

Ideological Encounters in the BBC Translation of Media Reports on the Conflict in Yemen

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Abstract: *This paper aims to investigate the influence of ideology on media translation. It examines the BBC news coverage of the current conflict in Yemen and the translation of media content discussing this conflict. In a globalized world, media becomes a powerful tool to generate and disseminate certain ideologies. Its power has been best manifested in the Arab Spring as social media platforms have played a pivotal role in campaigns to bring down regimes in the Arab world. Thus, it becomes important to explore the influence of ideology on media news agencies and the translations of the contents published therein. The paper comes to the conclusion that both the BBC coverage of the conflict in Yemen and the translation of relevant texts lack impartiality and neutrality.*

Keywords: ideology, manipulation, translation, war, Yemen

1. Introduction

Media content is most often determined by main actors in the political sphere. These actors transmit their ideologies through media channels and platforms. One of the most prominent and established media channels is the British Broadcast Corporation (BBC). The BBC is a public broadcaster located in London. It is the oldest television and broadcasting company in the UK (Mooney and Evans 2017:170). The BBC broadcasts news in 28 different languages including Arabic (Swinburne University OF Technology 2016:14). The BBC Arabic, established in 1938, is the oldest and longest running foreign-language news service in the UK.

On its website, the news agency states that it produces “accurate and unbiased news reports, and provides information based on experience and rigorous analysis” (BBC Arabic). This research sets out to investigate the news reports and the translations produced by the BBC. It will examine the BBC translation of the reports concerning the current conflict in Yemen.

2. Discourse and ideology

Discourse can be used as a tool to form, shape and promote certain ideas. Sertkan (2007) explains that ideology can be expressed through discourse; thus, discourse can be a reflection of ideology (Shahsavari and Naderi 2015:37). Discourse can also play a significant role in promoting a certain ideology in society. Ideology plays a substantial role in shaping, creating and controlling discourses and their practices. It is mainly expressed by talk or by produced texts (Dijk 2007:110). In

addition, it is used in discourse in ways that either maintain or weaken power relations (Harvey 2003:44).

For Claramonte (2003:72), language is a powerful weapon used by translators to bring their own thoughts. She demonstrates that “language is the translator’s tool, a dangerous tool, a weapon that he can cause damage with” (Claramonte 2003:2).

In this regard, Fairclough forges a link between power in discourse and the status of participants. He explains that the more powerful participants are, the more influential their discourse is (Fairclough 2015:46). Foucault considers discourse as the core of the relationship between knowledge, power and truth, and that it serves as a means for producing social subjects with certain views. He submits “‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it” (Foucault 1986:133).

Language can be used to promote and, sometimes, defy certain ideologies. One good example is the use of *fusha* (Standard Arabic) and *‘a:miyya* (colloquial) in Egypt in the twentieth century. Using colloquial Egyptian in literary work was associated with negative values like ‘ignorance’, ‘poverty’ and ‘ill manners’ by major players in the field of literary production in order to reinforce the use of Standard Arabic as a canonical practice in the field. In modern Egyptian culture, there has been a polarization in the scholarly community in two ideologically opposing groups of intellectuals: the proponents of Standard Arabic who adopt a pan-Arab or pan-Islamic collective identity and the proponents of colloquial Egyptian who support Egyptian identity. In debates involving both groups, the proponents of Standard Arabic, in order to undermine their opponent’s position, associate them with secularism, imperialism and anti-Arabism. Furthermore, they have always associated *fusha* with Islam in order to empower their position in the struggle against *‘a:miyya* advocates (Hanna 2016:172). Hannah adds that the status of Standard Arabic and colloquial Egyptian in all fields of cultural production in Egypt, the literary field in particular, has long been an ideological battlefield of discourses and counter-discourses seeking to accumulate gains in the fields of cultural production, as well as the social space at large. Promoting Standard Arabic was provoked by a strong sense of Arab nationalism and a Pan-Arabism ideology which calls for a standard Arabic to politically unify the language of all Arab countries.

Language can be an ideological battlefield of discourses and counter-discourses that promote and/or challenge certain ideologies. Thus, it can be used as a manipulation tool for the interest of certain powers and agents in order to promote certain ideas and thoughts.

3. Language media and discourse

3.1 Ideology in BBC

In a globalized world, media has become the most important platform from which political discourses and news are circulated and contested. Various powers have understood the importance of media in constructing, promoting and challenging certain ideologies. This is emphasized by Fawcett when he argues that

“throughout the centuries, individuals and institutions have applied their particular beliefs to the production of certain effects in translation” (Fawcett 1998:107)”.

In a similar link, Fairclough (2006:98) explains that the form and content of news reports are shaped according to the narrative the news agency tries to generate. The translations of news reports are also, quite often, shaped according to the narrative of the news agency. The entire process of any act of translation, including media translation, starting from the decision to report certain affairs and ending with the actual act of translation is guided by ideologies. This view is shared by Schäffner and Bassnett(2010:8) demonstrating that:

All processes, starting from a decision to report on affairs and events in another country (not only political affairs, but any topic) up to the production of a final text are determined by institutional policies and ideologies. Mass media enable communication across languages and cultures, but in doing so, they can privilege specific information at the expense of other information, and they can also hinder and prohibit information from being circulated.

Schäffner and Bassnett add that editorials recontextualize news stories by adding elements, deleting others or rearranging and substituting some elements (Schäffner and Bassnett 2010:5). Recontextualisation often involves the “filtering of some meaning potentials of a discourse” (Blackledge 2009:121).

The functionalist approach, initiated by Vermeer in the 1970s, through his skopos theory, proposes translation to be a purposeful activity designed for a specific purpose (Vermeer 2000:11). Translation can also be a translatorial action generated by a certain commissioner resulting in a target text which is structured for its specified needs. (Schäffner and Bassnett 2010:10-11). This indicates that in certain contexts, translators lack the freedom to act, particularly, in strict societies where texts and translations can be blocked to the public if they don't adhere to the official ideology of the ruling system.

The arguments discussed thus far reveal the influence of ideology on the material published in media and the translations of this material. This influence is best manifested in political news reports and their translations. News reports and their translations are often a reflection of the ideology of the publishing agency. In order to test this influence, a comparative study is conducted between reports published in BBC Arabic and their translations in BBC English. The news reports discuss the airstrikes launched by Saudi-led coalition on a funeral hall in the capital of Yemen, Sanaa in October 2016.

3.2 Analysis

English is a dominant widespread language. Almost every country has one media channel broadcasting in English. Nonetheless, some prominent media institutions, whose official language is English, like the BBC broadcast news in different languages including Arabic, Persian, Urdu and many other languages. BBC Arabic has its news correspondents in Arab countries and in the world. Its programs are produced in its studios either in Cairo or London (BBC 2017: BBC

Arabic). Thus, it is most likely that news reports concerning Arab countries are produced in Arabic and translated into English. Thereafter, the reports are translated from English into other languages. The analysis conducted in this paper is based on the aforementioned. The source text will be the Arabic text and the English will be the target text. A contrastive analysis between both texts is carried out to examine the credibility of the translations of the reports produced by the BBC concerning the war in Yemen.

Example 1

Source text

BBC Arabic (published on 9 October 2016)

الحرب في اليمن: السعودية "تحقق" في الغارات الجوية على مجلس العزاء بصنعاء

Target text:

BBC English (published 9 October 2016)

Saudis to probe deadly air strikes on Yemen funeral hall (BBC 2016b: probe)

Source Text	Target text
- الحرب في اليمن: السعودية "تحقق" في الغارات الجوية على مجلس العزاء بصنعاء	- Saudis to probe deadly air strikes on Yemen funeral hall
- ودعا الرئيس اليمني السابق علي عبد الله صالح إلى التصعيد العسكري مع السعودية	- Omitted
- واستهدفت الضربات الجوية مجلس عزاء والد وزير الداخلية اليمني، اللواء جلال الرويشان، الذي عينه الرئيس، عبد ربه هادي، لكنه احتفظ بمنصبه بعد استيلاء الحوثيين على صنعاء وخروج هادي إلى منفاه الاختياري في السعودية.	- The attack targeted the funeral of the father of Houthi-appointed Interior Minister Galal al-Rawishan.

In the first example, the source text discusses the airstrikes that targeted a funeral hall in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa. The phrase الحرب في اليمن which means "war in Yemen" is added to the beginning of the subheading. Adding the phrase explains the setting where the airstrikes occurred. It also states that there is a war in Yemen to imply that in the act of war it is normal to launch airstrikes and attacks. Thus, the Arabic version seems to justify launching airstrikes in Yemen from the very beginning. This phrase, based on the aforementioned, is a loaded linguistic feature that is employed in the text in order to propagate a certain ideology.

On the other hand, the same phrase has been omitted from the target text. This might imply that the English text does not consider the Saudi military campaign in Yemen to be a war. The target text also adds the word "deadly" to describe the airstrikes launched by the Saudi-led coalition. Knowing that these airstrikes did actually cause a high number of casualties and victims, one could

argue that the English heading is more accurate and informative. One could discern that the word “deadly” might not have been provided in the source text to conceal any claims of causalities caused by the airstrikes and to disclaim any collateral damage inflicted upon Yemeni civilians by the Saudi-led coalition attack. Based on the aforementioned analysis, the meaning in the Arabic version is toned down implying that the airstrikes did not have any deadly impact on Yemeni civilians.

In the second example, the sentence *ودعا الرئيس اليمني السابق علي عبد الله صالح إلى التصعيد العسكري مع السعودية*, which means that the Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh called for a military escalation with Saudi Arabia, is completely omitted from the English text. The Arabic version accuses the former Yemeni president Abdullah Saleh of igniting the conflict. According to the source text, he calls upon Yemenis to attack Saudi Arabia through military escalation. In relation to the first example, this statement indirectly provides the latter with a legitimate reason for launching the airstrikes. Nevertheless, this sentence is not mentioned in the target text, and consequently, the legitimacy for launching the airstrikes is also not provided or even implied in the English text.

In the third example, the source text provides *واستهدفت الضربات الجوية مجلس عزاء والد وزير الداخلية اليمني، اللواء جلال الرويشان، الذي عينه الرئيس، عبد ربه هادي، لكنها احتفظ بمنصبه بعد استيلاء الحوثيين على صنعاء*. The sentence means that the airstrikes targeted the funeral of the father of the interior minister Colonel Galal al-Rawishan who was appointed by the president AbdRabuHadi but kept his position after the Houthis took over Sanaa. In contrast to the English text, the Arabic version obviously states that the interior minister was appointed by the current Yemeni president Hadi who is supported by the Saudis.

As for the target text, it states that the airstrikes targeted the funeral of the father of the Houthi-appointed interior minister Galal al-Rawishan. This implies that the interior minister is supporting the Houthis in their conflict against the Saudi-led coalition. As a result, the airstrikes on the funeral might have been deliberate and planned to target the interior minister himself because of his sensitive and important position.

The interior minister is expected to be supporting the coalition forces as he is appointed by President Hadi, and therefore, it would be against the coalition’s interest to target him. However, the airstrikes might have de facto been deliberately launched by the Saudi-led coalition to target the Houthi-appointed interior minister. This is substantiated in another report published by the BBC on 12 October 2016 stating that “the Saudis have promised total transparency. That, in theory, should reveal who, if anyone, gave the order to bomb the funeral, knowing that senior Houthi rebel leaders would be present, and crucially whether or not they knew that large numbers of civilians would be hit” (BBC 2016c: Yemen conflict). Furthermore, the word *اللواء*, which means (major general), is provided in the Arabic text. Adding this word implies that the airstrikes did not target civilians, but rather, military personnel.

3.2.1 Discussion

The above examples demonstrate the influence of ideology on media reports and their translations. The Arabic source text undermines the consequences of the airstrikes launched by the coalition. Despite the severity of the attack that resulted in “disproportionately higher numbers of civilian casualties, when compared to military casualties” (Lederer 2016). The Arabic text does not state or even imply that these airstrikes were deadly and that they might have caused casualties. As shown in the aforementioned examples, it continuously attempts to justify launching the airstrikes by stating that they took place in an act of war. Although the number of civilian casualties could have been anticipated prior to the attack (Lederer 2016), the Arabic text implies that the attack was random and undeliberate by omitting the fact that funeral target was for the father of the Houthi-appointed interior minister Gala al-Rwishan. The Arabic source text selects motivated linguistic features and this selection is, most probably, motivated by the typical BBC Arabic discourse community. These loaded linguistic features reflect the dominant ideology of the Arabic speaking community.

Example 2

Source text

BBC Arabic news (published October 9 2016)

الحرب في اليمن: صالح يدعو اليمنيين إلى مهاجمة السعودية "ثأراً" لضحايا مجلس العزاء
في صنعاء (BBC 2016d: Saleh_yad^ū)

Target text:

BBC English News (Published October 9 2016)

Yemenis protest after funeral hall attack (BBC 2016e: protest).

In this example, the Arabic text most accurately reads as “War in Yemen: Saleh calls upon Yemeni people to attack Saudi Arabia to “avenge” the victims in the funeral in Sanaa”.

The Headline in English states that Yemenis are protesting after the attack that targeted the funeral in Sanaa. No details are provided regarding whether these protests are peaceful or armed. Thus, by simply stating that Yemenis protest, it implies that these protests are peaceful. It does not refer to any act of violence committed by the Yemeni side. In contrast to the source text, the English headline does not refer to the former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh.

3.2.2 Discussion

Similar to the first example, the Arabic text starts by stating that there is an ongoing war in Yemen, which prepares the reader to expect the kind of actions and violence occurring in any war. This justifies any attacks or strikes launched by the powers taking part in this war including the Saudi-led coalition. The Arabic headline also states that the former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh is calling upon Yemeni people to attack Saudi Arabia to revenge the fatalities caused by the airstrikes launched by Saudi-led coalition.

Once again, the Arabic source text puts more blame on the Yemeni side for escalating the war. Moreover, stating that the Yemeni president called upon Yemenis to attack Saudi Arabia justifies the actions the Saudis might do to defend their country. The Arabic text employs motivated linguistic features that, most probably, reflect the dominant ideology of the typical BBC Arabic discourse community. Disseminating news against this dominant ideology might provoke the country to block the BBC. This view is shared by Schäffner and Bassnett (2010:3), who argue that:

This means, that the availability of discursive spaces in which to act is itself something to be contested. In particular in dictatorial societies, texts can be prevented from being made accessible to the public if they are not in line with the official ideology of the ruling political party. For disseminating politics, the media play a significant role”.

On a paralinguistic level, the English version attaches the following picture on the website below the headline. This picture, adapted from UPA news agency, shows unarmed Yemeni people protesting peacefully against the Saudi airstrikes. In this regard, Baker argues that paralinguistic devices such as pictures and visual resource materials can be used to frame certain narratives and deliver extra information (Baker 2007:158). Thus, the picture, along with the headline, implies that the attacks by the Saudi-led coalition are unjustified and directs implicit accusations against the Saudis for targeting unarmed Yemeni civilians in their attacks.



Picture 1: Yemenis protested outside the UN's offices in Sanaa (adapted from BBC English October 9 2016, BBC 2016e: protest).

In contrast with the BBC English website, the Arabic website provides the following picture below the headline. This picture, adapted from Reuter news agency, supports the Arabic headline by showing armed civilians and militias protesting against Saudi Arabia. Attaching this picture supports the Saudi claim that their airstrikes are a defensive measure against the attacks by the armed Yemeni militias targeting Saudi Arabia.



Picture 2: (adapted from BBC Arabic October 9 2016, BBC 2016d: Saleh yad^u).

Furthermore, BBC Arabic on the same news report includes the following picture, adapted from Reuters news agency, which shows the former Yemeni president Ali Abdullah Saleh speaking to the press. Most likely, this picture was taken on a different occasion when Saleh was still the official president of Yemen. It shows the former president dressed in formal clothes surrounded by Yemeni officials and civilians. In the picture, one could see Saleh speaking to more than one news agency, including the official state news agency Saba. Thus, the picture might have been attached by BBC Arabic to support the headline claiming that Abdullah Saleh is instigating Yemenis to attack Saudis.



Picture 3: (adapted from BBC Arabic October 9 2016, BBC 2016d: Saleh yad^u).

Example 3

Source text

BBC Arabic news (published October 9 2016)

شهدت العاصمة اليمنية صنعاء مظاهرة احتجاج حاشدة ضد المملكة العربية السعودية بعد يوم غارة جوية على مجلس عزاء أتهم التحالف بقيادة السعودية بشنها وأودت بحياة 140 شخصا على الأقل.

"حانت ساعة الصفر لدعوة كل أبناء القوات المسلحة والأمن واللجان الشعبية ... للتوجه إلى جبهات القتال للأخذ بالثأر لأصحابنا" الرئيس اليمني السابق علي عبد الله صالح.
ودعا الرئيس السابق علي عبد الله صالح وحلفاؤه في الحركة الحوثية اليمنيين إلى تصعيد الهجمات ضد عدوهما المشترك المتمثل في المملكة العربية السعودية ردا على الغارة الأخيرة.
وقال صالح "أدعو كل أبناء هذه الأمة ... إلى مواجهة هذا العدوان بكل ما لديهم من قوة".
وأضاف "حانت ساعة الصفر لدعوة كل أبناء القوات المسلحة والأمن واللجان الشعبية ... للتوجه إلى جبهات القتال للأخذ بالثأر لأصحابنا".

وحض صالح "وزارة الدفاع ورئاسة الأركان ووزارة الداخلية على وضع الترتيبات اللازمة لاستقبال المقاتلين في جبهات نجران وجيزان وعسير"، وهي المناطق الواقعة على الحدود بين البلدين

(BBC 2016d: Saleh_yad^u)

Target text

BBC English news (published October 9 2016)

Thousands of Yemenis have taken to the streets of the capital, Sanaa, to protest after an air strike killed more than 140 people at a wake on Saturday.

Demonstrators gathered outside the UN headquarters demanding an international investigation into the strike, blamed on the Saudi-led coalition.

Saudi Arabia has not acknowledged any role but pledged to investigate.

It joined Yemen's civil war last year on the side of the internationally recognized government.

Powerful former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who has allied himself with the Houthi rebels that control Sanaa, has called for people to attack soldiers on the Saudi border in revenge.

More than 500 people were wounded in Saturday's bombing, which targeted the wake of the father of Houthi-appointed Interior Minister Galal al-Rawishan.

Many Houthi officials were in attendance and Mr Rawishan was seriously wounded in the strike (BBC 2016e: protest).

Reading both the English and Arabic texts one could observe the difference between both versions. The English version states that Yemenis have taken to the streets of Sanaa to protest against the airstrikes that killed more than 140 people. However, the Arabic source text submits that "the Yemeni capital Sanaa witnessed mass protests against Saudi Arabia a day after the airstrikes that the Saudi-led coalition was accused of". The Arabic version shows the Yemenis' resentment against the airstrikes Saudis were accused of. The phrase "accused of" is one of the loaded linguistic features used in the text to imply the uncertainty of

Saudi's responsibility for these airstrikes. This phrase suppresses Saudi's accountability of the attack. As a result, the Arabic text implies that Yemenis' protest against the Saudis is not justified.

The English text provides more elaboration on these protests and their demands of an international investigation. It also states that Saudi Arabia has not yet acknowledged its role in these airstrikes. This, however, was not submitted in the Arabic source text.

The English version, on the other hand, provides that Saleh, who is in alliance with Houthi rebels, is instigating Yemenis to attack Saudi soldiers on the borders. Yet, The Arabic version tones up the meaning and shows more violence from Saleh's side by stating that Saleh, along with his Houthi allies, is urging Yemenis to escalate their attacks against Saudi Arabia, their common enemy. Though the English text specifies that Saleh is targeting Saudi soldiers on borders, the Arabic version implies that Saleh is provoking people to target Saudi Arabia the country with its people.

Furthermore, the English text maintains that the Saudi-led airstrikes targeted the Houthi-appointed interior minister Galal al-Rawishan who was seriously injured. One could observe that this has not been maintained in the Arabic version. The Arabic text might have deliberately not provided this part to dissociate the Saudis with these airstrikes or, if the connection is confirmed, to make the airstrikes seem to be random and undeliberate action by Saudi Arabia.

4. Conclusion

The above analysis revealed that there is a consistent behavior repeated in both the Arabic source text and the English target text. The Arabic text constantly undermines the consequences of the airstrikes that targeted a funeral in the Yemeni capital of Sanaa. It seems to conceal certain information which might hold Saudi Arabia accountable for these airstrikes. Furthermore, the Arabic text appears to suppress certain issues by using certain discourse features such as omission, addition and substitution. The rationale for this could be that BBC Arabic is read by Arab speakers including Saudis and directing explicit condemnations against Saudis and holding them responsible in public for war crimes in Yemen might not be tolerated by the country. In addition, it might provoke Saudi authorities to block the BBC in the country.

On the other hand, the English translation is mostly read by English speakers who would probably not have affiliations to Saudi Arabia. Thus, delivering information condemning Saudi Arabia and its conduct in Yemen would not provoke any reactions and would be tolerated by the English reader.

In light of the aforementioned, it can be argued that the BBC, in contrast to its claim, does not deliver accurate information and news reports. It shapes the material and the translations of this material according to the expectations and the needs of the readers of the source and target texts. The BBC is "mistrusted by the public as a source of nothing but propaganda" as long as it is controlled by the government (British Journalism Review 2003:5). The BBC approach in news reports and translations of these reports could be described as functional. Drawing

on Vermeer's skopos theory (Vermeer 2000), it designs the material according to the aim it is supposed to achieve.

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