

**Wikipedia as a Translation Zone:
A heterotopic analysis of the online encyclopedia
and its collaborative volunteer translator community**

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Abstract

Recent research has highlighted the emergence and proliferation of online communities of volunteer translators whose intensely collaborative activities are largely facilitated by the participatory and interactive nature of new networked communication technologies. Much of the discussion regarding these forms of web-based translation has tended to focus on what brings individuals together to give up their time, skills and effort when co-operating within such prosumer-led projects. By contrast, this paper presents a case-study focused on the construction of the English Wikipedia article about Tokyo in order to argue that it is important for translation scholars to additionally take into account the difficult processes of fierce conflict and

debate which often characterise interactions within such communities. It does so by means of the spatial mode of analysis encouraged by Foucault's writings on 'heterotopia', demonstrating how this conceptual method can be applied to explain and explore the multifaceted negotiations that occur in this environment.

Keywords

Wikipedia; collaborative translation; volunteer translation; virtual communities; heterotopia; digital culture.

1. Introduction

The advent of networked digital communication technologies has had a profound impact on translation practices over the past two decades (Jiménez-Crespo 2017, 1). Most notably, recent research has highlighted the emergence and proliferation of online communities of volunteer translators whose intensely collaborative activities are largely facilitated by the open, participatory and interactive nature of these new tools (O'Hagan 2011, 12; Pérez-González and Susam-Saraeva 2012, 152). Much of the discussion regarding these forms of web-based translation has tended to focus on what brings individuals together to give up their time, skills and effort when co-

operating within such prosumer-led projects. For example, Pérez-González (2010) has drawn attention to the shared sense of political affinity binding an ‘ad-hoc’ group of activists, known as Ansarclub, which formed temporarily online in 2006 in order to produce Spanish-language subtitles for a controversial BBC News interview with Spain’s former Prime Minister José Maria Aznar López. His analysis examines how the members of this translation community “jointly construct[ed] the gravitational core of their emerging affinity space” through their interactions within the comments section of a progressive blog and hence how they developed into a collective force for political action (276). Similarly, Baker (2013) has investigated groups such as Babels, Translators for Peace and Tlaxcala, and highlighted the central ideals of global justice and pacifism by which these groups define themselves and their interventions. For instance, by examining the ‘manifesto’ included on the Tlaxcala group’s website, she shows how the activities of this group revolve around “a narrative of an inherently conflictual world where different imperial powers have subjugated weaker nations and groups and reinforced this subjugation through their language since time immemorial” (28). The translators belonging to the collective are then framed as ‘resistance fighters’ in this culture war, with a specific role to play in de-imperialising the English language and in combatting the homogenising tendencies of Anglo-centric neoliberal globalisation. Further studies of other online translation communities have additionally emphasised altruism as a ‘core value’

guiding the activities of many multilingual participants and drawing them together from disparate backgrounds for a common cause (see e.g. Čemerin and Toth 2017; Dombek 2014; McDonough Dolmaya 2012; O'Brien and Schäler 2010; Olohan 2014).

The analysis presented in this paper of collaborative volunteer translation in the context of the online user-generated encyclopedia Wikipedia aims to offer an alternative perspective on such co-production processes. While, as McDonough Dolmaya (2012, 182) has demonstrated, Wikipedia's translator-contributors are for the most part united in their belief that knowledge is free and committed in their desire to create an openly accessible, multilingual knowledge resource, this article shows that there is rarely absolute consensus on what knowledge should and should not be included, or how this task might best be approached. In fact, when collecting and collating the information required to produce their target-language texts, community members argue, often bitterly, over the ways in which the challenges posed by the linguistic and cultural heterogeneity of human knowledge should be tackled. In other words, Wikipedia can clearly be seen as a platform in which volunteer translators compete at least as much as they co-operate, in which they push against each other just as much as they pull together. Consequently, this paper argues that translation scholars should take into account not only the gravitational forces which bind together online communities, but also the internally disruptive,

‘centrifugal’ pressures which cause friction and debate between members, and which ultimately also have a major shaping influence on their output. Such a focus is particularly important in the case of Wikipedia, I would suggest, because it helps to challenge still pervasive conceptions of the site’s translators as impartial, disengaged and simply altruistic mediators between languages and cultures by highlighting instead the wide range of individual voices, conflicting perspectives and divergent motivations involved within this project (see also Jones 2018, 271).

Secondly, this paper aims to show how the difficult processes of debate and negotiation that occur within this environment can be productively explained and explored by means of the spatial mode of analysis encouraged by Michel Foucault’s (1986) concept of ‘heterotopia’. To my knowledge, Foucault’s writings on this subject have not yet been discussed within the field of translation studies, but the approach is potentially valuable, I argue, as a means of deepening our understanding of the tensions structuring emerging online spaces such as Wikipedia and the impact of these environmental features on translation practices. This paper thus hope to contribute to a growing body of research interested in what Federico Italiano (2012; 2016) has termed the ‘geography of translation’, that is, in the extent to which the location in which translation takes place shapes how and why it proceeds. Sherry Simon’s (2012) oft-cited theorisation of the city as a ‘translation zone’ has successfully problematised the traditional emphasis

on translation as it is performed between the distinct cultures of geographically distant nation states, and opened up new avenues for research into the different functions and meanings of translation in these urban spaces (see also Cronin and Simon 2014; Demirkol-Ertürk and Paker 2014; Koskinen 2014; Meylaerts and Gonne 2014). The conceptual method offered by the notion of heterotopia, on the other hand, might serve as complementary tool for promoting analysis of the inherently conflicted, heterogeneous and hybrid nature of the on- and offline environments that form the immediate arena of activity for much translation practice today.

Having introduced this theoretical framework, the remainder of the paper will finally turn to a case-study focused on the English-language Wikipedia article about Tokyo, Japan, and its associated ‘Talk page’ discussion forums. This investigation demonstrates in detail the potential of the concept of heterotopia for translation studies scholars interested in picking apart the reasons why the collaborative multilingual construction of a text such as this might be fraught with so much intersubjective dispute and discord. Specifically, I examine the platform as a space for both an encyclopedia and a community, and highlight how the site’s ambiguous positionality in this regard generates and shapes arguments among its translator-contributors. In doing so, I attempt to provide insights into a conflict-ridden form of virtual community translation involving translator-advocates of diverse and opposing points of view.

2. Heterotopia as a Conceptual Method

The concept of 'heterotopia' first made an appearance in the writings of French philosopher Michel Foucault in the preface to his third book *Les Mots et les choses* (*The Order of Things* – 1970). However, his ideas on the subject are most extensively developed in a lecture entitled '*Des Espaces autres*' ('Of Other Spaces') which was delivered to a class of architecture students in 1967, and it is on this short text that almost all subsequent scholarship has been founded (Rymarczuk and Derksen 2014). Here, he defines a heterotopia as a site ('*emplacement*' in French) in which "all the other real sites [*emplacements*'] that can be found in the culture are simultaneously represented, contested and inverted" (Foucault 1986, 24). Heterotopias exist both inside and outside of other social spaces, mirroring and condensing their realities, whilst simultaneously refashioning and subverting them. This is what Foucault calls their 'function' in a society: to create transformative new spaces and/or to undermine existing ones (1986, 27).

Foucault illustrates his argument with numerous examples, perhaps the most famous of which is that of the cemetery. As he explains, the cemetery is a space in Western culture quite separate from many of the everyday spaces of our social lives, an 'other' space with its own characteristics, its own rules, its own expected ways of behaving (1986, 25). Despite this apparent

distinctness, the cemetery is nevertheless intimately connected “with all the sites of the city-state or society or village, etc., since each individual, each family has relatives in the cemetery.” Otherwise incompatible spaces are thus juxtaposed in the heterotopia: spaces of life and of death, of public and of private, of the individual, of the family and of society – to name but a few – are all brought together into new relations, and in their combination new attributes, meanings and practices are generated.

Another interesting example is that of the garden which, throughout its long history, has always been considered a contradictory but somehow ‘sacred’ site (Foucault 1986, 25). The first gardens of ancient Persia, Foucault (1986, 25) suggests, were deeply symbolic places “that [were] supposed to bring together inside [their] rectangle four parts representing the four parts of the world.” Much as in modern zoos, they were spaces in which all the vegetation of the world was meant to be collected and collated, in order to create “a sort of microcosm” (Foucault 1986, 26). In Europe since the nineteenth century, Foucault proposes that museums and libraries have fulfilled a similar function too, albeit with an additional chronological, as well as a geographical, emphasis: their popularity is driven by the

idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the

idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages [...] a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place (Foucault 1986, 26).

Other illustrations provided in this short lecture include fairgrounds, festivals, brothels and libraries, and scholars from across the humanities have subsequently added many further spaces to this list (see Johnson 2013 for a useful overview). Most notably for our purposes here, McKenzie Wark (1993, 154) has suggested that cyberspace can be considered a heterotopia: this is a “logical, inaccessible space”, he argues, of “relational difference, [...] a network, linking terminals in difference [sic] places and times into a unified environment.” It thus shares much in common, Wark continues, with Foucault’s (1986, 27) example of the ship, a “place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea and [...] from port to port, from tack to tack, from brothel to brothel, it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures.” Similarly, cyberspace exists both within and beyond the spaces of our everyday lives; it is experienced as a real but somehow ‘other’ space, the development of which acts to create new transformative connections between otherwise unaffiliated and often incompatible sites. In

the words of Diana Saco (2002, 100), it is an environment of “productive confusion”, a space that is

at once impersonal and personal, mass mediated and popular, governmental and grassroots, corporate and individual, serious and playful. It has given rise to temporal ambiguities (heterochronia) between past and present in the mix of archived data and real-time exchanges. And perhaps most significantly, it has thrown public and private together in the same space, blurring that traditional liberal distinction.

Building on this idea, Jutta Haider and Olof Sundin (2010) have more recently posited that the online encyclopedia Wikipedia constitutes “a mirror of the Web which is part of the Web”, a platform which – much like the museums, libraries and archives that Foucault mentions in his lecture – brings together all kinds of contradictory ‘*emplacements*’, from all times, all places, all tastes, within a single environment. In doing so, it juxtaposes and actively challenges the traditional boundaries between the spheres of work and leisure, expert and lay knowledge, public and private (cf. Saco 2002, 100). “Calling Wikipedia a digital, a networked heterotopia”, argue Haider

and Sundin (2010), “is a very fitting description since it takes account of all these characteristics.”

While it is certainly easy to agree with this judgement, it is additionally important to be aware of the risks associated with this line of thought. Most significantly, critics such as Benjamin Genocchio (1995, 40) have pointed out that “scouring the absolute limits of imagination, [...] what cannot be designated a heterotopia?” Indeed, it is difficult to think of a space in society which does not in some way fit the mould of heterotopia as a mere category. This is because, as Foucault’s compatriot Henri Lefebvre (1991) argued much more extensively, all social spaces are heterogeneous, multifaceted, multivalent; all are ‘relational’ and interlinked by means of a constellation of dynamic and often contradictory connections. One might legitimately ask questions then as to the whereabouts of the ‘normal’ sites in society to which heterotopias might be considered ‘radically other’. Put bluntly, what use is heterotopia as a theoretical construct if it describes everything and therefore nothing?

In response to these criticisms, supporters of Foucault’s concept – including Sherman Young (1998), Peter Johnson (2013) and Robin Rymarczuk and Maarten Derksen (2014) – all make an important point: they argue that heterotopias must be seen not simply as a category with which to label a particular site, but primarily as a ‘conceptual method’ (Johnson 2013, 791), as a lens with which to consider a particular phenomenon from a new

perspective. It must be placed, in other words, within the wider context of Foucault's career-long project of 'making difference' (Johnson 2013, 800), of destabilising dominant approaches and structures within established fields of study, and of promoting the development of alternative connections and ideas. Conceptualising Wikipedia as a 'heterotopic' site of translation activity is helpful, not because it identifies the website as something absolutely different from the other '*emplacements*' of society, but because it encourages us to think differently about the encyclopedia and its translators. It provides a framework on the basis of which to consider Wikipedia first and foremost as a heterogeneous space, "as a site of juxtaposition and simultaneity" (Haider and Sundin 2010), with its own unique geography, its own particular functions and its own specific set of dynamic relations with all the other spaces of the world. As I will show in the case-study below, the concept of heterotopia helps bring into focus the ways in which these environmental characteristics reflect and subvert those found in other locales. It helps us to investigate the ways in which these qualities determine both who is involved in the project, and how they interact and engage in translation as part of their multilingual encyclopedia-building activity.

3. Contextualising the Case-Study: Wikipedia, the user-generated encyclopedia

Wikipedia is a free online encyclopedia-building project, first launched in January 2001. Unlike all previous attempts at authoring a reference work of this kind, however, the platform uses the affordances of wiki software to enable any reader to add to, remove or otherwise ‘edit’ its content. For this reason, Wikipedia is viewed by many as one of the most prominent examples of a ‘participatory’ model for the production and dissemination of knowledge: the encyclopedia is not the product of a closed collaboration between a select group of historians, scientists and other expert writers, but has now received close to a billion contributions to its articles by a global volunteer community numbering in the hundreds of thousands (Wikipedia, “Statistics”). Moreover, despite valid criticisms that continue to be raised concerning the reliability and systemic biases of the site’s content, Wikipedia has become sufficiently useful in terms of the breadth and depth of its coverage that it receives an average of 15 billion page views every month, making it by far the world’s most popular online information resource (Alexa Internet Traffic Statistics, “Top Sites”; Wikimedia, “Statistics”).

As discussed more extensively elsewhere by Jones (2017; 2018), McDonough Dolmaya (2012; 2015; 2017), O’Hagan (2016) and Shuttleworth (2017; 2018), translation plays a key role in the collaborative construction of Wikipedia. Not only are whole entries or sections of entries commonly translated directly between the 301 different language versions

of the encyclopedia (McDonough Dolmaya 2015; Shuttleworth 2018), but multilingual contributors also draw frequently on an abundance of external source materials published elsewhere on the web in diverse languages other than that in which they are writing (Jones 2018). In this latter case especially, the conventional binary distinction between original author and translator is fundamentally disturbed as translation is inextricably integrated into the processes involved in producing an encyclopedia article. In other words, it is often through translation that the multiple texts and bits of texts on which contributors base their encyclopedic content are collected, collated, summarised and combined as they seek to create a representation of the current extent of human knowledge on a particular topic. For example, Jones' (2018, 279-280) detailed analysis of the collaborative construction of the English-language Wikipedia article about the French capital city of Paris reveals that, of the 319 referenced sources cited at the foot of the latest version of that webpage, well over half (55%) are in French. This does not necessarily mean that over half of this text is the product of a Wikipedia-based translation effort: it is certainly possible that some of these French-language sources might have been imported into the encyclopedia via another English-language publication without the Wikipedian concerned having read them in their original form. Nevertheless, further investigation does indicate that the language skills of certain contributors have been put to considerable use in their search for and synthesis of suitable 'raw materials', including past and current census

reports, local history books and employment statistics (Jones 2018, 282-287).

The analysis presented in this paper, however, is not concentrated on the way in which the multilingual editors working on a particular page have translated a specific text or fragment of text, but on the debates that take place within the encyclopedia's 'Talk pages' with regard to the question of how to render certain names, labels and other 'culture-specific concepts' (Baker 2011) into other languages.¹ Hautasaari and Ishida's (2011, 128) statistical analysis of 228 Wikipedia Talk pages has suggested that issues relating to the translation of proper nouns frequently generate extensive discussion within the multilingual platform, but qualitative insight into the precise nature and causes of these debates remains lacking in the translation

¹ Wikipedia's 'Talk pages' are paratextual spaces which can be accessed simply by clicking on a tab (labelled 'Talk') located near to the top left corner of each article page. They effectively function as a discussion forum in which Wikipedia contributors are able to debate issues relating to sections of the existing article, plan new content and negotiate consensus within the community (Pentzold 2009, 257). Comments are organised within a Talk page both chronologically and thematically (according to topic headings created by the community) and, having posted within the forum, contributors are strongly encouraged to sign and date their comment. These discussion pages thus provide unprecedented access to the 'rich context' lying behind each article's content, explicitly revealing the "cacophony of individual voices" that have been involved in its construction (Viegas and Wattenburg 2006).

studies literature. In response to this deficit, this case study examines the English-language Wikipedia article about Tokyo, Japan, chosen as a text during the construction of which the volunteer community appears to have faced particular difficulties largely revolving around the question of how to translate the name and administrative status of this locale into English.

4. ‘Tokyo Is Not a City’

In order to understand why the translation of ‘Tokyo’ has caused such problems for Wikipedians, we must first explain – as Wikipedia user Hoary does in May 2010 – that, “Japan is perhaps unusual [...] in demanding in many contexts (e.g. the writing of addresses on envelopes) that each meaningful element of a placename should be suffixed with its [administrative] status” (Hoary, 06:09, 8 May 2010, Talk Archive 5). Moreover, within this tightly defined system, there is technically no legal entity equivalent to ‘Tokyo city’ (‘Tokyo-shi’ - 東京市 in Japanese). As the Tokyo Metropolitan Government website (n.d.) notes, a municipality of this name did once exist, but only for a few decades before its city status (‘shi’ - 市) was abolished in 1943 by the war-time Prime Minister of Japan, Hideki Tojo. Tojo merged ‘Tokyo-shi’ with the larger prefecture (‘Tokyo-fu’ - 東京府) of which it had previously been a part, and created a new administrative region called ‘Tokyo-to’ (東京都). This contains a number of

separate cities, such as Hachioji-shi (八王子市) and Tachikawa-shi (立川市), several towns ('chō' or 'machi' - 町) and villages ('son' or 'mura' - 村), and the twenty-three, independently governed 'special wards' ('ku' - 区) that form the urban core of the region: e.g. Shinjuku (新宿区), Minato ku (港区) and Chuo ku (中央区). As we will see in the discussion that follows, the problem is that this abstract administrative entity ('Tokyo-to') does not correspond with those everyday conceptions of 'Tokyo' that dominate among members of the general (lay) public, both inside and outside of Japan. Consequently, different factions within this article-focused community have come into conflict over whether to base their entry on official descriptions of Tokyo as a 'to' (都), by translating into English this governmental bureaucratic definition of the space, or whether to represent popular understandings of Tokyo as a 'city' that correspond more closely with common knowledge.

According to the so-called 'Page History' archived automatically by the wiki software for this text, the Tokyo article was first created at 19:59 on 19 May 2001 by a Swedish contributor going by the pseudonym of Pinkunicorn.² That said, this early version of the article did not contain any

² As Saldanha and O'Brien (2013, 47-48) have noted, the ethical dilemmas involved in internet-mediated research are often highly complex and therefore my decision to quote directly from these Talk page discussions and to include the user names of the individuals

information further than the three words “Capital of Japan” until a New York-based user added a more substantial series of paragraphs in December of that year (Revision as of 03:26, 4 December 2001). In this form, and in almost all of the English text’s iterations during the first four years of its development, Tokyo is referred to – repeatedly and unambiguously – as a city: in Figure 1, for example, Tokyo is described as the “largest city of Japan” and mention is made of the fact that “[b]efore the Meiji Restoration, the city was known as ‘Edo’”.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

concerned has certainly not been taken lightly. Ultimately, however, I would argue that my approach is justified by the fact that these forums are fully open to the general public and that, like Wikipedia’s encyclopedia content itself, these discussions are explicitly intended to be read by any and all visitors to the site. Moreover, I have judged that the Wikipedians’ chosen pseudonyms do not compromise their offline identity and that avoiding citing their comments verbatim would only serve to limit the authenticity and validity of the analysis.

Starting in the spring of 2005, however, a number of contributors begin to contest the way in which “[t]he intro implies that Tokyo is a city” (Photojpn.org, 03:32, 16 April 2005, Talk Archive 1). Editors such as Photojpn.org, Fg2 and Rick Block all point out that “the government abolished the city of Tokyo more than sixty years ago” (Fg2, 10:36, 23 March 2005, Talk Archive 1) and therefore that “Tokyo is not a city under Japanese law” (62.254.168.102, 14:46, 28 November 2005, Talk Archive 1). “[I]sn’t it time”, they ask, “to stop calling Tokyo a city?” (Fg2, 21:06, 28 November 2005, Talk Archive 1). They acknowledge that this might sound “really weird” to most readers, but insist that “weird or not, it’s fact” (Fg2, 10:36, March 23, 2005, Talk Archive 1). Arguing that “[t]his is supposed to be an encyclopaedia”, they assert the need to “remain factual and technically correct” (Photojpn.org, 01:25, 16 April 2005, Talk Archive 1). As Rick Block will later note, this means ensuring the Tokyo article focuses on “the only existing geo-political entity called Tokyo, which since the city and prefecture merged is Tokyo-to” (Rick Block, 05:03, 7 May 2010, Talk Archive 5).

Consequently, and beginning at 05:11 on 15 April 2005, Photojpn.org makes an attempt to ‘clean up’ the article, translating the term ‘to’ (都) initially by ‘geographic and political area’ (Revision as of 05:11, 15 April 2005) and then later by ‘prefecture’ and finally ‘metropolis’, which he describes as being “similar to a prefecture” (Revision as of 01:36, 21 April

2005 – see Figure 2). This second set of solutions (and the use of the English word ‘metropolis’ in particular) follows ‘official’ institutional translation policies, promoted most notably by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government, as Fg2 and Endroit both confirm in later comments:

Tokyo Metropolis [is] the official name Tokyo adopted for itself in English (Fg2, 10:34, 16 August 2007, Talk Archive 4)

Tokyo Metropolis is the official name, as well as the literal meaning of 東京都 [Tokyo-to] (Endroit, 18:24, 19 August 2007, Talk Archive 4)

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

It would be all too easy to dismiss this intervention, as well as the ‘edit war’ that ensues, as no more than a meaningless instance of ‘wiki-bickering’, that

is, petty and pedantic nit-picking at issues of little real importance. A heterotopic approach to the analysis of this argument, on the other hand, allows us to see the broader issues at play. Indeed, framing Wikipedia as a heterotopia proves particularly productive here principally because it draws our attention to the ways in which Wikipedia's disjunctive spatiality affects how the site deals with questions of expertise and authority. More precisely, this conceptual lens helps us to highlight how Wikipedia functions both and simultaneously as a space in which to collect, contain and organise the received knowledge produced by elite institutions and as a meeting place in which ordinary people from all around the world can assemble, discuss, quarrel and contest that knowledge. It suggests that one of the most significant sources of division that underlie the translation-related debates occurring within the Tokyo article's Talk pages has to do with the platform's contradictory nature as a radically open and horizontally structured space of democratic 'equipotentiality' (Bruns 2008) in which deep hierarchies of knowledge nevertheless persist.

To explain what I mean by this, it is useful to step away from the Tokyo page for a moment and to refer to a comment made more generally about Wikipedia by one of the site's co-founders, Larry Sanger. Sanger was the PhD student hired by Jimmy Wales in January 2000 to work as 'editor-in-chief' for Wikipedia's ill-fated forerunner Nupedia and, according to Sanger's memoir, it was he who first suggested to Wales that wiki software

might be used to speed up the online encyclopedia construction process (Sanger 2005; see also Reagle 2010, 39). In March 2002, however, he quit both projects, later attributing his frustration to the fact that

[f]or months I denied that Wikipedia was a community, claiming that it was, instead, only an encyclopedia project, and that there should not be any serious governance problems if people would simply stick to the task of making an encyclopedia [...]. In fact, Wikipedia was from the beginning and is both a community and an encyclopedia project. (Sanger 2005)

This observation is important because it underlines a key difference between Wikipedia and most other knowledge resources, and one of the principal contradictions lying at its heart. On the one hand, there is the fact that Wikipedia is an encyclopedia and that encyclopedias have conventionally tended to privilege the contributions of experts and expert forms of knowledge (Hartelius 2010, 510). The Encyclopaedia Britannica, for instance, boasts on its website that its content has been contributed by “thousands of eminent experts, scholars, and leaders [...] [including] more

than a hundred Nobel laureates, four presidents of the United States, countless Pulitzer Prize winners and others of international renown” (Britannica, “Contributors”). Indeed, the list of “prominent people who have written in their field of expertise” for Britannica comprises such distinguished individuals as Albert Einstein, Sigmund Freud, Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Archbishop Desmond Tutu (Britannica, “Contributors”). These contributors are carefully selected, we are told, in order to maintain the highest degree of ‘accuracy’ and ‘reliability’ (Britannica, “Britannica Today”). In other words, it is the means by which Britannica’s publishers ensure the “quality which is the hallmark of [their] name”; it is the means by which they achieve what they see as the main objective for the encyclopedia production process (Britannica, “Britannica Today”).

This traditional approach necessarily produces a clear hierarchy that divides non-experts from experts, readers from writers (Hartelius 2010, 506). It separates the general public from those individuals who have a sufficiently deep understanding and comprehensive skillset to provide “accurate, reliable information [...] you can trust” (Britannica, “Trusted information”). In this way, it establishes a top-down model for the production and distribution of expertise and knowledge, according to which encyclopedias are conceptualised as spaces for public pedagogy – much like the public museums and libraries of Western modernity – built for the education of the masses by a small elite (Hartelius 2010, 513). This aim of ‘democratising’

scientific knowledge by collecting and re-distributing it among a more general readership can be traced back in history to the grand ideals of the European Enlightenment, and the founding principle of improving access to information in order to help people “make rational choices and lead a more enlightened life” is inarguably a valuable one (Yeo 2001, 12; Haider and Sundin 2010). As Johanna Hartelius (2010, 513) notes, however, it is also deliberately ‘monological’ and exclusionary: the power to assert information as fact, to decide what is and what is not worth knowing, lies primarily with the expert writers, reviewers and editors employed by the encyclopedia’s publisher, while the reader is more or less excluded from the process of knowledge production (see also Swarts 2009, 282).

Within Wikipedia, this top-down approach and the traditional values on which it is based run into direct conflict with the culture of Wikipedia as the meeting place and home of a vast virtual community. Specifically, this is a community that, as Reagle (2010, 77) notes, emerged primarily out of the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) movements of the mid-1990s. Not only were Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger both active contributors to the group discussion forums at the heart of these global collectives (in fact, it was via these chatroom discussions and interactions that Wales and Sanger became acquainted – Schiff 2006), but it was also through such networks (Slashdot and Kuro5hin, most notably) that Wikipedia was first launched and promoted (see e.g. Slashdot.org 2001). Therefore, many of the first

Wikipedians to get involved in the project already belonged to these internet groups and, for this reason, the encyclopedia platform as a community space has inherited many of the cultural values associated with the FOSS movement. As Reagle (2010, 77) explains, this includes most notably the use of GNU free documentation copyright licences and a strong emphasis on radical openness, on the importance of breaking down hierarchical divisions and structures to encourage greater popular participation.

The prominence of this anti-hierarchical culture is particularly noticeable in documents such as the ‘Statement of Principles’ that Wales produced in October 2001 to guide the community through its early development. Here, Wales (2001) argued that the project’s “success to date is entirely a function of our open community” and that Wikipedians must ensure “[n]ewcomers are always [...] welcomed. There must be no cabal, there must be no elites, there must be no hierarchy or structure which gets in the way of this openness to newcomers.” As Sanger has noted (2005), while this approach does not necessarily exclude experts, it does mean that everyone’s contribution must be considered equal, and that no special respect or privileges can be accorded to traditional sources of expertise. In this way, it subverts long-established knowledge hierarchies by placing the power to assert information as fact and decide which truth-claims are legitimate in the hands of a much wider segment of the general population, that is, of anyone who has the time, technical ability and inclination to contribute. Wikipedia’s

editing guidelines may conform to traditional encyclopedic principles by stipulating that all content should be supported with references to “authoritative, reliable sources” (Wikipedia, “Five Pillars”), but the decision as to what gets published within the site and how this information is framed ultimately belongs to its users (Wikipedia, “Introduction”).

The main consequence of this shift, Haider and Sundin (2010) rightly suggest, is that in the Wikipedia context, “nothing is fixed, everything is negotiable.” Thus, when Photojpn.org, Fg2, Rick Block and others alert their colleagues to the fact that “Tokyo is not a city” and therefore that ‘Tokyo-to’ should not be translated as such, it is perhaps unsurprising to find that many contributors contest the authority of the Japanese government to make this decision. Indeed, D. Meyer, Hoary, Mdw0, adamrice and TAKASUGI Shinji have all argued at various points during the ongoing article construction process that the Wikipedia text should cover what most people think of as Tokyo, not what the Japanese government defines it as. Native Japanese-speaker TAKASUGI Shinji, for instance, notes early on in the discussion that “what Japanese call Tōkyō is usually the 23 special wards [i.e. the urban core of the region], not Tokyo Prefecture [i.e. Tokyo-to], even though the former has no single administration” (TAKASUGI Shinji, 14:59, 23 March 2005, Talk Archive 1). Later, in July 2006, D. Meyer is even more explicit in suggesting Wikipedia should reject official definitions of Tokyo in favour of those

circulating in the everyday language of ordinary citizens: he posits that stating Tokyo is not a city “is a legal technicality. In common usage both inside and outside Japan Tokyo is thought of as a city, albeit an extremely large one with a unique governmental system” (D. Meyer, 23:00, 4 July 2006, Talk Archive 2). adamrice (15:57, 11 July 2006, Talk Archive 2) echoes the same idea later on that week, writing “Tokyo (IMO , equivalent to the 23区 [‘ku’ or ‘wards’]), [...] is a city in the sense that people identify it as their hometown, the city where they live, the big city where they go to shop, or whatever. Legal constructs and mental/societal ones don't always coincide perfectly.”

That said, it is in May 2010 that the most forceful arguments in favour of this view are put forward. Mdw0 for instance insists that “Tokyo IS a city in the simple, non-technical meaning of the word, and thats [sic] what this article needs to refer to” (Mdw0, 03:59, 6 May 2010, Talk Archive 5). Hoary (15:08, 9 May 2010, Talk Archive 5) also voices a similar opinion when s/he pitches his/her expertise and knowledge of Tokyo as a local resident of this space against ‘perverse’ institutional definitions of the Japanese government:

[o]f course it's a city. It exists. I'm in it right now. I
crossed to its centre this morning and I crossed back

this evening. No, I am not a solipsist, and so I believe an accumulation of sensory data that tell me that it's a city that in most ways resembles other cities I know, other than having a green hole in the middle [...] and being composed of boroughs that various government agencies perversely insist are themselves "cities". How is my conception of Tokyo as a city a misconception? How is it uncitlike or not a city? Merely by governmental fiat? Sorry, [Oda] Mari, but the English language is not something that's legislated by the Japanese (or other) government. [...] (Hoary, 15:08, 9 May 2010, Talk Archive 5)

As Mdw0 sums up, the feeling among many members of the community is that while “official definitions of local government boundaries should most certainly be mentioned in an article, [...] they absolutely should not dominate an article about a whole city” (Mdw0, 08:57, 9 May 2010, Talk Archive 5). They believe that Wikipedia should represent the knowledge and expertise of the majority, and that the community should translate ‘to’ as ‘city’ in accordance with popular conceptions of Tokyo, rather than focus solely on reproducing the official definitions put forward by government

elites. This view conforms with many of the community guidelines concerning naming conventions suggested by other Wikipedians for general application across the platform (e.g. Wikipedia, “Use Commonly Recognisable Names”), as well as the ‘Principle of Least Astonishment’ which is often deployed by contributors in similar situations (see Wikipedia, “Principle of Least Astonishment”).³ For Fg2, Photojpn.org and others, however, this proposed solution is still seen to undermine Wikipedia’s founding objectives as a project aiming to produce a fact-based encyclopedia, a space in which to collect “verifiably accurate” information extracted from “reliable, authoritative sources” (Wikipedia, “Five Pillars”). The site’s preference – imposed by its encyclopedic form – for the established knowledge produced by societally privileged institutions is thus seen to generate frictions with the otherwise radically egalitarian and open

³ The Wikipedia community’s ‘Principle of Least Astonishment’ suggests that contributors to the encyclopedia should generally aim to avoid shocking, surprising or confusing readers with illogical, overly technical and difficult to understand content. In the case of the Tokyo article, this principle would consequently support the view that ‘to’ can be translated as ‘city’ in this case given that this term is widely used and understood by the majority of Wikipedia’s English-speaking users when they think of the capital of Japan. As the title suggests, the “Use Commonly Recognisable Names” principle similarly advises that names and labels used in Wikipedia articles should be recognisable to “someone familiar with, although not necessarily expert in, the subject area” (Wikipedia, “Use Commonly Recognisable Names”).

culture of its community. This kind of conflict would seem to be inherent to the tensions present in this environment and debates continue to rage on this subject, even now at the time of writing in spring 2018 (see e.g. Asakura Akira's Talk page comment, posted at 16:55 on 24 January 2018). Indeed, due to the heterotopic qualities of this environment, it is unlikely they may ever be fully resolved.

5. Summary and Conclusions

The analysis of this case-study has tried to demonstrate the importance of not neglecting the fact that, although multi-agent volunteer projects are certainly driven forward to large extent by forces of affinity, the processes by which the different participants collaborate is seldom smooth. Indeed, the situation in Wikipedia would indicate that both consensus and dissensus play equally important roles in the dynamics and success of volunteer co-production, and consequently that future research into collaborative translation practices should aim to take both forces into account (cf. Reagle 2010, 46). This paper has also attempted to show how the concept of heterotopia can provide an insightful means of exploring and explaining this facet of collaboration within the user-generated encyclopedia. Through its focus on simultaneity, juxtaposition and discord, this lens has allowed me to concentrate on the points of friction, disjuncture and dissonance that cause dispute within the community. Specifically, I have examined the clashes

that arise between expert and lay understandings of Tokyo. Heterotopia has helped to highlight the manner in which these divergent accounts of the urban environment are brought together in the space of Wikipedia, and therefore how the specific hybrid geography of this online space shapes the production and dissemination of knowledge across languages and cultures within this context.

Having said this, it is important to mention one significant drawback of the heterotopic approach, namely, the fact that it tends to present the characteristics of the space studied as fixed and unchanging, unresponsive to social dynamics. It does not provide a means of accounting for the ways in which the Wikipedia space has changed over time. This has led me to emphasise features of the encyclopedia and its community that seem relatively stable, that appear inherent to the content production and translation process. This perspective is clearly contrary to modern conceptions of social space as something that is being continually produced, of space as a process (see e.g. Massey 2005), and it is likely that there are many, more transitory features of the Wikipedia space that have significant bearing on particular articles at particular moments in their history. As a result, future research in translation studies could usefully explore the fluidity of Wikipedia's environmental characteristics in more detail (cf. Faraj et al. 2011). We might look for instance at the extent to which the English-language Wikipedia community has become more geographically

diverse as internet penetration rates have risen over the past seventeen years worldwide, and how this is changing the nature of the online space and the production of content across linguistic borders within it.

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