Manipulation and partiality in Italian translations of foreign news about Italy: three case studies

This paper analyses the Italian translations of three articles on Italian politics published in 2015 in the New York Times and the Financial Times. It looks at the discursive re-localization of these three translations when they were circulated in the context of Italy’s politics and media. As argued by Schäffner and Bassnett (2010: 2), “Media reports about political events are always forms of recontextualisation, and any recontextualisation involves transformations. Recontextualisation and transformation are particularly complex where translation is involved.” The three translations analysed in this paper reveal a double act of recontextualization: British and American media discuss the Italian economy or politics following a certain articulation of national images which often derives from a pre-existing, standard representation of Italy, or “frame”, which is replicated through news translation (Valdeón 2016); then, when these texts became known in Italy through their translation, the Italian news items they discussed was heavily contested within Italy itself. This shift in discourse (re-) production is often attributed to the perceived manipulation of foreign texts about Italy for political purposes, and translated news has become an area of conflict between different ideological interests. The three case studies discussed in this paper are evidence that translation is used as an instrument of political legitimization (or delegitimization). If we view translation in a political context, then translation may also imply manipulation and suppression (sometimes even as an effect of bad translation) and may therefore become, in and of itself, a deeply political act.