The Ethics of News Translation

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Indice

1. Introduction

Translation is figuratively and metaphorically regarded as a bridge between cultures, and translators as bridge builders who transfer meaning with neutrality and impartiality. This metaphor, created for literary translation, applies to many other fields: specialized translation cannot overlook the expectations of the target culture (Kastberg, 2007; Stolze, 2009; Melnichuka & Osipovab, 2016; Scarpa, 2020); audiovisual translation provides excellent examples of the evolution of the multicultural approach (Ranzato & Zanotti, 2018; Chaume, 2020). Furthermore, a new term, localisation, has been developed to further explain the process in which translation proper (Jakobson, 1959) is only one of many steps of adapting a range of products (softwares, games) to local markets.

While translators continue to be regarded as bridge-builders, their neutrality, especially in case of conflict, is questioned (Newmark, 1993; Salam Carr, 2007). For example, political public statements are written in the parties' native language and only enter the public debate through the efforts of a vast network of channels (news agencies, journalists, newspapers, and social networks) as well as the silent intervention of various actors, or translating agents, whose impartiality is not to be idealised.

Since the Cultural Turn of the late 1990s, Translation Studies has used the terms 'agent' and 'agency' to denote the translator's active function in social contexts. From Pym's thesis on the translator's role in moulding the path of their translations to Simeoni's concept of the translator's habitus, the analysis of agency[1] has mostly focused on

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[1] While developed in translation ethics, the distinction between textual, paratextual and extratextual visibility (Koskinen, 2000, p. 99) can also be employed to define

literary settings where the translator's identity was easily retraceable by whoever wanted to learn more. Although the absence of public recognition for professional translators is not new (and Venuti [2005] deserved credit for starting the debate), their authorship could be always identified. Moreover, the basic skills of the profession were not directly examined: one could almost argue that they were taken for granted.

Nowadays, two key challenges urge us to reconsider our approach to translation analysis. The first challenge is discovering the translating agents' identity, which is not always disclosed; the second challenge, which is strongly tied to the first, is determining their translation skills. Users and consumers have become 'prosumers' as a result of technological advancements, blurring the line between «active translation agents and passive or unknowable translation recipients» (Cronin, 2010, p. 4). The cultural and sociological phenomenon of fansubbing is perhaps the best example of prosumers. The audience takes ownership of the audiovisual product, disregarding the official distribution chain's methods (and limits). Fansubbers, without claiming to be professional subtitlers, use their linguistic and technical ability to share their own subtitles for the benefit of – essentially – the entire globe.

Researching translation in the journalistic environment necessitates dealing with each of the aforementioned difficulties. Given the challenges of mediatised translation, which is more than just transcoding a message correctly but also interpreting the words in terms of cultural and ideological expectations (Zanettin, 2016, p. 305), knowing who the bridge-builders are and whether they are properly trained makes a huge difference in terms of the quality of the information provided. Moreover, in the journalistic industry, translators are rarely recognised as agents able to collaborate with other social agents in newswriting (van Rooyen, 2013, p. 495).

Furthermore, the number of persons involved in newswriting adds an additional methodological issue. Many 'actors' are usually involved in the selection, production and reception of translations (Tahir-Gürçağlar, 2009, p. 163), and they can only be identified by looking beyond the

agency. Textual agency refers to the translators' presence in the text, revealed by deliberate manipulation or stylistic preferences, paratextual agency consists of the translators' contribution in terms of notes and prefaces, and extratextual agency ranges from the selection of source texts books to the translators sharing their methods and strategies (Paloposki, 2009, p. 191).

text and into the translators' actual working environment. Needless to say, this complicates translation analysis. Because there is no clear way of tracing the translation act back to its actual creators, there is no way of reconstructing the professional context in which the translation was made, the translator's (or translators') professional background, the possible ideological interference and other factors that may have influenced the translation.

The importance of paying close attention to processes of mediation, quality control and effective communication continues to be highlighted in a world where communication platforms abound. In institutional contexts and politically conflictual situations, where «mediatized translation» (Zanettin, 2016, p. 305) may help to reduce confrontation as well as amplify dissent, the manner in which the message is reported is critical. Credibility – and maintaining it – is a journalistic goal that must always be backed by appropriate practice-based behaviours such as accuracy, balance, and seeking out the opposite viewpoint (Cotter, 2010, p. 51). Journalism is entrusted with the delicate responsibility of informing, as people can make informed decisions only by accessing reliable information. Therefore, while misinformation and disinformation are professionally and socially dishonourable, they are far more dangerous when coming from translation errors, as not all readers are able to find information on international affairs on their own.

These new challenges of communication are compelling the translation industry to boost its profile and respond to the proliferation of agents (professional and non-professional, human and non-human) who are challenging its ethics (Drugan & Tipton, 2017, p. 138). When it comes to journalistic translation, journalists could be among these chaos-makers. From an ethical viewpoint, the indeterminacy surrounding the identity of the person responsible for the translations featured in a news article complicates the problem of determining who is to be held accountable for the quality of any translated material, with implications related to these translating agents' varying loyalties and motives in communicating foreign events.

Translation scholars have only recently begun to explore translation in the journalistic context (the studies by Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009 were pioneering in this regard, followed by Valdeón, 2010; 2012; 2015a; 2015b; 2020a; 2020b). As the ethical issues connected to the position and relevance of translation in the news have not been discussed theoretically and practically, the aim of this monograph is to start filling

this gap by defining what kind of ethical issues concern translation in the news. This research will thus draw on both Translation Studies and Journalism Studies, where ethics and objectivity are becoming pressing issues (Steensen & Ahva, 2015, p. 12).

Chapter 2 will define the rules of newswriting and contextualize the role of translation in the newsroom; Chapter 3 and 4 will discuss ethics from the perspective of Journalism Studies and Translation Studies respectively; Chapter 5 will discuss the ethical problems emerging from recent translations featuring in Italian newspapers.

The analytical section takes a product-oriented approach (Zanettin, 2021, p. 96), adopting a comparative perspective and prioritizing translated fragments formally identifiable such as direct quotations, so as to facilitate the exploration of the translating strategies and the ethical issues involved. The contrastive analysis will focus on the English-Italian language pair and will privilege samples of written journalism, occasionally considering the online editions of the newspapers being mentioned.

The goal is to explore the ethical consequences of textual transformations on the target text. Therefore, the methodology will draw on Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) as the linguistic tool to identify the ideological shifts, and on the journalistic notions of frame (Entman, 1993) and news value (Caple & Bednarek, 2016) to understand the impact of said transformations in terms of journalistic writing. Finally, the results will be discussed in relation to the theoretical framework on journalism and translation ethics from Chapter 3 and 4.

2. Translation in the Newsroom

This chapter will describe the framework within which translation in the journalistic environment may be understood, analysing the subject from the perspectives of both disciplines involved: Journalism Studies and Translation Studies.

While journalism has been studied since 1690, when the first doctoral dissertation on news reporting was published (Conboy, 2013, p. 7), Journalism Studies emerged in the early 2000s as a modern subject separate from Communication Studies. The importance of diverse but intertwined disciplines ensures the theoretical multidisciplinarity of journalism: Political science, Sociology, History, Cultural Analysis, and Language are among the dominant perspectives in Journalism Studies. Linguistic investigations of journalistic texts employ semiotic, genre, discourse or framing theory as well as rhetoric, narrativity and literary theory (Steensen & Ahva, 2015, p. 6).

Nevertheless, the relationship between foreign languages and journalists appears to be quite complex: readers are unaware that translation is a part of journalistic writing, and journalists do not consider themselves to be translators (Holland, 2013, p. 337). Filmer (2014, p. 136) reports that the trenchant response she was given by John Lloyd – co-founder of the *Reuters Institute for the study of Journalism* – about the role of translation in journalism was: «translation is not the job of the journalist».

Professional linguistic mediators are frequently needed, but they are seen as a necessary evil. During World War II, for instance, translators at the BBC were seen as potential traitors of the original meaning of a text (Baumann *et al.*, 2011, p. 136). While both academics and journalists have underlined the institutional role of the journalist in collecting and writing news about people from different cultures,

nations, or linguistic groups (e.g., Anders, 1999; Tsai, 2005), mediators are met with suspicion, and the role of languages rarely acknowledged in Communication studies[1].

Nevertheless, the principle of translation was one of the communication models (along with transportation and transmission) proposed by American scholar James Carey (1965). Translation, in Carey's words, is «an interpretive process where intermediary persons collect and connect messages in ways so that they fit into a particular communicative setting» (Bro, 2013, p. 809). Among the various professions performing translation are journalists, who, together with other professional communicators such as technical writers and speechwriters, facilitate the communication between producers of messages and audiences. A distinguishing feature of any professional communicator is that

> the message they produce has no necessary relation to their own thoughts and perception. Professional communicators operate under the constraints and demands imposed on one side by the ultimate audience and, on the other side, by the ultimate source (Carey, 1965, p. 28).

Therefore, Carey acknowledges that a professional communicator's distinct qualities include resistance to ideological pressures as well as the influence of addresser(s) and addressee(s): «The clearest example of a professional communicator is a language translator who stands between two different linguistic groups and converts one language into its general equivalents in another» (Carey, 1965, p. 27). Thus, Carey only sees the linguistic facet of the translation prism. This viewpoint differs significantly from the one promoted by Translation Studies, yet it explains why the interlinguistic mediators are met with suspicion: they are seen as robbing journalists of control over the communication process. Carey's communication model highlights the idea that transportation and transmission have diminished the distances between people in terms of time and space; however, it is translation that bridges the social distance, allowing people who were «previously unaware of

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[1] Attention, albeit in a limited scope and number of studies, has recently been given to 'news fixers': media employees whose specific cultural knowledge helps foreign reporters in interlinguistic and intercultural communication, especially in case of conflict (Bossone, 2014; Palmer, 2019). Fixers act as «interfaces between cultures, translating on both literal and metaphorical levels» and facilitators of the «global-local exchanges» (Palmer, 2018, p. 134).

each other or unable to establish contacts themselves» (Bro, 2013, p. 817) to connect.

One way to understand the critical obliviousness to the presence of translation in journalism research is to examine the origins of scholarly articles on the subject. Given the large number of journalism institutions in the United States (Cushion, 2008, p. 283), the first academic journal, *Journalism Quarterly*, was founded by the American Association for Education in Journalism in 1924. The dominance of American authors in journals such as *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism* and *Journalism Studies* is, in many ways, predictable (Cushion, 2008, p. 286):

> Close to eight in 10 articles examined in both journals focus on journalism in North America or across Europe. But there is a notable difference between journals on North American and European journalism […] the North American/European dominance in both journals could more accurately be described as US/UK bias (in both journals over half of the articles examined either US or UK journalism) (Cushion, 2008, p. 286).

Anglo-American perspectives significantly impacted the modern understanding of news in early journalism research (Williams, 2006, p. 44) until the advent of the internet and globalization sparked the international comparative turn in Journalism Studies (Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzch, 2020, electronic version). The widespread role of English as a world language in newswires may have contributed to the neglect of linguistic mediation. Moreover, professional journalism education and scholarly study prefer to concentrate on «the normative dimension, eschewing analysis of what journalists do and why» (Williams, 2006, p. 46), overlooking the importance of theoretical models based on empirical evidence (Hallin and Mancini, 2004, p. 216).

When mapping the various processes involved in news production, journalism researchers appear to view 'translation' as either «the literal interlinguistic rendition of a foreign text» (Valdeón, 2018, p. 258) or one of the many techniques of news writing. In the rare cases where a definition is found[2], only a few words are employed. Overall, the majority of studies:

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[2] «1. Conversion of writing or speech from one language to another; 2. In computer science, conversion of one type of programming language into another» (Danesi, 2000, pp. 233-234).

1. makes no mention of translation (Watson & Hill, 2015; Steinberg, 2007; Danesi, 2009);

2. briefly names translation (while discussing the cultural relationship between Saussure's signifier and signified, Fiske, 2010, p. 42; or while introducing intercultural communication, Marsen, 2006, p. 7). However, the interlingual and intercultural aspect of translation in the news is disregarded even in a study conducted by a scholar with a linguistic background (Cotter, 2010);

3. mentions translation as a rhetoric/writing exercise to counteract ineffective prose by converting it into «simple, readily understandable English» (Beck *et al*., 2004, p. 17/electronic version).

Even in practice-oriented books, which are supposed to tackle all the aspects of newswriting, anecdotes and writing samples used to illustrate writing principles are typically drawn from and limited to national or local news, providing no instructions on how to perform translation. What professional journalists may not be aware of is the actual impact of the translated discourse, and how small discourse units that might be overlooked might have a fairly large impact on public understanding (Cotter, 2010, p. 173).

Reporting, writing, editing, and disseminating a news article are all part of the news production process, which is guided by components of practice such as standards, routines, and conventions. Since translation is merely one of the steps, it loses its independence. Therefore, no complete understanding of translation into journalistic writing can be achieved without considering the characteristics of news discourse and the principles of the newswriting process.

2.1 The News Discourse

The term 'news' refers to fresh information that is not known (Sissons, 2006, p. 24). In today's society, the task of journalism is to select the events that are happening around the world, discarding the irrelevant ones (Barbano, 2012, p. 20). Thus, «news is not out there waiting to be reproduced» (Van Hout & Jacobs, 2008, p. 64). On the contrary, news is the result of negotiation among sources, reporters, and editors; news production becomes a discursive process and journalists become interpretive agents.

A newspaper is defined by its social function (Barbano, 2012, p. 179). Until the twentieth century and the emergence of online digital communication, this social function consisted of providing readers with access to the most important facts. The time of the news and the time of the newspapers, which could be printed anywhere from 12 to 24 hours after the event, overlapped. Today, in the age of information overload, news travels in real time; time and space have become critical parameters of mass communication (Fairclough, 1995). Press agencies and online newspapers are able to provide a first draft of a news event and then update it to make it readily available to online readers. Therefore, by the time the newspaper is published, most facts are already known. The role of the newspaper has shifted: as a privileged witness, it should assist readers in deepening their knowledge and unravelling the complexities of the facts.

There are two main components to news media discourse: the text, which includes values and ideologies that impact and reflect the larger world; and the process, which has to do with the practitioner's norms and perspectives.

The shape and content of news discourse are affected by:

1. Contexts of use, which can be local or professional;

2. Linguistic or discursive structure, that is, the norms according to which news is assembled and the narrative form is established;

3. Interaction among participants, i.e. practitioners, readers, and the wider community.

Further profession-specific factors are:

a) The constraints of the medium on story structure. Broadcasting news will require attention to visual and oral modalities, while print news relies more on reading and writing, and online journalism on interactivity;

b) Journalists' consideration of audience and the community of coverage, which will lead them to write in such a way as to attract attention, therefore affecting interaction, contexts and story structure;

c) Journalists' attitudes, which can be more or less prescriptive and affects writing structure;

d) Professional norms, which vary according to the country and affect interaction, contexts, structure (Cotter, 2010, p. 25).

A comprehensive overview of news discourse must take into account the way language combines with other modes of communication such as graphics, photographs, maps, or illustrations. These multimodal features

have always existed, but they have become pervasive in the twenty-first century, altering the way news is delivered and consumed. As a consequence, research must consider the interrelationship of multiple modes of communication and the change in the patterns of presenting information across media. The final message result from the interrelation of the semantic and the semiotic dimension. Of all the various actors involved in the multimodal emergence, the target audience is the most visible. Thanks to the shift from print to digital and from offline to online, the audience is both the 'target' and the active contributor to the news dissemination process, weaving the information together from multiple viewpoints (Facchinetti, 2021, p. 198).

Aspects influencing the structure of news discourse – and thus the selection of the news to be translated – are news value and framing, which will be discussed in the following sections.

2.1.1 News Value

News selection is

essentially composed of two processes: one determines the availability of news and relates journalists to sources; the other determines the suitability of news, which ties journalists to audiences (Van Hout & Jacobs, 2008, p. 63).

The definition of «news value», i.e. the threshold that must be met for an event to be classified as news (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, p. 39), is an important aspect of the news production process because it establishes the criteria by which one 'fact' is judged more newsworthy than others.

These criteria are both practice-based and ideologically determined. News values are generally perceived as existing externally to the news story text, for instance, as values held by journalists. The guidelines driving the decision-making process include:

1. Proximity, which indicates whether the story occurred locally or whether it is relevant to local readers, both geographically or culturally;

2. Prominence, which includes the person under scrutiny as well as the significance for the readers. It is assumed that the actions of elite individuals or celebrities are more consequential than the actions of

unknown individuals. At the same time, focusing on individuals encourage the audience to identify with them. Prominence is also linked to Eliteness, namely, the high status of individuals, organisations or nations involved in an event or issue (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 437);

3. Impact, i.e. the repercussions and significance at the local level (Cotter, 2010, p. 69) or in terms of its effects/consequences (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 437);

4. Conflict, which leverages the potential drama and borders on negativity, as «bad news is more alarming, it is more out of the ordinary and it can be given more prominence» (Sissons, 2006, p. 29);

5. Timeliness, which concerns the relevance in time but also the competitivity in being the first to cover a certain event. Timeliness involves recent events or events that are temporally relevant to the readers and therefore more likely to be considered;

6. Usefulness, and the unusual (Cotter, 2010, p. 67) or Unexpected (Bednarek & Caple, 2017, p. 100) and Rare (Sissons, 2006, p. 28), which stimulates readers' curiosity;

7. Consonance, which is deeply cultural in that it relates to the degree to which the event aligns with the perspective readers' stereotypes (Bednarek & Caple 2012, p. 42);

8. Meaning represents the ease with which the event can be understood: «The quicker its meaning can be arrived at, the more likely it is to be reported» (Sissons, 2006, p. 27). The range of meaning has to be limited so as to fit within the time and space limits of news. Consequently, a further criterion is Clarity, as the clearer the meaning of the event is, the more likely it is to become news.

9. Composition, which involves a balanced presence of stories belonging to the same field.

A further aspect that contributes to defining news value is that «the news is what other media write about» (Jacobs, 2018, p. 15), or, in other words, an event is worth reporting if it has been reported on before (Jacobs, 2018, p. 20).

News values are internalised (that is, mental or cognitive), as they are based on both subjective and collective perceptions (Caple & Bednarek, 2016, p. 437). However, news values also need to be considered as a reflection of organizational, sociological, and cultural standards linked with economic concerns, rather than a mere reflection of what type of information citizens desire or need. Stories that are costly to pursue are

less likely to make the news; news subsidies, such as well-prepared press releases and photo opportunities, are more likely to be taken up by hard-pressed journalists (Harcup & O'Neill 2017, p. 1473).

A second set of commercial news values can therefore be defined:

10. Audio-visuals: stories containing compelling images, video and/or audio that can be accompanied by infographics.

11. Shareability: stories that are regarded to be likely to stimulate sharing and comments on social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter and others.

12. News organisation's agenda: stories that set or suit the news organisation's ideological or commercial agenda (Harcup & O'Neill 2017, p. 1482).

Furthermore, the concept of craft and the community factor are critical to comprehend news priorities, communicative outputs, and motivations (Cotter, 2010, p. 47). Therefore, the definition of news value varies from one country and culture to another. For instance, all media outlets in Italy follow the same agenda, with newspapers, newscasts and websites all displaying the same hierarchical organisation of events. This uniformity stems from the notion of «exhaustive coverage» (Barbano, 2012, p. 142, translation mine). Newspapers must secure coverage of the day's major events, or else a competitor will fill the void. The importance of selection is obliterated by the erroneous belief that all events can be successfully covered. Furthermore, this fear demonstrates the assumption that the journalist's value of the news corresponds to the value assigned by the readers. Thus, «exhaustive coverage» is autoreferential (Barbano 2012, p. 143, translation mine).

The homologation of Italian media also leads to an overestimation of the political dimension which has no counterpart in foreign/international newspapers. This hypertrophic political coverage is not due to the objective relevance of the events reported, but rather to the will to 'fill' the pages when no other agenda emerges. According to Ezio Mauro, former editor of the daily newspaper *La Repubblica*, politics has long been regarded as the pillar upon which to build the coverage of the day. Removing the average ten pages of a newspaper dedicated to politics means that other pillars must be found to fill the void (Barbano, 2012, p. 147). As a consequence, anything that does not revolve around politics is perceived as less important, and fewer resources are devoted to covering it. Entire sections which could showcase the creativity of the newsroom, such as culture or local/national events, are marked by a

passive acceptance of the agenda from the very sectors involved, without engaging in serious research on the subject (Barbano, 2012, p. 152).

News values influence the journalist's perspective on and interpretation of a story. The reporter is one of the main actors – along with the editor, who decides the story position and its length – in the news-making process. The reporter is continually involved, from conceptualization (what to cover) to story construction (what to emphasize, how to tell the story). To be a quality product, information must be accurate and fair, but it must also be attractively packaged to be appealing (Sissons, 2006, p. 2). Furthermore, no one can be entirely objective and «bias is inevitable» (Sissons, 2006, p. 12). The notion of bias automatically presupposes the possibility of neutrality (Davies, 2013, p. 7), but translators know that language is never neutral. One could go as far as to say that ideological points of view, systems of values, and beliefs are implicit in news texts and

> embedded in ways of using language which are naturalized and commonsensical for reporters, audiences and various categories of third parties […] taken for granted as common ground between reporter and/or third parties and audience, without recourse to rhetorical devices (Fairclough, 1995, pp. 44-45).

Newsworthiness is construed linguistically and mediated through language and image. Most editing changes aim at maximizing news value, and, as «there is no one-to-one relationship between language and news value», the same linguistic device can be used to construe different news values (Bednarek & Caple, 2017, p. 104):

1. Evaluative language, both positive or negative, can convey negativity or prominence;
2. Intensifiers maximize virtually any aspect of the reported event, highlighting newsworthiness in terms of impact;
3. Comparison emphasizes timeliness;
4. Language can emphasize news actors' emotional responses;
5. Collocates and word combination signal stereotypes or scripts, thus establishing Consonance;
6. First-person plural pronouns establish Proximity both culturally and geographically;
7. References to time and place establish Timeliness and Proximity (Bednarek & Caple, 2012, pp. 49-54);