

MOTIVATION FOR ASLA 2024 PRIZE FOR THE BEST MASTER THESIS

Can algorithms translate the world? A digital discourse analysis of Google Translate's algorithmic agency in the translation of news reports

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The study investigates the mediation of meanings by Google Translate's algorithmic agency, focusing on the translation of news reports from English to Portuguese, the official language of Brazil. The findings of the thesis illuminate how Google Translate's algorithmic decisions reshape language and representation, constructing and enacting power by renaming reality and reshaping evaluations.

The nuanced analysis reveals the algorithm's ability to neutralize appraisal, recontextualize semiotic elements, and standardize language, thereby changing ideological stances in the target texts. It offers a data-driven substantiation to the conclusion that machine translation can and does significantly recontextualize news media, which is an issue of current relevance. The robust theoretical framework and research design integrate three theoretical perspectives to showcase and analyse the shifts undergone by semiotic elements in the translation process. Potentially difficult theoretical details are explained and exemplified in a pedagogical manner, making it easy to follow all the steps of the investigation. The methodology is well anchored in the research questions and the theory strengthens the analysis. Further, this Master thesis shows good coherence between research questions, method, lines of interpretation, results, and conclusions. The text is well-written and of high quality in terms of language, style, structure, and scientific rigor.

The thesis makes a substantial and pioneering contribution to the field of Critical Discourse Analysis that focuses on digitalized content. It can also be used as an excellent example of meticulous text analysis in e.g. teacher education. The study reflects the reality of many news consumers who are dependent on the translations between English and their native languages. The results of the study are firmly linked to current and rapidly emerging research areas in e.g. Machine and AI translations and other technical solutions that are part of our everyday lives linking the study directly to the field of Applied Linguistics.

On the behalf of ASLA's student prize committee in April 2024