

Journalistic Translation. Lessons Taught and Learned on Ever-Shifting Grounds

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Abstract

Today more than ever, journalistic translation has become a necessity all over the world, in every language. Globalization, the intertwined economic fabric, reduced U.S. relevance in world matters, new players, and emerging economies and associations, among others, have made the translation of news imperative. The world needs journalistic translation to keep up with the times. To a large extent, journalism and translation have long shared the same cloak of invisibility of their makers' attempts to veil their subjective positioning. What happens when the veil is gone? This article discusses our experience in teaching journalistic translation at Universidad de Córdoba, Argentina: our best practices; the strategies that have contributed to our adaptation to changing times, and an *ad hoc* methodology for our students. Additionally, it will focus on our pedagogic ideas on genre, textual analysis, translation techniques, and translation-as-product development: Our lessons learned, and our lessons taught.

Keywords: bias, invisibility, journalistic translation, training translation, translation pedagogy.

Journalism is subjective. Freedom of the press is a recurrent and well-meaning catchphrase, but journalism is an intellectual discipline, so its freedom is inevitably relative. Journalism, as any other intellectual praxis, carries implicit subjectivities such as

historical conditions, technological resources, access to information, legislation, cultural level, background, skills, sagacity, intelligence and even the mood of those who write the news [Marín 2004: 11]. A journalist's subjectivity, in turn, combines with the economic, political, and ideological interests of every mass media company [Marín 2004: 12] everywhere in the world, resulting in further subjectivities on the part of the media. The triumph and tragedy of contemporary journalism is that, for almost two hundred years, it has made us believe in its objectivity. To a large extent, journalism and translation have long shared the same cloak of invisibility — an apparent asceticism of sorts — of their makers' attempts to veil their subjective positioning. However, what happens when the veil is gone? The real task of journalistic translation is unearthing these subjectivities to reformulate them in the target culture (while keeping the translator's own preconceptions and judgments at bay).

In 2022, a conference organized by the Canadian Association for Translation Studies was devoted to Translation and Journalism, 'A relatively new sub-domain in Translation Studies' [ACT-CATS], but at Universidad Nacional de Córdoba (UNC), in Argentina, Journalistic Translation has been a mandatory subject since 1990 in its five-year undergraduate translation program. These almost 35 years have not only witnessed tremendous advances in Translation Studies (in the role of the translator, the position of the discipline, the focus of study, methodologies, or innovations applied), but they have also seen immense changes in journalism (not only in format and technology, but in interests, focus, production, marketing, and political stances, just to name a few), which takes form in the current divisionism in many countries all over the world. The UNC subject of Journalistic Translation has not only embraced these changes but also adapted to the different guises of both disciplines and their relationship.

Much though journalism might be deemed one of the greatest cultural exports of the United Kingdom –after all, contemporary news reporting was largely shaped in the Western hemisphere by 19th century British newspapers–, journalism varies to some degree between nations, not to mention within the same country regarding socio cultural background of its readership, prestige or seriousness of newspapers, editorial gate keeping, political stance of media corporations, or reach, among others. However, even newspapers sharing common characteristics (e.g., similar interests or backgrounds of their readers, comparable political affiliations, equivalent editorial slant, etc.) will vary in style (if not in content) in different countries. Pinker has pointed out that ‘the words and constructions in a given language depend not just on the psychology of its speakers but on its history of fads, conquests, and neighbors’ [Pinker 2008: 428]; i.e., language reflects the way in which a given linguistic group understands the world around them. This is an issue of importance in the media because of the very essence of journalism: retelling *a* reality. If ‘languages provide the means to frame events,’ [Pinker 2008: 126], then it follows that news reporting may diverge in the details it considers newsworthy from one culture to the next. News corporations crave gains, and those profits depend on their ability to maintain their markets. As Robert Knight notes, ‘in the traditional media, and most of the new electronic media as well, news judgment first considers the audience’ [Knight 2010: 34]. Journalism means to catch and to keep its readers’ attention, to appeal and to interest; otherwise, companies risk losing their readers. This prompts a difficulty in journalistic translation as it is meant to preserve the content, style, and attitudes of the source text, while delivering the news in a manner that accommodates to the tastes and modes of news communication of the target culture.

As journalism is subjective, our first approach to the translation of the news focuses on categorizing genres according to the organization, materialization and expression of subjectivities, be those fully disguised as objective (informative genres), be them put forth as judgment (i.e., opinion genres), or combined (hybrid genres). As journalistic translation is still largely a vacant niche in the publishing world, with some academic papers but, so far, no manuals tackling specific methodologies to approach these texts, we have adopted a particular approach to the subject, resorting to journalism manuals both in Spanish and in English. This preparatory section of the course provides information on how to report the news: the rationale behind this approach is enabling our students to lift the veil of the journalist's craft, understand the mechanics of news reporting, learn the necessary skills of journalistic writing, and recognize the quality of the texts they will translate on the following stage. Both manuals are studied comparing the different approaches to journalism in Spanish and English as a means to scaffold the schemata of the texts with which students will later be presented. This first stage paves the way for appreciating text types in both languages and comprehending that 'objectivity, supposedly the soul of journalism, simply does not exist' [Knight 2010: 176].

The next step in the course takes up the study and translation of informative pieces in both languages using parallel texts. Natural or human-produced disasters, police reports and accidents have proven *simple* text types with 'fairly prescribed scripts and frames, which may differ across cultures' [Baer 2017]. This allows for a graded approach that ensures the development of journalistic translation skills and grants a sense of achievement in the students, which in turn becomes a motivating factor. Preparation activities include studying the organization of the texts in both languages with attention to the information segmentation pat-

terns and presentation style (headlining and titling, decks, *ledes* (also known as leads or noses, i.e., the opening paragraph of the news story), relevant and accessory information, inverted pyramid schemes, etc.). At this point, students are guided to notice the organizational patterns, distribution of information, paragraphing, and the like, while working on documentation techniques to produce glossaries. For instance, headlines take different forms in English and Spanish:

Chart 1

Characteristics of Headlines in English and Spanish

Headlines in English	Headlines in Spanish
Use verbs in the present with past, present or habitual reference, Omit the <i>to be</i> auxiliary in verb phrases (including the passive voice),	Use verbs in the present with past, present, or habitual reference, but allow for the use of future and past tenses as well,
Use infinitives with the <i>to</i> particle for future time reference,	Are made up of short, but complete phrases,
Omit the article and display a telegraphic style,	Sometimes omit articles, but not always,
Use Anglo-Saxon-origin, short verbs with impact (e.g., quit, push, hit, etc.),	Use the tacit subject in the active voice,
Use a comma instead of <i>and</i> for coordination,	Avoid punctuation marks whenever possible,
May be written simply as a series of nouns modifying a noun.	Tend not to use numbers, gerunds, or infinitives,
	Use acronyms.

The study of parallel texts and the recognition of differences in the presentation of information allows students to move ‘from the level of the word to the level of the sentence’ [Baer 2017]. Case in point, if a student were to translate a headline from English into Spanish preserving its telegraphic style and infinitives with future time reference, the result would be cryptic for Span-

ish-speaking readers. Similarly, a series of nouns modifying one another with no clarifying verb, or a cultural pun may be unintelligible when rendered into the target language. By this point, students have analyzed the mechanics of news reporting and textual organization, so they are encouraged to diverge from a lineal approach in translation, and instead focus on adequacy in the target language. At the same time, through cooperative learning, class discussions of translations by peers and the use of professional jargon to provide constructive criticism, students understand that there are no universal solutions to translation difficulties, but that the adequacy of a translation lies on its effectiveness.

We agree with Venuti and Colina in that ‘developments in educational research [have] shifted the focus of translation teaching from read-and-translate to the learner and the learning process, including contextualized or situated learning’ [Colina and Venuti 2017: 205]. In that respect, after having been exposed to the mechanics of proper journalistic writing, students can evaluate news articles from a journalistic point of view in the target language.

Nevertheless, one lesson learned approaching seemingly unbiased, informational news is that students tend to buy into the notion of journalistic objectivity (despite their previous cautionary readings) and believe that there may be no textual rhetorical markers of bias; after all — they seem to reflect —, a car crash, a burglary or an earthquake have similar features the world over. Our job is guiding them so that they can see that the organization of the news (the focus on casualties or the attention to prompt — or delayed — official response to the event, the blame on victims or on the lack of — or numerous — first responders, the naming of officials, etc.) gives clues to the authorial voice or the editorial slant of a newspaper. We do believe that simple, straightfor-

ward pieces with few rhetorical devices or stylistic features allow focusing on lexical and information choices and distribution, but it is reflection upon the controlled number of particular rhetorical devices that prepares them for the following stage.

After having worked on informative pieces and honed the skills of proper journalistic writing; studied the structure of the news, data presentation, authorial clues, and the like, and learned about documentation, useful and frequent translation techniques and strategies and adequate approaches to journalistic translation in seemingly objective, straightforward, simple yet authentic news, we devote the latter part of the school year to the translation of opinion pieces (columns, reviews and editorials, among others.). This section of the course presents new difficulties, as opinion texts have a more marked, subjective presence and a thicker textual texture. Therefore, journalists tend to display more complex rhetorical devices, more literary language, intertexts, subtle or explicit humor or irony and an overall more personal style. This entails that the study and translation of parallel texts will focus on genre markers and textual organization patterns, but documentation becomes a more complex task.

Opinion texts tend to display a wealth of stylistic features, which –following Riggs– are ‘the result of personal choice and reflect the original, idiosyncratic features of an individual’s way of expressing herself, [so they] are arguably artistic and therefore creative’ [Riggs 2022: 7]. The column, which is the umbrella term that Marín gives the opinion genres mentioned above, is characterized by its authorship and a personal style [Marín 2004: 284]. This means that our teaching approach diverges from the discussion of the typical scripts and frames of the informative genres, of documentation strategies to produce glossaries, and the like, in order to approach these textualities from their production of meaning, their unique translation difficulties (as they may be

text-specific), and textual coherence and cohesion. Class discussions and peer translation critique becomes more substantial and delves into more complex issues such as lexical nuances, rhetorical intricacies, and cohesion issues.

Riggs maintains that stylistic elements ‘play a role in encouraging people to subscribe to the *structure and way of thinking* that they encounter in news texts’ [Riggs 2022: 8]. Therefore, if when working with informative texts one of our aims is to detect veiled subjectivity markers to transpose them with a corresponding subtlety and bias, these opinion texts that make no excuse for their ideological position present the hurdle of a literariness (or *literalese*) in the presentation of the issues of public interest (after all, *it is the news*). Our program of studies also includes the subject Literary Translation as mandatory on the same academic year, so by the time students reach the translation of opinion texts, they should be familiarized with strategies to approach literary textualities. The challenge, here, is that much though opinion texts may make use of thicker textures, they are still meant to be read as news, so agility in the presentation of the information is key, without relegating the journalist’s personal style.

By exposing our students to different genres with diverse subjectivities and training them in the proper mechanics of journalistic writing in Spanish and in English, we provide the tools for them to tackle journalism more effectively, lifting the veil of its bias, recognizing its cloaking mechanisms, and moving away from the word level to the textual level. In turn, we develop genre-specific journalistic writing skills, foster constructive criticism (of the pieces they must translate, they have translated, or their peers have produced), and foster professionalism to deal with clients and colleagues. Time is of the essence in journalistic translation, so it needs translators that are quick on their feet to

undertake various genres, not as strings of words attached with the purpose of simply saying something, but as textualities that are meant to inform (or shape opinion) in the style of the target culture. Our approach is comprehensive because we need to train effective translators to join our ever-competitive profession.

Journalism is history in the making. But unlike history, which tends to reflect only the position of the victors until revisionists unearth new perspectives, contemporary journalism allows for a multiplicity of voices to be heard, for different opinions to reach wider audiences, and for more people (hopefully) to arrive at their own conclusions. Journalistic translation is the great enabler to allow news to travel fast and arrive in new lands. We know the world has never been better communicated than today. Our job as translators is to build the proper platforms for those ideas to reach new readerships.

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