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Online news reports and their translations: Describing the process

Sinara de Oliveira Branco

RESUMO

Este estudo interdisciplinar tem como objetivo (i) descrever como o jornalismo *on-line* é desenvolvido e (ii) observar até que ponto as traduções destes textos são produzidas seguindo uma linha mais voltada ao texto original ou seguindo um linha mais voltada ao texto e público alvo, tendo em mente as idéias apresentadas para a criação de textos jornalísticos *on-line* e as idéias da Abordagem Funcionalista na Tradução.

Palavras chaves: Reportagens *on-line*. Tradução. Abordagem funcionalista.

Jornalismo *on-line* e sua tradução: descrevendo o processo

ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary study aims (i) to describe how online news reports are developed and (ii) to see to what extent their translations are produced following either a more source-text-oriented model or a more target-text-oriented model, bearing in mind the ideas presented for the development of online journalistic texts and the ideas of the Functionalist Approach in Translation.

Key words: Online News Reports. Translation. Functionalist Approach.

"The medium is the message."

(Marshall McLuhan

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1 INTRODUCTION

Online Journalism has been gaining ground over the recent years and translations of online news have been largely produced for different languages, directed to different parts of the world. However, paradoxically, the issue regarding the translation of online news reports remains largely unexplored within the realm of Translation Studies (TS). Therefore, to remedy this current state of affairs, this work explores the issue of the translation of online news reports with a view to foregrounding this area and shedding some light on such a still largely unexplored field in the discipline of TS.

2 JOURNALISM X ONLINE JOURNALISM: WHERE ARE POWER AND CONTROL NOW?

Jones (2000, p.171) states that the Web has become the most important Internet phenomenon not only because of its ubiquity, or its use for electronic commerce, but because of its rise to prominence in 1998 as a medium for news. In fact, one of the main uses of the Web today is as a means for spreading information. Journalism and the Web share some common characteristics, and not simply in regard to their content.

Deuze (2003) affirms that the Internet is responsible for important changes in journalism today. Terms like 'hypertextuality', 'interactivity', and 'multimediality' influence the way professional journalism is being redefined and, consequently, help the raise of questions about how the medium enabling interactive and flexible text changes the way news producers disseminate information, initiate discourse to cultivate readership, and satisfy commercial interests. In this respect, Jones (2000, p.177) goes forth to say that online journalism is not the same as the journalism that we have known thus far. Online Journalism creates a different order of content; speed is not the issue. The issue now is the development of news that extrapolates and anticipates. The author says that the practice of journalism has not changed – traditional news media are still involved in the practice of journalism in some cases. Newsroom practice remains largely unchanged, according to Jones. Therefore, journalism as a process is the same. The difference brought to journalism by the Web is that journalism is no longer about space, nor about bringing together disparate places, peoples and interests. Journalism is no longer about time or history and the merging of multiple pasts into a single present either. The impact of the Web is on the commodification[1] of journalism.

The point Jones makes is that online journalism goes beyond information and reporting news. Online journalism implies money and public domain over the Web first, and then information. Herman & Swiss (2000, p.21) seem to be in tune with Jones' view when they affirm that "the most striking feature of digital communication

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[1] Commodification, or 'commodity', here refers to what Marx (1848) described as the expansion of market trade, and to the treatment of things – journalism, in this case – as tradable commodity. The term has generally a negative connotation, because it is related to the terms like 'fetish' and 'alienation'.

may well be not that it has opened up competition in communication markets, but that it has made it vastly easier, more attractive, and more necessary for firms to consolidate and strike alliances across the media, telecommunications, and computer sectors." The authors illustrate that in the late 1990s large telecommunications and computer equipment companies started to merge, due to the growth of the Internet. In the realm of new technologies and journalism, it can be noticed that this combination is quite recent and that it has affected news production in different ways. Thus, on the basis of the ideas above, it seems important to start presenting the ways in which journalism differs from online journalism.

Barbosa (2001)[2] cites some of the main features of online journalism: information is presented non-linearly, using links and it is not necessary to follow a horizontal reading of texts, especially long texts. Another common practice is editing texts written to press newspapers in order to publish them online, shortening those reports and dividing them in sections. This practice helps the reader decide what parts of the texts interest them, facilitating the non-linear reading. As regards the use of the Internet via links and hypertexts, the author also mentions a second resource of online journalism – the use of sound and video. Such a use helps reading from the computer screen in a more dynamic way given the fact that reading from the computer screen is still tiresome. Jones (ibid.) problematises this non-linear reading and space and time aspects involving online news: "a journal is not merely an exercise in recordkeeping, but also an exercise in slowing time and capturing space" (p.182) What the Web does is the opposite: history "will not be read in the linear, sequential unfolding of events over time, not in the structures of space it may develop, but in the relational movements of our interest and attention as we pay it heed" (ibid.). What seems to matter is the velocity and the amount of information individuals can access almost at the same time. History, facts, and news will be passed on through the links and hyperlinks without much attention or criticism.

The democratic view of the West concerning journalism affirms that some aims of journalism are: to inform, communicate, analyse, explain, and contextualise facts. Another important aim of journalism according to Jones (ibid.) is to make power transparent: to observe and to control power from individuals, institutions or organisations, even if such powers are considered legitimate in the social system. However, the author is aware of the fact that this Western democratic view is misleading; (i.e., economic and political powers control and influence journalistic media much more than the other way round). To support this idea, Lage (2001) affirms that the control coming from economy and international agencies over the press generates a subverted and dictatorial communication system. Economy and politics tend to determine what must be in the news – what should be said and what should be left unsaid. Pearson (1999, p.09) cites Newhagen & Levy (1998, p.13) to say that "quality control concerns drove the professionalisation of the occupation of journalism and its centralisation in the hands of a 'professional elite' responsible for determining what

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[2] http://bocc.ubi.pt/pag/barbosa-elisabete-interactividade.pdf, accessed on August 30th, 2006.

was 'true' and 'real' in the information they distributed." However, Pearson (ibid.) also mentions that the "nonlinear flow of information on the Internet, with distribution across numerous sender-receiver nodes, shifted the power structure in information selection, processing and distribution away from the journalist". Herman & Swiss (2000, p.07) criticize this aspect, and question whether these changes will lead the way to a qualitatively different media culture and society or whether "the corporate commercial system will merely don a new set of clothing." It is necessary to evaluate the positive and negative points of both press and online journalism and try to find a balance that promotes the spread of information both in press media and online.

To reinforce the economic power control involving journalism and the need for translation in the area, Zipser (2002, p.40) mentions that, as any other translated text, the journalistic text is by nature a sales product – i.e. a commodity –, so it must be adjusted to respond to its readership in the first place. This position entails that the translation of journalistic texts must take into account such a readership and, consequently, their translation must be considered as a 'prospective' translation. For this line of thought, the translation of a journalistic text – as any other translation type, according to the Functionalist Approach – must fulfill the needs of a client and readership, with the prospective idea meaning that the translation achieves such an aim also in terms of news selection as previously mentioned by Lage (2001).

To narrow the perspective to the issue at play, Deuze (2001) mentioned that "[a]s early as 1995, new media commentators realized that journalists were not the only ones providing information anymore – in particular on the World Wide Web." Nowadays, it is common to see people who are not journalists writing and being read as journalists. Herman & Swiss (2000, p.05-06) cite Negroponte, media lab director at the Massachussets Institute of Technology, saying that the Internet is underestimated, and that it will become the enabling technology of all media – TV, radio, magazines and so on. The preoccupation about this prediction is that, apparently, nobody knows what the price to be paid will be for accessing such a powerful means.

3 ONLINE NEWS REPORTS AND THEIR READERSHIP: WHAT IS THE JOURNALIST'S ROLE NOW?

Hall (2001) affirms that the Internet has changed the way audiences interact with the news forever. The author illustrates that stories are posted the moment they break and readers expect to be able to access both the news sources and local perspectives. This access is possible by means of interactivity, personalization and convergence. In order to provide the reader with all these resources, the standards and skills of journalism and journalists online have to be improved.

Online Journalism, according to Gonçalves (2002, p.02), is supposed to create research techniques and adequate gathering of information to what is offered by the telematic area. One of the improvements in this aspect comes from CAR – Computer

Assisted Reporting – which provides benefits, such as more information, more sources, more checks and balances freely available. However, Hall (2001) also mentions one drawback concerning such 'facilities': reporters and editors in general felt nervous and concerned about the 'omnipresence' of the Internet in their work. The author also mentions a piece of research at the BBC in Great Britain that revealed the unrest that new media technologies have created in the newsroom, besides the fact that journalists complained about lack of time to adequately use and master the technology, feeling stressed because of the 'immediate' nature of the Internet.

Making matters worse, a new kind of reader, more demanding and presenting new features, has also come on scene: Nielsen & Morkes (1997) have developed research about this new reader and have reported the fact that:

• users do not read on the Web; instead they scan the pages, trying to pick out a few sentences or even parts of sentences to get the information they want;

• users do not like long, scrolling pages. They prefer the text to be short and straight to the point;

• users dislike anything that seems like marketing fluff or overly hyped language and prefer factual information.

It was also noticed that scanning is common practice, that readers prefer short or at least broken up texts. Readers like summaries and the inverted pyramid writing style, starting by conclusions. Readers also opt for: (i) helpful hypertext structure; (ii) graphical elements if they complement the text; and (iii) playfulness and humour in work-related websites. Finally, readers demonstrated that credibility is an important issue on the Web: they want to know who the publisher of a particular site is and who their sources of information are.

In 1999 Deuze had already illustrated the point that the introduction of the Internet in the BBC newsroom caused feelings of stress and unrest among the journalists involved. The reason for this fact was that, all of a sudden, journalists had to keep the online counterpart in mind, master the new technology, learn the skills and be reflexive about what it meant to the values and standards in journalism – not a small task for whatever the professional.

Deuze (2001) reinforces the role of online journalists as professionals able to (i) make decisions on which media formats best tell a certain story (multimediality), (ii) allow room for options for the public to respond, interact or even customize certain stories (interactivity), and (iii) consider ways to connect the story to other stories, archives, resources and so on through hyperlinks (hypertextuality). The author says that this is the 'ideal-typical' form of online journalism worldwide. Such a professional, nevertheless, feels the pressure of the demands of the multimediality provided by the Internet, and such a pressure affects his/her production in different ways, including the news production – the content – in itself, and by 'content' here, Deuze (ibid) means everything, including banner ads, chat rooms, and research papers. Editorial content

are texts, including written and spoken word, videos and pictures, produced and/or edited by journalists. The author adds that few sites indeed use hyperlinks properly; (i.e., integrating their information with the Web). It is more common to see the use of hyperlinks to pages within the branded site or even frame. According to Deuze (ibid.), as regards the use of multimedia, sites that make good use of it are CNN and BBC.

At this point, it seems important to mention the role of interactivity more specifically, since it seems to be one of the great influences on the online reader. Deuze (ibid.) subdivides interactive options on Web sites into three types: (i) navigational interactivity – through 'Next Page' and 'Back to Top' buttons or scrolling menu bars –, (ii) functional interactivity – through direct mail to links, Bulletin Board Systems (BBS) and moderated discussion lists, for example –, or (iii) adaptive interactivity – offering chat rooms and personal customization through 'smart webdesign'. Once again, in order to raise the issue of limited use of interactivity on the Web, the author mentions that interactivity options are not developed beyond functional and navigational levels. This fact sounds controversial, since it has been already demonstrated that the more interactive opportunities websites give to users, the more involved the users will feel about the Web site.

To my view, in order to have this kind of implementation, the role of journalists has to be redefined, as well as the professional has to have a new preparation to assume the online work. Following this idea, Gonçalves (2002, p.02) brings up the concept of Precision Journalism, created in the 1970s to define the journalistic work in complex societies. However, the concept reveals the limits of digital models in Precision Journalism, because such models are used simply as ancillary to the process. By presenting the point of Precision Journalism, the author aims to show the need to start using technology to improve journalists' work, contributing to a change in the essence of this profession.

Graupera Sanz also mentions the new roles of journalists and says that "[these professionals] have to be able to use new tools on the online environment; they need new skills since unusual resources are available." The interactive reader expects the online journalist to organize texts directed to online interactivity. The author goes on to mention a publisher – whose name was not mentioned, though – talking about journalists working on the Internet: "They are not traditional journalists, they need to work very fast, sometimes they are more like editors, or producers. They need to be very focused on the right choice and the timeliness of the stories on the Web".

Nowadays, it is expected that journalists be 'entertainers' thanks to electronic media. News today is accessed electronically and readers expect to be informed in a more 'entertaining' way, via texts, pictures, links, etc. Furthermore, when reporting news – online or press news –, it is necessary to specify: (i) subject; (ii) object; (iii) cause; (iv) manner; (v) place; and (vi) time. These points tie with news questions "who?", "what?", "when?", "where?", "how?", and "why?", also used by Nord's (1991, p.04, 05) description of the initiation of a translation work: the translation is initiated by a customer approaching a translator, because s/he needs a certain target text for a

particular target addressee or recipient in the target language, from a certain source text written in a source language by an author or text producer or transmitted by a source-language sender under the particular conditions of the source culture at a specific time. As it is made evident, text production, be it a translation, a piece of news or any other text type, follows some guided rules that must be obeyed and that are sometimes similar to each other. Having raised the issue of translation I will now focus on the importance and need for online news translation.

4 THE DEVELOPMENT OF ONLINE JOURNALISM, THE INTERNET AND THE NEED FOR TRANSLATING ONLINE NEWS

Let me cite some points that, according to Sousa (1999, p.53-56) contributed to the development of journalism: (i) the increase of information load and its capacity to be spread; (ii) literacy and urbanisation; (iii) the increase of consumer power; (iv) the creation of journalistic companies directed to profit and not to ideological doctrine; (v) new values and lifestyles directing attention to recreation, trips etc.; (vi) technical advancement favouring cheaper text production. As we live in a consuming society, all these factors are influential for the interest in press news and online news.

As regards technical advancement, Pearson (1999, p.27) lists some qualities of news medium: "immediacy, interactivity, multimedia, technology and **making money**" (my bold types). Adopting a critical view over the matter, Herman & Swiss (2000, p.15-16) problematise the interactivity and dependence on the Web and the Internet, which make people feel the need to be connected 24 hours a day:

> The digitalisation and computerisation of our society are going to transform us radically, yet even those closely associated with these developments express concern about the possibility of a severe deterioration of the human experience as a result of the information revolution.

> Is it really so wonderful or necessary to be attached to a communications network at all times? Is it such a wonderful environment to be on city streets where everyone is talking into little cell phones? Is sitting in front of a computer or digital television for hours per day really such a great thing for humans to do, even if it is "interactive"? Why not look at the Web as a process that encourages isolation, atomisation, and marginalisation of people in society? In fact, cannot the ability of people to create their own "community" in cyberspace have the effect of terminating a community in the general sense?

The authors seem to be questioning to what extent all this modernity and digitalised society will in fact do some good to communities and to face-to-face interactivity among people. Obviously, being connected and using digitalised systems

have benefits. However, how far can people go and to what extent such uses and systems can be viewed as benefits before they turn problematic? The authors still make another comment over the matter:

> [A] theory has emerged asserting that we have no reason to be concerned about concentrated corporate control and the hypercommercialisation of media. This claim is that the World Wide Web, or, more broadly, digital communication networks, will set us free. (…) In any case, to varying degrees, visionaries told us how these magical technologies would crush the existing monopolies over media, culture, and knowledge and open the way for more egalitarian and just social order. But the World Wide Web is qualitatively the most radical and sweeping of these new communications technologies, and the claims about it top earlier technological visions by a wide margin. (ibid., p.05)

The quotation above calls the attention to an illusionary view upon the World Wide Web and its side effects. The authors invite us to take a more critical view over complex issues concerning technology and the Internet in order to avoid any kind of naivety over the matter.

Moving from technology and the Internet to language, Delisle, J. & Woosworth, J. (1995, p.101) claim that "ever since the invention of writing, people have attempted to acquire the technical and scientific know-how of their neighbours". This seems to be one of the reasons why translating – news and information in general – is so necessary. If people wish to acquire knowledge, they need to have access to other languages or have them translated into their own language. The authors go on to say that this need for knowledge and appropriation of knowledge "has led to the dissemination and development of science and technology" (ibid.). As can be observed from the quote above, the search for knowledge has been one of the main quests of humanity. Such a quest has promoted the development of technology and demanded faster means of communication – the computer and the Internet – to come into the scene.

As pointed out above, the search for knowledge and information provided by the mass media has been spread out all over the world at great speed, and it needs to be passed on to different countries and cultures. Translation has a lot to do with this coming and going of information around the world. Texts must be translated and, as Pym (2000) says, 'localised' for every specific place they are sent to, because the mobility of products and goods – including news – has increased thanks to the development of transport and communications technology. As information is exposed much faster nowadays, "rewriting becomes a constant activity; there are no singular ST and no definitive TT; globalisation has effectively blown apart most of the models we use to think about translation and indeed communication" (ibid., p.221). The quotation above brings back the point on Nord's Functionalist Approach used to investigate online news translations. As Pym mentioned, it is problematic to talk about one single ST or a definitive TT. These texts are adapted and read by thousands of people and go on adapting themselves to the needs of their readership.

Sousa (1999, p.55) adds some considerations about the hallmark on the media online – the Internet[3] and especially the World Wide Web. The author states that these advancements took AWAY from the journalist the role of being the information flow manager, because the access of information on the Internet made it possible for the reader to have access to some pieces of information even before they are eventually published in the news. To some extent, Pearson (1999, p.10) subscribes to this point of view saying that, according to Reddick & King (1995), "computer-assisted reporting and research (CARR) involves electronic access to government documents, databases, court reports, articles, and specialist opinions, adding to the depth of coverage of an issue and the discovery of angles on stories which have never been contemplated." However, Pearson (ibid.) complements this idea by saying that "while new media might represent a threat to the medium in which the journalist currently works, journalism itself can be enriched by using the new media proficiently." This means that the journalist must learn to take advantage of new technological advancements in order to know how to use them in their favour and in order to continue producing high-quality news and to provide the reader with new resources of information and interactivity. This is proof of a new professional coming on the scene, a professional that takes over the place of the passive reporter, creating a new relationship between author and readership.Complementing this idea, Gonçalvez (2002, p.03) affirms that online journalism includes all discursive product reproducing reality by the singularity of facts, using telematic support or any other type of technology transmitting numerical signs and incorporating the interaction with users during the production of news. The author cites this point in order to remind us that the consolidation of online journalism depends on the overcoming of the model of Precision Journalism and of the CARR, consequently, on the proper use of technology.

The general difficulty faced by journalists can also be identified when thinking about the translation of articles in general, since it takes obviously even longer to print the translated information. Another point to bear in mind is that when thinking specifically about online news, it is important to mention that this type of news occurs 'glocally', (i.e., on the global level, but with adaptations to the local level). Canetti (1999) reinforces this idea saying that one of the main difficulties in translating online news is precisely how to communicate such pieces of news in different cultures. The author affirms that the translator must 'reconstruct' phrases in the text in order to avoid 'syntactic calques'; i.e., some texts probably need to be translated in a way that the news is adjusted from one language to the other, from one context to the other.

Sousa (1999, p.77) mentions the "structural-functionalist paradigm", saying that the analysis of a system involves the study of its structure and function. In order to consider these points, it is necessary to analyse the functionalist paradigm applied to communication studies, answering the act of communicating questions; once again,

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[3] The term 'Internet' here will be used with the broader, lay definition used by Pearson (1999, p.12), taking it to be "any form of online computer-based communication available to journalists [and translators] for use in their work."

similar to the ones presented in Nord's (1991) Functionalist view of translation: Who? … Says what? … On what channel? ... To whom? ... With what effect? So, the functionalist paradigm, just like in Nord's model, involves the study of language functions and of the means of communication in the society.

Pearson (1999, p.41) cites an ethnographic survey on the Internet and its impact upon media relations. The conclusion of the survey was that "media provided public relations professionals with a 'dynamic' rather than 'static' medium; altering the time and space constraints present in the media." Such a survey leads us to have an idea of the future of the journalist as a "'facilitator' of public discussion, not the guardian of public knowledge (ibid., p.10)", and also to view the journalist in a new role: "creator of interactive devices on Web sites, discussion facilitator in online chats, incremental news updater, innovative and versatile, rather than medium bound, new deliverer, information consultant or broker, both writer and designer, Web scientist, and investigator/crime fighter on the web". Besides all these new features, I would add one more – the role of a translator of news reported online. In some of the sites investigated in the corpus of this study, the journalist comes up also as the news translator.

5 ONLINE JOURNALISM IN BRAZIL

Much research and publication about Online Journalism has obviously been developed online, showing the efficiency and validity of this media also for academic work. In Brazil, some universities have developed much research in the area and some of the works developed – relevant to this investigation – will be cited now. The first work mapping the area in Brazil was developed by *Grupo de Pesquisa em Jornalismo* [Research Group on Journalism] (FACOM/UFBA)[4] between August 2000 and August 2001. It aimed to present tendencies and features of online journalism in Brazil. The researchers came to the conclusion that journalistic reports in Brazil still present strong similarities to press news, not appropriately exploring the resources offered by the virtual environment to online journalism. Another piece of research was a comparative study developed in Santa Catarina about journalistic texts published on *Terra Notícias* and *Diário Catarinense*. The result was similar to the conclusion obtained by the Research Group from UFBA: there is not yet a standard model for the Brazilian online journalism. The sites are generally updated every 24 hours, like on *Diário Catarinense*, without, however, making its content attractive to readership. As regards *Terra Notícias*, the site is frequently updated, what makes it much more attractive than *Diário Catarinense*. Another positive point about *Terra Notícias* is that the site has received a prize for being considered as "high qualified in terms of general information". These comments present important points about text production of online news reports and also about where the Brazilian online journalism stands now concerning the production of online reports.

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[4] http://www.facom.ufba.br/jol/pdf/2002_palacios_mapeamentojol.pdf accessed on August 30th, 2006.

Another interesting piece of research investigated the use of weblogs – currently called 'warblogs' – to report the war in Iraq. The aim of the research was to analyse warblogs from a journalistic perspective. The researcher, Recuero (2003), explains that warblogs are created by tools that facilitate the release of a website, offering models of layout and not needing a HTML1 language expert to produce them. A common feature of weblogs is the use of short texts, containing only information considered as relevant, placed in a specific pattern – in blocks – on the site. These short texts in blocks are called 'posts'. Weblogs are updated daily and, in some cases, they are updated several times during the day. The author says that weblogs have played an important role on how journalism is practised nowadays. The reason for that is the fact that some people creating and writing news on weblogs are not professional journalists while others are journalists covering the war. There is still one important characteristic of weblogs differing from journalism in general: on weblogs the reporter/writer uses personal opinion, points of view, and presents personal comments about the issues covered. An example of an 'offical' weblog is the one created by the BBC team of war correspondents in Iraq, called 'Reporter's'. Recuero says that this blog is updated daily and some of the personalised characteristics shared are: (i) the use of first person singular in the texts; (ii) use of photos to identify who writes the reports; (iii) the author's signature in all posts published; and (iv) the author's personal introduction. It seems important to mark here that the characteristic of presenting personal comments has already been expanded to online journalism being written as a column, according to the author.

These are some examples of what has been developed in Brazil in terms of online journalism. It seems that some important adjustments still need to be developed concerning adequacy of press journalism to online journalism. However, it is clear that relevant sites and portals, such as *UOL* and *Terra*, already present important advancements.

6 CONCLUSION

This study aimed to describe how Online Journalism is developed presenting the literature regarding the matter. It also showed that the Internet is responsible for the changes happening in Journalism today. Innovations brought to the area of Journalism after the advent of the Internet were mentioned, as well as the impact of the Web on the commodification of Journalism. The difference between Journalism and Online Journalism was presented by making reference to what is expected from journalists nowadays. Furthermore, the main difficulties that these professionals face due to the changes they have had in the profession after the Internet were listed.

The description of Online Journalism in Brazil and the necessary adjustments to the virtual context still necessary not only in Brazil but in the area in general were left to the end of the paper, as points to be improved along with the development of research in the area of Translation Studies involving Online Journalism.

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