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MEDIATING NARRATIVES OF MIGRATION

2020, Volume 13

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Journalistic translation in migrant news narratives: Representations of the *Diciotti Crisis* in British news brands¹

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Abstract

On August 20th, 2018, 177 refugees were refused the right to disembark at the Port of Catania following their rescue at sea by the Italian coastguard. Matteo Salvini, then Interior Minister, declined to authorise disembarkation stating that he was acting in the public interest. He was subsequently charged by Italian prosecutors for illegal detention and abuse of office. A sad milestone in the European migration crisis, the narration of the Diciotti Crisis unfolds across languages, cultures, and media: digital intertextuality via translated quotations, tweets and posts from Facebook are interwoven with evocative images in the construction of multimodal news texts. Through a qualitative lens, this contribution examines the representation of the Diciotti Crisis in major UK news brands focusing on the role of translanguaging quotations in narrating the events. Drawing on a theoretical framework that combines journalism and media studies, news translation, and critical discourse studies, a self-compiled dataset was constructed in order to address the following questions: In which ways are translated quotations employed in the construction of the news and where are they sourced? In terms of news values, which aspects of the episode, with its far-reaching implications on the issues of international asylum law and human rights, were foregrounded by the different news brands?

Keywords: news translation; migrant crisis; Matteo Salvini; Italian politics; online newsbrands

1. Introduction

This contribution adds to research on news media representations of asylum seekers in the ongoing European migrant crisis. It presents the

¹ I wish to thank the guest editors and external reviewers for their thoughtful and detailed comments on my paper, which have been extremely helpful to improving earlier drafts.

results of a qualitative study on the ways in which the *Diciotti Crisis* was portrayed in major UK news brands. Viewing news as narrative (Baker, 2006; Buoziš and Creech 2018), the study examines the role of translation and the journalist-narrator in reporting events that saw 190 asylum seekers refused the right to disembark on Italian soil after being rescued at sea. The Italian government's decision to flout international human rights law signalled a crisis point in the tortuous migration scenario. The narration of the affair unfolds across languages, cultures, and media: digital intertextuality, tweets and posts from Facebook, evocative images and translation-mediated quotations are interwoven in complex multimodal news texts. A small-scale purpose-built corpus of texts retrieved from online UK news brands² is examined through a comparative-synchronic lens (Carvalho, 2008: 161). The analysis reveals how Italian source language soundbites and social media posts by key social actors re-emerge in British news texts as translanguaging quotations (Haapanen and Perrin, 2019). Focusing on Munday's (2012) adaptation of Agar's (1994: 232) "Critical Points to translator-journalist decision-making, the study questions translational choices in the journalistic reconstruction of events. Put simply, "critical points might be considered "locations in discourse where major cultural differences are signalled" (Agar 1994: 232). The theoretical framework draws on journalism and media studies, news translation, and critical discourse studies in order to address the following questions: in what ways are translated quotations employed and where are they sourced? Which aspects of the episode are foregrounded in the news discourse? The contribution is organised in eight parts: Section 2 summarises the sequence of events in the Diciotti case; Section 3 offers an overview of the relevant literature on journalistic translation, and is followed by the methods and rationale in Section 4. Section 5 and 6 present the results and discussion, while Section 7 concludes with some final observations and future directions for research.

2. The chronology of events

On August 16th, 2018 the coastguard ship *Ubaldo Diciotti* rescued 177 people including 11 women and 37 minors in international waters off the

² Searches were carried out on the following newspaper websites: the *Guardian*, *The Times*, the *Telegraph*, the *Mailonline*, the *Independent*, the *Express*, the *Mirror* and the *Sun*.

coast of Malta. The Italian authorities had been aware of the overcrowded boat since August 14th but waited for the Maltese coastguard to intervene given that it was within their search and rescue zone. Malta remained inactive. After a four-day deadlock between Malta and Italy regarding where the refugees should disembark, on August 20th, the Italian ship headed for the port of Catania. On route, the Italian Ministry for the Interior informed the captain that the passengers were not allowed to disembark and were to be detained on-board while the vessel was moored at the port. On August 22nd, Public Prosecutor Luigi Patronaggio filed a case against Matteo Salvini, Interior Minister at the time, for suspected “reato di sequestro di persona aggravato” and “abuso di ufficio” [aggravated damages for unlawful detention and abuse of office]. At 11pm that day, 27 minors were permitted to disembark. On August 25th, six ailing men suspected of having tuberculosis, pneumonia or other infections, and seven women were taken away by medics. On August 26th, the remaining refugees were authorised to come ashore. Salvini justified his decision stating he had acted in the public interest (*Corriere della Sera*, January 19th, 2019)³ and claimed that those on board had posed a threat to Italian security (*Il Foglio* March 20th, 2019)⁴. Despite multiple violations of national, European, and international law⁵ the former minister did not go to trial. The Italian senate voted to uphold his right to parliamentary immunity, reasoning that his refusal to allow the refugees to disembark on Italian soil was in agreement with Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte and Deputy Prime Minister Luigi Di Maio; therefore, he was not

³https://www.corriere.it/politica/19_gennaio_29/salvini-per-diciotti-stato-interesse-pubblico-dd7b8baa-2344-11e9-9543-1916afeb08d9.shtml (last accessed 30 September 2020).

⁴<https://www.ilfoglio.it/politica/2019/03/20/news/io-amo-l-italia-la-spericolata-difesa-di-salvini-sul-ca-so-diciotti-244252/> (last accessed 30 September 2020).

⁵<https://www.euronews.com/2018/08/24/8-laws-italy-may-be-violating-by-preventing-diciotti-migrants-from-arriving>. (last accessed 30 September 2020). Italy's national ombudsman for the rights of the detained people, Mauro Palma, said Italy was violating:

- a. European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights (ECHR)
- b. Article 13 of the Constitution
- c. Article 10 of the Constitution
- d. Geneva Convention, Community Law and Italian Law
- e. Article 33 of the Geneva Convention
- f. Code of Navigation, Article 83
- g. International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (SAR, signed in Hamburg in 1979)

personally responsible. The case drew considerable international media attention, not least for Salvini's vociferous self-defence on social media. In an analogous case, 116 migrants including 20 minors aboard the *Gregoretti* rescue ship were denied the right to disembark at Augusta Port in Sicily from July 27th-31st, 2019. On this later occasion, when Salvini was charged with the same offences, senators voted to lift his parliamentary immunity so that he could be tried. If found guilty, he will face a maximum sentence of 15 years' imprisonment and will be barred from political office. The trial was scheduled to start in October 2020 (after the deadline for this article). Before analysing how these events were reported in the British press, an overview of the relevant literature on the production of news narratives is presented below.

3. Journalism as narration, journalism studies in translation

The Information Age has witnessed traditional news media shift from print to digital forms. Simultaneously, online news outlets have burgeoned, undermining the supremacy of traditional newspaper brands. Although Conboy (2010: 103) maintains that "the future of journalism is linked to brand trust", van Krieken and Sanders (2017: 1365) argue that "simply providing news is no longer sufficient". The authors suggest that narrative journalism⁶ offers enormous potential to the traditional news brands because "news narratives are able to assign meaning to complex situations" and can increase mainstream audience engagement (*ibid.*). Yet, the notion that journalists are narrators is not new. Long before the dominance of the digital, Bell (1991: 147) stated that "[j]ournalists do not write articles. They write stories. A story has structure, direction, and a viewpoint. [...] Journalists are professional storytellers of our age". Indeed, Buozis and Creech (2018: 1430) contend that "[n]ews is not reality as it happened, but an observed documentation of that reality - a representation". On a micro level therefore, the voice of the individual journalist is central to the recreation of reality in news discourse, while on a macro level the

⁶ Van Krieken and Sanders (2019: 1) define narrative journalism thus: "Journalistic products that display storytelling techniques to report upon real-world events and situations. More particularly, mutual understanding could benefit from defining narrative journalism as a genre that employs the narrative storytelling techniques of voice, point of view, character, setting, plot, and/or chronology to report on reality through a subjective filter. This filter can be either a character or the journalist".

ideological stances of the different news brands “*reveal[s] broader social relations and cultural meanings*” (*ibid.*). In other words, the journalist plays a significant role in determining the ways in which discursive events are portrayed, but to what extent they act as single agents or as part of a cultural practice is still open to debate. What is manifest, however, is that news providers are powerful gatekeepers in modern societies, shaping public opinion on global events (Lippman, 1922/2007; Haapanen and Perrin, 2019: 36). In the case under investigation here, as with other foreign news stories, the audience’s perception of events will be coloured not only by the journalist’s selective appropriation of information but also by the added filter of journalistic translation. The next section focuses on the question of journalist-narrator versus migrant agency in relating events regarding the migrant crisis.

3.1 Who is the narrator? – the foreign correspondent versus the migrants’ lost voice

The advent of globalisation and new technologies have challenged the convention of the foreign correspondent as a permanent staff member in news organisations (see Sambrook, 2010). Nevertheless, the notion of the journalist as a “cultural authority” has endured (Hannerz 1996: 120; Zelizer, 2004: 104). Archetti (2012: 847) for instance, argues that foreign correspondents have an “increasingly important role as ‘sense makers’ within the huge tide of information available” on the Internet. Far from becoming extinct, foreign correspondence is thriving, albeit in a different guise (*ibid.*). There are, however, caveats. Reductions in postings abroad may result in more reliance on foreign freelance journalists who are paid per piece and are thus less motivated to spend time researching their stories (Archetti, 2012: 853). This can lead to disjointed and ill-informed narratives produced by non-specialist journalists. In the specific case, when it comes to reporting on the multi-layered issues implicit in the Mediterranean migrant crisis, specialist knowledge is essential. Journalists who work for elite newspapers will enjoy the brand trust this confers; inevitably they will be perceived as “authorities” on the complex issues they write about. In reality, as we shall see, this is not always the case. By contrast, the protagonists of the migrant crisis often have no voice. Ieracitano and Vigneri (2018: 64) demonstrate that “it is not a direct story migrants tell, but the description of their experience through other witnesses’ eyes: rescuers, doctors, volunteers or the *journalists themselves*” (my emphasis). Therefore, it is from the perspective of the journalist that

the migrant narratives are heard. Nelken (2018: 58), however, points out that asylum seekers “are not explicitly dehumanised in media representations, but their agency is deleted. The choice of depiction as 'victim' or 'threat' varies over time and across different newspapers, but their agency is consistently ignored”. He contends that what is glaringly absent in media representations of asylum seekers is, in fact, their voice. The question of voice is strictly linked to issues of translation and quotation, which are discussed in the following section.

3.2 Translingual quotation and translation in the news

This study adheres to the definition of journalistic translation (Valdeón, 2020)⁷ provided by Davier and Conway (2019: 1): “we intend translation here in the broadest possible sense, from the re-expression of bits of speech or text in a different language to the explanation of how members of a foreign cultural community interpret an object or event”. Such a flexible approach allows for the different ways in which news translation can be construed: it is not restricted to interlinguistic meaning transfer but embraces intercultural mediation, audiovisual translation, and cultural representation via images and other multisemiotic modes employed in the construction of news. These “multimodal ensembles” (Kress, 2011: 38) in which different semiotic modes work together to shape meaning require in-depth scrutiny. The present study, however, focuses on one aspect of journalistic translation: the role of translated quotations in the creation of multimodal digital news texts.

In his seminal study on news translation, Orengo (2005: 173) observed that official speeches, interviews, and witness accounts of facts are systematically disassembled bit by bit, translated, and re-used as raw material for the construction of news stories, through a process he refers to as “embedding”. In terms of political communication, Schäffner (2008) has highlighted the role of translation in reporting foreign politicians’ speech through cross-lingual and cross-cultural recontextualisation processes. According to Schäffner (*ibid.*: 3), “[n]ewspapers regularly provide quotes of statements by foreign politicians, without explicitly indicating that these politicians were actually speaking in their own languages”. In more recent research, recontextualisation is theorised within the convergence paradigm. Davier and Conway (2019: 3) explain

⁷ For an in-depth discussion on terminology surrounding the concept of translation in the news, see Schäffner (2012).

that “convergence [also] comprises the creation or integration of content for or from social media”. For journalists this entails refining skills and professional identities, especially for those trained in traditional news production settings. The data presented in this study offers examples of these multi-source texts that are seamlessly and invisibly pieced together via translation with what Haapanen and Perrin (2019) refer to as translingual quoting⁸. They explain (2019: 18) “[...] the process of quoting often harbours a translational aspect: whenever interviews and published articles involve different languages, the original discourse on which the quote is based is translated during quoting”. In the construction of news stories, quotations have important functions, for instance “they enhance the reliability, credibility, and objectivity of an article and characterize the person quoted” (Haapanen and Perrin, 2019: 17). Recent research adopting approaches from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) brought to light the ideological implications of reformulating translated political discourse in news contexts (Schäffner, 2004; Filmer, 2018; Caimotto, 2020). However, this crucial facet of translingual quoting is not addressed by Haapanen and Perrin (2019). They merely observe: “journalist-translators tend to keep quotation marks even in cases where the words of the original speaker have been noticeably changed” (*ibid.*: 19) without questioning the consequences of shifts in meaning. Nevertheless, their study provides valuable ethnographic evidence of journalists’ translation practices within the context of Swiss television newsrooms:

Journalists mostly translate quotes or to-be-quoted utterances by themselves, and their decision to do so is often solely based on their personal assessment of their own proficiency. [...] decisions relating to translingual quoting are often made on an ad hoc basis [therefore] the current practice is vulnerable to mistakes. Furthermore, in standard editorial practice, there is rarely anybody to check the validity of translations or notice such mistakes. (Haapanen and Perrin, 2019: 36)

In other lingua-cultural contexts, research has demonstrated the reluctance of news workers to recognise the importance of translation practices within their work (see Bielsa and Bassnett, 2009; van Doorslaer, 2010; Holland, 2013; Filmer, 2014). Even though translation is intrinsically a

⁸ In this contribution the shortened form “transquotation” is used by the author to refer to the same phenomenon, although Haapanen and Perrin do not use this term.

part of foreign news reporting, journalists often lack the linguistic and intercultural competencies necessary to undertake such tasks in the 21st century (Filmer, 2014: 154). This may account for the uneasy relationship between translation studies and journalism studies (Valdeón, 2017: 253), which can pose obstacles to interdisciplinary research. The following section moves on to describe the methods adopted for this study, the rationale and research questions, and reports on the difficulties and limitations.

4. Research rationale, methods and data

A sad milestone in the European migration crisis, the Diciotti case was chosen as the object of study for its far-reaching implications on the issues of asylum, reception, and human rights. It also sheds light on the ever-increasing nexus between politics and the social media exemplifying “the link of populist phenomena with the communication eco-systems” (Mazzoleni and Bracciale, 2018: 3). The political debates in this case, needed to be relayed from the Italian context to a British audience, therefore underscoring the vital role of translation. This article focuses on the representation of the *Diciotti case* in British digital news narratives and addresses two research questions:

1. Firstly, in which ways is translation employed in the narration of events and to what effects?
2. The second is deontological and relates to news values: which perspective of the affair would surface in the British newspaper coverage? A G7 country conspicuously transgressing basic human rights or would Matteo Salvini’s propaganda via social media dominate the news discourse?

Grounded in multimodal critical discourse studies (Machin and Mayr, 2012), the study performs a synchronic analysis in order to trace “the sequence of texts appearing in the media and the evolution of their meaning” (Carvalho, 2008: 164). A synchronic axis compares “simultaneous discourses” (*ibid.*) – for example texts dealing with the same event in different news brands. The data was collected by performing key word searches on the newspaper database *Nexis UK* and on individual newspaper websites with the term “Diciotti” on a cross-section of British national news brands: the *Guardian*, *The Times*, the *Telegraph*, the *Mailonline*, the *Independent*, the *Express*, the *Mirror*, and the *Sun*. This initial search

revealed a large quantity of data, not only articles published during the *Diciotti crisis* itself, but also subsequent reports on the Gregoretti case in August 2019, the Italian Senate vote on Salvini's Parliamentary immunity in February 2019, and again in February 2020 containing intertextual references to the *Diciotti*. It was therefore necessary to review the texts manually to check that the content was specifically related to the object of this study. These results were further refined to include only the articles published between August 19th-27th, 2018, the period in which the refugees were held on board the rescue ship. As there were no results for the *Mirror* or the *Sun* within the timeframe, they are not shown in Table 1. The texts analysed were sourced directly from newspaper websites. Although *Nexis UK* may be useful for creating large quantitative corpora, the constraints of such a database for fine-grained qualitative analyses are many. Firstly, the search results often exclude the texts published on newspaper websites and show only articles published in the printed newspaper formats. Digital news texts in which numerous images, video clips, links to other news sources and previously published news articles are embedded offer the audience a network of meaning making mechanisms that are unavailable on news databases, which only provide the written text. This is a considerable drawback for the researcher because as Bednarek and Caple (2012: 45) point out, “[n]ewsworthiness is not inherent in events but established through language and image”. A close multimodal analysis of many of the texts examined here would certainly yield interesting results, however, for space constraints this contribution focuses on the linguistic aspects.

The table below illustrates the dataset. The news brands are categorised as “popular”, “mid-market”, and “quality” as defined by the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC)⁹.

⁹ <https://www.abc.org.uk/>

NEWS BRAND	BY-LINE	NO. OF ARTICLES PER JOURNALIST	TOTAL NUMBER OF ARTICLES
<i>THE TIMES</i>	Philip Willan (Rome)	6	6
<i>GUARDIAN</i>	Lorenzo Tondo	4	4
<i>INDEPENDENT</i>	John Stone Bel Trew Mattha Busby	1 1 1	3
<i>TELEGRAPH</i>	Andrea Vogt Foreign staff	1 1	2
<i>EXPRESS ONLINE</i>	Harvey Gavin Ciaran McGrath Joe Gamp (freelance) Joe Barnes, Paul Withers Alessandra Scotto Santolo Ollie Smith	1 1 1 1 3 1	9
<i>MAILONLINE</i>	<i>Reuters</i> (without by- line) <i>Associated Press</i> , <i>Agence France- Presse</i> (without by-line) <i>Press</i> <i>Association</i> Faith Ridler, <i>AFP</i> for <i>MailOnline</i>	11 12 2 5 2	36

Debbie White, freelance, for <i>MailOnline</i>	1
David Churchill, freelance, for <i>MailOnline</i>	1
Steve Schrerer, (Rome) <i>Reuters</i> for <i>MailOnline</i>	2

Table 1. The dataset by news brand, by-line and number of articles

In the sections that follow, the most indicative findings from the two mid-market and three quality news brands examined for this study are discussed.

5. The middle-market news brands

As the name would imply, the middle-market news brands, the *Daily Mail* and the *Daily Express*, fall somewhere between the tabloids and the quality press in terms of content and style. They are neither upmarket, that deal primarily with hard news, nor downmarket that are primarily sensationalist; they offer a combination of entertainment and celebrity news with more serious items (Chandler and Munday, 2020). In terms of worldview, both the *Daily Mail* and the *Express* are conservative and traditionalist. Their target audience is mainly middle and lower middle class, middle-aged and female. Their news values lie more with national than international affairs, which could explain why the middle-market titles have very few staff foreign correspondents. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that quotations from foreign figures are taken directly from news agency sources, which have readymade translated soundbites embedded in their texts, or from social media, then translated “in-house” by whichever staff journalist happens to be writing the piece. Of the eight news brands sampled, the *MailOnline* and *Express* published the highest number of articles, 36 and nine respectively, within the timeframe.

5.1 The *MailOnline*

The *MailOnline* is the digital offshoot of the *Daily Mail*, and is the most popular middle-market online news brand¹⁰. Its ideological position is right wing, anti-immigration and Eurosceptic. The *MailOnline* published 36 articles within the timeframe and was therefore the most prolific news outlet on the subject of the *Diciotti Crisis* of the brands examined. However, 30 of the articles were attributed to various news agencies without specifying the name of a journalist, whilst two appeared under the by-line of a *Reuters* journalist, and two to an *AFP* journalist (see Table 1). Only two articles were produced by freelance journalists for the *MailOnline*. Updates on the evolving *Diciotti Crisis* were frequent; at the height of the crisis, five articles appeared online in one day, 4 supplied by news agencies and one by a freelancer thereby indicating that in terms of news values, the *Diciotti Crisis* had considerable resonance for the *MailOnline*. The longest and most in-depth article was entitled: “Migrants ‘held hostage’ aboard Italian coastguard ship begin hunger strike in protest at not being allowed to disembark” (White, August 24th, 2018)¹¹. The headline structure places “Migrants” in theme position, thus foregrounding them as agents of protest.

This was the only text from the entire corpus to focus on the asylum seekers’ agency. Embedded in the headline is the expression, “held hostage”, which is placed within inverted commas, which would imply that it is direct speech. Alternatively, the quotation marks might be construed as a distancing strategy that questions the veracity of what is placed within them. In fact, it is a translated reformulation of a statement by left-wing politician Laura Boldrini, drawn from an interview published in *Il Corriere della Sera*¹² the previous day. Boldrini referred to those detained on the *Diciotti* as “hostages”, accusing Salvini of exploiting the situation to gain leverage with the EU on the question of irregular migration. From source to target text, a translational shift takes place: “Qui ci sono 195 ostaggi: 150 naufraghi e 45 uomini dell’equipaggio che attendono di essere liberati mentre il ministro Salvini chiede un riscatto all’Europa” [Here there are 195 hostages: 150 victims of a

¹⁰ <https://pamco.co.uk/pamco-data/data-archive/>

¹¹ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/italy/article-6095709/Migrants-held-hostage-aboard-Italian-coastguard-ship-begin-hunger-strike-protest.html> (last accessed 10 April 2020).

¹² https://www.corriere.it/politica/18_agosto_25/diciotti-boldrini-sono-ostaggi-chiedere-riscatto-bruxelles-1ff883a6-a835-11e8-a941-3e0c2a4df45f.shtml (last accessed 10 April 2020).

shipwreck and 45 crew who are waiting to be freed while Salvini asks Europe for the ransom]. The source language noun “ostaggi” becomes the passive verb phrase “held hostage” in the target text, which at once underlines the asylum seekers’ lack of agency while implying a hidden agent. In the first line of the article, the agent becomes apparent: “*Italy* has been accused of holding 150 migrants ‘hostage’ on a coastguard ship” (my emphasis). For the target audience, the name of the accuser is irrelevant but by omitting Salvini’s name from theme position, his role in the affair is backgrounded; by metonymy, the Italian people are responsible for the actions of the former interior minister.

Further instances of reformulated quotes and indirect transquotations emerge in conflicting reports on the deteriorating health of those on-board. The article: “Tuberculosis outbreak sparks evacuation of 16 of the 150 migrants stranded in Sicily as Italian government continues to insist other EU nations take the refugees in” (*Associated Press*, August 25th)¹³ indirectly quotes members of the Red Cross: “authorities decided that 16 migrants should be taken off the ship for medical reasons, two of them for suspected cases of tuberculosis and three for pneumonia, Red Cross officials said”. As the events took place in an Italian port, it is likely that the Red Cross officials were Italian, and therefore any statement on their part would have been translated. In the same article, a Red Cross spokesperson is quoted directly: “‘more than a health emergency, it would be better to speak of a psychological emergency,’ Principato said”. The same Red Cross spokesman is indirectly transquoted in another article posted on the same day on the *MailOnline* website but this time by a *Reuters* reporter¹⁴. Regarding the health of the detainees, the journalist reformulates the spokesperson’s words and states: “A Red Cross representative said the health of the migrants ‘*isn’t particularly critical*,’ adding that their problems “are more psychological than physical” (my emphasis). These diverging representations (through translation) of the asylum seekers’ health published on the same day illustrate how “disjointed narratives” (see section 3.1) produced by different journalists for the same publication are likely to create dissonance for the reader.

¹³ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6097247/UN-refugee-agency-urges-end-Italy-migrant-standoff.html> (last accessed 10 April 2020).

¹⁴ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-6097579/Doctors-visit-migrants-stranded-Italian-boat-Salvini-defies-UN.html> (last accessed 10 April 2020).

 5.2 The *Express*

The *Express*'s editorial stance has traditionally been Eurosceptic, right-wing populism and was harshly criticised for its anti-immigration standpoint by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights¹⁵. The *Express Online* published 9 articles on the *Diciotti case* within the timeframe, 8 of which by staff journalists who are mainly based in London. By searching on the *Express* website,¹⁶ it can be ascertained that the expertise of the journalists reporting on the *Diciotti case* ranges from legal affairs, science and technology, weather, to world news and politics. Therefore, it might reasonably be assumed that none of them has any specific knowledge of Italian affairs nor of the Italian language. The first narrative strand to emerge from the *Express*'s coverage of the crisis is also about the refugees' state of health but in this case the "news" is scabies. The article: "EU migrant crisis: Scabies rife on-board ship carrying migrants refused entry to Italy" (my emphasis, McGrath August 23rd)¹⁷ reported that many refugees had been infected by the skin disease. The adjective "rife" cues mental frames of uncontrollable infection, possibly eliciting fear and repulsion in the audience. The text recounts prosecutor Luigi Patronaggio's inspection of the vessel as if the journalist were present. However, once again Italian newspapers are the source; the prosecutor's words were extracted and translated from an interview published in *Il Corriere della Sera*¹⁸ the day before. The following transquotation is displayed in a separate box and graphically represented between large inverted commas thus highlighting its importance to the narration of events: "I have found that they are almost all suffering from scabies". In-text, further transquotations are interwoven with the journalist's introductory narration: "He painted a grim picture of the scene on board the ship: 'A devastating reality, starting from the bad smells that remain on you'". No mention is made of the source for the citations. The same graphic strategy to frame selected translanguagual quotations is used in the article: "EU-Italy crisis talks FAIL: Italian leader LASHES OUT at

¹⁵<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15885>

¹⁶<https://www.express.co.uk/journalists>

¹⁷<https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1007646/eu-migrant-crisis-scabies-italy-matteo-salvini-ubaldo-diciotti>

¹⁸https://www.corriere.it/politica/18_agosto_23/migranti-procuratore-catania-a-bordo-diciotti-ho-visto-realta-devastante-c-erano-bambini-tanti-malati-scabbia-0be87d8e-a642-11e8-91e4-21266181578b.shtml

'hypocrisy' of European allies" (Smith, August 26th)¹⁹. It cites Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte via a translated post drawn from Facebook: "Once again we see a discrepancy, which mutates into hypocrisy, between words and deeds" [Ancora una volta misuriamo la discrasia, che trascolora in ipocrisia, tra parole e fatti]. Conte was referring to the EU partners' refusal to share the burden of refugee arrivals in Italy, a situation that came to head with the *Diciotti crisis*. The same quotation appeared two days earlier in the *MailOnline* (August 24th)²⁰: "Yet again, we take the measure of the dysfunction, which morphs into hypocrisy, between words and deeds,' he said". In both cases the translation with very obvious calques and Italian syntax has a foreignising effect, and might suggest a non-expert translator. Further examples of social media transquotations were revealed in the quality press, which are discussed below.

6. The quality news brands

The quality press and their digital offshoots have a reputation for being serious newspapers, which are more likely to offer more in-depth coverage of politics, economics, and foreign affairs compared to the mid-market and tabloid news brands. Also known colloquially as the "heavies", the quality brands aim at a smaller, more upmarket readership, but also an international audience, especially for the online versions (Harcup, 2014). In terms of political leaning, the *Guardian* is an independent, liberal and left of centre publication. It is renowned for its commitment to investigative journalism (*ibid.*). It has a younger, more London-based readership than the other qualities (Pamco)²¹; *The Times* is right of centre, while the *Telegraph* is Conservative and squarely on the right. All three have freelance correspondents who regularly report on Italian affairs. Compared to the middle market titles, the quality brands published fewer articles on the *Diciotti case* within the timeframe: *The Times* published six, the *Guardian* four, and the *Telegraph* two.

¹⁹ <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/1008432/EU-Italy-crisis-emergency-talks-Brussels-Giuseppe-Conte>

²⁰ <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/italy/article-6095709/Migrants-held-ostage-aboard-Italian-coastguard-ship-begin-hunger-strike-protest.html>

²¹ <https://pamco.co.uk/pamco-data/data-archive/>

6.1 *The Telegraph*

The *Telegraph* is one of the very few British newspapers to have a staff member based in Rome, yet the articles on the *Diciotti case* within the timeframe were not written by the *Telegraph* Italian correspondent, Nick Squires. The first is attributed to “our foreign staff”, which could be anyone from a reporter in Brussels to a correspondent in Spain. Entitled “Salvini threatens to send migrants stuck on coastguard ship back to Libya”, the article begins: “Italy's Far-Right interior minister has threatened to ‘send back to Libya’ nearly 180 people stranded for three days on an Italian coastguard ship” (August 19th, 2018)²², illustrating how translated text is embedded within news discourse without any clear indication of what was actually said and in which language. The ideologically loaded pre-modifier, “far-right” is an example of overlexicalisation and is used transversally in all the news brands along with other stock phrases such as “hard right” and “hardline”. Considering the *Telegraph*'s overtly right-wing stance, the question begs what “far right” might indicate in this context and to what aim. Such labelling leads to issues of perception of political leanings across cultures and their subsequent translations: in Italy, Salvini is rarely referred to in the national media as “far-right” [estrema destra] but rather as part of the centre-right (Filmer, forthcoming). Transquoting from social media can be found throughout the article with varying levels of success. An example is the following: “‘Malta's behaviour is once again unqualifiable and deserves sanction’, Italian Minister of Transport Danilo Toninelli said on Twitter on Sunday”. The original Tweet was: “[...]Malta è ancora una volta inqualificabile e meritevole di sanzioni”. “Inqualificabile” in Italian means “deplorable” or “unspeakable” but the term “unqualifiable” in English is defined in the *OED* as “lacking the attributes or accomplishments required to qualify for something; incapable of attaining the necessary qualifications”, which does not correspond to the source text meaning.

6.2 *The Times*

The Times published six online articles regarding the *Diciotti crisis* during the timeframe, all by Philip Willan, who is one of *The Times*'s freelance Italy correspondents. Published on August 19th just before the Diciotti arrived at the Port of Catania, the first is entitled “We’ll send migrants back to

²² <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/08/19/salvini-threatens-send-migrants-stuck-coastguard-ship-back-libya/>

Libya unless EU steps in, vows Salvini". The headline uses the same transquotation "send back to Libya" used by the *Telegraph* (discussed above), but appears in *The Times* headline without inverted commas and with the pronoun "we". The article begins with the statement: "Italy's far-right interior minister has threatened to deport 177 migrants back to Libya if Brussels refuses to redistribute them across Europe in a move that would violate international law" (*ibid.*). The article is structured around Salvini's statement to the Italian press, which he made on August 19th, and therefore contains quotes that have been extracted and translated, as in Orengo's (2005) "cut and paste" journalistic practices.

The following example from *The Times* (August 24th)²³ illustrates how journalistic licence can construct news through the invisible filter of translation. In "Get Stuffed, Matteo Salvini tells stranded migrants" Willan wrote: "Italy's interior minister *told* 150 migrants spending an eighth day on the Mediterranean to "get stuffed" as he sought to bolster his dominance of Rome's populist government" (my emphasis). The journalist cites the source of the translingual quotations as being a video posted on Facebook by Salvini. Salvini's diatribe was in Italian, and therefore the selected phrases extracted from the video required translation, as with all the examples discussed so far, although who does the translating is not apparent. The editorial decision to employ the expression "get stuffed" in the headline and attribute the "coarse imprecation"²⁴ to Salvini is an ideological one, creating translation effects. At best, the insult could be described as a satirical summary of the 20-minute tirade. Although the essence of the former minister's speech was clearly a condemnation of refugees arriving on Italian shores, he did not use an Italian equivalent of "get stuffed", nor did he directly address asylum seekers. His discourse was aimed at his Facebook followers. Therefore, the use of the reporting verb "told" and the vulgar insult in the headline are entirely misleading.

The article is accompanied by an image of a belligerent looking official on board the Diciotti, pointing an accusing finger at a group of weary asylum seekers crouching under a makeshift tarpaulin shade to shelter from the hot Sicilian sun. The image anchors Willan's words: "Mr Salvini's performance, accompanied by finger-wagging, was watched by more than 20,000 people". Kress (2011: 36) has argued that:

²³ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/get-stuffed-matteo-salvini-tells-stranded-migrants-3c91977dg>

²⁴ OED Online

Texts, of whatever kind, are the result of the semiotic work of design, and of processes of composition and production. They result in ensembles composed of different modes, resting on the agentive semiotic work of the maker of such texts.

The article is an example of the ways in which a combination of visual prompts and manipulated translation render foreign news reporting infotainment. While such tactics might be expected in the tabloid press, it is disconcerting to find them in a quality news brand.

6.3 The *Guardian*

The *Guardian* is considered the most trustworthy of British news brands²⁵ and provides the nearest to a narrator-journalist in the form of freelancer, Lorenzo Tondo. All four articles on the *Diciotti case* carry his by-line, although twice authorship was shared with reporters based in Brussels and Rome. He is Italian, and therefore falls into the category of “foreign freelance journalist” discussed in section 3.1. The British reader is reminded of Tondo’s geographical proximity to the events: “in Palermo” appears after his by-line in all the articles analysed. Yet, the *Diciotti Crisis* he reports on took place in Catania, which is on the other side of Sicily and a two-hour drive away. This might raise a doubt as to whether the articles produced by the journalist, however well-documented, actually contain any first-hand reporting. Tondo’s narrative begins with the article: “Standoff in Italian port as Salvini refuses to let refugees disembark - Interior minister wants EU states to take 177 refugees and migrants from ship” (August 21st, 2018)²⁶. The first word in the headline is “standoff”, a term that reverberates throughout the news discourse on the *Diciotti crisis* across the ideological spectrum. A standoff according to the *OED* “is any uneasy stalemate or deadlock; an impasse. Frequently in political contexts”. A more refined definition is: “a deadlock between two equally matched opponents in a dispute or conflict” (Lexico.com)²⁷. In the

²⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/gnm-press-office/2020/jun/17/new-data-shows-guardian-is-the-top-quality-and-most-trusted-newspaper-in-the-uk#:~:text=Katharine%20Viner%2C%20editor%2Din%2Dchief%2C%20Guardian%20News%20%26%20Media%3A&text=The%20Guardian%20is%20also%20the,ABC1%2C%20under%2035s%20and%20families.>

²⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/21/italy-refugees-salvini-refuses-coastguard-ship-docks-diciotti>

²⁷ <https://www.lexico.com/definition/stand-off>

Guardian headline, the “standoff” is implicitly with the asylum seekers but as powerless agents against Salvini, they are clearly not the ones creating a deadlock. The second point of linguistic interest in headlines is the differentiation between “refugees” and “migrants”. The importance of terminology when naming social actors in migratory situations has been discussed in the literature (see Khosravini, 2010; Ieracitano and Vigneri, 2018; Mahrouse, 2018; Nelken, 2018, for recent research on the subject). As a left-wing quality newspaper, the *Guardian* might appear to offer a more “empathetic” perspective by using the term “refugees” than conservative right-wing publications such as the *Daily Mail*, who use almost exclusively the generic “migrants” (Mahrouse, 2018: 34). Yet, the “refugee” versus “migrant” dichotomy creates tensions in the narratives surrounding who has the right to ask for asylum.

In the narration of the legal aspects of the *Diciotti case*, the role of translation becomes crucial. Here, we compare *The Times* and the *Guardian*. The article “Matteo Salvini facing kidnap charge after migrants held on rescue boat” (*The Times* ²⁸) contains two extremely significant critical points in terms of translational decisions. The first concerns the offences of which Salvini was suspected: “Sequestro di persone” (false imprisonment or illegal detention), which has been rendered with “kidnapped”. If we look at a technical definition of “kidnapping”, it is evident that the journalist’s choice of term creates translation effects:

Kidnapping n. *Carrying a person away, without his consent, by means of force, threats, or fraud.* Kidnapping is a common-law offence that overlaps to some extent with the offences of child abduction and false imprisonment. Kidnapping is punishable with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment. (Oxford Dictionary of Law²⁹; my emphasis)

The *Guardian* (Tondo August 22nd, 2020) on the other hand, writes “Salvini defiant over investigation into illegal detention”³⁰. The less loaded translation “illegal detention” is used during the event itself, however, when the Court of Ministers ruled (later overturned) that parliamentary immunity could be lifted, the *Guardian* headline read: “Court in Italy rules

²⁸ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/salvini-facing-kidnapping-charge-after-migrants-held-on-rescue-boat-hr23stvcj>

²⁹ <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100036295>

³⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/22/illegal-detention-italian-ministers-bar-on-migrant-ship-probed>

Matteo Salvini should be tried for kidnapping” (January 24th, 2019)³¹. The *Guardian* and *The Times* were not alone in choosing to translate the Italian “reato di sequestro di persona aggravato” with the term “kidnapping”. All of the news brands used this rendering at some point when referring to the case and its aftermath, yet this was not the only option. A search on the translation website *Reverso*³² yielded the following alternatives: abduction, false imprisonment, unlawful imprisonment, forcible confinement, illegal detention, to name a few. Whilst hyperbole might be expected in the tabloids, the translational decision to use “kidnapping” in the left-wing *Guardian* might be considered an ideological one.

The second critical point might be viewed in the light of cultural translation, which in terms of news translation “is essentially hermeneutical and aims to explain to one group of people how another group interprets an object or event” (Conway, 2012: 1002). The same *Times* article (Willan, 2018)³³ states that Salvini has “in effect” been charged with “kidnap, illegal arrest and abuse of office”. It explains that the public prosecutor “announced that he had placed Mr Salvini under investigation: the equivalent in Italy of being charged”. This is not the case. He was suspected of the crimes but he was not charged at this point in the proceedings. The Italian juridical system is very clear on the two distinct positions. The translation of legal discourse and terminology are some of the most complex and onerous linguistic spheres requiring expert knowledge in source and target languages plus competence in the respective legal systems. An inaccurate legal translation in a juridical context could have very serious consequences. However, the translational act in journalistic contexts is obscured, and those inaccuracies remain unaccounted for.

7. Final remarks and future directions

This contribution presented a qualitative study on the use of translation in British news narratives surrounding the *Diciotti case*, an episode whose ramifications continue to be far-reaching in the current political debate on immigration in Europe. From a translation studies perspective, the case

³¹<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/24/court-in-italy-rules-matteo-salvini-should-be-tried-for-kidnapping>

³²<https://context.reverso.net/translation/italian-english/sequestro+di+persona>

³³<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/salvini-facing-kidnapping-charge-after-migrants-held-on-rescue-boat-hr23stvcj>

was significant for the ways in which quotations from source language social media were translated and recontextualised in order to narrate events to an anglophone audience. Synchronic sampling was carried out on the major UK news brands' coverage of the case during the period that the asylum seekers were held on the Diciotti. With regards to the first research question on the use of translation and the sources of transquotation, the results would indicate that anglophone news narratives on Italian affairs are often constructed around textual material extracted from social media networks such as Facebook and Twitter, and from Italian newspapers, which are then translated into ready-made quotes. No indication is given that the original utterance was in fact in another language. This process entails translation input from the journalists, who may have no knowledge of a foreign language, let alone translation theory. Yet, they are providing their audience with the "news" from overseas. It appears that news texts on foreign affairs, even in the quality brands, can easily be constructed with a few well-chosen images and a sprinkling of transquoted tweets. Buozi and Creech (2018: 1430) suggest that "news is not reality as it happened, but an observed documentation of that reality". Instead, it seems that reality is not being observed at all; it is refracted through virtual discourse which is then reformulated and translated to fit the aims of the text producer, in this case the journalist, to meet target audience expectations.

However, examining the textual content is only a part of the puzzle. A triangulation of research approaches that account for not only the product but also their production (i.e. speaking to journalists) would greatly enhance the analysis of textual data. As the *Guardian's* correspondent, Lorenzo Tondo represented the best example from the study of the narrator-journalist-translator, he was contacted via telephone and email to ask if he would grant an interview. Having initially agreed to participate, when provided with a short list of questions, he failed to respond to my attempts to contact him again in order to arrange the interview. This is just a small example of the kind of obstacles researchers of news translation face, thus limiting investigations into translational practices in news contexts. Another area of journalistic research that has been underexplored is the reception of multimodal news texts. Investigations into the use of translation in digital news sources might focus on how much time readers spend browsing a news text, and if they actually watch and listen to the videos. Audience awareness and perception of embedded translanguing quotations of foreign leaders would provide useful insights

into the role of translation in national image building, cognition, and stereotyping.

Returning to the second research question, in terms of narratives, one of the most striking findings from this sample study, in agreement with Nelken (2018), is the total absence of the asylum seekers' voice. From the data analysed, across the ideological spectrum, the declarations of Salvini on social media, that reverberate through translation, were far more "newsworthy" than the fate of the 137 asylum seekers who were denied their identity, freedom of movement, and fundamental human rights.

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