Lingue e Linguaggi
Lingue Linguaggi 14 (2015), 111-119
ISSN 2239-0367, e-ISSN 2239-0359
DOI 10.1285/i22390359v14p111

TRANSLATING JANE AUSTEN'S *MANSFIELD PARK* FOR CONTEMPORARY ITALIAN READERS

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Abstract – My Italian translation of the novel *Mansfield Park* by Jane Austen was published by Rusconi Libri in 2012. The present contribution aims to describe and discuss some aspects of my practical experience in translating this novel. A particular focus will be on the issue of what it means, from both the cultural and the literary point of view, to translate this book into Italian in the 21st century, and on the strategies I adopted in order to translate certain aspects of the author's language and style.

Keywords: Jane Austen; translation; Italian language; contemporary readers.

1. Introduction

According to a survey conducted by Giovanni Peresson and published in 2011 by "AIE" (Italian Publishers Association), the Italian public is abandoning the reading of the classics. Pietro Citati (2012), moreover, observes that most Italians now tend to prefer the lighter reading offered by the "mediocre style" and "banal plots" of certain contemporary authors.[1] In spite of this general trend, the Italian publisher Rusconi Libri has recently decided to publish a new collection of Jane Austen's novels. At the basis of such a decision was the idea of encouraging readers to rediscover one of the most widely read novelists in English literature, by offering a retranslation of her works into Italian, which would improve on some disputable or old-fashioned choices in terms of lexis, syntax, style or concepts to be found in some Italian translations available today (Agorni and Di Giovanni 2004).

2. The Text and the Translator's Choices

I was hired to retranslate *Mansfield Park*, which has become known as Austen's "problem novel", particularly because of the critics' discordant interpretations of the role of its main character, Fanny Price. She is variously

[1] http://www.corriere.it/cultura/12_marzo_09/dan-brown-coelho-faletti-bestseller-da-non-leggere-pietro-citati_2c4f16a8-69c9-11e1-b42a-aa1beb6952a8.shtml

seen as either a true, passionate heroine with strong moral values, or as a weak and ambiguous figure, who differs from Austen's other, livelier and brighter female protagonists such as Elizabeth Bennet or Emma Woodhouse (Koppel 1999). This seems to be also one of the main reasons why *Mansfield Park* has not enjoyed the popularity of, for instance, *Pride and Prejudice* and *Sense and Sensibility*. It was her only novel not to be reviewed at all on publication in 1814, and it even lost its publisher money (Blackwell 2009, p. 42). Indeed, this is not like Jane Austen's other novels.

It has been defined as Austen's most controversial work, and such a controversial nature, as Jon Spence (2003) argues, probably lies in the fact that *Mansfield Park* is Austen's most engaged attempt to capture the complex inner world of human feelings, and to challenge her readers' feelings about the characters in the novel. But I would argue that it also lies in its more marked political nature, i.e., in the wide variety of themes that, subtly or explicitly, run through the novel: religion, education, slavery, rules of morality and etiquette.

The first Italian edition of *Mansfield Park* was published by Edizioni per il Club del Libro in 1961. Since then, other Italian translations have appeared on the market, e.g., by Edizioni Capitol in 1965 (the only one to have changed the original title into *Villa Mansfield*), by Garzanti in 1983, by Newton & Compton in 1998, by Rizzoli in 2000, and by Fabbri in 2004. If, on the one hand, as Antoine Berman suggests (1990), source texts never age, translations do, because the translation process is influenced by cultural, social and political factors that characterize the receiving culture at a specific time, and change over time. Hence, readers, whose expectations play a role in the translator's mind, have changed as well.

Meanwhile, translation norms have also evolved (Brownlie 2006). These factors certainly contribute to the ageing of translations, and are likely to encourage the choice of retranslating specific texts to adapt the original text to the cultural requirements of a specific language community. To put it simply, what might be accepted as a good translation, or as an effective translation strategy in the 1970s, may well be judged otherwise in the 1990s or 2000s. The role of retranslations, according to Gideon Toury (1999, p. 167), then, is to fill a gap in the target system and to bring in something that was not there before, "no matter how many translations preceded it". My aim as a translator of this time and place, therefore, was to find a new mediation between author, source text, and the receiving cultural system which, in this case, involves the Italian readers of today.

The following pages will explain how I have attempted to achieve such a mediation, starting from the textual analysis of the original work and a general reading of the translations mentioned above.

One of the main features of the novel is the prominence of dialogue. As Sarah Emsley (2007) suggests, Austen presents the action and the characters

"by people acting rather than by narration".[2] In *Mansfield Park*, the author often adopts brilliant colloquial phrasing, as in the following example, in which Edmund tries to encourage his cousin Fanny to be less shy. Table 1 reports an excerpt from the source text and two of its translations into Italian. One was published by Garzanti in 1983, and the other is mine (2012):

Source text	Translation by Garzanti (1983)	My translation (Rusconi Libri 2012)
Your uncle thinks you very pretty, dear Fanny — *and that is the long and the short of the matter*. […] If you cannot bear an uncle's admiration, what is to become of you? […] *You must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman.* […] *And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in the subject, I did not like* — I thought it would appear as if […]. (pp. 174-175, my emphasis)	Tuo zio ti trova molto graziosa, cara Fanny: *proprio così*. […] Se non puoi sopportare l'ammirazione di uno zio, che ne sarà di te? […] *Suvvia, cerca di non angustiarti per il fatto che stai diventando una donna avvenente*. […] *E mentre le mie cugine sedevano senza dir parola non mi piaceva* ... pensavo che avrei dato l'impressione di […]. (pp. 202-203, my emphasis)	Vostro zio vi trova molto graziosa, cara Fanny – *tutto qui*. […] Se anche l'ammirazione di uno zio per voi è insostenibile, che ne sarà di voi? […] *Non abbiate paura di diventare una donna attraente.* […] *E mentre le mie cugine se ne stavano lì sedute senza dir parola, senza manifestare il minimo interesse per l'argomento, non mi piaceva* — ho pensato che avrei dato l'impressione di […]. (p. 182, my emphasis)

Table 1.
Colloquial language: two different translation strategies.

The source text is clearly colloquial. However, the translation published by Garzanti (1983) reported here does not render the same colloquial register. Rather, as will be explained further below, it may be seen as an 'ennobled' version of the original dialogue.

This seems to be in line with what Paola Venturi (2009) observed in her research on the translation of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English literary classics in Italy. Venturi (2009) shows that such translations share a common aspect, i.e., the tendency to reproduce the supposed classical qualities of the classic, even when they are not present in the source. This means that the translated text is often embellished with, for instance, higher-register, formal Italian words that are often selected to translate standard English counterparts, or with "allongement", which Berman (1999, p. 56) identifies as an unnecessary lengthening of the text through addition.

[2] http://www.jasna.org/persuasions/on-line/vol28no1/emsley.htm

According to Venturi (2009), this phenomenon is due to the high status assigned to classics in the Italian culture, which has an influence on the way these works are translated.

The translation by Garzanti (1983) reveals the use of the refined, but old fashioned *suvvia*, of the verb *angustiarsi* and of complex phrasing that do not quite correspond to the original form. This creates an unnecessary elevation in the register of the target text, and makes the reading pace slower than it would be in English. In my translation, I have tried not to distance the Italian text from the oral mode. Thus, I have translated "the long and the short of the matter" into *tutto qui* which, I believe, is probably as colloquial as the source text, and "You must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman" into *Non abbiate paura di diventare una donna attraente* which, instead of *Suvvia, cerca di non angustiarti per il fatto che stai diventando una donna avvenente* has the same linguistic register and does not slow down the reading pace.

Moreover, the following sentence *se ne stavano lì sedute* reads more naturally than *sedevano senza dir parola* (Garzanti 1983), and it also involves the slightly more marked sense of criticism towards the behavior of Fanny's cousins Maria and Julia, which seems to emerge from the source text.

Furthermore, I have chosen to use the polite form of the Italian pronoun *voi* instead of the informal *tu* between Fanny and Edmund. This (certainly debatable) choice, which also characterizes the most recent film versions of Austen's novels, is based on a series of considerations: first, some commentators point out that the use of *you* in English, particularly in the eighteenth and part of the nineteenth century, quite often had a very formal meaning. Marzio Barbagli (2000) moreover, shows that the use of formal, polite pronouns in Italian was very common during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries even between brothers and sisters.

The Bertram family, the social environment at Mansfield Park, and, most of all, the rules of etiquette of those times required an extremely formal behavior, both from the verbal and nonverbal point of view. In order to express such a distance, and the artificiality of manners which Austen herself subtly criticizes or satirizes, I decided to employ the Italian *voi*, which sounds stiff enough for the purpose, and helps orient the reader in this particular context.

A further essential aspect of the narrative voice in *Mansfield Park* is the use of the free indirect discourse, which depicts the individual voices of the various interlocutors, and colours the narrative with the idiomatic speech of the various characters. David Lodge (1990, p. 126) explains that this technique allows the novelist to "control and direct the readers affective and interpretive responses to the unfolding story". Moreover, Louise Flavin (1987) actually demonstrates that free indirect speech in *Mansfield Park* occurs two to three times as much as in the other novels. It is therefore crucial

to follow the quick comings and goings of Austen's voice in her characters voice, and to carefully consider whose voice is speaking at a specific point, in order to reproduce it accurately in the target language. The following excerpt (Table 2) is a crucial passage in Maria's mind, after Henry Crawford's departure from Mansfield Park. Maria realizes that her hopes to marry Mr Crawford have vanished, and thus she decides to marry Mr Rushworth not out of love, but because she wants to escape from her father, and the whole social environment of Mansfield Park. Again, one translation is by Rizzoli (2000), and the other is mine (Rusconi Libri 2012):

Source text	Translation by Rizzoli (2000)	My translation (Rusconi Libri 2012)
She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed. The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely necessary. She must escape from him and Mansfield as soon as possible, *and find consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world, for a wounded spirit. Her mind was quite determined, and varied not.* (p. 179, my emphasis)	*Maria si dimostrava sempre più riluttante nel sopportare le costrizioni che il padre le imponeva. Quella libertà che l'assenza di Sir Thomas aveva portato con sé era diventata adesso una questione di vita o di morte.* Doveva mettersi in salvo da lui e da Mansfield il più presto possibile; *doveva trovare consolazione nella ricchezza, nel prestigio sociale, nella confusione mondana, e curare così il suo spirito ferito. La sua mente era più che mai ferma, e determinata a non cambiare risoluzione per niente al mondo.* (p. 274, my emphasis)	*Era sempre meno disposta ad adeguarsi alle restrizioni imposte dal padre. La libertà che aveva conosciuto durante l'assenza di Sir Thomas le era ormai assolutamente indispensabile.* Doveva scappare da lui e da Mansfield al più presto possibile, *e trarre dal lusso, dal prestigio sociale e dal clamore della vita mondana un conforto per la sua anima ferita. Ormai aveva deciso, e non intendeva cambiare idea*. (p. 186, my emphasis)

Table 2.
Free indirect discourse: examples of different renderings.

Dorrit Cohn (1978) explains that free indirect discourse offers a sense of emotional realism that is created by the readers access to the unspoken thoughts of the novel's characters. Such an emotional immediacy, as may be noticed in the excerpt reported, is mediated by the presence of the narrator. The thoughts of Maria are here interspersed throughout a piece of descriptive third-person narrative, and lack the introductory tags that signal indirect speech, such as "she thought". "She" at the beginning of the excerpt refers to Maria Bertram, and here it seems that it is actually Maria who is giving voice to her thoughts. In this passage the narrator inserts words and phrases that articulate Maria's non-verbalized emotional response to the situation while

managing to maintain a language that sounds similar to what Maria might actually use to think to herself. Her reported thoughts are characterized by rapidity and anxiety, as shown by the tight and quick phrasing above. The main challenge, at this point, was to express in Italian not only this narrative voice, but also its rhythm and 'colour'. So, I translated "She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed" into *Era sempre meno disposta ad adeguarsi alle restrizioni imposte dal padre* and I turned "which her father imposed" into the passive form *imposte dal padre* because, although *Maria si dimostrava sempre più riluttante nel sopportare le costrizioni che il padre le imponeva* is grammatically closer to the original, it would have had a different, probably heavier impact on the Italian reader.

Also, "The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely necessary" already seems to be part of Maria's troubled stream of thoughts, and thus *La libertà che aveva conosciuto durante l'assenza di Sir Thomas le era ormai assolutamente indispensabile* creates an effect that is probably closer to the sense of urgency produced by the source text. The Rizzoli translation, *Quella libertà che l'assenza di Sir Thomas aveva portato con sé era diventata adesso una questione di vita o di morte*, has a more complex grammatical structure, which is reminiscent of Alessandro Manzoni's writing style, and also overtranslates "absolutely necessary" into *una questione di vita o di morte* (a matter of life or death). The same considerations are valid for the last part of the excerpt, which expresses not only her speed and the blindness of her desperate conclusions but also her search for material happiness as the definitive solution to her inner pain.

The almost spoken cadence of this last part should have a corresponding Italian version, instead of the more elaborate earlier translation, to allow Italian readers to receive an equivalent message, and, hopefully, an equivalent aesthetic effect. So, for example, *scappare* is semantically closer to *escape* than *mettersi in salvo* (flee to safety), and it is more similar in terms of colloquial register. Also, though *La sua mente era più che mai ferma* ("her mind was quite determined") follows the English word order rigidly, it sounds quite unnatural to the contemporary Italian ear. Finally, Rizzoli's *e determinata a non cambiare risoluzione per niente al mondo* (and nothing on earth would have changed her mind) is more formal, complex and adds further meanings to the original text, losing the desperation, speed and the blindness of the original pithy "and varied not".

Lefevere (1988, p. 176) points out that it is impossible to define, once and for all, what a good translation is. And critics may or may not agree with the particular strategies chosen by the translator for a particular purpose. What is important is that such strategies are coherently adopted throughout the whole translation process, while bearing in mind that translation is no longer a problem of merely finding verbal equivalents, but also of interpreting a text, its style, its properties, and its culture-specific values.

3. Conclusions

My idea of the contemporary Italian target reader, who lives in a fast-paced world, where communication modes and codes are influenced by the Internet and other digital environments, has certainly exerted a major influence on my choices in this translation work. Indeed, I considered it my main reference for preserving coherence in terms of translation strategies. This reader does not need an unnecessarily embellished text featuring complex syntax and register elevation, which, actually, do not have much in common with the language of the source text. Thus, in my translation I have attempted not to alter the aesthetic properties of the source text in order to create a 'classic sounding' target text, because that would have silenced part of Jane Austen's particular and brilliant language and style, which deserve to be appreciated by Italian readers as well.

Finally, as a female translator in line with Gayatri Spivak's principle of women's solidarity (1993), my aim was to reproduce the voice of Jane Austen as faithfully as possible, so that, instead of it being frozen in an artificial, conservative Italian, it could find, I hope, a chance to return to the surface of the text.

Bionote: Simona Sangiorgi graduated with honours in Translation from the Advanced School of Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators of the University of Bologna at Forlí with a thesis focusing on politeness strategies. In 2008 she obtained a PhD in Languages, Cultures and Intercultural Communication from the University of Bologna. She is adjunct professor at the University of Bologna. She also works as a professional translator. Her experience includes teaching Linguistic Mediation at the Advanced School of Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators (University of Bologna at Forlì) and Business Language at the School of Economics, Management and Statistics (University of Bologna). Her research fields are related to contemporary cultural and linguistic manifestations, with a special focus on the language of tourism, translation studies, and the representation of Italianness in American mass media. She has recently published *Fun Factories of Our Times: Amusement Theme Parks, Their Words, and Their Way to Postmodernity* (Otto – Nova americana 2012). Her articles and book reviews have appeared in several international journals and among her most recent publications is "Translate, Explain or Borrow? Culture-specific Terms of Italian *Strade dei vini e dei sapori* in German and English" (*Tourismus-kommunikation*, ed. Doris Höhmann. Bern: Peter Lang, 2013, pp. 163-172).

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