

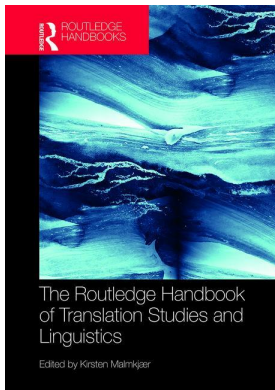
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Narrative analysis and translation

Mona Baker

Interest in narrative has a long and complex history that spans centuries and a diverse range of modern disciplines. Herman, Jahn and Ruyan (2005, 344) date the concept back “a couple of millennia, both in Western and non-Western cultures”, but credit French structuralists, especially Roland Barthes and Claude Bremond, with emancipating it from the restricted bounds of literature and elevating it to “a semiotic phenomenon that transcends disciplines and media”. Lyotard’s work further expanded the definition of narrative beyond any form of textual realisation with the claim that Grand Narratives “may exist as collective beliefs rather than the message of particular texts” (Herman *et al.* 2005, 344), thus paving the way for the now widespread use of the term in this diffuse sense, as in ‘gendered narratives’ and ‘narratives of race’.

Among the many definitions and uses of narrative adopted by scholars in various disciplines today, the strand that has taken root in Translation Studies draws on developments in social theory, and has come to be known as socio-narrative theory (Harding 2012a). To date, the most detailed exposition of socio-narrative theory and its application in Translation Studies remains *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account* (Baker 2006). Case studies that have developed the approach or some aspect of it include Boéri (2008), Pérez-González (2010), Morales-Moreno (2011), Harding (2012b; 2014), Erkazanci Durmus (2014) and Bassi (2015), among others, and a detailed engagement with the theoretical underpinning of the approach can be found in Robinson (2011). This chapter focuses on the analysis of translated texts and interpreted events across different media using the tools afforded by socio-narrative theory, and begins with an outline of the theory’s assumptions and the difference between narrative, as understood in this approach, and discourse, especially as defined in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

Basic assumptions

A narrative is a story with a perceived beginning and a projected end, and with a pattern of emplotment that allows both narrator and audience to make sense of the events depicted. Narratives are populated by protagonists, whether animate or inanimate, configured in

relation to each other and the unfolding story. Socio-narrative theory takes as its point of departure the idea that narrative is *the* principal mode by which we experience the world, rather than merely a genre or particular type of text. The claim is not that everything comes to us already configured in narrative form, hence the distinction between narrative and chronology, list or database (White 1987; Herman 2013). Rather, our minds construct narratives out of various types of input in order to comprehend and make sense of the world; Herman (2013) refers to this process as *storying the world*. Texts of different types and in different media feed into this process, and Herman (2013, 9) includes translations and other types of retellings among the network of narratives that mediate our understandings and memories of specific experiences.

A related assumption is that the narratives we tell ourselves and others about the world(s) in which we live construct rather than represent reality. Translation can then be understood as a form of (re)narration that participates in constructing the world rather than merely a process of transferring semantic content from one language to another, accurately or otherwise. This raises the question of the status of “the real” in narrative theory, and the related question of the limits of neutrality in the context of translation and interpreting. The claim is not that there is no reality, nor that translators necessarily do or should set out to disregard the source text and re-narrate from their own perspective. Rather, what socio-narrative theory suggests is that “real events do not offer themselves as stories” (White 1987, 4), and that in order to make sense of them we have to narrativise them, to bestow a structure and an order of meaning on them. This order of meaning is informed by our own location within a variety of public and personal narratives and reflects the inescapable prejudices and limitations of that location. The same argument holds for physical entities as it does for events. As Harding (2012b, 23) argues, drawing on Sarbin (1998), while it is not possible to deny the reality of a brick wall given that we cannot walk through it, whether we assign that wall the function of protection or imprisonment is part of the process of narrativisation and reveals one of the ways in which the narratives we weave inform how we act in the world and hence constitute reality for us and others.

To complicate matters further, deliberate fabrications are widespread, and we do not always recognise them as such. A powerful example is the case of the Syrian-American LGBT blogger Amina Abdallah Arraf al Omari, better known as the “Gay Girl from Damascus”, whose story captured extensive media attention in 2011 and generated widespread sympathy on social media, until *The Electronic Intifada* exposed her as a hoax (Abunimah 2011). She turned out to be a fictitious character created by Tom MacMaster, a doctoral student at the University of Edinburgh. By then the fictitious Amina had developed a romantic relationship with a real-life French-Canadian gay blogger, and her alleged abduction by three men working for the Syrian President’s family had mobilised various groups to lobby the US government to use its influence to set her free. Despite many clues that should have raised doubts about her authenticity, such as the fact that she was never available on Skype or on the phone and the nude pictures she sent her lover never showed her face (O’Hehir 2015), she was real because she had a real-life girlfriend and because *The Guardian*, a highly respected British newspaper, interviewed her and included a photograph she provided in the report (Marsh 2011). While this example does not involve translation, it reveals the same kind of logic that underpins the phenomenon of pseudotranslation, which has attracted much scholarly attention. In both cases, and irrespective of their status as real or fictitious, the narratives we weave about events, people and texts actively construct the world because they generate responses and consequences that may or may not be anticipated by those who play a role in elaborating and disseminating these narratives, and these

consequences cannot simply be written off when a narrative turns out to be fictitious. Hence, as Rambelli (2009, 211) explains, James Macpherson's pseudotranslation of the Ossianic poems "supported the romantic hypothesis that poetry was not a matter of rhetorical devices but a natural and primitive form of expression", and the poems eventually came to constitute "a major point of reference for Scottish national pride [and] served as a model for other cultures which sought epic cycles of foundation, such as Finland". The impact of the Ossianic poems on the development of poetic or national traditions remains, irrespective of their fictitious status.

Narrative and discourse

Narrative and discourse are both key notions in the humanities, and scholars continue to define them in a variety of ways. They also overlap, as evident in the fact that narrative analyses frequently refer to hegemonic and other types of discourse, and discourse-oriented analyses often feature references such as corporate narratives. Despite the overlaps and diversity of definitions, however, the two concepts remain distinct in terms of the underlying assumptions of the theoretical frameworks in which they are embedded and, consequently, the types of analysis they support. Given the growing popularity of CDA among scholars of translation and interpreting, this section will focus on the partly overlapping concepts of discourse, as defined in CDA, and narrative, as used in socio-narrative theory, in order to address the question of whether narrative analysis can offer alternative insights that a CDA framework does not already afford us.

The starting point for definitions of discourse, including its definition in CDA, is Michel Foucault's work, but as Mills (2003) points out, Foucault himself offered various and often contradictory definitions of this concept. Nevertheless, practically all definitions of discourse, including its conceptualisation in CDA and CDA-informed studies of translation and interpreting, share a focus on abstract forms of knowledge and the way knowledge is constructed and mediated, primarily through text. Importantly, knowledge is understood as institutionally generated and sanctioned, as evident in Mason's (1994/2010, 86) definition of discourse as "systematically organised sets of statements which give expression to the meanings and values of an institution". The emphasis on text and institutions has important consequences for the types of analysis that can be supported by CDA, as opposed to socio-narrative theory.

First, although a number of scholars who work with the notion of discourse have attempted in recent years to extend its purview beyond verbal material, the emphasis continues to be placed on text, hence Wodak and Meyer's (2001/2009, 6) distinction between discourse as "structured forms of knowledge" and text as "concrete oral utterances or written documents". A narrative, by contrast, is assumed to be "realisable across a variety of media", such as "written and spoken text, images, diagrams, colour, layout, lighting in theatre and film, choice of setting, and style of dressing" (Baker 2014, 159–160). This lends narrative greater versatility in analysing complex instances of translation, such as web-based material (Baker 2007; 2010a; McDonough-Dolmaya 2010) and illustrated children's literature (Sinibaldi 2011). Narrative also lends itself much more readily to the analysis of paratextual material such as book covers (Al-Herthani 2009; Summers 2012), and to relating their verbal and non-verbal features to the wider cultural and political context in which the translation is embedded. For example, Al-Herthani explains that the front cover of the 1993 English edition of Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* shows a large faded globe, with a crowd underneath, including an Asian officer wearing a turban and bowing to a white man who is dressed as a high-ranking official. Here, as Al-Herthani (2009, 152) explains,

The globe may serve as a frame that evokes several narratives, including complicity between scholars and imperialism, since it is scholars who produce scientific and systematic means of controlling the other, such as maps and globes. The globe, a map of the world, may also signal the expansionist nature of imperial powers which have the whole world as a target, ultimately seeking to rule both the natives and “the waves”, as Said (1993, 378) puts it. The way the Asian man is portrayed reminds the reader of the imperial narratives of “subject races” (Said 1995) who are happy to pay obeisance to their Western masters.

The cover of Kamal Abu-Deeb’s Arabic translation, on the other hand, depicts a picture taken from the Palace of Versailles, which shows two large Roman statues lying helpless and defeated on the ground “with a rope coiled around the neck of each statue” (Al-Herthani 2009, 150). Al-Herthani (2009, *ibid.*) interprets this image as “symbolising the defeat of imperial powers at the hands of resistant communities”, and argues that it “hints at one facet of Said’s intellectual project, namely the decolonisation of symbols of colonial heritage, which are depicted here as lifeless statues, with no power and no legitimacy”. Thus, while the image on the cover of the English text “evokes and anchors the narrative of imperial hegemony” which is the focus of the first part of the book, the image on the cover of the translation “elaborates a narrative that challenges imperialism and declares its defeat” (2009, 157), the topic of the second part of the book. Each image gives salience to a different element of the overall narrative elaborated by Said, in the same way as foregrounding and backgrounding textual elements through omission, addition and reordering are a facet of one of the key dimensions of narrativity, namely selective appropriation.

Second, CDA’s emphasis on textual material and abstract structures of knowledge is rendered more restrictive by a tendency to downgrade the individual text in favour of repeated occurrences across a large body of material produced by institutional actors, because individual texts are assumed to have “minimal effects, which are hardly noticeable and almost impossible to prove”, while “a discourse, with its recurring contents, symbols and strategies, leads to the emergence and solidification of ‘knowledge’ and therefore has sustained effects” (Wodak and Meyer 2001/2009, 38). A corollary to the dismissal of individual texts is that “individual resources” and “the specifics of single-exchange situations” are not deemed relevant to CDA analyses – only “the overall structural features in social fields or in overall society” (Wodak and Meyer 2001/2009, 10). This has important implications for the types of genre that lend themselves to productive analysis using CDA, with obvious restrictions relating to literature and any form of creative endeavour. By definition, much literature deliberately breaks away from recurrent discursive patterns, which makes it difficult to isolate textual patterns repeated across many literary texts. Media texts, on the other hand, lend themselves extremely well to CDA analysis and continue to attract considerable attention from CDA scholars.

Socio-narrative theory is not hampered by assumptions relating to the value of individual texts and resources, nor by the highly deterministic claim that “it is not the subject who makes the discourses, but the discourses that make the subject” (Jäger and Maier 2001/2010, 37). Unlike CDA scholars who argue that “[t]he subject is of interest not as an actor, but as a product of discourses” (2001/2010, 37), narrative theory recognises the role that individuals can play in shaping the world around them to varying degrees and pays equal attention to the personal and the public, the hegemonic and the resistant. Although some types of narrative – specifically meta narrative – tend toward the abstract and the hegemonic, and in this sense overlap more clearly with the notion of discourse as structures of knowledge and the emphasis

on institutional power, narrative theory also pays considerable attention to the detailed, concrete stories of everyday life and the personal dimension of experience. It further acknowledges that individuals can and do exercise agency and are not mere products of discourses nor of dominant narratives. This attention to the personal and the non-mainstream is reflected in the typology of narratives that informs studies of translation and interpreting which have adopted the socio-narrative approach to date, as explained in the following section.

Finally, narrative and discourse seem to generate different resonances, irrespective of the claims made about their relative epistemological status by leading scholars in each field. While discourse is associated with knowledge, and hence objective reality, narrative is associated with stories and hence with fictional accounts. Herman (2013, 344) thus argue that an expression such as ‘narratives of science’ now,

carries the implication that scientific discourse does not reflect but covertly constructs reality, does not discover truths but fabricates them according to the rules of its own game in a process disturbingly comparable to the overt working of narrative fiction.

At the same time, in the context of the epistemological crisis that has come to define our contemporary world, many increasingly see narrative as all that is left “when belief in the possibility of knowledge is eroded” (2013, 344).

A fluid typology

Revisited and adapted to different contexts by scholars such as Boéri (2008) and Harding (2012a; 2012b), the typology of narratives that informs socio-narrative studies consistently pays equal attention to personal and institutional narratives, however labelled. The typology was first proposed by social theorists Somers and Gibson (1994) and later elaborated in Baker (2006) with specific reference to translation and interpreting. It initially consisted of four categories: ontological (personal), public, conceptual (disciplinary) and meta narratives, discussed in more detail below. Boéri’s (2008, 26) study of conference interpreting introduced an additional category, professional narratives, to cover “stories and explanations that professionals elaborate for themselves and others about the nature and ethos of their activity”. Harding’s (2011; 2012a; 2012b) revision of the typology is more substantial: instead of a flat model, she proposes a more detailed taxonomy that foregrounds the difference between personal and collective narratives at the top level, with subcategories under each. In both cases the position of personal narratives within the typology remains intact; indeed, personal narratives are specifically foregrounded in Harding’s typology, and the studies themselves draw on the tension between the personal and the public to explain important aspects of the data. While all theoretical models are open to extension and adaptation as scholars apply them in different contexts, socio-narrative theory is particularly amenable to this type of intervention because of its underlying assumption that all narratives are constructed, and hence “where we choose to draw any boundaries, including boundaries between theoretical categories, is part of the narrative world we are constantly engaged in constructing for ourselves and others” (Baker 2010a, 351–352).

To return to the original typology proposed by Baker (2006), ontological narratives, referred to in subsequent publications as personal narratives, were first defined restrictively as “personal narratives that we *tell ourselves* about our place in the world and our personal history” (2006: 28; emphasis added). This definition unduly confined them to the domain of

cognition and was later refined to strengthen the interpersonal dimension, allowing the category to further encompass the narratives an individual tells others and those that others elaborate about the individual, with the main criterion being that a given individual “is located at the centre of narration . . . is the subject of the narrative” (Baker 2010a, 350). Personal narratives in this expanded definition include genres such as autobiographies as well as biographies, eyewitness accounts and courtroom testimonies, whether delivered by the defendant or a witness. In all cases what is disseminated is an account of events that explicitly features either the narrator or another individual at the centre of the narrative.

The attention paid to personal narratives reflects socio-narrative theory’s interest in discordant voices and how they challenge streamlined, reductionist accounts of the world or some aspect of it. The role played by translation in foregrounding or occluding such voices has been the subject of several studies. Harding’s (2012b) extended study of media reporting on the 2004 Beslan hostage crisis found that eyewitness reports which figured to varying degrees in the original reporting in Russian practically disappeared in all English versions offered by state-controlled as well as independent news outlets. The effect of translation was ultimately to “emphasise and reinforce simplistic, reductionist framing narratives and to weaken or even eliminate complex and multivalent narratives” of a major trauma in modern Russian and Chechen history (2012b, 223). Similarly, van Rooyen (2011) cites an example of a radio news item translated from English for the South African Broadcasting Corporation’s Afrikaans service, which omitted a long stretch where a township resident explains why he wants to see an end to coal mines in his area. Van Rooyen (2011, 26) explains this example partly in socio-narrative terms, as reflecting “obscured patterns of domination and oppression”. People living in townships, she argues, “did not have a voice” in apartheid South Africa, but now they are “given the opportunity to speak but [are] silenced once more in the Afrikaans news bulletin”.

Like all categories proposed by socio-narrative theory, the boundaries between personal and other types of narrative are porous and the categories themselves highly interdependent. Unless a personal narrative remains locked in the mind of a single individual, as the initial definition of the category unintentionally implies, it simultaneously constitutes a public narrative, to a greater or lesser degree. Public narratives are “stories elaborated by and circulating among social and institutional formations larger than the individual” (Baker 2006, 33), obvious examples of the overlap being the personal-cum-public narratives of high-profile individuals such as Nelson Mandela and Simone de Beauvoir.

Conceptual narratives are “the stories and explanations that scholars in any field elaborate for themselves and others about their object of inquiry” (Baker 2006, 39). Said’s (1978) critique of the narratives produced by orientalists is a good example, but this critique is itself a conceptual narrative. Similarly, in the context of translation and interpreting studies, Baker (2008, 22) argues elsewhere, Skopos theory constitutes a conceptual narrative that evokes representations of “an industrialized, affluent society populated by clients and highly professional translators”; the latter are projected as “highly trained, confident young men and women [who] . . . go about their work in a conflict-free environment and live happily ever after”. This corporate narrative of the world of translation clearly does not accommodate locally sourced, trained translators and interpreters, let alone untrained taxi drivers and doctors who often have to scrape a living in various conflict zones by working for military forces and media outlets. The US military forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, for instance, narrated not only locally sourced interpreters but also American interpreters of Iraqi or Afghan origin as potential sources of threat and denied them basic rights of protection, including “enter[ing] the Green Zone through the priority lane in order to avoid being easy targets for

suicide bombers as they stood in long queues” (Baker 2010b, 210). As with any narrative, Skopos theory foregrounds certain aspects of experience and downplays others, with consequences for those excluded from its purview. The corporate account of the world it elaborates is shared by many other approaches in the professional and academic worlds and has been extremely influential. In recent years it has been challenged by both professionals and scholars, however, leading to significant developments in the way professional associations such as the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) position themselves. Kahane’s (2008) article in the *AIIC Webzine*, which frames the argument in socio-narrative terms, called on AIIC members to acknowledge the predicament of interpreters in war-riven countries (Kahane 2008). On the scholarly side, Boéri (2008) mounted a similar challenge in the same year, and one year later the AIIC launched a project to support “Interpreters in Conflict Areas” irrespective of their professional or membership status. Attention to such dynamic processes that involve individuals and small groups challenging and adjusting powerful mainstream narratives, be they public, professional or conceptual, has rendered socio-narrative theory particularly attractive to scholars interested in the activist dimension of translation and interpreting.

Meta narratives are “particularly potent public narratives that persist over long periods of time and influence the lives of people across a wide range of settings” (Baker 2010a, 351). They are characterised by “a sense of inescapability” (Baker 2010a, 351) and a high level of abstraction (Harding 2012b, 39). Examples include religious narratives such as Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as political narratives such as the Cold War and the so-called War on Terror. The latter has attracted particular attention in socio-narrative studies of translation and interpreting (Baker 2007; 2010a; Harding 2012a; 2012b; Bassi 2015).

The porosity of the boundaries between personal, public, conceptual and meta narratives does not compromise an analysis that draws on this typology, because the idea is not to identify the types of narrative evoked in a given text or set of materials mechanistically, but to capture the interplay and tensions between them in order to explain meaningful differences that can be observed over time or between different sets of data. For example, Bassi (2015) draws on socio-narrative theory in a detailed analysis of the way in which Roberto Saviano, author of the Italian non-fiction best seller *Gomorra* (2006), was branded in his home country and internationally through translation. The book is a first-person account of the criminal organisation Camorra, which is involved in the disposal business and considered responsible for the widely publicised rubbish crisis that started in Naples in 1994. Its publication angered the organisation, whose bosses were reported to have issued threats against Saviano’s life. Umberto Eco’s 2006 broadcast message, in which he urged the state to offer Saviano protection and compared him to well-known figures killed by the Mafia in 1992, set the scene for branding the author domestically and “plac[ing] his personal story within the public narrative of the national struggle against organized crime” (Bassi 2015, 53). When an Italian newspaper broke the news in October 2008 that an ex-Camorra boss had revealed details of a plot to kill Saviano, a series of events began to unfold that included six Nobel Prize Winners signing a letter expressing solidarity with the author. Saviano’s high-profile appearances with Salman Rushdie outside Italy paved the way for branding him as “Italy’s Salman Rushdie” and for his association internationally with the meta narrative of the War on Terror and, more broadly, of “a meta-narrative of history as a coherent movement towards ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’” (2015, 58). Bassi’s (2015, 57) meticulous analysis shows that over time, and with the intervention of various narrators, this branding became “part of a coherent timeline linking the ‘Rushdie affair’ with 9/11” and the War on Terror. Ironically, Saviano’s own narrative of *Gomorra* explains it “as a modern

organization perfectly integrated within capitalism and democratic Europe”, but this explanation is undermined by the narratives in which the author is embedded internationally. As Bassi (2015, 59) explains,

in Saviano’s narrative, the “global threat” comes from the Western project of capitalism; in the narrative of the label “Italy’s Salman Rushdie” and “writer under threat”, a good West is threatened by something that is located outside Europe and on its borders, and which is imagined as culturally distant.

An interdependent set of dimensions

Socio-narrative studies investigate translation as a form of mediation with a complex relationship to other forms of mediation assumed to precede and directly inform it to varying degrees. From close translations of sacred texts to the transediting of news items, fansubbing, volunteer interpreting, theatre translation and even pseudotranslation, the focus is not on establishing the degree of match between a putative original and a putative target text but on what dimensions of narrativity are deployed and how they impact the new context of narration. According to Baker (2006), who draws on both Somers and Gibson (1994) and Bruner (1991), the eight dimensions of narrativity are temporality, relationality, selective appropriation, causal emplotment, particularity, genericness, normativeness/canonicity and breach, and narrative accrual. The most important of these are discussed and exemplified here.

Temporality has received the most sustained level of attention from scholars of narrative. White (1987, 177), following Paul Ricoeur, distinguishes between “the experience of time as mere seriality and an experience of temporality in which events take on the aspect of elements of lived stories, with a discernible beginning, middle, and end”. The emplotment of stories along a timeline not only projects a certain pattern of coherence onto a set of events but also endows the narrative with moral force, allowing us to attribute blame, responsibility, victimhood or credit to various protagonists. The order in which a story develops is therefore an intrinsic part of the narrative being told and is meaningful in its own right. For example, a non-chronologically ordered narrative may allow the narrator to complicate the perspective from which the story is told, which explains Milan Kundera’s outrage at the first English translation of *The Joke*, an intricate narrative told in a different way from the perspective of each key protagonist. The translators, David Hamblyn and Oliver Stallybrass, apparently “found the lack of strict chronological order in the book misleading” and “decided to introduce chronology by cutting, ‘pasting’ and shifting the chapters around” (Kuhiwczak 1990, 125). A polyphonic narrative about the ambiguity and complexity of human experience thus became a flat, localised story about the relationships between specific protagonists.

The passage of time impacts the meanings assigned to verbal, visual and behavioural signs deployed in articulating a narrative, in ways that cannot be anticipated or controlled by narrators, including translators. Abdel Nasser (2016) offers several examples of the impact of the changing context of the Egyptian revolution on the way poems written and (re)translated before or during 2011–2012 are reread after the military takeover in 2013. One example, not discussed in these terms by Abdel Nasser (2016, 119), comes from her own translation of Amin Haddad’s poem “Freedom is from the Martyrs”, written to commemorate the massacre of demonstrators in October 2011 and later published in 2013 as part of a collection of the same title. The translation follows the original closely in referring to “the blood of martyrs *on the asphalt*” (my emphasis) which “blooms flowers and blooms light”. The expression, “on the asphalt”, acquired a particular resonance following the military takeover in June 2013, and

especially after the issuing of a protest law in November of the same year that continues to allow the authorities to imprison very large numbers of activists. Whatever the intention of the poet and the translator, this phrase now strongly evokes public narratives of the long-awaited release of some of the many youths arrested on Egyptian streets, and the cheering of other activists at the end of each protracted trial as a prisoner is announced free and “on the asphalt”. This new meaning does not invalidate the initial reading of the poem and its translation, but it evokes other layers of experience – other public and personal narratives – unlikely to have been anticipated by the poet or the translator.

Like other dimensions of narrativity, temporality is not necessarily or solely realised in textual form, so that “even where explicit verbal indicators about the temporal position of events are absent, the rendering of a character’s appearance or of the setting can suggest the position of a given scene or occurrence on an overarching timeline” (Herman 2013, 126). Moreover, as Herman’s comment makes clear, the concept of temporality extends to spatiality in narrative theory, with time and space being regarded as deeply interdependent notions. Translations can then relocate source narratives not only temporally but also spatially, and can do so through verbal as well as non-verbal means, as demonstrated in Karunanayake’s (2015) study of theatre translation in the context of recent conflicts in Sri Lanka (1983–2009). *Saakki*, the 1986 Sinhala translation of Dario Fo’s *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, relocates the events of the play in Sri Lanka partly through verbal means, such as introducing references to Buddhism alongside the original references to Christianity (2015, 214). This strategy proved successful, Karunanayake (2015, 213) argues, because “both religions are familiar to the target audience”. At the same time, the Sinhala translation anchors the new setting within *Kolam*, “an early 20th century community or non-urban theatre form that made extensive use of masks” (2015, 215). The director of *Saakki* drew on the *Kolam* tradition of engaging with space by using the auditorium for performance and situating the audience on the stage of a formal theatre space in Colombo (2015, 221), in a reversal of canonical practices that reconfigures the relationship between actors and audiences. This reversal of norms reminds us that breach is “part of the inherent potentiality of narrative” that allows it to “disrupt the legitimacy of a canonical storyline or genre” (Baker 2006, 98). All these choices cumulatively relocate the events narrated in the source text within the temporal and spatial context of 1990s Sri Lanka, with important implications for the way the audience interprets the unfolding political narrative.

Relationality is a dimension of narrativity that translators and interpreters can easily relate to: it means that individual elements acquire meaning and value from the way they are configured within a narrative and cannot mean in the same way once transformed into a different narrative environment. Translation scholars have traditionally treated this issue as a facet of culture specificity, but the notion of relationality covers much more and is not tied to verbal elements of a narrative. One example which allows us to think beyond the semantic meaning of lexical items is the occurrence of typographical and grammatical errors in activist subtitling, as in Figures 12.1 and 12.2.

Unpolished output such as the subtitles shown here is traditionally considered unprofessional and, from the perspective of the corporate world, would not inspire confidence in the film makers or subtitlers involved in the two Egyptian collectives. Babels, the network of volunteers who provide interpreting at World Social Forum events, have come under heavy attack from some professional interpreters precisely on the basis that their output fails to meet the standards of high-quality, polished performance, as set by the AIIC (Boéri 2008). In the world of contemporary activism and citizen media reporting, however, and given the attendant pressures and precariousness associated with these contexts, “unpolished” and “polished”



Figure 12.1 Typographical error in *Freedom for Hassan Mostafa*

Source: The Mosireen Collective <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NQH3LCebMJU> (accessed 16 May 2016).

acquire reverse values. Thus, for instance, “images produced via the use of mobile camera phones” during such crises as the London bombings in July 2007 have now become iconic “because of—rather than despite of—their shaky, grainy look” (Cross 2016, 228). Typographical and minor grammatical errors are an intrinsic element of what Selim (2016, 83) refers to as “‘crisis translation’, . . . done in the urgency of the moment, when a specific event or series of events require immediate dissemination to the outside world”, and are thus not only tolerated but may suggest a greater degree of authenticity and commitment. Indeed, as Cross (2016, 229) argues, “the amateur” now “forms a point of resistance for the professional” and authenticity is gradually acquiring greater value than expertise, to the point where the professional world itself is beginning to appropriate some of the features associated with unpolished, “authentic” output.

Relationality combines with other narrative dimensions to elaborate specific narratives, as exemplified in Baker’s (2010a) study of the Middle East Media Research Institute. A pro-Israel advocacy group that claims its work “directly supports fighting the U.S. War on Terror” and boasts “providing thousands of pages of translated documents of . . . print media, terrorist websites, school books, and tens of thousands of hours of translated footage from Arab and Iranian television” (the Middle East Media Research Institute (MEMRI), “About Us” page), MEMRI’s narrative of the world is partly elaborated through its choice of source and target languages and the strictly uni-directional flow of its translation. Source languages always include Arabic and Persian, with other languages like Turkish, Daru, Pashtu and Hindi being included or excluded at different points in time. These are “index . . . societies that are depicted as sources of threat” and therefore have to be monitored (Baker 2010a, 355). Target languages consistently feature English, French, Spanish, German and Hebrew, with languages such as Russian and Chinese included or excluded according to the political climate of the day. They “index those [communities] that must



Figure 12.2 Grammatical error in *Episode 2: Sabah Ibrahim*

Source: Words of Women from the Egyptian Revolution <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9aXkZCr5hE> (accessed 16 May 2016).

police the world and fight terrorism”, that are entrusted with monitoring sources of threat (2010a, 355). This pattern of selective appropriation, together with the flow of translations in one direction only, are in keeping with the meta narrative of the “War on Terror”, with its non-negotiable “us” and “them” binary. Speakers of the source languages do not need to be informed of what speakers of the target languages say to each other, “they simply need to be monitored” (2010a, 356). The source language group is emplotted as aggressor and the target language group as bearing the burden of monitoring these sources of threat and, importantly, as victim. The implication is that in invading other countries “the victims are merely responding to the aggression being visited on them” (2010a, 356). In terms of relationality, “[e]ach language accrues a specific value by virtue of its positioning within the narrative” at any given moment in time (Baker 2010a, 356). Russian and Chinese appeared as target languages in 2007, part of the community entrusted with policing the world, but by 2016 they were no longer included in this category. Turkish began life as a target language in 1999 and became a source language in 2006. These changes in the choice of target and source languages, Baker (2010a, 356) argues, signal “a change, or an attempt to effect change, in political reality”. The value accrued to each at different points in time is specific to this unfolding narrative.

Baker (2006, 85–98) discusses and exemplifies various aspects of genericness at length. An important aspect of genericness is how a given narrative signals its factual versus fictional status. Genres understood or presented as factual, such as autobiographies and films presented as based on true stories, invite questions about their truth from critical recipients of the narrative, though uncritical recipients often accept the version of reality they depict. Baker (2014, 172) argues that translation is a genre in its own right which, like media reporting, “is naively thought of as a matter of objective recounting of factual material”, of a prior reality, and therefore “indirectly bestows a factual character on the representations it generates”. The

entire MEMRI project plays on this assumption: MEMRI claims to simply report, through translation, what the sources of threat are saying to each other, which is quite different from what they tell “us” in English or other languages. Translation, as a genre, thus derives its status as objective reporting from its association with texts assumed to pre-exist it. The highly contested *Tiananmen Papers* is a case in point. Published in January 2001 and presented as an English translation by Andrew Nathan and Perry Link, it purported to be based on a pre-existing Chinese document that included transcripts of secret conversations among China’s political elite during the 1989 Tiananmen events. The Chinese “original” appeared later, in April 2001. Moody (2002, 150) suggests that “even in the Chinese text the raw data have already been considerably massaged”, and points out that there are differences between the English and Chinese versions, irrespective of the authenticity of the latter: in length, style and the attribution of statements to specific politicians, among other things. And yet, on 8 January 2001 the BBC casually reported extracts from the purported English translation, presented as a set of “secret Chinese official documents on the 1989 . . . uprising” (BBC News 2001), without any reference to its contested status. The extracts included statements such as “The spear is now pointed directly at you and the others of the elder generation of proletarian revolutionaries”, attributed to Li Peng.

Baker (2014) discusses a US political commercial entitled *Chinese Professor* aired on CNN in October 2011 in similar terms. The commercial, she argues, chooses to have the Chinese-looking actor speak in Chinese, rather than English, in part because “the presence of subtitles constitutes the Chinese speech as an ‘original’, a source text, and therefore indirectly constructs it as ‘authentic’” (2014, 173). Many (uncritical) viewers will get the impression that the foreign speech came first, that it is a prior, original communication, and hence “accept the illusion” that the subtitles are there simply to report what the Chinese are saying behind our back, so to speak, “despite the fact that the speech itself is constructed to suit the producers’ agenda and the subtitles may indeed have been written before, rather than after, the Chinese monologue” (2014, 173).

Future directions

One of the difficulties of working with socio-narrative theory is that it goes against the grain of established research traditions in Translation Studies. It refrains from streamlining translator choices into types of strategy; does not focus on identifying recurrent linguistic patterns as in norm theory and corpus-based studies; and assumes – indeed requires – the embeddedness of the researcher in the narrative world under analysis, both as a theoretical premise and as a prerequisite to making sense of the data. This makes the theory challenging for those who are used to thinking of research analysis as a matter of identifying categories, patterns or types of strategy and drawing “objective” conclusions about the motivations behind systematic choices. The challenge is exacerbated by the relative dearth of existing studies of translation and interpreting that draw on socio-narrative theory. The field would therefore benefit from more extended case studies that address a broader range of contexts and genres, including interpreting and translating asylum narratives, autobiographies, testimonies and children’s literature – all of which lend themselves very readily to narrative analysis. It would also benefit from studies that examine how communities of translators and interpreters, whether professional or non-professional, elaborate narratives of who they are and how they relate to the public, conceptual and meta narratives of the day. Boéri (2008) offers an excellent starting point in this respect, but narrative studies of this type can go further, to examine areas of

dissonance or coherence between the public narrative of a community and the actual strategies its members adopt as they translate and interpret in specific contexts.

Further reading

Baker, M. 2006. *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. London: Routledge.

This book introduced socio-narrative studies and hence remains a central reference point for scholars in the field. It does not include extended case studies, but it offers a detailed exposition of the theoretical assumptions and conceptual tools needed to apply socio-narrative theory, with examples from a wide range of genres and contexts.

Baker, M. 2010. Narratives of terrorism and security: “accurate” translations, suspicious frames. *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 3(3), pp. 347–364.

A detailed case study of an entire programme of translation that offers examples of socio-narrative analysis of a wide range of data, including choice of source and target languages, directionality of translation, the grouping of translations under specific categories, the selection of material to be translated, and paratextual framing through choice of titles for individual translations.

Bassi, S. 2015. Italy’s Salman Rushdie: the renarration of “Roberto Saviano” in English for the post-9/11 cultural market. *Translation Studies* 8(1), pp. 48–62.

An extremely detailed and sophisticated application of socio-narrative theory, this article analyses the branding of authors in their home countries and internationally, the movement of cultural products across highly charged political territories, and the type of representations this dynamic generates.

Boéri, J. 2008. A narrative account of the Babels vs. Naumann controversy: competing perspectives on activism in conference interpreting. *The Translator* 14(1), pp. 21–50.

A very well-argued socio-narrative analysis of an encounter between two communities of conference interpreting with vastly different values, this detailed case study addresses important controversies relating to professionalism and volunteer work and reveals the narrative dynamism of a fast-changing area of practice.

Harding, S.-A. 2012a. How do I apply narrative theory? *Target* 24(2), pp. 286–309.

Offering a detailed, extended case study of mainstream and non-mainstream news reporting of the 2004 Beslan hostage crisis, this article is particularly useful for its overview of some studies informed by socio-narrative theory, and its focus on exemplifying how the theory can be applied and extended to accommodate concepts from narratology.

Related topics

Discourse analysis, interpreting and translation.

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