

FROM ADAPTATION TO APPROPRIATION: FRAMING THE WORLD THROUGH NEWS TRANSLATION

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Abstract

Terminological issues are problematic in the analysis of translation processes in news production. In the 1980s, Stetting coined the term “transediting”, which has been widely used in the translation studies literature, but “translation” itself becomes contentious in communication studies, a discipline closely related to news translation research. Only a few communication scholars have specifically dealt with the linguistic and cultural transformations of source texts, but they tend to regard translation as word-for-word transfer, unusual news production. More productive for the study of news translation seems to be the application of the concept of framing, widely used in communication studies. Framing considers the linguistic and paralinguistic elements of news texts in the promotion of certain organizing ideas that the target audience can identify with. In news translation, this entails the adaptation of a text for the target readership, a process can lead to appropriation of source material. Two examples are mentioned to illustrate this point: the appropriation of the US Department of State cables by the Wikileaks organisation, and the pro-Romanian slogans produced by the Gandul newspaper as a response to Britain’s anti-immigration campaigns. The final section relates news adaptation to adaptation of other text types, such as literary and historical works.

Keywords: *adaptation, transediting, appropriation, framing, news translation*

In the 21st century news translation has attracted the attention of an important number of translation scholars, who have published extensively on the interlinguistic transformation processes present in news production (Bielsa and Bassnett, Hernández Guerrero, Valdeón). However, there is no agreement on the term to be applied to these processes, as they may involve translation but also editing. In fact, in 1989 Stetting coined the term “transediting” to refer to the changes that occurred when news producers receive texts in a given language and transform them for a target readership, often using material from different sources. In her view, transediting involves various types of adaptations:

- Adaptation to a standard of efficiency in expression: “cleaning-up transediting”;
- Adaptation to the intended function of the translated text in its new social context: “situational transediting”;
- Adaptation to the needs and conventions of the target culture: “cultural transediting” (377).

Although Stetting applied the term to a number of different text genres, including religious, literary and historical texts (374), transediting would later become popular in news translation research, even though Stetting is an anglicist rather than a translation scholar, and she was particularly concerned with English language teaching at the time she introduced the term (Schäffner 866-83). However, Stetting’s article has contributed to reveal the complex relationship between news production and translation. Additionally, it reminds us of the terminological and conceptual difficulties researchers are confronted with when dealing with the linguistic and cultural transformation of media texts in general, and news texts in particular. In this article, we aim to consider the terminological conundrum characterizing news translation research. Then we will move on to reflect on the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to advance in this exciting subfield, focusing on the concept of framing, and will discuss some examples to illustrate the significance of such an approach.

From translation to adaptation and back

The lack of consensus in the study of news translation is not unique to this sub-discipline. Writing about theatre and film adaptation, Zatlin, a professor of Spanish literature and a translator of Spanish and French theatre, has noted the striking similarities between translation and adaptation theories (xi). “Thus,” she claims, “I have routinely mentioned the parallels with translation when teaching film adaptation and with film adaptation when teaching literary translation. I am, of course, not alone in observing this connection” (x). Zatlin also observes that translators of foreign drama usually prefer translation to adaptation (24) and mentions John Clifford, who openly opposes the term adaptation (25). In this context, translation tends to refer to faithful or literal renderings of a source text, whereas adaptations “even ones that involve few textual changes, may radically alter underlying meaning” (80). In fact, adaptation has been used by postcolonial theorists to emphasize the appropriation of western texts in postcolonial contexts (81), as shown by Chaudhury and Sengupta in their discussion of the Bengali versions of *Macbeth* (6-18), and by Wong in her discussion of Chinese adaptations of *The Merchant of Venice* (99-111).

Adaptation has also been closely discussed in connection with filmic versions of plays and novels. Research by authors like Naremore, Boozer and Leitch (published by prestigious university presses) have demonstrated the popularity of adaptation theories within academia. Boozer, for instance, relies on structuralism and semiotics to relegate the role of the original author to a secondary position (20-21), whereas Leitch insists on the existence of a subliminal negotiation between the authors of original texts and screen adapters (236-256). Here adaptation is “less an attempted resuscitation of an originary word than a turn in an ongoing dialogical process” (64). This is related to the work of Quebecois intellectual Michel Garneau, who, in the 1970s and 1980s, adapted Shakespeare’s plays to the idiom of Canadian French in order to make a statement against the dominance of the French used in France (Raw 106) and coined the term “tradaptation.”

“Tradaptation” or transadaptation takes us back to Stetting’s transediting, where translation went beyond word-for-word replacements and suggested more fundamental transformations. In fact, adaptation was discussed even in the more linguistic approaches to translation (Vandal-Sirois and Bastin 22). Vinay and Darbelnet, for instance, stressed that it was necessary to adapt the source text if the translator wanted to produce a good version, and they included adaptation as a valuable procedure. The importance of translation as adaptation has only increased in the globalized world of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, as organisations release information to an international audience (Vandal-Sirois and Bastin 22). Additionally, in news production the process remains far more invisible than in the case of canonical texts. News consumers are rarely aware of any translation processes, let alone of any ideological shifts aimed at infusing the target versions with new meaning. If, as Cherrington claims, “most translations and adaptations are carried out by non-professionals; those who visit, or live, work, or study in another country or another culture” (Cherrington 210), in news writing translation becomes invisible as it is often regarded as a small part of the production process. That is, translation does not exist as a relevant activity. And, even though journalists often translate, they reject their role as translators of news originally written in other languages. Journalists view this process as part of an editing process, or, to put it differently, of the adaptation of the source news texts and/or events to the expectations of the target audience.

Thus, like in the case of more canonical text types, the complexity of news translation should encourage researchers to consider other disciplines and epistemological approaches. As film adaptation theory can engage with literary text analysis, communication studies can provide tools to understand the news transediting process. However, in a first approach to communication studies we are likely to be baffled by the conceptual challenge posed by terms like translation and adaptation. A cursory look at some of the most recent work on news production published by communication scholars only serves to increase

the conceptual and terminological confusion. Let us consider the following extract:

Framing news in terms of its economic consequences for the audience is a translation of the journalistic news values proximity (De Vreese 190).

As can be seen, communication scholars use the term translation, albeit with different implications. Translation tends to have a more generic use, it is akin to transformations of any kind. Occasionally it may also refer to linguistic changes into a target language. In 2011, Baumann, Gillespie and Sreberny guest-edited a special issue of *Journalism* devoted to translation and the BBC. It is probably the first time that communication scholars have delved into translation as a process characteristic of news translation: here translation is understood as linguistic transfer from a source language into a target language. In the introduction to this special issue, they argue that “The long-standing reputation of the BBC World Service (BBCWS) among the world’s pre-eminent broadcasters and its credibility have depended on the largely undocumented and unexplored everyday transcultural encounters and translation practices that have taken place in the diasporic and cosmopolitan contact zones of Bush House” (135). For their analysis of textual transformation practices, these authors devise a framework that consists of four distinct processes:

By (1) transporting, we mean all processes involved in feeding information into the BBC World Service’s [former headquarters][...] at Bush House, London, and/or its regional desks and hubs around the globe, a unique and unequalled infrastructure of global news coordination [...]

By (2) translating, we mean the techniques, crafts, and possibly grafts, of language-to-language transformations. Even the seemingly simplest linguistic transformations are evidently transformative in journalistic practice, be it by contents or by the discursive tone implied or smuggled in. Examples abound in all our contributions.

By (3), transposing and trans-editing, we refer to implicit, and often silent, discursive re-intonations, while trans-editing emphasizes the simultaneity of translating and editing processes. The two, however, belong together, and go hand-in-glove at most instances that we could research in detail.

Finally, processes of (4) transmitting were examined for converging or conflicting patterns which often determine which audiences and users get which news and BBC commentaries in which areas and at which, accessible or inappropriate, times (137).

It is indeed a commendable attempt to provide a working framework for the analysis of news production, including translation, for a discipline that, as they point out, has largely neglected transcultural and translinguistic encounters. However, it is a taxonomy that brings us back to the traditional view of translation as linguistic transfer, as they reserve the term for “seemingly simplest linguistic transformations”, whereas they borrow Stetting’s transediting for more

complex practices where translation is modulated by editing processes. Thus, Baumann, Gillespie and Sreberny are clearly unaware of the evolution of translation studies publications, which have largely moved away from earlier definitions of translation in terms of its faithfulness to an original text. However, by adding editing and transposing to the equation, with its many re-intonations, they also hint at adaptation as a key element in the interplay between linguistic transfer and news writing.

On the other hand, translation and adaptation are key terms in van Leeuwen's enlightening discussion of the rewriting characteristic of *The Vietnam News*, an English language daily funded by the Vietnamese government as a part of its market reform policies. Van Leeuwen analyses 100 translations from the Vietnamese press authored by forty translators who also acted as proofreaders (and, on the other hand, wrote their own articles too. This is a common situation within the trade, as journalists may start as translators and gradually work on their own stories). In the study, van Leeuwen claims that translators worked with six to eight sub-editors who corrected the translated English and wrote headlines and captions. This is a typical feature of news writing, as headlines are often authored by other journalists. Within this context, van Leeuwen identified three types of decisions: translation decisions affecting the language; translation/adaptation decisions affecting journalistic style (226-230); and translation/adaptation decisions affecting cultural and ideological references in the source texts (230-234). The title of the article is also highly indicative of the content: "Translation, adaptation, globalisation," where translation is applied to linguistic choices whereas adaptation is related to the modulations (or re-intonations in Baumann, Gillespie and Sreberny's terms) necessary to cater for an international audience with a strong Anglo-Australian bias.

The Anglo-Australian features of the target text are explained in terms of the globalizing strategy of the Vietnamese government and the attempt to reach an international readership. In order to do this, translators and editors imitate the practices of their Western counterparts and avoid the peculiarities of the local models. In this sense, the resulting texts are very much target-oriented (van Leeuwen 235). This is achieved by means of adaptations strategies. Paradoxically, while the adaptation of plays mentioned above localizes the product for regional audiences, the adaptation of Vietnamese news globalizes the text for a wider Anglo-Australian readership that cuts across nations and continents.

Framing the news through translation

By translating/adapting Vietnamese news for international audiences, the editors of this news medium contribute to create news texts that meet the expectations

of the target readers in terms of format, and, above all, content. In communication research the concept of framing has provided a fruitful basis for the study of news content. However, framing is not free from controversy. In fact, during the 20th and 21st centuries it has been used in several disciplines: from psychology to linguistics, from sociology to communication. Its long tradition in academia has given way to a “fractured paradigm” (Entman 51). From a sociological perspective, frames have been defined as “principles of organisation which govern events – at least social ones – and our subjective involvement in them” (Goffman 10), and as a “central organizing idea” that contributes to make sense of relevant events (Gamson and Modigliani 3). Similar definitions have been used in communication studies where Reese refers to “organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world” (Reese 150).

Framing can be realized by means of various strategies, including selection and deselection of information, as well as careful use of the various components of news texts, including headlines and subheads, leads and the selection of quotes. Equally relevant is the use of graphs and photographs (Tankard 100). To these, translation can contribute to the framing processes of news production by combining selection and deselection of news events and reports, as well as linguistic transfer and adaptation of other elements such as headlines and quotes. As a matter of fact, headlines are the most likely components of a source text to change, as conventions vary from language to language. However, they are not necessarily the most relevant. We can use the case of the so-called Wikileaks as a case in point. Although the term Wikileaks refers to an online journalistic organisation that posts classified documents considered of public interest by its promoters, the word has been widely used in connection with the release of the US Department of State wires in five major international media, the *New York Times*, UK’s *The Guardian*, Spain’s *El País*, France’s *Le Monde* and Germany’s *Der Spiegel*.

The publication of the wires involved a careful selection of texts by those companies, as some of the material was considered inappropriate. Another factor taken into account was the large number of cables, which made it impracticable for the newspapers to publish them all or post them in their online versions. It also meant that translation acted as a gatekeeping mechanism and as an adaptation strategy, which allowed the media to select what to publish, when and how. In the end globalisation and localisation acted as two complementary forces (Castells 84), and translation contributed to adapt the bulk of the original texts to the target readerships: on the one hand, the combined economic and political power of these five media turned the Wikileaks into a global issue, but, on the other, their own local interests limited the scope of possible themes to be published. For instance, the online version of *El País* made a world map available to its readers with a specific number of wires for each country. The

number one country is, of course, the United States with 600, with Spain coming second with a total of 292 texts (“Las Revelaciones de Wikileaks”). The numbers of papers with information about other countries is usually well below ten, with the notable exceptions of Cuba and Venezuela in Latin America, and Iran in the Middle East. The number of papers about China is also high, highlighting the interest of the US in the Asian giant. However, it should be noted that many of the cables are available only in English, whereas a smaller number of them has been adapted into news articles.

On the other hand, *The Guardian* also offers its international readers a virtual map of the cables that can be accessed by clicking on the appropriate link. As can be expected, the number of cables is much larger for the United States, with a total of 232 wires, and the UK, with 72 texts in total (“US Embassy Cables”). The map also provides easy links to articles based on the leaked texts, 48 and 29 respectively. Adaptation here is not available in terms of interlinguistic translation but rather in the number of news articles available based on the original material, as well as on the selection and deselection processes of the original texts. In other words, we are dealing with intralinguistic translation and/or adaptation processes. Thus, adaptation plays a key role in the writing and publication of the original papers in English. However, it is the efforts of the five media at play that makes the Wikileaks issue so unique: the combined use of appropriation, adaptation and translation turn the release of the papers into a global venture. Additionally, these processes have expanded as the texts reach other markets and cultures, which, in turn, needed to adapt and translate them for their own target audiences.

In other cases, though, adaptation plays a subtler role, especially when the abuse of national stereotypes becomes a contentious issue for certain media and nations. The current economic crisis, for instance, has promoted a rhetoric of exclusion and fear that is present in European media as well as in the voices of many politicians. In 2013, following the announcement of the lifting of all restrictions of movement within the European Union, allowing the citizens of Bulgaria and Romania to move to other EU nations in search of jobs, the tabloid press in the UK abuse the image of Eastern Europeans as pickpockets and scroungers in an attempt to encourage the British government to oppose the measure. The institutionalized response came soon afterwards in what was a controversial abuse of stereotypes of the self, in this case the UK: the government announced that it would use the image of Britain as an unwelcoming and rainy nation. The less conservative media criticized the announcement and even called their readers to send slogans to dissuade foreigners from visiting the country. The readers of *The Guardian* came up with ideas such as

The sky in the UK is this colour [grey] for 8 months of the year. Try Miami instead [...]
 UK? YUK!
 Come Here and Clean the Loo (“US Embassy Cables”)

The controversy reached Bulgaria and Romania, where the media published the information conveniently translated into their languages. In an unexpected turn of events, *Gandul*, one of the major newspapers in Romania adapted the idea to promote a pro-Romanian campaign, in which the writers used similar lines but with a very different aim: to attract UK citizens to the country.

Bunicul meu e vecin cu printul Charles, al tau este?
 [My grandfather is Prince Charles’s neighbour, what about yours?]

Noi il avem pe Dracula voi pe David Cameron!
 [We have Dracula, you have David Cameron!]²²

In this case, Romanian media appropriated a frame of exclusion, selected the information that wanted to publish and produced new poignant slogans parodying the original discourse.

The Wikileaks and the *Gandul* slogans exemplify the forms in which adaptation and translation work together in the age of globalisation. Orengo has pointed out that localisation in news production involves a process of adaptation of a text so that it “has the feel and look of a nationally-manufactured piece of news” (170). However, the examples mentioned above do not only have the feel and look of a local product: they do not hide their international origin, but rather they preserve it by adapting the material to meet the expectations of the target readership in the case of the Wikileaks, or by appropriating a news event (the anti-Romanian campaign jokingly turned anti-British by *The Guardian*) and a textual typology (advertising slogans) in order to create a new and more positive stereotype, as in the case of the *Gandul* campaign. In this sense, the producers of these texts are not just translating, they are not merely adapting the source documents; they are appropriating the texts in order to manufacture ways of looking at the Other that the readers can identify and even feel more comfortable with. Leo Chan argues that “adaptations are like domesticated translations, where target values, conventions and norms are superimposed on the source text (...) and the foreign becomes palatable for the local audience” (415), but in these cases the foreign becomes more palatable by preserving its origin.

²² I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Rodica Dimitriu for translating these into English.

Final discussion

Writing about literary and historical texts, Vandal-Sirois and Bastin have noted that adaptation and appropriation usually go hand in hand. Adaptation has been a very problematic concept within translation studies, as the more purists tend to regard it as an extreme form of free translation. Historic texts usually provide good examples not only of adaptation, which Sanders defines as a journey from the source text to a new cultural milieu, but of appropriation, understood as “a more decisive journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain” (26). Sanders, who focuses on literary works, stresses the difficulties of distinguishing between homage and plagiarism (32-41), but pays little attention to translation (Chan 415). However, the connection between translation, adaptation and appropriation emerges as we become aware of two facts, regardless of whether we are looking at literature, history or news. First, the adapted works take on new “meanings, applications and resonance” and, two, “appropriation does not always make its founding relationships and interrelationships as clear” (Sanders 32). Vandal-Sirois and Bastin relate this to Chesterman’s *telos*, the personal goal of the translator (Vandal-Sirois and Bastin 23). We can take this further and extend it to the ideological stance of the target readership. The Spanish chronicles of the conquest and their translations into English provide us with excellent examples of the adaptation and, eventually, appropriation of source texts to support personal and national agendas (Valdeón, “Retranslation”). Bartolomé de las Casas’s *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* offers itself as an example of the appropriation of a text that was meant to convince the future Spanish king to take action against the misdemeanors of the conquerors with a careful combination of facts and fiction. The English translators of the 16th century and beyond not only appropriated the text for their purposes, they also increased the fictional elements of the book and claimed that these fictional elements were as truthful as possible (Foster 121).

Understood this way, journalistic texts mentioned above provide an excellent opportunity to study these complex interrelationships. For example, the *Gaceta de Caracas*, a pro-independence periodical in the nineteenth century Venezuela, used English, French and Spanish source texts in order to produce articles that would support the ideological positions of the target journalists and their readers: “All are deliberate interventions motivated by the target journalists and their readers, and even though sources are often quoted, they still represent appropriations” (Vandal-Sirois and Bastin 37). Two centuries later news appropriation and adaptation still characterizes news production, although in most cases the invisibility of the process does not allow the readers the work of the journalist as a translator. The US Department of State cables made available by Wikileaks and five Western media offer an example of appropriation of texts, their adaptation to the needs and interests of the target audience and the selective

translation and adaptation of some of them. Here readers are more likely to become aware of the fact that the target texts are instances of appropriation, translation and adaptation.

However, in the majority of the cases this relationship becomes far more shadowy, and the influence upon the audience is less obvious and, yet, unescapable. This implies that research into how these transformations are shaped, by whom and why would help us take a more critical view of how information is fed onto us in the age of globalisation, as a small minority of the population now controls mainstream media, and news has become another component of the consumerist society (Castells 118). In this sense, a term like transediting may have become obsolete or even useless (Schäffner 881) because the original emphasis on language transfer and edition is of lesser importance than the political, economic and social implications of processes like adaptation and appropriation. For this reason, the analysis of news texts requires an interdisciplinary approach that takes advantage of the research carried out in disciplines such as communication studies, where concepts like framing have contributed to advance our knowledge of news production practices and agendas. Thus, it might be necessary to consider whether concepts like localisation and globalisation are enough. Adaptation studies has suggested the term relocation to refer to the recontextualisation of a source text (Sanders 63-64), although in a more positive way that we would like to suggest here.

Finally, it should be pointed out that, even though transediting may not be the right term to define the strategies characteristic of news translation, it seems reasonable to differentiate between translation and other practices. While this does not imply that we should return to translation as a more or less faithful linguistic transfer between languages, it might be valuable to make a distinction between translation and other processes such as adaptation and a more violent and disruptive one: appropriation.

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