Watching News Translation as It Happens
A DDL Project on the USA President's Inaugural Speech

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Abstract   Observing and comparing various translations of the same source text is an activity that can improve students' language skills and their awareness of translation practice. Foreign news concerning the inaugural speech given every four years by the President of the Unites States of America offer a rare occasion to observe a wide range of translation and reporting strategies. This article overviews the findings of scholarly research on journalistic translation in the last two decades and offers some examples of translation choices that were observed in 2009 and in 2017 when Barack Obama's and Donald Trump's speeches were reported in Italian news outlets. Possible activities and items worth observing with students are presented and discussed.

Keywords   POTUS inaugural speech. News translation. Translators' visibility. DDLC. Critical analysis.

Summary   1 Introduction. – 2 News Translation and the Media. – 3 Setting up the Activity. – 4 Examples from Obama and Trump. – 5 Conclusion.

1 Introduction

Translation as a method for foreign language (FL) learning has been widely employed, rejected and debated in the course of history (Laviosa 2014). Recent research over the past three decades shows the potential results that working with translation can offer – either observing and comparing translated texts or practicing translation – in terms of intercultural awareness and socio-cultural competence in the FL, also improving the ability to avoid interference with one's L1 (Siridopoulou, Tsapaki 2014). The observation of translated texts can make students more aware of the effects that translation choices may have on their readers. If such texts are selected from mainstream media, students will also improve their abilities to read news texts with a critical attitude, detecting discursive strategies and ideological implications (we use the notion of ideology here in its widest neutral sense). In the past fifteen years, the discipline of Translation Studies has started investigating journalistic translation (Valdeón 2015), drawing attention on a phenomenon that previous research had mostly ignored. The translation of news articles is mainly performed by journalists who were not trained as translators and the amount of changes deemed acceptable between source texts (STs) and target texts (TTs) is higher than for other text types, up to the point that it is often difficult to identify a ST and a TT (Davier, Schäffner, van Doorslaer 2018, 156) and analyses rather concentrate on migrated textual segments (Caimotto 2015). This paper overviews the advantages that can derive from the observation of translated texts in a foreign language classroom and provides practical information to set up a guided activity of translation observation and analysis of one of the most significant translation events on a global scale, the inaugural speech of the new President of the United States.

2 News Translation and the Media

While the translation of news is a process that remains highly invisible and understudied (Bielsa 2016, 197), the transformations that have characterised the media system in the last decades have already influenced the way in which news is translated and redistributed, as technological convergence blends different platforms, with written texts online following rhythms that would otherwise characterise oral communication (see Davier, Conway, forthcoming). In 2005, Bassnett (2005, 125) already pointed out the higher level of similarities between journalists who translate news and interpreters, rather than translators, as journalists summarise, rephrase, add or omit information just like an interpreter would add, paraphrase and reshape where necessary. News translation is characterised by a high

level of invisibility (Bani 2018; Bielsa, Bassnett 2009, 72-3; Davier 2014) and most information circulating nowadays is (re)distributed through the three main global news agencies: Reuters, Agence France-Presse (AFP) and Associated Press (AP). As Scammell (2018, 9) explains, national news organisation have gradually reduced the practice of sending foreign correspondents abroad. This, together with the development of online news, has contributed to the increasing dominance of global news agencies.

The publication of the inaugural speech given by the President of the United States (POTUS) is an exception in news translation, as it offers the rare occasion to collect and compare several translated versions of the same text. The speech is scheduled and the ceremony takes place every four years on January 20th or 21st. News outlets plan their translation activity and some send correspondents to Washington. Hence, it is possible to observe a blending of the old practice of sending correspondents and the new online provision of real-time information, mixing news from the three main global news agencies, from other news outlets (e.g. CNN) and from the social media, mainly Twitter. Together with the possibility of analysing several translations, scholars can also observe paratexts (Caimotto 2010 and forthcoming; Romagnuolo 2009; 2014) and they can carry out a critical and/or political discourse analysis of the speech itself, exploiting the possibilities offered by the compared observation of the TTs, which is likely to reveal and foreground ST discursive strategies that were backgrounded in the speech itself. According to Munday (2012, 42), the large number of interpretings and translations represent "an unusual opportunity" for translation scholars. In his analysis of translations into Spanish of Trump's (Munday 2018) and Obama's (Munday 2012, 42-83) inaugural speeches Munday employs the notion of "critical points". These are points and lexical features of the ST that are likely to reveal the translator's values, but Munday underlines that the translator may have inserted these critical points in the TT "perhaps surreptitiously and not consciously" (2012, 40-1).

3 Setting up the Activity

The activities presented in this paper are suitable for students attending their last year in secondary school as well as undergraduate students. This work focuses on translations from English into Italian, but the same activity can be organised for other target languages, if the inaugural speech is reported and translated in the local media. Several goals can be pursued when carrying out the activities, so it is useful that teachers decide beforehand the purpose(s) they want to focus on. Of course, teachers will also take into account the knowledge and skills of their students and will select the activities

accordingly. The observation of translated texts will improve the students' language skills as it is likely to add lexical items to their vocabulary and enhance their awareness of grammatical and syntactic structures. The possibility of comparing several translations – all of which will be in their L1 (or anyway the dominant language of the school they are attending if they are non-native speakers) – will allow them to identify discrepancies relatively easily and is likely to spark their curiosity finding out what was in the ST and establishing which TT they consider better suited to render the speech. The teacher will play an important role in this phase, pointing out that it is not a matter of prescriptively establishing which translation is 'right' and which is 'wrong', but rather observe the differences, reconstruct the reasons behind the translators' choices and provide an evaluation, which will have to be based on discursive analysis but will remain subjective.

Depending on the level of the students involved, the focus can be shifted either on translation practice – undergraduate students of Foreign Languages would be particularly interested in this – or on the discrepancies between the target texts, concentrating on the different effect these may have on their target readers. The latter activity could be carried out by teachers and lecturers aiming to improve their students' critical skills rather than their language knowledge – even if, of course, FL learning will still benefit from the activity. One of the ways in which the different effects can be observed is to divide the class in different groups who will read different versions and then answer the same questions that the teacher will prepare beforehand: the differences in perception will prove that discursive strategies can play a major role in orienting the way in which events are perceived by the recipients of news items. If in line with the teacher's purposes, the reception-focused activity can be an introduction to a general work on the ways in which news media can influence the public opinion.

The use of translated texts will allow the discursive analysis of the speech from a critical perspective even for students whose L2 knowledge is not particularly strong. This proves particularly relevant for secondary school students, as the fact that the text under scrutiny concerns another country will make it easier for both teachers and students to discuss political issues and implications while keeping a distance from one's own political views, as the analysis of political texts pertaining to a different country and culture is less likely to trigger the emotional responses a speech from a local/national politician would generate. At the same time, the discussion of political issues and the critical analysis of the discursive strategies employed to convey them will favour the development and strengthening of the students' critical abilities to carry out the same kind of analysis on speeches given by local and national representatives.

The collection of data for the compared analysis can also be adapted to the technological possibilities available. The observation of online translation will make students aware of the work of news translators and the hectic rhythms they have to endure. In order to do this, it is necessary to read online news providers while the POTUS delivers his/her speech and, in the following hours, repeatedly checking the pages where the translation is provided and saving on one's hard disk the various versions, in order to compare them later. Due to the different time-zones, this is likely to happen in Italy after 6PM and throughout the evening, hence the live observation can be assigned as homework or carried out collectively through an e-learning platform. Alternatively, if observing the way in which news translation is enacted is not among the main goals being pursued, the teacher could save the data and then select some examples to show in class. Students will probably enjoy detecting the typos and mistakes that typically characterise the very first versions published online while the POTUS is still delivering the speech (Caimotto 2010; 2019). The teacher could decide to take the students to a local library where they would be able to read and compare the TTs across mainstream newspapers, or invite them to visit their local library and discover what is available in terms of daily newspapers. This is likely to push students to read newspapers that they had never opened before, allowing them to realise the effect that the habit of reading one single newspaper on a daily basis can have on its readership, especially when that newspaper has a strong political positioning.

Depending on the students' level of English, the activity will start from either the ST – analysing the English version and its strategies before looking at how it was translated – or from the comparison of TTs for students whose English is weaker, as being familiar with the overall meaning will help them understanding the English text with less effort, allowing them to concentrate on other aspects. The analysis of the ST can be an occasion to introduce students to the analysis of lexical choices, perhaps employing corpus-aided techniques. By using the resources available on *The American Presidency Project* website[1] students will be able to compare all the US inaugural speeches and, for example, observe if and how a specific word was employed by former presidents by using the advanced research tool. The tool also accepts some wildcards, so it would be possible to search for 'storm*' and obtain the various occurences of 'storm' and 'storms' (a Barack Obama's favourite, as 5 of the 10 occurrences across all inaugural speeches are found in his two inaugural addresses). Students could be asked to identify which of the occurrences refer to actual storms and which are metaphors. The use of *The American Presiden-*

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1 https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/.

cy Project database is a good way of introducing students to corpus-aided analysis, which – especially for undergraduate students – could be followed by activities employing simple software like AntConc.[2]

The following section will provide examples of various discursive strategies and translation choices that were observed during the first inaugural speech given by Barack Obama in 2009 and the inaugural speech given by Donald Trump in 2017. Teachers could use them a source of inspiration for the selection of items from the new inaugural they are investigating and as preliminary activities to prepare the students for the observation of the upcoming inaugural speech.

4 Examples from Obama and Trump

In 2009, during the live observation of what was being published and later edited on the night after the delivery of Obama's speech, the *Corriere della Sera* online offered the following case of mistranslation, published shortly after the end of the speech at 6:59 PM, Italian time:

> To those leaders around the globe who seek to sow conflict, or blame their society's ills on the West: know that **your people will judge you on what you can build, not what you destroy**. To those who cling to power through corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent, know that you are on the wrong side of history; but that **we will extend a hand if you are willing to unclench your fist**. [emphasis added]

> Ai leader che cercano di dare le colpe all'Occidente, sappiate che il vostro popolo vi giudicherà **per quello che farete**. Anche se **mostrerete il pugno**, noi vitenderemo [*sic*] la mano. (*Corriere della Sera* 2009a, 6:59 PM Italian time; emphasis added)

Later that night, the *Corriere della Sera* website amended the TT, providing an almost unabridged translation:

> A quei dirigenti nel mondo che cercano di seminare la discordia, o di scaricare sull'Occidente la colpa dei mali delle loro società, diciamo: sappiate che il vostro popolo vi giudicherà **in base a ciò che siete in grado di costruire, non di distruggere**. A coloro che si aggrappano al potere grazie alla corruzione, all'inganno, alla repressione del dissenso, diciamo: sappiate che siete dal-

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> la parte sbagliata della Storia; ma che siamo disposti a tendere la mano **se sarete disposti a sciogliere il pugno**. (*Corriere della Sera* 2009b, 11:40 PM Italian time; emphasis added)

Depending on the students' level and the main purposes of the activities, the teacher will choose between the most demanding task of asking students to collect the various online versions by themselves, detect discrepancies, identify amended mistakes and speculate on what led the journalist to translate the way they did and the likely effects on the readers (this level would probably suit University students). Simpler versions of the activity can be offered if the teacher will collect the versions, identify the discrepancies, give the students the ST and the problematic TT asking them to detect the problems (the texts could be abridged to simplify the task) and later provide them with the amended version. The activity could be followed by a discussion on the effects on the readership, perhaps in the students' native language, to strengthen and enhance their critical skills. The latter activity, in secondary schools, could also be carried out by a different teacher, if the whole project is shared across more than one discipline – Italian or History could be relevant subjects.

A typical characteristic of political speeches is the use of pronouns and possessive adjectives to generate 'invoked inclusiveness' and 'implied exclusiveness' (Munday 2012, 71; Chilton 2004). While, as Munday explains, presidents usually use the pronoun 'we' to refer to himself and the people or to refer to himself and a small group acting for the nation. But Donald Trump broke with this tradition and created a separation between the president and what he refers to as "the establishment", stating that with his election and the beginning of his presidency the power would be given back to people. A search through all the US inaugural speeches reveals that the word "establishment" was used 14 times, but only in one case, in 1981, Ronal Reagan referred to "the Federal establishment", in all the remaining 12 cases the word is simply the noun form of the verb to establish, without the negative judgement implied by Trump and Reagan. If we observe pronouns and possessive forms in Trump's inaugural speech, we can see how Trump employs them to convey the perception that he belongs to the people rather than the government:

> The establishment protected itself, but not the citizens of **our** country. **Their** victories have not been **your** victories; **their** triumphs have not been **your** triumphs; and while **they** celebrated in **our** Nation's Capital, there was little to celebrate for struggling families all across **our** land. (Trump 2017a; emphasis added)

The two printed newspapers that provided a full translation of the speech in Italy were the *Libero* and *Il Giornale*. The latter speci-

fied the name of the translator, Seba Pezzani, while we can assume that the former published a translation performed by a journalist who had no specific translation training. Printed newspapers usually specify that the text was translated when they ask an external professional translator to provide the Italian version of the text, the same happened with *Il Sole 24 Ore* in 2009, which had the inaugural translated by Fabio Galimberti (see Caimotto 2010). When comparing the Italian TTs for the passage quoted above, students will be able to see the different effect and appreciate the difference between a translation that is formally correct and one that also conveys the discursive strategies deployed in the ST while resulting more idiomatic.

> **L'establishment** ha protetto se stesso, ma non i cittadini del nostro Paese. Le loro vittorie non sono state le vostre vittorie. I loro trionfi non sono stati i vostri trionfi. E **mentre hanno** celebrato nella capitale della **nostra** nazione, c'era poco da festeggiare per le famiglie **che sono** in difficoltà in tutto il **nostro** paese. (*Libero* – Trump 2017b; emphasis added)

> Il **sistema** proteggeva se stesso, non i cittadini del nostro Paese. Le loro vittorie non sono state le vostre vittorie. I loro trionfi non sono stati i vostri trionfi. E mentre **quella gente** festeggiava nella capitale del nostro Paese, c'era poco da festeggiare per le famiglie in difficoltà **nell'intera nazione**. (*Il Giornale* – Trump 2017c; emphasis added)

In this specific case, the journalist translating for the *Libero* omitted the pronoun "they" – a choice that would usually prove idiomatic as Italian does not require pronouns as often as English – here, though, the addition of *quella gente* (those people) renders the negative meaning of the pronoun "they" implied in the ST. The choice of the tense to translate "celebrated" also appears more idiomatic in *Il Giornale*, being the tense employed for narrations. In the *Libero* TT the repetition of *nostra/o* makes the text less idiomatic, compared to *Il Giornale*, where Pezzani omitted the second one. The observation of translated inaugurals is also likely to offer examples of Anglicisms in Italian, as due to the tight deadlines and, maybe, the (unconscious) desire to keep some of the relevant discursive choices, the journalists tend to transfer a number of Anglicisms higher than what is usually found in Italian news articles. In the passage quoted above, we can see how Pezzani decided to translate "establishment" while all the other Italian mainstream media, whether printed or online, either omitted the sentence or used the Anglicism. The teacher could identify similar cases in the inaugural speech under investigation and invite students to reflect and become more aware of the effects

that an excessive use of Anglicisms can have on the readers, making the text less readable and less effective. In the case of Trump's inaugural speech, the Anglicisms often employed in Italian mainstream media were "America first", "establishment", "leadership", "carnage", "Commander-in-chief" – which certainly cannot be considered everyday expressions in Italian.

Apart from observing translation strategies in articles like those published by the *Libero* and *Il Giornale*, students will also see how other mainstream media publish articles about the speech blending direct quotations with comments added by the journalist. Distinguishing between what was said by Trump and what was added by the journalist is not always straightforward and this is a chance to invite students to reflect on how the media can reframe the messages of politicians, observing the use of inverted commas and other discursive strategies journalists can use. In Trump's case, the sentence

> We will reinforce old alliances and form new ones and unite the civilized world against radical Islamic terrorism, which we will eradicate completely from the face of the Earth. (Trump 2017a)

offered two relevant translation choices in Italian newspapers. The *Libero*, which signalled with three dots where parts of the ST had been omitted in translation, did not include this sentence in its TT. The choice appears peculiar, as in another article published on the same day, Socci (2017) appreciated Trump's choice of reintroducing the phrase "Islamic terrorism" that Obama had attempted to remove from public discourse (Diaz 2016). Perhaps even more surprising is how *Il Manifesto* reported that passage:

> "Sconfiggere l'Isis e i gruppi di terrorismo islamico sarà la nostra priorità". Come? Semplice: "Lavoreremo con i partner internazionali per tagliare i fondi ai gruppi terroristici, e ci impegneremo in una cyberguerra per distruggere e disabilitare la propaganda, nel perseguire una politica estera basata sugli interessi americani, ricorreremo alla diplomazia. Il mondo deve sapere che non andiamo all'estero in cerca di nemici". (Pieranni 2017)

The latter passage in inverted commas is not signalled as coming from elsewhere, hence readers are likely to infer that Trump's inaugural speech included those words (any other passage between inverted commas actually comes from the inaugural speech). But in fact this inference is wrong, as the passage actually comes from a page on the White House website titled "America First Foreign Policy", and what follows is the real ST, which Pieranni embedded in the translation of the inaugural:

> Defeating ISIS and other radical Islamic terror groups will be our highest priority. To defeat and destroy these groups, we will pursue aggressive joint and coalition military operations when necessary. In addition, the Trump Administration will work with international partners to cut off funding for terrorist groups, to expand intelligence sharing, and to engage in cyberwarfare to disrupt and disable propaganda and recruiting.
>
> [...] Finally, in pursuing a foreign policy based on American interests, we will embrace diplomacy. The world must know that we do not go abroad in search of enemies, that we are always happy when old enemies become friends, and when old friends become allies. (Whitehouse.gov 2017)

Students could be invited to start a discussion, attempting to establish why the *Libero* journalist omitted a sentence that should arguably be appreciated by its readers – given the right-wing and anti-immigration position of the paper – while *Il Manifesto*, which defines itself as a communist, anti-racist and anti-war newspaper, chose to present a passage taken from a war-mongering policy as part of the inaugural speech. The teacher will have to guide the debate, making sure that the political views of the students are employed to enrich the discussion and offer different points of view without hampering the debate. Focusing on the textual analysis of the ST will help to keep the discussion on the right track. The implied violence of Trump's original declaration is at the centre of the TTs analysis, both the *Libero* and *Il Manifesto* recognised the force of that statement and had opposite ways of rendering it in Italian.

Students could be invited to observe how the goal of the whole article written by Pieranni is to foreground the dangers and the negative aspects of the new presidency. Including a sentence from the White House website and making it much more prominent by presenting it as part of the inaugural speech has the effect of heightening the level of warning. *Il Manifesto* deems Trump untrustworthy, and the idea of a possible war without borders against an internationally widespread problem, initiated by the world's strongest military power, is particularly worrying for the editorial board and for the readers. On the contrary, the *Libero* showed a very positive attitude towards Trump's presidency and decided to omit the passage that can be interpreted as the announcement of religion-based discriminations and hostility.

5   Conclusion

The activities presented in this article can be tailored to suit the language skills of the students and the goals the teacher(s) decide to pursue. Together with the positive effects that these activities are likely to have on the students' vocabulary and, in general, their FL learning, they offer the possibility of presenting the students with some issues and activities that could prove new to them. The ways in which news is translated and redistributed worldwide consist in a largely invisible process of which most newspaper readers are unaware. Moreover, the fine-grained analysis of news texts, identifying the ideological implications and the effects of discursive choices, is rarely performed by students; the possibility of carrying out activities that focus on a foreign language and the political/ideological implications for a country different than one's own represents an occasion to apply critical skills to current political and sociological issues without touching upon sensitive aspects of local or national politics.

The activities proposed here also offer a chance to reflect and debate upon the effects of technology, observing the influence that tight deadlines imposed by the hectic rhythm of online information have on journalists who publish TTs that are still full of typos and inaccuracies because they aim to be the first ones. While it could be argued that the choice made by Pieranni (2017) to insert an extra passage – in the article about the speech published in *Il Manifesto* – was a conscious political choice, the other changes introduced in the translations of inaugural speeches are rather subtle and could result from time constraints and the need to fit within limited space. The influence of mainstream, hegemonic discourse paired with the political positioning of the newspapers could explain their ideological implications. The chance of organising the activities presented in this paper across more than one discipline – for example English language and Italian/History classes – would offer students the possibility of seeing through the connections that link information, politics, news translation and distribution, while strengthening their critical abilities and FL skills.

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