TRANSLATING NEWS TEXTS FOR SPECIFIC LINGUISTIC AUDIENCES[1]

Abstract : *In a world marked by communication and conflict, mass media tends to minimize the essential role of translation in facilitating linguistic and cultural exchanges on the international scene. This paper purports to present and explain the situations in which translators have to fill up the gap existing between translation and media projects, as well as to examine the ways in which geographic, socio-cultural and linguistic coordinates may influence the process of editing (and sometimes transediting) of the global news. The methods used for highlighting cultural differences are both quantitative (based on a selection of articles from the British, French and Romanian press; for example, Romania's 2009 presidential elections and its echoes in the British and French press) and qualitative (particularly documentary, based on the latest research in the field). The inductive methods consist in identifying the textual and extra-textual strategies involved in the translation process and in exemplifying the editorial conventions applicable to the news coming from a different socio-cultural context. The expected outcomes of this paper are to highlight the causes of the refractions undergone by source information and to emphasize the translator's overlooked role as, for most of the times, (s)he remains invisible in order to guarantee the quality of the translation and to respect the work and vision of the person producing the news. Last but not least, when it comes to news translation, the word translation itself gains new meanings, different from its traditional ones, as readers are totally unaware of the translational operations the articles they are reading have been through.*

Keywords: *globalization, negotiation, editing.*

In an era of globalization in which thousands of messages are sent everyday in all parts of the world, mass media tends to neglect the role of translation and, implicitly, of the translators who produce different local versions for the same international messages. In their book, *Translation in Global News* (2009), Bielsa and Bassnett explain this by the fact that, inside news agencies, translation consists more of editing and reshaping the source texts so that the latter satisfy the expectations and needs of the receiving audience, and the majority of those involved in the process of news translation consider themselves journalists rather than translators. Thus, the journalist-translators are seen as cultural mediators in charge of an almost impossible task – that of getting across the

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implicit and the unknown by negotiating the meanings and selecting and recreating the original text with the ultimate goal of respecting the pattern and requirements of the target context.

Can we consequently consider all these transformations of source texts as being a sort of media manipulation? Or should they merely be regarded as inevitable forms of rewriting according to the receiving context of the journalistic texts? If we were to take into account André Lefevere's perspective, according to which translators are "artisans of compromise", being constrained by "the times in which they live" (i.e. historical-ideological factors), "the literary traditions they try to reconcile" (i.e. literary factors), and the features of the languages they work with (i.e. linguistic factors) (Lefevere cited in Dimitriu, 2006: 66-67), we may claim that, from an ideological perspective, translations cease to be transparent reflections of the original texts, becoming instead distorted products for which the principle of equivalence doesn't seem to work anymore. And yes, from a psychological perspective, it has been demonstrated that, the same as in television, the audience can be cognitively and affectively manipulated every time the reality is shaped according to the intended purpose, the same formula being repeated several times in order to obtain an automatism or conditioned reflex from the part of the public.

If "in the beginning, there was the Word", language exerts a fascinating power in this millennium marked by communication, the control over this instrument granting the holder the liberty to act over the other through words – "how words do things with us" (Dannet cited in Gherghel, 2009: 111). The journalist-translators handle the words on a daily basis, influencing global perceptions and reactions, and being able to stir political and economic conflicts inside and between nations. A similarly neglected role is that of the news interpreter acting as a mediator, who may face great challenges when reporting from different contexts and remote geographical areas in his/her attempt to create a dialogue between (sometimes conflicting) cultures and ideologies.

Even though pressured to translate great amounts of information in a relatively short period of time (sometimes within hours or even minutes),

> "translators are still indispensable intermediaries in the new informational economy and are likely to remain so precisely *because* information is so important. For many subjects in the informational economy, the language of (native) expression remains the preferred language of (individual) access". (Cronin, 2003: 16).

When analysing the political discourse, Christina Schäffner points out that the most important role played by mass media is political in nature, "the topics which quality newspapers discuss in texts on their front pages, in editorials and comments" being "good examples of political texts" (2004: 118) and that "both

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translators and interpreters operate in contexts which are shaped by social aims and ideologies, which is particularly obvious in the field of politics" (ibid.: 122).

In order to understand the evolution of the Romanian press in the last twenty years, attention has to be paid to all the political, cultural and ideological factors that have contributed to the place that mass media occupies nowadays in the national landscape. Journalism in post-communist Romania has faced great challenges, striving to find its way in a very sensitive political context as a result of the collapse of the communist regime, with its rigid system of censorship. On the one hand, people were enthusiastic about a future without constraints but, on the other, they remained psychologically marked by the oppressive political system they had overthrown.

In December 1989, all eyes were on Romania, the new emerging media laying the bases of democracy and, for the first time after a dark period, the voice of the people was finally listened to. Unfortunately, the journalists in post-communist Romania did not yet master a deeply embedded culture of professionalism and the government continued to exert a certain control over the media, especially over television and radio channels. According to Peter Gross,

> "in the simplest formulation, Romanian journalism in the 1989-1996 period was a mixture of polemics, rumor, and half-accurate, incomplete, and biased information. It was a highly politicized and partisan journalism, and the few attempts at neutrality failed. In short, Romanian journalism began its post-communist era in an amateur state, and by 1996 it had become, at best, pre-professional, a pattern discernible in the majority of post-1989 East European nations" (Gross cited in Carey, 2004: 195-196).

Up to the present, although journalism and its mechanisms have evolved and refined, the media environment seems to be increasingly dominated by press barons, the newspapers becoming a source of economic and professional control, while the freedom of expression is often misunderstood, taking the form of abusive intrusions in the private, political and social life. The present national press is characterised by a witty, yet incisive and mocking style. After two decades of democracy and modernisation, Romania's history is still in the making, the press contributing to the reconstruction of a nation which was left in a severe state of economic and social stagnation.

In November – December 2009, the media wrote a new decisive chapter in the Romanian history on the occasion of the presidential elections, whose echoes in the international press were best reflected in translation. The political campaigns of the two most important candidates, Traian Băsescu (former president) and Mircea Geoană (former foreign minister), took place in a very unstable context marked by recession. The press was clearly divided into two groups: the supporters and the attackers of Liberal Democratic Party (PD-L), of which Băsescu had been the president.

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We thought it would be interesting to observe and analyse those articles translated from and for the international press in order to examine the ways in which source texts are re-created and edited according to the expectations of the target audience or, in other others, according to the *skopos theory* postulated by functionalist approaches. For example, on December 10th, 2009, the British weekly *The Economist* published an article that was used by two Romanian newspapers on December 11th, 2009 – *România liberă* [The Free Romania] and *Ziarul de Iaşi* [The Iaşi Newspaper]. The title was preserved in the Romanian translation: "Traian Băsescu wins a tight but mucky race. Now he must keep his promises" [Băsescu câştigă o cursă strânsă, dar murdară. Acum trebuie să-şi ţină promisiunile]. The Romanian press obviously had enough material and resources to produce local news, but the perspective of a famous foreign publication is always considered to be reliable and trustworthy, making the readers feel important whenever they read that Romania's position within Europe (and even worldwide) has come to the fore.

Before proceeding to any sort of analysis, it is important to make a brief description of the three newspapers selected for this purpose. *The Economist*, which dates back to 1843, addresses a well-educated audience informed weekly on world politics, business, finance, science, technology and the arts, with an average circulation of more than 1.6 million copies per issue in 2009, half of them sold in North America. A peculiarity of the publication, stipulated on their website, is that except special reports, articles are not signed, representing the work of a group of people, despite the fact that the newspaper has always rejoiced an illustrious staff, such as Garret FitzGerald (Ireland's prime minister from 1982 to 1987) or Luigi Einaudi (the president of Italy from 1948 to 1955).

The editors and journalists from *The Economist* often cooperate on articles, considering that what is written is more important than who writes it. If the original articles are never signed, it is less likely for translations to be signed either. According to Bielsa and Bassnett, translations have to be unsigned because "invisibility guarantees the good quality of the translation which, like edition, has to respect the work and vision of the original producer of the news" (2009: 92). It seems that excellent news sense and good writing skills sometimes override translation, which is seen as a failure to replicate a source text exactly, whether it comes down to losing certain features in the target text or adding them. In other words, "the more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text" (Venuti, 1995: 1-2).

Founded in 1887, *România liberă* was the official organ of the Romanian Communist party until 1989, being presently one of Romania's most important national newspapers and aiming at an intellectual and middle-class readership. *România liberă* is also one of the national publications that seemed to support Băsescu during the presidential elections; it even took his side in a scandal that had shaken the country when the opposition came up with a video in which the former president was hitting a 10-year old boy during a 2004 campaign rally. That video

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was purposefully presented in the press just a few days before the final election tour. The journalists from *România liberă* denounced this type of dirty competition promoted by the opposition, and regarded it as a personal revenge of one of the most powerful man in Romania, Dinu Patriciu (CEO of The Rompetrol Group, a multinational oil company), against the man who had ordered his imprisonment in 2005. *România liberă* reminded its readers that Romania wants concrete solutions to its multiple problems instead of a media circus and a brain washing experiment.

Finally, *Ziarul de Iaşi* is a local Romanian newspaper addressing a majority of male (51,20 % between July 2007 – July 2008), middle-class (53%), but intellectual readers. At local level, it is considered to be the most reliable newspaper of Iaşi, being preferred by most of the local business men.

As a first remark, in Great Britain, as well as in Romania, the national press is more important than the local one, and taking into account that English is today's *lingua franca* we shall compare the articles published by the two national newspapers, *The Economist* and *România liberă*, more in terms of political perceptions, than of an in-depth analysis that would be hard to follow in all details by outsiders to the Romanian political scene. Even if *The Economist* tries to be impartial and objective, we can detect from the title a certain grudge against Băsescu by calling him a president who "won a mucky race", with reference to the irregularities reported even by the Romanian press during the elections, when both candidates were suspected of election fraud, of bribing the people for their votes, and of spending public money for their electoral campaigns.

Even the photo taken from AFP and representing Băsescu in the middle of a crowd of politicians, waving to the people and talking to the prime-minister who holds the flag, has a mocking explanation – "A sea captain rules the waves" (with reference to Băsescu's former profession, i.e. that of a sailor, before becoming the president of Romania). *România liberă* replaced this photo with a more neutral one, taken during a press conference, a decision that was probably motivated by in-house reasons or by the ideological position of the publication. Instead, the newspaper constantly mentions the foreign source, using sentences such as "scrie *The Economist*, citat de Newsin" [writes *The Economist*, cited by Newsin – my translation], "În ediția de joi, prestigiosul săptămânal britanic dedică alegerilor prezidențiale din România o analiză intitulată «Împotriva tuturor posibilităților», având ca subtitlu: «Traian Băsescu câştigă o cursă strânsă, dar murdară. Acum trebuie să-şi țină promisiunile»" [In its Thursday edition, the prestigious British newspaper dedicates an analysis to the Romanian presidential elections entitled 'Against all odds', having as subtitle: 'Traian Băsescu wins a tight but mucky race. Now he must keep his promises' – my translation], "*The Economist* spune despre Mircea Geoană" [*The Economist* says about Mircea Geoană that...], "Potrivit publicației cu profil economic" [According to this economic publication...], etc.

Once again, *The Economist* seems to hide its own opinions behind other people's declarations or actions: "The campaign was exceptionally dirty: observers think that both sides cheated", "Supporters who once saw him as the apostle of

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clean government now regard him as the lesser of two evils", "Critics make fun of his private life, colourful even by local standards", "some feared". Instead, they overtly describe Băsescu as an "exasperating former sea-captain" and a "stalwart Atlanticist".

All in all, the above-mentioned Romanian publications faithfully translated the original text, but the journalist-translators were forced to reorganize and reshape the material because as random as information filtering may seem to those who aren't trained as journalists this process is subject to internal (the reason why an event becomes press information, how the text is constructed) and external (the status of the publication and the journalist, modifications that appear in the psycho-moral profile of the audience) constraints that are extremely important in editing news agency source texts (cf. Coman, 2009: 112). This is what Bielsa and Bassnett call *transediting*, a concept initially proposed by Karen Stetting, which represents a solution of compromise between *editing* and *translating*, and which refers "more specifically to the form that translation takes when it has become integrated in news production within the journalistic field" (2009: 64).

All the essential information is preserved in the target texts, as well as the numbers and percentages. The only thing that differs between the English and Romanian articles is the order in which the events are presented, and between the two Romanian articles produced at national and local level the citation of the original sources – *The Economist* and *Newsin*, respectively. On the other hand, we can say that, apart from news restructuring, we also have here a case of direct translation, considered by Bielsa and Bassnett the least common form of news translation (2009: 12), with the observation that the English text was modified in translation in terms of stylistic conventions. The Romanian translations can be considered good translations that do not lead to any misinterpretations, which, then again, raises the problem of training the journalists for becoming translators and vice-versa, and that a good news translator has to be in the first place a good journalist. Some news agencies are not ready yet to bear the costs implied by this process, although some others have started to pay translation courses for their editorial staff.

On the other hand, the French press seemed to lay more emphasis on the financial crisis that, in their opinion, influenced the course of the 2009 presidential elections. Here we have a more obvious example of massive reorganization and reshaping of the news that are coming from a different geographic, socio-cultural and linguistic context. *Le Monde*, the world's most important French-language daily, published on November 23rd, 2009 an article entitled "Vers un second tour pour l'élection présidentielle roumaine" [*Romania is having a second election tour*]. *Le Monde*'s five-section article is comprised by Hotnews (one of Romania's most accessed online press sites) in only two sections and one lead.

The first obvious difference between the two articles is to be found in the Romanian title - "Le Monde: În plină criză, Băsescu îl va înfrunta în turul doi pe Geoană, susţinut de fostul partid communist PSD" [Le Monde: In the context of the

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financial crisis, Băsescu will compete in the second election tour with Geoană, supported by PSD, the former communist party] – which apart from being much longer than the original, underlines the fact that Băsescu, the representative of the people, is actually fighting against former communists. This clearly changes the status of the article for a Romanian audience still marked by the communist regime, and the ideological implications are different for the source and target readership. By modifying the title in the target language, the Romanian journalists offer Băsescu a competing edge against his political rival and put him in the spotlight, unlike the French publication which remained impartial and presented the events from a more general perspective. On the one hand, journalists often write as though they are addressing "a homogeneous group of people with shared beliefs and values whose defining feature is the newspaper that they read" (Reah, 1998: 36) and, on the other, they create media frames by providing a certain context for the readers, reinforcing stereotypes, determining judgements and decisions, and drawing "attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements" (Gambier, 2006: 11).

Also, the Romanian journalists preserved only a few parts of the French article, focusing on the confrontation between the two most important candidates of the presidential elections (whereas *Le Monde* had also a third candidate in view, the liberal Crin Antonescu), and the political and social situation of a country ruled by an interim government after the dismissal of the prime-minister. The attention of the Romanian audience is thus drawn to the most important dates of the electoral period, October 13th (the day the deputies adopted the censorship motion against the prime-minister) and December 6th (when the second tour was scheduled). The two articles were published on the same day, which proves that the Romanian journalists were working under serious spatial and temporal constraints, the newsworthiness of that particular story depending on serious editorial decisions regarding its immediate publication.

A particular case of news transformation is practiced by the European Commission's latest multilingual site displaying the most relevant press articles on European affairs in collaboration with a consortium lead by Courrier International, composed of *Internazionale* (Italy), *Forum Polityka* (Poland) and *Courrier Internacional* (Portugal). Launched on May 26th, 2009, PRESSEUROP.EU. monitors daily about 250 international and European publications, and offers the public a variety of press articles and archives in 10 different languages. What is interesting about this site is that, starting from a given article, the journalists select the information from the original text and sum it up in all the 10 available languages, not losing track of the source, which is always mentioned in the right. If the readers access the respective link, they are led to the site of the original producer of the news.

For example, an article published on November 19th, 2009 in *Gândul* [The Thought] – a Romanian newspaper founded recently (2005), but which became quite popular thanks to an experienced and professional team – was included on the

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site as one single informative section. The original title, "Cei trei granzi ai României au importat modelul dezbaterilor din Botswana. Vezi cum se negociază la sânge întâlnirea dintre prezidențiabililor americani" [Big three in Romania import debate model from Bostwana. Read about the fierce meeting of the American presidents], initially very long, was finally reduced to "Campanie prezidențială după model afgan". The comprised source text was, in its turn, translated differently into English [Election brings out Africa obsession] and French [Campagne présidentielle à l'afghane].

Whereas the Romanian and French versions are almost identical, including the title, this is not the case with the English version, which seems to explicitate the main theme of the original article both in the title and in the first line of the résumé – "The Romanian nation seems to be obsessed with the idea of being compared unfavourably to Africa and other developing parts of the world" – although the author of the Romanian source text from *Gândul* had not either overtly stated, or implied such an idea in his article. The English and French versions also use a punctuation mark that cannot be found in the Romanian version – "This modus operandi is peculiar to Romanians, «but, let us not forget, to weak democracies, too, like Afghanistan, Botswana or Ukraine **!** » " [Ces habitudes sont spécifiques aux Roumains, «mais n'oublions pas qu'elles le sont aussi aux démocraties faibles, comme en Afghanistan, au Botswana ou en Ukraine **!** »], maybe with the intended purpose of dramatizing the entire situation.

The original article published in *Gândul* was heavily reshaped and reorganized, and the result is a completely different text translated into 10 languages. This is a clear example of selective appropriation of textual material, because the journalist-translators omit important parts of the Romanian article and add information that is not even present in the source text, emphasizing "particular aspects of a narrative encoded in the source text" or "aspects of the larger narrative in which it is embedded" (Baker, 2006: 114). The initial author mentioned the names of the three candidates only in the title and in the first line of the source article (unlike its short versions into Romanian, English and French, which focus on these three candidates), saying that "avoiding TV debates before the presidential elections and the endless fights regarding their organisation doesn't characterize the political life of Bucharest" – my translation – (the author used in fact another culture-bound term, "on the shore of *Dâmbovița*", the main river crossing Romania's capital, the use of which would have been pointless or irrelevant in translation because a foreign audience may have never heard of this toponym), and continuing with examples of African, Ukrainian and American candidates who refused to appear on TV before the presidential elections, but who became presidents in the end. The main idea was that it's always better to have a "bad press" than a "bad debate".

From the analyses presented above, we can observe that source text information was generally adjusted to target-culture readership. There were, however, the significant exceptions of the European Commission's site –

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Presseurop -, the mere purpose of its translations in several languages being to convey information without any further concern for the cultural and ideological background of the readership. Although news translator is seen as a re-creator, a writer who, "unlike the literary translator, does not owe respect and faithfulness to the source text" (Bielsa and Bassnett, 2009: 65), the main purpose of the target text being that of providing information about an event in a concise and clear way, attention has to be paid to all the linguistic, ideological, cultural and sociological constraints implied by news translation in terms of negotiation and conscious selection and recreation of the content in the target language.

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