BEYOND BILINGUAL BROADCASTING: THE CASE OF EURONEWS

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1. Introduction

As the field of Translation Studies widens, its theoretical foundations have greatly expanded in order to be able to account for different phenomena. What initially was seen as a simple operation in which meaning was transferred from L1 to L2 has changed greatly over the years; this evolution has been parallel to advances in the way we understand “meaning”, which is no longer a mere referential operation and includes a number of shades such as presupposition, implicature (as seen by Pragmatics) and more specifically, pragmatic presupposition. More significantly, the acceptance of an activity called “constrained”, “subordinate” or “conditioned” translation has taught us to accept that there might be other factors, beyond the “message”, which determine the choices in the target language, such as pictures, lip movement and sentence length, or even, as Rabádas (1992: 49) points out, marketing and reception of a product.

Yet it might be necessary to move one step further. In recent years, some scholars have been looking at a multinational activity, for which no name is easily found, based on the elaboration of texts in different languages starting from an original text containing the basic data. Those texts, while containing the same basic information, enjoy a great creative freedom, the only condition being that the final product should be revised to check that the main ideas have been conveyed. Such is the case, for example, in international marketing, where several leaflets are produced simultaneously; while the common origin is clear (a “fact”, as it were), we can hardly say that these texts have been translated from one another. Another possibility, which Holz-Mänttäri (quoted by Nord 1991: 27) calls “intercultural cooperation”, is that of somebody translating an operation manual and, realizing the original is full of factual mistakes, prefers to consult an engineer and produce a “version” of the instructions in the target language. In this case the source text has disappeared, but the purpose remains.

In the realm of television, and starting from a very simplified script, the case of Euronews is similar one. This channel, which started broadcasting on January 1st, 1993, can be received in English, German, Italian, French and Spanish. It must be said that, in principle, although Euronews is broadcast in several languages, such multilingualism is not easily perceived as such, for most Euronews viewers have access to it in only one language either through cable networks, collective
aerial systems or even as part of the broadcasts of specific channels (as in the case of La2, which includes two hours daily of Euronews material). Therefore, it is only those viewers with an individual satellite dish that can actually compare versions in different languages.3

An additional factor in translation is that, when we translate, we must take into account whom we are speaking, which includes being aware of the international role of L1 and L2. Whereas one of them may be limited to a specific area, the other one may be an international language, used by non-native speakers as a vehicle to gain access to information. The key factor to our study, therefore, involves the kind of audience of each sound channel. The Spanish case is different from all the other subcarriers, for all the other languages correspond to more than one country (even Italian is official in Switzerland), whereas Spanish can be completely identified with one European country. Therefore, the transnational trend in other languages is unnecessary in Spanish, for it is unlikely (and, as we said above, technically difficult) that anybody north of the Pyrenees will listen to Euronews in Spanish.

Our study is based on a total of 20 news broadcasts, recorded during the month of January. We shall deal with on-screen graphics, amount of information supplied and attitude of the newsreader.

2. One Europe, one label: graphics

On-screen graphics are another area of interest. In this area, Euronews tries not to offer the same word in different languages, but rather chooses to either use general, easily understandable cognates or one language.


Concerning geographical names, Euronews is highly respectful: the practice seems to be that of using local names if the language is one of the “official ones” (Italia, Deutschland, España), even if the country in question has another official language (Belgique and not Belgien); for Algeria and Switzerland the French version is preferred. In other cases, English is used (Czech Republic, Russia).

English is also used in the exchange rates sections; the labels are Euronomoney rates and Interbank rates. In this case, the explanation may be due to the fact that English is generally considered to be the language of international business.

2.2. “International” labelling.

Under this heading we have gathered those labels which, although they may belong to one of the official languages, act as international icons due to either their expanded usage or their transparency when seen from the others. Some are clearly English, but known all over the world (No comment), although most are Latin- or Greek-based words from one of the official languages but easily understandable in the others (Analysis being similar to Fr. analyse, Sp. análisis, It. analisi and G. Analyse; Economia to economy, economie, economia, economía and Ökonomie, ditto for Style, Perspectives, Visa and others).

Within this category, the time is also interesting, as a message which may cause lack of identification. The Spanish voiceover, almost invariably, says “hora europea”, whereas the English version tries not to mention Europe too much and simply tells the time; the label “central European time” is only used in graphics and the teletext service. In this area, one of the modifications introduced, precisely during the month when the sample was collected, was the “universalization” of the time shown in the lower right angle of the screen; previously, Central European Time was shown, whereas as of mid-January only the minutes past the hour appear. This, which could be interpreted as an attempt not to exclude Eastern Europe viewers, might also be meant not to clash with the British local time (CET minus one), and could be related to the purchase of a 49% stake in Euronews by the private British channel ITN on 27th November 1997.

Should we favour the latter hypothesis, that of not hurting the British ego, we should also look at the number of occurrences of the word Europe, which is significantly lower in English than in other languages; although we have no significant statistical data, the way the newscasts end and the weather starts is an interesting example of how you can address yourself to everyday while catering for British not-so-enthusiastic feelings (together with other references to the European Union we shall comment on later):

Here’s how the weather looks in your region.
Este es el mapa del tiempo en el continente europeo.

Euronews. Think broad.
(replacing a former “Europe’s rolling news and information channel”) Euronews. La cadena europea de noticias.

3. News about different countries: different versions

In what seems to be a happy coincidence, the main news items concerning the UK and Spain have dealt with similar matters. Therefore, our study shall be concerned with what Alcaraz (1991: 145) calls pragmatic presupposition, i.e. the “knowledge, expectations and values necessary for an utterance to be meaningful”, which we shall itemize under the following variables: amount of information supplied (corresponding to participants’ knowledge) and attitude of speaker (as the external sign of ideology).
3. 1. News about the UK and Eire.

The main story dealt with during January 1998 were the Northern Ireland peace process. There were other news items, such as the future opening of the burial site of Princess Diana, but none of them appeared for more than one or two consecutive days.

In general, the English version tries not to be too "local", neither in the words used nor in the information given. For example, the euphemism troubles, frequently used when talking about Northern Ireland, does not appear at all. Even when talking about the admission fee to Diana's burial site, the price is quoted in dollars (in the same way as when talking about money given to the unemployed in France); of course, the Spanish version quotes the price in pesetas.

The Spanish version is quite correct in the equivalents given, which largely coincide with the ones traditionally used by other Spanish media, such as the non-translation of IRA (unlike South American newspapers, who translate it as ERI); the only faux pas is the rendering of Maze prison by "prisión de Maza" (\?), which is fortunately done only once. What cannot be imitated, however, is the number of puns based on the name of the prison (\textit{into the maze, out of the maze}).

3. 1.1. News about Spain.

The most salient news item was the murder of José Ignacio Iruretagoyena, a Popular Party town councillor, by ETA gunmen, together with short reports on visits of King Juan Carlos I to Bosnia and storms in the Basque Country. In these cases, the information supplied was quite complete in English, with a wealth of background and geographical data, whereas in Spanish little if any background was given. Other data hidden or supplied, however, did not entail merely the knowledge of the facts themselves, and shall be dealt with in the attitude section.

3. 1.2. News about other countries.

Within this category, two of the phenomena we have already mentioned appear: the adaptation of the Spanish version for a single-country audience, and the rewriting of news. Concerning the former, in the coverage of the Paris-Dakar race, the English voiceover gives a general account, with no mention of English participants, whereas the Spanish one adds, within the "also-ran" category, some detail about how Spaniards did in each leg.

As for the rewriting of news, we have detected a few omissions which, although they do not come under the heading of attitude, deeply affect the way the news is perceived. For example, when reporting about the Clinton/Lewinsky affair, the English and the Spanish voiceover differ greatly, and some details are omitted in Spanish, such as the possibility that Monica Lewinsky should submit a declaration if granted immunity. These modifications, which seem to go beyond the mere adaptation of the message, are better seen under the following lens, that of attitude.

3. 2. Attitude.

In general, and whenever possible, Euronews has a pleasant, jocular tone, which is more or less reproduced in all sound channels. This can be seen in the way the visit of Prince Charles and his sons is reported; although, of course, there is no direct translation, the humorous remarks in English, all containing the allegory of "hunting" ("fair game for photographers", "allowed the cameras to open fire") reappear in Spanish (\textit{bien equipados, esquivar a sus anchas, piruetas en la nieve}). Also, the unprentch technical problem in the Mir space station is humorously treated in English and Spanish: a view of the astronauts playing with an inflatable champagne bottle is described as \textit{their champagne has gone flat and poco les dura la fiesta}.

When humour is not possible, the references are literary ones; compare the voiceover at the end of the report about killings in Algeria, where T.S. Eliot and Dante Alighieri provide the tragic tone: 

\begin{quote}
Ramadán, which is Islam's holiest month, seems also to be the cruellest.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Los argelinos han perdido toda esperanza.
\end{quote}

The only news item in which we have found clear samples of value judgments (not very frequent in "state" TV channels) is the victory of April Mó in the presidential election in Kenya. The Spanish version only mentions claims of vote-rigging by the opposition leaders, whereas the English voiceover offers details such as "he has been handed victory yet again", "a history of human rights abuse", a constitution \textit{tailor-made} and a number of ironic remarks by the newsreader which, we might suspect, could be related to the way the governments of former colonies are seen from Britain. There are other cases, such as the treatment of Yasser Arafat, who appears in English as the \textit{Palestinian president}, whereas in Spanish he is \textit{el líder palestino}, thus diminishing his status and that of the Palestinian institution. An interesting, though unnerving remark, if we remember that Britain played a major role in the creation of the state of Israel on former Palestinian soil.

Nevertheless, in news broadcasting the attitude of the speaker is not present in clear value judgments (which is contrary to "good" practice), but in the selection of data. Despite the brevity of our study, we may quote a number of markers corresponding to local ideology, namely:

\begin{enumerate}
\item when talking about monetary union, the English-speaking newscaster adds the remark "led by \textit{Bonn}", which is not present in Spanish, reminding us of British reluctance in front of German power within the EU;
\item when reporting about Spanish forces in Bosnia, the Spanish newscaster fails to mention that they belong to Nato troops, which is said several times in the English version; this is highly relevant for a country such as Spain, where there was a referendum to join the Treaty which clearly stipulated that Spain would not enter the military structure, a condition which was later disregarded by successive governments.
\end{enumerate}

Yet the most controversial issue, as we suspected, is the usage of euphemisms and disphemisms,
which is determinant in the way ideology is conveyed through language, in the treatment of ETA killings in the Basque country. The Spanish voiceover largely coincides with that of major Spanish TV channels and politicians (locura terrorista, los violentos, etc.), with a constant use of the word terrorista. The English version maintains a respectful tone, but seems to avoid the word terrorist, which is used only once in the initial summary and does not even appear in the long story; terms such as bombing or killing, with a few murders here and there, are favoured, and even the term guerrilla.

This, in principle, might be seen as an excessively neutral policy, not acceptable in the circumstances; however, it is our belief that this results from a conscious effort by English-speaking journalists not to use the word terrorist, after frequent accusations made of bias in the treatment of Northern Ireland killings (see Campos 1987 and Elliott et al. 1983).

Our hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the fact that, in English, neutral terms are used for the Ulster conflict, with terms such as sectarian violence, plus a general vocabulary of war (even with the idea of prisoner exchange), whereas in Spanish “terrorista” is used. In Spanish, however, it seems that the traditional pro-Catholic bias lives on, if we look at the terms used; some of the references are compulsory, such as the rendering of the province as Ulster, thus eliminating the assumption that Northern Ireland is part of the UK (in Spanish la provincia del Reino Unido is used only once). However, other details result from a conscious choice: where the English-speaking news reader talks about the LVF guerrilla and the LVF attack, in Spanish reference is made to terroristas de la Fuerza Lealista del Ulster and atentado, whereas the LVF leader in Spanish fue abandonado en la prisión de Maze, the passive mercilessly hiding the authors. In fact, the word terrorista is only used for Roman Catholics and Protestants alike in the “Analysis” section, where a more conscious effort is made to avoid taking sides. Nevertheless, we must insist that this pro-Catholic bias is not, in our opinion, a result of the speaker’s choice, but is conditioned by the tradition and ideology of the whole Spanish press, or, if we adopt the polisystem terminology, by the “canon” prevailing in Spanish journalism.

This, of course, questions the idea of a joint European channel broadcasting simultaneously, for if the voiceover changes, it is not the same news (despite claims to the contrary) that Europeans are receiving. To name a clear example, the news about the extradition of an alleged Irish terrorist, Roisin McAliskey, included in English the fact that she was in poor health condition and had been imprisoned with her baby daughter, whereas nothing was said about this in the Spanish version, which greatly changes the way the news is perceived and judged (although it balances the generally pro-Catholic treatment given in Spanish).

We also detected a curious difference in a seemingly “harmless” matter: a hip fracture suffered by HRH the Queen Mother, who was described as Britain’s favourite grandmother in English, whereas in Spanish she became el miembro favorito de la familia real británica, thus opening a presupposed message that other royals might not be so popular, in line with the stance of the Spanish media in general, always eager to stress the differences between royal families. This sort of remark would be hardly acceptable in official media in English.


From the few samples collected, it is easily deduced that, far from offering a dubbed version of the same text, which would be technically impossible, what Euronews does is work on a short number of “facts” (if there is such a stable entity in journalism), supported by the same images, but that is where all similarities end. Unrestrained by literal translation or even dubbing, and given a considerable degree of freedom by the fact that addresses are not aware of what is said in other languages, journalists prepare the text that, in their opinion, best suits their prospective audience.

All the discrepancies point in the same direction: where the Spanish version goes local, the English one remains international. Both in attitude and information supplied the English version addresses itself to audiences all over Europe and northern African countries, whereas the Spanish version has a thoroughly Spanish focus and attitude, often echoing those in Spanish TV channels.

This has a lot to do with a wider discussion, related to the role of English as a world language. Countries such as Sweden, Holland or Denmark, since they have “minority” languages, have chosen to make English their instrument towards universality, as shows the fact that many degrees in such countries are taught entirely in English. Thus, Euronews has chosen to reach a wider audience by eliminating many components that could make it too local; with the exception of one of the sports commentators, whose accent is slightly on the Cockney side, the English used is also non-regional, both in pronunciation and grammar. The policy is highly effective if we consider that British citizens do not usually resort to satellite news, and if they do, they will tune into Sky News, not out of ideological reasons, but simply because the prevailing satellite package in Britain is that offered by Sky TV, which broadcasts through the Astra satellite system, whereas Euronews has chosen Eutelsat. The two satellites are, in principle, incompatible and impossible to receive with a single, static dish. Moreover, Euronews is not rebroadcast by any British TV channel (unlike TVE, RAI and France TV), therefore, despite the minor adaptations aimed at not insisting too much on Europe as an icon, Euronews has chosen not to speak to the British, for they are not listening.

But the most important conclusion that we may draw, after the differences we have pointed at, is that translation, or multilingual broadcasting if we please, is conditioned by a number of factors, amongst which the knowledge and attitude of the addressees, as defined by the cultural canon, is the most important. For their part, the facts themselves (i.e. the “referent”, or the traditional idea of “meaning”, as linguists say) only play a secondary role, to such an extent that there is no visible source language text, and the translator is no longer a mediator, but even a creator, which entails a
Encuentros en torno a la Traducción

certain danger that, as we have seen, the general message might change dramatically.

This, in turn, affects the very nature of translation; traditionally, we have seen it as a transfer from an original text in L1 into L2, but perhaps a wider definition should be adopted to encompass also those cases in which there is no "original" text in L1, but simply a number of visions of the same facts through different languages and different ideologies. Lemarchand (1995: 25-33) questioned the existence of the "source text" as a stable entity; what we wonder here is whether its very existence can be questioned as well, going in the direction of what Holz-Mantári calls "intercultural cooperation".

Bibliography


Unlike most TV channels, Euronews has no Internet site of its own, but information can be found at the following sites:

http://www.itn.co.uk/euronews
http://eurworld.compuserve.com/homepages/AndyFitz/euronews.htm
http://www.francetv.fr/html/euronews.html

Notes

1. All translation theorists are prepared to accept, however, that dubbing a film into a foreign language does come within the realm of translation; however, in addition to non-referential factors, such as lip movement, duration of utterance, etc., there are other filters, such as cultural differences and even censorship, which may well lead a completely different L2 text, which everybody would accept as a "translation". Is translation, then what we are prepared to accept as such?

2. Although early advertisements for this channel mentioned a sound channel in Arabic, the scheme was dropped, although the 7.74 MHz sound carrier has been left available for future use.

3. As from Feb 2, 1998, and as a result of the launching of the Astra 1G geostationary satellite, Euronews has entered the CanalSatellite digital package, and can also be viewed by such subscribers (300,000 in Spain at the time of writing this paper), although only English and Spanish are available.

4. Talking about the literary and cultural canon, I cannot resist the temptation to quote a few remarks by the protagonist of a horror story by Adobe James: “Fifteen years ago, I would have suspected Kenyatta’s Mau-Mau. Not now. His Kikuyu bandits and assassins have gotten what they wanted; everything! Now they are all Gilbert and Sullivan Major General in their own black armies; politicians robbing the natives now” (“An Apparition at Noon” in Van Thal, H. ed. (1968) The Ninth Pan Book of Horror Stories, Pan Books).

5. This is not the only case usual Spanish terminology is used; the past, present and future leaders of the EU becomes la troika comunitaria, as usual in Spanish media.

6. This does not mean, however, that journalists do not know what their colleagues say in the other languages; the coincidence of humour and literary remarks suggests that, at least, there is some kind of post-the-fact mutual awareness.

7. Time and space restrictions have led us to disregard comments in other languages. Further research could be made, however, on how the same news item is dealt with in other languages, and on how French, Italian and German newscasters deal with controversial subjects (unemployment in France, Algeria, corruption in Italy) that may affect their respective areas.
NUEVAS TENDENCIAS Y APLICACIONES DE LA TRADUCCIÓN

ENCUENTROS EN TORNO A LA TRADUCCIÓN
Carmen Valero Garcés
Isabel de la Cruz Cabanillas
(Eds.)

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