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The Domestication of International News in Media Translation

Naima EL MAGHNOUGI

Abstract

This paper was first presented in a study day about “Media Control: What Are We Heading for?” which the English PhD students of “Space and Culture” research team organized in April 20th, 2011 in Oujda. Within the same year, I had the opportunity to present it to the master students of Fahd Institute of Translation in Tangier on 16th May. The paper covers the issue of translation in media news production, with particular emphasis on international news. So far, news translation has been unexplored; and Media Studies has been largely monolingual and ignorant of the translator's intervention in news production (Bassnett 2006:1). Accordingly, my paper argues that by submitting international news narratives to translation, they inevitably go through a process of domestication and reframing. As an invisible agent, the translator applies these strategies to conform to the linguistic, cultural and ideological environment of the target readership and viewers.

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Keywords: News Domestication; News processing; News Reframing; the Translator's invisibility; Gatekeeping; Trans-editing.

Introduction

The development in new technologies has significantly changed the media by increasing the rate of information and news flows worldwide. With cable and satellite television networks spreading rapidly across the globe, news TV channels are increasingly becoming major sources of information for viewers all over the world. Not less important, the printed press and internet news bulletins are competitively delivering news in real time to their readership. These channels and online journals rely on international news agencies in providing international news. It follows that this news, primarily expressed or delivered in different languages, necessarily needs to be translated or interpreted before they reach a large number of readers and viewers. Translation has thus become a very common practice in the processing of international news by the media.

No doubt, the cultural, economic, social, and psychological impact media have on modern societies has become an established fact nowadays. The globalisation of media products has even further increased this impact on a global scale. However, up to now the role of translation within global news circulation has received little attention, alongside with the agency

journalists/translators have in adapting the news material to their target audiences' expectation. Ali Darwish emphasizes the considerable importance of this research as he observes that "there is hardly any significant literature on the role of translation in the news despite the central role translation plays in the process of news reporting" (2009:58). Similarly, Susan Bassnett highlights the centrality of translation in global news making and circulation:

Translation Studies has traditionally ignored a field in which the process of interlingual transfer is performed by journalists and not translators. Media Studies has remained largely monolingual in its approach and blind to the crucial intervention of translation in News production. Yet, since the establishment of the modern journalistic field, translation has been pivotal in the circulation of the news which describes a high interconnected world. (From the call for papers of "Translation in Global News" conference: 2006)

Interestingly, during the first international conference held at the University of Warwick in 2004, one of a series of seminars funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council to investigate "the politics and economics of translation in global media", Susan Bassnett realized that generally media translations are done by journalists and correspondents instead of well-trained translators or interpreters. Yet, there are no specific news

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translation training programs for these professionals who work across various languages and cultures while they report news. Equally important, Bassnett affirmed that the translation of news is shaped by the cultural and ideological contexts within which it occurs and is delivered. According to her, news translation obeys more to the editorial policies of the Newspaper or the channel that diffuses it (Bassnett 2004: 2).

Departing from these premises, my paper considers the impact of translation on news making. It argues that by submitting news to translation it inevitably undergoes a reframing process and entails a reconstruction of a reality that is already subjected to professional and contextual influences. In addition to the distinct linguistic, cultural and ideological frameworks that affect the reframing of international news, enormous constraints of time, space, and editorial policies are challenging the news reporters/translators work. My argument in examining the process of news translation and their reconstruction both in the print and watched media is underpinned by Venuti's particular use of "translation domestication", the translator's invisibility, fluency and transparency in translation. Moreover, this paper explores some technical media terms such as Gate-keeping, News Processing/Framing, Trans-editing, which intervene at the level

of control of information flow and its reproduction through translation.

I. Language, Culture and Translation in Media News Production

The vital role of language is probably nowhere as salient and influential as in news media. Because media language is addressed to a large audience, journalists and reporters usually rely on special language effects, images and metaphors to communicate their messages effectively; and also to trigger particular responses and generate certain feelings on the part of their targeted audience. However, language, in the absence of translation, can become a real barrier to the flow of news and its dissemination to media organizations particularly in the case of international news. Yves Gambier, who is an expert in media translation, states that hyperbole and understatements are major tools of manipulation in news making as they influence the readers' and viewers' perception of reality. In the following example, Gambier illustrates the effect of hyperbolic statements in the American rhetoric on the war of Iraq and Bush's campaign against the mass destruction weapons:

The danger to our country is grave; the danger to our country is growing. The Iraqi regime possesses biological and chemical weapons. The Iraqi regime is building the facilities necessary to make more biological and chemical weapons.

And according to the British government, the Iraqi regime could launch a biological and chemical attack in as little as 45 minutes after the orders were given (26th Sept:2002) (Qtd in Gambier 2006:20).

This polemic discourse about the Iraqi use of mass destruction weapons, in the absence of proofs and substantial evidence, had of course only one purpose which is to justify Bush's military intervention in Iraq in 2003 *visa-à-vis* the American citizens and the world public opinion. Gambier draws here on the impartiality of journalists and News reporters as they use language subjectively so as to shape the news and the reality it reflects. Equally important, Gambier highlights another important aspect concerning news making which he calls media frames. According to him, news discourses are usually framed by the use of certain keywords, concepts and visual images in narrating or reporting the event. These frames provide a context in Which the target audience understanding of certain issues is manipulated, and their attention is drawn to some aspects of reality while others are obscured or silenced (2006:11). Gambier is well aware that journalists and international news reporters necessarily subscribe to the cultural, political and ideological frames within which they operate; their professional performance is inevitably bound to their allegiances to the institution or the government they work for. In fact, this reality becomes doubly

problematized when the news is translated; as it is then subject to another construction/contextualization and framing of the translator.

For a long time, we have been convinced that media news is a window on the real world and that it reports reality as it is. However, to assume that media can report news truthfully and objectively is in fact not only naive but also completely wrong. Sauvi Hautanen (2006: 108) argues that “News writers and editors construct a subjective picture of reality by selecting and organizing information in a way that makes sense to them and their audiences”. Likewise, Schudson (2003) clarifies that “news is not a mirror of reality. It is a representation of the world, and all representations are selective. This means that some human beings must do the selecting; certain people make decisions about what to present as news and how to present it” (Quoted in Ali Darwish 2009: 99). Both Hautanen and Schudson emphasize that news is in fact produced in a particular language and shaped by the cultural and ideological perspectives of the news sources and information providers. Building on this, a pertinent question asks itself here: to what extent can this news be mediated, transferred or translated in a multilingual environment without being reconstructed or reframed according to the interpretive frameworks of the target language and culture?

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The role of translation in media news is not less important than language and culture. International organizations, news agencies and information sources use translation extensively in the making and production of news such as The US Foreign Broadcast Information Service, the BBC Service, and the so called big fours: Reuters, Associated Press, United Press International and Agence France Presse. Moreover, translation is very common in news processing by the non-English news providers such as Aljazeera, and A1 Arabiya which rely on these international information “wholesalers” for their news supply.

At an interlingual level, translation means the transfer of a message from a source language to a target language; this transfer however involves serious constraints that prevent the reproduction of two identical or fully equivalent texts. The reality represented in a given language through a certain semantic structure and shaped by the cultural context in which it is deeply grounded can never be reproduced in the same way through translation by the mere linguistic substitutions. Moreover, if we consider the phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactical and rhetorical differences that exist between languages, it is almost impossible to reproduce similar realities; although the translator may have a great competence in understanding, interpreting and matching between the source and target languages. Indeed, the notion of equivalence has always been central to the debate on

translation: whether complete translation is achievable or not across linguistically and culturally divergent languages is highly controversial. In this respect Ali Darwish points out:

Translation is a multimodal process that takes place in a temporal- spatial environment. It operates at several levels simultaneously: linguistic, cognitive, socio-cultural, psychological, geo-historical and aesthetic. These levels are bound to be in conflict with one another across languages. A certain expression in one language might find its equivalence only on one or two levels, but not at all levels at once (2009:116).

Darwish implies that translation is a constraint driven process in which the translator inevitably faces difficulties and conflicts when the source text can't match fully with the target text. Yet, the role of the translator in dealing with these difficulties or conflicts shouldn't be overlooked. As a mediating agent, the translator's work usually involves a process of interpreting and deconstructing a text in the source language and its reconstruction in the target language. It follows that the reality reconstructed/reproduced via translation, no matter how close it is to the original one, remains highly fragmentary and subjective. This brings to the fore another level of the translator's intervention which is the ideological and cultural mediation of his/her translation. As Andre Lefevere confirms, translation is

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not made in vacuum because “Translators function in a given culture at a given time; the way they understand themselves and their culture is one of the factors that may influence the way in which they translate” (1992: 14). This point has also been articulated by another prominent translation scholar, Laurence Venuti who criticizes his contemporary Anglo-American translators for their obsession with coherence and transparency. Venuti (1995) argues that abiding by these mainstream aesthetics, i.e. coherence and transparency, usually result in the domestication of literary and news narratives translation according to the linguistic and cultural expectation of the target readership or viewers, which is most of the time done at the expense of authenticity and accuracy of translation products. The following section clarifies Venuti’s most used concepts such as the translator’s invisibility, translation domestication, fluency, transparency and easy readability. These concepts will support my argument concerning the domestication of international news translation which usually entails a subjective reframing and re-contextualization of the news material according to the editorial and ideological frameworks of the news providers.

II. The Domestication of News Translation and the Translator’s Invisibility

From the eighties onwards, the study of translation has seen a radical development especially with the descriptive and

the cultural turns in translation studies. Within these studies, emphasis has been put on the norms and constraints that govern the production and reception of translation. According to Lefevere and Bassnett, the study of translation practices has moved from “a formalist approach and turned to the large issues of context, history and convention” (1998: 123). Translation, as they explain, has to be established in a certain context; this contextualization “brings first culture and then politics, ideology and power into sight”. This new approach marks indeed a "Shift of emphasis" in Translation Studies since it offers a new way of dealing with translation and shows how:

Complex manipulative textual processes take place: how a text is selected for translation, for example, what role the translator plays in the selection, what role an editor, publisher or patron plays, what criteria determine the strategies that will be employed by the translator, how a text might be received in the target system. For a translation never takes place in a vacuum, never in a void, and there are all kinds of textual and extra-textual constraints upon the translator (Bassnett 1998:125).

Consequently, the traditional discourse, which has usually conceived of translation as a “metaphoric process, a process of substitution in which words of one language are selected so as to substitute the words of another language”, has considerably

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shifted to viewing translation as a metonymic process. According to Tymoczko, a metonymic view of translation “would stress the partial and partializing aspect of translation” (Qtd in Batchelor 2009: 260-62). Viewed as such, translation is considered as a fragmentary activity during which translators make choices and, by so doing, engage in cultural and ideological negotiation of the source text. In a similar vein, Andre Lefevere’s book *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame* (1992) explains how translation is an act of rewriting of an original text so as to conform to the receiving system; it demonstrates the connection of all facets of translation, from text choice to translation strategy to publication, with ideology. Rather than being detached from their cultural systems, translators, according to Lefevere, are engaged and actively affiliated to their culture. Lefevere thus identifies three types of ideology which shape the target text:

- The translator’s ideology;
- Ideological constraint by power or patronage; and
- Ideological constraint initiated by the target audience.

In fact, Lefevere is not the only one who has considered the importance of the target cultural and ideological systems in deciding about the form and content of translations. Laurence Venuti’s most important publications: *The Scandals of Translation* (1998) and *The Translator’s Invisibility* (1995)

approach translation in the context of global cultural and linguistic asymmetries. Venuti criticizes the Anglo-American tendencies in domesticating literary and news translations. He explains how fluency and transparency have always been the major criteria in English language translations, and how translators would conform to the domestic cultural values and aesthetics of the target language and culture. Venuti observes that translation is often regarded with suspicion because it inevitably domesticates foreign texts and results in the formation of cultural identities and constructing representations of foreign cultures (1998: 67). According to him, this domestication usually relies on omissions and additions in the source text as an intervention strategy which the translator applies for the sake of fluency, transparency and easily readability of the target text:

A translated text, whether prose, or poetry, fiction or nonfiction, is judged acceptable by most publishers, reviewers and readers when it reads fluently, when the absence of any linguistic or stylistic peculiarities makes it seem transparent, giving the appearance that it reflects the foreign writer's personality or intention or the essential meaning of the foreign text - the appearance, in other words, that the translation is in fact not a translation, but the 'original' (1995:13).

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Thus, in order to achieve transparency and ensure easy readability of the translated text, the translator has to adopt a fluent translation strategy: “The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator and presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text” (ibid). The translator’s invisibility, as Venuti explains it, seeks to erase any of the foreign “cultural capital” of the source text in the target language by submitting it to a “domestication revision” in such a way that the translator becomes invisible and the text he produces looks like an original not a translation (Ibid: 14). Most importantly, Venuti argues that such domestication occurs through the process of adapting foreign texts to linguistic and cultural values that operate at every stage in the production, circulation and reception of any kind of translations including news translation. As a matter of fact, Venuti asserts that the dominance of fluency and transparency in English language translation “becomes apparent in a sampling of reviewers from newspapers and periodicals” (Ibid: 18).

Assuring easy readability and immediate comprehension to the target readers and viewers is the major concern of journalists in general, and news translators in particular. However, the textual and cultural domestication in news mediation through translation has also to do with time saving and speed which characterizes news media production and reception nowadays.

The readers of daily newspapers and online bulletins, for instance, need to read the news quickly, getting straightway to what an article says or a piece of information means. The same thing can be said about the broadcast and newswriting: lengthy news reports have no place and generally brevity is the rule. Claire Tsai explains how “Condensation is a major requirement in broadcast media editing” (2006:61). Besides, in news translation the reader or the viewer is not aware that what is being written or read out is anything but original despite the fact that every news item is essentially a mediated discourse from another language and another culture. Therefore, the invisibility of the translator is a very common reality in the field of media news translation since his or her identity remains unknown. With this respect, Sara Bani observes that:

The indication of a translator’s identity is not always available in newspapers; on the contrary, there are many cases in which the translator is completely invisible from the graphic point of view (2006: 35).

Sara Bani explains how newspapers readers can hardly make the difference between a translated article and the non translated one, not only because it is not indicated graphically but also because the reader is supposed to make no effort to access the meaning of the article. To put it in Sara’s words, “the interlinguistic and intercultural transition through translation

passes unnoticed to readers, who often read a press translation as if it were like any other article in the newspaper” (Ibid: 36). Sara’s point of view alludes to another reality: although translation is at the heart of international news production, it is most of the time undertaken by journalists and reporters themselves. We shall come back to this point while dealing with the pitfalls of journalists’ translations.

In sum, the process of bringing information out of one cultural context into another may involve an interlingual transfer, but news translators’ focus is not on the “linguistic transferal”; rather it is on the “transposition of information in a format aimed at meeting the demands of the target readership” (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009: 132). Subsequently, media news translation necessarily involves a domestication process which reconstructs/rewrites the original news or source information so that it can fit in the cultural and ideological frameworks of the issuing media institution, and responds to the needs and expectations of the target readership or audience. Unfortunately, this textual and cultural adaptation of the translated news is also what makes the act of translation unnoticed and invisible!

III. How is International News Reconstructed through Translation?

According to Ali Darwish, in a monolingual news media environment, the news flows from the primary sources through

the reporter/news editor and is read or written by the news presenter or the journalist to the target audience; in this case the mediation is fulfilled in the local language(s), whereas in the translation-mediated news reporting, the news flows from the primary sources in its native form through the primary reporting in mediated form to the news editor or broadcaster to another audience. One can see that there are many mediating agents who interfere in the process of news production as it is clarified by Ali Darwish in the following figures:

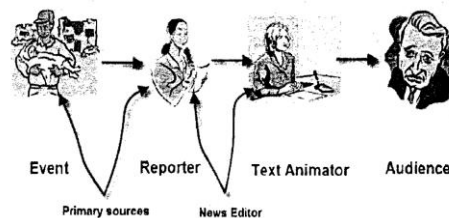


Figure A: A basic model of news flow in a monolingual environment (Darwish 2009: 91).

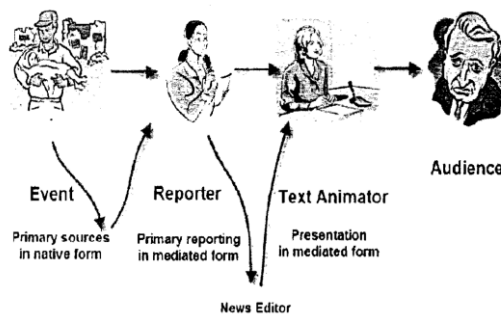


Figure B: A basic model of a mediated news reporting (Ibid).

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To use the proper journalistic term, news material has to go through a process of modelling and adjustment so that it can be ready for printing or diffusion both in a monolingual or multilingual environment. Moreover, this news processing involves a control of information flow into and through information channels and in media language this is named Gatekeeping. This is a metaphor media experts use to describe filtering systems or circuits, usually referred to as Gatekeepers, which information gets through before it becomes a final news product.

However, in a multilingual environment, the translator or the journalist who translates the news is a vital mediating agent in news processing; which means that translation and editing are also part of the news processing. Karen Stetting (1989) has coined the word transediting to indicate a combination of translation and editing. According to her, editing is included in the translation task and trans-editing necessarily entails “transforming the language and the structure of the original message by using strategies such as re-organization, addition, deletion, and substitution”. Yves Gambier elaborates more on similar strategies and defines them as follows (2006: 14):

- a. **Re-organisation:** to reorganize or reformulate the source text by focusing or moving information in a given paragraph. This reorganisation is partly due to differences

between languages, rhetoric traditions, and intends to serve the target readership or audience.

- b. **Deletion:** unnecessary information or details are completely ignored; some paragraphs, sentences or lexical items are excluded. In the case of news broadcasting for instance, a 5 minute news item need to be reduced to one minute, the translator then resorts to omitting repetitions and irrelevant details.
- c. **Addition:** Addition is necessary because sometimes the translator needs to clarify, to make explicit some background information.
- d. **Substitution:** usually concerns stylistic and rhetorical reformulation of the source text. It can also involve other strategies, for instance, certain details are made less specific, personalization is avoided and some culture-bound words or idioms which may sound unfamiliar to the target audience are substituted.

These strategies are indispensable for the domestication of the international news and are part of its processing starting from the early stage of spotting the event in the foreign country until it is broadcast or printed as a final news product to the target public. What is more, international news translators have to cut, edit, reformulate, clarify the information at hand in order to adapt to domestic style preferences (Bassnett 2004: 6). Thus, the

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translator/editor of international news acts as vital “Gatekeeper” or as an agent of censorship who decides about what should or shouldn’t cross the cultural and the ideological frontiers of the target public.

In fact, these Gatekeeping functions are not the sole strategies analysed in the process of news translation; international news communication cannot be analysed as isolated news texts as it shapes and takes shape in a particular environment. Translation Studies in recent decades has emphasized the importance of both context and contextualization in the translating process and their impact on the translator’s decisions making. Dobkin argues that news translation has to conform to specific editorial policy, norms and formula:

News stories are organized according to standard production formulas; television audiences need not only to be informed but also seduced and entertained. News stories are also based on the intuitive, professional assumptions of the news journalists and translators (1992).

As I stated before, in international news translation there are also enormous constraints of time and space which translators of news have to face. The short deadlines that rule journalistic practice forces editors and journalists to depend on quick translation of the incoming news from international news

agencies and sources. Michel Cornin in *Translation and Globalization* is particularly interested in the issue of ‘Space-time compression and time-to-market imperatives’, and according to him, the issue of time is “more pressing for a translator working with a 24-hour news channel” (2003: 71). Moreover, Susan Bassnet points out that “Most journalists and translators have poor translation skills and lack structured methodologies in news translation which ensure accuracy, fairness, truthfulness, objectivity and neutrality of reported news” (2006: 2). As a matter of fact, major violations of these principles are unfortunately inevitable in international news translations.

The aforementioned characteristics of media news translation show how translation mediation does not only provide information for the content of international news, but it also frames these news narratives and subsequently reduces their authenticity and objectivity to a great extent. This reality is further complicated by the fact that the majority of journalists working in foreign countries and reporting news from these multinational locations have not sufficient knowledge of the local languages and cultures. Most of the time, international news correspondents and reporters rely on local interpreters, which can result in serious mistranslation or omissions of significant information (Bassnett 2006: 5).

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Ali Darwish tells us about a very significant incident of CNN's mistranslation of a speech given by the Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadnihad. CNN incorrectly quoted the president as saying "Iran has the right to build nuclear weapons" while the original speech stated that "Iran has the right to nuclear energy, and that a nation has civilization does not need nuclear weapons" (2009: 58). Equally important, Darwish notices that the translation standards used at Aljazeera Channel reveals serious mistakes, and adds that "the literalisation style that has been adopted in this channel is gravely contributing to mistranslations, misinterpretations and misrepresentations". Ali Darwish implies that Aljazeera reporters rely on a literal translation which can produce a very poor translation quality. The following example he spots in Aljazeera news report is very revealing:

Original news:

USA Secretary of state Condoleezza Rice defended the unlimited detention of suspected terrorists saying in an interview that it benefited the United States and the entire world.

Aljazeera Arabic Translation:

دافعت وزيرة الخارجية الأمريكية كوندوليزا رايس عن الاحتجاز غير المحدود للإرهابيين
المشتبه فيهم قائلة في مقابلة أجريت معها بأن ذلك كان ذا منفعة الولايات المتحدة

والعالم أجمع

Back translation:

The American Foreign Minister Condoleezza Rice defended the unlimited detention of the terrorists suspected of them saying in an interview held with her that was of benefit to the United States and the entire world.

Ali Darwish explains that in the English construction suspected terrorists, the adjective “suspected” qualifies and delimits the noun terrorists. In other words, the terrorists are not yet terrorists. However, in the Arabic construction noun plus adjective describes and does not qualify or delimit. In this case the phrase suspected terrorists is translated as terrorists suspected of them and produces thus an oxymoron: how can they be terrorists and suspected of being terrorists at the same time?! In view of this, Ali Darwish asserts that Aljazeera and other television networks, which rely on translations of news from international providers in their news broadcast, are “contributing to the reframing of news and events and creating information and cultural misfits, often unintended by the original sources and sometimes unwelcomed by the intended viewers” (2009:258-259).

Conclusion

In this paper, it has been argued that translation mediation in international news production plays a crucial role in

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reconstructing/reframing the news realities at different levels. News narratives are primarily constructed in one language and shaped by the cultural and ideological frameworks of the news sources or providers; by submitting this news to translation it necessarily entails its reconstruction in another language. Most importantly, the reconstruction of international news usually calls for domesticating strategies on the part of the translator and his/her interference in adapting and reformulating the source news so that it can fit in the target language and culture. However, this domestication or adaptation process can sometimes lead to mistranslations and have serious repercussions on the news product. In a nutshell, neither media nor translation can be impartial or objective in their mediation; subjectivity and manipulation are indeed inherent characteristics in both of them.

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