Call for Papers: Special Issue of *Babel*
Translation as Participation: Rethinking Human Agency in the Platform Era

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About *Babel*



Babel: International Journal of Translation is a peer-reviewed international journal published by John Benjamins on behalf of the International Federation of Translators (FIT). Established in 1954, the journal provides a broad interdisciplinary forum for scholarship on translation and interpreting, encompassing theory, practice, pedagogy, technology, history, sociology, and terminology. *Babel* is indexed in major international databases, including the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI), and Scopus.

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About the Special Issue

In recent years, the global expansion of digital platforms has profoundly reshaped how translation is produced, circulated and valued. Much public discourse frames this change in terms of automation, suggesting that, with the development of neural machine translation and increasingly AI-assisted workflows, technological advancements are rendering human translators redundant. However, this narrative overlooks the crucial cultural transformation in the new media landscape and misses what is most important about our moment, namely the emergent forms of human agency that arise within digital ecosystems. To approach this transformation, the concept of "convergence culture" provides a critical perspective, as translation increasingly takes place within participatory cultures shaped by fandom, social media, and networked publics (Jenkins 1992, 2006; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013). Thus, this special issue proposes to reconfigure human agency in translation by conceptualizing translation as participation, perceived as a culturally and affectively invested mode of engagement. The issue aims to initiate discussions concerning how we might understand "translation as participation" in the current environment where human and technological mediation are increasingly interdependent on digital platforms.

In the platform era, human involvement in translation has not vanished; rather, it has been reconfigured by the communicative logics of new media, where translation functions within networks of collaboration, circulation and meaning-making that connect professionals, volunteers, fans and users across linguistic and cultural boundaries. A shift toward human-centered AI and intelligence amplification has thus

been proposed, emphasizing enhancement of human cognitive agency rather than its replacement (O'Brien 2024; Jiménez-Crespo 2025a; Jiménez-Crespo 2025b). The technological turn situates translation within networked infrastructures, such as algorithms, platforms and automated workflows, while the participatory turn highlights collaboration, user engagement and affective investment of fandom as constitutive of contemporary practice (Wu 2021). These two dimensions of technology and participation are mutually beneficial and stimulating. The cases such as crowdsourced translation, fan subbing and collaborative localization show that translation has become a shared process of meaning construction (Evans 2020; Desjardins 2020; Jiménez-Crespo 2020). Recent work on post-editing further suggests that translation work remains dynamic and complex under technological mediation, resisting straightforward reduction to speed or efficiency metrics (Rico 2022). Against this complexity, recent scholarship has also turned attention to how quantification and platform metrics shape translators' working conditions, while relying on their adaptive and relational competence (Moorkens 2024; Fırat et al. 2024).

Nevertheless, as Terranova's concept of "free labour" (2000) and Fuchs's *Digital Labor* (2014) remind us, participation in network culture is simultaneously voluntary and exploitative, pleasurable and productive. Translators, subtitlers and localizers, be they professional or fan, embody this paradox, creating value that circulates across cultural industries while often remaining under-recognized and uncompensated/undercompensated. In this sense, digital participation frequently oscillates between creativity and exploitation, voluntarism and value production (Kücklich 2005; Scholz 2013). Online collaborative translation embodies this tension, as it is driven by passion yet risks being subject to potential exploitation when gamification design blurs the boundary between work and play (Zwischenberger 2024), which also requires ethical reflection and intervention.

Situating itself at the intersection of translation studies, media studies and digital labor research, this issue proposes to rethink "translation as participation", foregrounding how the human translator's role is being reconfigured rather than diminished, and how this reconfiguration raises renewed attention to questions of justice, recognition and ethical responsibility. Contributions may draw on a wide range of participatory and platformed contexts, including but not limited to social media, web-based literary platforms, streaming services, gaming and localization environments, fan communities, activist networks and other forms of grassroots cultural mediation. The issue seeks to address the following conceptual and theoretical questions:

- How does translation operate as a participatory practice in platformed cultural environments, and how are forms of agency in translation reshaped by fandom, affective investment and community norms under such conditions?
- How do platforms structure, incentivize, gamify and govern participatory translation practices (for instance, through gamified designs such as metrics, rankings, rewards and visibility mechanisms)?

- How are identities, forms of belonging and mediated publics constituted through participatory translation practices?
- How are core concepts such as authorship, responsibility and agency rethought under conditions of collective and distributed translation?
- How does participatory translation intersect with forms of digital labour, playbour and unpaid/underpaid cultural production?
- How do ethical tensions emerge from participatory translation practices shaped by platform logics?

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Submission and Review

All full manuscripts will be subject to rigorous double-blind peer review. Acceptance of an abstract does not guarantee acceptance of the full manuscript. Prospective contributors are invited to submit an abstract of approximately 300 words, together with a short bio-note, to the guest editor at translationasparticipation@gmail.com.

Tentative Timeline

- Abstract submission deadline: December 31, 2026
- Notification of abstract acceptance: February 28, 2027
- Full manuscript submission deadline: November 30, 2027
- Peer review and revisions: December 2027–May 2028
- Expected publication: Mid to late 2028, subject to the journal’s production schedule