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## Translating loaded language in the EU: Political Discourse Analysis meets News Translation

**Abstract:** So far, the main focus of Translation Studies has been on the textual transformation of a source text into a translated text, with scant attention paid to translation policies and practices in EU institutions. This paper explores a possible interdisciplinary approach situated between Political Discourse Analysis and News Translation by investigating the European Parliament Press Service Translation Policy, its structure, and professional roles. After introducing News Translation as a new discipline evolving from Translation Studies, this paper will characterize some of the “unknown agents” of the translation processes carried out by the European Parliament Press Unit with the use of such ethnographic methods as interviews and observation practices. By exploring both the translation processes and the translation product, this paper attempts to show that the European Parliament Press Team shares a common Translation Policy based on linguistic accurateness and to identify the processes by which information is transferred to another culture through translation, showing a possible cooperation between Political Discourse Analysis and News Translation.

**Keywords:** translation studies, translation of politics, translation processes, News Translation, translational behaviour, European institutions, politics of translation.

### 1. Introduction. News Translation: providing information in a multilingual setting

As soon as Translation Studies were established as an academic discipline in its own right in the 1980s, News Translation became yet another area of interest for translation scholars. As Bielsa & Bassnett (2009: 14) observe, “[t]he important role played by translation in the production and circulation of global information flows has been fundamentally neglected, and this has led to the assumption that information can circulate unaltered across different linguistic communities and cultures.” Since translation takes place across linguistic and socio-cultural patterns that can alter the semantics of words, we cannot deny that production of journalistic text is strongly affected by this. In order to support this statement, I will now proceed by explaining how news translation has so far been considered and researched by major scholars.

News circulates the world at an incredible pace, connecting different cultures, and journalists reporting facts in another language frequently face the problem of the untranslatability of certain concepts, similarly to translators of literature (cf. Baker 2006).

News translation has been identified by Kang (2007: 238) as “a collective effort” made by media professionals, and the news texts that are finally published are “the result of the collaborative work of people assuming different roles and engaged in language transfer, cultural adaptation, proofreading, revising, naturalizing, editing and other textual processes that are carried out repeatedly and cyclically.” In 1989, Stetting introduced the term *transediting* as a hybrid definition of the activity of translating and editing, clarifying that “a certain amount of editing has always been included in the translation task” and that “making changes to the content of a translation is legitimate and even necessary” (Stetting 1989:371). Therefore, changes, added or removed words, are simply textual alterations or improvements of cohesion, style, and grammar and do not “kill the personality and the interesting features of the actual piece of writing” (Stetting 1989: 372).

Although the term *transediting* has been studied and used by several scholars, it is not the only specialist term used to refer to the unique practice of news translation. In his study of BBC Mundo’s news web texts and their source English reports (BBC World), Valdeòn (2008: 303) speaks of *translation and mediation, transformative acts, and translatorial/editorial strategies*, and he explains that news translation consists in “translation of information rather than translation of texts” (Valdeòn 2009: 79).

Another aspect which has been investigated by several scholars and that still requires further analysis is the role of the news translator and how he or she is perceived in today’s newsrooms. How is this professional figure evaluated? Does this evaluation vary from medium to medium and from country to country? Bani (2006) has analysed news translation practices into Italian, on the basis of texts from the weekly magazine *Internazionale*, and she explains that selected news articles are sent to a translator who works outside the newsroom. She distinguishes between textual manipulation carried out by editors, like cutting or inserting explanations, and translation strategies like summarising or including further explanations. As soon as the translation is ready, it is sent to the editorial office and undergoes a complex editing process, with “one editor checking the target text against the source text, another editor proofreading the Italian version, followed by a copy-editor considering how and where the translation will be placed inside the newspaper, and ending with the director having the final say” (Schäffner 2012: 871). However, the *Internazionale* newsroom represents a peculiar case since the media do not always have specialised translation services at their disposal, for economic or editorial reasons; in many cases, the translator and the editor work separately, in two different offices, as the research studies by Kang (2007), Arnès (2005) and Schäffner (2005) have shown. Especially with the global economic crisis affecting the journalism market, newsrooms have undergone severe cuts in the language service.

However, as Tymoczko & Gentzler (2002) suggest, translation may also involve more sinister forms of textual manipulation, which they refer to as *falsification* and *refusal of information*. To provide a pertinent example, the strategy of omission, which is extremely common in news translation, effectively prevents target readers from having full access to the source.

News translation, as Kang (2007) explains, is an institutional practice subjected to certain institutional conditions and values; I have chosen to investigate the European Parliament translation practices for the media since I think it can pose challenges for both media and translation studies. All studies into news translation have revealed that the processes involved in this kind of translation are highly complex. However, at every stage of news gathering language is incorporated and this is why news translation can definitely pose challenges to several key concepts of Translation Studies, but, as Pym (2010: 109) reminds us, “the practice of translation exceeds its theory, thus requiring an ongoing empirical attitude.”

## 2. Translation Policies and Practices in EU Institutions: The European Parliament Press Unit Translation Policy

The particular conditions and constraints in the context of the European Union offer a wide field for interdisciplinary research in translation. The reason why it can be of extreme interest for translation scholars is that communicating across national borders involves communicating across languages and cultures at an incredible pace; one has to take into account that for decades the EU has been striving to construct a European identity, and this goal can be achieved through the power of language. Umberto Eco’s statement “Translation is the language of Europe” suggests that translation is one of the main assets of daily communication in Europe. The most appropriate way to investigate the EU context with reference to translation processes is to conduct ethnographic research, employing methods such as interviewing or practicing observation techniques, in order to get a wider picture of all the actors and processes imply. As claimed by Schäffner (2001: 249), “translation work is being carried out in specific conditions, these conditions reflect changes in the working environment of translators, the translations produced have consequences for the political development of the European Union.” Koskinen (2008) has provided a framework for research on translation in institutional settings, using the Finnish translation unit at the European Commission as a case study. In her ethnographic study *Translating Institutions: An Ethnographic Study of EU Translation*, Koskinen aimed to explore the organizational role and professional identity of translators in order to elaborate broader methodological and theoretical issues, drawing attention to both people and texts in their institutional habitat. Other scholars, such as Dolloerup (1996), Wagner (2002), and Šarčević (2001), have also dedicated several studies to institutional translation, and they all remarked on the nature of the EU language policy, which is based on the principle of language equality.

At present, there are 24 official languages in the EU, and the daily amount of translation interchange is rather extreme in every Directorate General of the Institution.<sup>1</sup>

1 The European Parliament is made up of twelve Directorates-General plus the Legal Service, which are responsible for the organisation of parliamentary business under

The Directorate-General for Translation at the European Parliament, which specializes in translation, ensures that documents are available in all the 24 official languages of the European Union, thus enabling the Parliament to meet its commitment to the policy of multilingualism. DG Translation is required to translate out of and into the 24 official languages of the European Union, providing EU member states with immediate access to all kinds of texts; they are also in charge of developing IT tools and terminology databases to support translators and to keep costs at an acceptable level. Unfortunately, the language units are not yet able to cover all the combinations of the 24 official languages, and the Parliament relies on a *relay* system, whereby if a language unit cannot translate a document from the original language, it works on the basis of a completed translation into another language. The *relay* languages are, at present, English, French and German.<sup>2</sup>

After presenting briefly how the Directorate-General for Translation works, I will now shift attention to how press translation is carried out at the European Parliament Press Unit, to highlight the role that is played by translation in delivering press documents to the European Parliament. My analysis sheds light on which translation processes are employed in text production, how press officers deal with translation, what kind of texts get translated and for what purposes. Although I spent five months working at the Press Unit, where I had the chance to observe all these aspects in detail, I considered it necessary to officially interview the Coordinator of the European Parliament Press Service and combine his answers with what I had previously observed. Firstly, it is necessary to clarify that all members of the European Parliament have their own Press Units, whose service differs significantly from that of the European Parliament Press Unit in terms of function and policy. I will now provide two figures below, in order to explain how the European Parliament Press Service is organized.<sup>3</sup>

the political leadership of the European Parliament President, the Bureau of the European Parliament and the Conference of Presidents of the European Parliament, and are managed by the Deputy Secretary-General in terms of cooperation and coordination. For more info on how the European Parliament is organized, please follow this link: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/the-secretary-general/en/organisation/directorategenerals.html>.

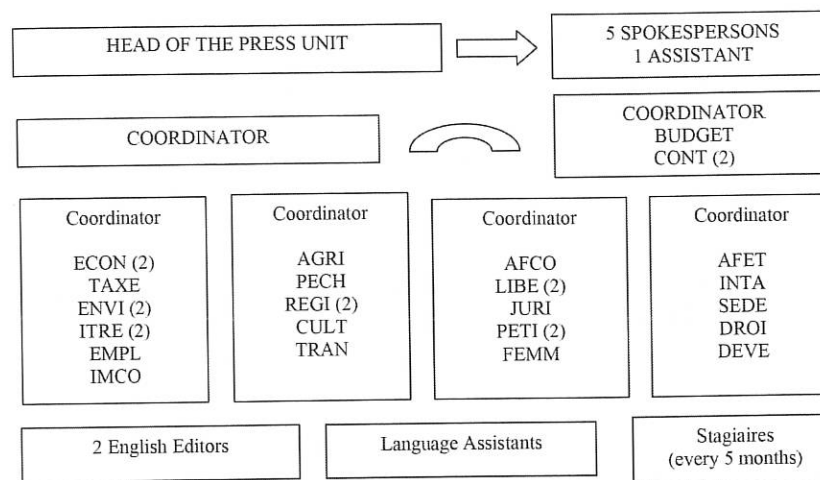
2 For more details about multilingualism in the EU, please follow this link: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/aboutparliament/en/20150201PVL00013/Multilingualism>.

3 For further details concerning press officers' full names by policy areas and languages, please check the following link: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/contacts-and-services/content/20140326CPS39922/2>.

Figure 1. Structure of DG Communication.



Figure 2. Organisational structure of the European Parliament Press Unit.



## 2.1 Translation processes and practices in text production: the “unknown agents”

In the recent volume *The Known Unknowns of Translation Studies*, edited by Brems, Meylaerts & van Doorslaer (2014), Schäffner (2014: 131) proposes to investigate translated political discourse in detail. With reference to the chapter she wrote, titled “Unknown agents in translated political discourse,” I will try to answer some of the questions she poses.

As Figure 2 indicates, press officers are in charge of reporting the activities of committees, debates in the Parliament’s office in Brussels, and votes during plenary sessions in Strasbourg through press releases and press conferences (mainly before and during plenary sessions). Depending on their background, press officers are instructed to follow debates of one or maximum two parliamentary committees, update the press kit online, and maintain contacts with journalists by organizing meetings and seminars. There is one press officer per language, who is normally fluent in two foreign languages: in addition to his or her mother-tongue, he or she has to speak English and another European language (preferably French). Press releases are normally written in English and French, published online, or simply sent to journalists, depending on their priority. They are first drafted in advance,



sent to all press officers, and later proofread by English native editors. However, before and during plenary sessions in Strasbourg, newsletters concerning upcoming votes in the following week are drafted in English, and they get translated within Thursday by press officers, who are helped by language assistants and trainees. After each parliamentary vote during the plenary in Strasbourg, an official press release is published and translated by press officers, assistants, or trainees one hour after the vote at the latest.

As clarified by the Coordinator during the interview, press officers are divided into language areas but cannot always count on the support of language assistants, who are or have previously worked as professional translators and carried out quality checks. At present, there are only seven language assistants working in 23 languages (Gaelic excluded) in the Press Unit. Press releases are always drafted in advance by press officers, sent to editors, and checked before the vote; after the Parliament's vote, they get re-edited if the outcome of the vote differs from the one expected. Finally, before being published, they are checked by coordinators and the head of the press unit. One of the first questions I posed to the Coordinator of the Press Unit concerned the press officers' language and translation skills. I will now quote an extract from the response I received:

We can say that press officers are also translators in a certain way indeed, if we refer to the EU multilingual context. We are fine with it, also psychologically; we do adapt translations to a certain extent. We do communication when translating, especially with the language. A press release has a language which is different from an academic text, so the translation is never literal but has to respect sense and content.

Indeed, while I was working there, accurateness and meticulous attention towards word choices and punctuation was evident and striking, especially considering the workload and speed in delivering the news. What translation scholars might wonder about, though, is how non-professional translators achieve such level of accuracy, what tools they use, and whether or not they go through specific training. For one, press releases are always based on original texts, such as resolutions and amendments, translated by professional translators in the DG Translation. Also, if press officers have doubts concerning one term or another, they can directly contact the translators or consult with native English editors at the office. Translation software is provided by the Parliament to support press officers' translation activities and Google Translate is also frequently used as a tool, especially to translate acronyms and links. As regards verification of press officers' language and translation skills, EPSC selection requires a proficient knowledge of English and another European language from a candidate who wishes to apply for any position in DG Communication. Toward the end of every year, the work done by press officers is meticulously evaluated by the head of the Press Unit, and they can choose to improve their second foreign language by joining courses organized by the institution itself or they can choose to learn a third or fourth foreign language. The scoring and monitoring system within the Press Unit contributes to ensuring a translation policy based on equivalence and accurateness across languages and cultures — one which is

also strongly interrelated with a communication policy based on transparency and impartiality among political parties. In the following section, I will try to propose useful methods to investigate translated news texts, such as newsletters and press releases, and translation processes in the media by combining Political Discourse Analysis and News Translation.

### 3. How Political Discourse Analysis and News Translation share a common ground

In this section, I will combine various research proposals in an attempt to illustrate how Political Discourse Analysis (including Critical Discourse Analysis) and News Translation can cooperate to unveil further elements concerning translated texts in the news media. Studying translated news texts as products raises a number of issues for both Political Discourse Analysis and News Translation. Institutional types of discourse in the domain of politics, such as speeches and press conferences, are closely linked to certain types of media discourse, such as editorials, comments, and news. Much remains to be investigated in order to get a deeper insight into political discourse in translation and the institutional practices and policies which determine it.

Combining TS and PDA allows us to discover more about “universal, culture-overlapping, and culture-specific metaphors” (Schäffner 2004: 141) and explain lexical choices or omissions which may involve ideological and socio-cultural values.

The aspect of information selection is of interest to PDA, Translation, and Journalism Studies. When a journalist decides which passages must be selected and for what reasons, he or she makes two choices: one related to newsworthiness and the other to word choice.

As observed by Schäffner (2012), the practices of selecting and transforming information are not only used to help the reader understand the message, but also to promote ideologies and reflect the institution's values. Schäffner (2004) has widely shown that translation solutions can deeply influence international political discourse and, therefore, policy making. Textual features need to be linked to the social and ideological contexts of text production since texts and discourses are framed by social and political structures and practices.

Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis can be used effectively to reveal translation and interpretation strategies as well as transformations that occur in the recontextualization processes across languages, cultures, and discourse domains, particularly in the mass media. Some analysis of political communication has been conducted within Critical Discourse Analysis, and it has resulted in the identification of the patterns of language used in particular political settings.

Translators usually work in specific socio-political contexts, producing target texts for specific purposes. This social condition is reflected in the linguistic structure of the target text. Therefore, translation conceived of as a target text reveals

the impact of discursive, social, and ideological norms and constraints. If we link translation to its social contexts, causes and effects of translations can be discovered.

Carvahlo (cf. Richardson 2010) has outlined an interesting framework for the analysis of written media discourse. By outlining this framework, which is applicable to translation, she has significantly contributed to filling the gap in CDA analysis. Carvahlo proposes to explore the following issues:

- the time plane in discourse analysis of journalistic texts: time sequence of texts,
- analysis of the strategies that social actors adopt to raise issues,
- extra- and supra-textual models of the operation of discourse.

By reporting extracts of Carvahlo's research, I argue that cooperation among Political Discourse Analysis, News Translation, and journalism studies could be of interest for further investigation on translated news texts.

According to Fairclough & Wodak (1997: 258), the aim of CDA is to make "ideological loading of particular ways of using language and the relations of power which underlie them" more visible. In CDA, this is usually done on the basis of discourse in one language and one culture. When dealing with translation, textual features, ideological contexts, and underlying relations of power apply both to the source text and culture and to the target text and culture. Using the analytical instruments of Translation Studies, it is possible to describe and explain target text profiles, the translation strategies used, the appropriateness of those strategies, the conditions under which the translator operated, and the effects a text has had on the target culture. With reference to the relation between texts and discourse, researching the conditions under which they were produced might be of interest for both discourse analysis and translation studies, and their concepts and analytical tools could be interrelated to achieve this goal.

If we consider a cross-cultural perspective, different social actions could derive from "readings of an original text and its translation," determined by orders of discourse (Schäffner 2004: 142). Therefore, the concepts of intertextuality and interdiscursivity as well as orders of discourse would be useful in highlighting the socio-political and ideological structures, processes, constraints, and norms in which translations were produced. The concept of intertextuality refers to the fact that "texts explicitly or implicitly recontextualise elements from previous text" (Al-Heijn 2012: 313). As indicated by Fairclough (2003), intertextuality can be *external* when it refers to the relationship between a text and other texts, or *internal* when it refers to semantic, grammatical, and lexical features within a text.

According to Van Leeuwen & Wodak (1999: 96), the process of "recontextualization always involves transformation, and what exactly gets transformed depends on the interests, goals and values of the contexts into which the practice is recontextualised." However, according to Al-Heijn (2012), such transformations can show more complexity when translation is implied. To conclude, as argued by Schäffner (2004: 138), "examples of translation strategies such as these [implication, explicitation, domestication] should illustrate the point that CDA needs to draw on TS theories when tackling translated texts."

#### 4. Concluding remarks and future directions of research

Conceived of as a product and a process, news translation in the European context can highlight sociocultural and political practices, norms, and constraints, which can be of particular relevance in the field of political discourse. Combining concepts and methods of modern Translation Studies and Political Discourse Analysis can thus result in a more extensive study of political discourse itself. The role of translation and interpretation in political discourse, together with translation policies and practices in political institutions, have rarely been addressed within the field of Translation Studies with the aim of illustrating discursive events in the domain of politics and the resulting discourse types, such as official press releases, press conferences, and speeches. Translational choices can show that textual features need to be linked to the social and ideological contexts of text production and reception.

Texts and discourses are framed by social and political structures and practices, and this represents a fruitful link between News Translation and Political Discourse Analysis. PDA and CDA aim at revealing the connection between properties of texts and socio-political or socio-cultural structures and processes. Analytical tools used in PDA and CDA can contribute to shedding light on the "different implications of different readings for social action" (Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 279).

However, as Schäffner (2004:142) claims, "the concept of discourse has not yet played a highly significant role in TS." This paper is an attempt to bridge the gap between these disciplines and show how the EU institutional setting related to European news media might be considered a field of analysis.

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