Riggs, Ashley. "Stylistic Features of News as a Catalyst for Change? Lessons for Journalism, Translation Studies, and "Europe"." *Stylistic Deceptions in Online News: Journalistic Style and the Translation of Culture*. London,: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. 155–169. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350114203.ch-006>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023, 13:09 UTC.

Copyright © Ashley Riggs 2020. Released under a CC BY-NC-ND licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>). You may share this work for non-commercial purposes only, provided you give attribution to the copyright holder and the publisher, and provide a link to the Creative Commons licence.

Stylistic Features of News as a Catalyst for Change? Lessons for Journalism, Translation Studies, and “Europe”

In this chapter, I will briefly explain why the findings presented in this volume are important for journalism, Translation Studies, and “European” societies in general. The results of the study will hopefully remind journalists to reflect more upon their stylistic choices and make readers more aware of the far-reaching influence of stylistic choices in the creation of a narrative, which is what news texts really are. Furthermore, the findings nuance, I argue, the assertion by many scholars that the news outlets of European countries are moving toward a standardized, “European” form of news, and I consider this a strength. The study also builds bridges between literary and non-literary analysis, which is rare, and supports the current trend, in Translation Studies, of broadening the definition of “translation.” The concept of “cultural translation” contributes to this trend while also providing a paradigm for those who inform the public to consider their role, writing and choices: every form of communication is translation; journalistic communication is a civic responsibility, performed in the service of intercultural mediation and the optimizing of communication and understanding across borders, groups, and societies. I conclude with ideas for improving journalistic practice, including ensuring the independence of members of regulatory bodies; doing more to guarantee journalists’ conformity to editorial guidelines; or recruiting, training, and hiring more minority journalists. Such initiatives are perhaps small steps in addressing societal trends and attitudes such as Islamophobia, the conflation of Islam and terrorism or terrorism and crisis, and the marginalization of minority groups, but as such efforts multiply, they have the potential to improve coexistence among the diverse groups that comprise contemporary “European” society.

Stylistic Features: A Key Component of Media Power

We have seen that while news framing is often a prime focus of studies of news discourse, at a more micro level, stylistic choices play an influential role in shaping the messages conveyed by news texts. Not only framing, but also stylistic choice, “is far from a neutral or inconsequential process” (Freedman 2017: 214). What is more, incorporating stylistic features into a news article is in itself a *desirable* move, as it brings to a predominantly informational text some of the qualities of literature, that is, of good writing, writing that comprises aesthetic elements, writing that draws the reader in and then keeps her there. By all means, use stylistic devices—as long as they do not serve to misrepresent or discriminate. This is unfortunately the case, however, of many of the findings presented in Chapter 4: they continue “a pattern of ... misrepresentation that has been prevalent since 9/11” (214). For example, in the news articles analyzed, Muslims and terrorism were linked, early on in the news cycle, in part due to the background of the perpetrator of the Nice attack; in turn, the attack prompted frequent and lengthy reporting on jihadists, extreme groups, and terrorist events. Moreover, terror was tied to religion, despite the statistics we have seen which show that religion is only infrequently the motivation behind violent attacks in Europe. The “Us” versus “Them” dichotomy was in play, with Western countries portrayed as the noble bastions of democratic values and as victims of a violent, retrograde “Other,” or Muslims portrayed as “problem” or “failed” members of society. All of these messages were buoyed by use of the stylistic features of modality, alliteration, and metaphor.

What I would particularly like to concentrate on here, though, is the fact that these messages, like the stylistic choices that underpin them, are highly likely to stoke fear and a sense of threat. Use of modality, for instance, reinforced by frequent violent and negative metaphors and/or made more salient through alliteration, demonstrated that *potential* threats are allowed a “‘continuous discursive presence’ (Hoskins and O’Loughlin 2009: 107–8) that not only encourages anxiety but can also serve to tether any political activity by Muslims ... to the possibility of future radicalized violence” (Titley 2019: 85). As we saw in Chapter 3, this way of defining political action and engagement on the part of Muslim citizens may keep them from exercising certain rights due to citizens, which may in turn hamper their effective integration. What is more, “fear sells” (boyd and McBride 2014: 177); and mainstream newspapers, whose circulation continues to wane, need to sell. This decrease in readership, coupled with “[t]he technology explosion that has shepherded us into the 21st century,”

“has magnified the value of attracting an individual’s attention” so that media organizations will “go to great lengths to seize focus by any means possible” (177), even when doing so “can pose a challenge to journalism’s core values of truth, transparency and community” (177).

Moreover, while “[a]n individual act of fear-mongering causes little damage,” “the additive effects of repeated episodes are huge” (boyd and McBride 2014: 178). As the authors point out and as the tenor of the two articles I could not include in my corpus demonstrate, when news stories stoke fear, they not only risk undermining accuracy, they also “fail to tell other stories” (179). In an example that boyd and McBride discuss, such tendentious choices in terms of news content work to the detriment of “youth who seriously need attention, support and help” (179); in the articles in my corpus, the selection of themes leaves out examples of positive coexistence of culturally different groups, the contributions to society of citizens who just happen to be Muslim, or correctives to certain entrenched prejudices, for instance. “For every headline meant to capitalize on fear, an opportunity is lost” (boyd and McBride 2014: 180). In contrast, the “[f]earful messages spread especially far, particularly stories that play into [the] broad cultural anxieties” (181) that have been discussed at length throughout this book. The media’s amply demonstrated power to shape politics, policy, and public opinion operates in part through stylistic choices that can contribute to those cultural anxieties, but could also contribute to countering them if stylistic devices were used differently.

The Notion of “Cultural Translation”: A Boon for Translation Studies, a Boon for Journalism?

The tenets of cultural translation and cosmopolitanism are valuable ones for Translation Studies. As translation is conceived of not as interlingual, but as intercultural, transfer, and as every “other” is a “text” for each of us to try to decipher, these approaches contribute to a growing trend to broaden the definition of “translation.” Together they also position openness to the “other” and tolerant cultural exchange as paramount, and they foreground the experience of the foreign, the effort to understand the foreign, as laudable goals.

In this sense, it is also valuable for the journalist reporting on events abroad for her home audience to think of herself as a translator, as she is mediating between cultures and should—the news principles and guidelines surveyed support this—optimize communication between them, such as by reporting

only accurate information, or by avoiding any content or language choices that discriminate against minority groups. If she “translates” well, in line with the ideas underpinning cultural translation, she can challenge the apparent fixity of identities and the apparent validity of certain ideologies. Indeed, her “translation” can serve as a “critique of ideology” (Maitland 2017) or encourage her readers to engage in such a critique. An ideology that might come to be critically examined is one that is prevalent in contemporary “European” societies: that which maintains that Muslims are backward, anti-democratic, violent, terrorists.

To achieve these goals, however, journalists and readers alike must be educated, interpreting subjects, seeking to understand. With respect to the goal of re-presenting the Muslim “Other,” and as a result of my findings, I would encourage journalists to try to cultivate in their writing, and thereby in their readers, an “antiessentialist” position on Muslims and Islam. As López García and Bravo López (2008: 979) define it, the antiessentialist view

denies the total alterity of Islam, the comparison of these two symbolic macro-entities called West and Islam, because it distrusts these identity categories and instead sees collective identities as dynamic, mutable phenomena that carry within them an infinite number of contradictions. Above all, it denies the possibility of establishing a direct link between ethnic origin and cultural identity, beliefs or ways of life.

In fact, before asserting anything on the subject of Islam, the antiessentialist prefers to ask: “Which Islam?” “Whose Islam, from where, during what historical period?” (980). If journalists reporting on violent attacks abroad were to invariably ask such questions, we would see fewer generalizing and negative portrayals of Muslims and Islam in the press. The language, including stylistic choices, would be different; the messages conveyed to the public, more nuanced; the public’s resulting interpretations and judgments, better founded; and therefore a contribution could be made to fostering more inclusive “European societies”.

Gianni, Giugni, and Michel (2015: 85) emphasize how difficult it is to precisely capture both the literal and the social meaning of the term “Muslim.” It encompasses much more than religious affiliation. For the Muslims the authors surveyed, religion was above all both private/personal, and a point of cultural reference, not the prime determiner of their identity. Basically everything the authors learned from their Swiss respondents—that spiritual leaders such as imams carried little sway, that respondents believed that democratic values and

laws, as well as the secularity of the state, should be respected, that immigrants, particularly from the Maghreb, were able to integrate successfully on various levels despite important avenues, such as citizenship and voting, being closed to them—flew in the face of the essentialist, rigid, reductive, and negative representations of Muslims that often dominate in the media.

The authors also warn that defining integration as unilateral adaptation to “national values” and then exhorting a minority population—in particular one that is already relatively well-integrated according to various parameters, as is the case of Muslims in Switzerland—to comply, “risks provoking” various kinds of “social reactions” (Gianni, Giugni, and Michel 2015: 116). “For members of the majority,” for instance, it may lead to a hardening of identity “in the face of the presumed menace” (116). Moreover, there is a greater risk that “any resistance” at all to adaptation will automatically be interpreted as “a lack of integration” (116). For the Muslim minority, such pressure risks “exacerbating the feeling of discrimination and lack of recognition,” which may in turn lead to either a radicalizing of given members’ identity or “a tendency toward social and political self-exclusion” (116). Were these things to occur, they could indeed threaten “social cohesion and citizenship, which are essential to the vitality and legitimacy of democratic societies” (116).

The effective “cultural, social and political integration of members of minorities (and not only Muslims) requires their participation in the definition of” the shared cultural, social, and political space (Gianni, Giugni, and Michel 2015: 121). This is necessarily a dynamic, sometimes fraught, and constantly evolving process. It absolutely requires giving more consideration to diversity than the model of integration-by-(pure)-adaptation does. It also requires “fighting against all disrespectful and degrading representations which stigmatize a given cultural group” (122). What does all of this imply? Intercultural dialogue. And translation. Indeed, as the authors observe, encouraging Muslim communities to gather, form associations, and dialogue with social and political authorities “pushes both Muslims and secular institutions to make the effort to *translate* their values into a language the *other* can understand” (127).

Changing Habits for a Changing Landscape?

If journalists were to proceed, to write, as suggested above, they would make more strides toward fulfilling journalism’s “social responsibility, which is to contribute to providing information that is balanced and contextualized and provides the public with unbiased elements with which to formulate judgments”

(Piquer Martí 2015: 155). There are various other measures that can be taken, however. The author also suggests, for instance, that “ethical codes need to be reinforced and committees formed that defend truthful and impartial reporting about minorities” (155). These and other measures are discussed below.

The Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) “suggests establishing a body that looks at the ethical and sensitive issues in the media of key nations” (they name the United States and Britain) (Grass 2013). “The reports should highlight examples of good and bad reporting so journalists all over the world can use them as guidelines for their future work.” In addition, the EJN’s report “recommends international media invest more time, money and manpower in adequate research and communication, and on analyzing the impact their reports can have” (Grass 2013). Working from a large series of concrete examples of news texts that have been evaluated by external experts would surely be a practical and productive way for journalists to develop best practices for how to report on “sensitive” issues such as integration, Islam, Muslims, and terrorism—and to avoid conflating them.

(Regulatory) Bodies with Teeth?

Another move would be to create regulatory bodies “with teeth,” or to reinforce existing ones. The regulatory body in the UK that currently adjudicates on press content issues which have recently led to a series of corrections or calls for corrections is the Independent Press Standards Organization (IPSO). The remit of this body is seen as a step in the right direction, but as we already know, there is criticism, and there is room for improvement. First, IPSO needs to become independent in more than name only. Second, it needs to raise quality standards.

It is not just the right thing to do but a vital commercial imperative if the newspaper industry is going to effectively compete with the chatter of unregulated online news and social media. (Ponsford 2017)

To do so, it also needs to have more power in order to impose “a stronger deterrent to reporting that fails to meet the highest professional standards that members of the press subscribing to IPSO have undertaken to maintain.”¹ This is all the more essential as “quality” news, not only tabloids, is guilty of publishing inaccurate news that misrepresents Muslims. A Muslim Council of Britain report (2017: 5) suggests that there should be a means of subjecting media outlets to financial penalties when they publish false, misleading, or Islamophobic news.

The report also calls for “[s]tronger regulation by a truly independent body with the willingness and ability to deter poor standards within the media, as recommended by Lord Leveson,” and “[t]raining for journalists” so that they develop “a better understanding of Islam.”

The document also provides a whole series of recommendations for changes to procedures and amendments to the Editor’s Code. Surprisingly, “under the Code as it currently stands, an article may breach the Public Order Act against incitement to racial or religious hatred but may still not be in breach of the Editors’ Code” (Muslim Council of Britain 2017b: 7). For this reason, the MCB argues that despite the importance of safeguarding freedom of expression, “A new provision should be added to the Code prohibiting the incitement to hatred against any group with protected characteristics” (7). This echoes Lord Leveson’s recommendations. In a similar vein, the paper suggests that “[a] new provision should be added to the Code prohibiting the levelling of abuse against any vulnerable group unless it can be justified in the public interest” (8). Determining what constitutes abuse is subjective, however, especially considering that the paper maintains that “mere insult” would still be acceptable (7).

According to journalists themselves, internal regulation based on ethical principles and, in particular, accountability (which includes the value of self-regulation) is preferable to external regulation. In their research involving journalists from a number of regions of Spain, presented recently at the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) conference in Madrid, Ramon, Mauri, Díaz del Campo, and Rodriguez (2019) investigated Spanish journalists’ opinions about in-house Media Accountability Instruments (MAIs), which constitute a means of ensuring accountability without state intervention. As found in an earlier study of journalists from twelve European (including the UK, Switzerland, and Spain) and two Arab countries, in-house stylebooks were seen as the most effective tool, yet even this score was only modest (5.82 on a scale of 1 to 10). Older journalists tended to have more confidence in stylebooks and ombudspersons while newcomers, who embraced accountability the most, considered the section of media websites which presents corporate information as the most effective guarantor of accountability. Moreover, if stylebooks did not receive a terribly high score, this is for two important reasons: time constraints mean they are not properly consulted or comprehensively followed (we saw clear evidence of this), and there is no penalty for non-compliance.

The researchers also organized focus groups with Spanish citizens to examine their knowledge of these accountability mechanisms. There was a clear lack of

visibility, and citizens pinpointed the need for media to make the public more aware of them. Journalists and citizens alike were well aware that criticism is healthy. One of the researchers' main conclusions was that media organizations need to revise and update their portfolios of existing MAIs and promote the public's knowledge of them.

On the topic of "audience-inclusive models" of self-regulation, García-Avilés (2019: 272) and his team conducted a study of online accountability measures that looked, among others, at the practices of the online editions of the Spanish news sources studied here, *El País* and *El Mundo*. They found that 45 percent of the media outlets used no online accountability instruments whatsoever; 43 percent used just one (274). They observed that the newsroom blog, while underutilized in the Spanish context, not least because blogs are time-consuming, is a positive tool because it allows journalists to exercise some "autonomy, not just from outside forces but also from the internal control imposed by employers, newsroom practices and the loyalty to colleagues," while also allowing them to explain "to the public the limits" placed on "journalists' decisions" (275). *El País* has a blog, "*El País que hacemos*," which "provides explanations about the paper's coverage, including interviews with the journalists and editors involved in particular news stories" (276). It is not clear, however, how the news stories discussed are selected nor whether reader complaints or other input are addressed. *El País* also incorporated an ombudsperson role in 1985 (277). The study shows that this person's priorities are "issues related to content and editorial aspects," "although other complaints such as gender discrimination and political bias are also prominent" (277). Nevertheless, ombudspersons across Spanish media lack "punitive powers" (278).

Finally, García-Avilés (2019) reminds us that media accountability tools have not been widely taken on board in Spain; that economic and personnel constraints hinder their implementation; and that their use must be coupled with a diplomatic approach based on a willingness to listen, solve problems, and admit shortcomings (280). Accountability tools also need to truly target accountability rather than other goals such as "self-promotion" (281). All in all, though, professional accountability does not seem to have been sufficiently improved.

Rodríguez-Martínez, Mauri-De los Ríos, and Fedele (2017: 70) conclude that "criticism can be considered the best solution to faulty journalistic practice, as well as one of the fundamental aspects of accountability." Given the focus of the press industry on accountability and journalists' own strong recognition of its

importance, not only do accountability instruments need to be implemented, evaluated, and updated, but “independent monitoring processes need to be implemented to guarantee [their] neutrality, impartiality and trustworthiness” (Sorsa 2019: 147).

The fundamental problem with all of the above solutions, however, is that if they do not recognize stylistic characteristics as a key driver in cultural (mis)representation of Muslims and Islam in news reporting about terrorism, they cannot identify them, let alone regulate them or encourage journalists toward improved use of stylistic characteristics. It is for this reason that more studies like this one, on other topics, on press from other countries, on more stylistic devices, should be conducted and disseminated.

Various sources discussed above have highlighted the ineffectiveness of certain existing laws in combating misleading, maligning, hate-inciting news content. Not only do these laws need to be reviewed, and not only does the power of bodies like IPSO need to be reinforced; there are other actions that can be taken at the governmental and community levels. A roundtable held at the House of Lords in April 2016 suggested various solutions such as encouraging the circulation of “clear definitions of radicalisation (as terminology) ... within the law enforcement and security agencies, and put[ting] in place guidelines to protect individuals from agency profiling”; setting up “a consulting forum led by media and government to facilitate professional communications practices for mosque leaderships, neighbourhood centres, charities, schools and other minority group institutions” to help them “to promote and publish more balanced narratives about their communities”; nominating “a well-recognised figure” such as “a celebrity role model as a Muslim Media Relations officer” and more generally facilitating the visibility of, and engagement with, Muslim role models; and “creating community relations reporters in minority communities.”² A report by the Muslim Council of Britain also calls for “considering multi-agency co-ordination to stop using the term ‘Islamic’ or ‘jihadi’ when describing terrorism in line with [measures taken by] the Obama administration” (Muslim Council of Britain 2016: 4).

In conclusion—and it is much easier said than done, and, depending on the administration in power, not necessarily a priority—more steps need to be taken politically, socially, and economically to educate, to actively deter inaccurate representation, and to further the opportunities and the full inclusion of minority groups in the workplace, in the media, in society. After all, “[i]n developed countries terrorism is more likely to occur in those places where socioeconomic

factors such as high unemployment, a lack of faith in democracy and the media [...] and negative attitudes towards immigration are widespread” (Warsi [2017] 2018: 76; Institute for Economics and Peace 2019).

Corrections

One way to counter misleading, inaccurate reporting, Islamophobia in reporting or the conflation of terrorism and Islam in reporting is to require corrections of such content. The event entitled “Islam in the Media: Are We Getting It Right?”³ that took place in London in September 2017 involved discussion of the corrections newspapers have already been required to publish when they emit false or misleading claims about the Muslim community. In response to the question “What would it take for the correction to hit hard?”, Miqdaad Versi highlighted the need for a move from “due prominence” to “equal prominence” (described in detail in Muslim Council of Britain 2017b), that is, that the correction should have the same prominence as the original false or misleading claim. He noted, however, that the print press does not like the idea.

With respect to breaking news, “Any material changes to an online news story should be referenced at the top of an article e.g. We previously reported XXX. This was incorrect. It is actually YYY” (Muslim Council of Britain 2017b: 4). In general, “All false stories should be removed with an acknowledgement of the removal. This includes stories published on social media” (4). It is important to be aware, though, that “discriminatory pieces and hate speech against Muslims in *opinion pages* of newspapers ... are not covered by the current regulator [IPSO] (in spite of Lord Leveson’s recommendations).”⁴

With respect to ruling on corrections called for on the part of newspapers, in particular, the same document (Muslim Council of Britain 2017b) also demonstrates that the requirement in IPSO’s code that inaccuracies be “significant” is highly subjective, which has led to clear and unambiguous inaccuracies being ruled by IPSO to be not sufficiently serious to require correction (5). Moreover, according to the paper, “All inaccuracies” [I would stipulate “proven inaccuracies”] “which have been the subject of complaint should be corrected. Any value judgment about ‘significance’ can be dealt with” effectively if a requirement of “equivalent prominence” is also put into place (6). Where headlines in particular are concerned, “All inaccuracies ... should be considered ‘significant’. If it was considered important enough to be in a headline then it is clearly significant and central”(6).

Minority Journalists

If we fail to represent people in our mainstream narratives, they'll switch off. ...
Where are we telling these kids that they can be heroes in *our* story?

(Riz Ahmed, Speech to Parliament,
Channel 4 annual diversity lecture, March 1, 2017)⁵

According to Josie Dobrin, “Of all the creative industries, ... the press is one of the slowest when it comes to diversifying the workforce.”⁶ In their meta-analysis of (English-language only) studies addressing the treatment of Muslims and Islam in the media, Ahmed and Matthes (2017: 220) highlight the gravity of the current lack of Muslim perspectives in Western news, given that “[t]he Muslim community has over a billion people,⁷ and it stretches across six continents encompassing hundreds of cultures (Courbage and Todd 2014).” The absence of this perspective has multiple causes, from failing to consult, include or quote members of the Muslim community when preparing an article, to not hiring journalists from this minority,⁸ which may in turn only leave space for narrow and biased “external” views of members of the minority. The authors found that only 9.56 percent of the studies surveyed, or thirty-three, incorporated a Muslim perspective (Ahmed and Matthes 2017: 230).

At the same time, however, as pointed out in the “action points” published following the Cambridge University study of the connections between negative depictions of Muslims in the media and anti-Muslim hostility in the UK,⁹ media outlets also need to avoid “ghettoization,” that is, over-assigning stories about minorities to minority journalists (and, hence, under-assigning them other types of stories). In fact, the researchers suggest assigning “minority group coverage to non-minority reporters and editors, so as to broaden awareness and avoid ‘ghettoisation’ of minority coverage” (University of Cambridge 2016). In addition, they call on media organizations to “develop and promote context-sensitive awareness and language use among staff” (University of Cambridge 2016).

Conversely, while in a democracy one cannot silence extreme views due to freedom of speech laws,¹⁰ and while balanced news means representing diverging views, the media should avoid handing extremists a highly visible platform on a silver platter. The terror-group-supporting Anjem Choudary is a case in point, according to Miqdaad Versi (2016b), as broadcasters continue to invite him *without properly contextualizing the persona and the views*.¹¹ Providing visibility without proper contextualization risks not only fomenting Islamophobia by

encouraging people to associate Muslims with extremists, but potentially encouraging terrorism itself. “[Me]dia outlets should not be doing the work of terrorists or spreading their message” (Versi 2016b).

In relation to terrorism reporting more specifically, since it is often linked up with reporting on Muslims and Islam, I have highlighted key questions that journalists can realistically and productively ask about terrorist or other violent events and about their own reporting on them. Seib (2017) reminds us that “[a]nswering such questions requires daily news coverage that consists of more than depictions of scattered chaos.” Here is his advice on how this can be done:

- Given that terrorist reporting tends to unquestioningly link up terror and Islam, do not “shy away” from reporting on religion-related themes, as doing so “creates a vacuum of public knowledge that terrorists and anti-Muslim activists and politicians can exploit.” I would note that religion-related themes can also be positive.
- Report on Islam regularly, not just when violence happens. If this were the case, “perhaps news consumers would realise that there is far more to Islam than violence. And if antipathy toward Islam were to diminish, terrorists would lose a recruiting tool.”
- Report on state-sponsored terrorism. “[T]he news media could play a more forceful role in describing how even purported allies,” like Saudi Arabia, “help terrorism take root.”
- Avoid understating the sophistication of terrorist groups.
- Scrutinize counterterrorism efforts. “The public needs to know what’s working and what isn’t.”

Following these steps could conceivably lead not only to better understanding and integration of Muslims, but even to a decrease in terrorism.

Social Media

While detailed analysis and discussion of social media are beyond the scope of this study, they are more and more popular as sources of news, especially among young people. I have encountered useful recommendations for improving reporting on Muslims and combating Islamophobia on these platforms. False reports should be removed and their removal, flagged. At the “Islam in the Media” event, Versi insisted that major platforms like Facebook can develop a tool whereby, if a news item is corrected, the account of anyone who has posted

the inaccurate news will also receive, and feature as a post, the corrected version. Moreover, the MCB Editorial Code document (2017b: 3) recommends that “[w]herever the Press chooses to publish a headline in isolation e.g. on its front page or social media, care should be taken to ensure that such a headline, when read alone, is not inaccurate or misleading”. There is no clear reason why online hate crime should be treated differently than hate crime perpetrated in the public space. Finally, the MCB “Response to the Fake News Inquiry” paper (2017a: 6) recommends “Kitemarks”¹² for the trustworthiness of news outlets, determined by an independent panel” as “one means of ensuring that non-verified one-man bands are more easily identified.”

Style and “European” Media

It is undeniable that on some levels, news is becoming more and more homogenized. This is evident in the fact that more and more news organizations obtain their news from press agencies—the prevalence of articles from the ATS in my Swiss subcorpus (see Appendix) attests to this—and make very little adjustment before publishing them as their own. My analysis of stylistic features has nevertheless prompted me to question the concepts of a “European” or a “transnational” media. Why? Because the extent to which similarities and differences among national media exist depends upon how their key characteristics are defined, as this has to be done before they can be compared and contrasted. If stylistic features are taken as a key characteristic, there are many differences; by virtue of the different languages in which news is reported in Europe, but also by virtue of the differing weight certain stylistic characteristics may carry in those different languages, or the forms that may predominate in one language versus another. From my corpus, for instance, it appears that alliteration may play a more significant role in English than in French or Spanish in rendering content salient; certain types of metaphor may be common in one language when reporting on the particular themes of Muslims and violence, but completely absent in another language; the type of modality used in one language may tend toward distancing, whereas in another, it may contribute to portraying supposition as fact. Some may see these as inconsequential differences; but as style shapes message, “message” in these cases may turn out differently in one language versus another. In any case, the weight of stylistic features and how they may be *differently distinctive* warrant further research across a greater variety of languages, news sources, and themes.

Conclusion

The role of the journalist has been defined here as that of a translator of culture who narrates not only events but, when those events occur abroad, “other” places and populations for the “home” audience. This role carries both power and responsibility, and fulfilling this role, I hold, therefore requires “ethical reflection” (Maitland 2017, “Introduction,” section “What’s ‘Wrong’ with Cultural Translation?”).

It is beyond well-established that reporting on Islam and Muslims often paints each in a negative light, including by associating them closely with terrorism and violence when reporting on these types of events. This misleading, inflammatory targeting of a minority group has been recognized (a notable example is Leveson, 2012) and changes called for. While best practices have been proposed (see, for example, Seib 2017), there is a big piece of the “how” of those messages themselves that has not been sufficiently researched: the stylistic features that feed into the negative representations. For practice to change, these factors, too, need to be recognized and remedied.

The power the journalist wields is found not only in the content she conveys but in the forms she chooses; these include stylistic features. The findings of the present study confirm that the stylistic features of modality, alliteration, and metaphor are a non-negligible aspect of “making terrorism mean” (Freedman 2017: 211), and therefore warrant further research.

During a recent lecture at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism on the challenges and future of journalism, Marty Baron, the editor-in-chief of the *Washington Post*, said: “The answer for us [journalists] is clear: Just do our job. Do it honestly, honorably, seriously, fairly, accurately, and also unflinchingly. ‘To show, by our work,’ as David Shribman, editor of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* put it, ‘that the truth still matters’” (Baron 2018). This is laudable, but vague. Techniques of reporting that contribute to exacerbating tensions and heightening the sense of threat exist. They are highly questionable. But they sell news. This is one of many thorny questions currently facing journalism that do not have easy answers. In terms of religion and avoiding pre-emptively making terror “about Islam,” Seib (2017) has some sage advice: “report on Islam regularly, not just when violence happens.” This is indeed the kind of reporting we desperately need more of. It is the means, among other things, for European readers to encounter an “Other” group that is plural, not monolithic; multi-faceted, not one-dimensional; mutable, not fixed; in short, often much like

themselves. The result, instead, “of publishing texts which only narrate conflict-laden events which, in turn, are constantly linked to one community is that it constructs an image of Islam and terrorism as intrinsically connected” (Piquer Martí 2015: 143). Moreover, given that in the media, writing is always from the “Us” perspective (Piquer Martí 2015: 141), the Islamophobia present in society necessarily spills over into news articles. According to Piquer Martí, the way that the media portrays (Muslim) immigrants—through un-contextualized, isolated messages always bound up with violence and conflict—coupled with the public’s relative ignorance of the Muslim world, encourages negative stereotypes. Thus, whether or not the alternative hypothesis about the perpetrator of the Nice attack, Bouhlel, presented in the *Telegraph* on July 18 (that he was suicidal), marked a turning point in its reporting, that possibility was already unlikely to “stick,” given the messages, reinforced by stylistic choices, that had preceded it. Journalists and other news actors need to turn “a critical eye to their complicity in normalizing prejudice” (Allan [2010] 2014: 196); stylistic choices, which play so subtle yet so central a role in shaping cultural representations and public opinion, are a good place to start.