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31

NGOs, media and translation

Wine Tesseur

Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are non-profit organizations which are neither government departments nor commercial businesses and which aim to serve the public good. Many provide humanitarian and development assistance, and are involved in advocacy and global policymaking activities, for example at the United Nations. NGOs are also important providers and translators of information and play a key role in today's globalized information and knowledge society (Castells 2000; Cronin 2003). These organizations are thus powerful political players that influence the world we live in. Because of their position in society and politics, it is important to understand how NGOs handle their communication and translation activities.

The organizations that this chapter focuses on are international NGOs (INGOs), meaning that they work in different countries, and are led by humanitarian, development, environmental and human rights related objectives. Examples include Oxfam, Save the Children, Christian Aid and Amnesty International. The mandates of such INGOs generally describe their organizational mission as working to end poverty and injustice, and they are led in their work by such values as equality and inclusion. The information that INGOs produce, translate and share with their beneficiaries, partner organizations, donors and the broader public is intended to serve their organizational mission and can be expected to be designed according to these values. For example, INGOs will communicate about their humanitarian interventions and the living conditions of their beneficiaries in the traditional media in order to raise public awareness of injustice and poverty. Furthermore, INGOs may use new media channels, such as social media and other mobile phone applications, to attract donations as well as to interact directly with their beneficiaries.

The research reviewed in this chapter generally deals with international NGOs that have their roots in the Global North, mostly in the UK and the USA, and that are active in various countries in the Global South. Despite this chapter's focus on Northern INGOs, it is important to acknowledge that INGOs that have their roots in the Global South are on the increase. Their growing success can be considered as directly linked to changes in the sustainable development agenda, which favour localization and participation from Southern actors (Davies 2012). Despite these changes, providing humanitarian and development assistance are two areas of work in which Northern INGOs are still the largest players. For example, figures of humanitarian spending show that over the last decade a handful of Northern INGOs have continued to dominate the humanitarian market by accounting for nearly a quarter of expenditure (ALNAP 2015). These organizations include Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), Save the Children International, Oxfam International and World Vision International (ALNAP 2015).

Yet the legitimacy of Northern INGOs and their ability to speak, advocate and design projects for those in need is increasingly questioned in various circles, including by academics, journalists and those working in the NGO sector (Bond 2015; Doane 2016). Scholars have criticized INGOs for lacking close ties with local civil society in the countries where they work (Banks, Hulme, & Edwards 2015). They have argued that the transformational agenda that INGOs work towards is often not rooted in local values and expertise. This disconnect is usually partly ascribed to the increased power of Northern governmental donors (e.g. US Agency for International Development (USAID) or the UK's Department for International Development (DfID)). INGOs have started to receive more funding from such donors over the last few decades, and with this, the power of Northern-based donors to shape INGOs' activities according to their own values and priorities has also expanded (Banks et al. 2015). So, despite INGOs' goals of inclusion and equality, international aid is generally understood as marked by strong power imbalances between actors in the Global North and South (Banks et al. 2015; Bond 2015; Doane 2016). Academics have also pointed out that English as a former colonial language and as a language that is strongly associated with technology and progress forms part of this power imbalance, and that more attention should be paid to local languages in sustainable development efforts (Bamgbose 2014; Crack 2019).

The current chapter will engage with these discussions from the perspective of INGOs' media and translation activities. It explores how INGOs use media to communicate with beneficiaries and the wider public, what languages they choose to communicate in, and what role translation plays within these communications. By way of introduction, the chapter presents a brief overview of how INGOs are structured and provides examples of how they tend to organize their translation work. It then moves on to the role of translation in INGOs' media-related work. First, it explores INGOs' position as alternative global news providers. Next, the chapter discusses the potential that new media tools offer to INGOs to communicate more directly with their beneficiaries. In each of these cases, the role of translation is explored in more depth. The chapter draws on scholarly literature from a variety of disciplines and subdisciplines that have engaged with NGOs and media, including translation and interpreting studies, journalism and media studies, development studies, international relations, and disaster management.

International non-governmental organizations and translation

Traditionally, INGOs have their headquarters in the Global North, where strategic decisions are taken, and have field offices in the countries where they implement projects. It is notable, however, that several INGOs have started to change their organizational structures in recent years. For example, INGOs such as Oxfam International and Save the Children International have federated into more horizontal organizational structures, in which all country members have similar decision-making power. Others have moved (part of) their headquarters away from the Global North (Smedley 2014). Amnesty International for example has reduced the size of its headquarters in London, and has relocated some of its headquarter jobs to newly founded regional hub offices (Bonallack 2018). These changes in the INGO sector have been described as triggered by a combination of factors, including a fall in donor income and the need to reduce operational costs, as well as a response from INGOs to questions about their legitimacy (Smedley 2014). Amnesty International's restructuring was designed to move Amnesty closer to the grassroots level, and is thus a prime example of how questions on legitimacy can lead to organizational change (Shetty 2015).

Changes in organizational structure may be expected to trigger different language needs. However, INGOs' institutionalized translation practices have continued to focus predominantly on the same languages. It should be noted here that research on language and translation policy and practice in INGOs is limited, and that the following insights are derived from key publications that deal with a handful of large UK-based international NGOs, i.e. Amnesty International, Christian Aid, Family for Every Child, Oxfam, Save the Children, and Tearfund (Footitt, Crack, & Tesseur 2020; Tesseur 2018).

Languages for which INGOs commission professional translation typically include former colonial languages such as French, Spanish, and Portuguese, with English being the traditional source language. Arabic has also gained in importance in recent years. Underlying these language choices is the fact that broad geographical regions can be covered by using a relatively limited number of languages, thus there is a high return on financial investment (Tesseur 2014). Professional translation tends to be reserved for a small selection of documents, i.e. those that are strategically important to INGOs to enhance their reputation and showcase their work. These typically include reports targeted at donors and/or media outlets, and other material that highlights the work and achievements of INGOs, such as press releases and promotional videos. In other words, they concern material that is not primarily intended for INGOs' beneficiaries. Translation of these materials is usually commissioned through the services of an external professional translation agency (Footitt et al. 2020). However, some INGOs have established small internal translation departments, where project managers outsource most of the work to freelancers (Footitt et al. 2020). These include Amnesty International, Oxfam GB and Oxfam International, Save the Children UK and Tearfund (Tesseur 2017; Bonallack 2018; Sanz Martins 2018). With its own Language Resource Centre, Amnesty International has by far the most extensive internal translation service, with a team that is geographically spread out across various regions (Bonallack 2018).

INGOs' professional translation practices raise questions on the extent to which translation that prioritizes information flows from English into other (mainly former colonial) regional lingua francas serves INGOs' aims of inclusion and equality. For example, one issue is that choosing to translate into a lingua franca ignores the reality that many local communities and organizations do not speak these languages and are thus denied access to information, and second, by prioritizing translation *from* English, there is a risk that skewed power balances in which information and knowledge flows in one direction, i.e. from the Global North to the Global South, are maintained (Narayanaswamy 2017).

A key reason for INGOs to limit professional and institutionalized translation services is because translation is difficult to fund. Institutional aid donors often limit the budget that INGOs can spend on administration, and translation costs are usually considered as falling into this category (Footitt et al. 2020). The case of Amnesty International is somewhat different: as a human rights movement, Amnesty prides itself on working independent from government. Amnesty raises funds through contributions from individuals, membership fees and fundraising activities, rather than from governmental donors and it therefore tends to have more leeway in how it uses its funds. It is also noteworthy that Amnesty's changes in organizational structure have led to an increased demand for translation *into* English, although English continues to be the primary source language of Amnesty texts (Bonallack 2018). In sum, these observations indicate that INGOs' organizational structures can have an influence on INGOs' translation needs, but that donors' rules and regulations may make it challenging for INGOs to conduct (more) translation work. Footitt et al. (2020) argue that the responsibility for recognizing the importance of languages in INGOs' work does not only lie with INGOs, but also with their donors.

The previous paragraphs describe INGOs' use of professional translation, which tends to be relied on for key documents and key working languages that cover wide geographical regions. By contrast, translation into and from local languages is usually dealt with on a more ad-hoc basis by INGO staff themselves, although translation is not usually part of their job descriptions and they have not been trained in translation (Footitt et al. 2020). Local translation needs include for example health information that needs to be translated into communities' languages, or success stories from beneficiaries that are included in donor reports and are translated from local languages into English. Next to written translation, there are also many oral translation needs in INGOs' programming work. The task of interpreting is usually undertaken by a variety of actors, including in-country staff, staff from partner organizations, or members of the community that the INGO is aiming to work with (Footitt et al. 2020). INGOs sometimes also rely on volunteer interpreters, who may not be from the same community, particularly in crisis situations (Federici and Cadwell 2018). These ad-hoc approaches to translation and interpreting in INGOs' country programmes also apply to media-related activities, as will be discussed in more detail below.

In sum, INGOs are involved in a variety of translation and interpreting processes when mediating between beneficiaries, their donors and the wider public. There are key differences in INGOs' translation practices for documents targeted at external audiences, such as donors and the media, for which they frequently rely on professional translation, and translation into and from local languages, which is often not accounted for in project budgets and tends to be conducted by multilingual aid workers or volunteers. The discussion below aims to shed light on how these practices affect NGOs' media work.

INGOs, global news and translation

INGOs as global news providers

The way in which international NGOs have engaged in media coverage has changed significantly over the last two decades (Fenton 2010). Humanitarian organizations and advocacy groups have been active in media production for many years, for example, by publishing their own periodicals and disseminating information and images related to their work through the media to further their cause. In an effort to increase their press coverage, INGOs have started to professionalize their approach to news production in recent years by hiring former journalists and investing in media equipment (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010). INGOs now frequently produce multimedia packages and make them available free of charge to news organizations (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010). Research has also demonstrated that mainstream media such as newspapers and television frequently rely on INGO-provided material (Van Leuven and Joye 2014; Wright 2018b). In addition, research by, amongst others, Franks (2013) and Wright (2018b) has shown that there is also a longstanding tradition of journalists (freelancers and others) accompanying NGO workers on fieldtrips to work on news stories together. The boundaries between NGO news production and the traditional media are thus often not clear-cut.

Researchers have explored the drivers of this phenomenon from two key perspectives: firstly, they have explored why INGOs are keen to act as news providers, and secondly, they have investigated why traditional media would be interested in using INGO-produced content. From the perspective of INGOs, engaging in news production heightens their chances of media attention, which can positively affect fundraising income (Franks 2013). In addition, engaging in news production allows INGOs to strengthen their advocacy work. Raising public awareness of poverty and human rights issues through media coverage allows INGOs to gain wider support and increase their pressure on policymakers. In other words, INGOs' motivations for acting as news providers have been described as stemming from objectives that aim at increasing their fundraising income, brand awareness, and organizational effectiveness. These aims are different from those of mainstream media outlets, which traditionally aim to provide objective and impartial news coverage.

Given these diverging aims, one may ask why traditional media outlets use the news content provided by INGOs. In the literature from journalism and media studies, the key reasons for this are generally attributed to the vast changes in the political economy of the traditional news industry (Powers 2014; Wright 2018b). Firstly, the shift from print to online news has led to a decrease in income from sales and advertising. Consequent cost saving measures have included reduced foreign news budgets, which have negatively affected travel funding and the number of foreign correspondents in news outlets (Fenton 2010). Journalists are now required to do more in less time because of cost-saving measures and due to the nature of online news, which is fast-paced and needs constant updating (Fenton 2010; Sambrook 2010; Cooper 2018). These changes mean that it has become increasingly attractive for mainstream journalists to rely on others to provide them with content, and

INGOs have stepped in to provide media content from areas that are difficult to access because of financial and security reasons.

The increasingly fuzzy boundary between the media work of these organizations has given rise to a polarized debate in journalism and media studies over the last two decades (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Beckett 2008; Sambrook 2010; Franks 2013; Lugo-Ocando 2014). Some scholars have highlighted the positive potential of INGOs stepping in as news providers and have for example argued that these changes could enhance social engagement and bring more diversity into journalism (Beckett 2008; Sambrook 2010; Yanacopulos 2015). However, the majority of debates have focused on the negative implications of INGO-media interaction both for INGOs and the traditional media.

INGOs' objectives to use media coverage to advance their financial income and organizational effectiveness have been described as potentially harmful to their core values and public image (Cottle and Nolan 2007; Fenton 2010; Kalcsics 2011). For example, Cottle and Nolan (2007) suggest that in an aid field that has become increasingly competitive and crowded and in which donor funding is decreasing, INGOs' strategies for gaining media attention have become characterized by a pervasive 'media logic' that contradicts INGOs' ethical humanitarian principles. This media logic consists of strategies such as working with celebrities, pitching news packages that will appeal to known media interests, spending time and resources on safeguarding their organization from media scandals, and linking stories of humanitarian disasters to the Western home country by foregrounding the role of INGO delegates as 'stars' (Cottle and Nolan 2007: 875). INGOs have been accused of being complicit in reproducing a single, dominant worldview, which all too easily depicts people in poverty as passive, waiting to be 'saved' by Northern aid workers (Davies 2008; Franks 2013; Lugo-Ocando 2014). Franks (2013) has argued that INGOs' involvement in news production may lead to a decontextualized account of the complex realities of poverty and inequality. Mainstream media, from their end, have been accused of readily accepting the stories produced by INGOs, thus risking the loss of their critical independence (Davies 2008; Franks 2013).

Gaps in research: translation and interpreting in INGO news production

Ensuring that news relating to INGOs' work represents a variety of views means listening to a variety of voices that are linguistically diverse. Yet the debates on NGO news production have tended to focus on news reporting in English, and have given little consideration to the multilingual origins of news and the translation processes that are naturally involved. However, more recent research on NGOs as news providers has started to shift the focus of debate from polarized discussions that are often based on sweeping generalizations towards the need to analyse the heterogeneous and complex nature of NGO news production (Powers 2017; Wright 2018b; Isharaza 2019; Ong 2019; Nolan, Brookes and Imison 2020). This emerging body of research aims to better understand the motivations, perceptions and perspectives of the actors involved in INGO news production processes (Wright 2018b).

It is within this context that the role of translation has started to attract some attention, most notably through Wright's (2018a) analysis of how INGO beneficiary voices are represented in news stories in the traditional media. Wright (2018a) analyses two cases of INGO news production, one concerning Save the Children UK, and one on Christian Aid. In both case studies, Western journalists visited areas in the Global South where INGOs were working. The trips were largely organized by staff from the INGO media teams based in the Global North, and Southern INGO staff provided language mediation during the visits. In accordance with the ad-hoc interpreting practices described above, these staff members were not trained in interpreting but subsumed this role as part of their day-to-day job.

In her analysis, Wright (2018a) asserts that the INGO staff members from the Global North that were involved in news production and that had organized the trips had an inadequate understanding of linguistic and cultural mediation, with interpreting often considered as ‘a largely logistical issue, akin to booking flights, travel permits or a driver’ (2018a: 97). This led to visitors ‘not devot[ing] much time to briefing the local fieldworkers’ (2018a: 97), resulting in practices that undermined the INGOs’ commitment to empower local people by representing their voice in global media. In one case, the interpreter was not told that a news story was being produced for a major global media outlet, but was under the impression that data was being collected for a donor report. This led to inadequate informed consent, with beneficiaries not made aware that their story would appear in global media. In another case, the interpreter was asked to speed up the interpreting process and was not able to elaborate on culturally specific terms, resulting in a reduction and simplification of beneficiaries’ speech. Wright (2018a) concludes that although the two INGOs in these examples had engaged in internal discussions on what it might mean to give ‘voice’ to their beneficiaries, their practices, and particularly their lack of understanding of translation as a complex and culturally specific process, undermined their organizational values and aims. Wright’s (2018a) analysis is a case-in-point of why practitioners as well as researchers should pay attention to the role and complex nature of translation in INGO news production processes. Her two case studies illustrate the underlying power dynamics between different actors, and demonstrate how discourse can change in translation.

Yet up until now, translation and interpreting studies has paid little attention to the role of translation in INGOs’ news production. Research on this topic would be well suited in a discipline that increasingly considers translation as a social activity which is influenced by various actors and institutional norms (Wolf 2007). Two notable exceptions from translation studies allow for some further insight into the variety and complexity of translation and transformation processes involved in reporting NGO content: Hawker's (2018) account of the journey of Amnesty International human rights testimonies from witnesses to audiences; and Tesseur's (2013, 2014) account of the translation of Amnesty's press releases. Taken together, these case studes provide a reasonably comprehensive account of Amnesty International's discursive and translation processes from testimony collection to reporting.

Drawing on ethnographic data and interviews with Amnesty researchers, Hawker (2018) identifies at least four different stages of translation of Amnesty's testimonies from Arabic-speaking witnesses, which can be summarized, somewhat simplified, as follows:

(1) An Amnesty researcher records a witness's account in writing.

Language: the witness speaks Arabic. The Amnesty researcher speaks either Arabic or English (if English, an interpreter provides language mediation). The researcher takes notes in Arabic and/or English.

(2) The Amnesty researcher digitizes the account by typing up the notes.

Language: the digitized notes are taken in a mix of English and Arabic. Direct quotations are typed in Arabic and fact-checked with the witness, colleague and/or interpreter.

(3) 10-20% of casefiles are used in reports, campaigning and media products. When this happens, the researcher selects segments and quotes from their notes.

Language: the report is written in English, so any notes in Arabic are translated. Colleagues may assist in providing idiomatic phrasings. Shorter material, for example, for online media, is sometimes also produced directly in Arabic.

(4) The report is now finalized and sent to the Amnesty's Language Resource Centre, a separate department.

> *Language: a professional translator translates the full report into Arabic (and potentially other languages). The translator checks specific terminology and phrasing with the researchers who wrote the report.*

The translation process of Amnesty's human rights testimonies is complex, involving different actors and transformations: from verbal to written, from conversational to formal style, etc. Given the sensitivity of the type of evidence collected by Amnesty, careful steps are taken to ensure that the voice of the witness is represented accurately. Amnesty International's 2008 *Guidelines for Writers* state: 'Where possible, provide quotations in the original language or give the reference for this. This is particularly important if you are using personal testimonies' (Amnesty International 2008: 12). While this is a noble aim, Hawker (2018) challenges the very notion of 'the original' in her analysis, thus mirroring observations from researchers investigating news translation (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009: 16). She argues that the different norms of written and spoken English and Arabic imply that there could 'not be a verbatim "accuracy" of a specific witness's utterance' (2018: 85). In addition, her analysis shows that human rights testimonies are always 'co-produced', involving various actors such as Amnesty researchers, interpreters and translators.

Both Wright's (2018a) and Hawker's (2018) case studies draw attention to the complexity and variety of translation processes in INGO news production and reporting. Amnesty International's practices of meticulously recording, translating and reporting witnesses' voices appear vastly different from Wright's (2018a) account on the mediation of aid beneficiaries' voices, in which interpreters were given insufficient time and information to mediate beneficiaries' voices in an adequate way. Yet attempting to explain this contrast as simply caused by differences between organizations would disregard other aspects that influence translation practice, such as the target audience and the purpose of a text. For example, Amnesty's testimonies can have legal functions and can serve to build factual evidence that could potentially be used against violators of human rights in court. Therefore, accuracy is of the utmost importance.

Tesseur's (2013; 2014) case study on Amnesty International press releases can further illustrate the point that translation processes in INGOs can vary even within one organization, and that text type and target audience play an important role. Her analysis demonstrates that the care that Amnesty staff take with the quotations from witnesses does not extend to quotations by other speakers. In a corpus of English press releases and their translations into Dutch produced by the Flemish Amnesty office, quotations from Amnesty staff members (e.g. Amnesty researchers) were frequently attributed to other speakers in the translations, usually to Flemish Amnesty staff. In a research interview, a Flemish press officer argued that this practice increased the chances of local media reporting, as journalists were more likely to pick up the press release in their reporting if they had access to a local spokesperson (Tesseur 2013). Whilst this media logic made sense, the practice was not shared among all Amnesty sections and staff (Tesseur 2014). These diverging translation practices, Tesseur (2014) argues, pointed to varying conceptualizations among staff of what translating for Amnesty International implied. For some, like the professional translators employed by Amnesty's Language Resource Centre, translation was portrayed as an activity in which one needed to be 'faithful' to the original text. Others, however, such as the Flemish press officer, viewed translation as a means that should serve Amnesty's organizational goals, i.e. to enhance attention to human rights abuses and end human rights violations.

Tesseur (2014) links these different understandings of what translating for Amnesty International means to broader internal discussions on Amnesty International's organizational aims and values. Whilst for some, Amnesty's voice should be defined locally (as for the press officer), allowing for diversity, for others, Amnesty's message and voice should be closely controlled by a central entity such as headquarters or the Language Resource Centre in order to protect Amnesty International's reputation as a highly regarded and neutral human rights expert. These sorts of dilemma's also raise questions on translation, such as, what languages does Amnesty 'speak' and translate from and into? What prominence should be given to representing a multilingual set of voices and what resources should be dedicated to this? These are questions that have started to be discussed in Amnesty, where staff of its Language Resource Centre aim to raise the profile of language as a core component of a holistic approach to diversity and inclusion (Bonallack 2018).

In summary, in journalism and media studies, critics have expressed concern that INGOs' function as news providers puts their organizational values at risk, but the link between producing INGO news content that represents a diversity of voices and translation has largely remained overlooked. Yet case studies on Save the Children, Christian Aid and Amnesty International demonstrate that translation is a complex process in INGO's content production that influences who is represented and in what way. This research indicates that INGOs' organizational values may be at risk if the role of translation and its complexity are not considered.

New media forms and multidirectional communication

NGO advocacy and development efforts, new media and translation

Traditional media are suitable channels for INGOs to disseminate information related to their work to the wider public. Conversely, new media forms, supported by better and cheaper mobile connectivity, present INGOs with opportunities to engage in more dynamic and multidirectional forms of communication with their beneficiaries. The term new media here refers to 'those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication and involve some form of computing', thus including amongst others social media, mobile apps, blogs, and online communities (Logan 2010: 4).

Mainstream development discourse has included much enthusiasm about the democratic potential of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs), since at least the 1990s. The World Bank's World Development Report for 1998/9 (World Bank, 1998), titled *Knowledge for Development* directly tied the paradigm of development as knowledge capacity to the use of ICTs. Within this paradigm, knowledge is considered as essential for developing countries to experience progress. The Global North is considered as having the scientific and technical knowledge necessary to 'develop', and ICTs are viewed as channels that will allow this knowledge to become widely accessible and end global inequality (Narayanaswamy 2017).

In recent years, new media specifically have been heralded as providing potential to engage citizens more closely in advocacy campaigns and in democratic projects. In the context of transnational advocacy, optimists have argued that the advance of social media and other online spaces has allowed INGOs to create and restructure their networks to include a wider variety of voices, such as those of local activists (Reese 2015; Yanacopulos 2015). However, there is a dearth of literature on how INGOs may be using translation to engage with a more linguistically diverse network. For example, little is known about how INGOs may translate tweets, Facebook posts and other online material to reach a wider audience.

On the local and national policy level, NGOs have been involved in projects on e-democracy and e-governance that use new media forms such as mobile phone applications as platforms where citizens can receive and share information. The underlying idea of these initiatives is that 'citizen-led social accountability' mechanisms are a key solution to making public services more effective and transparent (Sharma, Raj and Shadrach 2006; Narayanaswamy 2017). Yet evaluations of such projects have shown that the optimism about the democratic potential of ICTs to enhance citizens' participation is often unfounded. Rather, ICTs 'tend to mirror existing inequalities, thus reinforcing and underpinning, rather than challenging, exclusion from the knowledge society' (Narayanaswamy 2017: 74; cf. Srinivasan 2017). One of the potential pitfalls of the use of ICTs is the lack of (local) language support. An experimental study by Alathur, Ilavarasan and Gupta (2011), for example, reported that a lack of multiple language support was considered as one of the underlying factors that resulted in non-participation of citizens in an e-democracy project in India.

Despite INGOs' values of equality and inclusion, reports and studies on the use of new media in advocacy efforts are remarkably silent on the role of languages and translation. This linguistic blind spot can be illustrated by the low profile of language and translation issues in reports and research literature reviews published in the international aid sector on digital empowerment for women and girls (Gurumurthy and Chami 2014; Spuy and Aavriti 2017). Women and girls tend to have lower access to education and are therefore more likely to face literacy and language barriers, yet reviews on digital empowerment for girls and women do not generally engage with the critical role of language. A notable exception is a report on the 'digital divide' between women and men in nine countries, which reported that women and girls experienced barriers in accessing online content, firstly, because of a lack of (digital) literacy, and secondly, because English language knowledge was often required to be able to navigate the internet and mobile applications easily (World Wide Web Foundation, 2015). Within NGO programming itself, there are examples of good practice of projects that focus on women and girls and that have turned to translation to enhance accessibility of online platforms (Narayanaswamy 2017; Plan International 2018). However, these multilingual approaches are generally underreported. When reports do mention language, this tends to be only in passing, describing language as a logistical issue without further critical engagement.

NGO humanitarian interventions, new media and translation

Whilst the success of using new media for democratic uses may be limited, social media networks such as Twitter and Facebook have unquestionably transformed the nature of communication and information sharing in humanitarian crisis. The Haitian earthquake is considered the first major disaster during which people sought help via social media platforms (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative 2011). This changed the type and amount of information that was available to INGOs and other responders to organize their humanitarian interventions. In the scholarly literature on disaster preparedness and management, the potential benefits of these new digital platforms and technologies for crisis communication have been a key area of focus ever since the Haitian earthquake (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative 2011). Some crisis technology initiatives have for example sought to develop new ways to collect, categorize and prioritize information collected from social media such as Twitter (Cadwell *et al.* 2019).

However, when considering languages, translation researchers have argued that many of these initiatives have focused on English only, and have disregarded the role of other languages in crises (Cadwell *et al.* 2019). Translation scholars and practitioners involved in the International Network on Crisis Translation (INTERACT)[1] have started to raise awareness of the low profile of languages and translation in crisis settings, including in initiatives that mine data and information from social media. Cadwell *et al.* (2019) have argued that when a crisis happens, there is a need for translation, particularly in light of increased globalization and urbanization (O’Brien 2019). Research from the INTERACT project has demonstrated that language and translation needs are often not adequately considered in disaster preparedness plans (O’Brien *et al.* 2018). In addition, research has shown that aid workers are often not aware of the linguistic needs of the communities that they set out to help (Translators without Borders 2019).

One example that illustrates this is Rogl’s (2017) analysis of the volunteer translation networks that emerged after the Haitian earthquake in 2010. Rogl (2017) demonstrates that these networks played a key role in supporting the coordination of the international emergency response by offering translation and interpreting services. Translators without Borders, also an official partner in the INTERACT project, was a key actor in coordinating a large amount of the translation work. In her analysis, Rogl (2017) describes how volunteers with multilingual skills organized themselves in Facebook groups and on other online networks to exchange information on linguistic needs and to offer their services. Although NGOs were not involved in organizing or coordinating these groups, Rogl (2017) points out that NGOs made use of the emergency messages translated by these volunteer networks to coordinate their response. This example illustrates that NGOs and other humanitarian actors were largely unprepared to deal with the linguistic realities of the disaster context in which they started working.

Another problem of crisis communication and related technology initiatives is the overt focus on social media. Cadwell *et al.* (2019: 300) argue that crisis communication is about ‘more than tweets’. The authors assert that there is often an assumption that translation in crisis settings is largely concerned with communications directed towards affected communities, but that this understanding may not be adequate. The authors analyse a corpus of translations provided by Translators without Borders in one particular crisis setting to illustrate this point. The findings indicate that public messaging only constituted 8% of the corpus, whilst training material was the largest volume at 60% and surveys was the second most requested text type for translation at 21%. Although the authors indicate that the data needs to be interpreted with caution, these findings merit some further reflection.

Keeping in mind our focus on new media, the finding that 21% of the corpus consisted of surveys is relevant here. Surveys are a key tool for INGOs to record beneficiary needs and to keep track of their programming progress. Growing pressure from institutional donors to demonstrate value for money requires good quality data, preferably recorded digitally, so that INGOs can demonstrate informed decision-making and effective use of public funds. In recent years, INGOs have started to switch to 'Digital Data Gathering', a term used to describe the process of collecting data by 'using an electronic handheld device such as a smartphone or data pen' (Matturi 2016). Data collection software such as CommCare and Kobo Toolbox are now widely used by aid workers to input data directly on mobile phones and tablets, with the data then automatically uploaded to a server once internet connection is available. Such software has been heralded for its potential to improve speed, efficiency, and accuracy of data collection (Matturi 2016; Dauenhauer *et al.* 2018). In addition, these programmes have a built-in feature that allows aid workers to design surveys in multiple languages, including support for a variety of local language fonts (Dimagi 2019).

However, the idea that the use of these tools will help eliminate human error, including language and translation errors, may be too optimistic. Firstly, translation and language issues that inhibit traditional paper-based surveys are likely to continue to affect digital data collection if they are not carefully considered. For example, research by Translators without Borders has shown that one of the issues with humanitarian surveys is that enumerators, i.e. the people conducting the survey, often poorly understand key terminology. The study reports that only 48% of enumerators of a survey in north-eastern Nigeria understood the word 'infertility' (Translators without Borders 2018). Secondly, not all languages are written languages, and funding for translation is limited, so even if digital data gathering tools allow the option of designing multiple language versions, enumerators will still frequently be expected to sight-translate survey questions from English into their local language, and translate the responses back into English. Thirdly, built-in translation features in software can enhance the illusion that translation is a straightforward word-for-word process, leaving little space to discuss the specific meaning of key concepts and check if enumerators have understood them. The meaning and cultural appropriateness of certain terms can differ depending on the specific local community, and so relying on one translation that has not been produced with the local context in mind can be problematic (Footitt *et al.* 2020). Publications in the field of development studies and humanitarian technology, however, tend to disregard the complexities of translation that are involved in this type of data collection (Matturi 2016; Dauenhauer *et al.* 2018).

In summary, new media tools provide potential benefits as well as limitations for INGOs in their aims to communicate more directly with their beneficiaries. Overall, literature from development studies and disaster management show a lack of consideration for the role of languages and translation when engaging with new media. In translation and interpreting studies, research on these topics is limited, but has been growing in recent years, particularly through the INTERACT project.

Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature on INGOs and their media practices. It has demonstrated that languages and translation generally have a low profile in research from various disciplines that engage with NGOs and media. This low profile can be considered as symptomatic of a wider neglect for languages in the international aid sector, which has been noted in recent research led by language and translation researchers (Footitt *et al.* 2020; O'Brien *et al.* 2018). This chapter has argued that the absence of reflection on the role of languages and translation can result in practices that are at odds with NGOs' values of inclusion and equality, because they may overlook the importance of linguistic inclusion and diversity.

Translation and interpreting studies have only just started to investigate these issues. There is scope for translation and interpreting scholars to contribute to debates in journalism and media studies about INGO media practices. By investigating the role of translation in depth, translation researchers can contribute to discussions on how successful INGOs are in their efforts to represent their beneficiaries and in mediating different voices and views between beneficiaries, donors and the wider public. For translation and interpreting studies, such research would be an important contribution to the growing body of sociologically oriented research. Future studies could employ ethnographic approaches as well as interview and desk-based methods to contribute new insights to the discipline. Furthermore, this type of research can lead to recommendations to the aid sector, as indeed has been the case for Wright's (2018a) study. As a result of her research, Wright was invited by the Disaster Emergency Committee to develop a set of guidelines intended for visiting press officers who work with local fieldworkers as interpreters (Wright 2015).

Considering INGOs' use of new media channels, another fruitful avenue for future research is that of machine translation (MT). Cadwell *et al.* (2019) discuss the potential use of post-edited MT for crisis related information. Although caution is in order about the risks involved in employing MT in crisis contexts, and post-editing is required (O'Brien 2019), these tools do offer new opportunities for INGOs to support their multilingual practice. What is needed, then, is activist and collaborative research with INGOs that can assist these organizations in how to use these new tools ethically and practically.

Overall, the critical role that translation scholars can play is to provide evidence that can demonstrate to INGOs and their donors that translation is not a neutral and straightforward process, but that translation or non-translation may have an impact on aims of inclusion and equality.

Further reading

- Narayanaswamy, L. (2017) *Gender, Power and Knowledge for Development*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge.

This book explores information flows between the Global North and South and whether or not access to information aids development. The author critically reflects on the role of NGOs in the South who act as intermediaries of this information, and on the role of translation and ICTs in information flows.

- Tesseur, W. (2018) (ed.) Translation and Interpreting in Non-Governmental Organizations. Special issue of *Translation Spaces,* 7(1).

An edited journal issue that brings together articles that explore various aspects of translation and interpreting practice in NGOs. Contributions include work by translation scholars as well as translation managers from Oxfam GB and Amnesty International.

- Wright, K. (2018b) *Who's Reporting Africa Now?: Non-Governmental Organizations, Journalists, and Multimedia*. New York: Peter Lang.

A detailed critical analysis of news production processes involving various actors from major news organizations and NGOs. Drawing on case studies, the book explores issues of political and moral value underpinning NGO media collaboration.

- Yanacopulos, H. (2015) *International NGO Engagement, Advocacy, Activism: The Faces and Spaces of Change*. Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

This book provides excellent insight into the 'spaces' in which INGOs live, operate and organize themselves, including digital spaces and INGOs' use of networked campaigns for global justice.

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[1] https://sites.google.com/view/crisistranslation/home