Chapter 7. News Translation

Activities

Tips for Activity 1.1

Often local news reaches the global arena either because they can be interpreted within a global issue (like global warming, MeToo movement, political corruption, space race, Covid-related developments, etc.), because they are especially odd or funny or due to a sudden rise in popularity in social media. Sometimes, the same piece of news could be selected or not based on the local status of news: in times when big issues have arisen and there is plenty of information to publish, news from elsewhere could find less space.

Sample key to Activity 1.2

The Amanda Gorman case is a way of manipulating discourses by using recontextualization strategies such as selection or deletion.

In February/March 2020, literary translation was on the spotlight in international news. Following President Joe Biden’s inauguration ceremony, in which the young poet Amanda Gorman recited the poem The Hill We Climb, translations of this English-language poetry book began being commissioned worldwide. In the Netherlands, the publisher Meulenhoff invited the Dutch poet Marieke Lucas Rijneveld, who had been awarded the International Booker Prize, to translate Gorman’s poetry. In February 25 2021, Dutch journalist and activist Janice Deul published an opinion piece in De Volkskrant, entitled “Een witte vertaler voor poëzie van Amanda Gorman: onbegrijpelijk” [A white translator for the poetry of Amanda Gorman: incomprehensible, translation by Haidee Kotze].

The original article, closely translated by Haidee Kotzee, has three sections. The first one functions as an introduction in which Deul informs that she and Gorman share a passion for fashion besides literature, so much so that Gorman was invited to become a model. On that account, Deul draws the readers’ attention to the importance of Gorman’s figure in the reception of her poetry, which includes autobiographical content. In other words, visibility and representativity are brought in as key ideas for Deul’s opinion about the pointing of a Dutch translator for The Hill We Climb. The second section bears the title “Translation Rights” and contends that choosing Rijneveld to translate Gorman was a “missed opportunity”. An opportunity for giving Black translators the right to translate the most trendy literary piece in current times. To put it differently, Biden’s inaugural ceremony gave visibility to a “skinny Black girl, raised by a single mother” (Gorman 2021, quoted by Deul 2021) and from that moment Gorman came to represent the voice and visibility earned by those who, like her, have been and still are silenced and overshadowed for so many reasons: skin colour, family issues and even other impairments (Gorman had speech impediments in early age). Deul considers that this could have been the time to give visibility to Black translators in the Netherlands. Coherently, in the last section “Local Talent”, Deul lists possible names for translating Gorman.
and concludes: “Talented people of colour also need to be seen, heard and cherished. Publish their work too, hire them too (…)” (Deul 2021b)

This article triggered a controversy in social media, namely on Twitter, which led Rijneveld to resign from translating Amanda Gorman’s poetry book. Rijneveld's dismissal made the content of several news reports in newspapers worldwide. On February 26 2021, AP News published the news that “Dutch poet declines assignment to translate Gorman’s works”. On the same day, The Independent published the news story entitled “Dutch writer Marieke Lucas Rijneveld steps down from assignment to translate Amanda Gorman’s work” and ABC News published “Dutch poet declines assignment to translate Gorman's works”. However, it was by early March that renewed attention was given to this story. On March 1, The Guardian published “‘Shocked by the uproar’: Amanda Gorman’s white translator quits”, by Alison Flood. France 24 and the newspaper Monde from Montreal informed that by March 2, APF had published a news dispatch on it. The titles of the stories published by these two outlets which credit APF is very similar to one another and also to the one published on The Guardian: “Amanda Gorman’s white Dutch translator quits after ‘uproar’ (France 24) and “Pay Bas: la traductrice blanche d’Amanda Gorman démissionne après un ‘tollé’” [Netherlands: Amanda Gorman’s white translator quits after ‘uproar’] (Le Journal de Montréal). On the same March 2 the Portuguese digital newspaper Observador publishes the story by Sónia Smões “Marieke Lucas Rijneveld desiste de traduzir poema de Amanda Gorman por não ser negra” [Marieke Lucas Rijneveld gives up from translating Amanda Gorman’s poetry, because they are not Black] and the Spanish El Mundo published “Marieke Lucas, la escritora blanca que ha tenido que renunciar a traducir a la afroamericana Gorman” [Marieke Lucas, the white writer who had to waive translating the Afroamerican writer Gorman], by Imane Rachidi.

From this non-systematic search through online news outlets, it seems that between late February to early March the news reports began stressing the fact that Rijneveld was forced to dismiss the translation because they are white. This is possibly related to both the use of, firstly AP news dispatch and, afterwards AFP’s, and also the influence exerted by the article published on The Guardian.

In March 2021, The case Gorman/ Rijneveld became global news, starting a debate on “who should be/ is entitled to translate Amanda Gorman”. Opinion pieces followed news reports almost immediately. In the Spanish newspaper El País, detractors of Deul were fierce. Nuria Barrios (2021), the Spanish-language translator of The Hill We Climb contended that “According to Deul, applying what we might call Deul logic, only whites can translate whites, only women can translate women, only trans people can translate trans people…”; besides, this article claims that Janice Deul had sustained “that a black poet can only be translated by another black poet”. The well-known and awarded novelist Javier Marías published an opinion text on March 27 qualifying the article published in De Volkskrant of idiota, because it made the case that (and Marías quotes “the article”): “Solo una persona del mismo color de piel que Gorman podría traducir adecuadamente sus poemas”.[Only a person of the same skin color as Gorman could properly translate her poems.”]
In view of the successive manipulations Dutch-speaking translation scholar Haidee Kotzee (among others scholars, e.g., Luc van Doorslaer 2021), entered the discussion because “Deul’s critique of the choice has subsequently been substantially misinterpreted”:

Deul’s point, though, is not principally that the mismatch in backgrounds, and Rijneveld’s lack of experience, make them unsuitable as translator. Rather it is that the decision for Rijneveld signals trust in Rijneveld’s ability to convey this culturally significant work in another language — trust which is not generally afforded to people of colour. (Kotzee, 2021a, n.p.)

So how come Janice Deul’s argument got so modified? Haidee Kotzee puts forth a possible explanation, while stating her reasons for publishing a translation of the entire article by Janice Deul into English:

The article prompted widespread debate; the interpretations of many of the subsequent contributors to this debate raise questions about their engagement with the article itself. This translation aims to make the original opinion piece accessible to a wider audience. (Kotzee, 2021b, n.p.)

Even though the data collected for this book does not come from systematic research, it was striking to see that all the news stories mentioned above included the exact same (few) quotations taken from Deul’s text. From all three sections of the opinion piece summarized and commented above, only three quotations were retrieved from the text and used in the newspapers and other news outlets.

Table 1. Use of quotations from Janice Deul (2021a) in different news outlets. Quotations in this table follow Haidee Kotzee’s translation (Deul 2021b).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News outlet/Quote</th>
<th>“An incomprehensible choice [that of Rijneveld as Amanda Gorman’s translator], in my view.”</th>
<th>“They [Rijneveld] are white, non-binary, have no experience in this area”</th>
<th>“Nothing to the detriment of Rijneveld’s qualities, but why not choose for a writer who — just like Gorman — is a spoken word artist, young, female, and: unapologetically Black?”</th>
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<td>The Independent</td>
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<td>ABC News</td>
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<td>The Guardian</td>
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<td>France 24</td>
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<td>Monde Europe</td>
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<td>Observador</td>
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<td>El Mundo</td>
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Table 1 indicates that the first two news stories (published by the end of February), conveyed that Janice Deul did not understand the reasons for appointing Rijneveld, despite their qualities, and not someone “unapologetically Black”. *The Guardian* added a third quotation which not only drew a parallel in Deul’s argument Rijneveld: white, non-binary vs. Gorman: female, unapologetically Black” but also evoked the idea of “experience in this area”. Hence, by means of selection and omission of the other arguments, these media outlets (in different degrees) came to claim that Janice Deul had argued that only someone with the same skin colour and gender identity had the adequate experience to produce an adequate translation of Gorman’s poetry.

To conclude, by means of recontextualization strategies, namely, selection, and in successive indirect translations of AFP’s dispatch and *The Guardian*’s article, Deul’s text was manipulated in such a way that she was accused of exerting censorship to white translators. In order to reestablish the truth, Haidee Kotzee retranslated the text into English so that detractors could read what Janice Deul’s argumentation really is about. In a sense, Kotzee wanted to provide a close translation to be used as a pivot in further news texts about the subject. Because Dutch is a peripheral language, the recontextualized version of Deul’s opinion piece in news stories and dispatches in English and French became the source from which journalists drew while writing their opinions pieces. The crude criticism and even insults targeted at Janice Deul seem to call for a revision of agency and social responsibility of relayers in news translation.

References for this activity


 Follow up to Activity 3.1


Extra activity 1.

Read the following extract of an article published by the New York Times published on June 3, 2020 and which is cited by Valdeón (forthcoming):

Amsterdam’s Red Light Zone Stays Shut as Rest of City Edges Open …

“No photos of sex workers,” read the signs above the brothel windows. “Fine: 95 euros.”

This article was translated into Spanish and was published in the Spanish-language version of the New York Times the same day:

Ámsterdam está a punto de abrir, excepto por el barrio rojo de la ciudad …

“Prohibido tomar fotografías de las trabajadoras sexuales”, decían los rótulos colocados encima de los escaparates de los burdeles. “Multa: 95 euros”.

Indirect Translation Explained - Hanna Pięta, Rita Bueno Maia & Ester Torres Simón
What instances of indirect translation do you identify here (if you don’t know Spanish, it suffices to know that the translation is rather literal)? Would you say the Spanish translation as whole is an indirect translation?

Extra activity 2.
Read the following excerpt taken from the Reuters’ Handbook of Journalism (2018: 87-88, see above) and try to compile all the agents that are mentioned for each story, distinguishing between the ones that are credited and the ones that remain invisible.

3. EDITING BY - Should usually show the name of the last person who edited the story or the person who did the most substantial edit. If the story was edited in the bureau before being sent to the desk, the "Editing by" field should show the name of the bureau editor and the person who finally pushed the button on the story. This field should never show more than two names.

4. WRITING BY - used on stories where the bylined reporter on the spot can report but not write, for whatever operational reason. Note that the contact details in this case should also be for the writer. Reason: the reporter in this case is very probably not easy to reach. This field may also be used where a journalist has written a story that draws substantially on a series of stories from another Reuters service, possibly even adding some local reporting, rather than producing a straight translation of a story. (Writing by Olaf Brandt; Editing by June Sink)(olaf.brandt@reuters.com; +1 646 897 1335; Reuters Messaging: olaf.brandt.reuters.com@reuters.net)

5. TRANSLATED BY - used on stories that are translated into another language, alongside the credits for the original reporter(s) either in the byline or the sign-off, as outlined above. Contact details should be those of the translator unless the reporter can also easily field questions in the new language of the story. (Reporting by Sam Thomas; Translated by Jeanne Bouchard)(jeanne.bouchard@reuters.com; +33 1 1234 5678; Reuters Messaging: jeanne.bouchard.reuters.com@reuters.net)