

How terrorism is “made to mean”, or why we should study stylistic features of news

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Abstract

This study examines instances of metaphor in two British news sources: the left-leaning *Guardian* and the right-leaning *Telegraph*. The symbolic value attributed to terrorism is discussed, as well as the role of the journalist which, when she reports on events happening abroad, it is argued, is that of a translator of culture. Findings highlight in particular metaphors of war/violence, plants/growth, water and disease. The news sources use these symbolically powerful metaphors in diverging ways which also reflect their political affiliation. Both sources emphasize violence and negativity in a way that is likely to heighten fear and distrust of certain groups, in particular Muslims. Metaphor warrants further attention from journalists, translators and readers, as well as further research by scholars studying journalism and translation.

Keywords

Metaphor, cultural translation, terrorism, news, discursive power

~ “It is rarely noted that a key dimension of ‘symbolic violence’ is the violence of being rendered symbolic.”¹ ~

Preamble

Lance Hewson’s detailed and novel approach to translation criticism, described and demonstrated most comprehensively in his 2011 volume *An Approach to Translation Criticism: Emma and Madame Bovary in translation*, not only allows a thorough and effective comparison of literary works and their translations; it also makes the translation scholar using it, who is by definition already attuned to the intricacies of language, even more sensitive to the discursive power of specific linguistic and stylistic features. One such feature is metaphor. Omnipresent in the literary text, it plays an important role in shaping impressions and interpretations ... and is often a challenge to translate. Metaphor is by no means unique to the literary text, however. Does it carry the same weight in other kinds of texts? How does it contribute to shaping their content and messages? This article is an opportunity to reflect on the discursive power of metaphor in a very different text type, the news article, and on how it may contribute to “translating” not only events, but also the people and places involved. While translation is used in a broad sense here, I maintain that such reflection is an essential exercise for journalists and (interlingual) translators alike.

1. Introduction

On Bastille Day, 14 July 2016, thousands of people gathered on the Promenade des Anglais in Nice, France, to watch the annual fireworks display. When it ended and the spectators began to disperse, Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel drove a large, rented truck at great speed through the crowds, ultimately killing 86 people and wounding 434.

I chose to analyze coverage of the Nice attack because the event and its “antecedents” (Charlie Hebdo, Bataclan) in France received wide attention, including from the media, were a source of significant debate and division, and laid bare political differences and prejudices. This article is part of a larger project on translation as cultural representation in which British, Swiss and Spanish news texts about the July 2016 attack in Nice are analyzed;² here, I focus on two British news sources. In the United Kingdom, the attacks in France added grist to the mill of the government’s conservative positions and policies, which were reflected in the Brexit referendum that passed the same summer, backlash against a longstanding policy of multiculturalism, and the government’s defense of ever-stricter securitarian laws and policies, all of which in turn fueled a rise in anti-Muslim prejudice and hate crimes.

I draw frequently from the *After Charlie Hebdo* edited volume (2017) because the attacks of January 2015 constituted another – albeit not as momentous as 9/11 – watershed moment for media treatment of terror; they occurred in France; they involved mass casualties; and they constitute an earlier link in the “event chain” (see below) of which the attack in Nice, discussed here, is also a link. Significantly, they also acted “as a licence for amplifying and extending the enthusiastic, multi-stranded anti-Muslim racism” that has continued to develop since 9/11 and

¹ I quote Gavan Titley here (2017, p. 1).

² Research for this article and the broader project is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation [Grant number P2GEP1_171957].

has now “achieved a dangerous banality in the political rationalities and public cultures of ‘the West’” (Titley, 2017, p. 1).

Then why not analyze the stylistic features of reporting on Charlie Hebdo here? Not only did the events receive wide international media attention, but no fewer than 83 books were written about them between 2015 and 2016 (Amiriaux & Fetiu, 2017). Looking at the continuing trajectory of representation as another piece of the puzzle, another link in the “event chain”, may show how certain choices have coalesced, but also, from an ethical perspective, that certain choices are highly questionable despite being common. This article also serves as a starting point for comparative work on metaphor in *Suisse romande* and Spanish news.

2. “Terrorism” as a symbolic act

Terrorism is doubly symbolic: first, because it is perpetrated for political ends and to elicit reactions: in particular, fear (Freedman, 2017, p. 211); second, because the word stands in for other ideas and/or becomes inextricably tied to them in various types of discourses. Because it is symbolic, and because there is no clear, internationally agreed legal – not to mention moral – definition of “terrorism” (Kundnani, 2017; Warsi, 2018 [2017]), it “has to be *made to mean*” (Freedman, 2017, p. 211; emphasis in original), and indeed, within the definitional void, uses (or telling instances where the term is avoided) of the term – not to mention consequences – proliferate, whether in everyday discourse, law and its application, the political sphere or, importantly for this study, the media.

Freedman groups journalists with “storytellers, mythmakers”, and other “[s]ymbol makers”, observing that they “have a unique ability to shape the political agenda by organising the discursive frameworks through which the public comes to understand acts of violence.” (p. 211) Terrorism is thus an *event* which is *interpreted*, rather than simply an act or a fact. Muslims and Islam, because they are commonly conflated with terrorism, are therefore also rendered symbolic. I will discuss the notions of event and interpretation further in the following sections.

2.1 The terrorist act as “events”

According to Eyerman, individual happenings become events “[t]hrough a dialectic of actions and interpretation. Actions occur in time and space, events unfold” (note the metaphor) and become meaningful “in the interplay between protagonists, interpreters and audience, as [...] meaning is attributed and various interpretations compete with each other” (Eyerman, 2008, p. 22; also qtd. in Titley, 2017, p. 5). Put otherwise, the process of imbuing a happening with meaning constitutes a “struggle” during which, eventually, “various accounts stabilize, with perhaps one achieving some kind of hegemony, but counter interpretations or stories may continue to exist alongside” (Titley, 2017, p. 5).

The Nice attack was an event in this sense, and also because in the process of meaning-making, it was associated with other terrorist acts. The *Guardian* article that I have labeled TG9 shows this linkage clearly in the first phrase of its headline: “From Charlie Hebdo to Bastille Day”. Indeed, the Nice attack is part of an “event chain” that may include, depending upon the journalist, readership and context of publication, the Charlie Hebdo events, but also the Bataclan attacks, the killing of a priest in Normandy, or the actions of Mohammed Merah in 2012, in France; 7/7 (the London bombings of summer 2005), the killing of a British soldier on

the streets of London in 2013, the recent Westminster Bridge and Manchester attacks, among others, in the UK; 9/11, for these and potentially many other national contexts.

2.2 Reporting on violent attacks as “interpretation”; as translation

The journalist, then, does not simply hold up a mirror to a happening to “show” it objectively and transparently, but rather constructs and conveys her interpretation of that happening (which thus becomes an event). She does not provide “the truth”, but rather begins or continues a narrative. Importantly for this study, if she reports on an event occurring abroad, her reporting has, I hold, a particular translational dimension, not only because of the “transediting” (Schäffner, 2012; Stetting, 1989) activities likely to be implicated in such work, but also because when she narrates or re-presents events taking place abroad, she also re-presents, to some degree, the country, culture and population in question.

This is where the connections between journalism and translation studies are, I think, particularly evident. Like translators, journalists reporting on events abroad act as “cultural mediators” (Beliveau, Hahn & Ipsen, 2011; Bielsa & Bassnett, 2009; D’hulst, Gonne, Lobbes, Meylaerts & Verschaffel, 2014; Schäffner & Bassnett, 2010; Williams, 2011). This role also comes with – or should come with – a whole host of ethical considerations. In line with Sarah Maitland’s (2017) work on cultural translation, according to which the activity of translation (from one language to another) is a paradigm for all human exchange, the translator, “[a]s an individual working within a specific set of audience requirements, constraints, needs and expectations to which her translation [here, we could substitute “article”] must be sensitive”, is required to engage in “intense ethical reflection on the relations between distant and often conflicting contingencies of text, society, people and culture.” (Maitland 2017, “Introduction”, section “What’s ‘wrong’ with cultural translation?”) This could apply to the journalist as well, *a fortiori* when she reports on events occurring abroad, as is the case in the corpus discussed here. While she may not currently be required – nor, many will argue, have the time³ – to engage in all the aspects of “ethical reflection” Maitland describes, one might hope that she would; some would argue that the lack of such reflection has contributed to the current, so-called “crisis” in journalism and a prevalent lack of trust in the news.

2.2.1 A word on power

Maitland’s critical approach to cultural translation is also “interested in the ethical dilemmas posed when texts, human actions and human productions exercise *power* over people” (Maitland, 2017, “Introduction”; my emphasis). As her audience’s interlocutor, as a purveyor of cultural knowledge, all the more so when writing about an “other” culture, and as the author of an interpretation of events, the journalist wields a certain power. In deciding who is interviewed or not, who is quoted or not, what information is included or left out, how thoroughly that information is verified, as well as in making linguistic choices which will convey images, connotations, judgments, suggestions, and so on, journalists simultaneously reflect and contribute to shaping cultural debate, public opinion and even politics and policy. This is not to ignore other agents who wield power (government or media magnates, for example). As Conway (2010, p. 202) points out, “[w]hile individual journalists might not be responsible for the system of transformations under which they operate, that system and the power

³ Journalists and translators also have a number of other kinds of constraints in common, of course, such as institutional pressures.

relations that shape it do have an influence on the stories they produce.” In addition, “the effects of media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 54), that is, of framing events. It is in part by investigating such strategies and their prevalence that we can better understand the media’s influence.

3. Stylistic features of news

News texts are, indeed, frequently discussed and analyzed in terms of framing. However, as my title suggests, I will look instead at stylistic features, and metaphor in particular. Why? Such features are situated at a more micro level than framing, so how significant can they really be? They are generally considered key aspects of *literary* texts, not pragmatic ones, not least because they are what makes a text an “aesthetic object”, in which form is at least as important as content and the “interrelation” of the two is what gives the text meaning (Culler, 1997, p. 33). And yet, to ask how journalistic texts “make terrorism mean” is to ask, as one does for literary texts, “about the contribution of its parts to the effect of the whole” (p. 33). Like literary texts, journalistic texts create meaning through the use of evocative language. Journalism studies have sometimes recognized the key form-content relationship in such texts, with Ettema (2012 [2010], p. 296) asserting, for example, that “the formal features of news, as much as (or more than) its content, are a source of whatever socio-cultural authority that journalism retains.”

Similarly to Culler on literary texts, then, Ettema goes so far as to say that the aesthetic/stylistic features of the text are one source of the power the journalist wields. They are also the result of free choice.⁴ They are marked; they are remarkable. They have effects upon the interpretations which a journalist’s readers are likely to construct (Hewson, 2011). In other words, I will argue, they are a non-negligible aspect of “making terrorism mean”. Furthermore, stylistic features of news texts have been under-researched up to now, with a few notable recent exceptions – primarily involving metaphor – but mainly in economic/financial journalistic texts (see, for example, Ravazzolo, 2017; Schäffner, 2014).

3.1 Stylistic features in the news analysis literature

The goal of this article is not to review the abundant literature on “the war on terror”, either as policy or as trope. Nevertheless, war remains a prevalent image when terrorism is the topic of news, and the way in which it is employed warrants more attention. It will be discussed further in the findings section below.

Various scholars have pointed out other examples of language use in the news when terrorism, Muslims or Islam are the topics. I shall discuss a few here which are particularly relevant for the focus of this study. In terms of qualifying violent attacks, Titley (2017, p. 12), for example, highlights the influence that the 9/11 attacks of 2001 still carried, in London and in France, when the 2005 London bombings and 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks were named/labeled: *Le Monde* included on the front page of its 11 January edition the title “Le 11-septembre français” and the “epithet” 7/7 was rapidly applied to London’s summer 2005 attacks, thus “fix[ing] the attacks in a particular genealogy of exceptional moments.” Titley goes on to argue that this allowed the media to treat the attacks like a crisis event, something to be grappled with and,

⁴ Boase-Beier defines style as “aspects of language assumed by the hearer, reader or translator, and indeed by the speaker, original writer, or writer of translations, to be the result of choice” (2006, p. 53).

finally, controlled, and whose underlying causes (because framed as exceptional) did not need to be interrogated. We will see below that the results of this study are more nuanced.

In terms of the treatment of Muslims and Islam in written news, much research has also been conducted. In the UK context, Richardson (2004), using critical discourse analysis (CDA) approaches to examine broadsheet news, observed four frequent argumentative themes in reporting about Islam: the association of Islam with terrorism and/or extremism, with a military threat, with a threat to democracy and with a sexist or social threat. He also found that British newspapers applied processes of separation, differentiation and negativisation to Muslims and their religion. These tendencies continue in the UK and in Europe today (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Ogan, Willnat, Pennington & Bashir, 2014; Piquer Martí, 2015; Women and Equalities Committee, 2016). In the same vein, Muslims are often associated with immigration in “western” news, very often in a negative fashion. Delphy, writing on the French context, asserts that “what’s being created in France [...] is a caste situation, not a class situation. [...] We even see it in language: when we speak of ‘second-’ or even ‘third-generation immigrants’, we transform the immigrant condition – which is, by definition, temporary – into a hereditary and almost biological trait.”⁵ Such terms were also found in this corpus, though not frequently. Yet if we consider connections made between Muslims and immigration more generally, a similar picture is seen in the UK context. For instance, Baker, Gabrielatos and McEnery (2013, p. 105), drawing upon examples from the right-leaning *Times*, qualify them as “representative” of how the British press portrays refugees, by “characterizing them with the adjective *destitute*, which emphasises their plight, while also using a water metaphor (*pouring*), which appears to collectivise, dehumanise and problematise their existence.” Piquer-Martí (2015) has also amply discussed the use of water-related metaphors in news about immigrants in the Spanish context.

In addition, just as the term “terror” is applied selectively (consider, for example, the shootings in Las Vegas, in a church in Charleston, South Carolina, at a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, the man who sent pipe bombs to American political figures, or the German citizen who drove a lorry into a crowd in Münster, Germany in April 2018), former *Guardian* editor Rice-Oxley (2016) observes that the descriptions of perpetrators of violent acts also vary: “It was noticeable how the [white, English] alleged killer of Jo Cox (a British Member of Parliament) was described as a ‘loner’ with ‘mental health’ issues; Muslim attackers are rarely described that way.” Even when a Muslim perpetrator of violence *is* described this way, it doesn’t necessarily make any difference, as we will see.

Clearly, there is a “narrative aspect of identity” (Grievés, 2012, p. 15), and in the case of Muslims, journalists have told a predominantly negative story up to now. This is part of the violence of being rendered symbolic. We will see below how this process plays out in the present corpus.

4. Corpus and methodology

This article covers new analysis of the same corpus I have addressed in two other texts (Riggs, 2018, expected 2019). Whereas previously, I examined use of the term “jihad” and its derivatives, modality, the treatment of the notions of “integration” and “Muslims”, the invoking of Britain and Britons, and alliteration, here I will focus mainly on metaphor.

⁵ <https://www.opendemocracy.net> (also qtd. by Titley, 2017, p. 18).

The corpus comprises 13 articles from the *Guardian* (about 13,500 words) and 14 from the *Telegraph* (about 14,000 words), all published online between 15 July (the morning after the attack took place) and 18 July 2016. These news sources were chosen because they represent left-leaning and right-leaning sections of the political spectrum, are not tabloids, and are widely read. One difference, it should be noted, is that the *Telegraph’s* content is behind a paywall while the *Guardian’s* is currently free. Articles were chosen if they fell within the defined time frame, addressed the Nice attack, however briefly, and contained more than 300 words, not comprised mainly of direct quotes. Their content was collected, coded and analyzed using the qualitative data analysis tool QDA Miner. Metaphors were also coded as

1. relating to terrorist violence specifically;
 2. not relating to terrorist violence specifically;
- of the metaphors in the second category,
3. violent nonetheless; and
 4. positive (for example, “none can rival Nice when it comes to conjuring up images of the sun-kissed good life” (TGObs17)),
 5. negative (e.g. “a cancerous obstacle” (DT26)), or
 6. neutral (e.g. to be “in the spotlight” (TG1)).

5. Findings

5.1 On the attacker’s background

Just as the label “terrorism” is used selectively, those committing violent acts are labeled and narrated selectively and, often, inaccurately. Titley (2017, p. 10) points out that “the biographies of attackers, analysed after the facts of their actions, rarely map onto the modular understandings of ‘extremism’ and ‘religious radicalisation’ that have informed security operations and official narratives.”⁶ Interestingly, the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* do indicate that Bouhleb did not appear to be religious; call him a “loner”; cite various habits such as drinking, drugs and picking up both women and men (mainly the *Telegraph*); and mention a history of mental health issues. And yet, as former editor of the *Guardian* Rice-Oxley (2016) observes, “[d]uring the Nice attacks, everyone from the President down had reached for the words ‘terrorism’ and Isis before much was known about the truck driver who killed 84 people.” He claims that the *Guardian’s* approach differed:

Throughout that day, we were extremely careful about using the T word (it has become rather meaningless) and deliberately avoided mentioning Isis. Of course, it was clear that a mass killing had taken place. But as to motive, nothing was apparent. One of our earliest decisions was to send a reporter to the Tunisian home of the perpetrator, where an alternative to the Isis footsoldier narrative emerged. (Rice-Oxley, 2016)

First of all, in one *Guardian* article (TG1) published the day after the attack, Isis or Islamic State is mentioned a total of 13 times. While terror is mentioned just once, it is in a hyperlink labeled “Why is France targeted so often by terrorists? – video explainer.” The connections have clearly been made. Moreover, the aforementioned aspects of the perpetrator’s biography and the

⁶ Also see Kundnani (2017) on how definitions of “extremism” and “radicalisation”, like that of “terrorism”, have been altered over time to fit political, and in particular securitarian, agendas in the United Kingdom.

strategies Rice-Oxley describes are not the ones that “stuck”. (Nor is everything else about the *Guardian*’s early reporting beyond reproach.) Why not? Part of the explanation is of course the early positions taken by those with authority: the French president, as Rice-Oxley indicates, other members of government and various media outlets. An early sequence of paragraphs in DT6 (*Telegraph*) is another telling example, “establishing” that Bouhlel was a terrorist *before* quoting acquaintances of his who emphasized other traits:

A terrorist who used a hired lorry to kill at least 84 people in a rampage during Bastille Day celebrations in Nice has been named as a convicted criminal well known to the police for armed attacks.

Tunisian-born Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel – described as a “weird loner” who “became depressed” when his wife left him – was a French passport holder who lived in the Riviera city and was regularly in trouble with the law.

Another part of the explanation is stylistic features. Authority and language work in concert: “people in power get to impose their metaphors.” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 484) In reality, despite Rice-Oxley’s claims, the *Guardian*, too, ends up favoring the terrorism narrative through various means, and in particular, its use of modality (see Riggs, 2018, expected 2019); the *Telegraph* does the same, largely through the highly marked and forceful language of its columnists and foreign correspondents (Riggs, 2018).

5.2 Metaphor

Metaphor is a prime example of marked and forceful language. Therefore, in the section that follows, I shall discuss its role in the articles examined.

Obviously metaphor receives a lot more attention in research on literary texts than in analysis of journalistic texts, although there are some exceptions, as indicated above. However, if we follow Lakoff and Johnson (1980) in their theorization of conceptual metaphor, its role in non-literary texts deserves more attention. Indeed, they demonstrate convincingly that “most of our everyday, ordinary conceptual system (and the literal language used to express it) is metaphorically structured” (p. 485). We rely on metaphor to help us or others to visualize situations or ideas of many kinds, and to represent, understand or clarify abstract concepts. Like narration, given the network of “entailment relationships” associated with a given metaphor⁷ that “make the metaphor mean”, use of metaphor means that some realities will be foregrounded and others will be dissimulated. The authors use the example of the war metaphor to discuss how metaphors “may be a guide for future action” and “can be like self-fulfilling prophecies” (p. 484).

5.2.1 War/violent metaphor

The present corpus confirms that the “war on terror” trope, made a household name by the George W. Bush administration after 9/11, is alive and well. According to Titley (2017, p. 7), “[t]he attacks in Paris of January and November 2015 positioned France as a key site in an amorphous war that spills across territories and boundaries.” In the aftermath of those attacks and the Nice event, such positioning, performed by the authorities and by the press, prevails: use of the trope in official discourse is highlighted by both the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* (albeit more frequently by the former). TG4 reminds readers that “Hollande had already

⁷ Using the example “time is money”, Lakoff and Johnson explain that “entailment relationships” are associated ideas, such as “time is a limited resource” and “time is a valuable commodity” (p. 457).

declared that France was ‘at war’ following November’s Paris attacks”, while TG14 recalls his “war-like stance” at that time. In relation to Nice, DT6 quotes then-interior socialist minister Bernard Cazeneuve as saying “We are at war with terrorists who want to strike us at any cost and who are extremely violent”, while TG13 reproduces far-right *Front National* leader Marine Le Pen’s “call [] for a ‘war on Islamic fundamentalism’ and accusation that “all that had happened so far was a ‘war on words.’” TG14 and TG16 repeat part of Le Pen’s statement as well; TG16 includes part of the statement by Cazeneuve quoted in DT6 and cites right-wing former president Nicolas Sarkozy’s use of a war metaphor.

Official discourse and the choice of journalists to quote it thus clearly situate Nice within the “war on terror” event chain. In doing so, they also clearly qualify the violent act as an act of terror. What I find just as interesting, though, is that war- and violence-related metaphors crop up in these articles in relation to content/themes that are *not directly related to terrorist violence*. As described in the methodology section, Table 1 shows the results of coding of metaphors in terms of connotation and whether they describe terrorist violence (TV), do not describe terrorist violence (NTV) and, within the latter category, are nonetheless related to violence (V) (data contributing to the *total* number of metaphors is highlighted in bold):

Metaphor Source	Total	Negative			Positive			Neutral			Violent: 27**
		TV	NTV	V	TV	NTV	V	TV	NTV	V	
TG	51*	17	17	6	0	3	0	2	12	2	Violent: 36
DT	49	15	6	4	3	5	1	10	10	3	

TV=Terrorist violence

NTV=Not terrorist violence

V=Violent (violence, war, threat, death) nonetheless

*The total was determined by adding up the figures marked in bold.

**The figures in this column were determined by adding up those from the “TV” and “V” categories.

Table 1: Quantitative data on violent and non-violent, and negative, positive, or neutral, metaphors in the corpus

Two sets of results in particular stand out: one related to negative connotation, the other to violence. Violent metaphors constitute over half of the occurrences of the stylistic feature in both sets of articles. The *Guardian* tends more toward negative metaphors than the *Telegraph*, notably even when the content described is not terrorist violence. In contrast, across connotations, the *Telegraph* includes more violent metaphors than the *Guardian*. However, we have just seen a number of instances in the *Guardian* of violence introduced through direct quoting, which was purposely left out of the quantitative data analysis in order to ensure the focus was on the journalist’s own style.

Let us now look at war- and violence-related metaphors in detail. By using the imaged phrase “standard bearer”, which carries naval or military associations, twice, TG1 emphasizes its assertion that France is seen, including by Isis, as a “standard bearer of western secular liberalism”. According to the journalist, this makes the country a target. In line with what Lakoff and Johnson (1980) label the “countries as persons” conceptual metaphor, France is often personified in both sets of articles through discussion of the emotions and reactions of the country. TG9 also uses violent metaphor to explain why Isis has targeted France and, in

particular, why the organization chose the symbolic Bastille Day: it “represents a significant **blow** by French people to a tyrannical regime and, as such, the spirit of the French republic itself.” Thus Isis has hit France when it will hurt most.

TG1 continues with the battle-related imagery further on:

And this may be a final reason why Isis has focused on France. The group has been heavily influenced by both millennial thinking, which stresses the imminent final **battle between the forces of belief and unbelief** [...].

The *Guardian* article emphasizes the idea that Isis is on a religious crusade, and the presence of alliteration makes the phrase even more salient. Similar imagery appears elsewhere in the *Guardian* articles, in addition to Hollande’s aforementioned “**war-like stance**” (TG14). France, too, must take a war-like position: “Terrorism has upended politics in France since 2015, and now that is about to get worse. It has put the nation on a **war footing** [...]” “Sparring” appears twice in TG4 to highlight the political disunity which reigns following the Nice attack:

After last year’s attacks there were brief pauses in political **sparring**, but this time the accusations began sooner;

After the attacks last year [...] there was a short pause in political **sparring**. But this time the anger and accusations began even before families could bury their dead.

Also note the assonance with “a” in the second example. The same article uses the term “martial” to further emphasize this contrast between political positions after the Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan events, on the one hand, and after Nice, on the other:

After the Charlie Hebdo attacks, the tone of the government’s approach was to try to understand society’s ills and act on what was termed France’s “social and ethnic apartheid”. After November’s attacks, the tone was more **martial**. [...] This time Hollande is pleading for the preservation of national cohesion and unity.

Here as elsewhere there is strong emphasis on national political disarray. Coupled with the violent act itself, this may heighten the impression that events are out of control, that there is a crisis situation, an impression which is also encouraged by various other choices throughout the corpus (for example, modality).

In terms of war-related metaphor and in particular how it is associated with politics, the *Telegraph* corpus shows similar patterns, but unlike the *Guardian*, it attributes more blame to the socialist government through a combination of metaphor and other choices. As in the *Guardian*, there is concern about how these violent attacks may fuel the cause of the *Front National*. In DT7, the attacks are associated with Muslims and it is assumed that the electorate will do the same:

Nice, together with the regional capital, Marseille, and countless smaller towns with large Muslim populations in south-east France, is the Front’s prime **battlefield**.

Moutet, the French journalist who wrote DT7, goes on to assert that the attack on Bastille Day revelers in Nice was, in fact, a major **coup** for Isis – for her, Isis is clearly behind it – “because it will exacerbate the racial tensions upon which it [Isis] thrives.” It would have been fair to admit that the *Front National* also thrives on racial tensions.

One of Moutet’s metaphors may give the initial impression that she faults all politicians equally:

Meanwhile, France’s politicians, unlike after previous terrorist attacks, have left their **shell-shocked constituents** bereft.

Note the alliteration, emphasizing the striking equation of the ramifications of the attack with the ramifications of political turmoil. Moutet’s use of violent metaphor continues:

With next year’s presidential and general elections **in their sights**, they have given up on national unity to denounce mismanagement of security measures.

DT24 makes a similar observation using metaphor:

political unity [...] has **shattered** [see discussion of full sentence below].

In reality, rather than faulting *all* politicians, both DT7’s and DT24’s authors actually favor a conservative position; DT7, through Moutet’s negative stance on Muslims, reinforced through alliteration (Riggs, expected 2019) and what she terms the “failings of integration”, and DT24, through incorporation of direct quotes from right-wing figures, not both sides, so that it is criticism of the socialist government that was in place and its “failures” that come to the fore:

Nice has long been a **bastion of the Right**. Christian Estrosi, a security **hardliner** and ex-minister under Mr Sarkozy who is now president of the wider Riviera region, accused the government of failing completely in Nice. (DT24)

Furthermore, while both news sources refer to the claim made by Isis that Bouhlel was a “**soldier**” of Islam, the *Telegraph* both uses the metaphor more often and tends to take the claim at face value, while the *Guardian* emphasizes the lack of evidence for the claim.

Finally, DT7’s author concludes via a violent metaphor that the Nice attack is decisive. She also intimates that France was totally unified before the spate of attacks of which Nice is the most recent, in line with her blame of Muslims and radicalization which, according to her, came from outside, and with her failure to acknowledge longstanding social problems (contrary to the *Guardian*):

Nice, I am sad to say, may prove the most **divisive blow** against the France of liberté, égalité and fraternité.

Let us now consider metaphor usage related to plants/growth, disease and water.

5.2.2. Plants/Growth

To put it briefly, this rubric reveals a key difference between the two news sources. TG1 uses plant- or growth-related metaphor to evoke the underlying, longstanding social and economic causes of the violence France is experiencing:

Other reasons for the violence are **rooted in** grave problems within France itself.

The article goes on to discuss security problems and failings, recognizing that they are not just down to France, but also the result of shortcomings at the European level; other “grave problems” emphasized by this and other TG articles are social and create “**fertile ground for polarization**”.

TG3 takes a similar position:

Hollande has announced more airstrikes in Iraq and Syria against Islamic State, as well as the calling up of reservists and a three-month extension of France’s state of emergency – none of which is likely to address the **roots** of the problem.

The instance of “root” found in the *Telegraph* subcorpus plays a very different role, emphasizing instead the presence and threat of Salafism:

[...] Salafism, a form of conservative Islam which rejects liberal French values and provides the theological underpinnings of global jihadism, has **taken root**. (DT26)

In sum, the two news sources appear to employ plant/growth metaphors in conjunction with distinct phenomena, but all are negative.

5.2.3. Disease

I mentioned above that the marked and forceful language of the *Telegraph* articles by columnists and foreign correspondents emphasizes the terrorism narrative. Their use of disease-related metaphor is a prime example. In DT26, British journalist Meleagrou-Hitchens asserts that

[t]he person who drove that lorry believed he was part of an altruistic and utopianist global project intended to save humanity, not destroy it. The people he killed were, in his eyes, a **cancerous obstacle** to this vision, and having chosen to reject it had to be removed from the equation.

He unequivocally makes religion, and in particular Islam’s supposed abhorrence of the western “Us”, the issue.

Now, consider Moutet’s choices in the following excerpts from DT7:

Bouhlel’s alleged associates have now been arrested and held by the French police, looking for the connections that have escaped them until now. [...] Meanwhile, a divided country is once again questioning the motivations of the enemy within. Isil’s **deadly ideas are airborne, like a virus**. [...] The more they separate seemingly ordinary Muslims from the national community, the better, they believe – especially if activists and the commentariat’s useful idiots reinforce the notion that the perpetrators were “driven to it”.

Her strong metaphorical language emphasizes the threat, and the possibility of contagion, represented by Isil, and denigrates a position more typical of the left – and, indeed, of the *Guardian*. Moreover, the phrase directly following the metaphor and simile, “seemingly ordinary Muslims”, is unsettling and seems to insinuate that the group in question is not *really* ordinary, and corruptible.

5.2.4. Metaphor associated with water

As mentioned above, both Baker *et al.* (2013) and Piquer-Martí (2015) have highlighted the role of water-related metaphors in negative discourse about Muslim immigrants and refugees. The results of this study suggest that their use is more nuanced. Consider the *Guardian*, where such metaphor actually contributes to contextualizing and historicizing the events, as well as interrogating their causes:

There will also be the question: why is France suffering a **wave** of extremist violence that is more intense – certainly more lethal – than any other seen in the west since the 9/11 attacks almost 15 years ago? (TG1)

France has a history of Islamic extremism reaching back decades. The 1990s saw two **waves** of attacks. One was linked to the bloody civil war between authorities and extremist groups in the former colony of Algeria. A second involved **homegrown** militants

in the north of France who evolved a particular **brand** of terrorism mixing armed robbery and jihadism. (TG1)

While the article does bring up terrorism early on (15 July), it in various ways refutes the “crisis” narrative, as also supported by the *Guardian*’s greater general focus on underlying and longstanding social causes of extremism, which we see here with “history...reaching back decades”, reference to the civil war with Algeria, and the “homegrown” (another growth metaphor) nature of certain violent activists. The metaphorical “brand” also suggests that there are various types of extremism, with different types of actors, motivations and *modi operandi*.

Next, we find a very different kind of criticism to that which we saw from the *Telegraph* journalists above, while the “pouring” metaphor is used to describe compassion, rather than immigration (recall Baker *et al.*):

Beyond the terrible loss of families for ever torn apart and traumatised just because they wanted to watch fireworks on a warm summer evening, the wider result [note the alliterative effects with “t” and “w”] of this tragedy is that extremes, political and religious, will continue to feed off each other. Voices of reason and moderation will be **drowned out** [...] (TG3).

[C]ondolences **poured in** [for those families and the deceased]. (TG13)

Moreover, TG15, the article Rice-Oxley mentioned (see above) which was written by a journalist who visited M’saken, Tunisia, actually uses water imagery and a related reference to a natural phenomenon to depict the history of Bouhlel’s psychological state. He had a “**stormy** adolescence”, “[i]n France his violent temperament “**resurfaced**”. These and other images also allow us to picture the setting, which is portrayed in a positive light (as is Nice, in the *Guardian* but not in the *Telegraph* (Riggs, expected 2019)):

Once a small town, M’saken has in recent years been **swallowed up** by the expanding Sousse coastal conurbation, its wealth fuelled by miles of hotels along glittering beaches. The town has handsome cafes and wide boulevards, its prosperity underlined by a shiny Renault dealership on the main street.⁸

In contrast, as already mentioned, according to Moutet in DT7, “Radicalisation came to France [...] in **waves**”, that is, external forces, not France, are responsible for it (also see Riggs, 2018). Similarly, DT21’s water-related metaphor is a dig at what are, to a conservative observer, the downsides of being in the European Union and the Schengen zone:

France can do little to prevent the **flow** of suspected weapons or terrorists into its territory.

Terrorists and their tools come from outside. This is a position the conservative readership of the *Telegraph* is likely to support, even though recent attacks in the United Kingdom tell a very different story.

Finally, the phrase “in the wake of”, used a total of three times in DT24, emphasizes both political turmoil and the terror event chain:

Political unity that stood firm **in the wake of** the Charlie Hebdo and Paris November terror attacks has **shattered in the wake of** this latest massacre.

⁸ In this excerpt, the verbs “fuelled” and “underlined” also demonstrate how ubiquitous metaphor is in our everyday language.

To summarize, the findings on metaphor point to its ubiquity in language; demonstrate that the “war on terror” trope is still widely used by both politicians and the media; and suggest that the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* use certain types of metaphor in divergent ways. For example, while both news sources use war and battle metaphors to emphasize political disarray in France, the *Telegraph*, in line with its political leanings, blames the then socialist government. Plant- and growth-related metaphors point to longstanding societal problems that underlie radicalization and terrorism, in the *Guardian*, while in the *Telegraph*, these metaphors and disease-oriented metaphors tend to emphasize the threat of Islam and Muslims. Finally, violent and negative metaphors abound in both news sources, even in textual segments where terrorist violence is not the topic.

6. Conclusions

The role of the journalist has been defined here as that of a translator of culture who narrates not only events but, when those events occur abroad, “other” places and populations for the “home” – in this case, primarily British – audience. This role carries both power and responsibility, and fulfilling that role, I hold, therefore requires “ethical reflection” (Maitland, 2017, “Introduction”, section “What’s ‘wrong’ with cultural translation?”).

The power the journalist wields is found not only in the content she conveys but in the forms she chooses; these include stylistic features. The findings of the present study confirm that stylistic features, and in particular metaphor, are a non-negligible aspect of “making terrorism mean”, and therefore warrant further research.

First, the longstanding “war on terror” trope is still in play, in both the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph*, in particular through the quoting of authorities who use it. What is more interesting, however, is that war- and violence-related metaphors appear frequently even when terrorism or the violent act are not the topic. As war imagery colors much of the content, and in particular descriptions of the political situation, and as violence and negativity pervade the texts, an impression of chaos, crisis, threat and danger, already present due to the nature of the event in question, is likely to be heightened and, in turn, to foment fear and distrust of certain groups. Indeed, both sources are guilty – the word is appropriate – of evoking a war between cultures, between Islam and “the West”, even though the perpetrator’s links to extremists acting in the name of Islam and in particular to Isis were never, to my knowledge, clearly established.

There are nevertheless differences in how the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* treat the themes of Islam and terrorism and convey violence and negativity, and these are also partly explained by metaphor usage. While both news sources emphasize the political disarray which follows the Nice attack, the right-leaning *Telegraph* blames the socialist government that was in power, emphasizes the Nice attack’s place in a violent event chain, and tends to fault Muslims/Islam and extremism, which are also portrayed as *external* forces, through use of water-related and plant/growth metaphors. The *Guardian*’s use of such metaphors instead emphasizes the underlying social and economic (and therefore also partly *internal*) causes of violence in France, and historicizes and contextualizes both the event and the perpetrator’s identity and background.

Second, a finding related to disease metaphor is particularly interesting, even though such metaphor appears infrequently and only in the *Telegraph* subcorpus. Recall the discussion, above, of how terrorism and the related notions of extremism and radicalization have been

“made to mean” over time. Moutet’s use of the virus metaphor could not illustrate more precisely what Kundnani (2017) describes:

The concept of ‘extremism’ underwent a transformation following 7/7. [...] It now emphasised attitudes, mindsets and dispositions. Above all, it referred to a free-floating ideology that did not work through recruitment but through radicalisation. ‘Radicalisation’ referred to the process by which extremist ideology captured the minds of the young and made them into potential terrorists. Extremism was pictured as a virus, flowing from radicalizer to radicalized, infecting, spreading, infiltrating (Bettison 2009: 130-1). Naively allowing Muslims too much separation and autonomy, in the name of multicultural tolerance, had encouraged the spread of the virus. (p. 148)

This result suggests that more work should be done on disease-related metaphor in news about terrorist events, in particular how it may tie in with particular political positions (as the quote above suggests). It also shows that in this kind of study, quantitative data does not tell the whole story: even infrequent occurrences of a stylistic feature can carry significant meaning.

Finally, I observed that there was a strong and very early focus on terrorism and terrorist motivations in both news sources despite Bouhlel’s background, psychological problems and lifestyle. These characteristics were in fact part of counter interpretations (recall Titley) which did not “stick”. The terrorism narrative instead came to overshadow more measured, balanced approaches by other authorities because of the interpretations that had already been developed and reinforced around prior links in the event chain. Given these observations and given the *selective* use of the “terrorist” label in conjunction with recent violent events around the world, one can ask, and journalists should ask, whether the early presumption of terrorism was justified, and whether the presumption was made because of France’s recent history or, instead, because the perpetrator was a Tunisian living in Nice (point of departure for a significant number of men who left to fight in Syria, as both news sources indicate).

This corpus, albeit small, supports Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) assertion that conceptual metaphor is omnipresent in our discourse and shapes the way we take in and interpret information. We are accustomed to metaphor; do we also take its power for granted? We need to be aware of the prevalence and weight of metaphor in others’ and our own discourse, in our own and others’ interpretations of ideas and situations. This goes for journalists, too, as Rice-Oxley (2016), incorporating a lovely water metaphor, convincingly asserts: “Suffice [it] to say that it is vital to measure every word in our news stories carefully to navigate these precarious waters of meaning.”

It is beyond well established that reporting on Islam and Muslims often paints each in a negative light, including by associating them closely with terrorism and violence when reporting on these types of events. This misleading, inflammatory targeting of a minority group has been recognized (a notable example is Leveson, 2012), and changes, called for. While best practices have been proposed (see, for example, Seib, 2017), there is a big piece of the “how” of those messages themselves that has not been sufficiently researched: the stylistic features that feed into the negative representations. For practice to change, these factors, too, need to be recognized and remedied.

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Corpus (listed by code)

The Guardian (all retrieved from www.theguardian.com)

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- TG3. Nougayrède, N. (2016, July 16). As horror strikes again, all eyes are on how France reacts.
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