



Allameh Tabataba'i University
Faculty of Persian Literature & Foreign Languages
Department of English Translation Studies

**The Effect of Political Ideology on the Translation of
Journalistic Texts**

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Translation Studies

Advisor: Dr. Zia Tajeddin

Reader: Dr. Ahmad Seddiqi

By: Mohammad Javad Shamsali

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Approved and Evaluated by the Thesis Committee:

.....*Zia Tajeddin*..... Advisor: Dr. Zia Tajeddin

.....*A. Seddiqi*..... Reader: Dr. Ahmad Seddiqi

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Abstract

Considering the important role that media play in everyday-life of different societies, conducting research on the effect of political ideologies of different media in the process of their news production is of significant importance. Since a major part of news produced by media comprises translated news, transjournalism can be studied in terms of the effects of the political ideologies of media. Based on different political tendencies of different media, such potential effects may vary from one medium to the other.

The Hypotheses of the present research were:

1. The political ideologies of media do not affect transjournalists in the process of their translations.
2. There is no significant difference between conservative and pro-reform media in terms of the language of their translated news and journalistic items.

In order to examine the extent and type of different political ideologies of different media and based on the categorization made by Teun and Dijk (1998) with regard to different types of ideological changes in the discourse

of media, the present research selects a piece of news from the Associated Press and examines different translations of the said item, rendered by 30 translators from different media, in terms of the effects of different political ideologies.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

People are informed about the events around the world most commonly through translations of news that media present to them. Each media has its own political ideology according to which they apply their strategies for designing the format and content of their editorials and news items. These differences in ideologies are what make the news items taken from the same source sound and sense differently.

As a result, the translators omit some parts of the news, add some extra information to it, exaggerate some parts or underestimate some others, and choose different equivalents for a specific part, in order to make it compatible with their strategies, and render the piece of news in accordance with their political ideology.

Significance of Study

Nowadays, as a result of vast communication and interaction between people, the role of news and mass media has become crucially important. The media and press shape the attitude of people towards their society and the world. The influence of media and the press on public opinion is so important that, they sometimes change the path of social and political

processes and even reverse them. It could be said that not only is the public opinion informed by the media and press but also it is *led* by them.

Every news agency, newspaper, magazine, radio or TV network has a specific orientation and tries to pursue it through specific strategies. Meanwhile, translation of news and journalistic texts constitutes a major part of the news-related activities. It goes beyond the national borders and informs the people of what is going on in other parts of the world. Translation of news is like a window through which the public opinion is informed about the world. Therefore, it becomes necessary to conduct researches on the strategies adopted by the media and press in translating the news.

Purpose of the Study

There are numerous media, each with their own presuppositions about any given ideological issue, which may bring about a variety of differences or even paradoxical approaches. Such differences will appear in translations and need to be addressed in translation of journalistic texts. The present research intends to address the effect of political ideology of transjournalists (journalist-translators) on their translations. It also tries to figure out which

media tend to influence their political ideologies in translation of news and other journalistic texts.

Research Questions

Taking into consideration what was discussed above, the following questions can be formulated:

1. Do ideologies affect the translation of journalistic texts?
2. If so, which media use more ideological terms in their news production?

Hypotheses

Examining the translations of journalistic texts, as well as the fact that most of the differences in these translations are the results of differences in political ideologies, suggests the following hypotheses:

The political ideologies of media do not affect transjournalists in the process of their translations.

There is no significant difference between conservative and pro-reform media in terms of the language of their translated news and journalistic items.

Definition of Key Terms

Ideology: When using the term ideology, the present research takes the definition suggested by Perez (2003:5): Ideology “consists of the set of ideas, values and beliefs that govern a community by virtue of being regarded as norms”

Political Ideology: The present research mainly deals with the political aspect of the concept of ideology. Political ideology relates to the beliefs of a group. According to Sargent (1990:13): “A political ideology is not one that has to do with narrowly defined governmental activity; a political ideology touches on all aspects of the social system.”

Ideological Weight: In the present research, when a concept or term is open to different ideological interpretations and each ideological group has different perceptions of its background and philosophy, this phrase or concept carries an ideological weight.

Media: According to Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia (Jan 2007: paragraph 1): “**Media** may refer to:

In communication:

- Print media, communications delivered via paper
- Electronic media, communications delivered via electronic or electromechanical energy

o Multimedia, communications that incorporate multiple forms of information content and processing

• Published media, any media made available to the public

o Mass media, all means of mass communication

▪ Broadcast media, communications delivered over mass electronic communication networks

▪ News media, mass media focused on communicating news

▪ News media (United States), the news media of the United States of America”

Based on the above-mentioned points, in the present research, media is meant all forms of published media (audio, visual, print).

Conservative vs. Pro-reform Media: After 1997 presidential election in which the reformist candidate Mohammad Khatami became the winner, the calls for social and political reforms became manifest throughout the country. Meanwhile journalism became the battleground in which the split between two types of media became manifest more than ever before: Pro-reform vs. Conservative ones.

Conservative Media: As defined by Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (2004: 265), conservatism is "a political philosophy based on tradition and social stability, stressing

established institutions and preferring gradual development to abrupt changes". Based on this definition, the media which were against the reform movement and were the critics of the reformist government, were called conservative media. These press institutions put emphasis on the principles of revolution and of being committed to all of the previous revolutionary practices.

Pro-reform Media: As stated in Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia (2006:1), "A reform movement is a kind of social movement that aims to make gradual changes in certain aspects of society rather than rapid or fundamental changes. Reformists' ideas are often grounded in liberalism".

After 1997 reform movement in Iran, the number of the media which focused on the need for changing some of the revolutionary practices and adopting new political strategies, grew rapidly. These media are best known for their criticism of the ruling system and supporting the principles of modernism and civil society.

This fact distinguishes pro-reform media from the conservative ones which persist on being faithful to the political practices which were dominant during the first 19 years of post-revolution era.

Journalist: According to Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia (Jan 2007: paragraphs 1-3):

“A journalist is a person who practices journalism, the gathering and dissemination of information about current events, trends, issues and people....Reporters are one type of journalist. They create reports as a profession for broadcast or publication in mass media such as newspapers, television, radio, magazines, documentary film, and the Internet. Reporters find the sources for their work, their reports can be either spoken or written, and they are generally expected to report in the most objective and unbiased way to serve the public good....Depending on the context, the term journalist also includes various types of editors and visual journalists, such as photographers, graphic artists, and page designers.”

Based on the explanations rendered above, in this research the word journalist covers all the professionals who practice journalism and includes managing directors, license holders, strategic advisors, chief editors, editors, reporters and correspondents.

Transjournalism: In the present research, by transjournalism it means those areas of translation which deal with journalism and

vice versa. Therefore, the translators who work at media and translate news, editorials etc., are called transjournalists.

Interest: According to Teun and Dijk (1998:59) "Positive or negative opinions about "Our" or "Their" actions or conditions basically follow an evaluative logic based on a construction of what "Our" best interests are". In the present study, this term is used to describe the translational changes which were applied for "Our" interests or against the interests of "Others."

Polarization: According to Teun and Dijk (1998:57): "Opinions may be organized following an ideological pattern that polarizes in-groups and out-groups", namely "Self" vs. the "Others". In the present research it is used when a word or phrase is translated in such a way that explicitly or implicitly describes the "Others" as an opponent pole in relation with "Us"."

Attribution: According to Teun and Dijk (1998:58). "Attributions of negative actions to our enemies require that our enemies are described as responsible agents who are consciously aware of what they do and of the consequences of their actions, even if these actions may be branded as irrational or even crazy at the same time". In the present research it is used when a negative quality is attributed to "Others" or a positive one to "Us"."

Meta-opinions: According to Teun and Dijk (1998:58) "Opinions may be opinions about other opinions. Thus positive opinions about our enemies are disqualified. Doubts about the contents of the assertions of

others may be expressed by discrediting them as mere claims.” In the present research it is used when a disqualifying opinion is expressed against the opinions of “Others” or a qualifying opinion is expressed about “Our” opinions.

Unmentionables: According to Teun and Dijk (1998:60) “Negative information and negative opinions about “Us” may be left completely unsaid in excessive ideological confrontations” and this is the case when censorship is applied.

Arguments: According to Teun and Dijk (1998:60) “Opinions usually need support. They collocate with a sequence of assertions that make them more plausible by various rules of influence, based on attitudes or values. Possible negative opinions about “Us” are forestalled by implicit 'counter-arguments' against such opinions.” In the present research it is applied when an argument is used or some additional information is added for supporting opinions, which implicitly or explicitly express an opinion about other opinions, events and actions.

Using History: As stated by Teun and Dijk (1998), ideological opinions selectively invoke and hide history. In the present research, it is used when political ideological changes are exerted with reference to historical events and backgrounds.

Limitations

There were a number of restraining factors which constrained the process of research to a significant extent:

A. The main problem was finding the qualified participants who, on the one hand, could meet the qualifications of the present research and, on the other hand, were willing to devote their time and cooperate.

This had a number of reasons:

1. Since the research had to choose the participants from both conservative and pro-reform media, the researcher had to be very meticulous about choosing the right ones. Many of Iranian media are government-affiliated and state-run and due to the following factors their political positions are not clear enough:

a. They mostly try to pretend that they are impartial with regard to different political trends.

b. Because the managing directors, license holders, chief editors and other strategic positions are appointed by governmental bodies, the changes of governments, especially when the new government is from the opposite political wing, lead to changes in those positions as well as in the said media. This is while the journalists working in those media are still the same and in many cases they may have opposite political tendencies in

comparison with their managing directors, chief editors and other strategic ranks in those institutions. This organizational paradox within such media, made it too difficult to categorize them in either conservative or pro-reform side.

Therefore, the choice was so limited with regard to state-run media.

2. After the closure of a significant number of private political media in the recent years, the number of such media which all had a clear-cut political position reduced to a few numbers. This fact considerably restricted the choice of the present research in selecting the required participants.

3. Following the advent of Internet, the main News Agencies turned to broadcast their news online. As a result, they became an easily accessible source for all newspapers and other media. With translations of world news available on news agencies' websites, other newspapers and media could easily take their required news, specially translated ones, from such sources and consequently they found themselves free of the need to recruit translators. Such a trend in recent years has brought about a significant reduction in the number of transjournalists at media. Consequently the present research had a lot of limitations in finding the required number of transjournalists.

4. After finding the qualified transjournalists, many of them were unwilling to cooperate mainly because:

a. Media profession is so hectic and the workload is so heavy that not everybody has enough time to spend on non-work matters.

b. Or; there was just the matter of unwillingness on the side of transjournalists.

Due to the above-mentioned factors, this research was so restrained in choosing a more elaborate and comprehensive instrument and had to limit its work to just a concise piece of news (although the said instrument was so brief, it was meticulously and purposefully selected from different pieces of news so that it could meet the requirements of the research).

B. The researcher also had a lot of problems in finding the resources on the relationship between media and translation and specially the effect of political ideology on media translation.

C. The other significant problem in the face of the present study appeared in data analysis. Since ideology is an abstract and subjective issue, there was no concrete objective criterion in measuring the effects of ideology on transjournalism and it was so difficult to convert the subjective interpretations of such an abstract issue into concrete figures and numbers.