

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on the translation of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's (SABC) Sotho news bulletins from English. The main aim in this study is to examine the approaches which are adopted by the SABC translators of television news into Sotho languages, particularly into Sepedi. As a result, the research seeks to describe and analyse the procedures, methods and strategies used by the SABC when translating the news. The analysis draws on translation theories and strategies proposed by Mona Baker (1992), Christiane Nord (1991, 1997) and Gideon Toury (1980).

Before analysing the collected data for this research, some background information about the SABC is provided. This is followed by the rationale, the literature review and the theoretical framework within which the research is based. The analysis is followed by a conclusion. While trying to accomplish my main objective in relation to strategies and methods of translation, this research also tests Stephen Maphike's 1992 hypothesis which states that the news translators translate literally or word for word, instead of translating conceptually. The hypothesis is made clear in the rationale, and in the conclusion, an inference will be made as to whether the hypothesis is valid or not.

Finally, given that TV news is the source from which the majority of the people get daily information about current events, some suggestions are made about the SABC's methods of translation in order to assist in making the news as accurate and accessible as possible.

1.1. *BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT THE SABC*

According to Barry Mishkind (2004), the first broadcasting station in South Africa was established by the South African Railways in Johannesburg on the 29th December 1923. On 1st July 1924, however, the Scientific and Technical Club in Johannesburg took over the control of the broadcasting station from the South African Railways. In Cape Town, so says Mishkind, the Cape and Peninsula Broadcasting Association also

started its own broadcasting station which came into being on 15th September 1924. A similar initiative or endeavour was also introduced in Durban on 10th December 1924.

The existence of these broadcasting stations relied heavily on the financial support which emanated from the listeners' payments of their licenses. However, as Mishkind argues, due to the limited area covered by these three broadcasting stations, this kind of support was not sufficient to maintain and sustain them, and consequently, the African Broadcasting Company (ABC) was formed on 15th April 1927. This company was formed by the I. W. Schlesinger organization with permission from the South African government and it incorporated the three broadcasting stations under one umbrella. According to Mishkind, this organization had the sole rights of broadcasting. But still, the financial difficulties were not yet over, and this prompted the then prime minister, Hertzog, to order an inquiry into all aspects of broadcasting. In addition, as William A. Hachten (1984) notes, the South African government invited Sir John Reith, the director general of the British Broadcasting Corporation, to visit South Africa so that he could share his broadcasting expertise with the South African government.

All this resulted in the formation of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, which, according to Mishkind (2004), was created under the Broadcast Act No. 22 of 1936. In this Act it was stipulated that broadcasts should also be made in Afrikaans within the following year. The establishment of the SABC put an end to the ABC.

Since 1923, the time when broadcasting was introduced in South Africa until 1936, broadcasts were made in English only, and the inclusion of Afrikaans in the subsequent years was seen as a positive step towards the maintenance and sustenance of the SABC. It should be noted that during this time, all the broadcasts were made over the radio as television had not yet arrived in South Africa. Before coming to South Africa, television was already known in other countries of the world, especially European countries, or the so-called developed countries. To use Shameela Essack's (2002), words, "television first made its appearance in the United States and Europe in the 1950s, whereas South Africans were only able to access television two decades later" (Essack, 2002: 9). To be exact, Hachten states that "the Republic of South Africa has had television service only since January of 1976" (Hachten, 1984: 206).

The status of the Afrikaans language in the SABC became stronger and stronger especially after the National Party won the governmental elections in 1948. This National Party victory meant that consequently, Afrikaaners (Hachten 1984) gained control of the SABC's board of governors and gave more attention to programming in Afrikaans. Following this, "the SABC established its own news gathering service and in 1950, ended the practice of carrying BBC news over SABC facilities" (Hachten, 1984: 202). This practice had been going on for a long time.

In Mishkind's words, "the English and the Afrikaans services were for many years known as Radio South Africa and Radio Suid Afrika, respectively. They are now called SAFM and Radio Sonder Grense (RSG), and each broadcast(s) 115 ½ hours of programs each week. These cultural services are beamed nationwide on FM, while RSG is also available on short wave".

(<http://www.olderadio.com/archives/international.safrica.html>).

Mishkind also notes that on May 1, 1950, the third program service known as the Springbok Radio was introduced, and in his opinion, this was probably the most popular of all the SABC's services. According to Hachten (1984), Springbok Radio was established as a commercial service and it generated funds for the SABC's three medium wave services. This proved to be a success and by the mid-1950s, each of the three services, that is, the English, the Afrikaans services, and Springbok Radio, was "receiving an equal share of the seventy hours a day of broadcasting over fifty-two transmitters" (Hachten, 1984: 202).

But despite this, Mishkind (2004) reveals that Springbok Radio was eventually closed at the end of 1985 as its listeners had been reduced in number following the appearance of television in the late 1970s. The decline of Springbok Radio resulted in the loss of revenue for this radio, that is, the Springbok Radio itself, and its reluctant closure was inevitable. Many of its listeners were against this move.

Furthermore, Mishkind also reveals that a necessity for the broadcasting service for black people, who were by then known as the Bantu, was realized in 1952. Following this, a Rediffusion service for blacks or Africans was established on 1st August 1952, in Orlando Township, just outside Johannesburg. This was a single channel, wired

loudspeaker system which was operated by a British firm, and it reached 11, 910 subscribers by 1957, when the SABC started providing sixteen hours of programming daily for the system. Broadcasts were made in three Bantu languages to the townships in Soweto. But due to some technical and cost problems, so argues Hachten (1984), the SABC was unable to expand its Bantu service throughout the country via medium and short wave.

But the development of FM in 1961 brought some remarkable changes to the whole situation. According to Mishkind (2004), from 1st June 1962, broadcasts were made in Tswana and Northern Sotho from Pretoria, and from January 1st, 1963, they were made in Zulu from Durban. From 1st June 1963, they were made in Xhosa from Grahamstown, and in February 1965, broadcasts in Venda and Tsonga were inaugurated from studios in Johannesburg and transmitted from stations in the Northern Transvaal province.

Mishkind (2004) also states that the first FM transmissions of the English and Afrikaans Services, Springbok Radio and the South Sotho and Zulu Services were made on Christmas day of 1961, while the FM stereo tests began in Johannesburg in 1985. Moreover, he also reveals that the first station to go FM stereo was Five FM, from the Sentech Tower in 1986. In addition, Five FM was also credited as the first station to go nationwide on 1st December 1988. But at the moment, there are many stereos that have since been established at the SABC. Those include both the commercial and the non-commercial or the public broadcast service stereos or stations.

Furthermore, Mishkind states that at the present moment, the broadcasting infrastructure in South Africa is operated by Sentech (Ltd) which was originally formed as the signal distribution company of the SABC in October 1992. This network, so says Mishkind, was formerly owned and operated by the SABC, which through deregulation within the industry in 1996/97, brought about Sentech's current portfolio within the industry. The SABC now still continues to be state-owned, but unlike in the past, it is also a self-governing company which has a board of directors. But as Hachten advises, "no history of the SABC, however brief, would be complete without reference to the covert influence of the Broederbond" (Hachten, 1984: 203).

According to Hachten, the Broederbond was a secret, all-male, white Afrikaner organization which was founded in 1918 by a handful of young Afrikaners. This organization which, to use Hachten's words, was "the real force behind the scenes in South African public life", was able to reach a membership in the 1970s, of twelve thousand, and it was organized into some eight hundred divisions (Hachten, 1984: 204). Only Afrikaners who were staunch supporters of the National Party government were allowed to be members of this organization. These included prime ministers, cabinet members, leaders in the church, education, labour, police, the media, universities, and even the Boers in the farming communities.

The Broederbond's main objectives may be summarized as follows: Firstly, the Broederbond's aim was "to maintain a separate pure-white Afrikaans 'volk' (nation), seemingly at all costs", secondly, to afrikanerize English-speaking South Africans, and finally, to maintain a white South African nation built on the rock of the Afrikaner volk with the Broederbond as the hard core of that rock (Hachten, 1984: 204). Following this, Hachten maintains that "the SABC, as one of the strongest opinion-forming and cultural institutions in South Africa, has been under the Broederbond influence for many years". This means that everything that the SABC was broadcasting, had to comply with the interests of the Broederbond. The following editorial which appeared in the *Cape Times* when Steve de Villiers was appointed as director general of the SABC, makes this point clear:

That the newly appointed director general of the SABC, Mr. Steve de Villiers, is listed as a member of the Broederbond is hardly surprising. What would be surprising would be the appointment of a non-Broeder to this top and most influential position. ... The point is that once again a member of the Afrikaner secret elite is to decide what is good and what is not good, for the listening and viewing public. There is no chance of English-speakers gaining admission to this exclusive section of the Afrikaner section of the white section of the total population (Hachten, 1984: 205-6).

In addition, Hachten also points out that the Broederbond organization was responsible for the late introduction of television in South Africa. As indicated earlier, television had been known for twenty five years in other countries before it was introduced in South Africa in 1976. In Hachten's view, the National Party and its SABC were frankly afraid of television as they thought it would bring some negative

changes as far as their Broederbond ideology was concerned. They thought TV would *conscientise* both the urban black population and the white English people politically. This, it was thought, would result in people revolting against, or at least, complaining about, the National Party led government.

According to Hachten, an attempt to introduce TV in South Africa was first made in 1953 by the J. Arthur Rank organization, but the Nationalist government made it impossible for this to happen, saying the time was not ripe. Another attempt was made in 1964 by a group of firms under the leadership of Harry F. Oppenheimer, who was the head of the giant Anglo-American group. But again, the Nationalist Party government, particularly the minister of posts and telegraphs Dr. Albert Hertzog, and the prime minister Hendrik Verwoerd, blocked the way. But in 1968, one major obstacle to television's introduction was removed when Vorster relieved Hertzog of his post as the minister of posts and telegraphs. When the first "moon walk" in July 1969 was televised throughout the entire world, South Africa was among those countries that could not witness that historic event on TV. This, together with some pressure from the public, forced the Nationalist to look into this matter more carefully and make some recommendations about a national television system. A commission of inquiry comprised of 12 men was set up in December 1969 to find out if TV could not be introduced (Hachten, 1984: 206).

Eventually, a decision was taken that television would indeed be introduced in South Africa, but this would only happen if TV was to be operated from the point of view of the National Party and its Broederbond. The Nationalist government and the SABC were convinced that they would be able to control the new medium for their own purposes, both by avoiding its negative features and by using it as a political tool. It was decided that the first phase of television was to be a combined service for whites on one channel, presented equally in English and Afrikaans, and later, another channel for Bantu was to be introduced. Sotho and Zulu were the languages chosen for the Witwatersrand Bantu population. In the second phase, it was recommended that separate white services should be set up in English and Afrikaans. The Zulu service was to be extended to Durban and a Xhosa one was to be introduced in the Eastern Cape as soon as it was practicable. Finally, by January 1976, South Africa

saw history being made when “this carefully planned and controlled new television service was ready to broadcast” for the first time ever (Hachten, 1984: 209).

1.2. *THE PRODUCTION OF THE NEWS*

As indicated in the previous section, the SABC was under the strict control of the Broederbond for most of the time since its inception in 1936. As already stated, everything that was broadcast during the Broederbond’s reign had to serve the interests of the Broeders. This included the production and the broadcasting of the news.

As a result, many incidents were not covered in the media in order to preserve the Broederbond’s image in South Africa. According to Gordon S. Jackson (1993), “decisions on what journalists could or could not cover, were determined by the security authorities in a given situation” (Jackson, 1993: 145). Jackson also states that “the government simply ensured that only its version of reality was portrayed”, and he also points out that journalists who obtained photographs or footage of any incident that proved to be contrary to the government’s liking, could be given a “steep fine or a lengthy jail term for daring to share the material with the public” (Jackson, 1993: 145).

In order to stamp its authority on what was supposed to be viewed on TV, the government made sure that separate news bulletins were produced for different ethnic languages on different channels. News for white people was broadcast on TV1 while black people had to view their news, which usually differed from the white news, on TV2/3. One broadcast was made in Nguni languages, which are Zulu and Xhosa, and another one was made in Sotho languages which include Sesotho, Sepedi and Setswana. In the eyes of Dimitri Martinis (2002), however, the idea of providing separate news bulletins in different ethnic languages was just another way of reinforcing the apartheid ideology of separate development.

After the Nationalist Party government came to an end in 1994, many social changes did take place in South Africa, including changes in the SABC. Since then, there has been a great deal of transformation and the SABC did away with its culture of

“producing different news for different people”, to use Martinis’ (2002) words. At the present moment, just as Martinis argues, the SABC produces one bulletin for every South African citizen or viewer, rather, regardless of nationality. From the information that was accessed in this research, it is clear that the SABC produces one news bulletin in English which is translated into all the South African official languages.

The ideologies lying behind the SABC’s news production service are therefore quite different today. As we are now in a democratic dispensation, the SABC is trying its utmost to produce news that suits a democratic society. Gone are the days of the Broederbond in the SABC’s news production service, and also in all other services in general.

1.3. *RATIONALE*

When looking at the news broadcast on SABC 1, 2 and 3, it is clear that in most cases, the news is similar. That is, the news bulletins from these three channels usually cover the same news items although the way of reporting those items is sometimes different. Both the similarities and differences led to my interest in the strategies and methods used by the SABC translators.

In 1992 Stephen Maphike suggested that “the greatest mistake made by news translators is word translation instead of concept translation” (Maphike, 1992: 21). There is consensus in the literature on translation and on the theory of translation around this issue. Eugene Nida (1964) argues that “...if the translator is to produce an acceptable translation, he must, for example, have an excellent background in the source language and at the same time, have control over the resources of the language into which he is translating. He cannot simply match words from a dictionary, he must in a real sense create a new linguistic form to carry the concept expressed in the source language” (Nida, 1964: 145). In this quotation, Nida talks about a translator creating a new linguistic form to carry the *concept* expressed in the source language, and not the *word*.

A similar argument can also be found in *UNISA's 2001* Tutorial letter from the Department of Linguistics where it is argued that “the most important thing to remember when translating terminology is to translate concepts and not terms. Inexperienced translators, when confronted with technical translation, often cannot identify the concept behind the term. They simply look up the term in a bilingual dictionary and incorporate it into the translation without understanding it and then produce an unintelligible text” (UNISA, Tutorial letter SETRAN-9 102/2001: 34).

Given the fact that the SABC has developed a new language policy and the country as a whole has adopted a multilingual language policy resulting in a far higher frequency of translations, one would expect the approach in their translations to have moved away from such an unsophisticated approach. This research seeks to establish whether or not this is the case.