

## **“There has been some kind of explosion-like phenomenon”: Press conferences during the Fukushima nuclear crisis as instances of translation**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the applicability of the concept of translation as a communication process in which meaning is created, applying it to an example outside of the traditional paradigm of translation involving two natural languages. Specifically, press conferences delivered by then Government Spokesman Edano Yukio during the crisis in the nuclear power plants in Fukushima following an earthquake and tsunami on the northeast coast of Japan in March 2011 are explored as an instance of translation. It is *not* an interlingual translation that is of interest here, but the translation investigated is the action through which events and developments at the stricken nuclear power plants, knowledge of which is not accessible to the general public, are conveyed in press conferences.

I carried out a discourse analysis of a corpus of five randomly selected press conferences, especially based on the categories of genre and register according to M.A.K. Halliday. Video material as well as (governmental and independent) investigation reports of the incidents in the nuclear power plants are also considered in the analysis to serve as a kind of source material against which to compare the versions of the incidents portrayed. A focus is also put on contextualizing and interpreting the target texts as products of a specific communicative setup.

An excursus of this thesis deals with *keigo*, Japanese “politeness language.” The investigation confirms the growing consensus in research that views the traditional interpretation of *keigo* as an aesthetic expression of a society characterized by a strict hierarchy and mutual respect as a romanticizing myth. Moreover, the theoretical categorization of *keigo* is shown to be lacking in not, as purported, logically covering some frequently used *keigo* phenomena. A striking parallelism between *keigo* and translation is identified: both phenomena benefit (if in questionable ways) from common misconceptions about them.

The thesis shows that the example investigated must be regarded as an instance of translation as defined in Translation Studies. This is, *inter alia*, demonstrated by elucidating the communicative setup of the translation in the specific situation chosen, in which human actors with institutional and personal interests and agendas act within a given power constellation. In so doing, they have a certain leeway in their decision-making, which is at the same time subject to restrictions.

The conclusions drawn from the analysis provide ample evidence that an example such as the one analyzed in this thesis merits attention in Translation Studies research. For one thing, such communication situations can be understood more comprehensively by exploring their

translational nature and, for another, they provide valuable insights into the workings of translation.

**KEYWORDS:** discourse analysis, Fukushima, press conferences, science communication, translation as manipulation, translation as meaning creation

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