

Representation of women in news and their translations from English to Brazilian Portuguese

Context/Introduction

It does not come as a surprise to anyone when a linguist or a sociolinguist asserts that news very often influences and is influenced by the population in the construction of general concepts and stereotypes. It is also not new to say that there is no such thing as an impartial newspaper or news agency.

The major aim of this work is to determine whether it is possible for such concepts and stereotypes to be translated, or even translatable, in news texts. Through extensive analysis of paired news, texts in English and Brazilian Portuguese, words related to the isolated concept were used to see if the construction in the two versions was similar.

This isolated concept has been taken from a subcategory of Sociolinguistic studies: gender. More specifically, the word “woman”, with its plural form and its translations into Portuguese, was chosen to play that part.

Even though there is a constantly growing number of studies investigating women’s and men’s speech, the same volume of research is not found on what is said about men and women in different kinds of texts. At this point, it becomes clear why news texts were the choice for the study: they are relatively short, available online for free, which grants them easy and widespread circulation among people. The way it constructs concepts and spreads them provides the ideal conditions for analysis.

The fact that these news texts are pairs, written in English and later on translated to Brazilian Portuguese is another intriguing point in this research, because translation of journalistic texts is an unstable ground in Translation Studies.

This work is, therefore, inserted in two different areas, Sociolinguistics and Translation Studies, and its primary tool for acquisition of data is based on Corpora Linguistics.

Theoretical Background

Media Language

Since the 90's, with the widespread use of radio and television to aid broadcasting of news alongside with regular newspapers and tabloids, the concept of "worthy to broadcast" has changed dramatically. With the astoundingly rapid ways of updating and of even producing live news on television, radio and the internet, virtually anything became publishable regardless of proof or evidence at times, such as in personal blogs and social media pages.

The idea of impartial telling of news is now only a construct of some television channels and websites, claiming in their own means of communication that they do not seek more than a so-called "transmission of the truth". Although this position is still the official intention of some news agencies in Brazil, that is not what is stated by linguists and other researchers about the effects of news on society and the population in general.

Stereotypes very often occur in the same context as several types of discrimination. This happens because the broad-termed categorization results frequently on unequal chances for of these categories.

Language and Gender

More often than not, linguists have looked at the women issue in language in what we can call a descriptive way about our speech; our language has been studied as a deviation of that vague and indescribable notion of a standard language, that is, the male speech.

Janet Holmes develops this particular topic when discussing the idea of a sexist language. At first the matter seems absurd; how can a language, regardless of the speakers, transfer social inequalities?

"There are a number of ways in which it has been suggested that the English language discriminates against women. Most obviously, perhaps, in the semantic area the English metaphors available to describe women include an extraordinarily high number of derogatory images compared to those used to describe men." (p. 336)

The metaphors mentioned above range from animal and food vocabulary, but they are not restricted to the semantic field; they reach function words and morphemes (actor and *actress*, for instance, or even the standard gender for general sentences being "he", as in "one must be sure of his interests", and so on.

Corpus Linguistics

Although Corpus Linguistics is now widely spread and used and subject of seminars and congresses around the world, it is important to assert that it not a theory, but rather a chosen methodology. Jan Aarts mentioned in “Corpus Linguistics: An International Handbook” that it was never seen as a “discipline of its own right”, but “a means to an end”.(p. 34)

This paper will work with the same concept: the one that sees Corpus Linguistics as one of the best instruments available to search and identify patterns in language use.

It goes without saying that in an ideal context all corpora would approach both size and design perspectives, by carefully selecting parameters of population and type of texts, but also those would come in large numbers. Actually, the more variables inserted into the corpus design, the harder it will eventually be for the researcher to find texts to compile. This issue will be discussed in the methodology section.

Methodology

In order to ascertain whether the occurrence of texts concerning Casey Anthony was a coincidence or a pattern in translating news texts, two criteria were thus established:

- a) News texts must be available in both English (American or British) and Brazilian Portuguese;
- b) Selected texts must have as their central point of discussion a woman, a group of women or even women as a generalization.

The corpora used in this work are parallel in an attempt to elucidate the translation pattern. This work focuses on testing the hypothesis that such differences between translated and source texts are a relatively explicit in the making of news texts.

News texts proceeded to be collected online. In order to facilitate finding parallel corpora, searches were first performed on Brazilian versions of foreign websites, such as BBC Brasil or through the UOL database, which contains several translated news texts. Once an entry in Portuguese was found, related keywords were typed in search of the original newspaper websites from which the texts came.

The newspapers involved in the English corpus are: BBC, Freakonomics, New York Times, USA Today, Seattle Pi and Prospect Magazine, whereas the Brazilian Portuguese corpus is composed by texts taken from BBC Brasil, IG – Último Segundo and UOL Notícias.

They were collected by using the free software TextStat 2.8, in separate files for texts in English and Brazilian Portuguese, saved at first by their URL's and afterwards converted into .txt files for improved processing by the program.

Corpora collection took three months. Availability of paired texts is one of the main problems for this work. Even though the number of tokens intended for each corpus was around 40.000, at the point of closure the source text corpus in English had 36.583 tokens and the translated text corpus in Brazilian Portuguese had 32.144 tokens, both corpora calculated by the software above mentioned.

A few softwares were used to process the data and to sort them into the tables used here for analysis, those being AntConc, TextStat, Sketch Engine and Palavras, the latter one being a parser available at LEEL/UFMG, whose mainly use was for parsing the translated corpus.

Results

The quantitative analysis provided a picture of what words are usually related to women in that register; studies have already shown how women tend to be underplayed in all sorts of texts, so it hardly came as a surprise when terms usually connected to the lemmas “woman” and “mulher” have a significant amount of connections with words from the domestic environment, (they are subject of “rape”, described as “wives” and so on), especially in the Portuguese corpora analysed, both reference and translated corpus.

The next step, the analysis of clusters that could be found in the source and translated texts, revealed a particular pair of texts to be a problematic one, since the cluster “talented woman” could be found in the original corpus and it was nowhere in the translated one. The reason behind the phenomenon was that the translated text in Brazilian Portuguese is a product of a different translational approach; the sentences from each language could not be easily paired and some pieces of information had been dislocated, included or even omitted.

Bearing in mind that translating news texts was probably not a linear task, the qualitative analysis provided evidence that there were two main approaches used when translating these texts that had one or several women as their central theme: the first was called translation at sentence level, based on Baker's concepts about levels of translation and text level, being the second a category where all pairs of texts that shared the problems in pairing and changes in information flow were classified.

We can see the predominance of sentence level translations; although when the text level translation does occur, it seems to have a higher incidence on soft news than on hard news. This can be seen more clearly when the information is moved to percentages taken from the pairs of texts included in our two corpora:

Hard news at sentence level	5	62,5%
Hard news at text level	1	12,5%
Hard news at mixed approach	2	25,0%
Soft news at sentence level	9	64,8%
Soft news at text level	4	28,57%
Soft news at mixed approach	1	7,14%

Once it is acknowledged that the text sample has a significantly limited size, the percentages might provide evidence of a trend in translation choices.

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On the other hand, it cannot be said that soft news does not have a significant impact on society. It can be argued how even the subtypes under the label of soft news are within an entire semantic framework that is seen as feminine; arts, celebrities and lifestyle are stereotypically subjects regarded as “women issues”. If we check the table above, we can see that there is an increase in use of the text level translation for it; if the same standard is applied, does that mean that soft news does not need an “accurate” translation in the source language? Or is it a matter of transporting a fact to another culture, which therefore needs to be reset?

Whether those questions have affirmative answers or not, it is undeniable that the representation of women does suffer when an article is translated into Brazilian Portuguese via text level translation. As far as the texts included in our corpora go, these changes in representation frequently happen in one direction rather than the other: text level translations undermined their female subjects; from doctors to concerned mothers, from talented singers to incurable alcoholics, or even from women judged not guilty due to reasonable doubt to reckless mothers who “got away with it”.

In the last 50 years, there is a clear trend of empowering towards women, but if text level translations are not performed responsibly, there is a chance that these

misrepresentations, which might seem small when looked up close the way this work did, not only fail to inform but could even produce the effect of misinforming.

Further studies

Replicating this work with broader corpora or with different languages might shed some light on how accurate the conclusion driven from the present data is. Of course, Sociolinguistic Studies could benefit from an investigation of what factors determine the choice of news writing and selection, or to look at their making more intricately.

Since the translation of journalistic texts is still a somewhat cloudy subtopic in Translation Studies, more work can be done as to clarify the matter of translational authorship in news texts, to acquire a clearer view of what drives all the types of translation applied to news texts, especially how they can be affected by shifts in title, subtitles to pictures or even through an intertextual approach, how pictures and text are placed and if they provide any difference in effect.

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