

Riggs, Ashley (2020). *Stylistic Deceptions in Online News. Journalistic Style and the Translation of Culture*. London & New York: Bloomsbury. 207 pp, £66.50. ISBN 9781350114173.

Over the past two decades news translation research has proved to be a fruitful subfield of investigation within Translation Studies. The field illustrates how translation practice can provide not only broader insights into the conceptualization of translation, but also problematise the author's authority as well as the status of source and target texts. There have been relevant publications summarizing the development of research on these topics (such as Valdeón (2015) and van Doorslaer (2021, *forthcoming*)), the methodological issues related to this kind of research (a special issue of *Across Languages and Cultures*; see Davier *et al.* 2018), and the changes in practice and conceptualization due to media convergence (Davier and Conway 2019).

Ashley Riggs now adds to this field a monograph specifically focusing on the position and impact of (journalistic) style on the process of conveying and translating culture(s). Not only have style issues hardly been investigated in news translation research but this has been an underresearched topic in Journalism Studies more generally. Whereas stylistic features are relatively popular—although not always easy to investigate—in literature-oriented Translation Studies, it seems that in journalistic discourse, their impact and importance are often understated. Riggs' book has the merit of questioning this commonly accepted, perhaps even slightly hierarchical distinction. The volume convincingly shows that journalistic style—both in the source text and in translation—does matter and does potentially contribute to a particular framing.

The case study dealt with in detail is the 2016 terrorist attack in Nice, France: on the evening of 14th of July, Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel drove a truck into crowds of people celebrating Bastille Day, causing the deaths of 86 people and injuring several hundred. In particular, the book under review studies the news coverage of the attack in selected online newspapers in the UK, Spain and the French-speaking part of Switzerland. In these three different linguistic and cultural spaces the author examines alliteration, assonance, metaphor and modality as stylistic features in the news sources. The book has the clear structure of a PhD study: an introductory part is followed by a chapter on cultural representation as translation and on journalistic guidelines; another chapter situates politics, social attitudes, language and news in the three different societies; a further chapter is devoted to analyzing stylistic features in the news, and a conclusion offers thoughts on the possible consequences for journalism and Translation Studies.

Like other disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences, Translation Studies has gone through a period of controversy about the value and the

epistemological impact of activist research. The approach of this book is reminiscent of those discussions. It is quite generally accepted that the study of activist translation and translators in relation to social movement theory has added new perspectives and value to the discipline, for example in the case of studies on interventionist translation or the group identity of volunteer translator communities (see Brownlie 2016 for a larger overview). In these cases the *object of study* has activist characteristics. Less generally accepted, however, is the position of the *researcher* in this regard. Some contend that researchers can show commitment themselves; others will be much more cautious and argue that activist aims or intentions undermine the specificity of the researcher's position. "Insofar as researchers who have these goals aim to influence and change perceptions and situations in the world, they can be themselves called activist" (Brownlie 2016).

Riggs is sometimes quite explicit in the formulation of the goals of her research. It is her "aim to demonstrate" (21) that the Muslim identity of the Nice attacker influenced the coverage. Her starting point is that in news coverage "the anti-Muslim prejudice [is] often present" (6), that "the media participates in a discourse of 'Us' versus 'Them' that contributes to the polarization of communities" (20) and that by studying journalistic language "we can perhaps learn how to counter it" (20). These are obviously noble ideas and aims one can sympathize with as a private individual, but to what extent can these points of departure jeopardize the researcher's ability to investigate in an unbiased way? For example, the following quote seems to represent a missed opportunity: "Often, a partial and stereotypical image" of migrants and Muslims is provided, the author states (24). Over the past decade, Translation Studies has produced a considerable number of imagological case studies specifically focusing on journalistic discourse in translation (see for instance van Doorslaer *et al.* 2016). Unfortunately, there is no systematic imagological investigation testing the image claim. There are also clear tendencies in the press explicitly aiming at overcoming stereotypes. It would have been highly interesting to see that imagological claim being tested. Instead, as a generalization it is declared that "the press effectively silences these groups" (25).

Despite the obvious merits of the volume, such examples illustrate that personal commitment and convictions also run the risk of being counterproductive for solid research. Selectivity of arguments is unavoidable in a literature review on a broader topic. In this case, however, it is also traceable at the methodological level, i.e., in the analysis of the material itself, when the author states that "in the articles in my corpus, the selection of themes leaves out examples of positive coexistence of culturally different groups" (157). Some readers could get the impression that the points of departure, the selection of both background literature and of examples analyzed in the volume all point in the same direction. Although that one side

is convincingly illustrated, more counter-argumentation and illustration would have made the study more diverse, multi-perspectivist and scholarly nuanced.

The generally critical attitude in the book towards the media and journalists, who are quite harshly criticized because of “the essentialist, rigid, reductive, and negative representations of Muslims that often dominate in the media” (159) provides a concrete example. It seems that the specificity of the journalist’s function is sometimes subordinated to ethical or ideological issues. Journalists are reporting, which means that they also partly reflect the emotions and experiences in society. Especially in the period of the terrorist attacks in France, Belgium, Germany, Spain and other countries, the topic dominated the minds of many Westerners. Was that only a consequence of media attention, or was the media reflecting the growing unrest? To what extent are journalists also reproducing existing and new categorizations in society, for instance under the influence of the Rushdie affair that is described as “a watershed moment in the history of Muslims’ relations with British society” (55)? And what is our authority, as researchers, to prescribe to journalists that they “should [...] optimize communication” (157) between cultures?

Last but not least: this review is published in a Translation Studies journal, so some might ask at this stage where translation exactly shows up. Well, in this book translation is not—or certainly not mainly—considered interlingually. From the start, the author explains that “translation is conceived of here as the process of re-presenting societies and groups for foreign readers” and that “cultural re-presentation is translation” (6). News translation has certainly contributed to the broadening of the concept of translation, as was mentioned at the beginning of this review. In most cases, however, this was linked to the complexity of (often implicit) interlingual and intralingual rewriting processes in news production. Riggs’ approach studies news discourse as cultural representation, and considers that a form of translation. In some aspects this is closer to the concept of ‘cultural translation’ than to the ‘translation of culture’ that appears in the book subtitle. Expanded concepts of translation (such as those including intralingual and intersemiotic translation) have been very productive for the discipline in general. And yet one may wonder to what extent the use of the concept in this volume is still specific—and as such, key to Translation Studies. If every cultural representation can be called translation, why not call it ‘representation’, ‘mediation’, ‘intercultural communication’ or even ‘communication’ in general, as the concluding chapter even states that “every form of communication is translation” (155)? Seen from such a perspective, what would then still be the conceptual added value of translation?

Overstretching the concept of translation also leads to a lack of analytical power, as sometimes becomes clear in the analysis chapter. This is partly related to the difficulties of assessing and interpreting style issues, especially when combined with monolingual corpora based on a concept of cultural

representation as translation “even if there is no direct passage from one language to another” (25). It leads to sometimes predictable conclusions, such as: some newspapers are “more likely to recognize difficulties and discrimination faced by Muslims”, and some newspapers “historicize and contextualize more” than others (148). In addition, the author herself admits that, because of the limitation to a few stylistic characteristics, sometimes “the corpus is relatively small” (153). The analytical value of, for instance, alliteration is also debatable in some of the examples. The author states that the “political leanings of the sources come through in these examples, in part because they are reinforced via alliteration” (100). However, illustrations such as “**s**tate of **s**ecurity”, “**p**leading for the **p**reservation” or “the **r**ole of **r**eligion” (101-102; alliteration emphasis in original) are not very convincing in this regard.

Despite my sympathy for enlarged conceptualizations of translation, the volume shows that ‘traditional’ interlingual transfer and comparison sometimes offer better perspectives and opportunities for analytical relevance. Comparing linguistic and cultural differences in the role and functioning of alliteration and modality, for instance, would have been more in line with the core business of Translation Studies, but such approaches are not elaborated in this volume. Instead, the author returns to the starting point regarding commitment in the conclusion: “What I would particularly like to concentrate on here [...] is that these messages are highly likely to stoke fear and a sense of threat” (156). That might be true, but such research does not really belong to the expertise of Translation Studies’ nor of Journalism Studies’ scholars, especially in the absence of any reader-response or reception research.

To sum up, this undertaking is very brave and innovative in its attempt to integrate a focus on stylistic elements in journalistic discourse. However, the application of a general and overstretched concept of ‘cultural translation’ dilutes the approach both conceptually and analytically. As such, the relevance of this approach for Translation Studies as a discipline is limited, even if its recent tendencies towards a pronounced extension of the objects of study are considered.

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