



**CETRA**

Centre for Translation Studies

**Amnesty International's  
Language Strategy  
Put into Practice:  
A Case Study of the  
Translation of Press Releases**

**Wine Tesseur**

Aston University, United Kingdom

## **Abstract**

---

This paper investigates the language strategy and translation policies of Amnesty International by discussing the translation of a press release from a textual as well as an institutional point of view. Combining textual analysis with ethnographic methods of data collection and ideas from organisation studies, the paper aims to illustrate how the strategic use of language and translation plays a vital role in mediating the NGO's message and in contributing to its visibility and success. The findings of the textual analysis are contextualised within data collected at the local office of Amnesty International Vlaanderen to come to a better understanding of why particular translation strategies are being applied. The idea of an NGO spreading one consistent message is questioned by showing how different translation strategies apply to different languages and sections, thereby addressing the difficulty of defining translation in the context of news translation.

## **Keywords**

---

news translation, institutional translation, press release, NGOs, organisational structure

## **Acknowledgements**

---

I would like to thank the staff and volunteers working at the Amnesty International offices where I have conducted fieldwork for their time and enthusiasm in participating in my research. Specific thanks go to Lore Van Welden from Amnesty International Vlaanderen for her input and feedback on this paper.

## 1. Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have increasingly become part of international debates on human rights policy. Although these organisations are not political institutions in the classical understanding of being governmental or legislative bodies, they play an important role in framing debates and setting the political agenda, and have even been referred to as a “second super-power” in world affairs (Florini 2006: 674; Wong 2012: 2-3). The success of NGOs depends largely on their presence in the media. It is through the media that their ideals and aims are disseminated and become known, and it is by these means that NGOs obtain support and public sympathy (Cottle 2009: 147). Many large NGOs work across language borders and spread their message in different languages. Strategic use of language and translation are vital for making an NGO visible and successful.

As a new type of political institution, NGOs have been largely overlooked in Translation Studies. Much of the research into institutional translation focuses on intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union (e.g., Schäffner 2001; Tosi 2003; Cao and Zhao 2008; Koskinen 2008). As to news translation, more and more attention is being paid to translation at news agencies and to the question if news translation can in fact still be called translation (Orengo 2005; Bielsa and Bassnett 2009; Schäffner and Bassnett 2010; Davier 2012). However, translation of press material at other institutions, such as NGOs or national governmental institutions, has not been dealt with sufficiently (Schäffner and Bassnett 2010: 14; Schäffner 2012: 121).

This paper aims to investigate the language strategy and translation policies at Amnesty International (“Amnesty”), one of the largest and oldest human rights NGOs worldwide. The organisation’s language strategy will be discussed in the context of the NGO’s wider organisational structure and strategic plan. Using a recent Amnesty press release as an example, this paper traces how Amnesty’s language strategy and translation policies are put into practice. I will illustrate how different translation strategies apply to different languages and sections, thereby addressing the difficulty of defining translation in the context of news translation, especially with reference to Amnesty International Vlaanderen’s (AIVL) translation practices.

It should be stressed here that Amnesty's case is not considered as exemplary to all other NGOs. Much of the research on non-state actors implicitly assumes that NGOs share a common field and that studying one prominent NGO will help explain the rest of the field (Wong 2012: 8). The case of Amnesty discussed here should be seen as a starting point for more research into translation at other NGOs and political institutions and as an attempt at a better understanding of how language and translation play a role in the effectiveness of international human rights NGOs (*ibid.*: 16).

## **2. Methodological aspects**

The present paper is theoretically indebted to Descriptive Translation Studies (DTS) and research methods of ethnography. Taking translated versions of an Amnesty press release as the starting point (product-oriented DTS), the paper describes how the various translations are different from one another and from the source text. These differences will be partly accounted for by looking at the function of the text. However, to come to a wider understanding of why particular translation strategies are being applied and why such great differences arise between the various translations, it is necessary to look at the context in which the texts were produced, i.e., the institutions in which they are initiated, produced and translated. I agree with Schäffner that "understanding the practices and underlying policies thus requires us to research organisational structures, interactions and agency" (2012: 121).

In order to do so, I employ ethnographical methods, such as interviewing and observation practices, methods which have already been used in the context of institutional translation by, for example, Koskinen (2008) for the EU and by Bielsa and Bassnett (2009) for news agencies. I spent two months at both Amnesty International's Language Resource Centre Madrid Office (AILRC-ES) and at AIVL as a participant observer, carrying out tasks for them and observing the daily workflow. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Director of Amnesty International's Language Resource Centre (AILRC), the Director of AILRC-ES, the Head of AILRC-ES's editorial department and AIVL's Press Officer in order to gain better insight into Amnesty's overall organisation of translation work, and AILRC-ES and AIVL's translation procedures and practices more specifically.

The present paper thus combines the findings from textual analysis with data collected during fieldwork and ideas from organisation studies, mainly based on Wong's work (2012) on the organisational structure of NGOs. Both this theoretical framework and the data from fieldwork will help in reaching a wider understanding of why particular translation strategies are applied and how they influence the representation of Amnesty's message in different European countries.

As this paper deals with the translation of press releases, attention is also paid to the concept of translation to describe processes taking place in news translation. Since news translation entails various transformations, such as omissions, additions and reformulations, the question arises as to whether the concept of translation is still applicable here. Scholars have suggested various solutions to this problem: concepts such as transediting (Stetting 1989) and localisation (Orengo 2005) have been proposed to describe the processes involved in news translation, comparisons with the process of interpreting have been suggested (Schäffner and Bassnett 2010), and Gutt's Relevance Theory has been adopted to develop a classification for different types of news translation (Davies 2012). This paper will adopt Orengo's theoretical framework of localisation to describe processes of news translation while understanding localisation "as the process of giving global products a local character" (2005: 170). Orengo (2005) demonstrates how global news reporting is not only interlinguistically localised into the Italian locale, but also intralinguistically adapted to suit readers' political leanings within the same linguistic environment. This idea of news produced in a global network and disseminated to different locales will here be applied to the case of Amnesty as a worldwide organisation, working across geographical and linguistic borders.

### **3. Amnesty International and translation**

Founded in 1961 by the British lawyer Peter Benenson, Amnesty is one of the largest and most influential human rights NGOs worldwide and is considered by both academics and journalists to be a reliable source of information on human rights violations (Ron et al. 2005: 559; Wong 2012: 21). The organisation was the first to combine campaigning against individual cases through letter writing with lobbying international organisations and politicians to put an end to human rights abuses (Clark

2001: 9; Wong 2012: 4). Apart from this successful formula, Wong (2012) argues that there is another important reason why Amnesty has succeeded in influencing international human rights norms: Amnesty's internal organisational structure. In her study of how the structure of NGOs has transformed human rights, Wong (ibid.) points out that finding a balance between formal rules and informal relationships is vital for an organisation to be successful. Whereas many NGOs can rather be conceived of as networks of domestic-level groups, and not as cohesive, formally organised groups with clear lines of authority, Amnesty has succeeded in finding a good balance between centralisation and decentralisation of power and decision-making between its head office and the local hubs, which contributed to the organisation's success.

Although Wong's study (2012) provides new insights as to why some NGOs are successful in spreading their message and reaching their goals and others are not, the strategic use of language is not taken into account as a factor in making an organisation successful and influential. After all, it is through language that NGOs spread their message, their ideals and aims, and it is through translation that a wider audience is reached. Wong recognises the importance of media attention for NGOs to succeed in their goals and the spreading of a consistent message, both on the national and international level (see, e.g., ibid.: 133). Yet, how language and translation influence this "consistent message" and if we in fact can speak of one message remains to be studied.

The mix of centralisation/decentralisation Wong (2012) describes can also be found in Amnesty's language strategy. Over the years, Amnesty has become increasingly aware of the importance of strategic language use. In 2007, a new language strategy was produced in light of Amnesty's Strategic Plan that encourages growth in the global east and south. Since 1987, Amnesty has four official languages: English (which is also the organisation's working language), Spanish, French and Arabic. The use of these "core languages", as Amnesty calls them, is changing under the new language strategy to a more strategic use of language, with translation from more languages into more languages. Amnesty realises that to grow in the global east and south, it is essential not only to speak the local languages but also to be present in the field. In light of the new Strategic Plan and Language Strategy, Amnesty's International Secretariat (IS) in London will lose part of its power. How this new distribution of power will influence Amnesty's success remains to be seen.

This paper, however, focuses on the organisation of language and translation as it stands in this transitional period. Looking at translation into the core or “strategic” languages, a first important fact is that the status of these four languages was never identical: whereas nearly all documents (internal and external ones) are translated into French and Spanish at two Decentralised Units for translation (AILRC-ES in Madrid and AILRC-FR in Paris), a different translation policy applies to Arabic. The Arabic translation team, based at the IS, only translates documents related to the Middle East and North Africa. For other documents, Amnesty staff needs to file a request (Amnesty International 2005; Amnesty International 2006). Translation into the non-core languages is taken care of at a local level. Here, a difference should be made between “major” languages such as German, Portuguese, Japanese or Russian, which often have locally based translation teams that provide translation services to the relevant sections, and smaller languages such as Dutch. For the particular case of Dutch, to which more attention will be paid in the case study of the press release below, less translation is required as many of the staff of both AIVL and Amnesty International Nederland (AINL) have a good command of English, thus no internal documents need to be translated. Whereas translation into French, Spanish, Arabic and many of the other major languages is done by professional translators, translation into Dutch is taken care of by local staff who were not trained in translation or by (mostly unprofessional) volunteers. No translation tools are used, whereas AILRC-ES and AILRC-FR make use of both a translation memory and a terminology database. Besides leading to discrepancies in delivery speed and translation quality, this organisational structure also leads to a large difference in the degree to which sections localise the press material, as will be demonstrated in section 4.

#### **4. Case study**

One of Amnesty’s main methods of calling attention to human rights is by systematically and impartially researching the facts of individual cases and patterns of human rights abuses and then publishing them in reports (Amnesty International 2011). Whereas such a report is mainly intended for academics and practitioners, a press release that accompanies the report allows the journalist to pick up the story while



saving time and effort. For extensive reports, Amnesty also produces report summaries, again a useful tool for journalists. Many of the reports, report summaries and press releases are translated at the IS, at the Decentralised Units for translation or at local Amnesty sections. One recent press release that accompanies such a report has been selected and will be analysed here in more detail.

#### **4.1. Press releases at Amnesty International**

Press releases have been described as having a double function, i.e., they are both informative and persuasive (Lassen 2006; Lindholm 2008; Pander Maat 2008). Whereas Lassen argues that there is “crucial variation” (2006: 509) in the communicative purposes of press releases issued by corporate organisations on the one hand (whose main function would be persuasive) and aid organisations and governments on the other hand (whose main function would be to inform), this idea has been contested by Lindholm’s (2008) findings on press releases issued by the European Commission (EC). Lindholm states that the EC’s press releases do have a persuasive purpose: “The Commission needs to convince the reader that actions on the EU level are necessary” (ibid.: 51). Similarly, I argue here that press releases by human rights organisations such as Amnesty also have this persuasive function. Not only does such an organisation want to make the general public aware of human rights abuses and persuade people to take action, it also competes for media attention and for donor funds within an increasingly crowded field of aid organisations (Cottle 2009: 149). This generates a sense of competition, and aid organisations are increasingly adopting models and principles of corporate promotion and marketing into their communication practice (ibid.: 151), a tendency that also manifests itself with Amnesty. Around the mid-1990s the organisation adopted a more press-friendly orientation, after internal criticism on Amnesty’s lengthy reports on “countries that no one had ever heard of” (Ron et al. 2005: 573). In order to become more relevant and to increase media attention, Amnesty started publishing fewer reports while the number of press releases increased. The summaries of lengthy reports Amnesty has started to produce should also be seen in this light.

The persuasive function of the press release is important in light of the translation strategies adopted by the different Amnesty sections. As pointed out by Jacobs (1999: xi), the press release’s only *raison d’être* is to be retold in news reporting, pref-

erably verbatim. In section 4.2, the textual outcome of such an effort will be demonstrated, as well as how AIVL tries to reach this goal.

#### 4.2. Translation and localisation processes

The press release under discussion accompanies a research report Amnesty published on 24 April 2012 on the discrimination against Muslims in Europe. The report focuses on five countries: Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland. Amnesty issued a report, a report summary and a press release. The press release was translated into Spanish and French by AILRC-ES and AILRC-FR, uploaded on Amnesty's international website ([www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)) and sent to news agencies. Furthermore, the local sections in the five countries under discussion in the report all issued a press release as well. For the sections in Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Spain, the starting point for this local press release was the original press release issued by the IS. The section in Switzerland, however, produced its own press release which it published on its website in German, French and Italian. Because of length limitations, I will only discuss the press releases that took the press release of the IS as their starting point. Table 1 presents an overview of these press releases.

**Table 1.** Translations and local press releases of “Muslims discriminated against for demonstrating their faith”.

Section	Title press release
IS	Muslims discriminated against for demonstrating their faith [source text]
AILRC-ES	Discriminación contra personas musulmanas por manifestar su fe
AILRC-FR	Les musulmans victimes de discrimination parce qu'ils expriment leur foi
AI France	Europe: les musulmans victimes de discrimination parce qu'ils expriment leur foi
AIBF	Europe: Les musulmans victimes de discrimination parce qu'ils expriment leur foi
AIVL	Rapport: discriminatie van moslims in Europa, over keuzevrijheid en vooroordelen
AINL	Moslims in Europa gediscrimineerd wegens uitoefenen geloof
AI Spain	Discriminación de personas musulmanas en Europa

The discussion will first describe the press releases issued by AILRC-ES, AILRC-FR and consequently Amnesty International Belgique Francophone (AIBF), AI France and AI Spain. It will then focus on the translation into Dutch by AIVL and AINL.

#### *4.2.1. Translation by AILRC-ES and AILRC-FR and localisation by local sections*

As mentioned in section 4.2, AILRC-FR and AILRC-ES produced a French and Spanish translation of the English press release. These translations were distributed to the French and Spanish language sections, which then uploaded them to their websites. However, texts are often not uploaded as they are first received, but are adapted to the local target audience and can thus be described as localised texts in accordance with the definition presented above. Orengo has argued that news translation in fact occurs in two stages: “first an interlingual translation from the press release issued by an international news agency either into a local news agency’s translated press release, or into the translated news text; then an ‘intralingual’ translation when the localised news text is embedded into a news story by a specific newspaper” (2005: 177). A similar process is observed here for the translation and localisation process of a press release within one and the same organisation: first an international press release that is translated by the translation units, then a localisation process by the sections using these translations.

This localisation process differs from section to section and text to text. For instance, only slight changes were made in the translations provided by AILRC-ES and AILRC-FR of the press release under consideration. Most of the reorganisations or substitutions here can be explained in light of institutional policies and fluency, e.g., the replacement of “today” by “24 April 2012” in the French translation. These changes have no impact on the overall message of the text. For the localisation processes, however, there is a large difference between AI Spain’s press release on the one hand and AI France’s and AIBF’s text on the other hand. Whereas AI Spain only made one minor change to AILRC-ES’s translation (in the last paragraph that deals with the situation in Catalonia, “Spain” was deleted as this geographical specification is not needed for readers who live in Spain), the press release AI France and AIBF published on their website is much shorter than AILRC-FR’s translation (655 words instead of 908). The majority of the quotes by Amnesty’s expert on discrimination

were either deleted or are no longer represented as quotes. Paragraphs were reorganised, and subtitles were added. These changes can be seen in light of the *raison d'être* of the press releases: in order to maximise the chance for a press release to be retold, institutions adopt a style appropriate to newspapers to facilitate the journalists' work (Jacobs 1999). In the interviews conducted as part of the fieldwork, several among the Amnesty staff at AILRC and AIVL complained about the length and wordiness of the press releases produced by the IS. The press releases are often very long and contain much legal terminology, which make them less accessible to a general audience.<sup>1</sup> The way in which the different local Amnesty sections deal with these issues differs greatly. In section 4.2.2, I will focus on the translation practices at AIVL and AINL and will provide more insight into some of the reasons for the translation strategies applied by AIVL.

#### *4.2.2. Translation, transediting and localisation at AINL and AIVL*

Whereas the production process of a press release for the French and Spanish language sections was described above in terms of two separate processes of translation and localisation, the production of press releases at AINL and AIVL consists of one process. A local press officer translates and edits the press release at the same time. This process has been described as “transediting” and refers to the radical re-editing of texts (Stetting 1989) .

The press release produced by AINL is an example of such a transediting process: while not changing the overall frame of the text and keeping the focus on Europe as a whole, the press release shows signs of transediting: parts of the text were moved, deleted or reformulated. However, when looking at the press release produced by AIVL, the question whether the term “translation” still applies becomes pertinent. Much of the original information has been deleted, rearranged, and new information has been added on the particular situation in Belgium, quoting AIVL's policy officer instead of the IS's researcher. As new information on the local context was added and the international press release has been given a local character, the concept of localisation is again more appropriate here than that of translation. To illustrate these findings, Table 2 presents an example with the translations provided by AINL and AIVL.

---

1. The English press release under discussion contains 729 words. To compare, the 50 corporate press releases analysed in Pander Maat (2008) have an average length of 400 words.

**Table 2.** Examples of transediting and localisation at Amnesty.

Press Release (IS)	Transediting (AINL)	Localisation (AIVL)		
		Backtranslation		Backtranslation
“Wearing religious and cultural symbols and dress is part of the right of freedom of expression. It is part of the right to freedom of religion or belief – and these rights must be enjoyed by all faiths equally”, said Marco Perolini.	“Het dragen van religieuze en culturele symbolen en kleding is onderdeel van het recht op vrijheid van meningsuiting. Ook maakt het deel uit van het recht op godsdienstvrijheid. Deze rechten moeten door alle geloven in gelijkheid kunnen worden genoten”, aldus Amnesty International.	(“Wearing religious and cultural symbols and dress is part of the right of freedom of expression. It is also part of the right to freedom of religion or belief. All faiths must be able to enjoy these rights equally”, says Amnesty International.	Iedereen heeft recht op godsdienstvrijheid en op vrijheid van meningsuiting. Die rechten houden onder meer in dat je vrij bent om je religie te beleven en te veruitwendigen, onder meer door het dragen van religieuze symbolen. Die rechten houden uiteraard ook in dat je vrij bent om dit niet te doen. Met andere woorden, moslima’s hebben de vrijheid om zelf te kiezen of ze al dan niet een hoofddoek of gezichtssluier willen dragen.	(Everyone has the right to freedom of religion and freedom of expression. These rights entail amongst others that you are free to experience your religion and to externalise it, amongst others by wearing religious symbols. These rights naturally also hold that you are free not to do so. In other words, Muslim women have the freedom to choose for themselves whether or not they want to wear a headscarf or a veil.
“While everyone has the right to express their cultural, traditional or religious background by wearing a specific form of dress no one should be pressurized or coerced to do so. General bans on particular forms of dress that violate the rights of those freely choosing to dress in a particular way are not the way to do this”.	“Iedereen heeft het recht de eigen culturele of religieuze achtergrond te uiten via bepaalde vormen van kleding; tegelijkertijd mag niemand worden gedwongen dit te doen. Dit laatste mag echter geen reden zijn om tot een algemeen verbod op bepaalde vormen van kleding te komen. Dan zou het recht van een individu om te kiezen wat hij of zij draagt in het gedrang komen”.	“Everyone has the right to express their own cultural or religious background through specific forms of dress; at the same time no one should be pressurized to do so. This, however, should not be a reason to come to a general ban on specific forms of dress. This would endanger the right of an individual to choose what he or she wears”. <sup>2</sup>	“Wanneer een vrouw gedwongen wordt om een hoofddoek of een gezichtssluier te dragen, gaat Amnesty daar niet mee akkoord. Dwang, vanwege een echtgenoot, familie of de gemeenschap, mag niet worden getolereerd. Amnesty vraagt dat de overheid tegen zulke dwang optreedt. Dit deden we onder meer in Afghanistan en Pakistan”, zegt Eva Berghmans, beleidsverantwoordelijke van Amnesty International in Vlaanderen.	“When a woman is forced to wear a headscarf or veil, Amnesty does not agree with that. Force, because of the husband, family or community, should not be tolerated. Amnesty asks the government to take action against such force. This we did in amongst others Afghanistan and Pakistan”, says Eva Berghmans, policy officer at Amnesty International in Flanders.)

2. All translations done by me in this paper appear in parentheses.

The translation provided by AINL is close to the original, albeit with one strategic change: the quotes are no longer attributed to Marco Perolini, but to Amnesty International as a whole. In the version by AIVL, other changes are observed: the first quote is no longer represented as a quote, whereas the second paragraph has been substituted by a quote from the local policy officer and focuses on the ban of the headscarf and the veil, a sensitive topic in Belgium. Keeping in mind my previous observation that press releases are localised by the sections to adapt them to the local audience in a particular culture and country, it is especially striking to compare AIVL's press release to that of AIBF. Although both sections are based in Belgium and the topic of the headscarf is thus relevant to both, it is only AIVL that focuses so thoroughly on the topic. The press release published on the AIBF website does contain a paragraph specifically stating that the focus of the report is not on Belgium's particular situation. Amnesty's point of view on wearing religious symbols of dress is briefly explained and readers are referred to relevant information on this topic. The most important reason for this difference is the translation service offered by AILRC-FR: as AIBF receives a full translation of the press release, there is no reason to invest time in rewriting it. Thus, this example illustrates how Amnesty's organisation of language and translation influences the eventual message that is spread to local media. Although the different versions of the press release that are distributed still make the same main point and take a stand against discrimination against Muslims in Europe, it has become clear from my discussion that the idea of one organisation with one message is not that straightforward. The organisational structure of Amnesty, with its balanced division of centralising/decentralising power, has an influence on the final message the local sections spread, depending on the priorities and the campaigns each section has chosen to focus on. Section 4.3 will provide some more context as to why specific choices are made and strategies applied by AIVL, based on data gathered during fieldwork.

#### **4.3. Accounting for translation differences: The case of AIVL**

In the section 4.2.1, I discussed how AIVL's press release adopts a somewhat different angle than that of other local sections. Through fieldwork it became clear that the press release under discussion was no exception and that making thorough changes to the original press release is a recurrent strategy for AIVL. Some of the section's translation strategies seem controversial: not only are quotes often replaced by

quotes of local staff, they are also often attributed to different speakers.<sup>3</sup> For example, in the press release under discussion, a quote that was originally attributed to Marco Perolini is attributed to Eva Berghmans in the Flemish press release. This is a recurrent strategy in AIVL's press releases. Many of the strategies applied by AIVL are undertaken consciously and comply with one of the main functions of the press release: to persuade the journalist and the general public, to be retold and to increase the chance of media attention. Staff at AIVL are highly aware of the sensitivity of language issues and of the importance of having a local representative of the organisation who can speak the local language, especially for radio and television news. It is exactly with this purpose in mind that quotes are reattributed to local staff in AIVL's press releases.

For instance, for the press conference organised to launch the report on the discrimination against Muslims in Europe, AIVL had difficulty in reaching local audiovisual media, more specifically the Flemish television news, because the witness present at the press conference was French-speaking. Although this was a disappointment for AIVL's press officer, she found the decision understandable:

In eerste instantie ben je zo wat verontwaardigd: je hebt dan een goeie getuige, en het was echt een kei goeie, maar ze spreekt geen Nederlands... terwijl het wel over een internationaal rapport gaat. Maar aan de andere kant begrijp ik wel dat *Het Journaal* die overweging moet maken. [...] Stel dat die getuige een Vlaams meisje was, die Nederlands sprak, dat zou veel krachtiger geweest zijn. Anders was dat weer: 'daar spreekt weer een meisje, Frans, niet in mijn taal', dus ja, ik snap wel dat dat een rol speelt. [Interview May 2012]

(At first, you are kind of vexed: you have a good witness, and it really was an excellent witness, but she didn't speak Dutch... while it's about an international report. But on the other hand I do understand that *Het Journaal*<sup>4</sup> has to take this into consideration. [...] If the witness had been a Flemish girl, who spoke Dutch, that would have been much more powerful. Otherwise it would again be

---

3. Although the press releases at AIVL are produced by a single press officer, they are discussed extensively and approved by the other staff, thus it does not concern simply a personal decision by the press officer but a strategic decision taken in agreement with the whole section.

4. *Het Journaal* is the main news program of the Flemish public broadcasting company.



like: “there’s a girl speaking again, French, not in my language”, so yes, I do get that this plays a role.)

The fact that AIVL localises its press releases by assigning quotes to different speakers should be seen in this context: rather than wanting to present its own local Amnesty section, this replacement is done to increase the chances of news reporting on Amnesty issues by the local media.

However, this localisation process does not seem to be effective for all media: whereas radio and television prefer spokespeople who speak the local language, Flemish newspapers show a tendency for going back to the original source. AIVL’s press officer notes that not only do print newspapers copy-and-paste less from the press releases than they used to, they also ask for the original English press release more often. As she relates:

[...] naar aanleiding van het jaarrapport kreeg ik een telefoontje van een krant, die iets wou schrijven over het jaarrapport en dat wou combineren met een ander nieuwsfeit. En die had dus mijn Nederlandstalig persbericht, en die vroeg toch, die belde mij op en die vroeg: “Mag ik het internationale persbericht?”. Die quoten ook liever Salil Shetty, onze grote secretaris-generaal, of ze willen onze researcher echt quoten, de internationale persoon, en niet “Lore Van Welden van Amnesty Vlaanderen” of “Karen Moeskops van Amnesty Vlaanderen”. [Interview May 2012]

([...] following our annual report, I received a phone call from a newspaper that wanted to write something about our annual report and wanted to combine this with another news fact. And they had my Dutch press release, and yet still asked, called me and asked: “Can I have the international press release?” They also prefer to quote Salil Shetty, our Secretary-General, or they really want to quote our researcher, the international person, and not “Lore Van Welden from Amnesty Vlaanderen” or “Karen Moeskops from Amnesty Vlaanderen”.)

Thus, Flemish print newspapers tend to either pick up the international press release through a news copy of international news agencies, or prefer to write an original news story themselves, in which they mix several news facts and quote interna-



tional sources, while sometimes even trying to get in touch with the researcher who worked on the report to collect unique quotes. Although this development entails that the local press releases are used less by newspaper journalists, Amnesty's goal to reach the media is still achieved.

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have aimed at investigating the language strategies and translation policies at Amnesty in order to come to a better understanding of how the strategic use of language and translation play a role in mediating an NGO's message and in contributing to its visibility and success. The textual analysis and institutional description have shown that as Amnesty applies different translation strategies to different languages, there are discrepancies in the message of the press releases that different sections issue. Whereas the Decentralised Units for translation AILRC-ES and AILRC-FR create consistent translations without adding or deleting information, their products are localised by the various sections. Sections with smaller languages, such as Dutch, produce different "translations" altogether. Concepts of transediting and localisation to describe the transformation processes taking place here were suggested, as these concepts include editing and adaptation processes.

Furthermore, the discussion has made clear that it should not be taken for granted that an international NGO spreads one consistent message. Although the main focus remains on human rights abuses, local sections focus on different aspects, which is in line with Amnesty's overall organisation of power distribution and decision-making (centralisation vs. decentralisation). I have looked at one of the local sections, AIVL, in more detail in order to come to a better understanding of why certain translation/localisation strategies are applied and how these influence the dissemination of the section's message.

Overall, in this paper I have aimed to provide insights into translation practices within NGOs, a type of political institution on which little research has been conducted in Translation Studies. By using ethnographic methods of data collection and ideas from organisation studies, the paper raises awareness of how the organisational structure of an international NGO influences translation practices and strategies, and

has thus illustrated how such research methods can provide new insights for Translation Studies. Furthermore, the paper demonstrates how Orengo's (2005) theoretical framework of localisation to describe news translation can also be applied outside news agencies, i.e., to an international organisation that produces and translates news internally. More research could be conducted into translation practices and policies at other NGOs and also at national governmental institutions such as embassies, which aim to promote their home countries. In the specific case of Amnesty, more research could be conducted into the actual news reports on Amnesty issues to trace how successful Amnesty really is in spreading its message.

## References

### Primary Sources

Amnesty International. 2005. "Towards a language strategy for AI". Unpublished internal document. AI Index: ORG 33/001/2005.

Amnesty International. 2006. *Guidelines for Writers*. London: Amnesty International Publications. AI Index: DOC 60/001/2006.

Amnesty International. 2011. *Amnesty International's Statute*. London: Amnesty International Publications. AI Index: POL 20/001/2011. <http://www.amnesty.org/en/who-we-are/accountability/statute-of-amnesty-international>. Visited October 2013.

### Secondary Sources

Bielsa, Esperança and Bassnett, Susan. 2009. *Translation in Global News*. London: Routledge.

Cao, Deborah and Zhao, Xingmin. 2008. "Translation at the United Nations as specialized translation". *JoSTrans* 9: 39-54.

Clark, Anne M. 2001. *Diplomacy of Conscience: Amnesty International and Changing Human Rights Norms*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Cottle, Simon. 2009. *Global Crisis Reporting: Journalism in the Global Age*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Davier, Lucile. 2012. "Légitimité ou illégitimité de la traduction dans les agences de presse?". *Forum* 10 (1): 79-114.

Florini, Ann. 2006. "International NGOs". In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Institutions*, R.A.W. Rhodes, S.A. Binder and B.A. Rockman (eds). Oxford: Oxford University Press. 673-690.

Jacobs, Geert. 1999. *Preformulating the News: An Analysis of the Metapragmatics of Press Releases*. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Koskinen, Kaisa. 2008. *Translating Institutions: An Ethnographic Study of EU Translation*. Manchester: St. Jerome.

Lassen, Inger. 2006. "Is the press release a genre? A study of form and content". *Discourse Studies* 8 (4): 503-530.

Lindholm, Maria. 2008. "A community text pattern in the European Commission press release? A generic and genetic view". *Pragmatics* 18 (1): 33-58.

Orengo, Alberto. 2005. "Localising news: Translation and the 'global-national' dichotomy". *Language and Intercultural Communication* 5 (2): 168-187.

Pander Maat, Henk. 2008. "Editing and genre conflict: How newspaper journalists clarify and neutralize press release copy". *Pragmatics* 18 (1): 87-113.

Ron, James, Ramos, Howard and Rodgers, Kathleen. 2005. "Transnational information politics: NGO human rights reporting, 1986 – 2000". *International Studies Quarterly* 49: 557-587.

Schäffner, Christina (ed). 2001. *Language Work and the European Union*. Special issue of *Perspectives* 9 (4).

Schäffner, Christina. 2012. "Unknown agents in translated political discourse". *Target* 24 (1): 103-125.

Schäffner, Christina and Bassnett, Susan (eds). 2010. *Political Discourse, Media and Translation*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Stetting, Karen. 1989. "Transediting: A new term for coping with the grey area between editing and translating". In *Proceedings from the Fourth Nordic Conference for English Studies*, G. Caie, K. Haastrup, A.L. Jakobsen, J.E. Neilsen, J. Sevaldsen, H. Spect and A. Zettersten (eds). Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen. 371–382.

Tosi, Arturo (ed). 2003. *Crossing Barriers and Bridging Cultures. The Challenges of Multilingual Translation for the European Union*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Wong, Wendy H. 2012. *Internal Affairs: How the Structure of NGOs Transforms Human Rights*. New York: Cornell University Press.

**Wine Tesseur** is a Marie Curie Actions fellow at Aston University (Birmingham, UK), where she is completing her PhD. She holds an MA in Germanic Languages from KU Leuven (Belgium) and an MA in Translation from Lessius University College (Belgium). She previously worked as a research assistant on the Translation Studies Bibliography and on the *Handbook of Translation Studies*. Her PhD deals with translation services at Amnesty International. Email: [winetesseur@gmail.com](mailto:winetesseur@gmail.com).