

# Cultural representation in the media

Media



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## **Abstract**

The relationship between the media and culture has long been a topic of controversial debate. This study addresses this concern by evaluating two United Kingdom media outlets coverage of the same event through the lens of cultural and ideology. With indications of continuous forms of societal influence and impact, the evidence in this study is a mix of case study and academic review. The results demonstrate a wide acceptance of cultural and institutional manipulation on the part of the media mechanism, with a clear recommendation to seek several separate reports of the same instance in order to feel fully informed. This study has the potential to be relevant to cultural and international integration studies.

## **Introduction**

In our world of mass communication, media have made a very special place for itself in our lives. Representing cultures utilizing mass media such as television coverage, newspaper reporting and the technological advances of the internet has made communication among nations possible, yet, unique to each separate region and culture (Schaffner, 2008). Media plays a very significant role by allowing each separate population to experience the travails of the international community, through the lens of understandable context. Yet, the very nature of each of the unique cultures impacts the way in which the same event may be examined by the competing forms of media coverage (Schaffner, 2008). Base attitudes and approaches will differ depending on the societal expectations of the consumer population.

This analysis will begin with a examination of the translations of an excerpt of Saddam Hussein's trial by the Daily Telegraph and The Independent in 2004. Assessing the individual approach of each of these outlets will lead to a credible analysis of how these media approaches were used for different purposes. Following this segment, the study will turn to the role of translation in the production of news articles as well as the underlying dissemination of information.

In the end, this study will have examined past practice, present implementation and future potential with the stated goal of determining the impact that cultural representation has in the media.

#### Past efforts of Cultural Representation in the Media

Every nation in the international arena possesses a media outlet that allows for a form of large scale communication (Venuti, 2012). Utilizing this media access allows for a wide range of critical national and societal initiatives to be widely disseminated among the relevant populations. The mass media play an important role in mediating between politicians and the general public (Venuti 2012)). This point illustrates that a main channel for political information to reach the intended target is from a form of modern media. The ability to read, view or listen to a report of the topic is commonly preferred to attending the actual event itself (Schaffner, 2008). The ability to compact information in a manner that can be quickly and easily digested by the consumer is a demonstration of the innate value of any form of media. However, the quality of the media content varies due to the translator,

producer and consumer expectations relevant to that particular outlet (Schaffner, 2008).

Both culture and media thrive on an inclusive relationship with the population (Zlata, 2003). The underlying value that exists in the media outlet lies in their ability to reach the populace. The lack of a product that appeals to a large section of the target population lowers the value of the media outlet. Due to the increased drive to integrate on a global level cultural values and differences are increasingly visible and have the potential to impact every aspect of any media operation (Zlata, 2003). Language is the primary method that the media outlets reach their target audience, making the role of translator essential to their form of reporting (Zlata, 2003). News outlets and the process of interviewing people depend on the selection of translator and linguistic competence and preferences (Cecilia, 2009). When broadcasters speak foreign languages translation and interpretation are both crucial, and culturally influenced in the process of conveying the message (Zlata, 2003). The responsibility for correct translation and dissemination is entirely dependent on the knowledge, ideology and integrity of the media outlet.

The UK media outlet the Daily Telegraph and The Independent in 2004, have each provided two culturally varied translations of the same context. Varied approaches to the same account in the media are an illustration of cultural representation and societal values as understood by the individual organizations (Schaffner, 2008). This is the very concept that creates the perception of differing media reports regarding the same series of events.

## Modern cultural representation in the Media

“ The media has, in fact, been called the fourth estate” (Schaffner and Bassnet, 2010). The speed in which a message has the ability to reach as wide an audience as possible determines the values of the media outlet (Schaffner and Bassnett, 2010). As the world wide culture has embraced innovation, technologyhas vastly increased the ability of the various forms of media to express their product. The accuracy and strategies of the translation are important in every case, whether it is in print, on screen or online with the media’s ideological and political leanings reflected in their product (Schaffner and Bassnett, 2010). Yet, taking account the political background of the resource and the media itself, there are cultural factors behind the translation and dissemination of information (Bielsa, 2007). While translation is nearly invisible in the media reports this does not mean there is cultural impartiality in the process of translation.

Modern studies of media and their associated translation of material have grown significantly due to the role this mechanism serves in bridging gaps between cultures (Schaffner and Bassnett, 2010). Media enables communication across languages as well as the capacity to promote independent populations mutual understanding. The relation between media and translation occurs in a wide range of contexts such as the press, TV or the internet (Schaffner and Bassnett, 2010). Translation in every individual culture is a critical element in the media dissemination process that involves the direct interaction and understanding between cultures. News agencies commonly employ translation and select translators without knowing his or her ideological background (Magder, 2004). The quality of the translation in <https://assignbuster.com/cultural-representation-in-the-media/>

reporting news need to be taken into account by the news agency and the media due to the potential obstacles that can be created (Magder, 2004).

#### Analysis:

The media is argued to be viewed through a cultural perception (Bassnet, 2004). Each news item presented by the mass media, in any form, is only their unique representation and interpretation of the event, not necessarily the full or complete picture. Each person, reporter or journalist will experience the event in their own manner, producing their work according to their innate understanding (Bassnet, 2004). Utilizing the spoken word, literature and cultural instruments this unintentionally biased information is passed on to the consumer through the news outlet. The journalists and those who work to gather the information and eventually produce news are professional, yet, each person and organization is subject to their own ethical and value standards based on their cultural heritage (Bassnet, 2004). A priority must be placed on clear translation in the production of international news. This is an indication of importance for not only the translation functions, but also transferring the news across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Bassnet, 2004).

In order to assess this concept this study will take the two examples of the translated excerpt from the trial of the former dictator of the Iraqi regime, Saddam Hussein. These passages have been translated, edited and then published in the Daily Telegraph as well as the Independent in 2004.

Translation plays a fundamental role in the transfer of news around the world and at the same time different definitions of the translation are being used

by both layperson and experts (Bassnet, 2004). This is a demonstration that items from one language cannot easily being replaced into another. The translator is transferring the meaning between languages, and cultural clarity is not always present as this process unfolds (Bassnet, 2004). The news reporter often includes non-practical parts or culturally biased elements of a story during the process of translation in order to meet the expectations of the consumers. The often varied and often diverse opinions present in the mass media indicate a need for universal ethics standards.

The first edited transcript of the first court of the dictator Saddam Hussein which is published in the Independent:

The Independent, 2 July 2004:

The judge opened proceedings by asking Saddam for his name.

Saddam. Hussein Majid, the president of the Republic of Iraq.

The judge then asks his date of birth.

Saddam: 1937

Judge: ProfessionFormer president of the Republic of Iraq?

Saddam: No, present. Current. It's the will of the people.

Judge: The head of the Baath party that is dissolved, defunct. Former commander and chief of the army. Residence is Iraq. Your mother's name?

Saddam: Sobha, you also have to introduce yourself to me.

Judge: Mr Saddam, I am the investigative judge of the central court of Iraq.

Saddam: So that I have to know, you are investigative judge of the central court of Iraq. What resolution, what law formed this court?

The judge's response could not be heard.

The Daily Telegraph, 2 July 2004:

Judge: Are you the former president of Iraq?

Saddam: I am Saddam Hussein, president of Iraq.

Judge: (to court clerk): put down "former" in brackets.

Saddam: I am the president of the republic so you should not stripe me of my title to put me on trial.

Judge: You are the ex-leader of Iraq and the ex-leader of the dissolved armed forces. Were you the leader of the Ba'ath party and head of the armed forces?

Saddam: Yes. I've introduced myself to you but you haven't introduced yourself to me. So who are you.

Judge: I am a judge of the criminal court of Iraq.

Saddam: So you repress Iraqis under the orders of the coalition? Do you represent the American coalition?

Reading both edited transcriptions that had been published in in the competing British newspapers in 2004 produced several interesting  
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questions. To what extent do these printed versions differ? What cultural factors play a role in this difference? Why are they different in terms of information and the structure of the question? The first version, which is published in the Independent, says that the judge's response could not be heard, while in the second version the judge is clearly heard giving instruction to the court clerk. This attention or lack of attention to detail is an indication of cultural awareness (Bassnet, 2004). After the event was over, the translator's text was compared to the official transcript which illustrated that information was missing and that this text did not contain every element of the conversation. Bassnett (2004) states that during the hearings and sessions the translators are busy producing their own versions. This is an indication that media outlets are heavily dependent on the transcripts of the translator. This point of influence on the part of the translator is very important, as each cultural interpretation depends on the message (Bassnett 2004).

Further in the event the judge asks for his mother's name, but in the Daily Telegraph this point is not mentioned. How far we should trust the translators and the subsequent reporting by the media? This process of questionable translation is common in a country similar to Iraq which contains different religions and political backgrounds (Bassnett 2004). The ability to find a quality person to fill the role of translator is difficult due to the cultural affiliation to inherent differences in the views of their associated political parties.

Another notable difference between both versions, and cultural approaches, is that the person in the first version is a powerful judge that refers to <https://assignbuster.com/cultural-representation-in-the-media/>

Saddam's role as a former chief of the army, while in the second version the same concept is approached as a form of a question. This is a clear demonstration of cultural separation due to the interpretation of the event by the separate media outlets (Bassnett 2004). Each news agency has different policies, conventions and styles in their production of news which highlight these differences. Within every individual organization will be an understanding that is based on information passed between cultures (Bassnett, 2004).

The cultural differences become more visible as we read, with more transcripts available in Appendix A. According to the Independent, Saddam refused to sign the documents and both he and the judge were quarrelling about that. The Daily Telegraph reported this same set of occurrences differently. This is direct cultural reflection of the mood the readers expected to see and the willingness of the outlet to accommodate this (Bassnett, 2004). The Independent approached this in a more adversarial nature, while the Daily Telegraph sought to portray Saddam as more approachable. Moreover, Saddam's remark in his final comment with the guards that was not recorded in the Independent version is a further indication of the cultural dissemination of information based on the demands of the readers (Bassnett, 2004). The remark in the Telegraph enabled a sense of pity to be communicated culturally, while the absence of this element in the Independent eliminated this.

## Discussion

Despite the fact that we have two different English translations of a transcript in a court session that took place in Arabic, different edited and translation processes have taken place based on the cultural ideologies (Bassnett, 2004). The strategies of the translation that were used for the Independent are more likely to be culturally foreign to the UK as well as much more complex. Due to the nature of the associated readership, this outlet documents the many challenges that Saddam made to the judges, detailing the adversarial nature of the proceedings. Conversely, the culture associated with the Daily Telegraph expects another variety of reporting, a kinder and wider approach to the story.

The version of the same set of events in the Daily Telegraph is shorter and domesticated, a hallmark of the method in which the populace absorbs information (Bassnett, 2004). Saddam in this version does not appear as a former dictator but like a simple man who addresses the judge through his answers and attitudes. Saddam uses (would) which is a question word that often begins a lot of questions and ask for something. This is a direct representation of the cultural influence present in the writing; the underlying effort is to portray Saddam as demonstrating a gentle quality in the courtroom by saying “ I am not interfering with your responsibilities”. This is a form of outreach that is directly related to the cultural need to empathize with Saddam (Bassnett, 2004).

The role played by the translation of material in international news provides the link between politics and the media in both cultures (Bassnett, 2004). The elements revealed by the media outlets will be utilized to galvanize the populace in one form or fashion, thereby driving the governmental approach.

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Media reports about political events are always forms of re-contextualisation, and any re-contextualisation involves transformation and translation (Schaffner and Bassnett, 2010). Each of the separate cultures will have a unique interpretation of these elements. Cultural difference commonly occurs when a text is shifted for obscure political purposes or the translator attempts to skew the meaning in a way to serve the affiliated party. This form of cultural bias by the translator may have a great impact in the transfer of the meaning and the gist of the discourse and the message, thereby creating substantial obstacles (Schaffner and Bassnett, 2010).

Each of the media outlets as well as the underling cultures approaches the aspects of reporting and journalists' ethics as an intensive research need (Schaffner and Bassnett, 2010). Subjectivity and loyalty to the source text and ethics has a direct impact on the quality of media products, yet the quantity of each component rests in the values of the culture. This fact reflects the desire for the news agency and media outlet to maintain cultural and national credibility at every level (Schaffner and Bassnett, 2010). This is achieved through the accurate portrayal of world events through the lens of the associated cultural expectations. The international community depends on the media in terms of gaining information about the political state and cultural values and all socio-cultural norms (Schaffner and Bassnett, 2010). Yet, every story must be interpreted utilizing the known population variables that lie behind each writer.

In countries where governments interfere with the freedom of the press and sometimes the lack of freedom of expression occur, the media cannot broadcast and work independently (Poyatos, 1997). The culture of a nation

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will be familiar with the limits, thereby creating an unspoken form of boundaries. This regulatory environment can become another impediment to the accuracy of the translation (Poyatos, 1997). As news about a country is published in various newspapers some adjustments and reshaping is done due to the oversight environment, culture and ideology. A possible solution for this condition would be to create an environment in which no government should intervene into the media affairs and media should be totally independent (Poyatos, 1997). However, the values of the writers, publishers and readers will have to be taken in to continuous consideration.

Public relations professionals help to shape news content in national and local news media, based on the values of the consumers (Fletcher 2006; Franklin 1997). Due to the changes in political situations and relations between countries the news content might not be addressed exactly in every case, as illustrated by the Telegraph and Independent study. This is a reflection of the cultural constraints that must be taken into account for each individual nation in order to continually meet each unique regional need (Franklin, 1997). Freedom of the press does not mean the independence of any media channel; governments and the population are responsible for laying the foundation for a fruitful relationship between media the freedom of expression.

## In Conclusion

Translation plays a fundamental role in the transfer of different types of news around the world. The veracity of the translation and truthfulness of the translator are matters of primary concern. The societal values and

cultural differences of the authors, editors and organization are exposed with every article or broadcast. From the perspective of translation studies this lack of cohesiveness is an issue and has the potential to have substantial ramifications both politically and culturally.

The relationship between culture and media is one of inclusion, very much related to each other. In addition, media confers the capacity to reach a large audience in a manner that is efficient and effective. Mass media has, and will continue to have an impact on every person in each nation in the form of Internet, printing papers, Televisions and radios. The information and news passing between different cultures via the media are reshaped, reinterpreted and then republished. Therefore, transforming media representations entails a new way of thinking about media practice.

Media as a communication tool should be situated as institutions that allow for cultural development and the protection of cultural diversity. Further, mass media institutions need to be aware every aspect of the cultural constraints and expectations of the underlying society. Yet, in the end, as in all things, it lies with the reader, viewer or person subject to the media report to judge independently the veracity of the opinion.

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