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TRACING THE TRANSLATION OF COMMUNITY RADIO NEWS IN SOUTH AFRICA: AN ACTOR-NETWORK APPROACH

In South Africa, community radio is a powerful medium of communication for distributing news and information to particular audiences in specific languages. It is an interactive platform through which remote communities are able to communicate about issues that affect their daily lives. The community radio audience has the opportunity to participate in the day-to-day functioning of the radio station and to express their views about issues at the grassroots level, in the local language(s). In the South African multilingual context, with 11 official languages, news workers move between languages, text types and modalities as they prepare to present news to their audience through radio. Consequently, radio journalism in South Africa always also involves one form or another of translation, and my study sheds light on these practices.

In order to study the intersection between journalistic translation and journalism in the community-radio context in South Africa, my doctoral research offers insights about the role of translation in community radio stations that broadcast in one or several of South Africa's languages and target a specific community, whether geographic, religious or related by common interest. Given the absence of prior research on this context, the study was exploratory in nature. It rapidly became clear that studying translation as a product would not do justice to the complex picture emerging on the ground. I therefore adopted a framework that aimed to describe translation as a process and include situational translation practices and activities as well as relevant human and nonhuman actors in the scope of analysis.

On a conceptual level, the study engaged with Bruno Latour's (2005) actor-network theory (ANT). I argue that, in order to understand the role of translation in South African community radio, investigating the social is necessary in order to unearth real translation practices and understand the interactions between the various actors involved. In addition, investigating the nonhuman is relevant because



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of the vast number of references to technological tools in news production, for example, new media technologies, mobile phones, SMSs and other forms of messaging applications.

Latour's approach, as applied in this project, provided a travel guide according to which I approached the research questions and developed my research design with its two phases. In order to make the project manageable, I limited its scope to one province in South Africa, the Free State, where the main languages used are Sesotho, Afrikaans and English.

The first phase was a concurrent mixed-method design that combined the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The second phase consisted of data collection at three community radio stations in the Free State province, using a multiple case-study design.

The aim of the first phase was to present an overview of multilingual news flows in community radio in the Free State. The types of translation flows included intralingual translation from a source in English into a news bulletin in English (one to one), intra- and interlingual news translation from two (or three) source languages into one target language (many to one) and intra- and interlingual news translation from two or more source languages into two target languages (many to many).

The data collected in Phase 1 also provided ample examples of translation activities and processes involving human and nonhuman actors in newsrooms, for example, the visibility of language sources such as dictionaries and terminology lists and reflections by participants on struggling with translation but also using translation as a way of solving a variety of language-related problems.

Regarding human actors, the profiles of news workers, as possible key mediators, emerged in answers to questionnaires completed at the radio stations. The literature in both news translation and community radio emphasises the integral role of human actors in the news production process. News workers in community radio stations are involved in various news-related activities but often also in other, related activities at the radio station as a whole. From the data collected, it became clear that most of the radio stations have relatively small news teams, and these individuals are responsible for a number of other tasks too.

The majority of participants responsible for producing news bulletins specified their job titles as "newsreader". Some participants included a second or third job title, for example, the job title "social media editor". In most instances, the job titles were related to news production and presenting radio programmes. None of the participants indicated "translator" or something akin to it as their job title, but they did refer to translation as one of the functions in compiling news bulletins.

The second phase consisted of ethnographic observation in three radio stations, and I transformed these observations into written ethnographic accounts. These accounts show clear evidence of intricate relationships in the form of Latourian actor-networks between human and nonhuman actors. The ethnographic data allowed me to identify how actors took up the different roles they had acquired in the newsroom, for example, a news writer taking up the role of assisting a colleague to translate a news story in a language that the latter did not understand. The data also showed the important role of non-human actors in the news production process, including pens and papers, mobile phones, laptops, a broken microphone and a computer box that took on the role of a chair for the news writer. In some cases, it was the very absence of these nonhuman actors (for instance of a laptop, a dictionary or proper

furniture) in one radio station as opposed to another that provided precious indications with regard to power asymmetries between different groups of human actors.

Finally, the data collected in this project clearly show that translation does not only play a role in community radio news but also has a definite position (i.e. prominence) on all levels of the production process. This became evident through findings indicating a high degree of visibility of translation on the levels of the translator, process, product and the multiplicity of news sources.

The literature on news translation presents arguments and data regarding the status of translation in various news organisations, whether news agencies, newspapers, online or multiplatform media formats. In many cases, literature shows that some journalists do not recognise (or realise) that translation forms part of their daily newswriting activities while some perceive translation as just one of the many activities in their journalistic writing repertoires. However, my data showed that, with regard to the value news workers attached to the duty of news translation, news workers in community radio were likely to include translation as a part of their job descriptions or as one of their duties and responsibilities.

Indeed, even though the participants did not know that translation per se was the aim of the study, they used the term “translation” in open-ended questions when we discussed language-related problems. They also used “translation” as a tool to solve certain language problems. Language resources were visible in the newsrooms in the form of dictionaries, terminology lists and online resources. In addition to intralingual translation, I also uncovered examples of interlingual and, to a limited extent, intersemiotic translation.

This study focused on the processes involved in community radio news translation rather than the textual strategies used. I observed news workers translating news and also the final translated products being written down, typed and presented (read) live on air, but a textual analysis of the target text(s) was not within the scope of this study. However, it would be valuable to include a language-specific focus in future studies to determine whether translation procedures, such as domestication or localisation, are present in community radio news.

Above and beyond translation, multilingualism was omnipresent in the radio stations I studied. Examples include the multilingual news schedules of each radio station, languages spoken in newsrooms as well as all the individual multilingualism of the participants.

The data I collected led me to reflect on the multiple-source dilemma in news translation. A journalist could, for example, receive information from various sources (a tip-off from a listener via WhatsApp, a press release via email or a telephone interview) and thereafter translate the story into various target texts (such as a short radio news item for a news bulletin, a five-minute package for a current affairs programme and a longer, written article for the radio station’s online platform). This situation sometimes made it difficult to clearly identify and distinguish a “translation product”.

However, the multiplicity of translation sources and translation targets also gives translation a prominence on all levels of the production process.

In line with the key findings of this study, I present a conceptualisation of news translation in community radio:

News translation in community radio is a complex process that occurs in highly multilingual contexts that are bound by specific temporal and spatial constraints. These time constraints are not only related to the need to be first, but also result from constraints regarding language competency and the availability of technology, infrastructure, and manpower. Spatial constraints include the specific characteristics of radio news, for example, localised content and a certain number of news stories, for which news writers make use of multiple sources in multiple languages. These sources undergo various forms of transformation between and/or within different language(s) (intra- or interlingually), the sources being verbally written down and/or verbally spoken. These transformations are informed by the particular attributes of writing for radio and writing for the ear. The characteristics of community radio in terms of participation, involvement and a focus on local content in local languages, play a significant role in the process of translating the news for a specific news audience.

In conclusion, an actor-network approach is, therefore, particularly important for investigating translation practices in more informal and non-professional contexts like those this project investigated. The approach would certainly also be beneficial for investigating the social in more formal or professional journalistic settings. I argue that, when a researcher follows Latour's conceptual travel guide and translates the guide into an applicable methodological framework, it motivates and (to a degree) forces the individual to slow down, assume less, learn from the context and include a wider range of entities, both human and nonhuman.

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