

Journalistic Translation

Journalistic Translation:

*Procedures and Strategies
in English-Kurdish Translation
of Media Texts*

By

Sabir Hasan Rasul

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Translation of Media Texts

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TO MY FAMILY

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BT – Back-translation

CAT – Computer-Assisted Translation

DTS – Descriptive Translation Studies

KDP – Kurdistan Democratic Party

KIG – Kurdistan Islamic Group

KIU – Kurdistan Islamic Union

KNN – Kurdish News Network

KRG – Kurdistan Regional Government

PUK – Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

SL – Source Language

ST – Source Text

TL – Target Language

TT – Target Text

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Motivation for the book

This book is based on my PhD thesis conducted at the Centre for Translation Studies at the University of Leeds in 2015. To the best of my knowledge, this was the first PhD research project conducted specifically between English and Kurdish (Sorani) up until then. The project was supervised by Professor Jeremy Munday and Professor James Dickins.

The book explores translation of journalistic texts between English and Kurdish. In today's globalized world, the role and influence of media and journalism on individuals and society at large are immense. Not a day passes without coming upon breaking news, routine news reports, interviews, etc. that deal with social, economic and political issues at the national as well as global level. "First newspapers, then radio and television, now the internet and other new communication technologies all play an important and ever increasing role in the present-day world" (Tyulenev 2014: 57). As cross-cultural communication, translation figures prominently in today's globalized media and journalism. Journalistic translation as a practice is not a new phenomenon but actually dates from the time when newspapers started covering foreign news events centuries ago. The study of journalistic translation, however, is a more recent phenomenon and much of the major research in the area has been conducted only in the past two decades (cf. Bassnett and Conway 2006; Bielsa and Bassnett 2009; Darwish 2009/2010; Schäffner and Bassnett 2010; Rasul 2016/2018).

With regard to the Kurdish media, the area has remained largely under-researched, something that should come as no surprise given that the Kurdish media is itself in its infancy. Since the publication of the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan*, in 1898 until the mid-1980s, Kurdish journalism has sporadically witnessed the emergence of different periodicals, published mostly in Sorani Kurdish and in Iraqi Kurdistan. Development in Kurdish journalism has in fact started in 1990s after the

establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraqi Kurdistan. The new millennium, however, has witnessed a robust proliferation in Kurdish journalism at an unprecedented pace. Specifically after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, opportunities arose for Kurdish society to establish closer contacts with the outside world, something that was achieved mostly through the media. That is where translation came into play as a vital catalyst of development in the Kurdish media.

But translation itself is not unproblematic in the Kurdish context, and it too is a field where systematic research is lacking. Having worked as an English-Kurdish translator and interpreter for several years, I have extensive first-hand experience of the fact that translation between English and Kurdish struggles against abundant constraints that arise at the linguistic as well as cultural level of discourse. My experience teaching translation at the University of Human Development in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has shown me that translators working between the two languages have to be adequately equipped with detailed translation skills so as to apply appropriate translation procedures with the aim of overcoming such constraints. Through observation of the current translation trends in journalistic texts, mainly from English into Kurdish, I have also noted that such translations suffer serious deficiencies insofar as:

- 1) They lack a consistent and systematic translation approach in the translation process;
- 2) They lack lexical and terminological consistency;
- 3) The quality of some translations suggests that translators may have embarked on the translation task without the necessary skills;
- 4) Some translation products suggest that adequate translation revision might have not been undertaken;
- 5) The translation products are not devoid of ideologically-motivated changes and shifts;
- 6) Some translations lack the overall clarity inherent in the message being communicated.

Nonetheless, despite the crucial role of translation in the Kurdish media and multiple concerns regarding the quality of the translation products, the area has not been particularly touched upon by critics, academics or researchers. Deficiencies in the quality of the translation products and lack of sufficient research to explore translation in the Kurdish media have become a source of stimulation for this study, which aims to identify the patterns of translation procedures and overall strategies that characterize current English-Kurdish translations of journalistic texts. Translation

procedures are significant techniques employed to make necessary changes and shifts at the textual micro-level in an attempt to produce an appropriate translation. Any act of translation inevitably involves the use of translation procedures in some form or shape to overcome difficulties and constraints encountered in the translation process. That is because:

Even the simplest, most basic requirement we make of translation cannot be met without difficulty: one cannot always match the content of a message in language A by an expression with exactly the same content in language B, because what can be expressed and what must be expressed is a property of a specific language in much the same way as how it can be expressed. (Winter 1961: 98, quoted in Baker 2018: 94)

Therefore, translators have to take stock of such difficulties to decide on appropriate translation procedures; without careful employment of translation procedures, producing an appropriate translation is out of the question. Translation procedures are, after all, at the heart of translation skills that competent translators have to acquire.

1.2 Aims and research questions

This book sets out to investigate journalistic texts from a Translation Studies perspective. It specifically aims to identify the patterns of translation procedures and overall strategies that are employed in a corpus of journalistic texts translated from English into Kurdish. The study's main objectives are:

- 1) To understand the nature of journalistic translation products offered by the Kurdish media;
- 2) To understand the nature of translatorial practices and the institutional setting within the Kurdish media;
- 3) To create a replicable composite model of translation procedures that inclusively covers both linguistic and cultural aspects of translation;
- 4) To offer new insights into how to effectively employ various possible translation procedures to tackle translation difficulties at the linguistic level; and
- 5) To heighten (trainee) translators' awareness of cultural encounters and introduce them to cultural translation procedures that can effectively tackle translation difficulties at the cultural level.

In brief, the book is a descriptive translation study (DTS) of the procedures and strategies that are used in the current English-Kurdish translation of

journalistic texts. This is a significant endeavour to find out the current state of translation in the Kurdish media and to feed into applied Translation Studies by offering guidelines for Kurdish translators in the absence of existing resources in that language direction. This research ultimately intends to lay down a composite model of translation procedures that allows for a thorough analysis of a collected corpus of English-Kurdish journalistic texts but that also has the potential to be tried out on other genres and language combinations. In order to achieve the aims and objectives outlined above, this study specifically sets out to address the following research questions:

- 1) What are the patterns of general translation procedures employed in current English-Kurdish translations of journalistic texts?
- 2) What are the patterns of cultural translation procedures used in rendering cultural terms in such journalistic texts?
- 3) What are the overall translation strategies that can be construed as a result of the patterns of general as well as cultural translation procedures?
- 4) What is the nature of translatorial practices and the institutional setting under which translations are carried out in the Kurdish media? And how do these affect the translation procedures?
- 5) What guidelines can be offered to practising journalist-translators?

Clearly, the study is of a multifaceted nature, covering both textual analysis and institutional study of the Kurdish media. Linguistic and cultural aspects will be dealt with in the textual analysis phase. The institutional study also covers a broad area, investigating different aspects of journalistic translation and translatorial practices as well as the institutional setting under which translations are carried out.

1.3 Organization of the book

This book consists of nine chapters, which will be organized as follows:

Chapter One is the introduction, which presents the outline of the book: the motivation of the study, the aims and research questions and a summary of the chapters.

Chapter Two will introduce four key areas that are directly relevant to the study, namely, the Kurdish language and its dialects; a historical background of the Kurdish media; the language of journalistic texts and its typology; and finally, translation of journalistic texts, which is at the core of this study.

Chapter Three will discuss relevant theories concerning translation procedures and strategies for the topic under investigation. It will proceed to formulate a composite model of translation procedures to apply in the analysis of the adopted corpus to identify occurrences of translational relationship between ST-TT coupled pairs. The composite model will be based on the integration of three taxonomies of translation procedures proposed by prominent translation scholars, namely, Vinay and Darbelnet (1958/1995), Newmark (1988) and Dickins, Hervey and Higgins (2002/2016). As for the translation strategies, the chapter will consider the most prominent dichotomous translation approaches that are based on the notion of translation equivalence, namely, Nida's (1964) 'formal and dynamic equivalence', House's (1977/2014) 'overt and covert translation' and Newmark's (1988) 'semantic and communicative translation'. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Venuti's (1995/2008) 'domesticating' and 'foreignizing' translation strategies as an influential method for analyzing cultural terms in translation.

Chapter Four will present the corpus and methodology adopted in the study. It will introduce the journalistic texts that have been chosen, the media outlets disseminating the STs as well as those producing the TTs. The chapter will also present the nature of the qualitative and quantitative methods adopted to carry out a comparative analysis of the ST-TT pairs in terms of translation procedures and strategies as well as investigate translatorial practices and the institutional setting found in the Kurdish media.

Chapter Five will provide an analysis of the linguistic aspects of the translation by applying the composite model of translation procedures with a view to distinguishing the patterns of general translation procedures. The analysis process involves identifying occurrences of translation procedures, offering critical comments on their effectiveness and, wherever possible, highlighting the nature of the translation difficulty behind the implementation of each procedure.

Chapter Six will provide an analysis of cultural aspects of the translation by applying the composite model of translation procedures. The chapter will firstly highlight the interconnectedness of the notion of culture with language and translation. It will then examine the nature and categories of the cultural terms found in the data. Finally, it will identify the patterns of cultural translation procedures employed in the translation of such cultural terms.

Chapter Seven will draw out the overall translation orientations prevalent in the chosen journalistic texts, covering both the linguistic and cultural aspects of the data. The patterns of general translation procedures obtained from the linguistic analysis (Chapter 5) will be interpreted in relation to Newmark's (1988) semantic and communicative translation strategies. On the other hand, the patterns of cultural translation procedures obtained from the cultural analysis (Chapter 6) will be examined in relation to Venuti's (1995/2008) domesticating and foreignizing translation strategies.

With information and opinions drawn from a research questionnaire, Chapter Eight will investigate various aspects of translation in the Kurdish media, such as the nature of translation practices, the role of the translator, the institutional setting and the processes undertaken to bring about the final translation product. The chapter will also seek to identify relations, if any, between the external constraints imposed by the institutional setting and the nature of translation procedures identified in the data.

Chapter Nine will conclude the study by presenting an overview of the significant findings that have striven to answer the research questions addressed above; offering guidelines for practicing journalist-translators working in the field of English and Kurdish; highlighting the implications of the findings; and finally, indicating the limitations of the study whilst offering recommendations for further research studies.

CHAPTER TWO

KURDISH LANGUAGE, JOURNALISTIC TEXTS AND TRANSLATION

This chapter establishes the background knowledge of four key areas that are directly relevant to the core subjects of the book. Firstly, it provides a brief introduction of the Kurdish language and its dialects as classified by prominent linguists. Secondly, it provides a brief historical/diachronic background of the development of Kurdish media. This section also touches upon some areas of concern in the Kurdish media, including translation practices. Thirdly, the chapter introduces the language of journalistic texts as well as the approaches taken to study their typologies. The chapter ends with an introduction of journalistic translation and provides a survey of the most prominent and relevant studies of journalistic translation, mostly carried out in the course of the last decade.

2.1 Kurdish language

Kurdish is spoken by an estimated 40 million people – the largest stateless nation on the planet – who live in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Due to their political struggle in these countries, “there are a minimum of 1.5 million Kurds in diaspora”, especially in Europe and North America (Taylor and Skutnabb-Kangas 2009: 171). According to the Kurdish Academy of Language (2011):

The Kurdish language belongs to the Indo-European family of languages. Kurdish dialects are members of the northwestern subdivision of the Indo-Iranic language, Iranian branch of this largest family of language in the world. The Kurdish language is an independent language, having its own historical development, continuity, grammatical system and rich living vocabularies.

The figure below shows an approximate distribution of Kurdish-speaking areas in the Middle East.

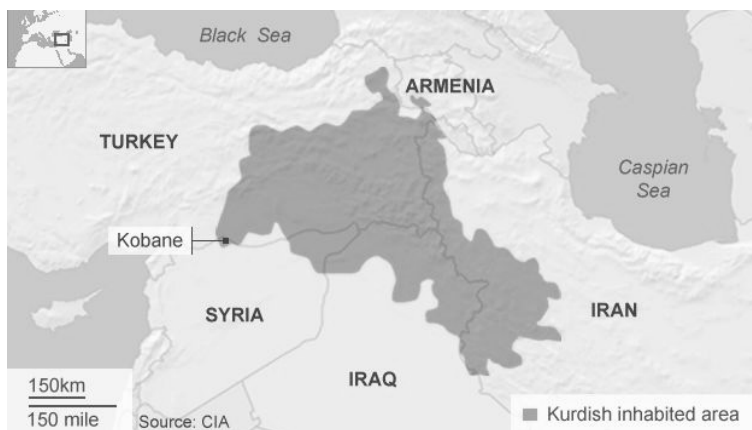


Figure 2.1: Distribution of Kurdish-speaking areas in the Middle East (Map courtesy of BBC news)

Similar to most living languages in the world, the Kurdish language has several dialects. Most linguists distinguish four major Kurdish dialects, although they do not agree on names and a division of the dialects. The different Kurdish dialect typologies are shown in Table 2.1 below:

MacKenzie 1961/1981	Zebihi 1967	Nebez 1976	Hassanpour 1992	Izady 1992
Northern Group	Northern Group	North Kirmanci	Kurmanji	North Kurmanji
Central Group	Central Group	Middle Kirmanci	Sorani	South Kurmanji
Non-Kurdish	Hawrami/Dimili	Gorani/Zazai	Hawrami	Dimili
Southern Group	Southern Group	South Kirmanci	Kirmashani	Gurani

Table 2.1: Kurdish dialect typologies (adapted from the Kurdish Academy of Language 2011)

Kurmanji (also Northern group/North Kurmanji/North Kurmanji) is the most widespread of the Kurdish dialects, while Sorani (less commonly known as Central Group/Middle Kirmanci/South Kurmanji) is “the most developed standard variety of Kurdish” (Aziz 2011: 51). Since the early 20th century, Sorani has been the predominant language variety in Kurdish literature as well as Kurdish media, due to the relative linguistic freedom

the Kurds have enjoyed in Iraqi Kurdistan, where Sorani is the language of the majority, whilst in other parts of Kurdistan (Turkey, Iran and Syria) the Kurdish language was strictly banned. The official policies made against Kurdish in these countries are what Gunter (2011: 196) terms ‘linguicide’ or ‘extermination’.

In the last two decades, the Kurdish language has experienced a period of revival “with the rise of the Internet, the creation of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in Iraq, and Turkey’s evolving more tolerant attitude” (Gunter 2011: 196). For example, Turkey has “abolished the ban on speaking Kurdish, allowed private teaching of Kurdish language in 2004 and set up in January 2009 TRT-6, a public television channel broadcasting in Kurdish” (Akin 2011: 12). Besides, the efforts of thousands of Kurds in the diaspora, especially in Europe, cannot and should not be underestimated in this revival.

It is crucial to point out that this book focuses exclusively on the Sorani dialect of Kurdish for two major reasons: firstly, the effectiveness and predominance of Sorani in contemporary Kurdish media and literature; and secondly, the author speaks Sorani and, thus, has more knowledge of this dialect than other dialects.

2.2 Kurdish media

In 1898, the princely family of Bedirkhan published the first Kurdish newspaper – *Kurdistan* – in Cairo, which is considered the foundation stone of the history of Kurdish journalism. The newspaper was bilingual, published in Kurdish Kurmanci and Turkish, using Arabic script. Although historians are reluctant to label it as nationalist literature (cf. Özoğlu 2004: 36), the newspaper aimed at “[stirring up] feelings in support of the Kurdish people, led by its notables and shaykhs” (McDowall 2004: 90). Miqdad Midhet Bedirkhan, the founder and editor of the newspaper, wrote in the editorial of the first issue of the newspaper:

They [the Kurds] are not aware of what is happening in the world and in their neighbourhood. I have put myself to the task of producing this newspaper - God willing - every fifteen days. I have named it ‘Kurdistan’. In this newspaper I emphasise the importance of education and science. Wherever there are great schools and institutions I shall report to the Kurds. I shall also inform the Kurds about any war that is taking place, about the deeds of the great imperial countries, how they fight and how they trade. No one has ever produced a [Kurdish] newspaper like this, mine is a pathfinder. (Kurdish Academy of Language 2011)



Figure 2.2: Front page of the first Kurdish newspaper, *Kurdistan*, published in 1898 (from Kurdish Academy of Language 2011)

The reason for the first Kurdish newspaper being published in Cairo was that it was not given permission in Istanbul, the Capital of the Ottoman Empire (Sheyholislam 2011: 80). Within four years of its publication (1898-1902), the newspaper moved from Cairo to Geneva and then to London and Folkestone, “possibly because the politically active Badir

Khans wanted to be in closer touch with Ottoman exiles in Europe” (McDowall 2004: 90). From the publication of the first Kurdish newspaper until 1985, Kurdish journalism had witnessed 145 publications, mostly published in Sorani and in Iraqi Kurdistan (Hassanpour 1992: 225-239). But Sheyholislam (2011: 81) observes that “[by] 1985, private journalism had disappeared and 11 periodicals published in Iraq, Iran, and the USSR were state sponsored”. Since the Kurdish uprising in Iraq in 1991 and the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in 1992, there has been a staggering proliferation of Kurdish media and journalism activities.

The new millennium has been a turning point in the openness of Kurdish society towards the outside world. This openness has been partly established through the media, along with other socio-political factors:

[A] cross-border or trans-state Kurdish identity has been strengthening in the past two decades or so primarily due to three factors: political developments in Kurdistan, the expansion of Kurdish diasporas, and the use of satellite television and the Internet among the Kurds. (Sheyholislam 2011: 79)

Today there are over 40 Kurdish satellite TV channels, dozens of local television and radio stations and hundreds of newspapers and magazines, along with thousands of internet websites, broadcasting and publishing mainly in Kurdish, and, at a lower scale, in Arabic and English. According to the Kurdistan Journalists’ Syndicate (KJS), in early 2012 there were 470 printed periodicals in Iraqi Kurdistan, mostly magazines with around 100 newspapers (Hogan and Trumpbour 2013: 21).

These media outlets are mostly based in Iraqi Kurdistan due to the relative freedom which came about after the establishment of the KRG, as compared to other parts of Kurdistan in Turkey, Syria and Iran. The role of the Kurds in the diaspora in promoting the Kurdish media has also been immense. In the course of the last decade or so, they have been able to make use of ‘cyberspace’ to create a virtual Kurdistan through online activities such as online news, personal websites and blogs, talk forums and the social media (Eliasi 2013: 4). More than a quarter of the Kurdish satellite channels broadcast from the diaspora, for example: *Aso Sat*, *KM TV* and *Rojhalat* are based in Sweden; *Kurd TV*, *MMC* and *Roj TV* are based in Denmark; and *Kurd1*, *MED Nuçê* and *Tishk* are based in France.

In an unprecedented effort, John Hogan and John Trumpbour (2013) from the Harvard School of Law conducted an empirical research project

to investigate the Kurdish press from social and political perspectives. They released the final report of the project entitled ‘The Press and Political Processes in Contemporary Iraqi Kurdistan’, which provides a thorough description of and great insights into current Kurdish journalism. In the report, the socio-political role of the Kurdish press has come under a cloud of criticism; “in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, there is very little disagreement that the current state of affairs in the press is a cause for serious concern” (ibid: 25). This indication casts doubt on the role of the Kurdish press as the ‘fourth estate’ and its function to mediate between people and the government, on the one hand, and to bring about reform in society and politics, on the other. Therefore, it is the press itself that needs reform first; there is “widespread agreement that newspaper journalism and the conditions under which it operates require reform” (ibid.).

One of the areas of concern identified in the report is that of translation practices in the Kurdish media. Hogan and Trumpbour (2013: 45) refer to the example of the former Consul General of France to the KRG, Frédéric Tissot, who was interviewed by *Awene* in July 2012. The interview was apparently conducted in French and translated into Kurdish. In the interview, Tissot stated that “the principles of democracy are not totally established in Kurdistan”, which was translated as “the principles of democracy are not established in Kurdistan”, and was used as the headline of the interview. Believing that his message had been radically changed by the removal of the word *totally*, Tissot wrote to *Awene*’s editor-in-chief and the company’s director, demanding the right of reply and for this to be published in the newspaper. Tissot did not even receive an apology or an explanation. The omission of the word *totally* in Tissot’s statement can be considered ideologically motivated; it is used to serve the *Awene*’s agenda as an independent newspaper that is critical of the Kurdish authority. Ideological manipulations of this nature are not an uncommon phenomenon in the Kurdish media; one-fourth of all translators participated in a questionnaire for the purpose of this book admit they make omission for ideological purposes (see Section 8.3.6).

Another crucial and relevant aspect of Hogan and Trumpbour’s (2013) research is their indication of Kurdistan’s coverage in the global media. According to Hogan and Trumpbour (ibid: 49), critics and commentators in Iraqi Kurdistan are more interested in international reports that are “sympathetic to [Kurdish] cause, to the cause of free-media and to telling the truth about Kurdistan and the behaviour of the nation’s leadership”. The Kurdish authority, on the other hand, is interested in the presentation of the Kurdistan region in the global media as a free and democratic

society, where human rights are respected and the rule of law prevails. For this reason, it uses its diplomatic relations to promote this positive attitude. Consider the positive article ‘The dash for modernity’ by William Hague, the former UK foreign secretary and the upbeat article ‘Kurdistan can be a model for democracy in a troubled region’ by the British MP Robert Halfon. Both articles are translated and published by authority affiliated media outlets – the former by the official website of the KRG representative in the UK and the latter by *Rudaw*. Commenting on the nature of the coverage of Kurdistan in the global media, Hogan and Trumbour (2013: 49) conclude that:

Clearly, it is a mistake to believe that all foreign coverage of Kurdish society and politics is wholly benign or completely malicious, naive or cynical. Foreign news stories, opinion pieces and reports of NGOs or academics, for that matter, need to be critically examined on a case by case basis.

The importance of the global reports covering Kurdistan does not only lie in the fact that they represent the viewpoints of foreign authors, but also in the role they play in Kurdish society and politics. “There is the belief among some Kurdish commentators that reports from the outside world have greater authority and impact than home grown produce” (Hogan and Trumbour 2013: 49). The translation of relevant foreign reports into Kurdish and their publication in the Kurdish media are increasingly gaining currency. Birot (2015: 26) has identified the trend that each Kurdish media outlet chooses to translate texts that are in line with its ideological stance, with the Kurdish media being divided along the lines of authority, opposition and independent (or so-called independent) media orientations.

2.3 Journalistic texts

Today journalism has become an inseparable part of our daily lives. Whether we want to or not, are aware or not, are concerned or not, we live in an environment influenced and even directed to a great extent by the media. On a daily basis, we unavoidably come across tens of news reports, articles, interviews, etc. on TV, on the radio, in newspapers and increasingly on the internet. As Talbot (2007: 3) says:

Very few of us, if any, are unaffected by media discourse. The importance of the media in the modern world is incontrovertible. For some sections of society, at least, the media have largely replaced older institutions [...] as the primary source of understanding of the world.

Journalistic texts are nowadays seen as an interesting and purposeful ground for various research studies. Due to its multifaceted nature, researchers have taken different approaches to exploring the language of journalism. Monika Bednarek (2006: 11-12) distinguishes eight major approaches to study journalistic texts, which are presented below with updated references:

- 1) **The critical approach:** this is associated with the critical study of the relationship between power and ideology, often calling for values such as social responsibility (cf. van Dijk 1988; Fowler 1991; Fairclough 1995; Caldas-Coulthard 2003; Weiss and Wodak 2003; Blackledge 2005; Lahlali 2011).
- 2) **The narrative/pragmatic/stylistic approach:** this is associated with the study of discourse analysis, especially the language structure of news discourse, covering some other aspects such as pragmatic analyses, genre, style and register (cf. Crystal and Davy 1969; Carter 1988; Bell 1991; Almeida 1992; White 1997; Ungerer 2004; Lahlali 2011).
- 3) **The corpus linguistic approach:** this involves corpus-based studies of newspaper discourse (cf. Minugh 2000; Schneider 2000; Biber 2003; Conboy 2007; Cotter 2010).
- 4) **The practice-focused approach:** this is concerned with the work carried out to promote journalism practices (cf. Bell 1991; Reah 1998; Rudin and Ibbotson 2002; Cotter 2010).
- 5) **The diachronic approach:** this is the study of newspaper discourse in terms of historical development (cf. Cotter 1996; Herwig 1999; Schneider 2000; Conboy 2007).
- 6) **The socio-linguistic approach:** this aims to explore the relationship between style and social factors (cf. Bell 1991; Jucker 1992; Conboy 2007).
- 7) **The cognitive approach:** the essence of this approach is the “analysis of the relation between cognitive processes, conceptual metaphor, social meaning, and discourse” (cf. van Dijk 1988).
- 8) **The conversationalist approach:** this involves the investigation of media discourse with the help of conversation analysis methods (cf. Clayman 1990; Greatbatch 1998).

Each of these approaches is geared towards monolingual analysis, but they can be applied to translation as well. For instance, the critical, the corpus-linguistic and the socio-linguistic approaches, amongst others, are important approaches that can be well applied in the translation of journalistic texts. In fact, since the last decade, there has been a growing