Postsocialist Networks: (Dis)connecting Translations

Since the early 1970s, the network technosociality has been considered a fundamental resource of restructuring of contemporary capitalism and an organizing principle of neoliberal policies. As a decentralized and flexible structure, the network seems doomed to failure in the stifling atmosphere of the hierarchical bureaucracy of the Cold War socialist regimes. The emphasis in historical accounts is often on socialist networks as unsuccessful technological projects like the All-State Automated System (OGAS) in the Soviet Union, a prime example of “how not to network” (Peters 2016). Or, on the contrary, socialist networks seem to be productive,

but legally and morally dubious, capillary infrastructures of the shadow economy, black markets, samizdat distribution, and piracy.

Relkom, the first computer network in Russia, was launched in 1990 and jokingly stood for “*re*al *com*munism” (Konradova and Schmidt 39). In the same year, Russia was connected to the Internet via the domain *.su*. Nevertheless, the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 was taken as a starting point in the development of network culture in the country, and the early Russian netizens “perceived the fall of the Iron Curtain and the discovery of cyberspace as being intimately linked” (ibid. 35). In Russia, the network not only marked and facilitated the transition to capitalism but was also viewed as a key achievement of the capitalist revolution and an imported gift from the West. The history of Soviet network experiments and computer industry, in turn, fell victim to “Russian techno-cultural amnesia” (Strukov 28).

The political manipulation of the memory of communism and the distrust of left-wing politics associated with the totalitarian past have turned, according to Liviu Chelcea and Oana Druta, ex-socialist cultures into “a particularly strong version of neoliberalism” (17). However, the hypertrophy of neoliberalism in these cultures, and in Russia in particular, is not simply an enthusiastic acceptance of the norms and values of late capitalism. Rather, postsocialist capitalism is an agony of compulsive synchronization with the global neoliberal order under conditions of socio-economic and organizational asymmetry. The redundancy of postsocialist capitalism consists in the scale of human and material resources to compensate for this asymmetry and in the distinctive regulatory mechanisms and forms of labor engendered by the dictate of structural consensus.

The network, as both a foundational model and major technology for synchronization, has become the cornerstone of the postsocialist game of catch-up. Participation in the global network culture has turned out to be identical to proper integration into the neoliberal regime. Meanwhile, the trajectories of this participation often reflect the foundational paradox of digital networks – “the more we participate in them, the more inequality and disparity they produce” (Mejias 3). By promising instantaneous communication and thriving on “the breaking down of the rhythms, either biological or social” (Castells 476), the network does not cancel real-world asynchrony and uneven patterns of participation. Instead, while the network enforces monoglossia and coevalness as conditions of productive connectivity, it produces intense competitiveness and precarity.

The continuing process of postsocialist synchronization within and outside the network is an act of translation with its compromises, errors, temporal lag, and reputation of being derivative or even parasitical. It is the translation, both as cultural localization and linguistic transfer, that underlies the building of “postsocialist global collectivity” and serves as a fundamental postsocialist medium of “forging of common time” within the digital present (Starosta 204, 205). Equally, translation becomes an essential driving force behind the development of the network infrastructure and the Runet culture imagined as what “breached borders and brought down political walls in the spirit of political transformation” (Asmolov and Kolozaridi 66).

Symbolically, translation as localization engineering becomes the basis of the Russian electronic modernity. The massive import of computer systems since the late 1980s spawned an army of engineers actively involved in the technical redesign of imports and Russification of software. Meanwhile, among the emblematic electronic devices of the early network culture in Russia were not only computers available for a limited number of citizens. In the 1990s and 2000s,

a pocket translator is a coveted device and indispensable assistant in the context of drastically enhanced communication with the outside world and abundance of information flooding into all areas of life through foreign goods, texts, and images.

While computerized networks facilitated this acceleration of information flows, their architecture, representation, and public image developed through the offline distribution of knowledge. The 1990s became the most flourishing period in the development of Russian computer journalism heavily influenced by the North American computer press. By 1983, there were more than two hundred computer magazines in the United States ("Boom in Computer Magazines"), and later on, many of them, such as *Byte*, *Computerworld*, or *Network World*, began to be published in large print runs in Russia. The published material was composed almost exclusively of the articles translated into Russian (Kuzmin), and it was common to find only four pages written by local authors in a 100-page magazine (Strelchenko). In both popular and specialized press, the spread of information about computer and network technologies, in fact, lay on the shoulders of anonymous translators.

The emergence of computer journalism accompanied a boom in translations of academic and technical literature along with popular books such as *Internet for Dummies*. Translators were faced with a hardly feasible task to translate the amount of knowledge and information in the field of cybernetics, computer technology, and network studies produced in the West during the Cold War up to date. In the Soviet period, the All-Union Translation Center and the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information actively translated and published Western computer literature with slight delays (Gerovitch 144). However, since Soviet translations represented shorter and censored texts supplemented by numerous comments in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism and were especially skeptical of mind-machine analogies, a cornerstone of the network imaginary, they lost their relevance in the post-1991 era. The relevance and quality of the post-1991 Russian translation carried out in haste and under the pressure of never-ending technological upgrade turned to be no less problematic. This translation was often portrayed as a "spontaneous, uncontrolled process" and blamed for giving rise to "terminological confusion, inaccurate formulations, and ugly barbarisms" (Shturts 66). In the 2000s, the Russian-language translation was recognized as one of the factors that slowed down the timely integration of Russia into the environment of computer and network innovations and contributed to the ongoing misunderstanding among the local specialists. Employed to connect, translation into local language simultaneously resulted in disconnection (see fig. 1).

Figure 1: A Russian magazine cover referring to article "IT-Terms: Lost in Translation." ***Computerra*****, no. 15, 2006.**

Meanwhile, emerged in reaction to the chaotic and linguistically incomprehensible Web, the Runet developed online as the Russian-language "samizdat, archive, and library" and "in complete accordance with literature-centric traditions" (Kuznetsov 11, 73). In the Runet vortex of classical literature, amateur poems, esoteric books, and other textual content, translations were ubiquitous. Circulation of professionally translated texts, anonymous adaptations, commentaries, and summaries of foreign-language content was happening along with the formation of translation communities and the development of local online translation services. The translation was present on the Runet, but it was not until the arrival of high-speed unlimited access in 2004 that it obtained actual visibility. The fast Internet speeds brought about the unstoppable cross-border video streams. Paradoxically, not texts but images placed language transfer at the heart of the network life.

Cyberdubbing on the Runet: Voice-Over Translation

The rapid expansion of the Internet has coincided with the decline of the logocentric privileging of language, and it might seem that "meaning has evaporated as the main point of reference" within the network driven by "the *power of affection* of images" (Terranova 13, 142). Nevertheless, the content, alphabet, and sound of human language remain essential factors in the regulation of trajectories and speed of image flows and shaping the sensory experiences of the network spectacle. The global image circulation is a cacophony of languages that bypass each other, clash in rivalry, and swiftly merge in the chaos of translation performed by people and machines.

In this cacophony, the Runet represents only a semblance of language enclave. By accumulating the dizzy multilingual flows, it exists as a gigantic translation engine that adapts and circulates moving images through quick and cheap cyberdubbing practices. Among them is voice-over that, in contrast to ventriloquism of regular dubbing, allows both the original speech and spoken translation remain audible, thereby highlighting the very presence and machinery of the linguistic transfer. Despite its obtrusiveness, voice-over is a primary translation technique on the Runet and an alternative to both subtitling that plays a marginal role in the local media history and time-consuming dubbing that requires lip synchronization.

Originated in the Soviet Union (Franco et al. 24, 47), voice-over is an integral part of (post)socialist aesthetics, cultural politics, and institutional routines. Most conventional narratives, both academic and popular, view it as a practice emblematic of rampant Russian video piracy in the 1980s and 1990s, a period when videotapes with pre-recorded foreign media poured into the country. In the VCR era, voice-over translators (mostly males) played the role of simultaneous interpreters who recorded their single-voice, improvised, barely synchronized translations directly to videotapes.

Portrayed as "a symbol of the capitalist transition's contradictions" (Chistruga and Svaneeng), this practice, however, had been officially incorporated within the Cold War culture of information exchange and media entertainment. Simultaneous interpreting, a source of Soviet pride and a revolutionary mechanism for building a global socialist community, is believed to be first introduced at the 6th Congress of Communist International in Moscow in 1928 (Gofman 20), or later, as a wired system of headphones

and microphones, at the 15th International Congress of Physiology in Leningrad in 1935 (Gaiba 31). After the Nuremberg Trials in 1945-1946, the wired system of interpreting manufactured by IBM becomes widely adopted in the world.

Meanwhile, in the USSR, this technique of translation migrated from the places of international gatherings and courtrooms to movie theaters. Since the 1950s, the offhand speech of a translator, emotionally detached in accordance with the interpreting standards, became "a key element of the foreign-film sound track throughout the Soviet Union" (Razlogova 162). Later on, this practice was adapted for television screens as voice-over to equally translate international news, commentary programs, and popular genre of Latin American telenovelas. Even when not performed simultaneously, voice-overs stressed immediacy and unscriptedness, which was in great demand among the audiences bored by carefully staged and static Soviet television (Evans 114-128). Today, voice-over, which implicitly blends the protocols of international communication and media pleasure as well as points to liveness and authenticity of entertainment, remains a dominant method to officially distribute foreign-language television content.

In this regard, as integrated into the overlapping histories of institutionalized and informal media consumption, voice-over on the Runet does not fully embrace the prevailing view on "cyberdubbing" as humoristic or subversive fan activity or an "effective tool for the expression of discontent" (Baños 163). Although some translators deploy it for parodic purposes, voice-over in Russia is a mundane cultural ritual that serves as a particularly effective adaptive strategy in the context of the asymmetrical information economy of the network.

At first sight, it might seem that on the network voice-over exists exclusively in the realm of informal media distribution. Indeed, one of the largest online collections of the VHS, televisual, and newly created amateur voice-overs is a torrent website RuTracker, whose vast community usually considers subtitles as an additional option and tolerates only the dubs made for children's animation films. Using translation as a shield from international copyright control, RuTracker prohibits the exchange of non-translated visual media and the inclusion of any languages other than Russian in descriptions. While the netizens share both sound files with their voice-overs, RuTracker has its translation studio that accepts orders and provides users with free or paid voice-overs of higher quality. Contemporary voice-overs usually represent pre-recorded and more precise translations, although asynchrony, discord, errors, and use of a limited number of voices (one or two) remain characteristic of this practice in the cyberspace.

Recently, although torrents have managed to retain their popularity with the online users, public attention has moved to semi-legal streaming platforms that mushroomed within the Runet. "The allure of streaming," as Tessa Dwyer and Ramon Lobato point out, "is that everything is already built into the platform" (139). A clear advantage of Russian informal streaming services compared to torrent sharing is not simply the integration of translation into the platform apparatus. The key feature of these services is the possibility to choose among the multiple voice-over versions simultaneously available via platforms (see fig. 2). Uploaded under the names of numerous translation studios or so-called 'release-groups,' these translations differ in their style of performance and reputation among the fragmented audience whose tastes and expectations not always coincide. The immediate access to multiple translations allows informal streaming services to outpace not only the torrent websites but

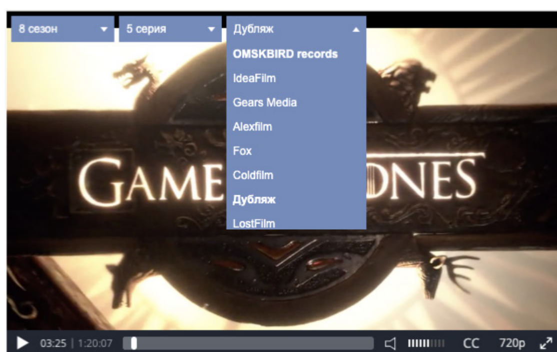

Figure 2: One of the Runet informal streaming services offers to choose among eleven translation versions to watch HBO's *Game of Thrones*.

also official distributors. As a rule, the latter provide viewers only with subtitles and one voice-over or dubbed version produced at their corporate studios.

It is common for independent translation companies to launch their own free streaming websites, which helps them build a strong fan base and interact with users. Among them is *LostFilm*, one of the oldest providers of voice-over on the Runet since 2004. The studio began with translation of the second season of an American TV series *Lost* (hence the studio's name). Carried out by the founder Andrei Kravets, that first amateur single-voice translation was aimed at the Russian public eagerly waiting for a return of the show. While the local TV channels remained paralyzed by negotiations with the ABC distributors and strict copyright requirements to officially release *Lost*, the sequel was quickly leaked all over the Runet in Kravets' translation. Today, *LostFilm* represents one of the most successful informal studios known for its big collection of translated TV series and cherished by fans for high-quality performance and 'soft' approach in translating offensive language.

Another noteworthy example is a release-group *Kuraj Bambey* created by Denis Kolesnikov in Tolyatti in 2009. Kolesnikov first translated a few episodes of *The Big Bang Theory* for his mother, who wanted to watch "something new," and then put them on the Internet. Suddenly, the sitcom which the Russian audience had never been familiar with topped online searches due to the humorous and witty voice-over. Contrary to *LostFilm*'s emotionally ascetic and precise style, Kolesnikov is highly visible in his translations due to signature jokes and phrases and masterly changes of timbre in revoicing of different characters.

Although the release-groups, such as *LostFilm* and *Kuraj Bambey*, play a crucial role in the circulation of unlicensed media, they are also important players on the market of legal distributors, not always explicitly though. Official TV channels and online video services often collaborate with the amateur studios or their independent translators and voice artists, while they tend to avoid giving publicity to the fact of partnership. So, in *Game of Thrones* or *Breaking Bad*, officially distributed by the largest local streaming service *Amedia*, one can easily recognize some familiar voices circulating across informal translations made by *LostFilm*. Meanwhile, Kolesnikov from *Kuraj Bambey* has become a star voice on a few popular TV channels. In January 2020, he signed a contract with the leading network and IPTV provider Rostelekom – Kolesnikov will translate twenty films and three TV series for the company (Istomina).

Whereas this complex interplay between formal and informal distribution networks unfolds on the battlefield for the U.S. 'quality television' products, there is a curious segment of numerous voice-over communities that seemingly stand away from it. These are outwardly inconspicuous small translation groups based on the local social media, such as VKontakte, which hosts multiple genres of entertainment content. Among these communities are *SezdiZi*, a highly influential voice-over group specialized in translation of Turkish films and TV

dramas, or *om_ocean_of_wisdom*, translators of Hindi language mythological serials and religious videos, or *Sexy Channel*, a studio of voice-over translation in the genre of erotica. Unlike the more fluent voice-overs of mainstream release-groups mimicking the television norms, the translations performed by these communities remain blatantly out of synch, sloppy and inaccurate. However, the aesthetic 'flaws' do not invalidate these voice-overs that redress the distribution gaps and provide access to content unavailable through other channels because of such interconnected factors as linguistic obstacles, unprofitability, and lowly status within the taste hierarchies.

Voice-Over Labor: Cultural Elites or Network Precariat?

Within the network universe, language diversity and demand of translation represent an unsettling truth that destabilizes the myth of borderless, instantaneous, and intelligible communication. In attempting to preserve the comforting illusion of seamless and sustained contact, the network reinforces what Lawrence Venuti calls the "translator's invisibility": an ideology that underwrites the norm of translator's self-erasure in linguistic transfer and ambivalent status of translators as second-class citizens alienated from the product of their labor (8-10).

In this regard, given the specificity of voice-over performance and tremendously tangible presence of voice-over translators on the Runet, the Russian-language cyberdubbing culture offers a radical challenge to the politics of invisibility. At the same time, while this culture places translators at the forefront of public life and endows them with exclusive authority, it continues to reproduce the inequalities and precariousness of translation labor. It exposes but does not alleviate "what is devalued or ignored in the cyberhype of global communities," namely "the effort, the difficulty and, above all else, the time required to establish and maintain linguistic (and by definition, cultural) connections" (Cronin, *Translation and Globalization* 49).

In Russia, the term 'voice-over' is often used interchangeably with the concept 'authorial translation,' which refers to a tendency to perceive a voice-over translator as a genuinely creative and artistic figure. This attitude stretches back to the practice of simultaneous film interpreting and the days of VCRs when many translators achieved the celebrity status comparable to that one of popular actors or musicians (Gorchakov). The effects of the tireless work of translators, who could have translated up to as many as seven videotapes per day (Dolsky), were on the surface of video spectacle and manifested in numerous mistakes, trembling voice, hoarseness, and gasping. The endeavors of translators were portrayed as "work on the inspiration," and the translators' "enormous expenditures of nervous energy" in conditions of fast production and omnivorous media consumption seemed romantic (Berdy et al. 53).

Although not to such an extent, the domain of cyberdubbing on the Runet is encompassed with the same heroic aura. The amount of media content in all languages grew 67 times from 2001 to 2012, while the number of professional Russian-language translators grew by only 30% (Kozulyaev). In the digital loop, technology simultaneously allows compensating for this disproportion by providing an opportunity to use machine translation and rerecord and easily edit sound, which, in fact, creates what Cronin calls "translational cyborgs" (*Translation and*

Globalization 112). However, working within the atmosphere of enduring information oversaturation and socio-cultural asymmetries, the translational cyborgs cannot get rid of the sense "of never doing enough fast enough" (Cronin, *Translation in the Digital Age* 94). In this context, voice-over translators retain their missionary reputation and the role of cultural mediators, and their raw error-prone and half-synchronous translations become a mark of their efforts. Viewers tolerate, get used to, and appreciate them as valuable aesthetic and cultural forms integral to their everyday experience.

On the Runet, the VHS translators remain iconic authors, and their labor is paid by users who usually order their voice-overs through *RuTracker* and donate money. The translations made in previous years circulate freely across the torrent websites. In turn, the average cost of a newly translated film from one of the stars is about 7,000 rubles (US$130), which includes the linguistic translation, vocal delivery, and post-synchronization. It is the highest price on the network, and it is also the cost of voice-over produced by professional companies. Most of the cyberdubbing labor, however, remains free and hidden behind the collective 'brand' names of release-groups.

It is noteworthy that, although the figures of translators and voice-over artists still tend to coincide, many big translation collectives invite additional performers not involved in the process of translation *per se*. This division of labor, typical of industrial production, results from the fact that the overwhelming amount of linguistic work that translators perform not always leaves them time for voice acting. Besides, this deals with the intention of some collectives to diversify the acoustics of their translations with the help of the artists whose gender, age, and vocal characteristics (e.g., pitch) match speakers on the screen. Meanwhile, in the public imagination, the translator and voice artist remain the same person, and translators gain a significant part of their cultural capital from the voices the viewers get intimately attached to. Equally, the original star persona whose body and, more importantly, voice are present becomes the incarnation of the translator, and vice versa. In this phantasmagoric symbiosis, the audience's love, anger, interest, or indifference towards both characters and texts depend not only on the screen action but also emerge from translation.

Due to their status of missionaries carrying the world culture to hungry audiences and affective power of their performance, the voice-over translators seem to belong to the digital elite of the Runet. Yet, while they occasionally receive voluntary donations from grateful fans or support themselves through the integration of ads of online casinos, the translation communities do not reap direct monetary rewards for their translations. Even big popular release-groups, such as *LostFilm* or *Kuraj Bambey* mentioned above, describe their activity as "work for pleasure" or "hobby" and consider online voice-overs as promotion for their offline studios carrying out translations on a by-order basis. In the offline world, the voices of cyberdybbers sound behind Saint Petersburg's subway announcements, in TV commercials for Sprite, or at corporate parties where dubbers perform the role of showmen and amuse the public. These are alternative sources of income translators get access to due to their strategy to use the online activity as advertising for their voices and public image.

"Free labour," as Terranova points out, "is not necessarily exploited labor" (91). Indeed, online voice-over culture might look on the surface like space to simply share knowledge, exchange information, and communicate in bypassing market regulations, predatory pricing, and cultural asymmetries. Nevertheless, enmeshed into affective

economies and intensified by postsocialist pursuits for proper inclusion, voice-over production simultaneously replicates exploitation and highlights power imbalance. While they manage to capitalize on online popularity and expand their influence outward, successful release-groups recruit "enthusiasts" galvanized by a desire to participate in voice-over culture.

Small release-groups and independent translators often play the function of 'testers' here. Their translations suddenly disappear from the network and are replaced by voice-overs from official distributors or big informal release-groups, if the latter see an interest among the audiences. On the Runet male-dominated voice-over scene, the mass involvement of female translators remains invisible, and women are pushed to what can be seen as peripheries of the Runet. These peripheries represent enclaves for distributing media made in other languages than English and not produced by major conglomerates.

In the highly hierarchical voice-over culture that reinstates real-world socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic inequalities, translation production turns out to be more than a neutral mechanism of access to knowledge. The voice-over scene of the Runet reflects the postsocialist struggle for liberation from alleged provincialism and for integration into the core of the global cultural economy. While both the Runet translators and consumers continue to benefit from voice-over culture, this culture simultaneously demonstrates that the struggle over inclusion requires an investment of immense human resources, triggers self-exploitation, and produces additional levels of disproportionality. If these conditions are not immediately evident, their effects manifest in uneven voices and broken languages of quick and inaccurate translations that mediate everyday lives and connections on the Runet.

Works Cited

"Boom in Computer Magazines." *New York Times*, 9 Nov. 1983, www.nytimes.com/1983/11/09/business/boom-in-computer-magazines.html. Accessed 10 March 2020.

Asmolov, Gregory, and Polina Kolozaridi. "The Imaginaries of RuNet: The Change of the Elites and the Construction of Online Space." *Russian Politics*, no. 2, 2017, pp. 54-79.

Baños, Rocío. "Fundubbing Across Time and Space: From Dubbing 'By Fans for Fans' to Cyberdubbing." *Reassessing Dubbing: Historical Approaches and Current Trends*, edited by Irene Ranzato and Serenella Zanotti, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2019, pp. 145-168.

Berdy, Michele, et al. "Киноперевод: мало что от Бога, много чего от Гоблина" [Film Translation: There is Little from God, Much from Goblin]." *Mosty*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2005, pp. 52-62.

Castells, Manuel. The Rise of the Network Society. 1996. Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
Chelcea, Liviu, and Oana Druta. "Zombie Socialism and the Rise of Neoliberalism in Post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe." *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, vol. 57, no. 4-5, 2016, pp. 1-24.

Chion, Michel. *Words on Screen*. Translated by Claudia Gorbman. Columbia University Press, 2013.

Chistruga, Vladislav, and Jacob Svaneeng. "The Curious Tale of the Soviet Voice-Over." *Jacobin*, 18 Jul. 2017, jacobinmag.com/2017/07/soviet-voice-over-cold-war-technology. Accessed 10 March 2020.

Cronin, Michael. *Translation and Globalisation*. Routledge, 2003.

____. Translation in the Digital Age. Routledge, 2013.

Dolsky, Andrei. “Хроники видика: легенды эпохи VHS. Первая серия [Video Chronicles: Legends of the VHS Epoch, Part One].” *YouTube*, uploaded by svyat_svyat, 14 Oct. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLXtum_xY_Y.

Dwyer, Tessa, and Ramon Lobato. “Informal Translation, Post-Cinema and Global Media Flows.” *The State of Post-Cinema: Tracing the Moving Image in the Age of Digital Dissemination*, edited by Malte Hagener, et. al., Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 127-145.

Evans, Christine E. *Between Truth and Time: a History of Soviet Central Television*. Yale University Press, 2016.

Franco, Eliana, et al. *Voice-Over Translation: An Overview*. Peter Lang, 2010.

Gaiba, Francesca. *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial*. University of Ottawa Press, 1998.

Gerovitch, Slava. *From Newspeak to Cyberspeak: A History of Soviet Cybernetics*. MIT Press, 2002.

Gofman, Evgeni. “К истории синхронного перевода [On the History of Simultaneous Translation].” *Tetradi Perevodchika*, no. 1, 1963, pp. 20-26.

Istomina, Maria. “Кураж-Бамбей озвучит фильмы и сериалы для Ростелекома [Kuraj Bambey Will Voice-over Films and TV Series for Rostelekom].” *Vedomosti*, 29 Jan. 2020, www.vedomosti.ru/media/articles/2020/01/29/821716-kurazh-bambei. Accessed 10 March 2020.

Johnson, Melvin. “Stanford Seminar: Google’s Multilingual Neural Machine Translation System.” *YouTube*, uploaded by stanfordonline, 9 March 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=nR74lBO5M3s&list=PUBa5G_ESCn8Yd4vw5U-glcg&index=104&app=desktop.

Konradova, Natalya, and Henrike Schmidt. “From the Utopia of Autonomy to a Political Battlefield: Towards a History of the Russian Internet.” *Digital Russia: The Language, Culture and Politics of New Media Communication*, edited by Michael S. Gorham, et. al., Routledge, 2014, pp. 34-54.

Kozulyaev, Alexei. “Как переводят фильмы, игры и сериалы [How We Translate Films, Games, and TV Series].” *VC.ru,* 7 Aug. 2017, vc.ru/story/25642-translation-business. Accessed 10 March 2020.

Kuzmin, Yuri. “Юбилей с оттенком грусти: книги и компьютерная пресса” [Anniversary With a Touch of Sadness: Books and Computer press].” *Russian Virtual Computer Museum*, www.computer-museum.ru/articles/istoriya-kompyuternoy-pressy/2277/. Accessed 10 March 2020.

Kuznetsov, Sergei. *Ощупывая слона: заметки по истории русского Интернета* [Touching the Elephant: Notes on the History of the Russian Internet]. NLO, 2004.

Mejias, Ulises Ali. *Off the Network: Disrupting the Digital World*. University of Minnesota Press, 2013.

O'Hagan, Minako. "Massively Open Translation: Unpacking the Relationship Between Technology and Translation in the 21st Century." *International Journal of Communication*, no. 10, 2016, pp. 929-946.

Peters, Benjamin. *How Not To Network a Nation: The Uneasy History of the Soviet Internet*. MIT Press, 2016.

Razlogova, Elena. "Listening to the Inaudible Foreign: Simultaneous Translators and Soviet Experience of Foreign Cinema." *Sound, Speech, Music in Soviet and Post-Soviet Cinema*, edited by Lilya Kaganovsky and Masha Salazkina, Indiana University Press, 2014, pp. 162-178.

Shturts, Igor. "Вложу ибуксы в куки [Adding E-books to Cookies]." *Computerra*, 18 Apr. 2006, pp. 66-69.

Starosta, Anita. "Perverse Tongues, Postsocialist Translations." *boundary 2*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2014, pp. 203-227.

Strelchenko, Yuri. "Мир ПК – 20 лет назад. Годы 1988-й, 1989-й [PC World – 20 years ago, 1988-1989]." *PC World*, 19 March 2008, www.osp.ru/pcworld/2008/02/4885936/. Accessed 10 March 2020.

Strukov, Vlad. "The (Im)personal Connections: Computational Systems and (Post-)Soviet Cultural History." *Digital Russia: The Language, Culture and Politics of New Media Communication*, edited by Michael S. Gorham, et. al., Routledge, 2014, pp. 11-33.

Terranova, Tiziana. *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. Pluto, 2004.

Venuti, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2008.