

(Mis)Translation of Culture? Journalistic style in online reporting about a violent attack abroad

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This paper summarizes an 18-month study¹ that began with two premises: 1) journalists reporting on events, places and people abroad are intercultural mediators engaging in the translation of culture (Brownlie 2010; Conway 2012; Davier 2015, 2017; Scammell 2018); 2) just as stylistic features shape the content and messages of literary works, they also influence the way news consumers perceive the events and societies reported upon. Nevertheless, stylistic features have been neglected by news translation scholars.² This paper aims to help fill that research gap by sharing findings from the analysis of a corpus of online news from England, Switzerland and Spain.

Articles came from different parts of the political spectrum and addressed the violent attack perpetrated with a lorry in Nice, France in July 2016. Uses of modality, alliteration and metaphor, and of the term 'jihad' and its derivatives, information about French society, and attitudes to Muslims were examined using the qualitative data analysis tool QDA Miner. Findings include a tendency to employ modality to give suppositions or other unproven content a patina of fact. The texts use symbolically powerful metaphors in diverging ways which sometimes reflect the political affiliation of the newspapers. Metaphor and alliteration often serve to emphasize violence and negativity in a way that is likely to heighten fear and distrust of certain groups, in particular Muslims. However, left-leaning sources tend to historicize and contextualize more, which could offset the fear and distrust. There is also a telling case of journalists failing to respect their newspaper's own editorial guidelines about use of a loaded term. Finally, the constellation of results differs according to country, potentially contributing to challenging the notion of a monolithic "European news". In conclusion, this paper aims to raise awareness of the key role journalistic style plays in the transmission of representations of the "Other" – a significant issue given the media's influence on public opinion, policy and cultural debate.

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² One notable exception is Schäffner (2014) on metaphor.