



BRILL

Book Review



Federico Zanettin, *News Media Translation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. viii + 238 pages, ISBN: 9781108470704.

Translation has always been at the very heart of how news is produced. Its role in today's globalized information flows is even more pervasive and, as the landscape of news media evolves to introduce new platforms and formats, translation activities often straddle different semiotic codes. This is perhaps why news translation has had to wait till the first two decades of the 21st century for the emergence of a critical mass of researchers, studies, themes and approaches able to make justice to the specific aspects, problems and practices related to translation in news and journalistic production (even in spite of the fact that news texts have always been used as sources of examples and data in research on translation). News translation is now an area of research in its own right and Federico Zanettin's volume provides a timely, wide-ranging and accurate overview of the available studies in this area, which the author complements with an original contribution in which he applies a "novel approach" (p. 133) based on ethnomethodology.

"News translation" is still used (e.g. by Davier, 2019) as a label for indicating the object of this emerging research field. Some scholars consider this label too restrictive and have proposed alternatives, such as "journalistic research" (Valdeón, 2015), so as to include all journalistic products that do not fall into the category of news, e.g. features, interviews and op-ed pieces. To identify the area of inquiry covered by his monograph, Zanettin has opted for "news media translation" (NMT), a label that (as he explains on p. 86, perhaps surprisingly late in the book) is even more inclusive and comprises translation (and interpreting) in all forms of media that are meant to deliver news to the general public: print media (newspapers and magazines), broadcast news (radio and television) and digital media (e.g. online newspapers, news blogs, videos and live news streaming). This, the author argues, highlights different media and includes translation activities performed by different actors and

at different stages of news production, including nonprofessional translators and news producers. Also, the label is meant to highlight points of contact between journalistic translation and areas such as audiovisual translation and research on translation and politics, conflict and war.

The existence of different labels for indicating this area of research is perhaps due to the fluid and elusive nature of translation (as both a practice and a textual product) in the context of news gathering and dissemination. Even though translation is a pervasive activity in the production of news, the way it is carried out (and presented to readers) is very frequently not in line with more common views of translation based on the expectation of a linear correspondence between a source and a target text. This poses specific conceptual and definitional difficulties and justifies the adoption of a variety of methodological approaches. These are discussed at length in what is the *de facto* “part 1” of the book (Chapters 1 to 3). The remaining chapter (n. 4), or “part 2”, is the one containing the author’s original contribution to research in the area.

Taken together, the first three chapters in the volume amount to an extensive overview of concepts, approaches and findings in both translation studies and other disciplines (such as journalism studies and media studies) that are relevant for the characterization and study of NMT. The overview is a veritable *tour de force* which provides a highly informative, exhaustive, insightful, and often illuminating account. The discussion is likely to be of interest not only for scholars interested in NMT but also for researchers working on related topics and areas. These might include the role of English as both a source and a target language (see, in particular, pp. 34–35), the role of translation in creating national identities (pp. 20–24) or the ways in which the emergence of “screen culture” is affecting translation in general (pp. 36–39). The author is to be especially praised for the accuracy and clarity of exposition throughout the overview.

More specifically, Chapter 1 is a discussion of some historical and social contexts in which the various “metaphorical” conceptualizations of translation, and related terminology, have evolved. Zanettin starts (pp. 10–11) from the idea that any definition of translation is based on a metaphor and notes that in most European languages translation is still generally characterized as “transfer”. This metaphor is often associated with two other key ideas: one is the existence of clearly identifiable source and target poles for the translation; the other is the existence of clearly defined boundaries between these poles, usually identified with national and linguistic boundaries. Throughout the rest of the chapter, Zanettin convincingly shows how in recent decades, as a result of changes in material culture and technology (leading to the emergence of online digital platforms and the rise of screen culture), the boundaries

between interlingual and intralingual translation have become blurred and the same process of “convergence” that has been observed for media systems (i.e. text, sounds and images reunited in a single digital interface) is taking place in the practice of translation. As a result, the meaning of translation “proper”, in the sense of interlingual transfer, is being expanded to include other metaphorical designations, such as “transediting” and “localization”. In particular, translation is affected by the new participatory culture facilitated by online social networking platforms, with the ensuing redefinition of the roles of consumers and producers (p. 38). This has led to the emergence of new translation practices (e.g. collaborative translation) and products (e.g. interpreted live-streamed press conferences).

Chapter 2 is dedicated to the role of translation in news production. The chapter includes three dense but characteristically clear accounts. The first is a section providing a historical overview of the (often unacknowledged) role of translation in news products. The second part illustrates the role of translation in today’s process of news production. Here, following Palmer (2009), the author rightly decides to treat the role of translation in news gathering and news dissemination separately, which makes the description of the intricacies of the translation process easier to follow. The section on news gathering (pp. 56–60) looks at the role of foreign correspondents and news agencies, charting the transformations both have undergone over the last few decades and, in particular (p. 60), the impact that the spread of English as a *Lingua Franca* has had on their work practices and the type of information they provide to foreign local media outlets. In the section on news dissemination (pp. 60–69), the author shows how translation practices vary according to media outlet type, languages (and language direction) and geographical area of dissemination. Chapter 2 then goes on to discuss some key issues and concepts in NMT research. Two of these are worth mentioning here: “source text (in)stability” (pp. 71–74) and “translation (in)visibility” (pp. 74–76). The first concerns the recurrent difficulty of identifying a specific source text for translated news content. This is both because unacknowledged translation (some would call it plagiarism) is an accepted practice in news writing and because the information presented in the target language text often derives from a combination of sources. The (lack of) visibility of translation in the news is connected to another interesting concept, i.e. the “illusion of transparency” (p. 75) for news readers: in short, when a news article is ostensibly presented as a translation, readers in the target language may assume a relation of linear correspondence between the target and the source text, whereas in fact the target text may have resulted from a process of substantial transformation that readers are bound to remain oblivious to.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of current research on NMT, presented according to three general perspectives: process-, product- and culture-oriented research. Of particular use is the separate section offering an overview of the literature in which studies are grouped on the basis of the specific language investigated in combination with English. The attention given to non-European languages is particularly welcome. There is much to be learned, for instance, from the studies that describe the way translation contributes to news production in China (pp. 93–94), where – contrary to what normally happens in European newsrooms – the tasks of selecting, translating and editing news items are given to different groups of people.

Chapter 4 is where the author presents his own original contribution to NMT research, based on the application of ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1967), a sociological approach that allows for the study of how meanings in text are constituted “indexically” (i.e. locally) and “reflexively” (i.e. with reference to context). Zanettin focuses, in particular, on the application of two specific analytical tools in ethnomethodology, i.e. conversation analysis (CA) and membership categorization analysis (MCA). CA has already been used extensively in research on dialogue interpreting and the author applies it to the analysis of two short extracts from an interpreter-mediated political talk show. This is the part of the volume I have found less appealing: the concise discussion of the two examples (pp. 146–147) hardly justifies the depth with which CA as a method is illustrated in the preceding pages (pp. 139–146). The impression is that the discussion of examples is essentially a token move aimed at showing the relevance and significance of interpreter-mediated events within the framework of NMT.

Of much greater interest is Zanettin’s application of MCA in two case studies of published newspapers texts. MCA is an analytical method aimed at elucidating the particular ways in which people, actions and events are made sense of in a given interactional context. To put it very succinctly, the analysis is based on the identification of lexical elements acting as categorization devices that guide the readers’ evaluative and ideological perceptions of the entities and activities mentioned in a text. Originally developed for the study of conversational interaction, and later extended to monologic text types, MCA has never been applied to news translation before. The first case study (pp. 158–167) shows how an article translated into Italian (and acknowledged as a translation) orients the reader to construct a narrative that is different from that emerging in the English source text. This is done, in the translation, through the omission of “categorizing” elements in key sections of the text (e.g. the headline and blurb) and lexical choices that guide the reader’s interpretation of the story: a “journalist/reporter” in the original (with the headline and

blurb explicitly predicating the protagonist as such) emerges as principally a female “victim of (gendered) violence” in the translation (in which both the headline and the blurb do not mention the protagonist’s profession). The second case study (pp. 172–184) applies MCA to a set of newspaper articles *not* ostensibly presented as translations and complements it with a corpus-based analysis aimed at comparing the collocational profiles (and the semantic prosodies) of the lexical items used in the texts in two languages to refer to the same events – the underlying idea being that “[c]ommonsense categorical knowledge can be provided by collocational information” (p. 169). These two case studies are particularly useful and interesting from a methodological point of view, as they convincingly illustrate the potential of ethnomethodology in characterizing the ways in which translated news content (whether it is openly presented as a translation or not) presents the “same” event differently to different readerships. The application of MCA in particular is a (much welcome) *pragmatics-based* approach, insisting as it does on giving pre-eminence to context and treating the co-construction of meaning as resulting from underlying mechanisms that are basically governed by relevance.

It is in Chapter 4 that Zanettin’s own essentially constructivist approach to research becomes fully apparent. This is described earlier in the volume as an approach that sees reality (and therefore meaning) as “something that is construed as it is being described and explained” (p. 137). It is contrasted with “essentialist and positivistic views of reality and social research” (p. 137), which the author sees as leading to a view of translation (and interpreting) practices that is too mechanistic because it is based on a definition of translation as the neutral transfer of information. Incidentally, this may be the reason why Zanettin’s otherwise accurate and exhaustive overview of research in the previous chapters tends to ignore studies that use news texts mainly as data without couching them in a discussion of the specificities of news production. This choice appears to be more than legitimate, given that Zanettin’s focus is clearly on the ways in which translation products and processes are affected by the *specificities* of news production and dissemination. Yet it may give the impression that the overview is less comprehensive than it is. One area of journalistic translation that might have been at least mentioned is popular science (e.g. Merakchi and Rogers, 2013; Musacchio and Zorzi, 2019), a field where translated texts are often not just different language versions of the same material but accommodate the cultural expectations and experience of the target readerships. Another gap in terms of thematic coverage is a discussion of the ways in which technology (especially machine translation) is affecting actual textual transfer processes in NMT, an aspect that is mentioned only in passing in the Conclusion to the volume (p. 186).

Minor quibbles apart, the volume by Federico Zanettin is an extremely useful overview, and a convincing practical exemplification, of the conceptual and methodological tools that can be brought to bear in the study of such an elusive object as translation in the news media.

Giuseppe Palumbo | ORCID: 0000-0003-0829-9118
Associate Professor of English Language and Translation,
University of Trieste, Trieste, Italy
gpalumbo@units.it

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