

Introduction¹

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Abstract

This book investigates the role translation processes play in shaping and reshaping ideological discourse, and the ways these processes impact the agency of the actors involved, be they individual, collective or institutional. The novelty of the approach employed lies in its focus on the notion of “lifestyle politics” (Bennett, 2003), which describes the tendency to politicize everyday life choices. These tendencies influence and affect people’s personal identities. Their subsequent evolution, studied by Zuboff (2019), moves towards “surveillance capitalism”, which exploits lifestyle politics to orient the choices and behavior of citizens (Bennett *et al.*, 2021). The “institutional” texts (Koskinen, 2008: 17; see also Krieg-Planque, 2012) analyzed are introduced, explaining that they are produced by international organizations on topics concerning and influencing the public debate and the personal sphere (e.g., gender identity, sustainable lifestyle, perception of safety and risk). The book is organized in seven chapters that are grouped in three parts (Hybridization, Threats and Well-being).

Translation Studies research has often focused on ideology (Millán and Bartrina, 2013) and how ideological elements are introduced, removed or altered when a text is translated. Since the paradigm of social constructionism started dominating the social sciences last century, subjectivity and objectivity have not been a primary issue, nevertheless this concept has been the object of many reflections in Translation Studies. As many scholars have pointed out (Davies, 2014; Holland, 2013; Tsai, 2005 to name but a few), searching for ideological elements can prove highly problematic for various reasons. First, the scholar needs to find ways to be as objective as possible, while at the same time recognizing that a purely

neutral position is impossible to achieve. The problem of one's own ideology has been thoroughly investigated by critical discourse analysis (CDA) scholars (see van Dijk, 2001). Angermüller's work (2018) on the Strong Programme in Discourse Studies also offers an important perspective for dealing with the difficulties and contradictions that scholars face when investigating discourse.

Investigating discourse-related issues in translation adds a number of layers: while the discourse analysis of a monolingual text involves the ideological perspectives of its author(s) and those of the discourse scholar, analyzing translated texts requires that the role of the translation agent(s) and the ideological differences separating the audiences of the two languages also be taken into account. Analyzing the translators' awareness of their own subtle ideological choices can prove extremely challenging, as they can be unconscious and difficult to retrieve through interviews (even when interviewing proves possible, given that most of the time the actual translators of institutional texts are invisible).

Based on these premises, we have envisaged an approach that investigates the role translation processes play in shaping and reshaping ideological discourse, and the ways these processes impact the agency of the actors involved, be they individual, collective or institutional. The novelty of our approach lies in its focus on the notion of "lifestyle politics" (Bennett, 2003), which describes the tendency to politicize everyday life choices, for example buying products and services or choosing one's means of transport through politically, ethically or morally inspired decisions (de Moor & Verhaegen, 2020:92). As we shall explain in more detail, these tendencies influence and affect people's personal identities. The evolution of this tendency, studied by Zuboff (2019), moves towards "surveillance capitalism", which exploits lifestyle politics to orient the choices and behavior of citizens (Bennett *et al.*, 2021).

This is why our analyses concentrate on "institutional" texts (Koskinen, 2008: 17; see also Krieg-Planque, 2012) produced by international organizations on topics concerning and influencing the public debate and the personal sphere (e.g., gender identity, sustainable lifestyle, perception of safety and risk). Accordingly, we have also borne in mind that (Schäffner, Tcaciuc, Tesseur, 2014:494) "(t)here is widespread agreement among researchers (e.g., Kang, 2008; Koskinen, 2008; Mossop, 1988) that institutional translation is still rather unexplored and that empirical studies are missing".

Our starting point is that rather than looking for ideological effects introduced by the translator, we focus on the hegemonic lifestyle ideology—a prominent feature of the current neoliberal order—and observe its presence in both the English and the French version of the same document. As Rada Iveković (2019:50) points out, this viewpoint is typical of the “*raison occidentale*” (Western reason), as the intertwining of individualism, patriarchy, nationalism is rooted in the myths, discourses and narratives of modernity exported by the Enlightenment.

As Western scholars based in Europe, our perspective is that of insiders. We assume that the global dominance of the English language (Crystal, 2003) was generated by the Colonialism of the British Empire, the Industrial Revolution, the military power of the USA that brought WWII to an end followed by decades of US economic dominant power and cultural hegemony. We also assume that this linguistic and cultural dominance keeps reinforcing worldviews that stem from the Global North. We have tried to keep the discussion relevant to readers in most parts of the world and, while we are not experts of Decolonial Theory, we believe our views coincide with their findings, as “decoloniality is best described as a gesture that de-normalizes the normative, problematizes default positions, debunks the a-perspectival, destabilizes the structure, and as a program to rehabilitate epistemic formations that continue to be repressed under coloniality” (Gallien, كلير جاليان. 2020: 28,). Regrettably, some important intellectual discussions taking place outside Western academia may still be under-represented, partly reflecting our own limitations.

Our perspective concentrates mainly on the ideological discrepancies that we find when comparing the English and French versions of the analyzed documents. We are interested in the continuity and differences in the ideological effects that each version is likely to generate on its target public. This is why which language was the source and which was the target is not particularly relevant in our model of analysis, as we will explain in greater detail.

As suggested by Arduini and Nergaard (2011) and Gentzler (2017), who promote the notion of post-translation studies, we start from an interdisciplinary perspective (Gambier & van Doorslaer, 2016) by drawing ideas and insights from disciplines outside linguistics, discourse analysis and translation studies, viz., political studies (Bennett, 2003; Bennett *et al.*, 2021), economic studies (Ban, 2016) and sociology (Bauman, 2012). In concentrating on texts in English and French, we envisage translation in its broadest sense. We thus scrutinize translation processes where a source

and a target text can be identified as well as cases where the translation process is less evident (see Schäffner, 2004 and 2012). The texts were produced by international organizations such as the European Union, the Council of Europe and the United Nations. We analyze the English and French versions of the texts, keeping in mind the normative role of the institutions themselves in controlling and constraining the language (Schäffner, Tcaciuc, Tesseur, 2014; Schäffner, 2018).

With Baumgarten and Cornellà-Detrell (2018: 24), we believe that “activists and translators are gaining more options to question, outflank, or even sabotage hegemonic and dominant forms of power”. Research on translation processes and practices has often focused on the reframing enacted by the translator through meta-narratives (Baker, 2006: 44; Des Rochers, 2011: 148), whereas we want to observe the two versions and retrieve the ideological elements present in both and/or in one only, thus offering a new perspective. Over and above the various types of “jargon”² used by international organizations, what we want to emphasize—reversing the usual perspective—is how the single language of the Western hegemonic ideology informs the various discourses³, repeating specific “programs of meaning” (Gardin, 2005; see section 1.3), and how the translation can produce a sort of resistance to the hegemonic discourse⁴ (counter-discourse, alter-discourse, anti-discourse, etc.). In our view, the effects of translation can be classified under four categories (see section 1.2.3): hidden transfers, forced revelations, visible revelations and ideological transformations. These effects will also enable us to map the visible links between Translation and Discourse Studies, as proposed in section 1.2.2.

Why the notion of lifestyle politics?

The perspective from which our research approach derives is rooted in the debate revolving around the environmentalist discourse. In 2019, *The Guardian* published an article on the Climate Accountability Institute’s *Carbon Majors* report (Taylor & Watts, 2019), showing that 35% of all energy-related carbon dioxide and methane emitted worldwide since 1965 can be directly linked to 20 companies. The *Guardian* columnist George Monbiot (2019) pointed out that these same companies contributed to creating a system that blames consumers and the population at large rather than the people who are ultimately responsible for the political and industrial decisions that can make the difference. Jaap Tielbeke (2020) brings together the two positions, i.e., the mantra that “a better environment starts with yourself”, saving water and energy, eating less meat and separating your waste, vs. the idea that rather than influencing companies’ behavior through

our choices as consumers we should insist on pointing out who is really responsible and demand a strong political response.

Lifestyle politics describes the growing tendency in Western countries to express one's political views through everyday life choices. On the one hand this is a choice made by individuals "who desire social or political change [and] are compelled to shape their own personal behaviors and choices toward the ideals they envision" (Portwood-Stacer, 2013: 2) as a reaction to feelings of disillusion towards traditional political parties. On the other hand, politicians and institutions have been exploiting this tendency in various ways through nudging (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) and behavioral influence (Bennett *et al.*, 2021). Whether this increases or reduces individuals' engagement in traditional politics is open for debate (de Moor & Verhaegen, 2020). As Emma Bell explains, the notion of empowering individuals by reducing State intervention can be employed as a form of soft power: individuals can be led to believe their agency has been expanded, but in fact forms of moral authoritarianism are introduced, as the State controls citizens through more subtle means, collaborating with private actors (Bell, 2015). If we step back and observe the whole issue, we can see how the very idea of envisaging politics as something tightly linked to individual, and mainly consumption-related, choices can only stem from a Western, neoliberal, modern way of thinking. For example, the notion that the environment should be protected by adopting a "green consumer" attitude is the product of a neoliberal economic system and is part of the hegemonic idea currently promoting "sustainable development". Our perspective is inspired by the work of Donella Meadows, the warnings of the Club of Rome's *The Limits to Growth* (Meadows *et al.*, 1972), of which Meadows was the lead author, and her work on systems thinking (Meadows & Wright, 2008) which clearly explains how the mistake of conceiving the economic system as more important than the biosphere is at the root of all the environmental problems we face today. As we will discuss, one of the most visible ways in which this dominant view has become hegemonic is the popularity of nudging strategies.

During the writing of this book, the COVID-19 pandemic dealt an unexpected blow to everyday life. Observing the public discourses focusing on individual responsibility, the discussions over whether life or the economy should take priority, and the studies connecting the excessive consumption of cheap meat to the spread of the virus while at the same time working on our case studies was at times disquieting. At the same time, however, it strengthened our belief that observing lifestyle politics and its

spread across countries through translation is an important key to understanding the world we inhabit and the centrality of Translation Studies.

The episodes stemming from the border policies put in place because of COVID-19 have brought about lifestyle changes mentioned by many political figures. In Italy, for example, “lifestyle” (“*stile di vita*”), primarily in the sense of the habits of everyday life, was often cited in speeches by the then Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte⁵. Efforts to get the public to show responsibility and the new habits imposed by the health emergency made it necessary to question the very notion of lifestyle as it relates to individual agency and choice versus current policies at the national and international level.

Lifestyle is a complex concept that was, as we will see in section 4.4, originally associated with international organizations’ discourses on health. Subsequently, it drew the attention of English speaking thinkers to the rise of “lifestyle politics”. In this connection, we employ Bennett’s notion of lifestyle politics to explain the ways in which new identities shape themselves outside and beyond the traditional political parties, by creating identities that express themselves through lifestyle choices. This fragmentation of identities—which becomes transnational and generates networks that transcend national boundaries—is necessarily reflected in translation practices, as there is less and less need to explain identity in translation. At the same time, the new identities—as Bennett explains—are easily repackaged and marketed as something that can be expressed through the purchase of specific products or services, and as such express and exemplify the hegemonic power of the dominant discourse: international, depoliticized and marketing-oriented.

The hegemonic ideology, whose central concerns are economic purports to offer individual “choices” that are in fact piloted through nudging strategies (see Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), is linked to the notion of “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff, 2019). Surveillance capitalism is an evolution of lifestyle politics, which consists in behavior control and limits human agency, laying the ground for a new economic order. All the individual can do, it seems, is bear the blame for not having chosen the right “lifestyle” (Morgan, 2016; Monbiot, 2019), i.e., that indicated by the policies recommended internationally and, consequently, at the national level.

Precisely because we are dealing primarily with international policies promulgated by specific organizations which circulate and gain legitimacy through discourse, we have chosen to investigate the discourses of the

English and French texts produced by these actors to determine whether and how they contribute to reiterating the hegemonic ideology in each language version.

The book's organization

The book is divided into seven chapters: Chapter 1 presents the key notion of lifestyle politics (as drawn from Bennett, 2003, Tominc, 2017, de Moor & Verhaegen, 2020 among others) and positions our study in reference to the existing theoretical frameworks concerning the notion of translation (section 1.2), and in particular to how it relates to the discourse studies (section 1.2.2) we will refer to constantly in the book. We also introduce our new classification for analyzing the four effects of translation (section 1.2.3).

This classification is employed to investigate six case studies that focus (chapters 2–7) on institutional texts concerning policies that orient and shape people's everyday life and lifestyle.

The six case studies are grouped in three parts: Hybridization (chapters 2 and 3), Threats (chapters 4 and 5) and Well-being (chapters 6 and 7).

A subject index and a glossary of terms used in the text are provided at the end of the book for the reader's convenience.

Notes

¹ The authors would like to thank Scott Kraemer, who translated or revised the chapters, for how he helped to achieve a uniform style and to improve the book's overall quality, also thanks to his useful insights.

² It has been said that from a communicative standpoint the European Union is in an "artificially supracultural situation" (Scarpa, 2008: 102). This applies to international organizations in general, where the discursive material produced varies both because of the different practices and tools used to draft and translate documents (Schäffner, Tcaciuc, Tesseur, 2014), and because of the different origin and background of translation personnel (Afton, 2007) (see section 1.3). Thus, although the debate about whether or not we can speak of a real linguistic "variety" in the international organizations is far from over, it is nevertheless apparent that each favors its own "jargon" (e.g., for the UN, see Cao & Zhao, 2008:46) or "reading" (e.g., the EU, see Colaci, 2018:31) which tends to promote certain terms, equivalents and phrasal structures (on the circulation of these elements among different organizations, see Raus, 2013). To distinguish the national languages from the homologues used by the international organizations, we could employ the expressions "linguistic heterogeneity" proposed by Eni Orlandi (1996a) to emphasize that the national languages and the international homologues have "different ways of meaning" and call on "heterogeneous memories" (*ibidem*: 2).

³ French discourse analysts would employ “discursive materialities” (Maingueneau, 1991:25) to highlight the extent of influence on thoughts and perceptions that language can achieve.

⁴ In this sense, translation can have a sort of “discursive agency” itself (see Marignier, 2020).

⁵ See, for example, <https://www.iowebbo.it/covid-19-conte-italia-devi-cambiare-stile-di-vita/> or https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2020/03/07/news/coronavirus_chiusa_la_lombardia_e_11_province_-250570150/