

Migrant Crisis in European Multilingual Media: Identity Construction across Languages

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Abstract:

International news articles published in various languages are usually tailored by the editors for their target readers in the corresponding language. On the one hand, the transformations made to the textual structure of news are intended to offer better accessibility to the information and make it more relevant to the readers in the target culture. On the other hand, the domestication of news provides compatibility with social attitudes, cultural background and shared knowledge of language users. Many such adjustments are made to the structures related to national and cultural identities and their construction. This paper will consider rhetorical and linguistic devices of discursive identity construction in the media coverage of events related to the EU migration crisis in four European languages (English, French, German and Spanish), as well as analyze their potential role in framing public opinion towards the migrant crisis.

Keywords: identity construction, migration, discourse, translation, multilingual media, global news

1. Introduction

The migrant crisis has been in the spotlight of the European press throughout the last three years. International news have highlighted the events in various languages as governments of many European countries faced challenges and looked for ways to address them. Because news media play an important role in the formation and reflection of public opinion, this research will be an attempt to analyze how issues arising out of the migrant crisis tend to be disseminated into different European languages within one selected news media. This study will focus on the Internet version of *Euronews*. It will consider identity-related information appearing in English, German, Spanish and French versions of news articles related to the European migration crisis, as well as the linguistic devices of discursive identity construction referring to national, cultural, religious and ethnic identities.

The paper is based on the assumption that the version of the news in every language is adjusted for the perception of the target audience in terms of the journalistic tradition and cultural and historical background of the reader, as well as its relevance to them. Such adjustments are permitted by journalistic ethics as long as the information provided is true and does not contradict journalistic standards. Therefore, journalists and translators are usually given the freedom by the editors to decide on such adjustments themselves and to tailor the text to the best of their writing skills and translation knowledge (Bielsa and Bassnet 2009:15). Bielsa and Bassnet (2009) also mention alterations of text and information as strategies of news production, referring to omission, explication and synthesis as “text manipulations” in the sense of handling the text. Valdeón (2014) defines omissions, additions and permutations as three principle strategies of international news production. Bielsa and Bassnet (2009) specify in this process the following textual interventions required from the translator: change

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of title and lead, elimination of unnecessary information, addition of important background information, change in the order of paragraphs, and summarizing information. Schäffner (1997) refers to the transfer of communicative and discursive action from its initial context into another in media discourse as “recontextualization” and defines the following strategies: selection of information (omissions, additions); restructuring and rearrangement of information; transformation of genre (e.g. interview into report on interview); and incorporation of (selected) information in a new text, including syntactic (and stylistic) adaptation, determined by purpose, practices and policies, and ideologies. It was noticed in the examined research material that different language versions of news tended to omit, generalize or specify identity-related information, which might have been potentially significant for public opinion and attitude towards the migration crisis and the corresponding state policies.

Euronews' homepage looks similar across languages and visually makes the impression that the same content exists in all versions. However, such versions are not meant to be traditional translations of an original article because their content varies. In the process of global news production, the writers may work with various sources in different languages at the same time. This information is spread quickly within a multilingual editorial team and processed into news texts in the target languages.

The objective of this paper is to trace the tendencies for adjustment of information related to the migrant crisis in Europe in the case of *Euronews*, and to describe their potential relation to the construction and maintenance of European and national identities, as well as the formation of public attitudes towards migrants. The findings suggested in the conclusion rely mainly on the approaches of critical discourse analysis and translation studies and are generally the following:

1. The information adjustment identified contains omissions, additions and alteration of information (for example, generalization). In some cases, omissions and generalizations are made due to the low relevancy of detailed information for the reader; in others, they may relate to patterns of information that might be potentially sensitive in the perception of the target audience.
2. Omissions of potentially sensitive information indicate the relation between information adjustment and discursive identity construction (in particular, identity perpetuation [Wodak *et al.* 2005]).
3. Although the style of the corpus is impartial and all unverified facts are referred to as such through corresponding words, the analyzed articles contain elements known in critical discourse analysis as “persuasive content features,” which may potentially be perceived as tools that facilitate the formation of opinions and attitudes, including those towards migrants.

I expect to encourage further research into this issue in order to consider it from different interdisciplinary perspectives and thus to contribute to the existing discussions on sustainable journalism.

By the mixed method of random and purposive sampling, ten *Euronews* articles covering the issue of the New Year's 2016 assaults in the German city of Cologne were selected. Most of the articles were published in January 2016, and the rest appeared between January 2016 and January 2017. All the analyzed articles are brief columns of similar length, mostly under 300 words. The corpus will be analyzed in four language versions – English (total of 1,607 words), German (total of 2,793 words), French (total of 2,137 words) and Spanish (total of 1,976 words) – and a comparative analysis of lexical components and structure of information carried out. The methodology used for this analysis combines the approaches of translation studies and critical discourse analysis. Therefore, we will compare

the patterns referring to the same information in different language versions and calculate occurrences of identity-specific information related to countries of origin and social status. Taking into account that the production and translation of multilingual news imply omissions, additions and alteration on lexical, structural and contextual levels, this deductive study will trace the potential role of such discrepancies in the construction of identities and public opinion in different language versions of the corpus.

This paper highlights a part of our PhD research on identity-related information in multilingual media (descriptive case-study of *Euronews*) in which the corpus includes random articles on various topics, including migration, published every first week of every month during the period of over one year. Due to systematic observation of the larger corpus, it was detected that the coverage of the New Year's 2016 assaults in Cologne in the various language versions showed a different focus in terms of identity construction, which in our view could be potentially significant. To verify these assumptions made on the basis of five articles from the corpus of the PhD research, we randomly selected five more articles that appeared first as a result of an automatic search on the English version of the *Euronews* website.

The examples for this paper are put in chronological order. The criteria for selecting the excerpts in this comparative analysis are the following: the compared excerpts either relate to the same piece of information and are structurally positioned in the same part of the article (headline, beginning, middle, conclusion), or may clearly be identified as a translation from the source language into the target language. The criteria for comparative analysis itself are focused on identity-related information and its structure.

We assume that all the texts selected for the corpus are “trans-edited” from source texts into target texts. One target text may be re-written from multiple sources and languages, whereby some of them are identified (direct speech, author's name specified or reference to any other source) and some not. Comparative analysis of multiple language versions helps us to identify the source text elements, on the one hand, and to detect the applied strategies even if the source text is unknown or unclear, on the other hand.

2. Adjusting media texts to the target audience: Perspective of discourse and translation studies

Almgren (2017:202) writes that “since media coverage affects the public's understanding of immigration, it matters how words and images are used and how information is left out of media narratives.” Mass media, including the press, radio and television, form a part of global communication as the encoders, with the decoders being the addressees or target audience. According to Charaudeau (2002), relevancy is one of the principles that define a socio-communicative situation, which implies that in order to understand each other, both the addressee and the speaker have to share the same view of the world and of themselves. In this understanding, the news text producer and the target audience must share the same identity to some extent as well. Yet this process becomes more complicated in the case of multilingual news. This explains the fact that changes made to texts in global news production are mostly related to identity. Schäffner (1997) mentions that global information is domesticated in the target cultures as “shared knowledge of an event” and always implies background knowledge specific to each culture. The tasks of selection, translation and adaptation entitle a newsmaker to perform a certain cultural mediation, “consciously creating a national cultural identity in relation to other national identities” (Clausen 2003:105). In a comparative study of English and Spanish news versions of BBC-World, Valdeón (2005:115) refers to Katan, mentioning that “translations are commissioned according to whether they fit into the target's culture (distorted, generalized or deleted) perception of the source culture,” which would strengthen the ethnocentric perception as translation would originate in the target culture.

As mentioned by Snell-Hornby (2000:12), language is “one of the most potent means of expression of cultural identity, along with non-verbal conventions, norms and rules of conduct to which numbers of a group are encouraged to conform.” Discursive strategies of identity construction are expressed through language. Wodak *et al.* (2005) define the following macro-strategies as having identity-constructing functions: construction, perpetuation (justification), transformation and dismantling (deconstruction).

Wodak *et al.*'s micro-strategies overlap with the stakes (French *enjeu*) of discursive strategies described by Charaudeau (2002:301–318): legitimation, credibility and captation, in which the stake of legitimation is used to reinforce the position of the speaking subject, the stake of credibility is used to confirm the truth of the content by manifesting the sincerity, and the stake of captation means ensuring that the addressee perceives or shares the ideas of the speaker. van Dijk's (1995) discursive strategies “employed to manipulate the prevailing models of ethnic events” also share similarities with Wodak *et al.*'s micro-strategies of discursive identity construction and Charaudeau's stakes of discursive strategies. In particular, strategies such as polarization between Us and Them focus on the problems caused by Them – negative socioeconomic consequences of immigration, preferential quotes from selected sources and positive self-representation. (van Dijk 1995:27–45).

For the examples taken from the selected corpus, we will consider how identity-related information is represented in different European languages in terms of discursive identity construction and political rhetoric.

3. Critics of the “open door policy” and first weeks after Cologne assaults

By the end of 2015, the news about the asylum seekers in Europe was marked by the emphasis on the existing crisis and reports of criticism towards Angela Merkel's “open door policy.” German articles tended to be careful in writing about the fall of the chancellor's popularity, either avoiding mentioning it or writing about shifts in popularity using words with positive meanings. The example below contains extracts from an article about the increasing number of refugees arriving in Germany, given in the corresponding language versions:

(1)

ENG: Angela Merkel has made a point of having her photo taken with refugees and early on in the crisis made it clear they would be welcome in Germany, getting ahead of the rest of the EU on the question. Now **some Germans fear she may have got ahead of herself.**

GER: *Beobachter sehen das Ansehen Deutschlands im Ausland durch Merckels Forderung nach offenen Herzen für syrische Flüchtlinge aufgewertet. Umfragen unter Bundesbürgern liegt die Kanzlerin inzwischen aber nur noch auf Platz vier der Beliebtheitskala.*

FR: *La chancelière Angela Merkel, qui a déclaré récemment que l'asile serait accordé à ceux qui fuient la guerre en Syrie, a vu sa côte de popularité tomber à un plus bas depuis quatre ans.*

SPA: *La canciller alemana Angela Merkel ha sufrido repetidos ataques por su actitud favorable a una ordenada acogida a los refugiados en una situación de emergencia.*²

The English version presents the information with neutrality and distantiation (“some Germans fear”) using metaphorical phraseology for euphemization (“may have got ahead of herself”). The French and Spanish versions directly refer to the criticism of Merkel's policy

² <http://www.euronews.com/2015/10/05/german-media-demands-the-real-numbers-for-the-refugee-influx> (accessed 25 July 2017).

towards refugees: the French version mentions that the German chancellor's popularity was at its lowest point in the last four years. The German version uses positive representation with the expression "*sehen das Ansehen Deutschlands im Ausland aufgewertet*" ("consider Germany's positive image abroad as overestimated"), and mentions that Merkel is only "*auf Platz vier der Beliebtheitskala*" (at fourth place on the scale of favorites). This may be viewed as adjustment with the function of identity perpetuation (Wodak *et al.* 2005).

The Cologne assaults on New Year's Eve 2015 speeded the process of changes to German legislation on migrants and refugees, which followed about a month after January 1. The first news about the attack started to appear on the *Euronews* homepage some days after the event with the following headlines:

(2)

ENG: VICTIMS SPEAK OUT AFTER NIGHTMARE NEW YEAR IN COLOGNE

GER: *DEMONSTRATION GEGEN ÜBERGRIFFE VON KÖLN - MERKEL FORDERT "HARTE ANTWORT DES RECHTSSTAATS"*

FR: *L'ALLEMAGNE SCANDALISÉE PAR L'AGRESSION SEXUELLE DE DIZAINES DE FEMMES LORS DE LA NUIT DU NOUVEL AN*

SPA: *ALEMANIA: PROTESTAS EN COLONIA POR LAS AGRESIONES SEXUALES MASIVAS DE LA PASADA NOCHEVIEJA*³

The German version above emphasizes Merkel's commitment to decisive action. The major focus is on sexual assaults in all versions of this article. The English version lists this fact at the end of the sentence, but it is followed by first-hand speeches of the witnesses who were harassed; therefore, it does not change the focus of the news. The details of the description of the supposed attackers and their origin vary only slightly in the four language versions. The English version refer to "a crowd of about 1000 young men, many of them drunk"⁴ and mention that "**police say the assailants were of north African or Arabic appearance, a fact borne out by witnesses**". The same allegation about the appearance is mentioned in the other three versions of the article. The English and French versions of the news state that most of the attackers were under the influence of alcohol (Fr. "*Plusieurs centaines de personnes, fortement alcoolisées*"). This fact does not appear in any of the articles we analyze, except once again in the English and French versions of an article published the same day.⁵

Yet all the versions of the news text make reference to the appearance and probable ethnicity or national origin of the men. Their description by the police as having "North African or Arabic appearance" suggests certain potential prejudice. No references to their identity were made, for example, in terms of the language they used or any other means of communication. No documents were mentioned which could have proved their national origin or legal and social status. All of the descriptions were reduced to "North African or Arabic appearance" with unclear definitions of what such "appearance" might be. The French version avoided mentioning the description "Arabic" referring to ethnic origin, but mentioned "North African" in terms of geographic origin. The conjunction "or" in "North African or Arabic" in the German and English versions is even more confusing as it is unclear if they include, supplement or exclude each other. The issue of the individuals' origin and identity being determined by their appearance was emphasized over the fact that they were under the

³ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/05/victims-speak-out-after-nightmare-new-year-in-cologne> (accessed 25 July 2017).

⁴ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/05/victims-speak-out-after-nightmare-new-year-in-cologne> (accessed 25 July 2017).

⁵ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/05/new-year-s-eve-attacks-on-women-in-cologne-stun-germany> (accessed 25 July 2017).

influence of alcohol. No names of the witnesses or police representatives who described the appearance of the aggressors were given. On the one hand, witnesses' testimonies are intended to increase the credibility of the text (Charaudeau 2014:286–297), but on the other hand, testimonies without names and personal references create the danger of fallacy through *argumentum verecundian* (misplaced reference to an unqualified authority) (Reisigl & Wodak 2001).

The same day, an article in all language versions mentions that there is no evidence that all the men were refugees:

(3)

ENG: “There are no indications that there are people involved here who have received accommodation here **in Cologne as refugees**,” said Henriette Reker.

GER: “*Es gibt keinen Hinweis, dass es sich hier um Menschen handelt, die hier in Köln Unterkunft als Flüchtlinge bezogen haben.*”

FR: “*Il n'existe pas d'indication, a dit Henriette Reker, que des gens impliqués dans ces agressions aient reçu un hébergement comme réfugiés ici à Cologne.*”

SPA: *La alcaldesa de Colonia, Henriette Reker, afirma que “nada indica que las personas que perpetraron las agresiones estén en los centros de acogida”.*⁶

In discourse analysis, this type of expression (“There are no indications that there are people... who have received accommodation... **as refugees**”) may be regarded as a tool of suggestion, compared to “yes-but” figure (Wodak *et al.* 2005). Such wording suggests that although there is no evidence that these people were refugees, such assumptions do exist. Yet the Cologne mayor's stance seems to be selective for her city only, as the statement refers to the refugees registered in Cologne only and not throughout the country. This detail was lost in the Spanish translation of the quotation.

Some days after the incident, the words “attacks” and “migrant” appear together in the headline of the English version (“Majority under investigation for cologne sex attacks of 'migrant origin’”) ⁷. The German and French headlines refer to “foreigners” (*Ausländer* in German and *étrangers* in French). The Spanish headline does not contain any such reference. The quotation marks in the English version have the function of distantiating.

The first part of another article contains information about people from North Africa and Arab countries in the German version (“*Nordafrikaner als auch Menschen aus dem arabischen Raum*”).⁸ All versions emphasize the occurrence of sexual assaults. The French version mentions that some of the suspects were identified without any further comments. The Spanish version refers to the suspects as “persons of foreign origin” (“*personas de origen extranjero*”). Some news also mentions the fact that the assaults caused demonstrations of anti-Islam activists⁹ (while the fact that the men were drunk, as well as the assaults themselves, are inconsistent with Islam as religion). In the concluding paragraph of another article, the English version mentions the migrant policy and the French version notes that most of the suspects were asylum seekers (“*Parmi eux figurent une majorité de demandeurs*

⁶ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/05/victims-speak-out-after-nightmare-new-year-in-cologne> (accessed 25 July 2017).

⁷ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/11/majority-under-investigation-for-cologne-sex-attacks-of-migrant-origin> (accessed 25 July 2017).

⁸ <https://de.euronews.com/2016/01/11/sondersitzung-zu-silvesternacht-nrw-innenminister-benennt-gravierende-fehler> (accessed 11 March 2020).

⁹ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/11/cologne-sees-reprisal-attacks-after-new-years-eve-assaults> (accessed 25 July 2017).

d'asile”).¹⁰ There are also some small discrepancies in the stated number of complaints, probably caused by time constraints and different data from source texts.

A quote from a participant of an anti-immigrant demonstration serves as a tool of polarization and as a perceived threat (polarization of then vs. now). “*Ich hab nicht mehr das Gefühl, dass das mein Deutschland ist*”¹¹ is translated from the German into the other languages without evident changes (“To me, this doesn’t feel like my Germany”). The French writers translated “my Germany” as “Germany that I know” (“*J’ai l’impression que ce n’est plus l’Allemagne que je connais*”). Quotes from witnesses and those who took part in the violent incident belong to the strategy of legitimation, providing credibility for the text, in which the media is only an observer. Some quotes of the demonstrators suggest direct connection between refugees and the assaults (the word “*RAPEUGEE*” as blend of words *rape* and *refugee* in “*Rapeugees not welcome*” quoted in the English version¹²).

The decision of Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel to change the legislation is not attributed to the Cologne events in the same phrase. However, it is included in the same article in which the assaults are mentioned. The French version mentions that changes to the law were adopted as a response to the criticism of Merkel (which is generally avoided in German versions and in other articles of the corpus as well). The collocation “foreign criminals” generalized in English and “*kriminell gewordene Asylbewerber*” in German is expressed in the French version as “*demandeurs d’asile condamnés par la justice.*” The Spanish version does not contain such reference to the asylum seekers in the phrase.

(4)

ENG: German Chancellor Angela Merkel has hardened her stance. She is promising tighter controls, expulsion for **foreign criminals** and a reduction in migrant numbers over the longer term in Germany.

GER: *Die deutsche Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel hatte zuletzt schärfere Gesetze verlangt, unter anderem zur Bestrafung kriminell gewordener Asylbewerber.*

FR: *...Face aux critiques, la chancelière allemande s’est prononcée pour un net un durcissement des règles d’expulsion des demandeurs d’asile condamnés par la justice.*

SPA: *Angela Merkel ha defendido reformas para retirar el derecho de asilo y facilitar la expulsión de quienes sean condenados incluso a penas inferiores a dos años.*¹³

According to the data published by Bloomberg on January 16, 2015, “Germany’s welcome for asylum seekers has ebbed after the Cologne attacks, following which scores of women filed criminal complaints for sexual assault”. These events also changed the attitude of Germans towards asylum seekers: “Following the Cologne assaults, 60 percent of poll respondents said that Germany can no longer shoulder the flood of refugees, up from 46 percent in December. Thirty-seven percent said the opposite, compared with 51 percent last month.”¹⁴ Bloomberg also mentions that, as of January 2016, Merkel’s popularity was at its lowest point since the Greek crisis in October 2011.

¹⁰ <https://fr.euronews.com/2016/01/09/les-femmes-se-rassemblent-a-cologne-pour-condamner-les-agressions-du-nouvel-an> (accessed 11 March 2020).

¹¹ <https://de.euronews.com/2016/01/10/koelner-polizei-loest-pegida-demonstration-auf> (accessed 11 March 2020).

¹² <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/10/cologne-police-break-up-anti-immigration-march> (accessed 25 July 2017).

¹³ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/10/cologne-police-break-up-anti-immigration-march> (accessed 25 July 2017).

¹⁴ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-01-15/merkel-s-popularity-drops-to-four-year-low-after-cologne-attacks> (accessed 11 May 2017).

In the following example, the English and French versions focus the criticism on Merkel's policy, which accelerated changes to the legislation: "Critics are blaming Chancellor Angela Merkel for letting in too many migrants" and "*le scandale fragilise la chancelière Angela Merkel.*" The German version makes a reference to the police, who allegedly had not provided the data on the origin of the suspects and does not include any criticism towards the Chancellor. Unlike the English, French and Spanish versions, the German version lists the nationalities of the suspects: "*neun Algerier, acht Marokkaner, fünf Iraner, vier Syrer, ein Iraker, ein Serbe, ein Amerikaner und drei Deutsche*" ("nine Algerians, eight Moroccans, five Iranians, four Syrians, one Iraqi, one Serb, one American and three Germans") – the list is organized in the descending order of the number of suspects; however, the "three Germans" are put in the end of the list. Notably in the list "one Iraqi, one Serb, one American," the designation of Middle East origin (potential migrant) comes first:

(5)

ENG: Some of the suspects have been identified by officials as asylum seekers. **Critics are blaming Chancellor Angela Merkel for letting in too many migrants. She said changes may be needed....** For many people, the beefed-up police presence around Cologne is not enough to feel safe following the mass assaults. Some 120 women were mugged, threatened and assaulted by roughly a thousand young men.

GER: *Die Polizei soll laut Medienberichten zunächst verschwiegen haben, dass es sich bei etlichen an Silvester kontrollierten Männern um Asylbewerber handelte. Außerdem hatte ein Bundespolizist in einem Bericht einen völligen Kontrollverlust der Sicherheitskräfte vor Ort geschildert. Die deutsche Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel schloss Konsequenzen für die deutsche Gesetzgebung nicht aus.... Das Bundesinnenministerium hat bestätigt, dass unter den Verdächtigen viele Asylbewerber sind. Die Bundespolizei habe 32 mutmaßliche Täter identifiziert, davon 22 Asylbewerber. Unter den 32 seien neun Algerier, acht Marokkaner, fünf Iraner, vier Syrer, ein Iraker, ein Serbe, ein Amerikaner und drei Deutsche.*

FR: *Les suspects interpellés sont en majorité des demandeurs d'asile et le scandale fragilise la chancelière Angela Merkel qui songe maintenant à durcir les procédures d'expulsions.... Actuellement, en Allemagne, seule une condamnation d'au moins trois ans de prison permet, sous certaines conditions, d'expulser un demandeur d'asile.*

SPA: *Según el Ministerio del Interior alemán, de los 32 sospechosos de los ataques, 22 son solicitantes de asilo. Ante los hechos, Angela Merkel ha planteado cambios en las reglas de expulsión de los condenados extranjeros.... Hasta el momento se han recibido 200 denuncias. Aproximadamente tres cuartos son por agresiones sexuales.*¹⁵

The tendency to avoid mentioning criticism towards Merkel's policy is also noticed in the example below. The English, French and Spanish versions claim that over 60% of German respondents are not satisfied with the job Merkel is doing, whereas the German version uses a generalization referring to 60% of pessimists, without mentioning the chancellor. The French version provided some more of the survey data, indicating that 56% of the respondents estimate that her policy is "bad" and that 48% were afraid of refugees:

(6)

ENG: **Public support for German Chancellor Angela Merkel has dropped** in the wake of the Cologne sex attacks that were blamed on migrants. **A majority of**

¹⁵ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/09/cologne-police-chief-retires-after-new-year-s-eve-mass-assaults> (accessed 25 July 2017).

Germans surveyed now think Merkel is doing a poor job dealing with the refugee crisis. More than a million migrants entered Germany last year, and Merkel has resisted pressures from her fellow conservatives to say: “enough”.

GER: *Die Vorfälle der Silvesternacht in Köln und anderen Städten verändern die Stimmung in Deutschland zur Flüchtlingsfrage. Zum ersten Mal überwiegen laut einer Umfrage des öffentlich-rechtlichen Senders ZDF nun die Pessimisten. 60 Prozent der Befragten sind der Meinung, dass Deutschland Zahl der Flüchtlinge aus Krisengebieten nicht bewältigen kann. Im Dezember waren es noch 46 Prozent.*

FR: *Après les violences de la Saint-Sylvestre à Cologne, les premières répercussions pour Angela Merkel. La popularité de la chancelière allemande commence à pâtir de la crise des réfugiés. Sa politique d’ouverture est jugée “mauvaise” par 56% des Allemands selon un sondage de la chaîne ZDF, et seuls 39% qualifient son travail de “bon”. Selon un autre sondage, 48% des personnes interrogées affirment avoir peur des réfugiés.*

SPA: *Desde la oleada de abusos sexuales registrada en Nochevieja en Colonia, las críticas y la presión sobre la canciller alemana aumentan. Según un reciente sondeo, un 56% de los encuestados se dice insatisfecho con la manera en la que Merkel ha gestionado la crisis de los refugiados.¹⁶*

The above examples show that although different language versions may use either specific or generalized descriptions to refer to the alleged origin of the attackers, it is still the central issue in most of the articles. This may be used as an argument for potential polarization between “us” and “them” (van Dijk 1995). It was also observed that if information related to inside culture (the news in German) contains potentially sensitive patterns, it is more likely to be avoided or generalized than in the languages of outside cultures, as it was the case in the mentioned articles.

4. Changes to the migrant legislation and flashbacks of Cologne attacks

On February 3, 2016, the German government agreed on a set of stricter asylum measures known as “Asylum Package II.” On March 2, 2016, these changes were passed by a great majority, but with the harsh criticism of the German socialists who called this package “anti-democratic” (mentioned on the official website¹⁷).

Half a year after the attacks, nine people were accused of robbery, although hundreds of women reported sexual assaults. No one was convicted. Throughout all the news coverage, there was a consistent emphasis on the sexual nature of the crimes and the violation of women’s rights. Yet the fact that these nine men were accused of robbery and not of sexual harassment is not evident from the English, German and French articles (this fact was mentioned in the Ukrainian version and is implied in the Spanish text):

(7)

ENG: The large number of accusations of sexual assault and robbery during the end-of-year festivities caused uproar in Germany, prompting the government to fast-track a reform of its sexual assault legislation. Once done, its hoped perpetrators will be easier to convict.

¹⁶ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/01/15/refugees-welcome-spirit-wanes-after-cologne-attacks> (accessed 25 July 2017).

¹⁷ <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/refugee-law/germany.php> (accessed 26 July 2017); see also <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2016/03/02/asy1-m02.html> (accessed 26 July 2017).

GER: *Nach der Silvesternacht waren in Köln fast 1200 Anzeigen eingegangen, davon fast 500 wegen mutmaßlicher Sexualstraftaten. Bislang wurden in Zusammenhang mit den Kölner Vorfällen **neun Männer verurteilt.***

FR: *Jusqu' à présent, **neuf hommes ont été condamnés** pour les incidents de la nuit du Réveillon, pour vols. En février, le chef de la police locale avait reconnu que la plupart des auteurs pourraient ne jamais être retrouvés.*

SPA: *A día de hoy, **no hay ninguna condena efectiva.** El pasado mes de febrero, el encargado de la investigación ya reconoció que la mayor parte de los agresores jamás podrían ser llevados antes la justicia.*¹⁸

Changes to the legislation on sexual assaults were adopted by the German Parliament in July 2016 and became law in November 2017. These changes state that there will be stricter application of the law if there is a clear “no” from the victim. At the same time, the earlier changes to the migrant law made it easier to expel a person from Germany in the case that any assault is reported.

The English version of same article again refers to “North African or Arabic appearance.” The German version writes that two of the suspects were not registered as asylum seekers. The Spanish version refers to the “Maghreb origin” of the suspects and the French to the “Algerian and Moroccan origin”:

(8)

ENG: Prior to Friday (May 6), **nine convictions had been made for theft, but this is only the second of two cases in which a sexual assault suspect has been identified.** Prosecutors in Cologne received 1,170 criminal complaints relating to the evening of New Year’s Eve, 492 of which were allegations of sexual assault. They were **reportedly carried out by men of North African and Arab appearance** prompting questions over Germany’s ‘open door’ migration policy.

GER: *Verurteilt wurde der Mann schließlich wegen Hehlerei und eines Autoaufbruchs, bei dem er auf frischer Tat ertappt wurde. Das Amtsgericht verhängte sechs Monate Haft auf Bewährung gegen ihn und seinen 23-jährigen Bruder. Weil **die beiden in Deutschland nicht als asylsuchend gemeldet sind, müssen sie nun aber in Abschiebehaft.***

FR: *Pour cette seule nuit au total 1527 plaintes ont été enregistrées, un évènement qui a profondément choqué les allemands. 120 suspects ont été identifiés, la plupart originaires d’Algérie et du Maroc. Certains sont arrivés récemment en Allemagne, d’autres sont présents depuis plusieurs années.*

SPA: *La noche de fin de año, la policía alemana recibió más de 1.500 denuncias por abusos sexuales, algo inaudito hasta la fecha, que desató un sentimiento de indignación en todo el país, porque los supuestos agresores eran **inmigrantes en medio de la crisis de los refugiados.** En los días posteriores fueron identificados 120 sospechosos, la mayoría de **origen magrebí. Algunos acababan de llegar a Alemania y otros vivían allí desde hacía años.***¹⁹

Because public attention on migrant issues was coupled with the Cologne assaults being attributed to asylum seekers, a set of important questions were pushed aside. In particular, how are women in Germany protected from sexual assaults if these crimes are committed by

¹⁸ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/05/06/cologne-attacks-algerian-man-acquitted-of-attempted-sexual-assault> (accessed 25 July 2017).

¹⁹ <http://www.euronews.com/2016/05/06/cologne-attacks-algerian-man-acquitted-of-attempted-sexual-assault> (accessed 25 July 2017).

local people? Are any changes in legislation necessary to protect women and to bring guilty men to justice to protect future victims? Who was responsible for the organization of the attacks? Who managed to bring such a large number of men, many of them drunk, together in one place and have them act together? Did anyone instruct them to do this?

In connection with the Cologne assaults, the German government adopted stricter laws for migrants and refugees. Yet the people who committed the crimes might have been residing (legally or illegally) in the EU without refugee status for years. Throughout the news coverage, the focus of identities was kept on the national and cultural level through the polarization of cultural values, organized construction of the image of a threat from the refugees and the legitimation of the government's decision. There was little focus on the protection of women's rights or issues of gender-based violence.

Little information appeared in the news about the results of the investigation of the incident in the months that followed. Yet a year later, on January 2, 2017, a tweet from the German police caused controversy and criticism as they used the word *Nafri* to refer to a group of people they found suspicious:

(9)

ENG: At issue was the use of the word “**Nafris**” – according to police, an internal term to describe young men from North Africa “who have been attracting attention for years for their readiness to use violence and/or to commit criminal offences.

GER: *Mit “Nafris” bezeichnet die Polizei “Nordafrikaner” oder Männer mit nordafrikanischem Aussehen.*

FR: *Les autorités ont expliqué que tous étaient des “Nafris” – l'équivalent allemand de “Nord-Af”, ce qui a provoqué un tollé sur les réseaux sociaux notamment.*

SPA: *Pero tal vez lo más polémico fuera un tuit de la policía en el que se utiliza el término “nafris” (por norteafricanos) para referirse a las **personas controladas**, lo que ha provocado una avalancha de críticas, al considerar que hubo un trato discriminatorio por razones de origen étnico.²⁰*

The French version provides the French equivalent for German *Nafri*, which is *Nord-Af*, to refer to the ethnic identity. The German version also mentions that the police explained these were men with “North African appearance”, without any objective features of such “appearance” – which is a potential source of bias.

The English version of the same article, dated January 2, 2017, concludes that, although these assaults caused increased criticism towards Angela Merkel's refugee policy, few of the attackers were actually asylum seekers from Syria or Iraq, but came from North African countries (this fact was not emphasized in the French and Spanish versions of the article). Also notable is that in the earlier articles of 2016, the mention of sexual assaults always took precedence over the mention of robbery in the collocations or even stood alone. In the German version of this article, the order is already switched (*zahlreichen Diebstählen und sexuellen Übergriffen*: “numerous robberies and sexual assaults”).

Of the more than 1,000 people who sexually harassed women in Cologne, none were found or brought to justice.²¹ It was established that most of these people were neither asylum seekers nor refugees, but people of “North African descent.” Little was said about their legal status or actual residence. The changes to the migrant legislation did not follow immediately from changes in Merkel's popularity, but a year later, public response did slightly change. As

²⁰ <http://www.euronews.com/2017/01/02/cologne-police-new-year-arrests-of-north-africans-not-racial-profiling> (accessed 25 July 2017).

²¹ <http://www.euronews.com/2017/01/02/cologne-police-new-year-arrests-of-north-africans-not-racial-profiling> (accessed 25 July 2017).

of the end of January 2017, the data indicate that “Nearly 60 percent of Germans, according to recent polls, now feel their country can cope with the refugees. That may be in part because refugee numbers have fallen from 890,000 in 2015 to 280,000 last year.”²² The Voice of America (VOA) also quoted Merkel stating that “the initial shock of the refugee impact is starting to wear off.” Yet the recent rise in her popularity did not coincide with the changes on refugee policy, but instead with the Brexit process. According to data from the VOA, “analysts say probably the best explanation for her growing popular support are signs... of increased backing for the European Union amid fears of instability.”

Most texts tend towards synonymic usage of the words “migrants”, “refugees”, and “asylum seekers”. The German and English texts sometimes use such vague descriptions as people of “North African” or “Arabic” origin. The French and Spanish versions, unlike the English and German, seem to avoid mentioning the names of countries of descent (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia); however, they use the description “Magrebi.” Most of the Spanish versions of the analyzed articles are similar to the French versions in content, structure and language. It is likely that most of the Spanish language versions are trans-edited from the French ones. Yet the Spanish versions were softer in their description of the origins of the men and seemed to avoid using nationalities or other identity descriptions whenever possible (e.g., referring to them as *origen extranjero*: “foreign origin”) or completely omitted the reference to them being asylum seekers. Such exclusion may be explained by the different historical backgrounds of the migration policies in the respective countries. In total, references to North African origin were made eleven times in the German language versions of the articles, nine times in the English, six times in the French and five times in the Spanish ones. References to the countries Morocco, Algeria or Tunisia were made up to two times in English and German, up to three times in French and zero times in Spanish. Unlike other language versions, the Spanish versions contained three references to the region of Maghreb – which, in our opinion, may be viewed as a contextual synonym for North African. All language versions contained up to three references to Arabic origin.

English language articles contain fourteen references to refugees, ten to migrants and four to asylum seekers (total: 28). For the German versions, the rate is eleven references to refugees (*Flüchtlinge*), ten to asylum seekers (nine *Asylbewerber*, one *Asylsuchende*) and one to migrants (*Migranten*) (total: 22). The Spanish versions contain sixteen references to refugees (*refugiados*), five references to migrants (*inmigrante*) and four to asylum seekers (*solicitantes de asilo*) (total: 25). The occurrences for the French versions are nine references to refugees (*réfugiés*), seven to migrants (*migrants*) and ten to asylum seekers (*demandeurs d'asile*) (total: 26). In relation to the total word counts the English language versions have the highest rate of references to the regions of origin. All four languages have a relatively similar rate of references to the attackers’ status (refugee, migrant or asylum seeker): 1.7% for English, 0.8% for German and 1.2% for both Spanish and French.

5. Conclusion

A journalist working in international news production carries out the function of cultural mediator. Writing about the events in one’s own country or on the international scale implies not only that he or she should provide, as best as possible, truthful and unbiased information, but it must also be taken into account that the news makes an impact on public opinion and has the potential to influence national policy. The decision of the journalists and translators to alter the information so that it differs from the source text is only justified if the facts are not distorted. Such changes are often motivated by differences in the cultural and political

²² <http://www.voanews.com/a/the-trump-factor-angela-merkel-s-re-election-prospects-improve/3698428.html> (accessed 27 July 2017).

backgrounds of the target reader. Yet in covering issues in which national and ethnic identities have to be mentioned, maintaining impartiality is more difficult. This implies a potential dilemma for a news writer: Is it possible to mention the facts without creating bias towards origin, ethnicity, religion or other identities?

Although differences have been detected in terms of the frequency of references to identities, not all of them are as essential as initially expected. The language of the analyzed corpus is in all versions correct and unbiased, all unverified facts are referred to as such through qualifying words (“suspect,” “allege,” “suppose”), which shows the high degree of professionalism and awareness of the news writers. At the same time, the analyzed articles contain elements known in critical discourse analysis as “persuasive content features”, which include the direct description of ongoing events, evidence from eyewitnesses and signals of precision (numbers and places) (van Dijk 1988). On the one hand, news articles follow the principle of being neutral and merely describing events; on the other hand, mentioning a sequence of facts may prompt a reader to commit the logical mistake of *post hoc, ergo propter hoc*, confusing the chronological order of events for the casual relationship between them (e.g., anti-Islam demonstrations after the Cologne assaults) (Reisigl and Wodak 2001). The fact that some patterns of information happen to be systematically omitted or generalized, as was the case for the fall of Angela Merkel’s popularity in the German versions of the articles, suggests that the process of news writing includes conscious or unconscious decisions about patterns that might be potentially sensitive in the perception of the target audience. We believe that the detected tendencies confirm that the way the events are covered may construct public attitudes, whereby the structure of information and collocation of words will be more important than individual words and their frequencies. We do not assume that editorials have any specific intentions in terms of attitude construction, yet the well-established traditions of news writing including format and style may contribute to such perceptions.

The principle of letting the reader decide what information means leads to a series of questions: what if media format, as well as changes to the news content and structure made due to cultural and relevance constraints, limit the options for readers’ conclusions? What if, by discursive means and rhetorical strategies, the opinion of the reader and reaction of the target audience may be partially predicted before the news appears in print? Because of the constant domestication of multilingual news, different cultures and languages seem to be captured in their own dimension, measuring all world events from their own perspective. As Nash (2005:31) claims, “the words are used not only to describe the reality, but also to construct it.” Translating and writing news within specific media formats therefore poses additional challenges for translators and multilingual journalists who have to face the ethical question of whether there is a moment at which the means would no longer justify the ends. Current approaches also propose replacing the “ideal of objectivity” with an ideal of subjectivity: Maesele and Raeijmaekers (2017:127) write that “this implies that journalists, and news media organizations more generally, make their positions explicit and abandon their claim to truth in order to generate a paradigm shift” and therefore open the floor to discussion.

In conclusion, we would like to refer to research carried out by Nickerson and Winnifred (2008:796–817), who study attitudes towards asylum seekers in Australia and their relation to layers of identities. Through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, Nickerson and Winnifred (2008:807) discovered that individuals who “strongly identified with their nationalities, and those, who perceived national norms as negative exhibited less favorable responses to asylum seekers,” while individuals who strongly identified themselves as humans were more positive in their attitudes. Based on these findings, the authors concluded that “activation of the human identity can suppress negativity towards asylum seekers associated with national identification” (Nickerson and Winnifred 2008:811). Supposing that

such a conclusion would also be valid for national and cultural identities in Europe, maintaining a balance of references to national and human identities in news writing might be a remedy for preventing the potential construction of prejudice towards migrants and asylum seekers with target readers, and contribute to sustainable journalism worldwide.

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