Translating the cultural Other during Covid:

A comparative study of Italian and UK online news

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Abstract & Keywords

English:

This article presents the results of a multimodal critical discourse analysis comparing UK and Italian online news texts published at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our theoretical framework and methodology draw upon framing theory, journalistic translation research, multimodal discourse analysis and discursive news values analysis (DNVA). Our analysis demonstrates how coverage of the pandemic in leading UK and Italian newsbrands perpetuated Italian and British national and cultural stereotypes through lexis, choice of images and transquotation. By exploring the nexus between multimodal discourse and cultural translation in the framing of international news, our study contributes to closing the gap in multimodal news translation research.

Keywords: news translation, cultural representation, COVID-19, multimodality, news values

1. Introduction[*]

National ideologies and cultural borders have not disappeared with the emergence of globalised societies: on the contrary, social practices such as stereotyping and Othering tend to re-surface in times of crisis. As Joep Leerssen (2007: 25) has suggested, '[t]he revival of national attitudes is not so much a re-appearance of something that had disappeared' but rather 'a new upsurge'. Studies have shown that when Coronavirus struck in Wuhan towards the end of 2019 and the pandemic loomed, the news media tended to frame the evolving international health crisis using 'hyperbolic and exclusionary language designed to generate distinct group boundaries between "us" and "them"' (Martikainen and Sakki 2021: 390). The aim of this paper is to analyse the construction in online news of reciprocal representations across Italian/English linguacultures (Risager 2012) during the first wave of Coronavirus. Because we are both readers and scholars of online newspapers who witnessed the pandemic unfold from two linguacultural perspectives, our attention was drawn to the ways in which cultural representations emerged in a dialogic exchange across the respective national news media through framing practices intrinsic to forms of journalistic and cultural translation.

To explore this exchange, we constructed a comparable corpus of journalistic texts encompassing the UK's reporting on Italy's handling of the Covid emergency during the first national lockdown outside China (Italy locked down on 9 March 2020), and Italian news reporting on the inexorable move towards Britain's lockdown (23 March 2020). Starting from the theoretical premise of media framing (Entman 1993) according to which aspects of a perceived reality are selected, foregrounded, or backgrounded to promote a particular interpretation, we analyse the verbal and visual features of the news texts using a multimodal critical discourse analysis approach (Machin & Mayr 2012; Ledin & Machin 2018). We focus on examples of cultural translation, transquotation, lexis, and the multimodal construction of meaning to address the following questions:

1. How does the interplay of discourse and image contribute to constructing representations of the Other at the beginning of the pandemic?

2. How do 'transquotations' (Filmer 2020; Haapanen and Perrin 2019) contribute to Other representations?

The study contributes to an emerging area of interdisciplinary critical discourse studies, which explores the nexus between multimodal discourse and cultural translation in the framing of international news (Altahmazi 2020; Aragrande 2016; Filmer 2021a, 2021b, 2016a, 2016b; Hernández Guerrero 2022; Riggs 2021, 2020). More specifically, the article contributes to the growing body of research on the role of translation in conveying information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Italy was the first European state to be hit by COVID-19 and the first nation outside of China to impose lockdown. Therefore, the containment strategies and pandemic policies adopted by the Italian government proved a testing ground for the Western world (Cerqueti et al. 2022). Following the British government's initial much criticised laissez faire approach, the UK eventually aligned with Italy's restrictive measures (see section 4.2).

Although the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has ended, the far-ranging repercussions of that period are still being felt in autumn 2023. In this context, it is timely to investigate the responsibility of the media in communicating information on the disease across languages and cultural spaces.

The contribution is organised in six parts. Following the introduction, part two gives an overview of the theoretical approaches that underpin the research. Section three describes the corpus and methodology, while parts four and five present the findings from the English and Italian digital news texts. The contribution closes with preliminary conclusions and remarks.

2. Theoretical approaches

2.1. Theoretical framework - Framing

Our overarching premise is that news producers employ framing practices when reporting on the Other. Framing is viewed here from the perspective of translation studies (Baker 2006: 5) and in particular, the sub-discipline of journalistic translation (Valdeón 2015). The application of framing practices in the production of translation-mediated news has long been recognised (some examples are Filmer 2016b; Liu 2019; Qin and Zhang 2018; Song 2017, 2021; Spiessens and Van Poucke 2016; Valdeón

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2014; Wu 2017). As Roberto Valdeón (2021: 6) points out, 'journalists and translators have the power to shape and reshape the representation of events, and, consequently, to frame them in particular ways'.

Robert Entman (1993) affirms that frame analysis can shed light on the subtle ways that influence is exerted on the human perception of reality during the transfer of information, for example, from a speech, utterance, or news report, to that receptive consciousness. Yves Gambier (2006: 11) observes that '[n]ews frames make certain facts meaningful, provide a context in which to understand issues, shape the inferences made, *reinforce stereotypes*, determine judgments and decisions, draw attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements' (our emphasis). Translation can contribute to the framing process by combining selection and deselection of news events and through the 'adaptation of other elements such as headlines and quotes' (Valdeón 2014: 56). Frames in the news can be examined and identified through '[t]he presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements' (Entman 1993: 52). In the specific case of a health crisis, Seow Ting Lee and Iccha Basnyat (2013: 120) point out that 'media frames play a critical role in shaping the public's understanding of a highly contagious viral disease and attitudinal and behavioural reactions that impact prevention, containment, treatment, and recovery'. Frames are reflected in, or 'carried' by, not only verbal content, but also photographic and audio-visual elements. Photographs are central to the framing process by 'narrowing down the possible interpretations and swaying the viewer/reader towards a particular view' (Breeze 2014: 316). Mona Baker (2006) has also noted that (re)framing is a multi-semiotic process drawing on linguistic and non-linguistic resources such as typography, colour and image, elements that are particularly significant in the examination of digital news texts.

2.2 Translation in the news

In the context of international news, the interpretation of reality is filtered not only through framing strategies inherent in news discourse, but also through translation practices. The concept of translation we adopt aligns with Lucile Davier and Kyle Conway (2019: 1), who view translation in the news 'in the broadest possible sense, from the re-expression of bits of speech or text in a different language to the explanation of how members of a foreign cultural community interpret an object or event'. Such a definition can accommodate multimodal content, intercultural mediation, and cultural representation in multiple modes within the remit of translation in the news.

In terms of cultural translation, that is, explaining one culture to another (see, for instance, Conway 2012; Katan and Taibi 2021; Maitland 2017; Ping 2022), journalists operate as intercultural mediators for their audiences when they mediate information about the cultural and linguistic Other (Beliveau, Hahn and Ibsen 2011; Brownlie 2010; Conway 2012). That said, research has indicated that reporting on other cultures is often characterised by 'negative mediation' (Valdeón 2007; c.f. Filmer 2021b; Riggs 2020). In addition, when 'reformulating, shaping, and domesticating foreign discursive events for their target audience', journalists may propose 'representations of Otherness that potentially foster prejudice' (Filmer 2021a: 2).

In the construction of news stories, quotations 'enhance the reliability, credibility, and objectivity of an article and characterize the person quoted' (Haapanen and Perrin 2019: 17). Research adopting approaches from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has brought to light the ideological implications of reformulating translated political discourse in news contexts (see, for instance, Schäffner 2004, 2008; Caimotto 2020). The journalistic practice of transquotation (Filmer 2020; Haapanen and Perrin 2019 refer to 'translingual quoting') plays a key role in shaping self- and other-representations and is therefore a key focus of our analysis.

2.2.1 Journalistic translation and COVID-19

A growing body of research employing different theoretical and methodological perspectives is emerging on the role of translation in relaying international news during the COVID-19 pandemic. A small but significant number of studies have focused on national identity and intergroup relations in cross-cultural news reportage. For example, Eleonora Fois (2022) employs imagology (Beller and Leerssen 2007) and framing analysis to explore how news translation contributes to the construction of national image in news texts produced for the Italian and English editions of ANSA, the Italian news agency website. Fois reports that the articles translated into English emphasised the 'responsibility frame' for China, thereby disassociating Italy from the virus. Adopting a multimodal discursive approach, Jari Martikainen and Inari Sakki (2021) examine how the Finnish press coverage of the evolution of COVID-19 in Sweden is presented through frames of nationalism and national stereotyping. They identify three multimodal rhetorical strategies: moralising, demonising, and nationalising, which construct discourses of arrogant, immoral, and dangerous Swedes. Narongdej Phanthaphoommee (2023) has looked at the phenomenon of fake news as a product of translation. The researcher examines Thai translations of online international news about the COVID-19 pandemic that have subsequently been proven to be untrue and observes that translation 'is one of the most important factors contributing to the spread of misinformation'.

2.3 Multimodality in journalistic translation research

Visual communication conveys beliefs and values just as much as words and 'plays a part in shaping and maintaining a society's ideologies' while serving 'to create, maintain and legitimise certain kinds of social practices' (Machin and Mayr 2012: 19). Thus, news values (what makes an event or topic newsworthy, see Section 3) are not inherently present in events but are discursively constructed through both word and image (Bednarek and Caple 2017; Caple, Huan and Bednarek 2020; Filmer 2021a; Martikainen and Sakki 2021; Riggs 2021).

If our discipline is to develop an understanding of digital news as a multimodal phenomenon, the interaction between the verbal and the visual needs further attention. Although journalistic translation research tends to focus predominantly on the written word, there are some notable exceptions. Where audio-visual translation is concerned, these include Claire Tsai's work on Taiwanese news broadcasting (2005, 2012, 2015), Gaia Aragrande's (2016) corpus-based study of *Euronews* online video-news, and Federico Federici's (2017) methodological reflections on how to analyse the AVT of embedded videos in online news texts. Regarding the multimodal discourse constructed by the text-photograph combination, Denise Filmer (2021a, 2021b) examined 'frames of "Italianness"' in American and British coverage of political figures, and Ashley Riggs (2021), how British, Spanish and Swiss news headlines and images frame a violent event as newsworthy and as a terrorist act.

3. Corpus and methodology

The research discussed here is a corpus-based, qualitative study of multimodal news content. We built an *ad hoc* comparable corpus of English and Italian online newspaper articles published in a short timeframe during which interesting reciprocal news narratives unfolded: the period during which Britain drew nearer to lockdown and the crisis deepened in Italy, including a significant spike in deaths in Lombardy[1] which led to a renewed focus on Italy in the UK media. The selection of the timeframe, the corpus and the methods used to analyse it are explained below.

3.1. The Corpus

The corpus consists of articles from one middle-market and three quality UK news brands, the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Guardian*, the *Mail Online* and the *Times*, and four Italian online news brands, *Corriere della Sera*, *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, *Il Giornale* and *La Repubblica*. Their ideological stances represent different parts of the political spectrum. Table 1 provides information about the size of the two datasets and the news brands' political positioning.

SOURCE – UK	Political affiliation	Number of articles 16-23 March	Number of words in excerpts analysed	Number of images analysed
Daily Mail	Right, Conservative	31	7,122	35
Guardian	Left	12	5,750	18
Telegraph	Right, Conservative	15	5,990	19
Times	Centre right	21	5,203	24
TOTAL UK		79	24,065	96
SOURCE – ITALY	**Political affiliation**	**Number of articles 16-23 March**		
Corriere della Sera	Centre right	9	3,521	13
Il Fatto Quotidiano	Liberal, supports Five-Star Movement	19	6,023	15
Il Giornale	Right	8	2,272	4
La Repubblica	Left	27	8,162	18
TOTAL ITALY		63	19,978	50
TOTAL ARTICLES		**142**		

Table 1: Information on corpus size and political affiliation of articles by news brand

3.2. Methodology

3.2.1. Establishing the timeframe

The 16-23 March 2020 timeframe is a period during which the rise in deaths in Italy was reported on regularly in both countries. On 19 March, the Italian army was deployed to Bergamo (Lombardy) to help document and remove the deceased, and reporting on the many deaths intensified. On 21 March, then Italian Premier Giuseppe Conte announced a significant broadening of the national lockdown, while the final date of the timeframe, 23 March, is the date on which the United Kingdom went into lockdown. Thus, this period represents a progression or even crescendo in both reporting across the linguacultures *and* the introduction of preventive measures. Qualitative analysis of 142 articles from this timeframe was sufficient to answer our research questions. That said, our research design has limitations, which are addressed in the Conclusions.

3.2.2. Approaches to data collection and analysis

We selected articles for inclusion by conducting searches on each news website using the following keywords: Coronavirus + Italy, Coronavirus + Lombardy, Coronavirus + Bergamo (UK websites); Coronavirus + Johnson, Coronavirus + Londra (Italian websites).

Following a close reading of the corpus to identify salient or recurring themes and linguistic characteristics, we selected and colour-coded the following elements for analysis:

National/cultural representations (word and image);

Identifiably translated content, including transquotation;

Content cited from newspapers of the Other country.

To analyse the interplay of news language and image, we adopted approaches from Critical Discourse Studies (for instance, van Dijk 1988; Fairclough 1995, 2003) and Discursive News Values Analysis (DNVA). Given the current gap in multimodal news translation research, we engaged in multimodal news analysis (Bednarek and Caple 2017; Caple, Huan and Bednarek 2020) which included DNVA of *both* text and image (Bednarek and Caple 2017, 2020; see Caple, Huan and Bednarek 2020: 4–17 and in particular Table 1.1: 4–5 and Table 1.2: 9–17). DNVA makes it possible to 'systematically examine how news values are constructed through such semiotic resources' (Caple, Huan and Bednarek 2020: 1).

The following news values are relevant for our corpus: '**Consonance** is defined as the construction of an event's news actors, social groups, organisations or countries/nations in a way that conforms to stereotypes that members of the target audience hold about them.' (Caple, Huan and Bednarek 2020: 7) That of **Eliteness** may include, among others, 'references to […] politicians, […] officials' (8), and photographs conveying it are likely to use a 'low camera angle indicating high status of participant in image' (Caple and Bednarek 2016: 448). With **Negativity**, 'the event is discursively constructed as negative (Caple, Huan and Bednarek 2020: 6), and visuals often involve a 'high camera angle, putting viewer in dominant position'; there is also 'running, ducking […] (suggesting unstable situation, that is, danger)' (Caple and Bednarek 2016: 447). Closely linked is **Impact**, the way the event is discursively constructed as having significant effects or consequences' (Caple, Huan and Bednarek 2020: 6), and

'showing the after-effects (often negative) of events [...]; showing emotions caused by an event; showing sequences of images that convey cause and effect relations' (Caple and Bednarek 2016: 448). **Aesthetic Appeal** is also interesting for our corpus (see discussion of monuments; of coffins): 'The aesthetically pleasing aspects of an event or issue', with 'lighting, colour contrast and shutter speed used for artistic effect' (448). The news value **Relevance** is not included in Monika Bednarek and Helen Caple's taxonomy but proves particularly useful for understanding how the Italian newsbrands constructed news on the UK's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other scholars of news discourse have defined **Relevance** as 'the effect on the audience's own lives or closeness to their experience' (Bell 1991: 157), or 'Interest for large groups of readers, thus, [...] both a cognitive and a social constraint on news selection. [...] [R]elevance criteria show how events and decisions may affect our lives.' (van Dijk 1988: 122)

Our study responds to 'the call to apply and test DNVA on news stories published in different languages and in different cultural contexts' (Bednarek and Caple 2017: 237; Caple, Huan and Bednarek 2020: 1).

4. Findings and analysis

4.1. The UK's portrayal of Italy

For lack of space, we focus here on specific lexical and visual themes: the very prevalent language of Italy's **struggle** (this term and related lexis are used frequently throughout the corpus) and its interplay with a sampling of images of the **army/police**, **monuments**, **emergency room/hospital settings**, and **coffins**. We then address a few examples of transquotation (the UK news brands citing Italian ones).

4.1.1. Cultural translation through the interplay between word and image

Across the news brands, the *combination* of specific lexical choices and **army/police** and **monument** images contribute to portraying Italy as not up to the task of managing the pandemic. According to the *Times*, 'Army lorries have been called in to remove corpses from an **overwhelmed** [used as an epithet] Italian crematorium as the country's death toll from coronavirus overtook that of China.' (Kington 20 March 2020). The epithet is part of the headline and therefore particularly salient for the reader. The opening **image** of the article features six army lorries and a few cars driving away from the camera at dusk, with the caption, 'An army convoy rolls in to remove bodies that were **threatening** to **overwhelm** the crematorium in Bergamo.' (Negativity; Impact)

Where monuments are concerned, the first **image** in another article whose headline, lede and first image caption emphasise the high numbers of deaths in Italy is a photograph of the Spanish Steps (Rome), taken from far below, with the building at the top lit up in the Italian colours of red, white and green. The caption reads, 'Italy recorded a record 793 deaths today, taking the toll in the world's **hardest-hit** country to 4,825.' (Willan 22 March 2020) Thus, a symbolic image acts as a synecdoche for the country, the angle of the shot (usually conveying authority, Eliteness) actually spotlighting the country which the *language* of the text portrays as struggling. (Negativity; Impact; Consonance) In addition, the phrase 'In the northern regions of Lombardy and Piedmont, where the health service has been **overwhelmed**' is immediately followed by an **image** of the Colosseum in Rome, with the transquoted caption 'Italian landmarks and cities are deserted as the prime minister, Giuseppe Conte, said the country faced "the most difficult time in our post-war period".' (Willan 22 March 2020) The Colosseum and Rome are not located in the northern region in question, but for the domestic readership, they are emblematic of Italy. The position and prestige of Conte also give credence to the qualification 'most difficult [...]'. (Negativity; Impact; Eliteness; Consonance)

The *Daily Mail* and the *Guardian* show similar tendencies. A *Mail* article observes, 'Bergamo has been so **overwhelmed** that the army has stepped in to move bodies to other provinces as the cemetery was too full.' (Aloisi, Pollina and Barbarglia 23 March 2020). In another *Mail* article describing Bergamo as 'the heart of the **hardest-hit** province in Italy's **hardest-hit** region of Lombardy, Italy'**[2]** (Associated Press 20 March 2020), the accompanying **image** shows people walking behind a hearse in a cemetery; a masked, blurred, spectral police or military officer stands in the foreground. (Negativity; Impact; Eliteness)

The *Guardian* publishes similar statements. For instance, 'The army was deployed last week to transport bodies from Bergamo city to neighbouring provinces after the crematorium became **overwhelmed**' (Giuffrida, 23 March 2020); a lede describes how 'Coffins pile up and corpses are sealed off in homes as Bergamo's funeral firms are **overwhelmed'** (Giuffrida 19 March 2020). The article's headline (again, salient for the reader) also includes '**struggle**'. Both articles feature images of army lorries; in the **first**, they are in a cemetery, while in the **second**, they and their camouflage tarp coverings are aesthetically juxtaposed with the background element of an unidentifiable but architecturally impressive stone monument complete with classical pillars (Aesthetic Appeal). The contrast between foreground and background is stark, making it salient for the viewer. The country known for its impressive art, culture and architecture is having to take the drastic step of relying on the army – potentially also representative of the authoritarianism associated historically with Italy (Consonance) – to address the COVID crisis.

Finally, while the *Telegraph*'s use of army/police images is not so clearly tied to the lexis of Italy struggling, it does reinforce the Italy-authoritarianism link. In the headline, 'Coronavirus: Italy's deadliest day as 627 are killed' (Gulland et al. 20 March 2020), the final participle gives the disease agency and suggests a violent death which alternatives such as 'die [from Covid]' would not. Such lexical/grammatical choices convey Negativity and Impact. The headline and its final word 'killed' are immediately followed by an **image** in which a member of the military, in full uniform and holding a machine gun, fills the foreground. The photograph is taken from below, emphasising his power and authority (Eliteness). He is flanked by other soldiers, a small army lorry and a tent. The image potentially also conveys Consonance by tying in with a stereotype of Italian officialdom as authoritarian. It could be frightening for the British collective imagination, given that the domestic readership is unaccustomed to seeing armed police in the streets.

Together with the chosen language and the use of army/police and monument images, the news brands also often rely on images of **emergency room/hospital settings** and **coffins**. The ways in which they convey Negativity and Impact bring home to the British reader the magnitude of the pandemic, convey a sense of threat, but also contribute to depicting Italy as struggling in the face of Coronavirus, all the more so as the three different visual elements – army/police, monuments (thereby with the addition of Eliteness and Consonance) and coffins – are sometimes found in the same photograph.

Where images of **emergency room/hospital settings** are concerned, suffice it to say that the *Daily Mail* articles contain a multiplicity – significantly more than the other news brands – of such images, whose characteristics strongly convey a sense of chaos, panic, lack of control, and the risk and prevalence in Italy of extremely serious illness. The tenor and sheer quantity of the images also tend toward the sensationalism for which the news outlet is well-known and, again, frame Italy as not up to the task of managing the virus.

Across the news brands, the use of images of **coffins** reflects the news values of Negativity – in many, the camera angle puts the viewer in the dominant position – and Impact. It is important to keep in mind that every news outlet uses images of coffins; they are proposed and repeated to the detriment of other images.

The *Mail* combines coffins and an association with religion through a **photograph** used more than once, a line of coffins with a cross on the foremost one (May 18 March 2020); and through another **visual** that so perfectly aligns a statue of the virgin in a park with the scene below that it looks like she is presiding over, praying over, the person on the stretcher being rushed (note the running, a factor in Negativity) along the path by medical personnel; the article evokes 'chaotic scenes' (Jones 20 March 2020).

The *Times* also includes **an image** that combines coffins and panicked medical personnel running; and both the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian* choose images foregrounding not only the aforementioned news values, but also that of Aesthetic Appeal. One **photograph** they both use shows a masked official carrying elaborate and beautiful funeral flowers, which are right in the foreground with, logically, the coffin in the background (Giuffrida 19 March 2020).

In stark contrast to the other UK online news outlets examined, the *Telegraph* mainly discusses the news about COVID-19 in Italy from the perspective of travel. Three headlines are, 'Is it safe to travel to Italy? (Dickinson 17 March 2020), 'Italy travel ban [...] should you cancel your trip?' (Morris 17 March 2020), 'Is it safe to go on my ski holiday?' (Aspden-Kean 17 March 2020),**[3]** despite the fact that travel was risky and limited in March 2020. This reflects an effort to cater for the many well-heeled retirees who make up its readership (and pay for its content).

The travel focus is reinforced through images: **four women in masks** taking a selfie on St. Peter's Square with the Vatican in the background (Dickinson 17 March 2020); other iconic monuments oft-visited by tourists (Consonance: stereotypical imagery, conformity to the readership's expectations); maps indicating '[w]hich parts of Italy are off limits to travellers' (Dickinson 17 March 2020), or travel advice by region (Morris 17 March 2020); the **interior** of an opera house (Hawlin 18 March 2020). Italy is above all the playground of those who have the wherewithal to visit, so Italy is in a sense inferior in a different way: the well-heeled readership is the central preoccupation (in this vein, note the possessive adjectives in 'your trip', 'my ski holiday').

In summary, with the exception of the *Telegraph*, whose focus is on travel, the UK news brands generally frame Italy as lacking the ability to contain the virus, and as being obliged to resort to tactics portrayed by the British online press as drastic, desperate, and insufficient in various ways. Negative representations of Italy and Italians are concomitantly constructed. The news values of Negativity, Impact, Eliteness and Consonance are foregrounded, with the exception of the *Telegraph*, which favours Consonance.

4.1.2. Transquotation in the UK news brands

A phrase in a *Mail* headline, 'Italy's medics at "end of our strength"' (Aloisi, Pollina and Barbaglia 23 March 2020), provides a truncated version of a transquotation included in the article. It is an interesting example of a translated quote which may, by virtue of not sounding entirely idiomatic, contribute to constructing a negative image of Italian doctors, who are already being depicted, via various linguistic and photographic choices, as struggling (recall the ideological implications of transquoted news discourse mentioned above). Literal and therefore sometimes unidiomatic translations may occur because the journalists do not consider the activity of translation as a key part of their work (see, for instance, Davier 2017). (Alternatively, they may be machine translations.) Yet such translations may frame the speakers – doctors, usually considered Elite actors – as inferior.

The same is true of a *Telegraph* article that transquotes an Italian doctor involved in fighting coronavirus in northern Italy: '"There are no more surgeons, urologists, orthopaedists, we are only doctors who suddenly become part of a single team to face this tsunami that has overwhelmed us"' (Bodkin and Nuki 22 March 2020). It relies on literal translation – this time with resulting subject and verb tense issues – and a water/natural disaster metaphor**[4]** which paints the pandemic as powerful and uncontrollable. The content emphasizes Negativity and Impact whereas the literality may undermine the Eliteness of the doctor.

Also in the *Telegraph*, a transquote from an interview with then prime minister Giuseppe Conte in *Corriere della Sera* may have a similar effect due to a combination of grammatical and syntactic choices and the resulting literality: '"People need to avoid in every way possible movement that is not absolutely necessary", Mr Conte said in an interview with *Corriere della Sera* newspaper.' (Squires 16 March 2020; Guerzoni 16 March 2020**[5]**)

The *Times* transquotes a statement by the Pope – a figure used in the UK online press to link Italy with Catholicism, in line with the *Daily Mail*'s strong emphasis on religion both through word and image (Consonance) – in such a way as to discredit him: 'The Pope appeared to have *forgotten social distancing rules* [our emphasis] when he advised people in an interview with *La Repubblica* to "give a caress to our grandparents and a kiss to our children"' (Kington 19 March 2020). Here we have a case of both criticism and manipulation through transquotation, as neither the full quote nor the context is provided**[6]** (Rodari 18 March 2020). In addition, the chosen **image** of coffins with figures in green scrubs and white protective garb *running* (characteristic of Negativity, an unstable situation) to put them into lorries, and the association encouraged, may add insult to injury (failure to respect social distancing leading to deaths, thus the cause-effect relation conveyed by Impact).

A *Daily Mail* article provides an interesting contrast. It reproduces a **front page** of the Italian *Corriere dello Sport* which features in small print a statement by then Brescia football club president and ex-Leeds chairman (the *Mail* flags this Italy-UK link; Relevance) Massimo Cellino, and in large, yellow letters (thus salient) the English phrase 'game over'. As the topic of both the *Mail* and *Corriere* articles is the interruption of the football season due to the pandemic, this phrase is a play on words. In addition, in the article, Cellino's words are transquoted and domesticated (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009): 'Don't be daft, how can we resume the season?' (Davis 22 March 2020; Zazzaroni 22 March 2020**[7]**). The rest of his transquoted statements (for example, 'be realistic, people', or 'the plague is on our doorstep') are also idiomatic**[8]** (which may contribute to establishing Relevance).

In summary, transquoting via literal/machine translation may contribute to depicting even typically Elite actors (doctors; the Prime Minister) as inferior whereas opting for domestication (Bielsa and Bassnett 2009) is one way of 'bringing the story home' (Bassnett 2005), is likely to lead the readership to feel connected to the content reported (Relevance), and may in turn help convince them of its validity (including that of stereotypes/prejudices represented).

The Italian news brands appear to rely more on transquotation than the UK ones, with interesting results. These are addressed in section 4.2.3 below.

4.2. *Italy's portrayal of the UK*

What follows is an overview of Italian news narratives on the UK's experience of the early stages of the pandemic. The most frequently employed news values are Consonance through stereotyping; Relevance, through the narratives of Italians living in the UK; and Eliteness in the person of Boris Johnson. For this reason, the ways in which Johnson's statements are transquoted are of particular interest. The linguistic choices across the newsbrands convey three main ideas: mounting **fear and panic** in the UK; **ridicule and dismay** at Johnson's herd immunity approach; **positive** (Italian) **self,** contrasted with **negative** (UK) **Other**, given the British government's apparent reluctance to go into lockdown. These three strands are intertwined in the discourse.

Johnson declared lockdown on 23 March 2020,[9] the last day of our timeframe. Perhaps for this reason (among others, like the propensity in Italian journalism towards words rather than image, even online), many of the articles in the corpus are accompanied by symbolic images of Johnson making declarations. Above all, what is prevalent in the Italian journalists' style of reporting is their tendency to function as cultural mediators by elucidating the domestic audience with their interpretations of the British national character, habits and attitudes in relation to the pandemic.

4.2.1. Cultural translation through word: common themes

The corpus evidences a dialogic relationship between the two media and cultures and a reciprocal narrative: From the analysis in section 4.1 one might interpret the British press's stance as, in part, 'it won't happen to us'; in observing the UK move towards lockdown, the retort from Italy seems to be 'we told you so'. Furthermore, Italian news outlets tend to frame the UK situation as a crescendo of panic and mounting fear; Johnson's constant changing of tactics is seen as adding to the anxiety, fuelling the impression that the situation was getting out of hand.

1. On 18 March 2020 *Corriere della Sera* (De Carolis 2020) ran the headline: 'Coronavirus, il **panico** di Londra […] e **Boris cambia piano**: scuole e college chiusi' [Coronavirus: Panic in London […] and Boris changes plan: schools and colleges closed]. With 'panic' in theme position, the focus is on the psychological state of the British capital, as synecdoche for the government, the population, and the nation. The article personifies fear as 'arriving in the UK': 'La **paura** del coronavirus arriva **anche** in Gran Bretagna, "**un paese che crede nella libertà**", nelle parole del primo ministro **Boris Johnson**, **ma** dove le abitudini e il tran tran quotidiani ieri si sono bruscamente interrotti'. The journalist delegitimizes Johnson by juxtaposing his declaration that Britain is 'a country that believes in personal freedoms', which is transquoted literally [un paese che crede nella libertà, in the words of prime minister Boris Johnson], with the government's sudden decision to close all schools and colleges. There is also the implicit comparison with Italy: 'coronavirus arrives in the UK, *too*'. As the days pass, the comparisons with the Italian situation become more evident in *Corriere della Sera*'s narrative. Four days later, 'Londra **teme** che i numeri di contagiati e vittime saranno superiori a quelli **italiani**' (Ippolito, 20 March 2020) [London fears that the number of infections and victims [in the UK] will be higher than in Italy]. The following day: "Coronavirus, Londra ora **teme** una **curva italiana**: i contagi aumentano **più che a Bergamo** (Ippolito 23 March 2020) [Coronavirus, London now fears Italian curve: the infections increase more than in Bergamo]. The ultimate comparison is with Bergamo, which just a few days earlier had been under the spotlight of British newsbrands reporting on the Italian handling of the pandemic (see above). The lexicon of fear and panic appears with similar frequency in the other Italian news brands.

The following examples instead focus on Italy as model. When Johnson declares lockdown, regardless of political bias, the Italian newsbrands use positive self-frames contrasted with negative Other representations to bring the news home. Johnson has finally capitulated and accepted that Italy is the example to follow:

1. Boris Johnson si allinea alla **via italiana** nella battaglia contro il coronavirus e impone all'intero Regno Unito misure **restrittive come quelle che la Penisola aveva adottato un paio di settimane fa**. [Boris Johnson aligns with the Italian way in the battle against Coronavirus, imposing restrictive measures on the UK like those the Peninsula adopted a couple of weeks ago (*La Repubblica* 23 March 2020).

2. Dall'immunità di gregge al lockdown **modello Italia** [From herd immunity to the Italian model] (Giuliani 23 March 2020).

3. […] il primo ministro Boris Johnson ha deciso di adottare **una strategia all'italiana** [the prime minister Boris Johnson has decided to adopt an Italian-style strategy] (*Il Fatto Quotidiano* 23 March 2020).

4.2.2. Cultural translation through the interplay between word and image

Images accompanying the news reports tend to function as synecdoche for Englishness rather than illustrating verbal content. The Union Jack, views of Westminster, Big Ben, a red London bus or scenes on the London Underground create Consonance in the Italian collective imagination as easily recognisable icons for London life, which conflates with British life as a whole.

In Il *Fatto Quotidiano* and *Il Giornale* in particular, the interplay between word and image also serves to contrapose British behaviour – which is implicitly or explicitly condemned – with the positive self-frame of caring and/or wise Italy's compliance with the lockdown rules. For instance, the headline from *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 'Noi italiani a Londra siamo molto preoccupati. Qui i locali sono aperti, sappiamo cosa ci aspetta' [We Italians in London are very worried. Here venues are open, **we know what's ahead of us**] (Vasques 18 March 2020), is accompanied by a **photograph** of theatregoers outside the Prince Edward Theatre in London. The message: Italians living in the UK know what lies ahead and are rightly worried.

Quoting anonymous Italians living in the UK is a common strategy of bringing the news home. *La Repubblica* (17 March 2020) for example, runs the headline: 'Coronavirus, **la paura** degli italiani nel Regno Unito: "Senza restrizioni, rischiamo il contagio"', [Coronavirus, **the fear** of Italians in the UK] with a **video** of Italians being interviewed on the question of wearing masks in London before they became obligatory in public places. The news of the spreading virus is supported by an image of commuters waiting on a platform of the London underground, only one of whom wearing a mask. The function may be descriptive, illustrating the British public's indifference to safety measures. It is also symbolic of London life, thus creating Consonance.

An article in *La Repubblica* (Guerrera 17 March 2020) entitled "Coronavirus, Johnson avverte: 'Per il Regno Unito la peggiore sfida economica dal dopoguerra' [Coronavirus, Johnson warns: for the UK, the worst economic crisis since the war] quotes Johnson, who is in turn citing Mario Draghi's famous maxim, 'whatever it takes' (Relevance for the Italian readership). The former British prime minister is described as a 'Brexiter', thereby highlighting his anti-European stance, while assuring the British public he will do 'whatever it takes' to overcome the crisis. The accompanying **image** reflects the negative news: customers sit in a gloomy pub drinking beer while looking up at a TV screen where Johnson is making a statement. The choice of photograph brings into sharp relief the contrasting approaches to COVID-19 in the two nations: Italians in lockdown and the British drinking in pubs.

4.2.3. Citing of UK news brands and transquotation

Images of Johnson dominate the Italian coverage of UK news, and his words are often transquoted. For example: 'Boris Johnson ha elogiato la sanità italiana: ma se non reggono loro, non reggeremo neanche noi' (Ippolito 23 March 2020) [Boris Johnson praises the Italian health service: if they can't bear the strain, neither will we]. The transquotation in the headline is a loose interpretation or recontextualisation of Johnson's words, quoted in the *Sunday Telegraph* (Bodkin and Malnick 21 March 2020): 'The Italians have a superb health care system. And yet, their doctors and nurses have been completely overwhelmed by the demand'. Johnson's positive evaluation of the Italian health system is newsworthy and boosts the positive self-image of Italy (Relevance). Its inclusion contrasts with Italy's framing of the Johnson government and the UK's attitude to the pandemic.

Other headlines and quotes from the same speech appear throughout the dataset. For example:

1. A *la Repubblica* (Scuderi 22 March 2020) headline reports 'Johnson, sanità italiana superba ma sopraffatta' [Johnson: Italian health service superb but overwhelmed]. The use of alliteration gives the summary Impact.

2. Il *Corriere della Sera* (Ippolito 23 March 2023): 'Gli italiani hanno un sistema sanitario eccezionale. E tuttavia i loro medici e infermieri sono stati completamente travolti: il loro conto dei morti ha raggiunto le migliaia e continua ad aumentare'. Here, the transquotation reads naturally in Italian; the journalist uses omission and fluent collocations: 'eccezionale' rather than the calque 'superbo', 'Il loro conto dei morti' to translate death toll, while the idiomatic 'I numeri sono molto netti' [the numbers are very clear] conveys the English 'The numbers are very stark'. The translational decisions would indicate a considered approach on how to render the quotations in Italian as opposed to selecting the first options that pop up on Google translate. As the London correspondent for the *Corriere della Sera* the journalist is likely to have a high level of English language competence.

Transquotation contributes to portraying the British people's behaviour and the UK government's early anti-COVID-19 measures as indifferent. This reinforces the news value Consonance, that is, what the domestic audience expect from the British. For instance, in an editorial in il *Fatto Quotidiano* (Pellizzetti 17 March 2020), what the journalist describes as 'il profondo disprezzo della solidarietà' [a profound disdain of solidarity] is a 'tratto della cultura anglosassone' [a feature of the Anglo-Saxon culture], which from Thatcher to Johnson, according to the journalist, is the ideological justification for 'indifferenza civile' [civil indifference]. The implication is that anglophone cultures would callously and willingly let older and more vulnerable members of society die in the pursuit of herd immunity. The journalist goes on to transquote Margaret Thatcher to legitimise his thesis: 'Margaret Thatcher dichiarava "la società non esiste" [There is no such thing as society].' This is an instrumentalized and decontextualized use of partial citation which Thatcher herself denounced at the time as manipulation of what she had intended to say.**[10]**

In another editorial published in *Il Fatto Quotidiano* on the same day (Rosso 17 March 2020), Johnson's announcement is portrayed as a 'brutal' way to introduce the herd immunity strategy:

> […] l'espressione un po' brutale con cui Boris Johnson ha inaugurato la politica della immunità di gregge che il governo inglese, finora unico al mondo, ha intrapreso per far fronte alla pandemia di coronavirus. [the rather brutal way that Boris Johnson has introduced herd immunity that the British Government, until now the only one in the world, has adopted to cope with the Coronavirus pandemic]

The journalist quotes *The Times'* description of Johnson's words as 'a solemn statement', which is left in English, and notes that in the UK, Johnson's assertion received a chorus of consent. The article ironically refers to the adoption of herd immunity as 'not lift[ing] a finger' against COVID-19. It ends with a transquotation of Winston Churchill in order to make a comparison with Johnson: 'Se nel 1940 Winston Churchill disse agli inglesi "Non ci arrenderemo mai", il "Preparatevi a morire" di Boris Johnson non è esattamente la stessa cosa. Dio salvi la regina'. [If in 1940 Winston Churchill said to the British people 'We will never surrender', Johnson's 'Prepare to die' is not exactly the same thing. God save the Queen.] There is a clear manipulation of transquotation to put Johnson in a bad light.

5. Conclusions

This study sheds light on how British and Italian producers of multimodal international news have exploited the COVID-19 pandemic to (re)affirm national identities and stereotypes. The negative other-representations observed, whereby the UK press emphasises how much Italy 'struggled' to address the virus and whereby Britain's 'panic and fear' is reported in the Italian press following the sharp escalation of COVID-19, confirm our hypothesis that in times of crisis, stereotyping and Othering as social practices tend to be reinforced, at least where this pair is concerned. Our research also contributes to filling the gap in research on multimodality in international news discourse by exploring how 'multimodal ensembles' (Kress 2011: 38) communicate national and cultural images.

Bearing in mind our research questions (see Introduction), the conclusions from our findings are as follows:

1. Both corpora show evidence of cultural translation practices – explaining the Other culture to the domestic audience – but in ways that encourage or reinforce stereotypes and prejudices. The trends in framing devices where both language and image are concerned suggest convincingly that even as the UK news seeks to inform and warn the domestic readership, there is a shared representation of Italy as not up to the task of managing the pandemic, and undertones of an association of Italy with authoritarianism. The Italian online press is vitriolic against the British and emphasises Italy's experience and wisdom; this may be a form of retaliation for the earlier British newsbrands' criticism of Italy's handling of the emergency.

2. Visual content plays a more significant role in the UK corpus than in the Italian one. Italy's online newsbrands tend to use images that are iconic, represent 'typical' UK life or portray Boris Johnson. In contrast, in addition to iconic images, the UK newsbrands also rely often on images of coffins, the army/police, guns, and emergency room/hospital settings. Thus the Italian articles mainly convey the news values of Consonance, Eliteness and Relevance whereas the UK ones also emphasise Negativity, Impact and, in a couple of unusual and interesting cases, Aesthetic Appeal.

3. Our corpus suggests that *Telegraph* journalists consider their readership to be UK citizens who have the knowledge, desire and (financial) wherewithal to appreciate Italy's cultural and other leisure offerings and to travel to Italy to take advantage of them. For the *Telegraph*, Italy is above all a vehicle for its British readership's leisure activities and enjoyment, and for its readership, the pandemic in Italy is above all an inconvenience.

4. Transquotation in the Italian and *Daily Mail* articles tends to be idiomatic and fluent, and sometimes manipulated for ideological purposes. Transquotation in the other UK news brands instead leans toward the literal (we hypothesise that

most instances are in fact machine translation; to be verified with further research). The resulting unidiomatic utterances may also contribute to depicting the Italian actors as not very competent.

There are some limitations to our study. First, as with any qualitative study, one can ask how researchers define a finding as significant, especially when data is selected on a somewhat subjective basis. We consider that our careful, detailed and in-depth analysis, numerous examples and clear explanation of the methodology go some way to mitigating this potential criticism, especially as they would allow other researchers to replicate the analysis. Second, further analysis of this corpus could incorporate a qualitative data analysis tool that would allow more systematic and efficient treatment of the data, and in particular visual data, so that we could address more images.

That said, our empirical work on multimodality and digital news is a significant strength. Our approach allows an overview of how text, paratext and image work together on a web page. Exploration of the word-image interplay not only contributes to filling a gap in journalistic translation research but shows how Other stereotypes and prejudices can be exacerbated in times of crisis.

Finally, in relation to our focus on journalistic translation and transquotation, various scholars have emphasised that journalists do not see themselves as translators (for instance, Bassnett 2005; Bielsa & Bassnett 2009; Davier 2017; Filmer 2014; Schäffner 2017; van Doorslaer 2013). Zanettin (2021: 75) neatly sums this up: 'Professional journalists generally see translation as a linguistic operation involving replacement of linguistic material rather than as a practice concerned with the negotiation of cultures.' Yet our study is a reminder that the negotiation of cultures is in fact at the heart of international news reporting.

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Notes

[*] The article was conceived, researched and written in collaboration. However, Denise Filmer was responsible for sections 1, 2 and 4.2, while Ashley Riggs was responsible for sections 3, 4.1 and 5. The authors would like to thank the reviewers for their very instructive comments, and Ilaria Patano for her help with formatting.

[1] According to the Italian Ministry of Health (**https://www.salute.gov.it**), on 18 March 2020 at 6pm, Lombardy was the region with the highest number of deaths, 1,959. The total number for Italy was 2,978. For 20 March, these figures were 2,549 and 4,032, respectively.

[2] The compound adjective in bold as well as similar variants are prevalent throughout the corpus.

[3] The **image** directly below the headline is from the upscale resort of Cortina d'Ampezzo, in northern Italy.

[4] It is important to remember that journalists select and deselect information, including direct quotes. Discussion of metaphor in our corpus is beyond the scope of this article but is addressed in a contribution by Riggs (forthcoming).

[5] Original statement: "Bisogna evitare in tutti i modi gli spostamenti non assolutamente necessari".

[6] Gloss translation, from an intervention meant to encourage Italians to look after each other and to find solace in relationships and everyday gestures (the bold sections have been left out of the English): "'**In these difficult days we can go back to the small, concrete gestures we have toward the people who are closest to us:** a caress for our grandparents, a kiss for our children, **for the people we love.**'"

[7] Original: 'Ma quale ripresa, ma quale stagione da concludere'

[8] Filmer (2020) has noted that expletives and insults generally need domesticating to achieve similar pragmatic meaning.

[9] https://www.google.com/search?q=you+must+stay+at+home+Johnson+lockdown+23+march+2020&rlz=1C5GCEA_enIT1009IT1016&oq=you+must+stay+at+8#fpstate=ive&vld=cid:e1957e5c,vid:vJycNmK7KPk

[10] A comment from a *Woman's Own* interview in 1987 that is often repeated, but rarely correctly contextualised. Its relevance was made explicit with the publication of the second volume of Margaret Thatcher's autobiography in 1993: 'they never quoted the rest […] My meaning, clear at the time but subsequently distorted beyond recognition, was that society was not an abstraction, separate from the men and women who composed it, but a living structure of individuals, families, neighbours and voluntary associations'.