

REVIEW

M. Cristina Caimotto and Rachele Raus:
***Lifestyle Politics in Translation: The Shaping
and Re-Shaping of Ideological Discourse***

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Translation is often politically loaded. Research into the intertwined relationship between translation and politics, especially the harnessing of translation for political engagements and ideological agendas, has been tremendously prosperous in recent decades (e.g., Tymoczko, 2000; Fernández, 2018; Guo, 2020). *Lifestyle Politics in Translation: The Shaping and Re-Shaping of Ideological Discourse*, authored by M. Cristina Caimotto and Rachele Raus, advances this line of inquiry by probing into how translation interplays with hegemonic lifestyle ideology, thus shifting our attention from grand political themes (such as political independence, cultural nationalism, and national rejuvenation) to seemingly trivial and personal issues (such as urban mobility and consumption of fruit and vegetables) that concern translation. Lifestyle politics in this context is interpreted as the politicization of everyday life choices. The overall aim of the book is “to look for signs of Western lifestyle politics in institutional texts and then observe what happens in parallel texts in another language” (16). Drawing on rich institutional bilingual (English and French) texts and informed by such useful notions as “apparatus”, “nudging”, and “marketization”, this timely monograph investigates how European hegemonic lifestyle ideology orients and shapes people’s everyday lives and thereby limits human agency, and how translation reframes the narrative through lexical and syntactic modifications. By so doing, it sheds light on a long neglected topic, and calls our attention to the activist role translators can play in bringing back a human-centric world. Although the authors’ perspective and the cases analyzed are largely European, the concerns this book raises (i.e., increasing state interference in private sphere, reduction of human agency, rampant consumerism, global warming, racial bias) assume global significance.

The book is divided into two introductory essays, six body chapters, and a conclusion. Clearly and systematically structured, these body chapters deal with six themes through qualitative inquiry and quantitative analysis assisted by corpus tools AntConc and Lancsbox. In what follows, we present a summary of these individual chapters before making an overall assessment of the volume.

The book starts with a brief introduction which explains why “lifestyle politics” is adopted as the central notion, outlines the research background, and presents the general organization of this volume. Chapter one, “Lifestyle Politics in Translation”, introduces key concepts of this book, showcases how lifestyle-related ideological elements can be hegemonic, and proposes four meaning-effects of translation based on degree of hegemony and resistance (i.e., hidden transfer, forced revelation, visible revelation, and ideological transformation), which are applied to examine six cases in the following chapters. These effects, as demonstrated in later investigation, are powerful analytical tools that can be fruitfully employed in discourse analysis of translation.

The next two chapters concern texts that deconstruct traditional Western dichotomies. Chapter two, “Gender and Intersectionality”, written by Rachele Raus, examines how and

why French language blocks and politicizes two interlocking and hard-to-translate concepts: “gender” and “intersectionality”, and how French translation of several informational documents resists lifestyle politics concealed in institutional discourse on prostitution and the body as commodity. Raus’s meticulous scrutiny of bilingual texts discloses that French translation “shifts the initial statements in English” and “prevent[s] the neoliberal discourse from circulating” (59). In chapter three, Raus draws our attention to discourse of robotics and artificial intelligence, which is usually regarded as ideology-free. After discussing how EU documents in English deconstruct the dichotomy of human/machine and legitimize economic practices in the name of “AI made in Europe”, she unravels the ways in which French translation diminishes the positive image of AI. Her in-depth corpus-assisted textual analysis leads to the conclusion that in the English version the individual’s agency “is limited by the context”, while in the French translation, individual “stands at the center of decision-making” (90).

The following two chapters are united by the theme of threats to human beings. Chapter four, “Terrorism and ‘Way’ of Life”, again by Rachele Raus, looks into discourse on terrorism in EU institutional texts. It first lays bare how the paradigm of “us” (Europeans) versus “them” (terrorists) emerges and dominates relative discourse. It then investigates the rendering of such phrases as “counter-terrorism”, “lifestyle”, “European way of life”, “standard of living”, suggesting that the French versions resist the program of restricting agency mainly through ideological transformation. Chapter five, “Climate Change and Sustainability”, by M. Cristina Caimotto, compares the English and French versions of the Paris Agreement, a legally binding international treaty on climate change. Through analyzing the English text from a narrative and discursive perspective, the author demonstrates the centrality of economy-related arguments in the agreement. Based on substantial discursive evidence, she asserts that the agreement is “driven by the program of meaning of sustainability which has become hegemonic and aims to guarantee ‘development’ rather than questioning how that constant need for development has caused the current crisis” (125). Rather than resisting hegemonic lifestyle ideology contained in the English version, as showcased in previous chapters, the French translation (e.g., “build on” translated into *cadre*, “sustainable development” into *développement durable*, “address” into *lutte contre*) “conveys and reinforces the false idea, the alter-discourse, that humans can invent technological solutions to allow the business-as-usual lifestyle to survive” (145). As such, this chapter stands in stark contrast to others.

The last two chapters, authored by M. Cristina Caimotto, center around discourse on human well-being, a theme that is closer to everyday lives. In chapter six “Urban Mobility and Automentality”, Caimotto compares the English and French versions of the 2007 Green Paper, “Towards a New Culture for Urban Mobility”, focusing on keywords such as “stakeholder” and “vulnerable” and passages pertaining to automobile-centric lifestyle and technological innovation. The discrepancies in the two versions disclose some slightly different ideolo-

gies. On the whole, the English version foregrounds individualism while the French version promotes a collective perspective. In the final chapter, the focus switches to food. After introducing the literature of food and public policies, Caimotto examines two institutional documents that lead to global healthy food campaigns. She convincingly demonstrates that sometimes the nudging strategies employed in the promotion of healthy lifestyle “do not aim to improve people’s well-being but rather the economic interests of some of the actors involved” (187). By neutralizing and reframing some key terms (e.g., “lifestyle”, “way of life”, “global strategy”, “developed countries”), the French text obscures the neoliberal overtones in English and transfers the responsibilities from individuals to the state, thus constituting a form of ideological resistance.

The conclusion recapitulates the six case studies and summarizes the main discrepancies between English and French versions. It also formulates a new discourse-centered definition of “lifestyle”.

Taken as a whole, this book constitutes an empirical and theoretical advance in the study of political and ideological re-narration of source text spearheaded by Baker (2007). Its greatest strength is the innovative perspective. Rather than looking for translators’ political positioning, which is elusive, it concentrates on the ideological effects of the translated text, that is, how ideological elements are conveyed and, more importantly, altered. The adoption of and engagement with notions like “lifestyle politics” and “surveillance capitalism” offer a vantage point to penetrate the mechanism in which institutional discourses “justify and legitimize the hegemonic ideology linked to neoliberalism” (189), and deepen our understanding of some politically and ideologically significant daily issues which are otherwise ignored. The authors also demonstrate their proficiency in corpus-assisted discourse analysis, an increasingly popular approach for examining language-in-use. Using concordance and collocational analyses with AntConc and Lancsbox, they unveil the latent hegemonic lifestyle ideology concealed in institutional texts and uncover the subtle but significant discrepancies between English and French versions against particular sociopolitical contexts. Embedded in these analyses, then, are the authors’ aspirations for greater social justice and individual agency. One problematic issue, however, is the excessive citation of translation examples. For instance, in chapter three and chapter four, a plethora of block quotations may overwhelm and confuse readers. As a matter of fact, fewer examples can serve the purposes of the author.

To conclude, *Lifestyle Politics in Translation: The Shaping and Re-Shaping of Ideological Discourse* is thoughtfully designed, engagingly written, and cogently argued. It extends the research scope of politicized translation with its comprehensive exploration of institutional texts and solid analysis of lexical and syntactic modifications. This accessible and instructive book will appeal to scholars of translation studies, especially those interested in political and ideological reframing in translation.

References

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