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NEWS TRANSLATION AND NATIONAL IMAGE IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

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Abstract

The press, as a culturally structured system, contributes to the formation of audience self-images – defining one’s domestic identity – and hetero images – defining the Other. Using journalistic translation and journalism studies, this contribution explores the national image provided by the Italian press in news translated into English by the *Ansa* news agency website during the current COVID-19 pandemic. The few studies on news translations including the English-Italian language pair studied the linguistic characteristics of translated language (i.e. universals), thus making the analysis of national image in news translation an unexplored area. The methodological framework will be based on Critical Discourse Analysis’ qualitative approach as well as two essential concepts from Journalism Studies. To begin with, the concept of gatekeeping can be used to explain the various flows of information and news provided in translated articles. Second, understanding the framework of news manipulation and rewriting will be made possible by understanding the concept of frame. The goal is to disclose how the Italian national image is communicated.

Key words

News translation; national image; frames; gatekeeping; Covid 19; ANSA

1. Introduction

In the last two decades, there has been a considerable increase in interest in national images (even stereotypes) (Leerssen 2007). The return of ‘identity’ as an autonomous force in social, political and cultural relations has been triggered by various developments, not least the Coronavirus pandemic (which is still current at the time of writing). Because news coverage of pandemics is marked by haste, uncertainty, and a scarcity of sources, the authoritativeness of official information becomes critical (Lee and Basnyat 2013: 122). Since foreign policy formulation is affected by the way decision-makers perceive other countries, Covid-19 forced all nations to manage the media representation of their national identities and images, lest their political and economic agendas be compromised (Wen at al. 2020). The press, as a culturally structured system, contributes to the formation of the audience’s self-image (one’s domestic identity) or hetero image (the identity characterizing the Other. Leerssen 2018: 27) through framing, or the

selection of facts (Entman 1993). The dominant frames in the news will shape the way issues are socially constructed.

In today's globalized world, translating foreign sources is an inevitable aspect of news production. However, the opposite is also true: national news is also translated into English, the established lingua franca, to reach a worldwide audience. The role of the translated press in constructing and reinforcing national images (van Doorslaer 2012; Valdeón 2015b) and the contribution of translation/translators in mediating global news should be acknowledged and assessed (Biel-sa and Bassnett 2009; Davier 2015).

Thus, drawing on Journalistic Translation (Valdeón 2015a) and Journalism Studies, this contribution will explore the construction and communication of national images in translated news during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Italy was the first European country to have been severely hit by the virus spread, the focus will be on the national image conveyed by the Italian press in news translated into English. This is an unexplored area of investigation, in that research using translated news in the English-Italian language pair has generally concentrated on the linguistic features of translated language (Ondelli-Viale 2010; Ondelli 2008; Laviosa 1998).

Today, news outlets rely heavily on agency wires (Valdeón 2015a: 639). News agencies dominate the journalistic landscape, owing primarily to the progressive decline of foreign reporting, but they also have the great advantage of providing direct access to information to both users and social media platforms (Scammell 2018: 8). The Coronavirus crisis has increased the amount and frequency of news consumption, confirming the preference for online sources as well as introducing a growing concern for misinformation (Reuters Report 2020: 9).

In Italy, trust in news is particularly low, mainly due to the partisan nature of Italian journalism and to the incursions of political and business interests into news organisations (Reuters Report 2020: 74). Neutrality is then highly valued. According to the 2020 Reuters report, ANSA, Italy's main news agency established in 1946, is trusted by 80% of the Italian public (Reuters Report 2020: 74), thus gaining first place (followed by *Sky TG 24*, 74%, and *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 72%). Therefore, the articles for the contrastive qualitative analysis will be selected from the ANSA news agency website, which features an Italian edition (henceforth *AIE*) and an English edition (henceforth *AEE*).

Given that "it is impossible to select and compose news without a perception of the target audience" (Richardson 2006, e-book), the analysis of the articles appearing in both the *AIE* and the *AEE* allows verify whether the different pool of prospective readers has an impact on the framing and image of Italy emerging from the translated articles. The selection included news published between 01 January 2020 (the beginning of the emergency) and 31 March 2020 (the most critical month for contagion spread in Italy¹) under the thread 'coronavirus'.

The methodology for the qualitative contrastive analysis will employ two key notions from Journalism Studies: gatekeeping (Shoemaker and Vos 2009) and framing (Reese et al. 2001: 11). Gatekeeping explains how the exclusion of certain issues and events contributes to steering the audience's worldview in a precise direction: among the actors able to influence and shape messages are markets, audiences, but also public relations, governments, and interest groups (Shoemaker

and Vos 2009: 76). Therefore, the status of translation as a first-level gatekeeping mechanism (Valdeón 2022) is connected to ideological affinity and helps define the reasons behind the news selected for translation in the *AEE*.

The notion of frame has been applied to a wide array of issues, from politics (Becker and Scheufele 2011) to health communication and pandemics (Lee and Basnyat 2013; Spratt 2001), but rarely to national image. Frames, which guide the process of writing *and* rewriting, determine whether most people notice and how they understand a problem: by operating on presence and absence, some elements are obscured and others are made more salient or influential (Entman 1993: 57). Frames are often employed in Discourse Analysis to deal with political discourse. The qualitative approach of Critical Discourse analysis (CDA) will thus allow unravelling the relationships of causality between the discursive practices in the news texts and the underlying social and cultural structures originating them (Richardson 2006).

These methodological tools will guide the contrastive qualitative analysis to answer the following questions:

RQ1: Are the Italian source text and the English target text framing the same event in different ways?

RQ2: What aspects are highlighted or downplayed?

RQ3: What discursive strategies connected to the national image of Italy emerge from the *AIE* and the *AEE*?

2. National images

Nations are to be understood as mental constructs of imagined political communities (De Cillia et al 1999), resulting from constant cultural negotiation. With globalization, the impact of national images (as a nation's soft power, Dai Guo and Chen 2014: 709) on public diplomacy, international perception, and international relations has become increasingly pivotal. In fact, actions originate from "actors' beliefs about other actors" (Hermann 2003: 286), which are mostly triggered by stereotypical schemata, influenced by perceived threats and perceived opportunity (Hermann 2003: 288). Thus, images are primarily built on personal experiences and stereotypes (Li and Chitty 2009), the latter being a cognitive shortcut to ease the burden of complexity (Dai Guo and Chen 2014: 709).

The power of the media to set the public agenda and throw into the limelight issues for discussion is undisputable (Tarasheva 2014: 7). Therefore, Media Studies explores several aspects of 'image' in media coverage and international communications: the intentions of the creators, the means they employ to highlight issues, and audience response. Cultural Studies connects images with cultural representations in the media, which are presented as "fodder for identity processes" (Tarasheva 2014: 12), playing a key role in the production and circulation of ideas and nurturing local, national and transnational communities' sense of themselves.

Therefore, national images are multi-dimensional and multi-sourced. They comprise three layers: cognitive attributes (the perceived characteristics of the

nation), affective attributes (the liking or disliking of the object), and action attributes (the responses to the object) (Scott 1965: 100). National identities are discursively produced and reproduced, hence the contribution of Critical Discourse Analysis (De Cillia et al. 1999: 157). In terms of content, some semantic macro-areas include the construction of a common political history, a common culture (language, religion, art, food), a collective political present and future (achievements, crises and threats, virtues and values), and a national body (on the local, geographic and physical dimension). In terms of macro-strategies, ‘constructive’ strategies build national identities by evoking cooperation and togetherness; ‘perpetuation and justification’ strategies maintain national identities by preserving or defending a certain status quo; “dismantling or destructive” strategies serve to de-mythologize or demolish existing national identities (De Cillia et al. 1999: 161). The translator’s interpretation and mediation of facts can easily intervene on any of these strategies and reshape national images for the target audience, working on selective perception and selective evaluation, which are the keys to understanding the image of foreign countries (Beller 2007: 4).

The image of the country is shaped by the comprehensive assessment and overall impression from other countries and the effect of international communication (Meng 2020; Li and Chitty 2009: 4), thus cementing the role of both the press *and* the translated press.

3. News Translation

News translation is a hybrid and non-canonical form of translation, as it might imply a whole or partial rewriting of news stories and a novel interpretation of cultural “others” (Conway 2015: 524). Source texts can be dismembered to suit the journalist’s real goal: the production of a new story and a new text (Orengo 2005; Bielsa and Bassnett 2009). Unstable sources are modified and adapted to suit the needs of the news outlet at any time, for the translator/editor focuses on the given information (Hernández Guerrero 2009). Only the authorship of the most stable sources is respected, as these tend to be opinion columns and editorials written by prominent specialists. The term *transediting* tried to embrace all the processes that affect international news production. Particularly interesting from a translation perspective are “situational transediting”, which adapts the target text to its intended function in the new social context, and “cultural transediting”, which adapts the target text to the needs and conventions of the target culture (Stetting 1989: 377).

Context and interpretation are then key factors in news translation, which, just like any translation, interlaces linguistic procedures with cultural negotiation. Yet, Journalism and Communication Studies do not seem to grasp the cultural transformations needed to adapt a text (or texts) to the target news medium. When mapping the various processes involved in news production, journalism researchers appear to view ‘translation’ as either “the literal interlinguistic rendition of a foreign text” (Valdeón, 2018: 258; see also Gambier 2010: 16) or one of the many techniques of news writing. The relationship between foreign languages and jour-

nalists appears to be quite complex overall. General readers – that is, readers who have no prior background in translation – are unaware that translation is an element of journalistic writing; many scholars agree that journalists do not consider themselves to be translators (Holland 2013: 337), and Filmer (2014: 136) reported that when asked about the role of translation in journalism, John Lloyd, co-founder of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, said flatly: “translation is not the job of the journalist”. Even in practice-oriented books that claim to cover all areas of newswriting, anecdotes and writing samples used to illustrate writing principles are usually chosen from and confined to national or local news, with no guidance on how to translate foreign sources (Cotter 2010: 173).

Therefore, translation is considered as an ancillary activity, or a supplementary task. The news production process, which is governed by components of practice such as standards, routines, and conventions, includes reporting, writing, editing, and disseminating. Because translation is just one of these steps, it loses its autonomy. Furthermore, the lack of explicit attribution of the translated parts of news stories makes it difficult to determine who was responsible for their creation: the journalist’s name is the only one that appears, leading to ambiguity. Research findings on the involvement of professional translators in the newsroom are not encouraging. With the exceptions of those magazines explicitly relying on translation (such as the Italian *Internazionale*), newswires do not generally employ translators (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009: 57; Davier 2015), and this trend emerges even in non-European settings: professional news translators are virtually non-existent in Japanese newsrooms as well (Matsushita 2020).

Not only does this potential lack of professionalism lead to the inability to connect facts with culture, depriving readers of a deeper coverage of events, but it also implicitly de-sensitizes to difference, conveying the idea of universal behaviour and shared cultural values. For this reason, the investigation on the function and effect of news translation in intercultural communication should be promoted (McLaughlin 2015), analysing whether news translation is able to present an objective representation of the different perspectives in a situation of cultural conflict (Conway 2010) and whether the translation process is distorted by external (political or military) forces.

News influences societies and societies influence the way journalists shape the news (Conway 2015: 526). For this reason, the notion of framing and gatekeeping need to be taken into consideration when discussing the cultural repercussions of news translation.

3.1 Framing

The notion of framing spans various disciplines: linguistics and discourse analysis (Van Dijk 1977a-b), communication and media studies (Pan and Kosicki 1993; Scheufele 1999), and sociology (Goffman 1974). In Journalism Studies, “To frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality and make them more salient” (Entman 1993: 52), promoting and guiding towards a particular causal interpretation or moral judgement, with a strong ideological footprint (Liu 2017: 453). There is a close link between the frames used by journalists and the frames used by

politicians, so the issues on the political agenda determine the issues that are discussed in media coverage (Entman 1993: 57; Vliegenthart 2012: 942).

Communicators are guided in deciding what to say by their schemata: stock phrases, keywords, stereotyped images help reveal the underlying frame in the text. The receiver, in turn, will interpret the message according to their frames. Therefore, particularly relevant to news writing and news translation is the highly stratified nature of frames, as the translator is one more agent who adds to the frames already localised in the communicator, in the text, in the receiver, and within the culture.

Issues can be framed and depicted more generally, in terms of historical trends or collective outcome – thematic frames – or as concrete instances or events – episodic frames. Thematic and episodic news framing can alternate in the same article (Iyengar 1991: 18), with different purposes. Episodic frames inhibit readers’ ability to grasp the general evolution of an issue and to hold public officials responsible for alleviation of problems. Conversely, thematic frames help audiences to see more clearly the way issues connect with societal and structural factors (Lee and Basnyat 2013: 121).

There also exist more specific types of frames. The “attribution of a responsibility” frame involves the way a problematic event or issue is portrayed by focusing on blame and responsibility (Liu 2017: 455). “Conflict” frames emphasize disputes between individuals, groups, or institutions (Liu 2017: 457; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000) and are widely present in (political) news coverage (e.g. Schuck and de Vreese 2006). The “human interest frame”, or “human impact frame” (Crigler et al 1992; Semetko and Valkenburg 2000), is meant to capture the audience’s interest through sensationalist headlines, images, and emotional angles. “Morality” frames put events, problems, and issues in the context of religious tenets or moral obligations (Liu 2017, 459, Semetko and Valkenburg 2000).

In linguistics, frames have been defined as conventional, shared knowledge about the world (Van Dijk 1977a: 6) developing from the pragmatic constraint of a discourse to be informative: what the hearer already knows need not be expressed and asserted. Conventional frames can be compelling in the coherent interpretation of discourse by language users (van Dijk 1977b: 128). Frames are high-level organizing principles in that they are based on mutual expectations (van Dijk 1977a: 21): the communicator selects according to what they perceive as “a normal condition, a normal component, or a normal consequence” of a certain action or event (van Dijk 1977a: 13) and then integrates, deletes, generalizes, thus revealing the underlying frame (van Dijk 1977a: 15).

Most research into news framing investigates either the frames in the finalized news story or the effects of framing, without considering the repercussions of the reframing embedded in the translation process, where the translator’s subjectivity plays a role as well. As the first receivers of the source message, translators can superimpose their own frame according to their cultural context: culture itself is a stock of commonly invoked frames. When news is translated for the audience, attention can be directed to one feature and diverted from another: the following section will then focus on the analysis of the corpus to discover the differences between the two editions of ANSA.

4. Analysis

The ANSA website specifies that the ‘English Service’ daily publishes from 70 to 100 news on the most relevant events in Italy and worldwide. This preliminary selection process leads to thinking that the English edition will not slavishly follow the Italian edition. In fact, the two editions differ significantly in the number of articles published under the thread ‘Coronavirus’ in January 2020: *AEE* only features one or two articles per day, and no articles were published between January 24 and January 27. *AIE* covers with at least one article per day until 20 January, with a steep rise from 21 January onward. Considering that the readers’ worldviews are shaped on the news covered (Shoemaker and Vos 2009: 5), this gap between *AIE* and *AEE* shows the gatekeeping role of news agencies: filtering the input of many news publishers directly affects the input available to citizens.

Moreover, the first *AIE* article about Coronavirus (titled ‘Cina: salgono a 59 casi polmonite virale in Hubei’, 129 words) appeared on 6 January, while the first *AEE* report on the matter (‘Health checks on Wuhan flights’, 678 words), appeared on 20 January. These two articles also present different focus. The *AIE* article describes the situation in China and the tests conducted to discover the origin of the ‘mysterious pneumonia’. The *AEE* rather focuses on the precautions taken by Italy to contain what was still called ‘a SARS-like virus’ by checking flights to and from the Chinese most-hit cities. The first section (93 words) goes into detail on the matter, while the second section (163 words) summarizes the main development and history of the virus. Other articles of the *AEE* edition published in January 2020 share the same background information, which confirms the practice of copying and pasting pieces of information on similar events from one report to the other.

Strategic structural differences between the *AEE* and the *AIE* are evident also in an article from 22 January. In terms of contents, ‘China virus: Italy alerts family doctors’ (*AEE*, 124 words) lists the ‘precautionary measures’ taken to challenge the virus (‘fever scanners at Fiumicino’, ‘alters sent out to family doctors’, and ‘the launch of a crisis unit’ including SIMIT, ISS and the health ministry). ‘Coronavirus: i comportamenti da seguire’ (‘Coronavirus, how to behave’, *AIE*, 149 words) changes the focus and details the list of precautions to be taken. This is an example of the press raising public awareness, fulfilling its role as the main source of public health information (Carducci et al. 2011) and amplifying the institutional messages in the early stages of a crisis. The frames of the two articles differ radically: the *AEE* clearly emphasises Italy’s active role in managing the virus outbreak, while the *AIE* shows a more practical, educational goal. The recurring label ‘the China virus’, for now only used in the *AEE*, clearly identifies the virus with a specific country.

(1) A clear *AIE* source text and a shared gatekeeping process is detectable for the first time in an *AEE* article published on 24 January:

AIE: Nessun contagio tra italiani a Wuhan¹

AEE: China virus: no contagion among Italians

The focus on the lack of danger is reassuring from both a national perspective (with a constructive strategy working on the idea of ‘group’) and an international perspective: the virus cannot be associated with Italy. In fact, not only does the amplification of the noun phrase ‘China Virus’ at the beginning of the *AEE* article contextualize the event (hence the omission of the geographical reference of Wuhan), but it also reiterates the underlying schemata in action, which connects the virus with China:

AEE: No Italians in Wuhan have caught the mystery [sic] SARS-like coronavirus that broke out in the Chinese city and has so far caused the deaths of 26 people, the Italian embassy in Beijing said Friday.

Contrary to the *AIE*, the embassy statement is only reported, hence the subjective interpretation related to the ‘mystery’ of the virus. Restructuring of various sentences from the Italian article is frequently found throughout the *AEE* article. The opening and closing sentences of the *AIE* article have been reordered and merged into the third and fourth sentence so that the lack of contagion is mentioned three times in the *AEE*:

AEE: [1] L’ambasciata d’Italia a Pechino “è in costante contatto con tutti i connazionali presenti a Wuhan, inclusa la signora Petra Vidali” [...] [2] Tra gli italiani di base a Wuhan, residenti e di passaggio, “non risulta al momento alcun caso di contagio di coronavirus nCOV-2019 [sic]. La stessa signora Vidali è stata nuovamente interpellata e conferma di stare bene”².

AEE: [2]“There is no evidence of any case of contagion (of Italians) by the coronavirus nCOV-2019 [sic]”, the embassy said in a statement. “Ms [sic] Vidali has been contacted again and she confirms she is well”. The statement said [1] the embassy was “in constant contact with all co-nationals present in Wuhan, including Ms [sic] Petra Vidali”.

There is, however, a problem of coherence, for no explanation is given about the role or the identity of Ms Vidali, whose name is mentioned twice. The second part of the *AEE* article features both new material and background information from previous articles: the fever scans at Fiumicino airport; the ‘fears’ that ‘during the travel and festivities accompanying Lunar New Year [...] the virus could spread more widely’. The *AEE* article is thus considerably longer than the *AIE* article (168 words and 79 words respectively), but from both titles the human interest frame and the prevalence of episodic frames are evident.

(2) On 10 February, both editions feature an article on the suspension of flights between China and Italy (133 words for the *AEE*; 110 for the *AIE*), building on episodic frames.

AIE: Il blocco dei voli diretti fra Italia e Cina “resterà fino a quando la comunità scientifica ci dirà che c’è un rallentamento dei contagi” di coro-

navirus: lo ha detto il ministro degli Esteri, Luigi Di Maio, parlando ai giornalisti a Belgrado³.

AEE: Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said Monday that the suspension of direct flights between Italy and Rome [sic] will stay in force until new coronavirus contagions start to come down. "It will remain until the scientific community tells us that there is a slowdown in contagions," Di Maio told reporters during a visit to Belgrade.

Both editions emphasise the trust given to the scientific community, confirmed as the authoritative voice (Spratt 2001: 74): the pronouns 'ci' and 'us' may include not only the Italian government but the whole population, thus building a constructive and inclusive image.

AIE: "In queste ore sta per partire un aereo militare italiano per andare a prelevare Niccolò", lo studente diciassettenne di Grado ancora bloccato a Wuhan, ha detto il titolare della Farnesina⁴.

AEE: The minister added that the government was sending a military flight to bring back a 17-year-old student who was unable to come back to Italy from Wuhan on other flights because he had fever [sic].

The reduction of 'il titolare della Farnesina' depersonalizes and eliminates the cultural reference (Gambier 2006: 16). In this case, the localisation aspects of the text were considered. The minister's direct quotation concerning the young student is reported, omitting all details but his age. The amplification of the last sentence, 'The boy has tested negative for the coronavirus', prevents associating the virus with Italy: the first confirmed case in Lombardy dates back to 23 February.

(3) Italy was the first European country to be severely hit by the virus. In such a tense climate, the public opinion was mobilized when a video featuring an Italian pizzaiolo coughing and spitting on a 'pizza corona' was broadcast on the French satirical show Groland. On 3 March, both *AIE* and *AEE* report the Italian reaction to the video.

AIE: Video su pizza, Canal+ si scusa [sic], Di Maio: pizza con ambasciatore Il gruppo televisivo si scusa con gli 'amici italiani' e rimuove il video⁵.

AEE: Embassy activated over French coronavirus clip-Di Maio Canal+ apologises for sketch, Paris disassociates itself.

The Italian title emphasizes the apologetic position of the tv channel, with a mention of the video being removed and a direct reference to international friendship. The verb chosen in the *AEE* title ('activated') rather implies an immediate reaction and mobilization. The apologies of the French channel are mentioned only afterwards, with an amplification ('Paris disassociates') which metonymically

implies a wider institutional involvement. The omission of ‘gli amici italiani – the Italian friends’ seems to confirm the change of frame and a more aggressive tone.

Moreover, the *AEE* article is considerably longer than the Italian one (560 words and 250 words respectively), with marked reorganization and rewritings. For instance, the apologies of a Canal+ spokesperson quoted in the *AIE* article are omitted in the *AEE*, which instead gives a concise summary of the sketch.

AIE: *Nello spot di ‘Groland Le Zapoï’ gli autori della storica trasmissione satirica francese di Canal Plus scherzavano sulla diffusione del coronavirus in Italia: nello sketch un pizzaiolo tossiva e sputava mentre preparava una pizza, che diventava una ‘Pizza Corona’⁶.*

AEE: In the sketch [sic] a pizzaiolo coughs and spits out green slime onto a pizza, which is renamed ‘Pizza Corona’ in the video.

The *AIE* gives more background information and provides an explicit interpretation of the sketch. The *AEE* pays little attention to the details which would help contextualize the event: the amplification of the noun phrase ‘green slime’ adds a repellent image to a seemingly neutral narration, and the omission of the subordinate ‘mentre preparava’ makes the action of spitting seem deliberate. Other amplifications include a partial quotation from the Foreign Minister’s Facebook post on the issue and details on his political position at that time, both of which are absent in the *AIE*:

AEE: “I consider the video broadcast on a French TV channel to be of dubious taste and unacceptable,” Di Maio, who recently stepped down as leader of the 5-Star Movement (M5S), said on Facebook.

Contrary to the Italian edition, the third paragraph further translates the Foreign Minister’s Facebook post.

AEE: “I understand satire, I understand everything,[sic] but making fun of the Italian people in this way, with the coronavirus emergency we are facing, is profoundly disrespectful. “At the foreign ministry we immediately activated our embassy in Paris. “We demand respect, above all in a delicate situation like this one. “I invite the show’s creators to come and eat a pizza in Italy, a pizza the likes of which they have never eaten in all their lives. “I invite them to respect our products and the Made in Italy brand”.

Two key issues are brought to the fore. Firstly, mocking all ‘Italian people’ is perceived as disrespectful as it stems from a health crisis that all Italians are facing, so much as to trigger an ‘immediate’ diplomatic response. Secondly, the ‘respect’ ‘demanded’ of foreign countries: the reordering of this sentence, which comes only at the end in the Facebook post, immediately gives the article a peremptory tone. The perpetuation strategy of calling a sense of unity against the divisive episode is exploited, revealing the conflict frame but also the moral frame, activated

by mentions of ‘disrespect’ in a ‘delicate situation’. The constructive strategy is detectable as well, in the noun phrase ‘the Italian people’ and the repetition of the inclusive pronoun ‘we’.

In his Facebook post the Foreign Minister also mentions the media’s ‘moral obligation’ ‘to provide correct and transparent information on the true dimension of the phenomenon in Italy. Unfortunately, this does not occur, which is damaging our economy and our entrepreneurs’. This direct accusation was included in the *AIE*, thus extending the conflict to the media, but omitted from the *AEE*. The central part of the *AEE* article reprises and redistributes the information concerning the apologies of the French tv channel and the solidarity of the French Embassy, which opens and closes the *AIE* article.

The *AEE* article’s conclusive section merges references to two articles published on the *AIE* on 3 March: the first pivots on the hypothesis of putting labels in Italian goods due to the Coronavirus (‘Di Maio, blocco merci Italia inaccettabile [sic]’) and the second announces measures to help the Italian enterprises affected by the emergency (‘Di Maio: Risorse per 716 milioni per il made in Italy’). Given that content in newswire reports is prioritized using an inverted pyramid structure (in which the sequence of information in the story indicates its perceived relevance. Scammell 2018: 9), it can be hypothesised that the additions to the last paragraph of the *AEE* article were not deemed relevant enough. However, given that journalists are widely dependent on newswires, those additions still provide information – specifically, on the measures taken to fight the economic repercussions of the pandemic – otherwise unavailable to an international audience.

The *AIE* emphasizes the French apologetic reaction, reassuring the Italian reader as to the international support, whereas the *AEE* brings to the front the national outrage for the satirical sketch, further reinforced by the added hypothesis of possible disciplinary actions against the French comedians.

(4) On 5 March, both editions report on the Italian Foreign Minister’s reaction to the CNN Coronavirus map which put Italy as Europe’s origin of contagion (215 words for the *AIE*; 435 words for the *AEE*).

AIE: Mappa CNN su Italia epicentro, Di Maio: “Distorce la realtà”. La cartina indica l’Italia come centro del focolaio del coronavirus, con frecce rosse verso i Paesi contagiati⁷.

AEE: Coronavirus: CNN contagion map distorts reality - Di Maio. Another example of misreporting by foreign media says minister [sic].

In contrast to the *AIE*, the *AEE* headline includes an indirect quotation of the Italian Foreign Minister’s words. Moreover, the premodifier ‘another’ in the second sentence establishes the conflict frame, implying previous similar cases. The *AIE* rather focuses on contextualizing and introducing the event, with a more specific informative goal.

AIE: “La CNN mostra una cartina in cui sembra che l’Italia sia l’origine del focolaio del coronavirus. Questa è una visione distorta della realtà. Il punto però non è la CNN, questo è solo un esempio, perché sono anche altri i media internazionali che stanno dipingendo l’Italia in modo sbagliato. La disinformazione di alcune testate fa a pugni non con delle opinioni, ma con i dati numerici: l’Italia è la nazione che sta gestendo con più rigore questa emergenza, che, come sappiamo, si è sviluppata in Cina”. Lo scrive in un post su Facebook il ministro degli Esteri Luigi Di Maio⁸.

AEE: Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio on Thursday accused CNN of distorting reality after it published a map of worldwide cases of the coronavirus linked to Italy, [sic] while adding that it is not the only organ to misreport [sic] the situation here. The map has big red arrows sprouting from Italy to other parts of the world and does not highlight other areas where there are a number of people with the [sic] deadly disease, such as China, Iran, South Korea and Japan.

The *AIE* opens with reporting on a Facebook post made by the Italian Foreign Minister, while the *AEE* mentions a direct quotation only in the third paragraph. In this first paragraph, the *AEE*’s most relevant deviation from the *AIE* is the use of the reporting verb ‘accuse’, which reinforces the conflict frame of the title. Like in Ex.4, however, the Foreign Minister’s comments on ‘discrimination’ and ‘scapegoating’ are omitted entirely. The *AEE* edition translates the portion of the Foreign Minister’s quotation where both a ‘positive self-representation’ of Italy and a clear ‘negative other representation’ (De Cillia 1999, 164) of China are visible (‘Italy is the country that is using the most stringent tactics to deal with this crisis, which, as we all know, began in China’).

With its 263 words, the background section of the *AEE* article on the so-called ‘pizzagate’ is longer than the paragraph dedicated to the primary event (172 words): while mostly reproducing chunks of the previous article – thus reinforcing the episodic frame – the reference to the sketch as ‘a regrettable piece of alleged satire’ further clarifies the stance on the matter.

(5) On 17 March, both editions feature reports concerning Italy’s response to the emergency (exploiting the episodic frame). The first report (67 words in the *AIE* and 37 words in the *AEE*) praises the ‘Italian know-how’:

AIE: OMS, l’Europa impari dall’Italia - “È diventata la piattaforma di know-how”⁹.

AEE: Coronavirus: Europe should learn from Italy says WHO - It has become Europe’s “know-how platform” says Hans Kluge.

The two headlines differ in their impact: the Italian imperative is pragmatically softened by the modal auxiliary ‘should’, which refers to advice or moral suggestions but is less pressing than *must* or *have to* (Verhulst et al. 2013: 211).

AIE: “L’Italia è diventata la piattaforma per il know-how in Europa”. Lo ha detto il direttore regionale dell’Oms per l’Europa Hans Kluge, secondo quanto riporta Bloomberg, aggiungendo che il Vecchio continente dovrebbe imparare dall’approccio dell’Italia. “Tutti i paesi, senza eccezioni, devono intraprendere le loro azioni più audaci per fermare o rallentare la minaccia del virus”, ha aggiunto Kluge, tornando a definire il vecchio continente l’attuale “epicentro” del virus¹⁰.

AEE: World Health Organization Europe Director Hans Kluge said Tuesday that “Italy has become the platform for know-how in Europe” on the coronavirus. He said Europe should learn from Italy’s approach to the emergency.

The *AEE* omits Kluge’s reference to the effort required of all nations, in addition to omitting and neutralizing the geopolitically treacherous reference to ‘the old continent’, (which was not used by Kluge). As a result, the focus is solely on WHO’s endorsement of Italy. Needless to say, the WHO press conference (55 minutes) touched on many other points which have not been reported, revealing ANSA’s prevailing frame of interest.

The focus on international praise and support is also found in the second article appearing on 17 March.

AIE: Coronavirus, Di Maio: “Il modello Italia salva le vite” – “E può servire ad altri Paesi”. E poi ancora: “In quarantena gli italiani che rientrano”¹¹.

AEE: Coronavirus: Italian model saving lives - Di Maio - Cited by heads of state like Macron.

The quotation referring to the quarantine has been omitted from the *AEE*, maybe because considered less relevant for a foreign reader. The last amplification in the *AEE* headline emphasises the support of the French head of state (mentioned only in the body of the *AIE* article) which is significant in light of the controversy seen in Ex. 3.

AIE: Come governo e come ministero degli Esteri siamo impegnati notte e giorno per gestire questa crisi e ormai è assodato che in tutto il mondo esiste un modello Italia, che viene citato da capi di Stato come Macron [...] Il modello che stiamo elaborando - ha sottolineato - può servire agli altri Paesi a salvare le vite dei loro cittadini¹².

AEE: “As a government and as foreign ministry[sic] we are working day and night to manage this crisis and it is now well-known in all the world that an Italian model exists, which is being cited by head of state like Macron”, he said. “The model we are elaborating can be useful for other countries to save the lives of their citizens”.

The focus of *AEE* is on the praise of Italy's actions, although all the actions deserving such a praise are listed only in *AIE*: from the quarantine for people coming from other countries to the repatriation of Italians abroad. Moreover, the *AIE* mentions the solidarity of China, which supplied medical aids to the Italian ICUs.

5. Discussion

The analysis showed that the recurring strategies (Gambier 2006: 16) used to translate the *AIE* source texts and create the *AEE* articles were:

1. Re-organisation and re-structuring: moving entire paragraphs or small details re-focuses the information and frames the event differently.

2. Omission, which ranges from isolated sentences or phrases (2; 4) to complete paragraphs and a considerable amount of quotations (3; 4; 5). Omissions are the most direct indicator that source text and target text develop different communication purposes.

3. Amplification, which is widely employed for inserting background information (3) but also to give a more definite orientation to the article and its frame (2; 3; 4).

As for frames, both editions initially tend to share the 'human interest' frame (ex. from 1 to 2), the stress being on the safety of the Italian citizens abroad. The action attribute is always detectable, but the amplifications in the *AEE* articles seem to be aimed at preventing the association of Italy with the virus. Both the *AEE* and the *AIE* headlines identify the virus with China; the keywords 'Virus Cina', 'Cina: virus', 'virus cinese', 'China Virus' are used even when China is not directly involved ('Virus Cina: primo caso sospetto in Canada', *AIE*, 25 January; 'Virus Cina: paziente Parma è negativa', *AIE*, 26 January): the virus is geographically localized and the 'responsibility frame' implicitly exploited.

In case of international incidents, both editions draw on conflict and responsibility frames (Ex. 3 and 4). However, the *AIE* focuses on Italy's reaction and reassurance on the international support (Ex. 5), whereas the *AEE* articles feature a markedly argumentative and aggressive stance, reinforced by the quotations chosen. Within the conflict frame, a discursive strategy aimed at constructing and reinforcing a positive image is equally visible.

The *AEE* particularly emphasizes the 'action' attribute, to communicate the prompt response to the various problems, while the *AIE* generally builds on the 'affective' attribute. The discursive strategies generally involve construction and perpetuation strategies with positive self-representation, aimed at invoking a sense of unity, with occasional negative representations of other countries (Ex. 4). Perceived hostility (Ex. 3 and 4) and friendliness (Ex. 5) do play a role in shaping the self-image of a country, proving that the emotional component embedded in national images influences the behaviour against the perceived opponent (Scott 1965). It emerged that episodic frames prevailed, probably due to the synthetic nature of the articles. In Ex. 3, 4, and 5, however, thematic frames would have improved the readers' understanding of the problem.

The analysis showed that many chunks of the *AIE* article were translated and then repositioned without attention to textual features such as coherence or clarity. Furthermore, the language of the articles from the English edition demonstrates a strong propensity to rely on word-for-word translations rather than opting for more idiomatic solutions. While a linguistic analysis was beyond the scope of this contribution, the clues suggest a sloppy approach to translation quality. Another issue concerned the difficulty of identifying who is responsible for the translations provided. ‘Redazione Ansa’ is the sole attribution that appears regularly, but this data is too general, and insufficient to determine whether or not professional translators were involved. Because it is hard to determine translatorship – i.e. who is responsible for the translations – for the *ANSA* articles, bilingual/translation competency cannot be assumed. Thus, it is not possible to rule out the possibility that the textual and linguistic issues above mentioned may be connected to the lack of professional translators (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009; House and Loenhoff 2016) raised in Section 3.

6. Conclusions

The speed of news agencies in covering various issues makes them a reliable ally for print news media. For this reason, news agencies largely determine the international agenda (with concerns about the lack of diversity of news content. Welbers et al. 2018: 317), becoming key players in the international diffusion of news. As national image depends on a nation’s conception of the fundamental character of its international political opponent (Li and Chitty 2009), the way news is framed by news agencies contributes to shaping the international perception of a nation.

Due to limitations of space and scope, no in-depth evaluation of the quality of the *AEE* translations could be attempted. The linguistic flaws detectable in the English articles, however, do not allow to assume the involvement of professional and competent translators.

The qualitative analysis focused on the Italian and English editions of *ANSA* and found that episodic frames were more common than thematic frames. Both editions tend to share the ‘human interest’ frame when covering the events connected to the pandemic; the *AEE* articles emphasize the ‘responsibility frame’ for China to avoid associating Italy with the virus. The conflict frame appeared in both versions, but depending on the audience, alternative discursive methods focused on action or affective attributes were used.

Frames and discursive strategies thus vary depending on the target audience, showing full awareness of the international impact of news in shaping a country’s national image.

Notes

- ¹ No infections among the Italians in Wuhan (translation mine).
- ² The Italian Embassy in Beijing ‘is in close contact with all the Italians in Wuhan, including Petra Vidali, a 24-year-old university student’. At the moment, there are no Covid-19 infections among the Italians residents, and Petra Vidali confirmed she is fine (translation mine).
- ³ During a visit to Belgrade, Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio said that the Italian ban on flights to and from China “will stay until the scientific community tells us that infections have slowed down” (translation mine).
- ⁴ The Farnesina minister said that a military flight was sent to bring back Niccolò”, the 17-year-old student still stuck in Wuhan (translation mine).
- ⁵ Video about pizza, apologies from Canal+. Di Maio says he’ll have pizza with the ambassador. The channel apologises with ‘the Italian friends’ and takes the video down (translation mine).
- ⁶ The writers of the Canal+ satirical show *Groland Le Zapoi* made a joke about Coronavirus spreading in Italy. The skit included a pizzaiolo coughing and spitting on a pizza, which was called ‘pizza corona’ (translation mine).
- ⁷ CNN map on Italy as virus epicentre, Di Maio: “it distorts reality”. The map places Italy as the epicentre of the coronavirus outbreak, with red arrows pointing towards the other countries (translation mine).
- ⁸ CNN has showed a map in which the covid-9 outbreak appears to have started in Italy. This is a distortion of facts. However, the CNN is one of many cases of international media portraying Italy in a false light. The misinformation of some news is not a matter of opinion: it clashes with data. Italy is the country that is using the most stringent tactics to deal with this crisis, which, as we all know, began in China (translation mine).
- ⁹ WHO says Europe has to learn from Italy, ‘the EU know-how platform on the virus’ (translation mine).
- ¹⁰ According to Bloomberg, “Italy has become Europe’s know-how platform”, said WHO Regional Director for Europe Hans Kluge, who added that the old continent should learn from Italy’s approach. “all countries, with no exceptions, need to take their boldest actions to stop or slow down the threat of the virus”, said Kluge, who once more defined the Old Continent as the current “epicentre” of the virus.
- ¹¹ Coronavirus, Di Maio: “The Italian system saves lives,” and “ it could be valuable to other countries as well.” “Italians returning from China will be quarantined” (translation mine).
- ¹² The government and the Foreign Ministry are working day and night to handle this emergency; the Italian method is now acknowledged worldwide and is mentioned by international heads of state such as Macron [...] the method we are implementing – he underlined – can benefit other countries as well” (translation mine).

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