Translating the News
Reframing Constructed Realities

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ABSTRACT

With cable and satellite television networks spreading rapidly and competitively across the globe, news and current affairs television is increasingly becoming a primary source of information for viewers worldwide for both domestic and international stories. While critically relying on translations of news from international providers, these networks are contributing to the reframing of news events and creating information and cultural misfits, often unintended by the original sources and sometimes unwelcome by the intended viewers. This paper examines the impact of translation on news making and argues that by submitting news to translation it undergoes a reframing process entailing a reconstruction of a constructed reality already subjected to professional, institutional and contextual influences.

INTRODUCTION

> "The impact of loss in translation is even greater in languages which are not only distant, but also characterized by a marked and radical differentiation in inequality…"
> —Rubel and Rosman, (2003:39)

Translation has recently received some attention in the news with controversies over the translation of the Bin Laden tapes by CNN, Aljazeera and other news outfits, highlighting an inconspicuous problem of translation-mediated communication and the critical importance of accuracy and precision of translated messages, especially in times of crisis and global instability.

The great German genius Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) once asserted that the translator must act "as mediator in this commerce of the mind, making it his business to further this intellectual exchange. For whatever one might say about the inadequacy of translation, nevertheless it is and will remain one of the most important and worthy occupations in the general intertraffic between peoples."[1]

More so in today's globalization and global television news media, translation-mediated knowledge transfer is becoming increasingly important in "the complex chains of global interdependencies"[2]; "being able to transmit vast amounts of information rapidly from continent to continent, we have

transformed a widely spread and diverse world into a single global megapolis" (Devlin, 1999:12). Different times however assign different value to the importance of translation, and the situationality of the translator within the larger context of social transaction plays a major role in the translation strategies chosen at a particular instance in the process of knowledge transfer, especially in an area of human activity as viscous and ephemeral as news media, where often "*voracities and verities are sometimes interacting*"[3]. In one respect, motivated by the doctrine of fidelity, the translator seeks to be faithful to the original. Yet a host of situational factors are willy-nilly brought to bear on this quest for the truth in translation. The state of tension and conflict is often resolved through reframing that conforms to specific editorial policy, norms and formulas.

Translations are not made in a vacuum, as Andre Lefevere (1992) confirms. "Translators function in a given culture at a given time. The way they understand themselves and their culture is one of the factors that may influence the way in which they translate" (Lefevere, 1992: 14). This view has been articulated by several writers and scholars in translation studies. As Gentzler and Tymoczko (2002) observe, "most contemporary translation studies scholars view the process of translation as heterogeneous with different issues addressed by different translations and different translators at different times and different places, depending on the specific historical and material moment" (xx).

Toury (1995) for example, contends that "[I]n its socio-cultural dimension, translation can be described as subject to constraints of several types and varying degrees. These extend far beyond the source text, the systemic differences between the languages and textual traditions involved in the act. Or even the possibilities and limitations of the cognitive apparatus of the translator as a necessary mediator" (54). He asserts that socio-cultural factors influence and likely alter the translator's cognition, and different translators performing under different conditions will choose different translation strategies and produce different products. Regarding translation as a norm-governed activity, Toury (1995) argues that translation has to contend with two languages and two cultural traditions. The translator's basic choice to work towards the norms of the source text or the target culture as an initial norm. This will define whether the translation subscribes to the norms of the source text or to the norms of the target culture, thus entailing different strategies that ultimately produce different translation products.

It follows that translations take place in various situations and environments where the translator may change locations, linguistic, cultural, ideological, temporal and or spatial affinities and perspectives. These interactive and interdependent influential variables consciously and subconsciously influence the actor's cognitive behaviour, responses, and attitudes to both source language and target language realities (Darwish, 2004). They also influence the actor's cognitive and affective responses to the source text and product, and ultimately affect the nature, focus, quality and pace of knowledge transfer and may act as a reinforcing positive or negative factor in defining the overall translation strategy.

In many translation-mediated news reporting situations and environments, particularly in television news media, the manner in which these variables are played out on and off screen in relation to each other, vis-à-vis a particular news story substantially affect the perspective of the story causing accuracy and precision to vary in salience and producing a reconstruction of an already constructed reality.

As Tuchman (1978) confirms, news is the product of news workers who draw upon institutional processes and practices to make information available to consumers. "News is located, gathered, and disseminated by professionals working in organizations […]. It is the product of professionalism and it claims to interpret everyday occurrences to citizens and other professionals alike" (Tuchman, 1978: 4-5). Such interpretation is a construction of reality as these news workers see it, influenced by the institutional processes and practices of the organizations in which they work. Consequently, not only do they bring their own perspectives, but they also frame their interpretation within the institutional context and situationality of these organizations. Furthermore, translators and or translation-journalists work under the same conditions, influences and constraints. In news translation in particular, the interplay of all of these factors and variables is more pronounced, intense and immediate.

Despite its crucial role in news making however, translation in the news has thus far occupied a very small area of research into translation and communication studies in general. Translation-mediated news production is generally acutely under-researched and particularly not researched at all in Arabic television. There is little research to date into the effects of translation on English-language news and on news translated primarily from English into other languages, and more to the point, the Arabic language.

A review of the literature at hand indicates serious research deficiencies in this area. The major publications (including 115 books) in both media and translation studies have neglected this area, with the exception of Darwish (2005) and Clausen (2003), who slightly touches upon language import through news.

Furthermore, a survey of more than 370 codes of ethics and codes of practice adopted by different media outlets around the world shows a serious lack of attention to translation. With the exception of the code of ethics adopted by the Press Foundation of Asia, enshrined in the Principles on Reporting Ethnic Tensions, which evolved from a nine-nation journalism conference held in Davao City (in the Philippines) in April 1970, none of the surveyed codes mention translation as a principal factor in ensuring accuracy and objectivity, and none of the United Nations fifty-one founding member states cite translation in the codes of ethics of their media and journalism associations, accessed during this survey. This lack of attention to translation further confirms that the role translation plays in framing domestic and international news is severely underrated and the impact of this phenomenon is seriously under-researched.

This paper argues that translation-mediated news reporting is largely a reframing process of already framed text, which entails a reconstruction of an already

constructed reality that has already been subjected to these professional, institutional and contextual influences. As a case study, this paper examines aspects of translation-mediated news at Aljazeera.

INFORMATION SOURCES

As political scientist Leon V. Sigal (1986) contends, "News is not what happens, but what someone says has happened or will happen". Most international news is ready-made; either conveyed by foreign correspondents or raw-translated by *in situ* or *ex situ* monitors from open sources of news already framed.

For over sixty years, the US Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)[4], a federal agency that monitors and translates foreign media into English, the BBC Monitoring Service, and the so-called Big Four: Reuters, Associated Press, United Press International and Agence France Presse, have provided daily feeds of extensive coverage of open source intelligence information (obtained from full text and summaries of newspaper articles, conference proceedings, television and radio broadcasts, periodicals, and non-classified technical reports), monitored worldwide — serving thousands of daily newspaper, radio, television and online customers with coverage in all media and news.

According to Boyd (1999), "an estimated million words a day stream directly into newsroom computers and spill out from agency printers. Reuters, PA, AP, UPI, which instantly identifies the source. BBC Monitoring in Caversham listens in to radio, TV and news agencies of 140 countries in seventy different languages and passes on the world's most important stories. Domestic copy is supplied by the BBC's General News Service…" (190). This "enormous productive news processing", Boyd confirms, involves taking "the mass of raw material coming in and refine, reshape and rewrite it into the 100 hours of regular radio news programs broadcast…" (190). The raw material is in fact raw translations of these open source news broadcasts. On a regular day, a monitor-translator listens to the broadcast live on radio or television, and while recording it, he or she types up a summary of the news into the computer. The items are prioritized and translated accordingly as per editorial policy or instructions, and the raw translation is edited by the duty editor and then dispatched to the news room, where it is submitted to "productive news processing" and reframing. With technological advances, this operation has become increasingly more efficient and the transition from the typewriter and reel-to-reel recording devices to computerized and digitized processing has meant shorter turnarounds and more pressure to produce ever increasing information loads and a higher potential for error and misinterpretation. With globalization, outsourcing open-source information to translation agencies and freelance translators has become a more cost-effective option for some of these operators. It is not unusual these days for news feed providers to outsource news media material captured primarily from the Internet, the preferred medium for most news material of low priority, to translation agencies and for these agencies to mete it out to their pool of freelance translators for exploitative prices and dubious quality standards.

Clausen (2003) contends that these international news agencies play a strong role in globalization in their function as international wholesalers. "…the international news agencies have great influence in international newsrooms. Their strong agenda-setting function, however, does not necessarily lead to 'homogenisation' of international information flows" (17). This may in part be attributable to the fact that most news feeds provided by these agencies are routinely translated into other languages, which results in further fragmentation, reframing and interpretation.

As Allan Bell (1991) also confirms, "most news outlets carry far more news originated by other organizations than by their own journalist. Almost all international news derives from the "Big Four" news agencies: Reuters, Associated Press, United Press International and Agence France Presse" (16). In most situations, minor editorial changes are made to the news feeds received from these sources, and any major discrepancies between the English language news feed and the source language text or discourse can be traced back to the originator of the news feed. The following example illustrates the situation where the same news item is repeated in its native form (English) by various news media providers unchanged and retaining the original frames.

> Ali said earlier that his house had been destroyed. His young son was buried in rubble but pulled out unharmed, he said. (Reuters)

> Ali said earlier that his house had been destroyed. His young son was buried in rubble but pulled out unharmed, he said. (The Telegraph, Calcutta, India)

> Zulfiqar said earlier that his house had been destroyed. His young son was buried in rubble but pulled out unharmed, he said. (The News International, Pakistan)

How the news item was put together in English in the first place and what happens to it when it is translated into other languages are two questions worthy of study, for not only is translation a vital component of the work of these organizations (The Big Four), but it is also an essential part of the operations of non-English news providers worldwide, which for the main part rely on these organizations for their news and other information sources. Consequently, translation into these languages adds another dimension to the problem of open source information. Yet surprisingly despite its centrality in the production of news in both directions, translation in this area has so far received little attention in both communication and translation studies.

TELL IT LIKE IT IS?

It has been argued that although the news media present reality "the way it is", news writers and editors construct a subjective picture of reality by selecting and organizing information in a way that makes sense to them and their audiences through framing (Ryan, 1991). News therefore, "is not a mirror of reality. It is a representation of the world and all representations are selective" (Schudson, 2003:33). Confirming this view, Dobkin (1992) explains that "News stories are

organized according to standard production formulas; television audiences need not only to be informed but also seduced, entertained, and in the proper state of mind for advertisers. News stories are also based on the intuitive, professional assumptions of news journalists and producers. These characteristics of news help determine the telling of the news stories and the way in which audiences are likely to interpret them" (27).

According to former foreign editor of *The Guardian*, Martin Woollacott (2005), journalists are instinctive moralists. "The first thing journalists want to know in a crisis is what are the rights and wrongs of it. They want a briefing on the physical facts, too—names, places and numbers, some history and geography—but the moral grid is primary. If they simply stuck with this as a given, they would indeed be poor creatures, and sometimes that does happen on stories of brief prominence. But on the bigger stories the moral view is debated; it evolves and is distinctly autonomous, insulated to some extent from the pressures of government". This moral grid, as Woolacott calls it, is responsible for framing news reports and stories. Consider the following excerpt form CNN's foreign correspondent Christiane Amanpour in Baghdad:

> AMANPOUR: Obviously, for so many people here and probably around the world, as well, a <u>deep sense of satisfaction</u> that Saddam Hussein and, in this case, seven of his <u>henchmen</u>, co-defendants, are sitting trial, finally <u>facing justice for some of the crimes</u> they're <u>alleged</u> to have perpetrated through that long, long brutal reign of his. [source: CNN, emphasis added][5]

The moral stance is framed in the phrases "deep sense of satisfaction", "seven of his henchmen", and "finally facing justice for some of the crimes". This is far from objective reporting. The correspondent has already made up her mind about Saddam's guilt, rightly or wrongly, and has framed news facts in a biased manner. More interesting is the surreptitious logical contradiction caused by the use of "alleged". How can they be *facing justice* for *crimes* they are *alleged* to have perpetrated? Using the expression "face justice" in its loosest sense to mean "stand trial" frames the news report because the expression "face justice" connotes guilt on the part of the accused. The following excerpts illustrate the presumption of guilt connoted in this expression.

> US President George W. Bush vowed today that Saddam Hussein would <u>face "justice</u> he denied to millions", but warned that the ousted dictator's stunning capture would not end deadly attacks on US forces in Iraq. [The Age][6]

> Being aware of your planned visit to Indonesia, another outcome of the meeting was the resolution to bring to your attention our strong views and lasting commitment to ensure that those known Indonesia figures who have documented involvement the attempted genocide of the East Timorese will <u>face justice</u>.[7]

In translation-mediated news, this framing process involves two things: (1) first-hand account of such events as witnessed or heard in their native form and

submitted to the translation process by often bilingual correspondents and field reporters, who transmit their own translations to their news networks (and the Big Four), and (2) formal and ad hoc translation of text processed in its original form *in situ* and *ex situ*. It can be argued that in doing so, the original frames are subjected to a reframing process that changes the perspective and meaning of the original frames.

For most non-English news media providers, news feeds constitute the primary source of information on international and surprisingly domestic and regional events. In the Arabic media for example, foreign information sources are translated verbatim down to the sentence and phrase levels. The synthesis process in this case is largely limited to basic text rearrangement that is subject to distortion, obfuscation, and translation mediated reframing of source information. Given the poor translation skills of most journalists and translators, as attested by the numerous examples of erroneous translations, and the lack of structured methodologies in news translation that ensure accuracy, fairness, truthfulness, *objectivity* and neutrality of reported news and transferred information through translated documentaries, major violations of these principles are inevitable. This is a serious problem that is increasingly causing misrepresentations, misunderstandings and communication breakdown across nations and cultures in globalized news media.

A serious example of erroneous translations is the initial rendition by Arabic media networks of the US President George W. Bush's reportedly improvised phrase "crusade" in the aftermath of September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks as a "*Cross-ade* War"[8], which has framed the US response ever since in the minds of viewers of these Arabic networks. The translation-mediated framing of the President's message forced the White House to explain the pragmatic aspects of the usage of the term "crusade", with a small "c" rather than "Crusade" with a capital "C". In a damage-control exercise, White House press secretary Ari Fleischer soon afterwards told reporters that President Bush only meant to say that this is a "broad cause" to stamp out terrorism worldwide.

> "I think to the degree that that word has many connotations that would upset many of our partners or anybody else in the world, the president would regret if anything like that was conveyed. But the purpose of his conveying it is in the traditional English sense of the word, it's a broad cause," said Fleischer. [source: Newsday, Inc.]

Other examples do not have immediate reactions as this one, but the incremental effect contributes to the reframing of the original message. Consider the following excerpt from the British Prime Minister Tony Blair's statement on the brutal killing of British hostage Ken Bigley in Iraq, aired on Aljazeera in October 2004 and the Arabic translation voiceover.

Original English text:

> I feel desperately sorry for Ken Bigley, for his family, who have behaved with extraordinary dignity and courage. I feel utter revulsion at the people who did this, not at the barbaric nature of the killing, but the way frankly they played with the situation in the past few weeks.

Arabic voiceover:

> أشعر بأسف عميق لمأساة عائلة بيغلي والتي أظهرت نبلاً وشجاعة.. وأشعر بمنتهى الاشمئزاز إزاء هؤلاء الناس الذين فعلوا ذلك. ليس فقط بسبب الطبيعة البربرية لما أقدموا عليه، ولكن أيضاً للطريقة التي فعلوا بها ذلك.

Back translation:

> I feel deep sorrow for the tragedy of Bigley's family who showed nobility and courage. I feel utter disgust towards those people who did this, not because of the barbaric nature of what they committed, but the way they did it.

Here, we can immediately see the extent of reframing that has taken place in the translation, which is inaccurate, imprecise and stripped off its original rhetorical effects. Most serious is the shift in focus from the victim, the man who lost his life, to the tragedy of his family (sorrow for the tragedy of Bigley's family). There is no mention of "Ken Bigley" in the translation. Moreover, the expression "they played with the situation" is rendered as "the way they did it".

The following recent example further illustrates the risks of news mistranslation.

> **Iran Bans CNN for Misquoting Leader on Nuclear Issue**
>
> Due to an error in translation, CNN incorrectly quoted Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, in his speech given on Saturday, as saying that Iran has the right to build nuclear weapons," the network said in today's statement. In fact, President Amadinejad said Iran has the right to nuclear energy, and that 'a nation that has civilization does not need nuclear weapons,' and 'our nation does not need them'.
>
> CNN apologized on all its platforms which included the translation error, including CNN International, CNNUSA and CNN.com, and also expressed its regrets to the Iranian Government and the Iranian ambassador to the UN," the network said.

[Source: Bloomberg, January 16, 2006]

Moreover, as discussed elsewhere (Darwish, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005), translation is at best a process of approximation where two systems of approximates—individual and general—coexist and sometimes compete. On the individual level, these approximates; lexical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic, are dependent on the individual's own competence and system of classification.

On the general level, a speech community may choose by convention to adopt a system of approximates that filters through to the individual system of approximates. Sometimes, there are irreconcilable differences between the two systems. In cross-lingual mediated communication, the translation act is always an act of intervention to reconcile these two systems of approximates. Excluding individual differences among translators in terms of competence and performance, the process is subject to the laws of relativity, optimality and approximation.

Again, while translation is an attempt to communicate aspects of the original message in another language, it is not immune to the translator-writer idiosyncratic features of style, diction and convictions, which are brought to bear on any rendition, motivated or otherwise, and which play a crucial role in the extent of loss, interference and perspective of the translation.

It is therefore necessary for journalists, news producers, news translators and translation educators to forge an understanding of the relationship between translation and news framing in order to define, develop and employ effective translation strategies that ensure objectivity of news reporting, or at least raise the awareness to the potential risks of translation to news framing.

Fairclough (2003:8) argues that texts have immediate causal effects in that they bring about changes in our knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, values and so on, and long-term causal effects. It can also be argued that by subjecting text to the translation process, there is danger of introducing new causal effects that are not intended in the original text.

NEWS TRANSLATOR AS ANIMATOR

With the advent of satellite television and Internet technologies in several languages, news analysts are able to compare the same news reported by different channels and are able to intuitively discern the subtle differences in the reporting, whether in the same language (for example, English-language CNN, BBC and Fox TV, or Arabic-language Aljazeera, Al-Arabiya and LBC) or across languages (for example, CNN and Aljazeera) — although the process of globalization of satellite news provision is producing cloned replicas that use the same presentation format and techniques, which in most situations flout established language and cultural norms and standards. Anecdotally, some of these differences are translation-induced; as the original news reports are submitted to the translation process, they also undergo a reframing process, which for the main part attempts to reconstruct a constructed reality, where the sought-after "truth" is invariably lost in the reconstruction of news artefacts. This reframing process takes place within the following extended rhetorical communication model of translation.
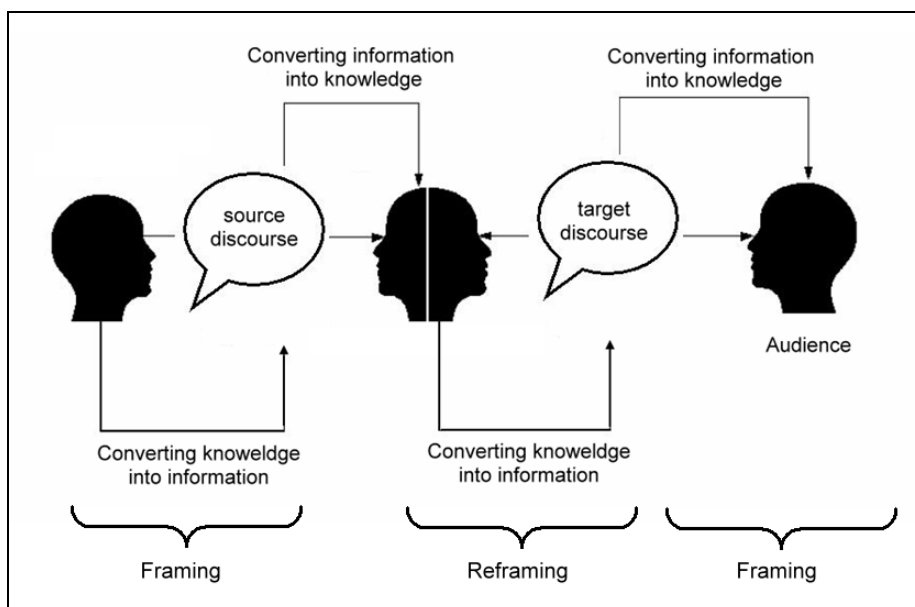
(Adapted from Darwish, 2001)

Figure 1 – A Rhetorical Model of Extended Bilingual Communication

Through translation, the communication process is extended beyond the boundaries of one system of signs, representation and meaning, thus increasing the complexity of an already complex process.

Within this extended model, the writer frames his or her construction of reality into text, turning knoweldge into information. Information is inactive knowledge comprising data, known facts or things used as the basis for inferences or reckoning. When the text is submitted to translation, the information is converted into knowledge as perceived by the translator. Knowledge is active information that involves recognition, understanding and identification. In other words, in simple terms, information becomes knowledge when the receiver makes meaning of it. At this point, the text is reframed into another text in another language.

In the process of completing the communication event, the translated text, once again, has no communicative value until it is read by a target language reader who receives the message conveyed by the text. Here we are talking about potential communication and actual communication. At the moment of reading the translation, a message is communicated. However, the message does not necessarily have the same communicative value as the source language message. Depending on the strategies and approach the translator takes, through personal choice or editorial policy, the communicative value will range on a continuum of approximation and optimization from core to periphery.

Following McCroskey's (1978) definition of rhetorical communication as goal directed, translation-mediated communication is always rhetorical irrespective of

the type of communication in the source language text since translation is always motivated and goal-directed—it seeks to stimulate a source-selected meaning in the mind of the target language reader by converting source language code into target language code to evoke more or less the same meaning and the same effect, however circumvented, and by striving to reconstruct the source language textual reality in the target language by desperately working to an ideal hypothetical model or blueprint. This blueprint is often conditioned by a number of variables.

FRAMING ARABIC NEWS: MONKEY SEE, MONKEY DO

According to Alterman (2002), the rise of Arabic[9] satellite-broadcast television stations in the last decade has caused a revolution in the Arab world. These stations have challenged traditional state monopolies over television broadcasting, and "have played a significant role in breaking down censorship barriers in the region. They have encouraged open debates on previously taboo subjects like secularism and religion, provided fora for opposition political leaders from a number of countries, and given a voice to perspectives that were previously absent from the Arab media" (Alterman, 2002).

Undoubtedly, the advent of Arabic satellite television stations in the Arab world has dramatically changed the way news and current affairs programs are presented in Arabic today. The supposedly fortuitous rise to fame of Aljazeera in the aftermath of the September 11 events and US-led war on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, has placed a great deal of demand on Arabic satellite television stations to vie for first place as an international Arab media player. Consequently, these television stations have experienced a marked increase in news and other programs that rely on translation of primary information sources that are already framed. Informal observation suggests that these news productions are subjected to a reframing process that is incrementally changing the perspective and meaning of the original news.

These Arabic television networks have adopted wholesale western television production technologies and presentation approaches, with Aljazeera setting the trend for the rest of the Arabic television networks. Aljazeera seems to have modelled itself after CNN and to some extent the BBC, in terms of the visual presentation and delivery of programs, without considering the linguistic, cultural and social idiosyncrasies of these technologies and approaches, and unmindful of their experimental and dynamic nature. With the rapid development of communication technologies, western television networks are still finding ways to combine visual appeal and usability of the visual medium for maximum effect.

To the extent that such emulation contributes to the reframing process of news, as far as the verbal presentation is concerned, Aljazeera seems to have adopted the BBC recommendations set out in The BBC News Style Guide, which warn against "singsong" and staccato sentences. Most Aljazeera newsreaders

(including interpreters and translators who are expected to do voiceovers) are reportedly BBC voice-trained. They seem to have adopted English language rules of elocution, presentation style and news-reading mechanics most-suited to English broadcasting. Moreover, there seems to be confusion among the ranks of presenters regarding the interpretation of end of sentence word stresses and pauses normally recommended for English language broadcasting.

Figure 2 – Aljazeera Standard Presentation Format

Figure 3 – CNN Standard Presentation Format

Network's logo →

News Crawl →

Breaking News Headline
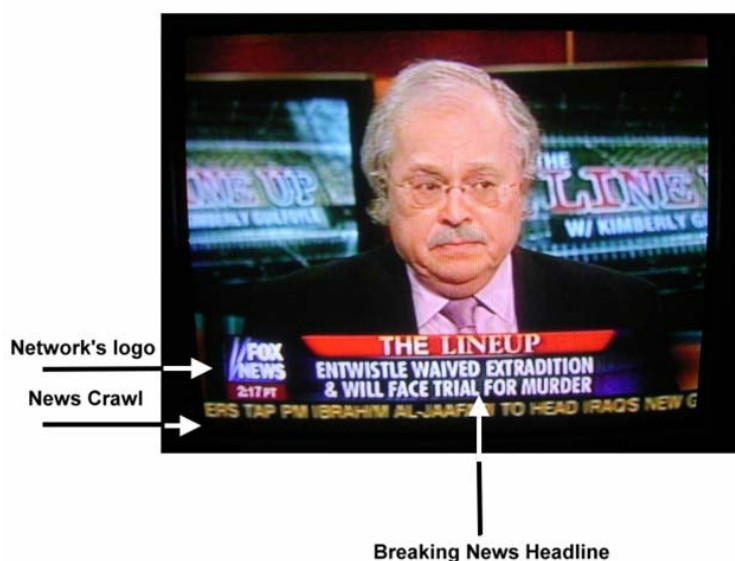
Figure 4 – Fox News Standard Presentation Format

As an example of such dynamic nature, CNN Network has recently changed its standard presentation format. In the new format, news vertical flips replace the horizontal news crawl that has become standard across news television networks.

Network's logo →

News flips →

Breaking News Headline

Figure 5 – New CNN Presentation Format (12-02-06)

While the colour scheme of the new format is not quite appealing (white text on a black patch, and the red colour of the CNN logo does not blend nicely with rest

of the colours) and the horizontal news flips are unusual and jar the viewers' frame of reference, the new format does ease up the visual clutter and expands the viewing space.

REFRAMING THE ALREADY FRAMED

Despite the cloning effect globalization of news media has had on regional and national terrestrial and satellite television, the visual clutter and graphic razzmatazz that accompany news presentation, and the reproduction of almost the same presentation format—for example, all news media networks have a news crawl at the bottom of the screen (see figures)—most news information carried by these media outlets is already framed at the source. Usually, it is in their representation to the viewers through translation mediation that the frames are reframed.

Turner (1991, cited in MacGregor,1997) argues that the phenomenon of global news the CNNization of the world, does not mean "just the advent of globally available television services, but the fact that such services have begun to play a role in international politics" (MacGregor, 1997:5) and regional social and political change. But as noted elsewhere (Darwish, 2005), Aljazeera, and other Arabic media networks, such as Al-Arabiyah, are contributing to social and cultural change in an unbridled and unplanned manner, and there seems to be a lack of a clear strategy on how to implement this agenda. The newly found "freedom" of the press suffers from oscillation and sporadic instrumentalization of inter-state feuds and rivalries, detected in innuendos, insinuations, indirect contextualization and below the belt punches. Here is a sample from Aljazeera's tabloid program *al-ittijah al-mu'akis* (The Opposite Direction), presented by Faisal Al-Qasim, aired on January 3, 2006.

[Original text]

فيصل القاسم: تحية طيبة مشاهديَّ الكرام، لماذا لا يتكرم الرئيس الأميركي بمواعظه الديمقراطية السخيفة إلا على سوريا؟ يتساءل أحدهم، هل الأنظمة العربية الأخرى ديمقراطيات أفلاطونية؟ لماذا لم يتحدث بوش يوما عن تطبيق الديمقراطية في السعودية المحكومة على طريقة القرون الوسطى؟ أم أنه من فرط إيمانه بارك حكم الشريعة فيها؟

[Translation]

FAISAL AL-QASIM: Good greeting[s] my dear viewers. Why doesn't the American President deign to make his absurd democratic sermons except to Syria? Someone wonders: Are the other Arab regimes platonic democracies? Why hasn't Bush ever spoken out about applying democracy in Saudi Arabia, which is ruled in the manner of Medieval Times? Or is it because of his too much faith he has already blessed the Shari'a law over there?

This kind of contextualization and framing, which is used over and over in the same and other programs, and "…fragmentation of reality, reporting that adopts the viewpoint of the source, which is largely in English, and translated documentaries that retain the format, discourse and perspectives of the original are contributing to language displacement in various areas of social life in the Arab world, which is now flooded with foreign and franchised programs targeting the young and disfranchised generations—with more that 15 satellite television channels bombarding the viewers. In some quarters of the Arab world long-standing traditions are being eroded and roof-top satellite dishes have replaced the *dishdasha* (the traditional Arabian wear)" (Darwish, 2005:441).

In the western media, foreign information sources, especially translations (with the exception of direct quotes and statements) are usually used as raw material that submits to a synthesis process to produce the news report. In contrast, in the Arabic media specifically, foreign information sources are translated verbatim down to the sentence and phrase levels, as already mentioned. The synthesis process in this case is largely limited to basic text rearrangement that is subject to distortion, obfuscation, and translation mediated reframing. Although access to the operations of news production at media outlets such as Aljazeera, etc, is not always possible, the operational aspects of news production can be gleaned from the product itself. For these newsrooms, translation constitutes the primary source of information.

ONE REALITY, DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES

The general consensus among researchers in mass communication and other human sciences is that our experiences of the world are not identical. The ways in which we perceive reality differ from person to person, and no two people see the world in exactly the same way. As Hancock (1971) explains, we perceive the world around us through our senses, which are not so reliable. People have different notions of colour, warmth, fear and so on. The traffic lights are a good example of how different people perceive colour differently. The intermediate signal is yellow to some, and orange or amber to others. The notion of heat is expressed in various ways on a scale ranging from too hot to too cold. For example, people in Scotland may refer to a 30º C temperature as hot while people in certain parts of Australia may call it warm. Moreover, Hancock argues that even if our senses are the same, we develop different views depending on the angle from which we look at things. The same object that exists in the external reality will look different when observed from different angles, and since it is impossible for any two persons to occupy the same physical space at the same time, their perception of what they observe is bound to be different. That is why for example, the police always take two snapshots of suspects and criminals: frontal and profile, and for the same reason, certain sports events have corner judges as well as the main referee.

Hancock adds that there are so many things in nature that we cannot perceive with our senses, without the aid of technology. As such, things are not what they appear to be. A picture for example, is made up of pixels. If enlarged, the

picture's definition is lost and the picture becomes incomprehensible. A line is a series of dots. Movement is a series of pauses, music is an arrangement of notes, and so on. Consequently, our observations and experiences of the external world are inevitably dissimilar. "So, in ourselves as perceivers and communicators, there is a faulty apprehension of the world, which is bound to enter into our communication. Indeed, much of communication is designed to put across to other people what we know is a personal, idiosyncratic view of the world" (Hancock, 1971: 15). In so doing, we fall prey to communication aberrations, distortions, and failure.

FRAMING REALITY

The general view among media researchers and practitioners alike is that the news is a representation of the real world; it is not the real world. It is a window on the world, as Tuchman (1978) puts it, through the frame of which we learn about the world. However, she contends that like any frame that delineates a world, the news frame is problematic in its characteristics and the perspectives it presents. Echoing this view, Schudson (2003) states, "news is not a mirror of reality. It is a representation of the world, and all representations are selective. This means that some human beings must do the selecting; certain people make decisions about what to present as news and how to present it" (33).

Journalists are at the forefront of those making such decisions, and as Alan Knight (2000) explains in *Reporting the Orient*, "Journalists inhabit a culture of ideas which shape the way they report, select, edit and prioritise news. These ideas reproduce and reinforce themselves in the news making process, re-creating apparently flexible ways for imagining the world outside the newsroom." (21).

To understand the role of news frames, we may turn to framing theory for answers. As a theoretical perspective, the concept of framing has become increasingly common in understanding mass communication, "whether in the fields of social psychology, public opinion, or media studies" (Norris et al, 2003:10), because it offers plausible explanations for the way news is constructed and presented to the viewers and readers. A frame is a property of a message, and as Hallahan (1999) confirms, "a *frame* limits the message's meaning by shaping the inferences that individuals make about the message" (207), [emphasis in original].

According to Kauffman, Elliott and Shmueli (2003), "framing involves both the construction of interpretive frames and their representation to others". These interpretive frames reflect judgments made by the creators or framers of the message (Hallahan,1999:207). Furthermore, Rhoads (1997) defines a frame as "a psychological device that offers a perspective and manipulates salience in order to influence subsequent judgment." This definition focuses on two relevant elements of framing: perspective and manipulation. One of the major problems of translating news or any kind of text for that matter is a phenomenon known as shift in focus. This shift in focus is practically a shift in perspective through

linguistic manipulation and reconstruction. One could argue that obligatory syntactic shifts in translating news reframe the message through shifting the focus from the subject to the verb in Arabic for example.

NEWS FRAMES

Ryan (1991) contends that "[F]ar from being an objective list of facts, a news story results from multiple subjective decisions about whether and how to present happenings to media audiences" (54). The selection process produces a news frame that "an entire newscast rather than a single story can carry news frames" (Ryan, 1991:54). These news frames "are almost entirely implicit and taken for granted. They do not appear to either journalists or audience as social constructions but as primary attributes of events that reporters are merely reflecting" (Katy Abel, 1985, cited in Ryan, 1991:54). The following excerpt form a news item broadcast recently by Channel Nine may illustrate this selection process.

> These are images of the three young men police want for questioning for the <u>cowardly</u> stabbing.

> Detectives are now focusing the investigation on what they call a pack of young Middle Eastern men who allegedly went on a vicious rampage, following the <u>December eleven</u> riot. [Channel Nine, 2006]

Of special interest in this example is the use of the American month-day format instead of the standard Australia day-month format. In analyzing this news excerpt, one is inclined to conclude that this shift of date format is a subtle semantic framing at the micro level, which is operating in a larger frame or meta frame—that is the frame of terrorism and the September 11 events.

How this news excerpt translates into other languages and retains the same news frame will depend on the translation strategy and approach chosen by the translator and on the editorial intervention of the news editor. Most likely, the word "cowardly" would be edited out of the translation as it might be deemed culturally inappropriate, while the "December eleven" would be lost to both the translator and the news editor, since making the semantic connection requires active elicitation of the original news frame. In either case, a new news frame is created.

FRAMING LANGUAGE

Through communication — more specifically, through language as a system of communication, we are able to frame our thoughts, organize our experience of the world, evaluate alternatives, make choices and decisions and convey such choices and decisions to others. As Henry Plotkin (1994) puts it, "...we think using language and hence manipulate our knowledge of the world through language. We also communicate our knowledge to one another primarily through language" (1994: 201).

The vital role of language is probably no where as salient and influential as in news media. Allen Bell (1991) highlights the importance and widespread influence of language in the media. "…media language is heard not just by one or two people but by mass audiences. It is the few talking to the many. Media are dominating presenters of language in our society at large" (1), with news being "the primary language genre" within the media.

In the Arab world today, Aljazeera is carrying this all-pervading influence of news language to millions of viewers [10] and accelerating the standardization process of the Arabic language at a rate unprecedented in the modern history of the region. Before the introduction of satellite television to the Arab world, there have been claims of conscious moves within journalism to simplify the Arabic language. Translating Mroue (1961), "the refined easy style we have achieved in Arabic writing today is not attributable to language teachers in schools and colleges, nor is it attributable to writers and ancient men of letters. It is in the first place owing to the journalism of today" (111). However, much as these early pioneers would like to think that the shift in style of Arabic writing is due to the conscious efforts of the press, it can be argued that the shift was due to the heavy influence of translation. As it is the case today, foreign press was the primary source of information for Arabic newspapers and journalists in the second half of the twentieth century. With the widespread of Arabic satellite television in the Arab world and real-time accessibility to foreign language satellite television, such as CNN, BBC, NBC and so on, the influence of translation on Arabic linguistic and thought patterns has become more readily pronounced and the correlation and causality between translation and the Arabic media language become stronger and arguably more established.

Highlighting the role of journalists as language custodians, Denmark-based Arab writer Noha Mellor (2005) echoes Mroue's view asserting that the "news media have thus played a role in the modernization of the language. Television plays an important role as a medium even for illiterates, but television sets are not yet available in certain rural areas, where radio is still the medium of necessity" (126). Mellor further confirms the views made here and elsewhere (Darwish, 2004, 2005) regarding the role of translation in journalism and the impact of translation on the language. "The short deadlines that rule journalistic practice have forced editors and journalists to depend on quick translation of incoming news from international news agencies and sources, paving the way for the introduction of new terms and expressions in the MSA [Modern Standard Arabic] used in the news (Abdelfattah, 1990:42f)". While Mellor's reference goes back to 1990, the situation is even worse today at Aljazeera and other Arabic news media networks. However, although high-powered newsroom production places ever-increasing pressures on journalists-cum-translators (or vice-versa), the introductions of neologies into news media language has more to do with the lack of a systematic approach to translation, as will be illustrated in this paper, and that such neologies are not just confined to terms and expressions of limited or confined impact. They extend to thought and logical patterns as well as argumentation patterns and paradigms, which largely contribute to the

reframing of the original message. Moreover, the adoption of English language broadcasting enunciation methods is a marked oddity of Arabic news media networks.

SEMANTIC FRAMING

One of major areas of translation reframing of news occurs at the semantic level. Semantic framing occurs at the lexical level of text. The choice of words frames the news report. Consider the following excerpts from a newspaper headline and Arabic news broadcasts showing how the words "deposed" and "toppled" have been mirror-translated into Arabic. In the first instance, the Arabic word (مخلوع) "makhlu'" is used. This word means "plucked out, torn off, and pulled up by the roots". Colloquially, the word also means someone who is of weak or loose character", akin to the standard Arabic word (خليع) "khalee'", which means "wanton", among other things. In the second, the Arabic word (مطاح به) "mutah bihi" is used. This Arabic word is a derivative of the verb (طاح) "taha", which means "to perish or almost perish, to get lost in the land".

[al-Hayat online]

الرئيس العراقي المخلوع للمرة التاسعة أمام القضاء اليوم ... الادعاء سيُجبر صدام وبرزان بالقوة على حضور المحكمة والمحامون يقاطعون الجلسة ويطالبون بإقالة القاضي.[11]

[Translation]

The <u>deposed</u> Iraqi president for the ninth time before justice today...Prosecution will force Saddam and Barzan by force to attend the court and the lawyers boycott the session and demand the dismissal of the judge.

[Aljazeera, 18/10/2005]

محاكمة الرئيس العراقي المخلوع صدام حسين

[Translation]

Trial of <u>deposed</u> Iraqi president Saddam Hussein.

[BBC, Arabic, 13/06/2003]

قال بول بريمر الحاكم الامريكي للعراق إن القوات الامريكية تواجه مقاومة منظمة من الموالين للرئيس العراقي المخلوع صدام حسين والذين ينخرطون على حد قوله في ما أسماه بعمليات تخريب سياسي محض.[12]

[Translation]

Paul Brimmer, the American Ruler of Iraq, said the American forces are facing organized resistance from loyalists to the deposed Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, who are getting involved, as he says, in what he called sheer political sabotage operations.

[ash-sharq al-awsat][13]

في الوقت الذي يؤكد فيه الجنود الاميركيون انهم بصدد التعامل مع اخر...
بقايا نظام الرئيس العراقي <u>المطاح</u> به صدام حسين.

[Translation]

[…] at the time when the American soldiers are asserting that they are about to deal with the remnants of the regime of the <u>toppled</u> Iraqi president Saddam Hussein.

Let us now consider English media framed the event.

> From only a short distance away, the <u>toppled Iraqi president</u> coldly watches witnesses testify about unspeakable torture under his regime. At times Hussein's rage forces him to his feet and a judge orders guards to silence him. [CNN, December 5, 2005][14]

> The New York Times first reported the withdrawal saying Saddam's son Qusay and one of the <u>toppled Iraqi president's</u> personal assistants, Abid al-Hamid Mahmood, carried a letter from Saddam authorising the huge cash removal. [The Guardian, May 6, 2003][15]

> The chief lawyer for <u>deposed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein</u> says he has been denied access to his client for the first time in more than a year. [BBC, 5 February 2006][16]

> <u>Ousted Iraqi President Saddam Hussein</u> is in custody following his dramatic capture by US forces in Iraq. [BBC, 14 December 2003][17]

In recent newscasts, Aljazeera opted for "the former Iraqi president", thus creating a new semantic frame.

Adjectival Dissonance

Another major area of translation-mediated semantic framing is the adjectives. In English grammar, an adjective is a word class that functions as a modifier of a noun and refers to an attribute of that noun. More specifically, an adjective is "a word that describes the thing, quality, state, or action which a noun refers to" (Richards et al, 1985).

How an adjective modifies a noun depends on its functional role within the semantics of the adjectival construction. In English, adjectives are either attributive (placed before the noun) or predicative (placed after the noun). Strictly speaking, attributive adjectives occur within the noun group and before the noun headword.

> This is a red carpet.

> It is an expensive, beautiful red carpet.

Halliday and Hassan (1976), distinguish six types of modifiers: deictic, numerative, epithet, classifier, qualifier, and what they call *thing*. Of relevance to the discussion are the types: epithet, classifier and qualifier. Another type of modifier is the intensifier, which is a class of words, generally adverbs, that are

used to modify gradable adjectives, adverbs, verbs or *~ed* participles (for example, *completely* destroyed).

Dictated by the noun-adjective syntactic structure, Arabic grammar defines an adjective as "that which is stated *after* [emphasis added] a noun to make explicit aspects of the conditions of the noun or the conditions relating to the noun" (al-Ghalaini, 1986:221-222). In other words, adjectives in Arabic are always post-modifiers.[18]

Let us consider one representative example of adjectival dissonance caused by faulty translation.

> [Original]
>
> US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice defended the unlimited detention of <u>suspected terrorists</u> saying, in an interview that it benefited the United States and the entire world.
>
> [Translation]
>
> دافعت وزيرة الخارجية الأميركية كوندوليسا رايس عن الاحتجاز غير المحدود للإرهابيين المشتبه فيهم قائلةً في مقابلة أجريت معها بأن ذلك كان ذا منفعة للولايات المتحدة والعالم أجمع.
>
> [Back translation]
>
> The American Foreign Minister Condoleezza Rice defended the unlimited detention of the *terrorists suspected of them* saying in an interview held with her that that was of benefit to the United States and the entire world.

In the English construction *suspected terrorists*, the adjective (suspected) qualifies and delimits the noun (terrorists). In other words, the *terrorists* are not yet *terrorists*. In contrast, the adjective in the Arabic noun + adjective construction (obligatory syntactic transposition) describes and does not qualify or delimit. Nonetheless, the phrase *suspected terrorists* is almost invariably translated into Arabic as "terrorists suspected *of* them" (obligatory transposition and anaphoric pronoun"), despite the fact that the Arabic post-modifier (suspected *of* them) is a descriptive permanent attribute, in this case producing an oxymoron. How can they be terrorists and at the same time be suspected of being terrorists? This is how the noun + adjective construction works in Arabic to create a semantic frame, and the dissonance-free rendition of (suspected terrorists) in Arabic is a phrase meaning (persons suspected of being terrorists).

TRUTH IN NEWS TRANSLATION

Generally, journalism is often seen as the pursuit of truth. However, as Windschuttle (1997) explores, this view is not widely held, and the belief that journalism can report the world truthfully and objectively is considered by various scholars not only wrong but naïve. To a large extent, this is an indirect admission of the numerous constraints imposed on the process of news

reporting. Arguing against this view, Windschuttle contends that "the claim that journalism is a pursuit of truth and an attempt to report what really happens is not refuted by the fact that many journalists often fail to achieve these goals. It is obvious that there are good and bad journalists just as there are good and bad scientists, doctors and builders. One of the most common fallacies made by contemporary media criticism is to draw from the premise that *some* reporting is misleading and inadequate, the conclusion that *all* reporting is misleading and inadequate, or even more fallaciously, that news reporting is *inherently* misleading and inadequate" (Windschuttle, 1997:5) [emphasis in original].

By the same token, the famous Italian proverb "traduttori, tradittori" (translators, traitors) is essentially an admission of the limitation of translation in conveying the truth of the original message. In his book *About Translation*, Peter Newmark (1991) decrees that translation "is concerned with moral and factual truth. This truth can be effectively rendered if it is grasped by the reader, and that is the purpose and the end of translation" (Newmark, 1991:1). However, this is not any easy goal to achieve. As Jason David BeDuhn (2003) contends, accurate, unbiased translations are based on three major factors: linguistic content, literary context and cultural environment. "The very same three things are consulted to assess a translation once it is done" (xvi).

Finally, neither journalism nor translation is an exact science. Both belong to human behaviour, and human behaviour is the least exact. Human behaviour is complex, adaptive, unpredictable and individual. However, human behaviour can be organized, rationalized and controlled. This will vary from individual to individual and from situation to another. No two individuals are the same. Different individuals acquire languages differently, and languages are dynamic and constantly changing in response to the changing environment. Moreover, apart from their inherent structural and developmental differences, in interlingual interaction, languages converge and diverge on a continuum of proximity. However, pursuit of truth in translation is predicated on the notion that translation is a rational, objective-driven, result-focused process that yields a product meeting a set of specifications, tacit or expressed, and not a haphazard activity (Darwish, 2003), and mechanisms must be found to ensure the process remains under control.

As Wolfgang Iser (2000) maintains, "each interpretation transposes something into something else" (5). Interpretation is primarily a form of translatability, Iser confirms, and as such, interpretation is bound to be different in three situations: (1) when different types of texts are transposed into other types, (2) when cultures or cultural levels are translated into terms that allow for an exchange between what is foreign and what is familiar, and (3) "when incommensurabilities, such as God, the world, and human kind—which are neither textual nor scripted—are translated into language for the purpose of grasping and subsequently comprehending them" (6).

Furthermore, translators and or translation-journalists work under the same conditions, influences and constraints, and their work is essentially an act of

interpretation, which is an act of translatability, to adopt Iser's view. In news translation in particular, the interplay of all of these factors and variables is more pronounced, intense, immediate and complex.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Straddling between tradition and modernization, Aljazeera has set out to be something different. With a clear agenda to lead the Arab world into the twenty-first century and a dream of western-style democracy, it has for the main part managed to strike a balance between two opposite poles. However, its overnight rise to fame in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and US-led war on the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that followed, has forced other countries in the Middle East to set up their own copycats— a case in point is the launch of the Dubai-based Al-Arabiya in March 2003. This has placed a great deal of demand on these Arabic satellite television stations to vie for influence as international Arab media players and as presumed regional democratization and normalization agents in the Arab world. Consequently, these television stations have experienced a marked increase in news and current affairs programs that rely on juxtaposing different and contrastive views of East and West. These networks have been quickly pressed into service to provide live world-class news and current affairs programs, and have been undergoing a process of refinement, adjustment and sometimes spells of atavism.

While there are similarities between Aljazeera and Al-Arabiya in terms of news production and presentation, there are also stark differences in the way they frame the news. For example, in their recent coverage of Saddam Hussein's trial, Aljazeera has referred to Saddam as "the former Iraqi president", while Al-Arabiya as "the deposed Iraqi president", despite the fact that both channels have used the same news feeds provided by the international news agencies and despite their claim to objective and unbiased reporting. There are also serious discrepancies within the same television channel across news stories, indicating internal inconsistency of editorial policies and that the concept of framing and translation-induced framing is not fully understood, discussed or addressed. For the Arabic news media, the definition of truth seems to be a viscous one depending on the duty editor. Ironically, Al-Arabiya's slogan is: "Al-Arabiya keeps you closer to the truth".

Nonetheless, in their over-reliance on translations of news from international providers, these television networks are contributing to the reframing of news events and creating information and cultural misfits, often unintended by the original sources and sometimes unwelcome by the intended viewers. Over-reliance on translation as the main source of information is certainly a major contributor to the creation of target language news frames. 🖎

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NOTES

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[1] Quoted in McFarlane, J. (1953). *Modes of Translation*. The Durham University Journal. Vol XLV, No 3. June 1053. UK.

[2] Quotation from Globalization: A Very Short Introduction by Manfred B. Steger (2003:2).

[3] From the title of a poem by Marianne Moore (1887 - 1972).

[4] Source: http://www.fas.org/irp/fbis/riddel.html.

[5] Source: http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0510/19/lol.02.html. Accessed February 16, 2006.

[6] Source:http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/12/15/1071336846380.html?from=storyrhs. Accessed February 16, 2006.

[7] Source: http://www.etan.org/news/2001a/10mcnr.htm. Accessed February 16, 2006.

[8] The conventional Arabic translation of "Crusade war" is "harb salibiyyah" (حـرب صليبيــة), which literally translates into English as: "cross- + (*attributive article meaning*) pertaining war".

[9] In reference to Arabic language broadcasting as opposed to Arab owned stations broadcasting in other languages.

[10] Around 70 million viewers according to Aljazeera's own estimates (Faisal Al-Qasim).

[11] Source: al-Hayat online: http://www.daralhayat.com/arab_news/levant_news/01-2006/Item-20060131-22115bd6-c0a8-10ed-0013-5f0aeba0db69/story.html

[12] Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/arabic/news/newsid_2985000/2985222.stm

[13] Source: ash-sharq al-awsat. http://www.asharqalawsat.com/sections.asp?section=4&issue=9169

[14] Source: http://www.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/12/05/robertson/

[15] Source: http://www.guardian.co.uk/Iraq/Story/0,2763,950307,00.html

[16] Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4684238.stm

[17] Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3317429.stm

[18] Other forms such as the "literal genitive" (or inverted adjective constructions) also exist in Arabic but function differently.

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