

# TRANSLATING THE “LITERARY” IN LITERARY TRANSLATION IN PRACTICE

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**Abstract** – The aim of this paper is to explore the ‘literary’ in literary translation. It begins with a discussion of what makes a text literary, focussing on some very famous literary works which did not (and indeed do not) necessarily fit what is generally considered the literary canon. The features that translators should identify when first reading a text, on the look-out for potential literary value, are then outlined. These features are both textual (covering non-casual language, rhetorical features and equivalences) and contextual (connotations, implicatures, intratextual and culture-bound associations).

The paper then discusses changing translation theory and practice, in particular illustrating points with comments made by translators and theorists in this book and elsewhere. Importance is also given to the profession itself, to literary translator beliefs about their role, the changing importance of the model reader and to changing beliefs about accepted style, making reference also to results of a global survey recently carried out on the subject.

**Keywords:** translation theory; translation practice; literary translation.

## 1. Literary and non-literary translation

Literary translation has traditionally been separated from non-literary or technical. Indeed, there are over 13 million *Google* hits for “literary and technical and translation”; and the differences on the surface appear to be so profound that university courses clearly differentiate between one and the other. On one side, apart from modules on ‘translation’, one course will devote more space to literature; while the other will certainly have modules on IT and CAT tools.

However, for the moment only the purely technical areas of non-literary translation lend themselves to IT, such as manuals, and other standardized informative genres. Any text which has been written with the intention of creating some effect on the reader (e.g. promotional, persuasive) rather than simply supplying an informative list will need the eyes of a mindful translator rather than the predicable strings of computer-generated close matches. Also, of course, literary translators today rely on internet resources such as *Google*, *Google Books* (Salusso, this volume), *Google images* (Parini, this volume, fn.) and *Google Ngram Viewer* (Dixon, this

volume). Dixon also mentions the fact that the reader too has internet at her finger tips; all the more true today with e-books which come ready installed with on-screen dictionaries, translations and Wikipedia available at the touch of the word. Yet, the fact that IT began aiding (or encroaching) on non-literary translation is a clear indication of the fact that literary translation tends to be seen as an art whereas non-literary is seen as technical.

Apart from the supposed artistic/scientific divide, there is certainly a difference in visibility. Though, Venuti (1998) rails against the invisibility of translators, the literary translator is one of the very few categories of translator/interpreter whose name will generally be known to the end user. Indeed, the translator's name should legally appear on the cover of the translated work, and the translator has (in theory) rights deriving from her work as a derivative author (Blésius 2003).

In an unusual copyright twist, Ian Halliday (this issue) recounts how D. H. Lawrence as translator earned the royalties rather than Giovanni Verga's immediate heirs; and as if to mark the point, the front cover of the first English edition (1925) of *Novelle Rusticane/ Little Novels of Sicily* actually has D. H. Lawrence's name in a decidedly larger font than that of Verga.

It also transpires that a number of translators do, in fact, appear as 'author'. Else Vieira (1999) highlights the case of Haroldo de Campos, whose 'transcreation' of Goethe's *Faust* into Brazilian-Portuguese resulted in Goethe's name being substituted on the front cover, with that of de Campos, while the original author appeared on the inside cover. Though, in general, 'prominence' and 'fame' do not in general collocate with 'translator', there are countries, such as China and Japan (Tanabe 2010), where literary translators not only have visibility but are revered. Closer to home, Sela-Sheffy (2008, p. 615) recounts that in Israel, a number of literary translators have actually become media "stars"; and Edith Grosman, the American Spanish translator, is well-known enough to have an entry on the Internet movie Data Base (IMDB) – though her actual translations are included in the "trivia" section.

In the Anglo-Italian world, William Weaver earned himself a *Guardian* obituary, which began by lauding him as "the greatest of all Italian translators".<sup>1</sup> However, he was not to be seen on TV chat shows. In Italy, star status appears to be even more limited, and as D'Egidio (this issue) notes, reader reviews tend not even to notice that what they have read is a translation.

There is little translation into English, and though there is a steady translation market into Italian, of 500-700 works/year (Fina, this issue), this is not enough to keep most translators alive. Estimates suggest that the literary

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/nov/18/william-weaver>

translation market accounts for between 1% and a maximum of 7% of the world market (Katan 2009, pp. 9-10), which consequently means that a literary translator will find it much more difficult to live on translating alone, and will tend to have another, fuller time job in a related field (Katan 2011). Professional translators, in general, according to an ongoing 2<sup>nd</sup> global survey,<sup>2</sup> though traditionally perceived as underpaid, in reality, are likely to earn well over the national average pay for their particular country, with a peak of nearly 50% of the 600+ respondents claiming to earn up to twice the national average, and just under 5% earning up to five times the national average.<sup>3</sup> Hardly surprisingly, the sub-group of ‘mainly literary’ translators (63 replies) report lower earnings: only 35% earn up to twice the national average, with 6% earning up to 5 times the national average.

If we accept that literary and non-literary translation are different, then there will be some identifiable translation strategies, techniques and procedures which appertain particularly to literary translation. And it is this area which I would like to focus on. We will begin, first, with the theory.

## 2. Defining the literary genre

The literary genre is notoriously difficult to define. If we begin with the traditional canons, such as the Oxford English Dictionary, we have: “Written works, especially those considered of superior or lasting artistic merit”. Unfortunately, what is considered as artistic merit notoriously changes over time. The American writer Mark Twain, for example, is now regarded a great literary genius, and *Huckleberry Finn* “the genesis of all American literature” (Ulin 2010).<sup>4</sup> It has been translated into some 65 languages and in almost a thousand editions. Yet, as Seymour Chwast (1996), writing in the Books section of the *New York Times* (to publicise a further new edition), explains:

a month after publication, the trustees of the Concord (Mass.) Public Library expelled the book from its shelves. It was ‘trash and suitable only for the slums’, they said. ‘It deals with a series of adventures of a very low grade of morality; it is couched in the language of a rough dialect, and all through its pages there is a systematic use of bad grammar and an employment of rough, coarse, inelegant expressions.’<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The survey was organized, and results analysed, following that of the first survey, available at [download2.hermes.asb.dk/archive/download/Hermes-42-7-katan\\_net.pdf](http://download2.hermes.asb.dk/archive/download/Hermes-42-7-katan_net.pdf) (on-line ‘surveymonkey’ questionnaire), and update (Katan 2011). The results for the 2<sup>nd</sup> survey, so far include 605 respondents who earn an income translating.

<sup>3</sup> This figure includes 10% with less than 1 year’s experience and over 20% with 20 years’ experience. The larger group results of 418 (those who translate and interpret) show a very slight shift to higher earnings, with 45% at twice the national average and just under 10% with up to 5 times the national average.

<sup>4</sup> <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/14/entertainment/la-ca-mark-twain-20101114/2>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/books/98/04/05/specials/smiley-huck.html>

George Bernard Shaw was equally scathing about James Joyce's *Ulysses*: "In Ireland they try to make a cat clean by rubbing its nose in its own filth. Mr. Joyce has tried the same treatment on the human subject" (Seder 2012).<sup>6</sup> The book is now regarded by the Modern Language Association,<sup>7</sup> at least, as the single greatest novel of the 20th century.

Sometimes the change of assessment can be swift. D. H. Lawrence's, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* was originally seized by the police for breaking the newly passed Obscene Publications Act of 1959 as a book which would "deprave and corrupt". The book was also criticized as a "trashy novelette", for its ungrammaticality and poor characterization; and a number of fellow writers declined to be called as witnesses for the defence, such as Evelyn Waugh, who said "My memory of it was that it was dull, absurd in places & pretentious. I am sure that some of its readers would be attracted by its eroticism. [...] Lawrence had very meagre literary gifts" (Yagoda 2010, p. 93).

The prosecution, of course, focused on the graphic descriptions of sex and the number of times the f-word was used. The only, and "crucial loophole" was "the question of literary merit – through which works might escape prohibition" (Sandbrook 2010).<sup>8</sup> The judges assessing the merit were not fellow writers or men (or women) of letters but a motley crew including the following professions: driver, cabinet fitter, dock labourer, teacher, dress machinist, none, housewife, butcher, and timber salesman (Yagoda 2010). The case was argued, and it only took 3 hours for the jury to decide that the book had artistic merit, and hence contributed to the public good.<sup>9</sup>

The main point here is that what is considered 'literature' cannot be ascertained from the grammaticality, register or tone of the words used.

Assessment of lasting artistic merit clearly requires a focus on the 'how' rather than on 'the what', and consequently on the fact that the selection and organisation of (e.g., common, dialect or taboo) words result in something that transcends trash, rough dialect, bad grammar and so on. In fact, we will return to evidence of Lawrence's artistic merit later, but it is clearly no simple matter to objectively define and identify the components of 'artistic merit' in literature; and it is often defined by what it is not. Voegelin (1960, p. 57), for example, distinguishes between "common usage" and "non-casual", which he defines as "more restricted and often enough, perhaps characteristically [employed for] more elevated purposes".

<sup>6</sup> <http://mentalfloss.com/article/30497/11-early-scathing-reviews-works-now-considered-masterpieces>

<sup>7</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/books/news/9807/21/top.100.reax/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/8066784/Lady-Chatterley-trial-50-years-on.-The-filthy-book-that-set-us-free-and-fettered-us-forever.html>

<sup>9</sup> Since then, the same crucial loophole has been used for "works of no literary merit ... and works of demerit" such as *Inside Linda Lovelace* (Robertson 2010).

For example, Seamus Heaney’s poem (below) would easily fall into this definition of literature. The poem begins with ‘common usage’ (e.g. “Potato crops are flowering/ Hard green plums appear”), but clearly as we read on so the language becomes more restricted and its purpose more elevated, corresponding to the enigmatic title “The Summer of Lost Rachel”. This is clearly *not* a piece about potatoes and plums.

Potato crops are flowering,  
 Hard green plums appear  
 On damson trees at your back door  
 And every berried briar  
 Is glittering and dripping  
 Whenever showers pour down  
 On flooded hay and flooding drills.  
 There’s a ring around the moon.  
 The whole summer was waterlogged  
 Yet everyone is loath  
 To trust the rain’s soft-soaping ways  
 And sentiments of growth.

The following, however, really does appear to talk of plums being eaten - and nothing else.

**This is Just to Say**

I have eaten  
 The plums  
 That were in  
 The icebox

And which  
 You were probably  
 Saving  
 For breakfast

Forgive me  
 They were delicious  
 So sweet  
 And so cold.

This text, deliberately written to resemble a casual fridge note, is recognized as an important piece of literature, and as having been composed by “one of the principal poets of the Imagist movement” (Academy of American Poets, n.d.). It has over one million *Google* hits and its own Wikipedia page. On the other hand, there is no restricted usage and little indication of an elevated purpose. All that we have that might indicate ‘literature’ is the fact that the text has a particular layout, which as Longenbach (2009, p. xi) points out is actually a fundamental sign: “Poetry is the sound of language organized in

lines. More than meter, more than rhyme, more than images or alliteration or figurative language, line is what distinguishes our experience of poetry as poetry, rather than some other kind of writing”.

What is important here is not so much that this text has the layout of a poem, but that the fridge note has become elevated through the fact that the author has left a sign of authorial choice, thus rendering it in some way observably different to what would be expected had the text *actually* been written mindlessly. Once we have this evidence (in this case, the organization into lines) we can begin to look for further layers of meaning from the words in the text. Snodgrass (2000, p. 51) gives us but one example of elevated meaning for the Plum poem: “Building on sibilance and concluding on ‘so cold’, the poem implies that sweet, fruity taste contrasts the coldness of a human relationship that forbids sharing or forgiveness for a minor breach of etiquette”.

This is then the test of a literary text, the existence of a potentially enhanced meaning, whereby more cognitive effect can be obtained in return for more cognitive effort (c.f. Katan 1993). According to Gotti (2005, pp. 146-148) the potential to reveal more is the only key difference between literary and purely technical writing. Indeed, he cites the economist Maynard Keynes, whose technical work became literary because Keynes wrote, not to clearly explain, but “to stimulate the reader towards a cooperative effort of interpretation of his text” (Gotti 2005, p. 148).

When the ‘non-casual’ elements are evident, which we now see as encompassing both what is said and not said but inferable, we can say that the text has ‘prominence’: “the general name for the phenomenon of linguistic highlighting, whereby some linguistic feature stands out in some way” (Halliday 1971, p. 340). There are other terms, such as “markedness”, coined by Roman Jakobson (1960) to categorise grammatical forms which were unexpected, and hence marked. In either case, there is a (quantifiable) deviation from standard or expected use.

Clearly, markedness and prominence by themselves do not automatically signify anything ‘literary’. Halliday, in fact, reserves “foregrounding” to those prominent linguistic elements that appear “motivated” and which add, through the prominence, to “the total meaning of the work”. Indeed, as Baker (1992, p. 130) points out, “The more marked a choice the greater the need for it to be motivated”. Surprisingly, perhaps, given his supposedly meagre literary gifts, Lawrence’s choice of language is often cited as an example of good literary style. Nicholas Del Banco (1991, p. 31) quotes Ford Maddox Hueffer’s reaction to the beginning of a short story Lawrence had submitted to *The English Review*:

At once you read, ‘The small locomotive engine, Number 4, came clanking, stumbling down from Selston’, and at once you know that this fellow with the

power of observation is going to write of whatever he writes about from the inside. ‘Number 4’ shows that. He will be the sort of fellow who knows that for the sort of people who work about engines, engines have a sort of individuality. He had to give the engine the personality of a number... ‘With seven full wagons’ ... The ‘seven’ is good. The ordinary careless writer would say ‘some small wagons’. This man knows what he wants. He sees the scene of his story exactly. He has an authoritative mind.

As Leach and Short (2007, p. 37) continue, the choice is clearly motivated, as it provides a “sense of listening to and ‘feeling’ the motion of the locomotive [...] created by a combination of rhythm [...] the dragging effect of consonant clusters [...] and the actual qualities of the consonants themselves”.

### 3. Analysing the text for translation

Italo Calvino wrote “you only really read an author when you translate him” (in Grossi, this volume); while Halliday (this volume) adds “literary translation is the human drive to understand [...] taken to the nth degree”; and this is plainly true when we realize that literary style, as we have seen, is not always self-evident. Indeed, in discussing the translation of Alasdair Gray’s poems Daniela Salusso (this volume) quotes the writer’s biographer: “to the untrained eye many of [the poems] just looked like prose chopped up into bits”. As all the translators in this volume note, analysing the text also needs trained ears to identify the voices. So, in general, more than reading, this means the translator voicing both the original and the new text (e.g. Dixon, this volume).

One of the few scholars to talk about how a translator in practice can train herself to notice where and how language choice should influence translation strategy is John Dodds (1994), taking “casual” and “non-casual language” (Dodds 1994, p. 21) or “low probability use” (Dodds 1994, p. 148) as his major starting point. Dodds distinguishes the following areas of the source text as essential for the translator to focus on (Dodds 1994, p. 141):

- Phonological features (rhythm, alliteration; sense in sound)
- Syntactic features (verb tense, word constructions, pre/suffixes, grammatical structures, ...)
- Positional features (foregrounding, parallelisms, paragraph structure, poem line breaks, ...)
- Semantic features (partial synonyms, antonyms, leitmotifs, keywords, ...)
- Figures of speech (analogy, metaphor)

These ‘features’ may result in euphony and onomatopoeia; they may highlight and link what otherwise would appear as isolated aspects within the text, and may strengthen underlying sub-themes or the leitmotif itself running through the text.

Central to this is Samuel Levin’s (1962, p. 27) criteria of ‘equivalence’. This use of ‘equivalence’ should not be confused with the equally important reader-oriented theory of “equivalent effect” (see Scarpa and Salusso this volume). Equivalence, here, regards evidence of a relationship between pairs of words or strings of words in the text: “insofar as they overlap in cutting up the general ‘thought mass’” (Levin 1962, p. 27); i.e., echo each other or set up contrasts and thus point to parallels or contrasts in meaning (c.f. Weatherill 1974, p. 63). What this means then, for the translator, is that a close relationship between subject content and linguistic form can be identified, or as Jakobson put it (1960, p. 39), there is a “projection of the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection to the axis of combination”.

Daniela Salusso (this issue) gives us an excellent example of how a translator first analyses a text to be translated using this very procedure: “what is unique to this particular collection of poems is the morphologic rendering of Gray’s poetic of ‘absences and reverses’, namely the ‘un-factor’. More or less intentionally, the author highlights this aspect by employing an astonishingly high number of adjectives and verbs beginning with the negative prefix ‘un’.

Dodd’s basic thesis is that a (literary) translator should first look for non-casual language in the original, and then account for this in the translation, if not actually recreate it: “the translation must be seen to be ‘adequate’ at all levels, ... [and] must attempt to solve *at least* the majority of the semantic and stylistic features that exist at all levels of language including phonology” (1994, p. 151).

What is important here is the ability to note the levels or numbers of features that are at play. If it is not possible to provide a wholly adequate solution for one of the features, then other features can (and should be) focussed on. Piccinini (this issue) gives us a good example:

The verb ‘to sift’ is particularly difficult to render; I can’t simply use the Italian verb *setacciare* because it has no intransitive meaning and I can’t paraphrase it if I don’t want to spoil the rhythm. So here I decide to allow myself a certain liberty on lexis and take more into consideration the music of the sentence, where the sibilant s and the fricative f alliterate enhancing the softness and the sense of delicacy of the literary image.

Today, Dodd’s suggestion that ‘adequacy’ can be fulfilled through (simply) satisfying a checklist of rhetorical features visible in both the source and the target text might seem a little too prescriptive, but it is crucial that a translator



be highly sensitive to any author’s ‘non-casual’ use of language. This is not to say that an author’s “choice and favour” is consciously motivated (Fowler 1977, p. 21). Dodds also refers to Wimsatt and Beardsley’s (1954, p. 3) Intentional Fallacy theory, which suggests that the author herself is never a useful starting point: “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art”. This means that it is the responsibility of the translator herself to look for (the very possibly unconscious) language choices which create increased cognitive effect. Clearly, this should not, and does not, stop translators from entering their author’s world, through reading the author’s oeuvre, or where possible meeting and discussing the translation with the author, and in many cases (as noted in this volume) establishing “a bond”.<sup>10</sup>

An interesting exception to this rule was D. H. Lawrence, now working as a translator. According to Halliday (this volume) it appears that Lawrence preferred to read and translate Giovanni Verga (which he thoroughly enjoyed) rather than meet him, even though Lawrence was at times living only 40 kilometres from Verga.

The importance of a thorough first reading, even ‘hyper’ reading (Ladmiral 1979), is often stressed by translation theorists, yet Irene Piccinini starts from what Taylor (1998, p. 158) calls a “rolling translation” approach. Instead of a first thorough analysis, looking for motivated patterns in Banville’s novel and then equally patterned solutions, she begins at the beginning, and lets the development of the language guide her as she begins to roll out her translation. This translation, then, is the result of “gradually moulding [the] language into the required shape” (Taylor 1998, p. 158). Today this is remarkably easy, as we write over and otherwise alter the electronic text with little cost – and with huge benefits. But as Halliday (this volume) notes, revising a physical text (as Lawrence had to) was a major issue. Whichever approach is preferred, revision is a constant feature, and often made in cooperation with others, such as with the author or the commissioner. For example, the title of Verga’s *Una Peccatrice* was revised from “A Lady Sinner” to “A Mortal Sin” as a result of discussions between Halliday (this volume) and the editor of the publication. And like all translators, his translations roll even more as he returned ten years on to ‘improve’ on his own translations of the past.

<sup>10</sup> William Weaver struck a close relationship both with Calvino and Umberto Eco (Spiegelman 2002; Grossi, this volume); Richard Dixon with Eco (this volume); Daniela Salusso interviewed Alisdair Gray.

#### 4. Analysing the context for translation

All texts need to be read within a context, and literary texts excel in exploiting extra-textual references to enhance meaning. There are two main areas to investigate: linguistic and socio-cultural. With regard to the linguistic, Federica Scarpa (this volume) shows how Shakespeare's Italian translators were able to identify the semantic equivalences set up as a result of his choice of figurative language. For example, in *Troilus and Cressida*, Ajax refers to manipulating the proud Achilles and making him docile, using the analogy of preparing dough for baking: "I will knead him: I will make him supple". Lodovici's (1960) translation shows how attentive he was to semantic equivalence as well as to Shakespeare's imagery. His "Me lo rimpasto io, me lo riduco dolce dolce [*I will knead him, I will reduce him into something sweet*] successfully retains the use of culinary equivalences to imply how Achilles will be cut-down; and the translation shifts only from the resulting texture *supple* to the resulting taste *sweet*. To give an idea of how carefully crafted this translation is, Scarpa (this volume) compares Squarzina's (1977) version: "Io ne faccio polpette, io lo svito" [*I'll make him into meatballs, I will unscrew him*]. This translation transforms Ajax's subtle art into something much more violent, and with 'lo svito', loses the continuation of the culinary context, a key domain in the play.

The extra-textual detective work necessary to reveal the original associations is a constant theme in the translators' own accounts in this volume; in particular when we come to the second area, which is mainly social and cultural. Here too we can divide the work into two main areas, the first of which is the writer's overt or covert use of other's published writings. Bacigalupo (this issue), in fact, divides his translation of *The Cantos* into those (easier), which only require attention to "questions of rhythm and diction, a translator's true business"; and those (more difficult) which require an investigation of the quoted sources. As often as not, the translator is more painstaking than the original author, finding misquotes, typos and more. Bacigalupo, for example, was faced with Pound's erroneous translation into English of a number of original Italian texts. At times Bacigalupo corrected the errors (not to correct the author but simply to aid the reader) and at times back-translated the actual mistranslation (with the original Italian on the facing page) to allow the Italian reader into Pound's (mis)understanding of Italian.

The second area here is social and cultural, where ECRs, extra-linguistic culture-bound references (Pederson 2011), remain hidden to the target reader. Again, the translator as a hyper-reader (Ladmiral 1979) will often be more attentive than the original author. For example, during his research Dixon (this volume) discovered that Eco's historical fictional character Simone Simonini could not actually have drunk Grand Marnier nor

could he have talked about a “hamster wheel” – as neither was in commerce in the 1870s.

Surprisingly, perhaps, it is popular fiction more than high-brow which requires a translator to be conversant with the social and cultural references referred to by the author. Ilaria Parini (this volume) analysed *Bridget Jones’ Diary*, and found 69 ECRs to personalities, which include not only references to British politicians, academics and writers, but also to more covert references to fictitious characters (such as Darcy, Heathcliff, Miss Money Penny, Miss Havisham, a Stepford Wife). Apart from personalities, there are also 36 British culture-specific elements (often repeated), including a large number of brand names only available in the UK. What makes life particularly challenging for the translator is that these ECRs will not have been selected at random, and will almost always hide more than they reveal at the first instance, creating rich cognitive effects for the reader able to access these covert associations.

The associations may simply add more coherence and depth to characters, from their postal code down to their most often used supermarket shopping bag. These associations, however, often offer much richer cognitive effects for the intended reader. For example, Bridget’s comment (Parini, this volume) that Daniel would not be put off his stroke even if he saw “naked pictures of Virginia Bottomley on the television”. Parini rightly notes that the Italian reader would not know that Bottomley was a conservative minister, and hence unlikely to be seen in anything but full dress; but more importantly, she is a Baroness whose good looks, as reliably recorded by the *Daily Mail* newspaper, “could inflame the erotic imagination”,<sup>11</sup> which now fully explains why Daniel might be sidetracked from his own activities with Bridget. And if we were to look further, we might note that Virginia Bottomley is, in itself, a *nomen omen*.

## 5. Towards translating for the reader

If the original text is clearly marked, and can be deemed ‘non-casual’, then we are moving to what Viktor Shklovsky (1917) called “ostranenie”, the sense a reader has of defamiliarization, estrangement, dehabitualization or non-ordinariness, the effect of which should enhance the reader’s appreciation of the text. Until relatively, though, Translation Studies did not occupy itself with the effect on the reader, because as Benjamin (1968, p. 75) famously asserted: “In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful [...]. No poem was intended for a reader”. Shklovsky, on the other hand, a contemporary of

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2067344/Chloe-Smith-Never-mind-ballots-heres-Sexy-Tories.html>

Benjamin's had a slightly more reader oriented (but not reader-friendly) perspective on Art:

The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged [...]. A work is created 'artistically' so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception. (Shklovsky 1917/1965, p. 22)

The idea of creating difficulty has not been popular with translation scholars, though Chinese translator and scholar Lu Xun (in Venuti 1998, p. 185) wrote: "Instead of translating to give people 'pleasure' I often try to make them uncomfortable, or even exasperated, furious and bitter". Today, Lawrence Venuti (Venuti 1988) strongly supports what he calls 'foreignization' ('ostranenie'), the strategy he traces back to Schleiermacher's (1812) simplistic divide regarding a translator's task, clearly preferring the former: "Either the translator leaves the author in peace, as much as possible, and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace, as much as possible, and moves the author towards him" (in Lefevere 1977, p. 74). By this, he means first and foremost to not adopt a fluent, idiomatic or reader-friendly translation, but to translate "introducing variations that alienate the domestic language and, since they are domestic, reveal the translation to be in fact a translation" (Venuti 1998, p. 11), what House (1997, pp. 111-116) would call an 'overt translation', a translation which clearly reveals itself to just that, rather than 'hiding', covertly, as an original text.

Venuti calls this approach "minoritizing", whereby a variant rather than the dominant cultural form (or what Shklovsky would call the language of habitualization) is used. In theory, this alienation would also lead the reader to appreciate the linguistic and cultural differences that the new text proposes. For Venuti, this strategy is also part of "a political agenda that is broadly democratic: an opposition to the global hegemony of English". Interestingly, as Maria Luisa de Rinaldis (this volume) notes the hegemony during the Renaissance times was the other around: "There were few translations from English into Italian [and] Italy was, in terms of style and poetics, the dominant model". And the Italian translators were clearly making political choices in their decision to translate the religious texts (which defended or promoted the protestant movement).

Apart from the political stance, there is today, a real literary issue at play; that of the McDonaldisation of language, whereby, what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1992, p. 400) calls a "with-it translatese", whereby "the literature by a woman in Pakistan begins to resemble, in the feel of its prose, something by a man in Taiwan". This is the downside of 'domestication';

whereby lingua-cultural differences in a text, which could inform or affect the reader are effaced, homogenised, to conform to a domestic standard. This is particularly problematic with the translation of dialect, local sayings, popular metaphors, colloquial and taboo language. Popular solutions include relocation of accents and/or standardization of the language, in all cases resulting in a ‘loss’ of the original. Daniela Salusso (this issue) in accounting for all other levels in Gray’s *Old Negatives* gets stuck on the Scottish term ‘gloaming’: “What gets lost in translation is the Scottishness of the poem, the fact that this twilight which is impossible to look upon is not an indeterminate twilight, but precisely a Scottish twilight, namely, a gloaming”. Salusso, though, is being a little hard on herself. Translation necessarily means letting go of the original language, but it also allows for conscious intervention and for the foregrounding of other features to compensate – which is exactly what Salusso does.

An example of the issue highlighted by Spivak, as Dodds (this issue) notes, is the long-standing norm which has historically affected much translation into Italian: *il bello scrivere italiano*. He cites the translation of John Fowles’ “The Collector” as a case in point. Fowles crucially selected ‘bad’ grammar to identify not only the working class origins of ‘the collector’ himself, but also to contrast these origins at every turn with the upper-middle class, university educated, language of his prisoner. Indeed, Fowles himself says (1970, p. 10) that the evil of the kidnapper “was largely, perhaps wholly, the result of a bad education, a mean environment, being orphaned”. The very first point is effaced in translation, making the two characters talk in Italian as equals.

An equally serious loss is noticed by Parini (this issue), where “Bridget Jones” in Italian suffers from what have been called the “universal features of translation”: explicitation, simplification, and normalization. Much of what is inferable (and hence the essential essence of literature) is either made explicit, generalised, or substituted with a more domestic term. In non-literary translation, these would often be seen as useful strategies. However, here, in return for domestic fluency we not only have a loss of Britishness, but also a loss of character. In reducing her use of ECRs, Bridget has become less observant, less well-read, and finally less funny.

A consistent strategy of reducing difference is unlikely to produce a text of lasting artistic merit which fosters literary appreciation. However, the polar strategy, an *a priori* translation policy to protect the foreignness is equally problematic. This is the educational aim that D. H. Lawrence (now as a translator of Giovanni Verga) pursued. Halliday (this volume) points out that Lawrence genuinely did appreciate the Italian idioms, maintaining the foreign imagery not only in his translations, but also in his own writings. For example, in talking about Verga’s work Lawrence writes in one of his letters “It is so good. - But I am on thorns, can’t settle” (in Halliday, this volume).

The reference to ‘thorns’, as we can also find in his translations, was a literal translation of the vivid Italian *essere sulle spine*.

However, used mindlessly, foreignisation understandably leads to what critics call “a tremendous failing” (Cecchetti in Halliday, this volume) and “ridicule” or “quizzical looks” (Dodds, this volume). For example, Lawrence’s translation of “fare il passo più lungo della gamba” becomes the decidedly ostranenie, *to take your stride according to your legs* (Dodds, this volume). This literal translation from the Italian results in an almost incomprehensible combination of words, which does not increase any useful cognitive effect, and hence does nothing to help the reader appreciate the foreign. We should also remember what Halliday (this volume) calls Lawrence’s low “reserves of patience and dogged concentration” (Halliday, this volume), coupled with the high costs of proof reading and revision, which could very well render at least some of these translations as examples of mindless rather than foreignised translation.

## 6. The reader

Benjamin’s famous comment negating the role of the reader, mentioned earlier, was made nearly a century ago. Since then there has been a Khurian shift, marked in particular by the Intentional Fallacy and then by Barthes’ post-structuralist “Death of the Author” (1977). Quite suddenly, the reader rather than the author or indeed the text itself began to take centre stage. Umberto Eco introduced the concept of Model Reader<sup>12</sup> in 1995. This implied, rather than ‘empirical’, reader “is able to recognize and observe the rules of the game laid out by the text, and who is eager and able to play such a game” (Radford 2002). This means clearly establishing what sort of reader is to be expected; imagining why she will be reading, and to what extent there is an inherent interest, or at least openness to the linguistic and cultural differences encountered in the source text. This imagined reader should fit with the *skopos*, at which point the translator is in a third (mediating) position and nowable to mediate between the two texts. Translation alternatives can be more easily assessed now by literally checking the imagined reader’s ability to recognise the rules of the game and gauging her continuing eagerness to continue reading.

What we notice with each of the translators included in this volume is the absolute focus on the model reader. Yet, we should also note that this focus on the reader is not actually new. Political and religious tracts, now considered literature (such as the King James Bible) have always focussed on the reader (Katan 2008). Interestingly, as de Rinaldis (this volume) points

<sup>12</sup> Very similar is the term “Implied reader”, coined by Booth ([1961] 1983).

out, the rare examples of translation into Italian during the Renaissance period reveal that reader understanding was a priority – and *bel scritto* was not the issue. Giacomo Castelvetro’s prefaces to his translations are crystal clear: “Translated from English into Italian by someone who hopes that the Italians may know how much the rumours, artfully disseminated throughout Italy, of the aforementioned act are false and mendacious”, and “Translated from English for those who love truth. In Venice” (De Rinaldis, this volume).

It is with the rise of English as a Literature that *the bel scritto* began to take hold, beginning with “the Classics”, from Shakespeare onwards. As Federica Scarpa (this volume) notes, translations of Shakespeare into Italian are now “reader-centred”. The translators she analyses, going back to 1960, have all focused on the performability of the play, and have borne in mind the audience’s lack of familiarity with Shakespeare’s world.

The most notable intervention is Costa Giovangigli’s, who translates the then popular Elizabethan spiced-ginger “Shrewsbury cakes” with the classically Italian “pizze”. It could also be argued that this form of extreme domestication might also be destabilising for an audience aware that pizza had yet to be invented in Italy (let alone popular in Elizabethan England), making the strategy a minoritising one, and hence in fact *ostranenie*. On the whole, though, the translations allow the audience into Shakespeare’s world through a familiarity which is not so culturally grounded, allowing for what Massimo Bacigalupo (this volume) suggests should be the *skopos* of a literary translation; to produce a text which “can in fact be read for pleasure and instruction [as the original author] certainly intended”. To do this, Bacigalupo himself retranslated Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* into a more prosaic and ‘down to earth’ Italian (following Pound’s own use of language).

Simona Sangiorgi (this volume), in retranslating Jane Austen, also underlines how she moved away from the “embellished [...] high-register” Italian translations of the recent past. Her analysis of previous translations shows that the emphasis on text created “unnecessary elevation” up to the turn of the century. Not unlike Bacigalupo, she sought “a new mediation” between the language of a literary classic written in the English of two centuries ago, and that of “a contemporary Italian reader who lives in a fast-paced world, where communication modes and codes are influenced by the Internet and other digital environments”. In practice this meant at times “stiffening” the text (using the outmoded *voi* instead of the contemporary *tu*) to help orient the reader to eighteenth-century rules of etiquette while at the same time retaining the naturalness and colloquiality of the original by actually simplifying the language of the original, to a present day colloquial naturalness in Italian, thus allowing Austen’s fresh style to be appreciated by the model Italian reader envisaged by Sangiorgi.

Richard Dixon (this volume), translating for his model Anglo reader, notes that she would not have the access to the Latin in *Il Cimitero di Praga*

that Umberto Eco's original readers would have; so "a little help could be given". He used a number of strategies including translation couplets (retaining the original followed by the translation), as well as highlighting parts of the translation to indicate *how* the translation was to be interpreted. There was even more translatorial (and editorial) intervention on the translation of *Il Nome della Rosa*. Katan (1993, p. 156) reports that 10% of the Latin was actually omitted in the translation "so as not to scare off the less-erudite reader".

Reader orientation in translation is also at times signalled through a protagonist's shift, whereby the character – in translation – becomes a mediator and interpreter for the non-Italian reader. For example, *Guglielmo da Baskerville*, one of the protagonists in *Il Nome della Rosa*, changed in translation to become (for the *New York Times*, emphasis added, in Katan 1993: 158): "Our learned and ironic monk-detective"; and hence the English reader's personal guide to the Italian world. William Weaver, consciously or not, allowed the Anglo reader to feel a close bond with the character, and through a process of deletion and foregrounding made "Brother William of Baskerville, a most agreeable and engaging hero [...] and is allowed an English sense of humour – vital to the progression of the story" (Tooney 1983, p. 3).

Parini notes a similar (though not so successful) approach in Crosio's translation of *Bridget Jones Diary*, where the diary note "Am going to cook shepherd's pie for them all" becomes: "Preparerò per tutti loro una bella torta salata del pastore: una tipica ricetta inglese a base di carne trita e pure di patate". Bridget, now not just writing in Italian, but has become Italian through the (decidedly didactic) addition of the gloss for herself and for her fellow Italian reader. The gloss explains just what "shepherd's pie" is, and back-translated, reads: "a typical English recipe with mincemeat and mashed potatoes". What the actual, empirical, Italian reader would make of Bridget's didactic note should definitely be an area of research.

It should be remembered that this focus on the target reader does not necessarily mean domestication, as Dixon (this volume) underlines in his search for the *mot juste*. What Dixon shows is that he first accounts for the cultural distance, negotiates this distance with his model reader and is mindful of the effect: "The word "redivivus" exists in English – it appears in the Shorter OED – but my spell-check doesn't like it and it is certainly far less common in English than *redivivo* in Italian. And yet "reborn" or "back to life" seemed just a little too weak. There seemed to be no real alternative to "redivivus". So that was the word I chose, knowing that the English reader would have to work just a little harder".

These examples show just how much both Anglo and Italian translators today have moved away from a source text only approach, or an enforcement



of a *bel scritto* on the target text, and very much see themselves as mediating point by point the effort and the effect reading the text might have.

## 7. Mediation

The debate over either translating to highlight difference (foreignise) or to explain or reduce difference (domesticate) is, of course, artificial. Even Venuti himself (1998, p. 12) realised that foreignisation *tout court* was impractical: “The heterogeneous discourse of minoritizing translation [...] needn’t be so alienating as to frustrate a popular approach completely; if the remainder is released at significant points in a translation that is generally readable, the reader’s participation will be disrupted only momentarily”. This is a useful let-out clause, and allows for what makes much more sense: cultural mediation, “a form of translatorial intervention which *takes account* of the impact of cultural distance” (Katan 2013, p. 84, emphasis added), rather than prescriptively demanding that foreignness be maintained at all cost. This idea of mediation, considering equally the source text and the model reader’s reading of the target text, appears now to be what literary translators today take as being core qualities of their profession. The previously mentioned global survey appears to confirm this. The chart below shows the responses from the 91 of the 600 respondents who “mainly” translate literary texts. They were offered five options regarding ‘professionality’, which spanned the various levels of intervention. As can be seen in Figure 1, there is general agreement that a professional translation “absolutely” requires fidelity to the original text while at the same time should equally “absolutely” require that the text be fully readable. Less often regarded as professional is further intervention to reduce cultural (rather than linguistic) issues, or that the text be totally domesticated. And finally, Venuti’s call for an ethics of difference, remains an extremely minority option:

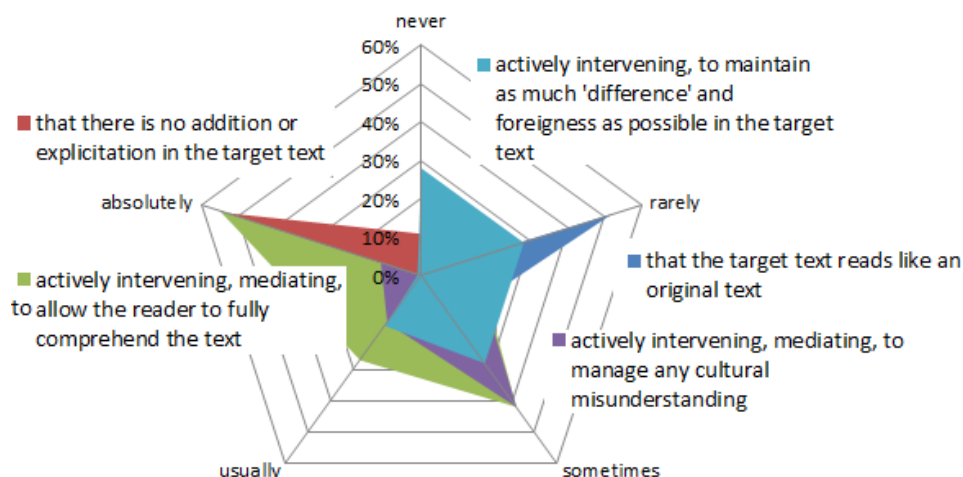


Figure 1.

“Mainly” literary translators and “What does professionalism mean?”.

Mediation requires that a translator is able to take a meta position, one which allows the translator to decide which strategy to use, whether more foreignising or more domesticating. This cannot be decided *a priori*; though once the Model reader has been formalized, certain translating decisions will become much more logical. And the more detailed the profile of the Model reader, the easier it is to decide just how much that reader will be prepared work – at that particular moment – to obtain the higher cognitive rewards. The task, as Dixon (this volume) says, is “to place the English reader in the same position as the Italian reader”, which does not automatically mean that reader is left in peace as his *redivivo/redivivus* example illustrates.

## 8. Towards Transcreation

Although this mediating meta-position frees the translator from *a priori* decisions about how to translate, the strategy is not in itself going to lead to enhancing the levels of appreciation. Something more is often necessary. We mentioned earlier how Bridget Jones (and many other characters) tend to lose something in translation, and indeed “lost in translation” has nearly ninety four million Google hits. However, loss is by no means a necessary consequence; but often to compensate for a formal loss, creativity is necessary, hence the idea of transcreation.

An example into Italian is Licia Corbolante’s retranslation of Sue Townsend’s popular “The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole” (see Katan 2004, pp. 206-207). Corbolante took the comically named character “Maxwell House” and transcreated him into “Teo Lipton”, thus creating a new term, both domestic *and* foreign. The overall sound is classically English. ‘Teo’

sounds English, yet is Italian and sounds close to the Italian for ‘tea’, which the British are known to drink gallons of. The surname, ‘Lipton’, refers to Italy’s best-selling “Lipton” brand of tea (thus mirroring the Maxwell House brand of coffee). To compound the humour, at the time of the translation, Lipton tea was advertised by a well-known American basketball coach, Dan Peterson, who even more famously spoke a ‘Stanley e Ollio’ Italian to advertise the product, which more than compensated for the loss of the comical associations cued by the name “Maxwell House”.

This is neither foreignisation nor domestication but transcreation (see Katan 2015), whereby the translator intervenes to create something clearly based on the original, but not directly inferable from the original text. Crucially, transcreation is capable of counteracting the universal features of translation, which flatten and standardise the reading, and hence reduce the possibility of (re)producing lasting artistic merit.

## 9. Conclusion

Clearly, translating the literary, which means first and foremost, sensitivity to the various levels or features in the text, the intended effects on the original reader, and the potential cognitive effects on the target reader make for what Halliday (this volume) calls the need “to live in a constant state of neurasthenic, of hypersensitive awareness”, which is perhaps the hallmark of any professional translator. In all cases, a translator is dealing with

a string of words that helps us read the text in its original language. It is a glossary rather than a translation, which is always a literary activity. Without exception, even when the translator’s sole intention is to convey meaning, as in the case of scientific texts, translation implies a transformation of the original. That transformation is not – nor can it be – anything but literary (Paz 1992, p. 154).

‘Literary’ translation though is clearly a special case of transformation, as text meaning is not only negotiated but the fruit of that negotiation with the reader is a heightened cognitive effect, creating some form of lasting artistic merit cued by the choice and selection of the new words. Hence, the literary translator will be listening and looking for evidence of non-casual language, of equivalences, and other extra-contextual associations which can point to a heightened meaning, which the original intended reader might reasonably be expected to infer. Then the translator as a mediator, having envisioned her ideal model reader is now in a position to transcreate for that reader.

**Bionote:** David Katan is full professor of English and Translation at the University of Salento (Lecce). He has over 70 publications including *Translating Cultures: An Introduction for Translators, Interpreters and Mediators* (Routledge) now in its 2nd edition; the headword entry “Culture” for the Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation (2008); “Translation as Intercultural Communication” for the Routledge Companion to Translation Studies (2009); entries for Benjamin’s *Handbook of Translation Studies* (2012, 2013), and “Cultural Approaches to Translation” in the Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics (2013). He translates regularly, mainly in literature and tourism, and has written about his translation of Italian dialect poetry (2001). Other publications regarding literary translation include those on James Joyce’s *The Dead* (1992), *Troilus and Cressida* (1993) and *Il Nome della Rosa* (1999). He is also keenly interested in “The Status of the Translator”. The results of the first global survey with over 1000 replies were published in Benjamins (2012, 2013). He is currently working on the second global survey of the profession, which focusses also on translation practice and transcreation. He has been senior editor of the *International Journal Cultus: the Journal for Intercultural Mediation and Communication* since its inception in 2008.

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