



HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSE &
LANGUAGE MISUSE: A
Study of Translation Trends
Found in the Multilingual
Country Reports Published
by Human Rights Watch

Jan Foremski, Arman Martirosyan, Martyna Nowakowska

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Research questions	4
3. Methodology	5
4. Results.....	5
4.1. Poland in 2020: Authoritarianism and harassment of minority groups.....	6
4.1.1. Democracy and elections	6
4.1.2. Independence of the media	7
4.1.3. LGBT rights	8
4.1.4. Migration and asylum	9
4.1.5. Women’s and children’s rights.....	10
4.2. Armenia in 2020 and 2021: From a ‘counter-battle’ to an ‘outing’	11
4.2.1. Concerning the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War.....	11
4.2.2. Concerning domestic violence and LGBT discrimination	15
4.2.3. General findings and conclusions on Armenia	20
5. Discussion and conclusion	20
6. References	21

1. Introduction

As Hendl (2020) notes, translations of news and media reports started to gain academic attention “as a specific type of translation in translation studies” only in recent years (p. 382). The present project will aim to contribute to this field by studying translation trends found in the multilingual country reports published by Human Rights Watch. The latter is an international non-governmental organization founded in 1978 that “investigates and reports on abuses happening in all corners of the world (*About Us*). Every year, the organization publishes its *World Report*, originally written in English and then translated into the respective language(s) spoken in the given country.

Our study will concentrate on two countries: Poland and Armenia, and their 2020 reports. The former, stuck between Central and Eastern Europe, is nowadays at the center of attention concerning its democratic status, especially within the European Union. The latter, on the other hand, recently went through a military conflict and political turmoil. Both countries have a known record of human rights violations when it comes to minorities and marginalized groups, which their respective media and news channels often do not report on or do so incorrectly/insufficiently. Human Rights Watch has expanded its work “to address abuses against those likely to face discrimination, including women, LGBT people, and people with disabilities” (*About Us*). Thus, its country reports – by admittedly including chapters on these groups – can have a positive effect since they somewhat fill in the gap of the local mainstream media.

Human Rights Watch is an independent organization and refuses government funding, which means that it is unlikely to be influenced by the political beliefs and decisions of given governments, stresses Hendl (2020, p. 382). Indeed, in his comparative study of English to Arabic translations of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International texts, he found that *local media translators* often manipulated the news to serve particular purposes, whereas *translators working for the NGOs* used “faithful translation” as their main strategy (p. 391). At the same time, still, although the Human Rights Watch

report translations will likely remain unaltered, the devices used by translators might include '(re)framing'¹ and 'transediting',² to borrow Hendl's terms. As he goes on to note, "news translators translate for a particular geographical, time-based and cultural context, and they are subject to crucial limitations of time and space" (p. 382), so they might need to use (re)framing as a tool for "omission and addition designed to suppress, accentuate or elaborate particular aspects" of a given narrative (p. 384). Although this mostly concerns non-NGO translators who will have to "edit text based on the rules and practices of the media in which they work" (p. 384), Human Rights Watch translators – working for an independent organization and keen on faithful translation – are rather faced with *linguistic* limitations that might, as a consequence, reflect cultural norms and beliefs. Hendl (2020) believes that faithful translation not only reflects the linguistic choices but also must reflect "the thoughts and feelings" of the source text (p. 386), as well as "the intention" of the original material (p. 391). After all, he considers this to be the "ethical role" of translators working in human rights advocacy (p. 392). Yet the two languages selected for our project – Polish and Armenian – belong to different language families than English, and it will be difficult for translators to remain completely unaffected. In fact, in the Arabic translations studied by Hendl (2020), the message was sometimes translated accurately but was "written in different styles" (p. 386). We, too, want to study the style and syntax as well as the particular vocabulary and constructions employed by the Polish and Armenian translators when dealing with the English text. Although they must be committed to a faithful and ethical translation, translators' ultimate goal is to "transmit information for a mass audience" (Hendl, 2020, p. 382), which means that certain English sentences and expressions might need precisions, elaborations, and a clearer language to make sense in a given country's language, thought process, and society.

¹ Media **framing** is defined as "a methodological concept of media coverage" which focuses "the attention of the audience on specific qualities" (Atanesyan, 2020, p. 535) and which "select[s] aspects of a perceived reality and make[s] them more salient in a communicating text" (Charman, 2018, p. 201).

² **Transediting** is the practice of "adding, deleting, and replacing" certain words and expressions (Hendl, 2020, p. 384).

The aims, hypotheses, methodology, and results are presented in the following sections, along with a more detailed discussion of the study's implications.

2. Research questions

As noted by Hendl (2020), one of the main roles of a translator is to faithfully represent the source material's content, attitude and style. Having said that, the linguistic and cultural differences between languages often make it difficult to accurately portray the original source. For example, Sharififar and Azadi (2016) argue that “[l]anguage is culturally embedded: it both expresses and shapes cultural reality” (p. 61). The authors go on to argue that as a result, the true meaning of a message can only be determined when the linguistic items (e.g., words, phrases) are analyzed in conjunction with the cultural context in which such items are utilized. Therefore, they stress, the role of a translator may also entail conscious accommodation of the differences between the source and the target language through different grammatical or lexical choices, many of which may not always accurately reflect the source material. This constant demand for conscious decision-making, according to the authors, may be vulnerable to manipulation, as the translator's personal interests and objectives can influence the linguistic and grammatical choices made during the process of translation.

Given this literary background, our paper focuses on assessing the differences between the original and translated versions of the *World Reports*, the aim of which is to provide faithful reports on critical political and social issues, such as armed conflicts, mass-immigration or the independence of the judiciary. Two reports concerning Armenia and Poland were analyzed. Given that our chosen languages belong to different language families (English – Germanic, Polish – Slavic, Armenian – Armenian branch), we predict that there will be vocabulary and style differences between the original and translated versions, with the latter possibly being “manipulated” in order to soften the strong language of the original text. In addition,

we hypothesize that the translations will portray the country in question in a more positive light when discussing topics such as Poland's allegations of oppressive ruling and human rights abuses concerning minorities. By the same token, for the Armenian translations, the involvement of the Armenian forces in the recent war may be reduced in the translation.

3. Methodology

The data consisted of two annual reports taken from Human Rights Watch's website. The reports are divided into several topics, which aim to cover a prominent, contemporary issue in a given country (e.g., women's rights in Poland, armed conflict in Armenia) and are offered in two languages.

The original and translated reports were organized into tables in Microsoft Word, with English as the first column, native language as the second column, and each paragraph as a row. Each sentence was then subjectively compared by native speakers of the language in the report who also speak English at a high level of proficiency. Whenever a difference between the original and translation was observed, the entire sentence was marked in bold characters or highlighted with colors, and given a brief explanation.

The obtained data were subjectively compared between countries to assess whether there was a difference in the type of mistranslations found in the original and translated reports.

4. Results

Two annual reports were analyzed – Armenia and Poland in 2020. The differences between the original and the translated versions of the reports are compared and presented below in respective subparts.

4.1. Poland in 2020: Authoritarianism and harassment of minority groups

The contemporary topics of Poland in 2020 were the democratic status, independence of the media, LGBT rights, migration and women’s rights.

4.1.1. Democracy and elections

There has been a growing list of issues concerning the state of democracy in Poland, with the Coronavirus pandemic exacerbating the methodology used for voting.

When the two reports are compared in Table 1, we first notice that the syntactic structure used in the Polish version is different, putting a clear emphasis on the democratic values of elections. By contrast, the English version only briefly summarizes the issue as “free and fair elections.”

English (HRW)	Polish (our translation)	Polish (HRW translation)
Initial proposals by the ruling party to hold the elections in May via a hastily created mail-in voting system or to extend the incumbent president’s term by two years raised concerns about free and fair elections .	Initial proposals by the ruling party to hold the elections in May via a hastily created mail-in voting system or to extend the incumbent president’s term by two years raised concerns about whether the elections will be free and fair .	Początkowe propozycje partii rządzącej dotyczące przeprowadzenia wyborów w maju za pośrednictwem pospiesznie stworzonego systemu głosowania korespondencyjnego lub przedłużenia kadencji obecnego prezydenta o dwa lata budziły obawy o to, czy wybory będą wolne i uczciwe .

Table 1: Free and fair elections.

In Table 2 once again, when the two reports are compared, the Polish version differs in its use of emphasis. The phrase “it is worth nothing” seems pejorative, displaying the author’s negative attitude towards the candidate who has won by only a small margin.

English (HRW)	Polish (our translation)	Polish (HRW translation)
Duda won by a slim margin.	It is worth nothing that Duda won by a slim margin	Warto podkreślić, że Duda wygrał niewielką większością.

Table 2: The winning candidate.

4.1.2. Independence of the media

The state-owned media has become the primary harassment outlet for the ruling party, frequently attacking any opposing journalists and politicians.

When two reports are compared in Table 3, we can observe that the sentence order was changed to a considerable degree. While the Polish version first mentions how the firing was unjustified, the English version begins with the suspicion that the firing was politically motivated. However, both messages (lack of justification, political motivation) are mentioned, therefore making sentence order the only noticeable difference between the two reports.

English (HRW)	Polish (our translation)	Polish (HRW translation)
Following waves of dismissals in 2019 at the state-owned public broadcaster, in January, in what appeared to be a political move , the broadcaster fired two experienced independent journalists <u>without providing reasons for their dismissals</u> . Similarly, in May, a journalist working for the public broadcaster for 20 years was dismissed without reason.	Following waves of dismissals in 2019 at the state-owned public broadcaster, in January, the broadcaster fired – <u>without providing a reason</u> - two experienced independent journalists. This decision appeared to be politically motivated . Similarly, in May, a journalist working for the public broadcaster for 20 years was dismissed without reason.	Po fali zwolnień w radiu i telewizji publicznej w 2019 r., w styczniu nadawca zwolnił - <u>bez podawania przyczyn</u> - dwóch doświadczonych niezależnych dziennikarzy. Decyzja ta wydawała się politycznie umotywowana . Na podobnej zasadzie, również bez podawania przyczyny, w maju zwolniony został dziennikarz pracujący dla nadawcy publicznego od 20 lat.

Table 3: State-owned media fires journalists.

In Table 4, when two reports are compared, the softening of the word “convicted child abuser” can be observed in Polish. However, this difference is unlikely to reflect any positive or negative attitudes towards

this person. Instead, the form “a person convicted for molesting children” in Polish is necessitated by the formal register of the report, as the literal version of the English form would appear too informal.

English (HRW)	Polish (our translation)	Polish (HRW translation)
In July, President Duda accused a German-owned broadcaster of interfering in the Polish elections due to an article criticizing the president for pardoning a convicted child abuser .	In July, President Duda accused a German-owned broadcaster of interfering in the Polish elections due to an article criticizing the president for pardoning a person convicted for molesting children .	W lipcu prezydent Duda oskarżył należącą do niemieckiej firmy stację telewizyjną o ingerowanie w wybory w Polsce z powodu artykułu krytykującego prezydenta za ułaskawienie osoby skazanej za molestowanie dzieci .

Table 4: Broadcaster accused of interfering in elections.

4.1.3. LGBT rights

The situation of the Polish LGBT community has been dire, with the state-owned media portraying them in a negative light.

When the two reports are compared, we can observe that the word connecting harassment and LGBT people is softened in the Polish version, whereas the English version uses a more negative word. This can be conceptualized in a more explicit manner by using the word “weapon” – aiming a weapon *at* someone vs. using a weapon *against* someone. See table below.

English (HRW)	Polish (our translation)	Polish (HRW translation)
Attacks and harassment against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people increased, and several LGBT activists were arrested during the year and faced spurious charges.	Attacks and harassment aimed at lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people increased, and several LGBT activists were arrested during the year and faced spurious charges.	Wzrosła liczba ataków i szykan wymierzonych w lesbijki, gejów, osoby biseksualne i transpłciowe (LGBT), a kilku działaczy LGBT zostało w ciągu roku aresztowanych i stanęło przed sądem na skutek bezpodstawnych zarzutów.

Table 5: Attacks and harassment.

When two reports are compared in Table 6, we can observe that while the Polish version focuses on the word “people,” the English version focuses on the word “monument.” This implies that the focal point of the Polish version was the fact that the monuments on which the flags were placed represented famous people rather than the flags being placed in a public area.

English (HRW)	Polish (our translation)	Polish (HRW translation)
In August, on the basis of an overly broad blasphemy law, police arrested several LGBT activists for placing rainbow flags on prominent public monuments .	In August, on the basis of an overly broad blasphemy law, police arrested several LGBT activists for placing rainbow flags on monuments of prominent people .	W sierpniu - na podstawie zbyt szeroko zakrojonego prawo o obrazie uczuć religijnych - policja aresztowała kilku działaczy LGBT za umieszczanie tęczyowych flag na pomnikach wybitnych postaci .

Table 6: Public monuments.

When the two reports are compared, we can see that the Polish version focuses on the word “people.” However, this is likely caused by the register of the report as the phrase “prawa LGBT” is pejorative and implies a negative attitude towards this topic.

English (HRW)	Polish (our translation)	Polish (HRW translation)
In June, he stated that LGBT rights were an “ideology” more dangerous than communism and signed a “Family Charter” pledging to “defend children from LGBT ideology.”	In June, he stated that rights of LGBT people were an “ideology” more dangerous than communism and signed a “Family Charter” pledging to “defend children from LGBT ideology.”	W czerwcu oświadczył, że prawa osób LGBT są „ideologią” bardziej niebezpieczną niż komunizm i podpisał „Kartę Rodziny” zobowiązującą do „obrony dzieci przed ideologią LGBT.”

Table 7: LGBT rights.

4.1.4. Migration and asylum

The state-owned media frequently portrays immigrants as dangerous criminals.

When the two reports are compared in Table 8, we can observe that the Polish version appears to be detached and the word “people” is not mentioned at all. By contrast, the English version paints the picture of people being unable to migrate to Poland in order to seek asylum.

English (HRW)	Polish (our translation)	Polish (HRW translation)
In March, Poland closed its border with Belarus in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, effectively making it impossible for people to access Polish territory to seek asylum.	In March, Poland closed its border with Belarus in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, effectively shutting down access to Polish territory to seek asylum.	W marcu Polska zamknęła swoją granicę z Białorusią w odpowiedzi na pandemię Covid-19, skutecznie zamykając dostęp do terytorium Polski w celu ubiegania się o azyl.

Table 8: Access to Polish territory.

4.1.5. Women’s and children’s rights

The issues faced by women are often brushed off as irrelevant by the ruling party.

When the two reports are compared, we can observe that the Polish version introduces the phrase “the notion of” in front of the word “gender.” This is likely explained by cultural differences, as the connotations of the word “gender” might be less known in Polish, hence “the notion of” had to be introduced.

English (HRW)	Polish (our translation)	Polish (HRW translation)
In July, the Minister of Justice declared that Poland would withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, claiming the Convention is “harmful” as it requires educators to teach children about gender.	In July, the Minister of Justice declared that Poland would withdraw from the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, claiming the Convention is “harmful” as it requires educators to teach children about the notion of gender .	W lipcu br. Minister Sprawiedliwości oświadczył, że Polska wycofa się z Konwencji Rady Europy o zapobieganiu i zwalczaniu przemocy wobec kobiet i przemocy domowej, twierdząc, że jest ona „szkodliwa,” ponieważ wymaga od pedagogów nauczania dzieci o kwestiach gender.

Table 9: The notion of gender.

4.2. *Armenia in 2020 and 2021: From a ‘counter-battle’ to an ‘outing’*

The year 2020 was a significant year for Armenia: alongside the ongoing flows in human rights concerning women and minorities, the country suffered terribly from the Coronavirus pandemic and particularly from a military defeat during the Nagorno-Karabakh War. The Human Rights Watch chapter on Armenia mainly concentrates on these three aspects. Since it was found that the chapter on COVID-19 was translated without considerable alterations, the below analysis will mostly concentrate on the war and minority issues. Additional remarks concerning the 2021 report on Armenia will also be occasionally featured, although the main analysis is focused on the year 2020. For the purpose of readability, all Armenian texts are transliterated and afterward translated literally.

4.2.1. *Concerning the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War*

The war that broke between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region in 2020 lasted for over forty days and dominated the events in both countries.

When it comes to the Armenian translation of Armenia’s chapter, we first notice that the translation has remained faithful as to the use of the term “Nagorno-Karabakh,” having been translated as “Leinayin Ġarabaġ” and not as the native Armenian name, “Artsakh.” The latter carries political implications since the de facto authorities in Nagorno-Karabakh call themselves the Republic of Artsakh. As Iskandaryan and Mikaelian (2018) point out, geographical names in this disputed region are problematic, with each city and town usually having two distinct names in Armenian and Azerbaijani (p. 3). The authors add that this “war on names” often “makes it difficult for ... journalists to work for international publications” because they “usually ask ... to change some expressions or names” (p. 3). Indeed, Human Rights Watch uses virtually no place names inside Nagorno-Karabakh, with the one exception of “Stepanakert” – the capital city of the de-facto republic – which is otherwise known as

Khankendi (Xankəndi) in Azerbaijani. Considerable differences arise in the 2021 report; here, geographical names are frequently used – and in a particular pattern. For the lands ceded to Azerbaijan, Human Rights Watch exclusively uses the Azerbaijani names: “Fizuli” (or Füzuli) and “Zangelan” (Zəngilan), which are known as “Varanda” and “Kovsakan” respectively in Armenian. Whereas the district that still remains under Armenian control is first written in its Armenian name, then given the Azerbaijani equivalent in parenthesis: “Russian peacekeepers reported the October 9 killing of a civilian in **Martakert (Aghdara) district**, while he was farming, due to gunfire from the Azerbaijani side.”

Interestingly also, Human Rights Watch does not refer to the events as “war,” but rather as “conflict” or “fighting” and other terms, all of which have inconsistent and non-direct translation choices in Armenian, as presented in the table below. Most notably among these is “hakamartoot’yoön,” the choice for the word “conflict,” where the prefix “haka-” means “counter” and hence the word itself could extralinguistically be perceived as *counter-battle* and suggest to the reader an interpretation that Armenia was in a defensive position. At the same time, still, Armenia is accurately referred to as a “warring party” (“paterazmoğ koğm” *warring side*), thus its involvement in the conflict is not altogether reduced. These observations found in the 2020 report differ from the one in 2021 since the latter explicitly refers to the event as “war” (i.e., “the recent war”) several times, which is accordingly translated as “paterazm” (*war*) in Armenian. The word “conflict” is still used and is still translated as “hakamartoot’yoön” (*counter-battle*), yet this time it is applied when describing the Azerbaijani forces too, which means that the “defensive position” interpretation for Armenia discussed above is rather loose. What is interesting, however, is the word “p’oxrajoot’yoönner” for “skirmishes,” where the prefix “p’ox-” means “inter-” or “exchange of,” reinforcing that both parties were engaged in post-war skirmishes.

English	Armenian (transliterated)	Armenian (translation)
“fighting”	“marter”	<i>battles</i>
“conflict”	“hakamartoot’yoön”	<i>counter-battle</i>
“attacks”	“harjakoomner,” “grohen”	<i>attacks, attack</i>

“hostilities”	“řazmakan gorçoğoot’yoonner”	<i>military operations</i>
“military offensive”	“řazmakan harjakoom”	<i>military attack</i>

Table 10: Comparison between English and Armenian words to describe the “conflict.”

One sentence is particularly striking when the Armenian and Azerbaijani versions are both compared to the original text. As presented below, the Armenian text has generally stayed more faithful to the source than the Azerbaijani translation. At the same time, the Armenian word “verahskoğoot’yoone” (literally *the overseeing*) differs from the stronger term “the control” since it suggests a milder understanding of the Armenian military presence in the region³. In comparison, although the Azerbaijani version has kept the word “control” intact, the translator has decided to add in the meaning of “occupation,” not originally suggested in English. Moreover, the Azerbaijani text, deviating from the original idea of “cede,” has added the biased understanding that Nagorno-Karabakh initially belonged to Azerbaijan and was thus “returned” or “restored” rather than “ceded.” But in the 2021 report, we can observe vocabulary differences from Human Rights Watch itself. Here, in Armenia’s chapter, the organization seemingly uses expressions such as “...in areas over which Azerbaijani **re-established control**” and “...in all of the seven **regained** regions around Nagorno-Karabakh” (both of which are faithfully translated in Armenian); and in Azerbaijan’s chapter similarly, the English text speaks of “...areas where Azerbaijan **re-established control**.”

Finally, the Armenian translation in the 2020 report has admittedly nodded to the popular media and parliament framing of the ceded lands to Azerbaijan by referring to them as “regions” (“řrjanner”) and not “territories” (which would be “taraçk’ner”) like in the English and Azerbaijani versions. This is because the lands that were handed over to Azerbaijan were part of the so-called “seven regions”

³ The more accurate translation, so as to convert the stronger and exact meaning of “control” would have to be “kařavaroom” or “ğekavaroom.” The noun “verahskoğoot’yoone” (*the overseeing*) is used in its original sense as a verb in the text when referring to the Russian peacekeepers who “**oversee** the ceasefire it negotiated” (“ir koğmic’ banak’vaç hradadari řežimě **verahskeloo** hamar”). It is also worth pointing out that in Armenia’s 2021 report, the word “control” is translated as “verahskoğoot’yoone” (*the overseeing*) even for Azerbaijan’s forces (“in areas over which Azerbaijan re-established **control**” – “taraçk’neroom, voronc’ vra Ađrbeřaně verakangnel ěr **verahskoğowt’yowně**” (*areas over which Azerbaijan had restored the overseeing*)), which makes our prior observation around this word’s extralinguistic understanding for Armenian readers somewhat weak.

(explicitly mentioned in the 2021 but not the 2020 report, as shown above), which were distinct from the Soviet-defined Nagorno-Karabakh Oblast but were still part of the de-facto Nagorno-Karabakh republic; Azerbaijan, viewing these territories within its sovereign borders under Armenian occupation, did not frame them as “regions” and hence their translation as “territories” is salient.

English	A Russia-brokered truce ended six weeks of fighting on November 10, with Armenia ceding control over several territories to Azerbaijan	
Armenian	Քոստանի միջնորդոտ'յամբ կնկ'վաժ շինադարոյ նոյեմբերի 10-ին ավարտեց'ին վեց'ճաբատ'յա մարտերը. Հայաստան Արմբեյանին շիջեց' մի կ'անի ճրճաների վերահսկողոտ'յոունը	With the ceasefire mediated through Russia on November 10, six weeks of fighting ended: Armenia ceded the overseeing of several regions to Azerbaijan
Azerbaijani	Rusiyanın vasitəçiliyi ilə 10 Noyabrda imzalanın atəşkəs razılaşması altı həftəlik döyüşlərə son verdi. Razılaşmaya görə Ermənistanın işğal etdiyi bir neçə əraziyə nəzarəti Azərbaycanca geri qaytarılma	The ceasefire agreement signed on November 10 through Russian mediation ended six weeks of fighting. According to the agreement, control over several territories occupied by Armenia was returned/restored to Azerbaijan

Table 11: Comparison between the English original describing the “control” of ceded territories and its Armenian and Azerbaijani translations.

Finally, in one instance the nominal construction in English is rendered into a verbal articulation in Armenian, as demonstrated below. The result is a much harsher – perhaps unjustified – understanding of the word “casualty” that suggests either injury or death, whereas the Armenian “zohvel” necessarily speaks of death – a violent and undeserved death at that (unlike “viravor” *injured*). Additionally, although in the first example below the noun “civilian” is translated faithfully, the second sentence shows that it is intensified with the additional adjective “peaceful” (“xəgəg”) in front of it. The same trend is preserved in the 2021 report: compare “k’əgək’ac’iakan anjink’” (*civilian people*) with “xəgəg bnakič” (*peaceful civilian*).

English	Armenian (transliterated)	Armenian (translation)
The Armenian military also used banned cluster munitions in populated	Hay zinvorakannerə bnakeli taraçk’neroom ògtagorçel en naew argelvaç kasetayin zinamt’erk’, inçi	<i>Armenian soldiers also used banned cluster munitions in residential areas, as a result of</i>

areas, resulting in dozens of civilian casualties	ardyoonk’owm zohvel en tasnyak k’agak’ac’iakan anjink’	<i>which dozens of civilian people were killed/perished</i>
Warring parties committed violations of international humanitarian law..., that unlawfully harmed civilians	Paterazmoğ koğmerë t’ooyl en tvel mijazgayin mardasirakan iravoonk’i xaxtoomner, oronk’ apòrinabar vnasel en xagag bnakçoot’yanë	<i>The warring parties have permitted international humanitarian law violations that have unlawfully harmed the peaceful civilians</i>

Table 12: English sentences about civilians and their translations in Armenian.

4.2.2. Concerning domestic violence and LGBT discrimination

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people enjoy few rights and social respect in Armenia. Politicians often treat LGBT topics as “propaganda” (Khandikian, 2019), which Human Rights Watch also refers to by stating that “some public officials ... suggested incorrectly that the [Istanbul] convention aims to promote LGBT ‘propaganda’.” As far as media coverage is concerned, Carroll and Quinn (2009) stress that “there is very little serious representation or inclusion of LGBT voices in mainstream media” (p. 41), and overall “LGBT issues are not considered newsworthy” (p. 42). This “lack of serious discussion around LGBTQ identities” (Beukian, 2018, p. 13) has resulted in journalistic shortcomings when reporting on LGBT people. Indeed, Khandikian (2019) points out that “journalists and editors ... have a negative attitude toward LGBT people, ... reflected in their reporting,” and that “they are not informed about sexuality, gender, ... [and] even lack the proper vocabulary of terms to use when reporting about LGBT people.”

PINK Armenia is an organization that has not only been a pioneer in LGBT activism but has also published numerous materials to familiarize the public with LGBT terminology and identity. In its *Guideline for specialists working with LGBT people* (2021), it gives a long glossary for LGBT terms in Armenian (pp. 79-84), although some terms like “homophobia” or “gender” do not have Armenian equivalents at all. Their glossary entries coincide with the various terms used for LGBT people found in Armenia’s Human Rights Watch report, as synthesized in the table below:

English	Armenian (transliterated)
“Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT)”	“Lesbi, gey, bisek’soal yew transgender (LGBT)” [literal borrowings from English in order to preserve the acronym]
“LGBT people”	“LGBT anjink’” [literal acronym preserved]
“Openly gay men”	“Bac’ahayt noynaseřakan tğamardik” [Armenian equivalent]
“ same-sex marriage”	“ noynaseř amoosnoot’yoön” [Armenian equivalent]
“Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI)”	Seřakan koğmnorošoom yew genderayin ink’noot’yoön (SKGI) [Armenian equivalent except for ‘gender’; acronym altered]
“homophobia and transphobia”	“homofobian yew transfobian” [literal borrowings]
“homophobic attack”	“homofob istakan harjakoom” [literal borrowing but with the Armenian ‘-ist-’ and ‘-akan’ suffixes added]

Table 13: Comparison between English and Armenian terminology around LGBT identity and issues.

If the above terms have at least one consistent way of expression, then “coming out”/“being out” finds itself the most problematic term to translate in Armenian. This may be because even the “act of coming out” itself is an uncommon practice given the societal pressure (Carroll & Quinn, 2009, p. 27), and it is consequently not discussed in media, giving way to a lack of expressions to describe it. PINK Armenia (2021) employs the verb “bac’ahaytel ink’noot’yoönë” (literally *to reveal/discover your identity*) to mean “to come out” (p. 49), but the same verb is also used to mean “to understand” or “to find oneself” in other instances. Hence, the organization also proposes for “to come out” the verb “ink’naxostovanel” (literally *to confess to oneself*) (pp. 66, 74). The latter, however, can only be used when an LGBT person themselves does the act of “coming out,” and it cannot be used in contexts when somebody else “outs” them. This inadequacy of terms is reflected in the Human Rights Watch report in Table 14, where the translator has clearly struggled to convey as accurately as possible the original meaning. And in Table 15, we notice that similarly to PINK Armenia’s suggestion of the word “bac’ahaytel” (*to reveal/to discover*) for “come out” or “be out,” the translator uses the derived adjective “bac’ahayt” (literally *revealed/obvious*) in the sense of “openly out.” In another instance found in the 2021 report, the translator had to use a more descriptive translation method to successfully transfer the meaning of “[crimes motivated by] anti-LGBT bias” (a topic not discussed in Armenian media or mentioned in the penal code), resulting in “[hanc’agorçoot’yoönner

drdvaç] LGBT anjanc' nkatmamb kanxakaloot' yoonnerov" ([crimes driven] by preconception/bias towards LGBT people/individuals).

English	In one case, after a young man disclosed his sexual orientation during the investigation into his alleged draft evasion, the information was passed to a local official, who outed him to his family, urging his brother to “restrain him” for bringing shame to the family	
Armenian	Mi dep'oom, ayn banic' heto, erb mi eritasard bac'ahaytel er ir serakan koğmnorošowmë, zinvorakan çarayowt'yownic' ent'adryal xowsap'elow pačarneri hetak'nnowt'yan ent'ac'k'owm, teğekatvowt'yownë p'oxanc'vel er mi teğakan paštonyayi, ov ayn p'oxanc'el er nra entanik'in` eğborë hordorelov «zspel nran,” k'ani vor xaytařakowm er entanik'ë”	<i>In one case, after a young [man] had revealed his sexual orientation, during an investigation into his alleged evasion of military service, the information was passed on to a local official who passed it on to his family, urging his brother to “restrain him” because he was bringing shame to the family</i>

Table 14. Comparison between the English text on an “outing” case and its Armenian translation.

English	Openly gay men fear for their physical security in the military, and some seek exemption from obligatory military service	
Armenian	Bac'ahayt noynaseřakan tğamardik vaxenoom en irenc' fizikakan anvtangoot'yan hamar banakoom, isk vomank' el jgtoom en azatvel partadir zinvorakan çarayoot'yoonic'	Openly [literally obvious/discovered] homosexual men fear for their physical safety in the military, and there are (even) some who seek to be exempted from compulsory military service

Table 15: Comparison between the English text on an out gay man and its Armenian translation.

As far as domestic violence is concerned, the chapter is translated quite accurately. The most striking differences arise once we compare some of the tense choices, which are employed inconsistently in the Armenian translation, although without drastically changing the semantic meaning of the sentences. While the English version presents facts and events in the past tense for narrative purposes, what may be implied from the Armenian text is that the presented issues are still real as of today. Some sentences are presented in the table below. The same phenomenon has been kept in the translation of the 2021 report as well (check the blue boxes in Table 16). In another instance, however, Human Rights Watch itself uses

the present tense, diverting from its narrative mode: “Domestic violence **remains** a persistent problem”
 – “Ĕntanekan br̄noot’yoonĕ **mnoom ĕ** mštakan xndir” (*Domestic violence remains a constant problem*).

English	Armenian (transliterated)	Armenian (translation)
Domestic violence... and violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity persisted	Ĕntanekan br̄noot’yoonĕ... seřakan koğmnorořman yew genderayin ink’noot’yamb paymanavorvaç br̄noot’yownn oo xtrakanowt’yoonĕ pahpanvoom en ⁴	<i>Domestic violence ... violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity continue to be preserved</i>
Coronavirus-related measures further jeopardized the security of domestic violence survivors	Koronaviroosi het kapvaç miřoc’ařoomnern aveli en vtangoom Ĕntanekan br̄noot’yoon verapraçnerin	<i>Measured related to the Coronavirus endanger domestic violence survivors even more</i>
During the pandemic-related lockdown, the government did not take targeted measures <u>to ensure victims of domestic violence could access shelters</u>	Hamaçaraki het kapvaç argelap’akman Ĕnt’ac’k’oom kařavaroot’yoonĕ npatakayin miřoc’ner çi jeřnarkel, vorpeszi apahovi apastaranneri hasanelioot’yoonĕ Ĕntanekan br̄noot’yan zoheri hamar	<i>During the lockdown related to the pandemic, the government has not taken targeted measures <u>so as to ensure the access to shelters for the victims of domestic violence</u></i>
Ethnic Armenian prisoners continued to be detained and prosecuted by Azerbaijan	řaroonakvoom ĕ ĕt’nik hay gerineri azatazrkoomĕ yew hetapndoomn Adrbeřani koğmic’	<i>Detainment and persecution of ethnic Armenian captives continues by Azerbaijan</i>
Armenia signed the ... Istanbul Convention ... but the ratification process remained stalled	Hayastanĕ storagrel ĕ ... Stambooli konvend’ia[n] ... sakayn vaverac’man gorçĕnt’ac’ĕ mnaç’el ĕ p’akowğoom	<i>Armenia has signed the Istanbul Convention ... yet the ratification process has remained in a deadlock</i>
The Minsk Group ... re-engaged on Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations	Minski xoombĕ ... krkin nergravvel en Leřnayin Ĝarabađi banak’oot’yoonneroom	<i>The Minsk Group ... have re-engaged anew on negotiations of Nagorno-Karabakh</i>

Table 16: English sentences in the past tense and their present-tense translations in Armenian.

Furthermore, the Armenian translator’s choices have sometimes put an emphasis or insistence on more neutral constructions in English, with the Table 17 examples of the adverb “ĕndamenĕ” (*only/solely*); the

⁴ The same sentence appears in the 2021 report as well; this time the Armenian translator has chosen the present perfect tense, in passive voice (“pahpanvel en” *have been preserved*), for English’s simple past (“persisted”).

word “ēl” that in this case articulates a meaning similar to “even more”; and the adverb “nooyinsk” (*and even*) which puts an emphasis not present in the original text.

English	Armenian (transliterated)	Armenian (translation)
Armenia has only two shelters for domestic violence survivors ... with total capacity for 17 to 20 people.	Ĕntanekan bĕnoot’yoön verapraçneri hamar Hayastann ooni ĕndamenĕ erkoo apastaran ... naxatesvaç ĕndamenĕ 17-20 hogoo hamar	<i>For survivors of domestic violence Armenia has only two shelters ... designed only/solely for 17-20 people</i>
The fighting compounded the loss of education...	Martern ēl aveli en xorac’rel ... krt’oot’yanĕ hasvaç vnasĕ ...	<i>The battles have deepened even more ... the damage caused to education</i>
politicians used homophobia ... by smearing LGBT people as a threat to the family, national identity, and national security	k’agak’akan gorçĕnerĕ ògtagorçoom ĕin homofobian ... LGBT mardkanc’ nerkayac’nelov vorpes spaĕnalik’ ĕntanik’i, azgayin ink’nowt’yan yew nooyinsk azgayin anvtangowt’yan hamar	<i>politicians were using homophobia ... by presenting LGBT people as a threat to family, national identity and even to national security</i>

Table 17: English sentences and their emphasized translations in Armenian (2020 and 2021).

Finally, from a purely linguistic perspective, the Armenian translator had to adapt some of the peculiar constructions of English that are unique to itself, such as “X somebody to death.” As a result, the translations are written in a more descriptive manner and the word order is changed. To demonstrate what is meant, see examples below. Yet, after all, this is logical since NGOs and their translators should aim to “render [the text] both coherent and comprehensible to their audiences” (Charman, 2018, p. 201).

English	Armenian (transliterated)	Armenian (translation)
“a man beat his female domestic partner to death”	“tğamardĕ çeçelov spanel ĕr ir zowgĕnkeroohon”	<i>the man by beating had killed his (female) partner</i>
“Coronavirus-related measures”	Koronavirowsi het kapvaç miĕoc’afoomner	<i>Measures related/linked to the Coronavirus</i>
“A Russia-brokered truce”	Roosastani miĕnordoot’yamb knk’vaç zinadadar	<i>A ceasefire brokered (signed) through the mediation of Russia</i>

Table 18: English sentences with peculiar constructions and their simplified translations in Armenian.

4.2.3. General findings and conclusions on Armenia

As this analysis has shown, translation manipulation mostly occurred to ease the intelligibility of the text, with the exception of some cases where a clear bias was shown or where cultural/popular norms were reflected. When discussing the Nagorno-Karabakh chapter, it must be noted that NGOs and especially the translators of the texts have “the potential to promote particular readings” of the conflict (Charman, 2018, p. 202), but they also need to develop an impartial and “peacebuilding strategy” (European Resources..., 2021, p. 10). At the same time, the objective of Human Right Watch is not to find reconciliation between Armenia and Azerbaijan (which is the task of “peace journalism” (Atanesyan, 2020, p. 543)), but to report on and expose the human rights abuses committed by these countries.

Regarding LGBT issues, NGOs have a special opportunity to “provide a perspective” that otherwise the local media would have ignored (Charman, 2018, p. 201). Indeed, as we have seen, Armenian journalists and the public overall have “negative attitudes toward LGBT people” (Khandikian, 2019). Thus, the Human Rights Watch chapter on LGBT people can bring awareness to issues left unreported in the mainstream media, as well as potentially “influence public opinions” (Atanesyan, 2020, p. 534). On the other hand, however, the report is neither lengthy nor thorough, and it does not provide definitions or explanations for the LGBT terms that it uses, meaning that Armenian readers are liable to not understand certain terms that they are unfamiliar with due to lack of coverage in their local media.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The study aimed to study the differences in vocabulary and style between the original and translated versions of the reports published by Human Rights Watch. In particular, it was predicted that the translations would be “manipulated” to soften the strong language of the original report. In the Polish reports, translation manipulation mostly occurred to increase the intelligibility of the text, as direct

translations could appear as pejorative or unfamiliar to Polish speakers. In addition, some clear bias was shown, particularly when discussing the topic of democracy and elections. Likewise, in the Armenian reports, translation manipulation mostly occurred to improve the readability of the text, apart from some cases where cultural norms were reflected, particularly around LGBT rights and the recent war.

Taking everything into account, the study aimed to draw conclusions regarding the softening of strong language in the translations of the English originals. However, such softening was rare, with most differences aiming to improve the readability of the text by providing additional contextual information. In other words, the translations of the reports by Human Rights Watch were faithful to the original and the translators' personal views did not influence the outcome in the overwhelming majority of cases. Nevertheless, the amount of data proved to be a limitation, with only two languages being compared. Future research ought to compare more languages, with a focus on languages distant from English, given that their translation will be significantly more difficult and therefore more prone to personal biases.

6. References

- Primary sources

Human Rights Watch (2021). "Armenia: Events of 2020" in *World Report 2021*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/armenia>.

——— (2022). "Armenia: Events of 2021" in *World Report 2022*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/armenia#155eb1>.

——— (2021). "Azerbaijan: Events of 2020" in *World Report 2021*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/azerbaijan>.

——— (2022). "Azerbaijan: Events of 2021" in *World Report 2022*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/azerbaijan>.

——— (2021). "Poland: Events of 2020" in *World Report 2021*. <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2021/country-chapters/poland>.

- Secondary sources

About Us (n.d.). Human Rights Watch. <https://www.hrw.org/about/about-us>.

- Atanesyan, A. (2020). "Media Framing on Armed Conflicts: Limits of Peace Journalism on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict." *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 14(4), 534-550. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17502977.2020.1780018>.
- Baratyan, N. (2011). *Angleren-hayeren ba'aran* [English-Armenian Dictionary]. Yerevan State University Press. <http://www.nayiri.com/imagedDictionaryBrowser.jsp?dictionaryId=60&pageNumber=2>.
- Beukian, S. (2018). "Queering Armenianness: *Tarorinakelov* Identities." *Armenian Review*, 56(1-2), 13–38. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/321824435_Queering_Armenianness_Tarorinakelov_Identities.
- Carroll, A, & Quinn, S. (2009). "LGBT Profile" in *Forced Out: LGBT People in Armenia*, 24–42. Report on ILGA-Europe/COC fact-finding mission. <http://www.ilga-europe.org/resources/ilga-europe-reports-and-other-materials/forced-out-lgbt-people-armenia-2009>.
- Charman, T. (2018). "Sexual violence or torture? The framing of sexual violence against men in armed conflict in Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch reports" in *Sexual Violence Against Men in Global Politics*, (M. Zalewski, P. Drumond, E. Prugl, & M. Stern (eds.), 198–210, Routledge. <https://books.google.fr/books?hl=en&lr=&id=UKdaDwAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA198&dq=human+rights+watch+reports+translation+reporting>.
- European Resources for Mediation Support (ERMES) (January 2021). *Media and disinformation in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and their role in conflict resolution and peacebuildings*. <https://www.coleurope.eu/news/ermes-iii-event-report-media-and-disinformation-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>.
- Hendal, B. (2020). "Translation of Human Rights News in the Gulf States on Twitter: An Ethical Approach." *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literatures*, 12(3), 381–404. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/344710712_Translation_of_Human_Rights_News_in_the_Gulf_States_on_Twitter_An_Ethical_Approach.
- Iskandaryan, N., & Mikaelian H. (2018). *Media coverage of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh*. Caucasus Institute Policy Brief. https://c-i.am/wp-content/uploads/Policy-brief-media_en_final-1.pdf.
- Keshavarz, M., & Zonoozi, L.A. (2011). "Manipulation of Ideology in Translation of Political Texts: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective." *Journal of Language and Translation*, 2(1), 1–12. http://tlt.azad.ac.ir/article_529069_fb280b9e2fc853ddc0cb310051ffed78.pdf.
- Khandikian, K. (2019). *Rainbow Hysteria: How LGBT Issues Became a Mainstream Topic of Conversation*. EVN Report. <https://evnreport.com/raw-unfiltered/rainbow-hysteria-how-lgbt-issues-became-a-mainstream-topic-of-conversation/>.
- PINK Armenia (2021). *LGBT andzanc' het aşxatank'i oogec'ooyc'* [Guideline for specialists working with LGBT people]. <https://www.pinkarmenia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/specialists-guideline-2021.pdf>.
- Sharififar, M., & Azadi, M.B. (2016). "Investigating Ideological Manipulation in Translation of Political Texts Case Study: Iranian Nuclear Talks." *International Journal of Educational Investigations* 3(2), 61–71. <http://www.ijeionline.com/attachments/article/51/IJEI.Vol.3.No.2.06.pdf>.