

*Original Paper*

Learning in and between Communities of Practice: Situated  
Translation Learning in a Chinese non-professional Subtitling  
Community

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Received: June 22, 2025

Accepted: August 29, 2025

Online Published: September 11, 2025

doi:10.22158/eltls.v7n5p29

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/eltls.v7n5p29>

**Abstract**

*This study sought to describe situated translator learning in a Chinese non-professional subtitling (NPS) community as an online community of practice (CoP) and identify community-level factors that potentially promote or inhibit translator learning enabled by social participation. Group documents collection and a semi-structured interview were used to elicit research data. Data analysis results suggested that translators of the NPS community learnt translation through participating in social practices both within their own CoP and in boundary spaces between CoPs, where they engage in translation collaboration with members of other communities. What is more, a range of participation-promotive/inhibitive factors operating at the community level were identified. The findings have significant implications for cultivating CoPs, either in classrooms or on the web, for situated translator training, including the needs to create inter-community boundary spaces for learning, foster a pro-collaboration community atmosphere, maintain the vibrance of the community, and ensure equal access to participation for all members.*

**Keywords**

*translator training, situated learning, community of practice (cop), non-professional subtitling (nps), translation pedagogy*

**1. Introduction**

Driven by surging cross-cultural communication needs, continuing translation professionalization and an ever-more fluid global translation landscape (Baker, 2014; Gambier, 2016; Drugan & Tipton, 2017), translator training has attracted increasing scholarly attention in Translation Studies (Li, 2024). In the 21st century, due to the subject's sensitivity to development in translation practices and receptiveness to

discoveries by translation research, it has acquired many new agendas. These include cultivating students' preparedness to work with new technologies (Venkatesan, 2023), fostering students' capability of reflexive translation-ethical judgment (Lambert, 2023), and lending insights from cognitive translation studies to refine pedagogy (Núñez & Bolaños-Medina, 2018). The trend of particular interest to this study is that translation competence has been re-conceptualized as socially constructed (Schlager & Risku, 2023) and, therefore, situated learning, or learning in authentic or simulated translation contexts (González-Davies & Enríquez-Raído, 2016), has been hailed as the preferred paradigm of translator training. One line of research under situated translator training has centered on translation learning in non-professional subtitling (NPS) communities (O'Hagan, 2008; Orrego-Carmona, 2014; Bączkowska, 2015; Bucaria, 2015; Bolaños-García-Escribano, 2017; Beseghi, 2013, 2021; Tzou, 2024), which evaluated or tested (simulated) NPS communities' potential as translator training spaces. Another line of research (D'Hayer, 2012; Berthaud & Mason, 2018; Cadwell et al., 2022) in the same domain has concentrated on characterizing or facilitating translator learning in communities of practices (CoPs), which enable immersive learning by allowing social participation in shared practices (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; 2000; 2009; 2010; Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). These two lines of research are interconnected, as NPS communities have been recognized as self-organizing CoPs (Pérez-González, 2012; Liu & de Seta, 2014; Kung, 2016; Zhang & Zheng, 2023). By far, however, scholarly studies (e.g., Liu & de Seta, 2014; Zhang & Zheng, 2023) to empirically describe situated translation learning processes in authentic NPS communities as online CoPs have remained scarce. Moreover, little research has set out to evaluate those communities' strengths and weaknesses regarding enabling social participation beneficial to translator learning, which potentially has important implications for cultivating CoPs for translator training.

This case study, cutting across situated translator training, NPS, and CoP, aims to contribute to addressing the afore-mentioned research caveats by empirically describing situated translation learning in a Chinese NPS community named SBB (anonymized) and identify those community-level factors that potentially promote or inhibit SBB translators' learning-enabling social participation. The research questions it tried to answer are as follows:

First, how do translators in SBB learn translation by participating in community-based practices?

Second, what community-level factors promote or inhibit the translators' learning-enabling participation in the relevant practices?

To address these questions above, we used group documents collection and a semi-structured interview as methods of data elicitation and subsequently analyzed the collected data for insights. The remainder of this article is structured as follows: Section 2 introduces the CoP theory as this study's theoretical framework. Section 3 details this study's methodology, including research design and implementation. Section 4 presents the empirical findings. Finally, Section 5 develops critical discussions on the main findings and brings this article to closure.

## 2. CoP as A Social Learning Theory

CoP refers to “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015, p. 2). It has been developed as a descriptive and analytical social learning theory rather than a term. Upholding that learning is enabled by active participation in social communities built around shared practices (Wenger, 1998), the CoP theory was first formulated by Lave and Wenger (1991) when they studied apprenticeship at workplaces, where they found ample evidence contradicting the traditional view that learning rested with individuals. According to Wenger (1998), CoPs, which are pervasive in existence and diverse in form, have three defining features: a shared domain of interest, an active community where members interact regularly, and a common practice which members engage in and develop a shared repertoire of resources for. Since its emergence, CoP as a theory has been applied in various disciplines for analyzing learning and knowing as inherently social processes (Wenger & Wenger-Trayner, 2015; Farnsworth et al., 2016).

CoP has not remained a static theory. According to McDonald and Cater-Steel’s (2017) apt observation, the theory has experienced two figure-ground shifts. In the initial phase (Lave & Wenger 1991), the theory emphasized that learning is an inbound trajectory that involves individuals joining a community from the peripheral and gradually moving towards the center as they learn about the shared practice. In the second phase, it was recognized that CoP is “an emergent structure resulting from a learning partnership over time” (McDonald and Cater-Steel, 2017, p. viii). Therefore, scholarly discussions on and attempts of cultivating vibrant, learning-enabling CoPs in diverse contexts (e.g., Wenger et al., 2002) grew considerably at this stage. Finally, in the third and current phase, learning is no longer viewed as a mere inbound trajectory into CoPs. Boundaries between communities, where members of particular CoPs develop levels of knowledgeability of foreign practices, are recognized as productive sites for situated learning (Wenger, 2010). At this stage, learning is considered to cut across the boundaries of various CoPs, which co-constitute, in an analogy to geography, a “landscape of practice” (Wenger, 1998; 118). McDonald and Cater-Steel (2017) argued that in the twenty-first century, learners’ social participation within CoPs and at CoP boundaries, which respectively builds up their competence in one particular practice and knowledgeability of additional practices, are equally important to their “knowing in practice” (Wenger, 1998, p. 134).

Thanks to CoP’s theoretical strengths, it has been used to describe community-based translator learning and guide the cultivation of learning-oriented translation CoPs in Translation Studies (e.g., Cadwell et al., 2022). Nonetheless, few existing studies focusing on the intersection of situated translator training and CoPs have cast adequate attention to translator learning in boundary areas between CoPs, which misses a critical facet of CoP-enabled translation learning.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1 Case Study

This research adopted case study, which is suitable for studying context-oriented practices (Saldanha & O'Brien, 2014; Yin, 2018) as its methodology. A Mainland China-based NPS community called SBB was approached and studied regarding CoP-enabled translation learning. SBB, which specialized in subtitling Korean-language audiovisual content, including TV dramas, movies, variety shows, music videos (MV) and music theater, into Mandarin Chinese, was founded in August 2015. The subtitling group had about one hundred and fifty members, the majority of which were fans of Korean video programs or songs. Rather than pursue speed in subtitling, the group focused on achieving high translation quality, hence it was slow in producing subtitled content. Within the community, members were situated in different subgroups according to their roles. These mainly included (1) subgroup of subtitle timers, (2) subgroup of Korean video translators, who translate Korean TV dramas, films and variety shows, (3) subgroup of Korean lyrics translators, who mainly translate Korean MVs and music theater, and (4) subgroup of English translators, who translate English content contained in Korean audiovisual programs. Several group managers known as “统筹 [coordinators]” operate outside the subgroups to coordinate between them. Translation in SBB took place in project teams summoned to subtitle specific content, such as a Korean TV series. Such teams were mainly composed of timers and translators recruited from across the community as well as a project coordinator (not necessarily a group manager) overseeing the workflow. Raw content for translation was usually selected based on the preferences of community members. Due to the high quality of SBB's subtitle translation, the group was hailed by the Chinese audience as one of the best NPS communities dedicated to translating Korean-language content in Mainland China (MM, see Table 1 for information).

#### 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Within the case study framework (Yin, 2018), we combined group document collection and a semi-structured interview as triangulating means of data elicitation. While group documents could reveal the reified translation knowledge translators of SBB learnt, the remotely conducted semi-structured interview was designed to appreciate how the translators learnt translation through social participation in community-based practices, which concerns the tacit and dynamic dimensions of translation knowledge transmission.

Data collection occurred from September 22, 2024 to October 27, 2024. After getting managerial consent, we first collected group documents from the group managers. The collected document was a web-based Word file integrating SBB's group guidelines, including those for all members and those specific to subgroups. The file, named “Getting to Know SBB in A Few Minutes,” was generated and then archived in Tencent Docs (<https://docs.qq.com>). In the first place, it contained directives or information for all members, including those on filling out a form to indicate their available time for subtitling, the method of joining a subtitling project team, the deadline for translation submission, the group's subtitling workflow, who translation/timing revisers are and what they do, internship for new

entrants, the pathway of rank promotion in the community, the method of community exit, and so forth. Beyond those for-all guidelines, there were more detailed guidelines particularly compiled for Korean video translators, Korean lyrics translators and subtitle timers, which were accessed via separate web links.

After the group document was collected, we distributed an interview participant recruitment message to SBB through its managers, inviting subtitle translators to participate in the semi-structured interview. Eventually, eleven translators, including Korean video translators (N=5), Korean lyrics translators (N=4), and English translators (N=2), contacted us via the email address advertised in the interview participant recruitment message and became our interviewees. Table 1 below tabulates information about the interviewees (all anonymized as two-letter codes), as revealed by our interview data analysis.

**Table 1. Information about Interviewees**

Reference number	Interviewee	Gender	Relevant information
1	QN	Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joined SBB in 2019;</li> <li>- Had no subtitling experience prior to joining SBB;</li> <li>- First entered SBB to do subtitle timing and then shifted to translating Korean videos as her Korean language proficiency improved.</li> </ul>
2	MM	Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joined SBB in mid-2017;</li> <li>- Had no subtitling experience prior to joining SBB;</li> <li>- Has shifted her role from a translator of Korean videos to a Korean translation proofreader.</li> </ul>
3	AL	Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joined SBB in 2016 to improve her Korean language proficiency;</li> <li>- Had no subtitling experience prior to joining SBB;</li> <li>- Has shifted her role from a Korean video translator to a Korean translation proofreader and a subtitling project coordinator.</li> </ul>
4	SJ	Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joined SBB in late 2017;</li> <li>- Had no subtitling experience prior to joining SBB;</li> <li>- Has shifted her role from a Korean video translator to a Korean translation proofreader.</li> </ul>
5	ZZ	Female	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Joined SBB in early 2020;</li> <li>- Had practiced subtitling in some subtitling group prior to joining SBB;</li> </ul>

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			- Has shifted her role from a Korean video translator to a Korean translation proofreader.
6	JZ	Female	- Joined SBB in early 2019; - Had no subtitling experience prior to joining SBB; - Has shifted her role from a translator of Korean lyrics to a translation proofreader.
7	LU	Female	- Joined SBB in 2017; - Had translated YouTube videos in some subtitling group prior to joining SBB; - Presently responsible for managing the subgroup of lyrics translators, while actively engaging herself in Korean lyrics translation and its proofreading.
8	SS	Female	- Joined SBB in mid-2022; - Had translated Korean content in a China-based fan club of some Korean idol prior to joining SBB; - Has actively engaged herself in translating Korean lyrics in SBB.
9	HE	Female	- Joined SBB in late 2020; - Had no subtitling experience prior to joining SBB; - Has mainly engaged herself in translating Korean lyrics in SBB.
10	VV	Female	- Joined SBB in 2019; - Had no subtitling experience prior to joining SBB; - Has been a freelance translator for years; - Has engaged herself in translating English content contained in Korean audiovisual programs in SBB.
11	FD	Female	- Joined SBB in early 2020; - Had no subtitling experience prior to joining SBB. - Has engaged herself in translating English content contained in Korean audiovisual programs in SBB.

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Interviewees electronically signed an informed consent form on interview participation before proceeding to the online interview. All interviews, conducted in one-to-one format and mediated in Mandarin Chinese, took place in encrypted meeting rooms on Tencent Meeting (<https://meeting.tencent.com>), a virtual conference software developed and managed by China's tech giant Tencent Inc. The interview protocol contained questions that invited interviewees to (1) briefly introduce their time of group entry, subtitling experience prior to group entry, and (changing) role and

responsibility in the group, (2) talk about their participation in community-based activities they considered helpful to their translation learning, and (3) reflect on those community-level factors they considered facilitative/inhibiting to their learning-enabling social participation. Each interview lasted 30-40 minutes. The audio-only (cameras were shut throughout the process) interviews were recorded. When all fourteen interviews, we downloaded the audio files and transcribed them in Mandarin Chinese. To ensure data validity through member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000), the Chinese transcripts were sent back to individual interviewees to check for any inconsistencies between the texts and their narratives and relevant experiences. Eventually, two interviewees made a few changes to their received transcripts. We then translated the interviewee-checked transcripts verbatim into English.

Document analysis, which involves skimming, reading, and interpreting selected documents (Bowen 2009), and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79), “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data,” were used to analyze group documents and translated interview data, respectively. Three overarching themes, each encompassing subsidiary themes, emerged during our thematic analysis: Interviewee Information, Interviewees’ Translation Learning in and between Communities, and Factors Affecting Interviewees’ Learning-Enabling Participation.

#### 4. Findings

##### 4.1 Situated Translation Learning of SBB Translators

###### 4.1.1 Learning Within Community Through Subgroup Guidelines

When translators first join SBB as new entrants wandering at the community’s periphery, they are immediately required to carefully read through (sub)group guidelines. While those general guidelines (Subsection 3.2) apply to all Korean video translators, Korean lyrics translators, and English translators, subgroup-specific guidelines also exist for the former two translator types.

The specific guidelines for Korean video translators, titled “Tips for Korean Video Translators,” start with an eye-catching warning (Figure 1):

“You are NOT allowed to plagiarize other subtitling groups’ translation. As a translator, you are here to improve yourself instead of being a copycat. Once we’ve found your plagiarism, we will remind you to behave appropriately the first time and expel you from the group the second time.” [my translation]



禁止抄袭其他字幕组的翻译，你是来当翻译锻炼自己的，不是来当抄写员  
一旦发现抄袭 第一次会进行提醒 第二次只能请你离开

Figure 1. Screenshot of the Upfront warning in “Tips for Korean Video Translators”

The text then proceeds to introduce the basics of translating Korean TV dramas, films and variety shows, detailing matters including the main characteristics of different video genres, the resultant translation difficulties and the corresponding solutions, preference for free over literal subtitle

translation, pursuit of logic, fluency, and naturalness of the target text, unification of program and character names before translation, use of a shared editable online document to enable collaborative translation, and so forth. Notably, it reminds translators twice that “when you are uncertain about a particular translation, type \*\*\* in the spot and leave it to the proofreader or raise it in the chatgroup for discussion.” [my translation] Following such a lengthy introduction, the text then gives instructions on how translators can view proofreaders’ color-marked corrections on their translation using Aegisub, an open-source subtitle editing software, and how they can proofread each other’s translation using the same software when necessary. The final two parts of the text give guidance on producing bilingual (i.e., both Korean and Chinese subtitles) Korean dramas and using trustable online databases to help tackle terminologies during video translation. In the section on making bilingual dramas, translators are warned that they need to render both Korean and Chinese subtitles correct, as “many Korean language learners will watch the program and as translators, we should not misguide them.” [my translation]

Concerning the particular guidelines for Korean lyrics translators, it contains instructions on translating Korean MVs, music theater and original soundtracks (OST) embedded in Korean dramas and variety shows, experience in lyrics translation shared by a veteran translator, calculation of lyrics translators’ workload using a Tencent Docs file, and competence-based rank promotion in lyrics translation subgroup. Without going into too many details, the following features of the guidelines are noteworthy:

- Translators are reminded to pay attention to possible errors in original Korean lyrics downloaded from online sources, such as Naver (<https://www.naver.com>), and correct them during translation;
- Translators are suggested to watch the source programs to appreciate the plot, the conveyed emotions, and so forth to facilitate their lyrics translation;
- Translators are encouraged to initiate subgroup discussions when they feel uncertain about translation or suspicious of proofreaders’ corrections;
- Translators are allowed to express creativity during lyrics translation based on their understanding of the original;
- As their translation competence develops, translators can first apply to be proofreading-free translators and then proofreaders. Eventually, they can even apply to be Korean video translators, the Korean proficiency requirement for which is higher than that for lyrics translation.

#### 4.1.2 Learning Within Community through Translation Participation

Besides learning through (sub)group guidelines, SBB’s translators also learn translation by participating in collaborative translation activities within their community.

In the case of Korean video translators, once they join SBB, they are placed on a three-month internship in video translation. The internship is to familiarize them with essential matters related to video translation, such as the established workflow and subtitle formats. New entrants who do not perform to the satisfaction of those overseeing the internship will not be able to become full members and get opportunities to do translation. During the internship, newly recruited translators collaboratively translate Korean programs whose dialogues pose few difficulties for translation. Each



translator is assigned an experienced proofreader, who carefully proofreads their translation and gives them detailed feedback. Through reading and reflecting on proofreaders' corrections, new translators learn about video translation. Besides, translators are sometimes required to proofread each other's translations as an additional form of training. However, it is a pity that there are no such internships for Korean lyrics translators or English translators.

When SBB's translators, irrespective of their subgroups, are able to participate in collaborative subtitling as full members, their translation learning mainly happens in two ways: learning from translation proofreaders and learning from (sub)group-wide collective problem-solving. On the one hand, translation proofreaders continue to play a significant role in facilitating translation learning in all translator subgroups. In these subgroups, translators keep the routine of typing \*\*\* when they feel unsure about translation and leave it to proofreaders for solution, from which they will learn. Both translators and proofreaders in SBB consider translation proofreading to offer them chances to acquire new perspectives in translation. SS, a lyrics translator, said the following:

“One merit of translation proofreading is that it complements your perspectives on translation. You translate things following your own perspectives. However, when you read the revised translations, you'll get new perspectives from your proofreaders. You'll be like ‘Wow, it can be translated like this!’” [my translation]

When video or lyrics translators join and translate in a project team dedicated to subtitling particular content, which is usually the case in SBB, proofreaders in the team share their revised translations, where revisions are highlighted, in the chatgroup set up for the project. Also, they sometimes openly communicate with translators on translation matters in the chatgroup, especially when they intend to understand translators' rationales behind particular translations to inform their decision-making in proofreading. Furthermore, some proofreaders tend to share additional learning resources in the chatgroup. For example, SJ indicated that when proofreading translation of Korean variety shows, she would share the translation of less-known expressions, such as current internet buzzwords in Korean, in the chatgroup. These publicized translation revisions, proofreader-translator communication and shared resources allow all translators in the chatgroup to learn. What is more, since individual video or lyrics translators do not have fixed proofreaders to collaborate with, as every subtitling project has a random mix of interested translators and proofreaders, they have the privilege to learn from different proofreaders. In the case of English translators, however, since they get translation tasks directly from group managers, who operate between the translators and their proofreaders, the only way they can learn from proofreaders is to read revised translations returned to them through group managers.

On the other hand, translators learn translation through collective problem-solving activities as they translate. In all three translator subgroups, members frequently discuss complex or elusive translation problems, although they may also engage in discussions in the wider community on issues including tackling the audience's occasional criticisms of SBB's translation and copyright-related legal warnings SBB receives. Nonetheless, the frequency of collective discussions varies across subgroups, with that

in video translator and lyric translator subgroups being much higher than in English translator subgroup, as tasks to English translators are much easier to do (VV). Also, MM indicated that in the subgroup of video translators, members would first discuss a translation problem within the subgroup and take it to the wider group only when they fail to resolve it satisfactorily. Concerning SBB translators' inclination to resort to collective problem-solving within subgroups, QN suggested that since translators in the same subgroup know each other well, they tend to trust each other in terms of knowledge. During subgroup discussions, translators contribute their respective knowledge conducive to translational problem-solving. For instance, QN said the following:

I'm certainly not the best in the Korean language. However, as a long-time consumer of Korean dramas and variety shows, I know which sort of subtitles viewers like. Many video translators in SBB can translate with high accuracy. However, their translations are sometimes too formal. I give them suggestions to make translation more colloquial and more comprehensible to the audience. [my translation]

The excerpt above indicates that collective discussions on translation pool up SBB translators' varying knowledge relevant to translation, making them good opportunities of translator learning.

In addition to collective discussions within translator subgroups, video or lyrics translators also frequently initiate or engage in discussions on translation in dedicated subtitling project teams. This is because, when translating in a project team, the translators "translate the same content and tend to face the same translation problems" (ZZ).

Apart from learning from proofreaders and collective discussions, translators of all three translator subgroups also learn by observing peer translators' work. For instance, LU described such learning-by-observation among lyrics translators in the following words:

Lyrics translation requires conciseness and elegance. To improve your competence, you need to appreciate the work of experienced translators. Although their translation varies from each other, each is beautiful in its own way. By observing their translation, you'll become a better lyrics translator over time. [my translation]

Observation of peers' translations is usually done through watching the final subtitles. Besides, in the case of music theater translation, where all translation and revisions take place in an editable online document, lyrics translators participating in the same project can easily observe the initial and the revised translation of their peers and learn.

#### 4.1.3 Learning at Community Boundaries through Translation Participation

Our interview data analysis indicated that translators in SBB also gain translation experience by participating in collaborative translation in the boundary areas between SBB and other communities, including Zhanzi (i.e., China-based fan clubs of Korean idols), communities of domain experts, and occasionally, the Bilibili platform ([www.bilibili.com](http://www.bilibili.com)), China's largest Danmu (i.e., bullet comments directly overlaid onto the screen) video site.

First, SBB has frequently engaged in the collaborative translation of Korean dramas and variety shows

with Zhanzi, which are established to promote Korean idols in China. When the two parties collaborate on particular projects, some shared guidelines are negotiated upfront by project coordinators from both sides to ensure consistency in translation. Since translators from Zhanzi, as frenzy fans of Korean idols, often possess rich knowledge about Korean idols and their works and activities, such inter-community collaborative translation offers new learning opportunities for SBB's translators. Moreover, SJ indicated that some Zhanzi translate Korean videos better than SBB. This means that in collaborative subtitling, SBB's translators can have chances to learn by observing translation by translators from Zhanzi.

Second, SBB has invited the so-called "translation advisors," who have abundant knowledge in professional domains, from among viewers to help translate Korean dramas that contain excessive specialized terminologies. One such case was narrated by SJ:

When we were translating the Korean drama Hospital Playlist (premiered in 2020), which contained many medical terminologies, besides doing extensive web searches, we had a translation advisor in the chatgroup to help. He was a professional in the medical field, and he would look at our translation and tell us, like, "this term should be translated in this way in Chinese..." [my translation]

When using translation advisors, translators of SBB can be viewed as operating at the boundary space between SBB and communities of domain experts. In such boundary areas, the translators learn from those helpful professionals.

Third, SBB has occasionally collaborated with the Bilibili platform to subtitle copyrighted Korean dramas purchased by and to be streamed on the vibrant media platform. According to LU, during such collaboration, personnel dispatched by Bilibili would look through their translation and point out how their translation at some points contradicted the platform's established policies and rules on content distribution and how they could revise the concerned bits. One example mentioned by LU is that they were required to change "内裤 [underpants]" in their translation into "贴身衣物 [underclothes]" due to the platform's concern that the former might arouse the imagination of the erotic. Thanks to such collaboration, particularly feedback given by the platform side, video translators in SBB not only enriched their translation experience but also sensitized themselves to real-world constraints on translation.

#### *4.2 Community-level Factors Impacting Translator Participation*

Our analysis of SBB's group documents and the interview data identified various community-level factors that could positively or negatively impact its translators' social participation in learning-enabling activities.

##### *4.2.1 Participation-promotive Factors*

###### *Factor 1: legitimization of participation*

In SBB's guidelines for all members and separate guidelines for Korean video translators and lyrics translators, the following sentences [my translation] reappear:

Welcome to SBB Group

Subtitling here is unremunerated. So, do not join us with the intention to make money.

Hope you can improve your competence, make new friends, and get happiness here.

Thus, SBB legitimizes participation in its NPS activity as a remuneration-free, purely altruistic act and a means to improve oneself, extend one's social network, and enhance one's sense of well-being. Such legitimization gives translators clear reasons to engage in translation projects.

#### *Factor 2: Requirement and incentives for active participation*

SBB's general guidelines also set a hard requirement on member participation in community practices: if a member's contribution to the group's subtitling projects is deemed too low, they run the risk of expulsion. Besides, there are tangible incentives for active member participation. In the first place, video and lyrics translators' contribution is documented and quantified and will be rewarded with small gifts at the year end. Moreover, for these two types of translators, the clear pathway of rank promotion (typically, from translators to translation proofreaders) in the subgroup also counts as an incentive for participation, which was also mentioned by interviewees including LU and MM.

#### *Factor 3: Good community atmosphere*

As was suggested by interviewees like AL, SBB has been a welcoming, inclusive and dynamic subtitling community. Members solve subtitling-related problems together and share other information, such as current news, overseas studies and exam preparations, in the community. According to FD, there are strong senses of shared identity and belonging among community members. To FD, such a good atmosphere motivates translator participation in community practices: "To me, it's a pleasure to watch them chatting with each other. When I am in a good mood, I feel more willing to engage in translation." [my translation]

#### *Factor 4: Interest as the threshold of translation participation*

In SBB, as members of all translator subgroups have met the language proficiency requirements set by the group, passed the group entry tests, and, in the case of Korean video translators, fared through the internship, the threshold for them to participate in community-based subtitling projects is one and only: their interest in the subtitled content. Such a pragmatic threshold, according to ZZ, has benefited all translators, particularly newly recruited ones.

#### *Factor 5: Rewarding translation experiences*

Additionally, MM expressed that translators in SBB have been willing to engage in subtitle translation because they get rewarding experiences which constantly promote their growth in translation experience and competence.

### 4.2.2 Participation-inhibitive Factors

#### *Factor 1: Community lacking binding power over translators*

One participation-constraining factor frequently mentioned by interviewees is that SBB has no binding power over its translators due to its interest-driven, non-profit nature, which means that it cannot force translators to participate in collaborative translation activities. For instance, LU said the following:

Unlike commercial companies which have clear hierarchies, our group has no hierarchy and every

member has the freedom to choose between participation and non-participation and decide on the degree of participation... While this is a merit, it also means that the community cannot require members to participate in subtitling regularly. Some members may hide themselves in the chatgroup and never translate. [my translation]

*Factor 2: Uneven participation opportunities across translator subgroups*

VV highlighted that English translators in SBB do not have enough chances to participate in collaborative subtitling and learn from the social process. In the first place, unlike Korean video and lyrics translations, which constitute the locus of the group's subtitling effort, English translation is comparatively marginal. Moreover, English translators routinely get translation tasks directly from group managers and then complete them within their subgroup, which seldom involves translator collaboration. Therefore, opportunities of translation participation are unevenly distributed across translator subgroups, which inhibits English translators' learning-enabling participation.

*Factor 3: Diminishing group dynamism*

The participation-inhibitive factor most frequently mentioned by interviewees was the diminishing group dynamism of SBB. There are two indicators of such a decline in community vibrance. First, the frequency of collaborative subtitling has dropped markedly. According to MM, it may be because most core members, who first joined SBB as university students having relatively rich spare time, have become full-time employees and their time investable to subtitling has consequently decreased. Second, new applicants to the group have fallen notably. MM gauged the reasons to include the waning popularity of Korean cultural products in China, the emergence of AI tools that conveniently generate fit-for-purpose subtitles and Korean producers' practice of distributing with-Chinese-subtitle programs on major Chinese media platforms. Pondering the status quo, JZ expressed that it is even uncertain whether NPS communities will still exist in Mainland China in the future. "If all subtitling groups disappear," said her, "for some, they'll lose a significant out-of-class space to practice translation." [my translation]

## **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

Through analyzing group documents and data elicited using a semi-structured interview, this case study revealed the various forms of participation-enabled translation learning, explicit and tacit, in Chinese NPS community SBB as a comparatively mature translation-oriented CoP. Also, it has identified community-level factors that potentially facilitate or inhibit SBB translators' learning-enabling social participation.

In the first place, this study found that translators in SBB learn translation both within their community and in boundary areas between communities. This means the translators' translation learning happens through two complementary forms of participation: one within the CoP as an inbound trajectory (Lave & Wenger 1991) and the other at CoP boundaries (Wenger 2010). While such a discovery further testifies to the potential of NPS communities to function as an informal environment for situated

translator training (Orrego-Carmona, 2014), the revelation of translators' learning at community boundaries adds a fresh perspective to scholarly research looking into the intersection of translator training, NPS, and CoP. Echoing the latest development of the CoP theory (McDonald & Cater-Steel 2017), it reminds us that boundaries between CoPs are equally productive grounds for situated translator training. This has direct implications for translation pedagogy designed against the CoP framework. Translation educators need to recognize the educative potential of boundary spaces between CoPs and capitalize on them by making connections, such as collaborative translation and exchange events, between the translation classroom and communities in the wider world, such as translation companies. Also, following the latest CoP theory (Wenger, 2010; Farnsworth et al., 2016), they need to design boundary objects (e.g., shared guidelines and processes) and designate brokers (e.g., teachers themselves acting as a bridge between communities) to ensure the productivity of those boundaries. Consequently, translation trainees will benefit from boundary learning to supplement their in-class translation learning.

Moreover, the current research identified multiple community-level factors impacting translators' social participation conducive to their translation learning. On the one hand, the five participation-promotive factors further highlight the many merits of NPS communities as grounds for translator training. Collectively, they suggest that active participation in translation learning-oriented CoPs needs to be stimulated on many fronts, including legitimizing member participation, designing appropriate incentives, and building good community cultures. That is, boosting participation in such CoPs takes a full "strategy." Among those pro-participation factors, we would especially like to highlight *interest as the threshold of translation participation*. We argue that such a practice in SBB ensures translators participating in subtitling projects favor the content they translate and are hence likely to devote effort to translation. Moreover, it makes translation participation accessible to all translators in the corresponding subgroups. It is thus particularly friendly to new translators who, in other contexts, might be excluded from translation participation due to their still-fledging skills.

On the other hand, three factors have been identified as participation-inhibitive. The first factor, *community lacking binding power over translators*, is related to the non-profit nature of NPS communities and is, therefore, a problem that does not seem to be easily resolvable. It renders translation participation in NPS communities, to a large extent, a decision to be made by individual translators, which underscores the significance of translator mobilization (e.g., through incentives). The second factor, *uneven participation opportunities across translator subgroups*, indicates that due to reasons including the varying centrality of different translation tasks in the community, translators in NPS communities could have unequal opportunities of translation participation both within CoP and at CoP boundaries. This raises the issue of inequality in CoPs, connotating that CoP members situated in different positions could have different learning opportunities and resources, which has been a significant criticism of the CoP theory (Roberts, 2006). Finally, the third factor, *diminishing group dynamism*, suggests in some Chinese NPS communities, such as SBB, due to forces including

tightening copyright enforcement in China and the development of AI subtitling technologies, group dynamism is falling. While declining collaborative subtitling activities means shrinking learning opportunities for translators, dropping new applicants means community membership becomes increasingly static, which also hampers translator learning. Beyond the current study, the waning vibrance of Chinese NPS communities in an ever-changing mediascape in China were also noted by other researchers (e.g., Li, 2015). Foreseeing that such a trend would continue, we share our interviewee JZ's concern that translation learners in China could lose a significant channel of developing translation competence and knowledge in authentic, informal translation environments.

For translation trainers, most, if not all, of those participation-promotive/inhibitive factors are implicative to their CoP-guided translation teaching. For a CoP aimed at translator training to form and grow either in the classroom or online, teachers as facilitators need to legitimize students' participation, ensure a benign atmosphere, set an inclusive threshold and design rules and incentives for participation, and ensure students can get rewarding learning experiences from participation. Also, they need to identify possible inequalities in the CoP and work to remove them to guarantee equal learning opportunities. What is more, they need to pay constant attention to changes in group dynamism so as not to let the CoP become dysfunctional over time.

Furthermore, this study suggested that translators in SBB are exposed to various translation-ethical elements as they participate in community practices. These include avoiding translation plagiarism, not unquestionably trusting online sources, ensuring translation accuracy, considering viewers' needs (e.g., of language learning), and abiding by media platforms' (e.g., Bilibili) policies and rules when translating for them. The relevant experiences help sensitize the translators to their various responsibilities in NPS, which have overlaps with professional translators' responsibilities (Lambert 2023), such as ensuring faithfulness in textual transfer and being emphatic persons. Zhou (2024) argued that Chinese NPS communities could become potential grounds for situated translator ethics training. To some degree, this research's findings support the recommendation. Arguably, moral exposure in NPS communities could help enhance translation students' professional ethics learning in the classroom, while offering valuable points of comparison to improve students' awareness of the context-particular nature of translation ethics (Inghilleri, 2012). Nonetheless, translation-ethical learning in NPS communities deserves more systematic scrutiny, while the current research did not make the subject its main focus.

Last but not least, one interviewee (i.e., QN) indicated that familiarity-based trust in each other's knowledge has made translators in the same subgroup willing to engage in collective problem-solving on translation. Such a finding highlights the importance of epistemic trust, which describes one's openness to the possibility of gaining reliable new knowledge from others (Fonagy & Allison, 2014), among CoP members to community-based knowledge transfer. According to Roberts (2000), trust is a precondition of tacit knowledge transmission. The implication for translator training programs using CoPs is that trainers need to foster epistemic trust among learners to facilitate collaborative learning.

Possible measures include promoting inter-learner familiarity and encouraging knowledge sharing among learners (Grasswick, 2010).

To conclude this article, this study has made contributions to (situated) translator training literature by investigating participation-enabled translation learning in a Chinese NPS community, whose findings have significant implications for translation training using CoP as pedagogy. A primary limitation of this study is that as a single-case study, the generalizability of its findings may be limited. Given this, future research can investigate situated translation learning in more NPS communities. Furthermore, inspired by non-professional translators' boundary learning, translation educators can try to design a translation curriculum that integrates learning in and between CoPs to better leverage CoP's strengths in contemporary translator training.

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