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WRITING AND TRANSLATING AFTER THE EMPIRE

Introduction

The problem of language, and consequently of translation, is clearly fundamental to both colonial and postcolonial history and literature. Indeed, in the words Eric Cheyfitz used, translation could be identified as the "central act of European colonisation" (1991, 104), as

> at the heart of every imperial fiction (at the heart of darkness) there is a fiction of translation. The colonial Other is translated into terms of the imperial self, with the net result of alienation for the colonised and a fiction of understanding for the coloniser (Cheyfitz, quoted by Wynn: 2000, 114).

From the outset, the Empire actually posited itself not simply as an economic, military and political enterprise, but also as a textual exercise, a mythical system by which familiar figures of speech were applied to new contexts in order to interpret and translate other lands and their people, thereby bringing them within what Foucault calls the Western episteme.

In particular, by imposing a foreign language and suppressing the local ones (or at least restricting their use to the household), the Empire tried to dominate the mental universe of the indigenous populations and control, through culture, the way they perceived themselves and their relation to the world. By doing so, colonisers provoked a dissociation of sensibility in the indigenous people, and the association of their language and culture with humiliation, low status, punishment and barbarism, led to what Ngugi wa Thiong'o terms "colonial alienation". This is the same experience Bhabha refers to when he says that colonialism created not only a divide between the Self and the Other, but also the otherness of the Self, obliging the black subject to perceive him/herself as Other.

The colony as a whole was therefore constructed as an inferior,

Other reality, and posited as a copy – a translation – of the mother country, which was then recognised as the great original. If this aspect was implicitly acknowledged by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, it was only in recent years that the relationship between colonialism and translation has come under close scrutiny for example in the work of Niranjana, who puts forward the notion that translation shapes "the relations of power that operate under colonialism" (Niranjana: 1992, 2).

It is therefore not by chance that Rushdie, in his *Imaginary Homelands*, defines the postcolonial writer as a "translated man" (Rushdie: 1991, 15). According to Rushdie, the "translation process" writers from the former colonies experienced when colonisers obliged them to abandon their language, can be seen as the necessary first step towards their formation as postcolonial writers. In their attempt to reject the appellative of copy and translation, and assert their identity and their culture, the colonies emerging from colonialism appropriated some of the translation strategies initially exploited by colonisers. Linguistic issues then, which structuralism and poststructuralism showed to be closely connected to problems of identity, therefore appear central to both colonialist and postcolonialist enterprises. In fact, if through the imposition of their language, colonisers created the colonised as inferior Others, who could therefore achieve an identity only in relation (and submission) to the mother country, it was always through language that the ex-colonies, at a certain moment in their history of domination and dispossession, began to subvert the ideology and the myths projected by the Empire.

Indeed, during the period of high decolonisation (after India's independence in 1947), literature, with its potential to compose alternative realities and use language in an imaginative way, was increasingly mobilised as a weapon of political liberation, thereby becoming a central arena of transformation. In those years, Asian, African and Caribbean writers focused mainly on reconstituting the cultural identity which had been damaged by the colonial experience, and concentrated on developing a symbolic vocabulary that was recognisably indigenous. By doing so, they emphasised the importance of what Ngugi would call a total "de-colonisation" of the mind of the once-colonised, a process which – by implying the complete rejection of the language of the ex-colonisers and the retrieval of the local mother tongues and the culture they carry – would have enabled them to name the world for themselves.

In reality, despite Ngugi's recommendations, many authors opted for the politics of in-betweenness Bhabha called for in his

The Location of Culture, the "in-between space" Bhabha himself defines as "the cutting edge of translation and renegotiation", that "inter" or "Third Space" which "carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (Bhabha: 1994: 38). By drawing on local cultures, by inserting in their works references to indigenous legends and myths, by relying on words and rhythms typical of their languages, and by intruding upon Western defining tales, these authors therefore brought about the disintegration of the imperial canon Chinua Achebe (a strong advocate of the use of English in African literature) hoped for. Thus, through their use of language, writers such as Tutuola and Soyinka (who in their works render Yoruba culture into English), Raja Rao (whose narratives are rich of references to the tale of Rama), and Ama Ata Aidoo (in whose work Akan legend clearly works as an intertext), "translated" some of the constitutive elements of their languages and cultures into what could be recognised as the language of the ex-colonisers only with great difficulty.

Because of this, Ngugi's adoption of Gikuyu oral formulae (which he used to insert in his texts before abandoning English for good), Rushdie's exploitation of the *hinglish* spoken in Bombay's bazaars and Zoila Ellis's graphic reproduction of hybrid linguistic forms such as the Creole spoken in the Belizean communities depicted in her texts, are all meant as effective anti-colonial strategies and should be read as an attempt on these authors' part to affirm their identity and the identities of the countries they stand for.

By using in their works a hybridised, non-standard form of English, these writers therefore encouraged the emergence of a situation in which a multiplicity of englishes are able to co-exist, as opposed to a world in which one metropolitan English dominates over other allegedly "deviant" forms. Thanks to these authors, the language of Shakespeare broke up, creating a number of splinter forms non longer identifiable as English. The development of multiple literary and spoken englishes, therefore illustrates the fecundity of post-colonial adaptation. It is a sort of cultural boomeranging where the once-colonised take the artefacts of the former masters and make them their own: as Rushdie suggests, mastering the language of the former masters actually completed the process of making the ex-colonised free. In order to loosen English from its colonial past and make it national, thus turning it into an effective anti-colonial instrument, writers must subject it to various processes of syntactic and verbal dislocation, exploiting the potential of local idioms and adopting indigenous

cultural referents. It goes without saying, then, that the work of Rushdie himself remains an exemplary case: in his novels, the author flamboyantly crosses, fragments and parodies different narrative perspectives; he derives his style from a certain kind of *Mughal* painting typical of the architecture of Hindu temples, occasionally inserting untranslatable expressions in his texts and adopting a structure of multiple mini-narratives which reflects the digressive form of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the two Indian sacred texts.

By establishing new metaphors of nationhood and creating new images as symbols to represent the nation, english thus becomes crucial for the constitution of the new, postcolonial nations. Hence, the introduction and the translation of elements derived from dialects, Creoles and patois, very rarely depend on "innocent", purely stylistic reasons, in so far as most of the time they are made to correlate with national self-perceptions. This is also the reason why the practice of translation has come to be perceived as fundamental to the postcolonial enterprise, to such an extent that for example Maria Tymoczo considers translation as an *analogue* for postcolonial literature, as the two types of textual productions share many similarities[1].

As Inga-Stina Ewbank observes,

> the idea of translation has come to be central in postcolonial thinking about permeable – or impermeable – borders, geographical, cultural and linguistic. In a discourse both critical and creative, translation can figure as a key concept in exploring otherness, exile, even belongingness (Ewbank: 2003, 14).

The fact that the disciplines of Translation Studies and Postcolonial Studies should be seen as correlated – as exemplified by the publication of volumes such as *Postcolonial Translation* (1999), *Translation and Minority* (1999), *Translation and Multilingualism: Postcolonial Contexts* (2001), *Changing the Terms: Translating in the Postcolonial Era* (2001), *Translation in the Global Village* (2002) and *Translation and Multiculturalism* (2002) – therefore comes as no surprise.

[1] For instance, both are concerned with the "transmission of elements from one culture to another across a cultural and/or linguistic gap" (Tymoczo: 1999, 23), and both are affected by "similar constraints on the process of relocation" (*ibid.*).

To a certain extent, it is actually possible, with all due caution, to detect similar trends in both fields, as theoretical elaboration in one discipline seems to reflect and penetrate that of the other. For instance, after the initial period during which Postcolonial Studies concentrated on what was perceived as a "homogeneous" and "globalised" idea of "postcoloniality", now there is a tendency to focus on the specificity and the diversity which distinguish the ex-colonies in different parts of the world. In fact, despite the emphasis placed by first-generation postcolonial scholars on concepts such as hybridity, heterogeneity, and difference – categories which, of course, were celebrated on a discursive level – on a methodological level they simultaneously compressed and deleted differences of history and geography, homogenising them into a collective entity. On one hand, the postmodernist, poststructuralist / deconstructionist approach of authors such as Said (who was heavily influenced by Foucault), Spivak (who openly acknowledges her debt to Derrida) and Bhabha (more attentive to Lacan), was extremely useful in the elaboration of some of the experiences of the ex-colonies, for example exposing the relation between culture and imperialism, language and power. On the other, however, it also led to a flattening of the cultural idiosyncrasies of various societies, and while constituting a necessary first step, it risked engulfing "postcolonialism" within the Western, metropolitan theoretical debate.

Thus, even though Said is careful to stress that culture and language create real oppression, and even though Bhabha claims that the Otherness of the black man is *inscribed* on his body through colonisers' language, thus distancing themselves from the postmodernist stance of relishing the free play of language as a means of evading the consequences of ideological constructs, their intellectual productions nonetheless create a disconnection from the real vicissitudes of the formerly colonised nation-states. As San Juan Jr notes in his *Beyond Postcolonial Theory* (1998), in this kind of production, very rarely do we encounter any specific scenario of unjust domination or actual resistance from which we might gather information about the real ordeals the ex-colonies and their inhabitants had to endure, and urgent life-or-death issues are often ignored.

As a result, further to the general acknowledgment of the fact that in a world of power and victimisation, colonialism and persecution, ideologies impact on the body, and the Empire's exercise

in textuality results in real segregation, exclusion from public life, economic exploitation, infliction of physical pain and even death, scholars such as Aijaz Ahmad have begun to problematise romantic and idealistic homogenisations of the "third world", questioning the postcolonial denial of the histories of peoples and their distinctive trajectories of survival and achievement, and finally denouncing the fact that the systematic decay of countries and continents cannot be easily squared with notions of transnational cultural hybridity and politics of contingency. As San Juan emphasises, criticising the reduction of the social to the semiotic, in the discursive realm of floating signifiers, the asymmetry of power and resources between hegemonic blocs and subaltern groups disappears (San Juan: 1998, 7).

Postcolonial discourse generated in the "first world" is increasingly seen as another product (and not an antithesis) of post-Fordist capitalism; the much celebrated notion of versatility is recognised as part of "cultural imperialism", and concepts such as hybridity and heterogeneity are seen as obfuscating the effects and practices of consumerism. Consequently, scholars have begun to express the need to re-address such trends as mutliculturalism, globalisation and the decline of the nation-states in the vicissitudes of the "culture wars" which – despite the end of formal colonialism – keep taking place (San Juan: 1998, 11). Furthermore, there is a call to redirect postcolonial studies away from diasporic concerns and back to the multiple arenas within the postcolonial states themselves (Werbner: 1997, 23), and as Timothy Brennan suggests, recuperate the suppressed history of entire countries (1997, 2; 2003).

The analytical simplifications in which postcolonialists have indulged are now banned in favour of a political analysis grounded in the history of the various countries (Chabal: 1997, 32, 51), and colonialism and postcolonialism, in particular as expressed in "third world literature", are no longer seen as monolithic entities, as the attention is re-focussed on categories such as race and nation (Ranger: 1997, 274). According to Coopan, these two categories have actually become "dangerously peripheral to what many would see as the 'real' work of the field" (Coopan: 2000, 7), but they are essential to an understanding of postcolonial situations such as the end of apartheid in South Africa, and provide new registers of expressions to the much acclaimed notion of hybridity which, as Loomba suggests, does not dilute the violence of the colonial encounter (Loomba: 1991, 172 – 3).

Contrary to easy forms of textualisation – and the implication,

recalling Derrida's, that any context is simply another text – scholars now acknowledge that power is always situational. Any analysis is therefore increasingly spatio-temporally oriented, locating considerations about the inequality of power and control over resources, and focussing on their material consequences such as brutalisation, exploitation and genocide.

This emphasis of Postcolonial Theory on specificity and historical analysis, in reality, reflects a more general tendency characterising recent developments in Linguistics and Translation Studies. In these disciplines as well, in fact, we can observe increasing attention to the notion that each system is a system in itself, and that there exist various sub-systems characterised by specific aspects such as peculiar syntax and / or pronunciation. As in Postcolonial Studies, in Linguistics and Translation Studies too, it is acknowledged that there no longer exists a single standard English, in that what was once known as English has now diversified into a series of micro-languages – comparable to the many englishes Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffith describe (1985, 8) – specific to a particular section of society, identified for example on the basis of class and origin. Hence, both on British soil and in the ex-colonies, these micro-languages have become determinant for the assertion of the specific identity of particular groups.

This process, obviously becomes more relevant to the study of linguistic practices in postcolonial contexts, where the acknowledgments that a particular sub-system had the same rights to authority as any other sub-systems, meant the passage from a situation of colonisation (when the language of one system dominated over all other languages, relegating the other systems to the role of sub-cultures, the prefix "sub" indicating here inferiority and oppression) to a situation of de-colonisation.

Peculiarities of Postcolonial "english"

It is precisely on the micro-languages which have become known as "postcolonial englishes" and the strategies translators have at their disposal when they are called to translate these non-standard forms of English, that this paper focuses. Because, as Barthes, Lacan et. al. have repeatedly suggested, any use of language always corresponds to an act of propaganda and an attempt to impose authority upon Others, no discourse can ever be considered innocent. As a consequence, Translation Studies scholars such as Tymoczo (*Translation in a Postcolonial Context*, 1999)

and Calzada-Perez (*A Propos of Ideology*, 2003), have repeatedly pointed out the bearing ideology has on translation, especially in a postcolonial, globalised context. As Said's insightful analyses have clearly demonstrated, no representation of culture – especially the culture of a colonised people – is ever innocent, neither in the original, nor in translation.

In the last half century or so, poststructuralism and postmodernism have acknowledged that there exists no universal truth, that the epistemological innocence of 19th century, with its infallible grand-narratives, is over and, as a consequence, that at the core of a text there is no fundamental truth to be unveiled. In the same way, within the discipline of Translation Studies it is now admitted that there is "no absolute truth to be conveyed in translation" (Simon, 1999, 63) – a concept also implied by de Campos's idea that "translation as transtextualisation or transcreation demythicises the ideology of fidelity" (see Vieira: 1999, 110), in that it expresses a refusal to duplicate the original. This is why translation strategies appear particularly important, as it is through them that translators respond to the alterity represented by the culture of the ex-colonies.

Because of this, as Katan acknowledges in his *Translating Cultures* (1999), it becomes fundamental for translators to have a strong background in the culture the texts stem from, in an attempt to exorcise the filters we resort to, albeit unconsciously, whenever we approach a text. These "filters" could actually be identified with the "conceptual" and "textual grids" which, according to Lefevere, underpin all forms of writing and which derive from the cultural and literary conventions of a given time and space (Lefevere: 1999, 75 – 6). According to Lefevere, "problems in translating are caused at least as much by discrepancies in conceptual and textual grids as by discrepancies in language" (Lefevere: 1999, 76), and translators ought to bear in mind both set of grids in source and target systems, in order to avoid imposing, for example, Western grids onto non-Western texts, thus translating non-Western cultures into Western categories.

The emphasis Tonkin puts on the necessity of respecting the original text, for example by making an effort to convey phenomena such as code-mixing (when words from another language or dialects are inserted in the text) and code-switching (when more substantial elements such as whole clauses or phrases are imported from another language, leading to the incorporation within the text of grammatical aspects of the language), therefore appears essential (Tonkin: 1993, 188). These strategies actually become fun-

damental tools for the affirmation of the characters' identity – usually set in opposition to a "third person narrator", usually speaking in standard English – the identity of the author him/herself and the community s/he belongs to. Ignoring such peculiarities would therefore mean to nullify the author's effort and halve the impact of the texts themselves. Translators, then, should always be aware of the fact that the difficulties presented by these texts are never simply linguistic. Unless the translator can actually understand the origin and the ideological bearing of certain lexical / syntactical choices, the translation will suffer enormously. Philological approaches to translation – according to which what cannot be translated must be confined to silence – are therefore rejected as forms of cultural imperialism, in favour of a more creative approach, in which forms which are not part of the receptor system are developed to encode alternative experiences and the "Otherness" inherent in the original text.

Since the language used becomes a fundamental component of these authors' project as writers and, more fundamentally, as postcolonial subjects, if translators really want to posit themselves as "cultural mediators", they ought to make an effort to avoid the kind of standardisation of the language which stifles (yet again) the very cultures, languages and identities to which these works try to give a voice within Western discourse after years of silencing. Sentences such as "You know teecha sometime we qurrel 'mongst weself ya da dis village, but when important thing like death happen, everybody pitch in because that could happen to all ah we" (Ellis: 1988, 22), are clearly understandable in spite of grammatical irregularities such as "weself" instead of "ourselves", and the alterations in the spelling of words such as "teecha", "qurrel" "mongst", "dis", "ah", which graphically reproduce the pronunciation of the people living in the Belizean rural communities Zoila Ellis depicts in her text. Yet, although the use of Creole does not make the text incomprehensible, and could thus be easily translated in standard forms, translators should nonetheless try and find a way of conveying the flavour the particular orthography and grammatical constructions of the sentences convey.

As Tymoczo underlines, "in obscuring or muting the cultural disjunctions [between source and target text], the translator ceases to be 'faithful' to the source text" (Tymoczo: 1999, 21). Indeed, as Valerio Fissore states in his "Nota del traduttore" to Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*:

> una traduzione che non registrasse la diversità sistematica non risul-

> terebbe che in una parafrasi (…) che snaturerebbe, con operazione colonialistica, la cultura dalla quale dicesse di tradurre e, infine, fallirebbe fondamentalmente l'obiettivo di accostare le due culture (Fissore: 1987, 17).

Consequently, by translating an utterance such as "mummy, can you believe that everyone remembered me? And they said: 'WAT-A-WAY-YU-GROW' AND 'HOW-IS-YU-DAADIE' AND 'HOW-IS-YU-MAAMIE' (Senior: 1987, 70), with "Mammina, ci credi che tutti si ricordavano di me? E continuavano a dirmi com'ero cresciuta e a chiedere come stava mio papà e come stava mia madre" (quoted by Adele d'Arcangelo: 2003, 5) – Roberta Garbarini clearly prevents Italian readers from hearing the true voice of the Jamaican people which the author was determined to insert in her text. The translator thus perpetrates, albeit unconsciously, the kind of epistemic violence Spivak describes as part of the colonialist enterprise.

Not only this, but even when writers seem to use standard English, translators should always question and further investigate the use of what appear to be standard forms, as authors might be using English as if it were another language. This is for instance the case of Achebe – who, as Riddy points out in his "Language as a Theme in *No Longer at Ease*", while writing in English indicates when conversational Igbo is supposed to be used by resorting to "a cadenced, proverb-laden style" (Riddy: 1970, 39) – and Okara, who in *The Voice* (1964) uses English as an extension of his Ijaw language. The process through which Okara tries to render his mother-tongue as literally as possible, in the attempt to translate into English, almost word-for-word, distinctive idiomatic or metaphorical expressions of Ijaw, could therefore be identified as "transliteration", a process which enables the author to maintain many of the characteristics of the original language, while adopting target-language conventions for the phonic and graphic representation of a source expression.

In Okara's opinion, in fact, it is fundamental to translate almost literally African folklore, imagination and philosophy into the European language the author happens to use, because a single African word, group of words or even a name, can express the social customs, the attitudes and the values of an entire country. In this case as well, then, translators should find a way to indicate that another language should be used in a particular segment of the text, adopting a suitable strategy in order not to betray the original text. This is the reason why I think that by translating lit-

erally some of the sentences with which Okara rendered some Ijaw expressions in English, Fissore has managed to maintain the flavour and the logic of the Ijaw language also in the Italian text. Clearly, if the meaning of a sentence such as "per il fatto che non sono andato a scuola io non ho bile, io non ho testa? Io niente so?" (Okara: 1987, 27 – 8) is rendered comprehensible, if only intuitively, by the immediate context in which the expression "io non ho bile" appears, and the further reference to that person's alleged ignorance, a sentence like "Dicevano: Okolo non ha torace. Non aveva un forte torace e non aveva ombra" (Okara: 1987, 25) – which translates the original "Okolo had no chest, they said. His chest was not strong and he had no shadow" (Okara: 1970, 23) – remains rather obscure both in Italian and in English.

Obviously, writers themselves can resort to different strategies in order to make their texts more comprehensible and provide readers with a sort of "key" to their work. For instance, Okara himself, in "African Speech…English Words", which appeared in Transition in 1963, comments on the example given above, clarifying the mechanisms of his use of English:

> The equivalent [of the expression ["he is timid"] in Ijaw is "he has no chest" or "he has no shadow". Now a person without a chest in the physical sense can only mean a human that does not exist. The idea becomes clearer in the second translation. A person who does not cast a shadow of course does not exist. All this means that a timid person is not fit to live (Okara: 1963, 16).

In this instance, then, the author – who is simultaneously a translator – resorts to the strategy Malone defines as "equation" (1988, 15), using calques of the Ijaw language in English, that is expressions which consist of target language words and respect target language syntax but are unidiomatic in the target language because modelled on the structure of a source language expression.

Authors have also at their disposal different linguistic levels which account for their comprehensibility, acceptability and, of course, translatability. For example Achebe, in *A Man of the People* (1966), resorts to standard pidgin:

> At that point my house-boy, a fifteen-year-old-rogue called Peter, came in to ask what he should cook for supper.
> "You no hear the news for three o' clock?" I asked, feigning great seriousness.
> "Sir?"

> "Government done pass new law say na only two times a day person go de chop now. For morning and for afternoon. Finish"
> He laughed (Achebe: 1988, 20 – 1)

As a result, the brief dialogue between the two characters is fairly easily understandable despite:

1. the omission of
    a. the auxiliary verb in the interrogative form ("you no hear"),
    b. both definite and indefinite articles ("government" and "person"; "new law")
    c. relative pronouns ("law say");
    d. the marker of third person singular ("say")
2. the use of the preposition "for", which replaces both "at" ("for three o' clock") and "in" ("for morning" and "for afternoon");
3. the formation of the past tense with a past participle followed by an infinitive without to ("done pass"), instead of the standard auxiliary + past participle;
4. the anticipation of the temporal expression ("only two times a day")
5. the spelling variation of "de"; and
6. the use of the expression "go de chop".

The only real challenge is actually posited by the last expression "go de chop", which, however, the immediate context makes comprehensible. Thus, although Marco Grampa might have emphasised more some of the non-standard features of the original and rendered "news" and the verb "done pass" more precisely, the meaning is more or less conveyed in the Italian text:

> In quel momento il mio cameriere, un ragazzaccio di quindici anni di nome Peter, entrò a chiedere che cosa doveva cucinare per cena.
> "Non hai sentito la notizia alle tre?" chiesi, fingendo la massima serietà.
> "Signore?"
> "Il governo ha fatto una legge che dice che d'ora in avanti bisogna mangiare solo due volte al giorno. Mattino e pomeriggio. E basta."
> Scoppiò a ridere (Achebe: 1994, 31).

In a similar way to Achebe, Sam Selvon, in his *Lonely Londoners* (1956), uses not pure Creole, which would have certainly resulted obscure and difficult to understand to most readers, but a modified dialect which might be more easily understood (Selvon: 1982, 60). Hence, the sentence "it have people living in London

who don't know what happening in the room next to them, far more the street, or how other people living" (Selvon: 1972, 58) appears immediately comprehensible despite the use of "it" and the verb "to have" (replacing "there" followed by the verb "to be", as in "there are"), and the omission of the auxiliary "to be" with the progressive form[2].

In these cases, however, the risk is that translators who do not have a strong background in Cultural Studies and are not aware of the tradition on which the author is drawing, cannot see the problems and challenges posed by the text, being for example unable to recognise – let alone convey in their translations – rhythmic parallelism, the use of pastiche or parody etc.

This is the reason why the translation Adriana Motti produced of Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (published by Adelphi in 1983 as *La mia vita nel bosco degli spiriti*), is all the more valuable, as in the hands of this experienced and gifted translator, Italian words retain some of the expressive force which Tutuola conveys by drawing on Yoruba culture. As Itala Vivan notes in her "Nota" to the Italian translation of *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, Tutuola actually draws on various features of Yoruba literary repertoire, in particular the folktale, the dilemma tale, the riddle, the proverb and the panegyric. Furthermore, the repetition of the leitmotif, the various epithets, and the dialogues, from which the interaction between the performer / *conteur* and his audience originates, are all characteristic of Yoruba oral tradition. The language Tutuola uses in his works, then, is a sort of English-Yoruba, an extremely innovative language rich of neologisms, calques and analogies, which while replicating the sounds of standard English, maintains the structures of the native language.

The Translator's Strategies

It appears therefore clear that unless translators possess a particular linguistic sensibility in both source and target language, they will not necessarily find an adequate way of conveying in translation the magic and hypnotic qualities which in the original text might be expressed through syntactical and lexical repetition,

[2] For a detailed discussion, see Talib (*The Language of Postcolonial Literatures*, 2002).

the use of onomatopoeia and alliteration. As an example quoted by Adele d'Arcangelo implicitly demonstrates, for instance, in the translation of Kincaid's *The Autobiography of my Mother* (1996), the only strategy the translator actually cannot avoid respecting in the translation of a segment which refers to obeah mythology (an ancestral tradition which stems from the encounter between the African culture of the diaspora and the native Carib people), is lexical repetition ("the fishermen", "my mother", "contentment"). The syntactical repetition of the construction "there is (…) there is (…) there is", the use of the onomatopoeic expression "plop plop" referring to the waves, and the alliteration of the letter "s" in the sentence "the silvery sea criss-crossed with darts of light", are on the contrary ignored. Thus, the passage

> The fisherman is coming in from sea; their catch is bountiful, my mother has seen to that. As waves plop plop against each other, the fishermen are happy that the sea is calm. My mother points out the fisherman to me, their contentment is a source of my contentment. I'm sitting in my mothers' enormous lap. Sometimes I sit on a mat she has made for me from her hair. The lime trees are weighed down with limes-I have already perfumed myself with blossoms. A hummingbird has nested on my stomach, a sign of my fertileness. My mother and I live in a bower made from flowers whose petals are imperishable. There is the silvery blue of the sea crisscrossed with short darts of light, there is the warm rain falling on the clumps of castor bush, there is the small lamb bounding across the pasture, there is the soft ground welcoming the soles of my pink feet. It is in this way my mother and I have lived for a long time (Kincaid: 1996, 60),

is translated as

> I pescatori stanno tornando dal mare; la loro pesca è abbondante; mia madre vi ha provveduto. Mentre le onde si infrangono, si infrangono le une contro le altre, i pescatori sono felici che il mare sia calmo. Mia madre mi indica i pescatori, la loro contentezza è motivo della mia contentezza. Sono seduta nell'enorme grembo di mia madre. A volte sono seduta su una stuoia che lei ha fatto con i suoi capelli per me. Gli alberi di lime sono appesantiti dai frutti – mi sono già profumata con i loro boccioli. Un colibrì ha fatto il nido sul mio stomaco, un segno della mia fertilità. Mia madre e io viviamo in una capanna fatta di fiori i cui petali sono eterni. C'è il blu argenteo del mare, attraversato da luminosi raggi di luce, cade una pioggia calda sui rami di ricino, un agnellino saltella sul pascolo, i miei piedi rosei poggiano su un soffice terreno. Così mia madre e io viviamo da molto tempo (Kincaid: 1996, 38–40)

Occasionally, writers can actually provide readers with clues

as to the meaning of certain words, concepts or references to local history or legends inserted in their texts. For example, in *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe explains the ritual of the kola (Achebe: 1988, 19), and makes it clear within the text that the word "harmattan" refers to a wind from the Sahara, by stating for example that "the cold and dry harmattan wind was blowing down from the north" (Achebe: 1988, 18). Similarly, he explains the meaning of the word "*agadi-nwayi*" and how it came to indicate a particular "medicine":

> its most potent war-medicine was as old as the clan itself. Nobody knew how old. But on one point there was general agreement – the active principle in that medicine had been an old woman with one leg. In fact, the medicine itself was called agadi-nwayi, or old woman (Achebe: 1988, 24).

In addition, he immediately gives the translation into English of words such as *ndichie* ("the elders", *ibid.*), and *obi* ("hut", Achebe: 1988, 25), and explains that *agbala*, "was not only another name for a woman, it could also mean a man who had taken no title" (*ibid.*). By so doing the author – who, as Walder rightly observes in his *Post-Colonial Literatures in English* clearly wanted to address both a local and an overseas audience (Walder: 1998, 11) – simplifies the reader's (and, the translator being fundamentally identified with a reader, the translator's) job, as the translator can simply rely on the author's strategy and translate his/her explanation word for word, while leaving (perhaps in italics), the words and expressions in other languages as they appear in the original. And in fact, the words which appear in italics in the original text are left unaltered in translation, in so far as their meaning is clarified by the rest of the sentence.

Not only this, but in the first example, Silvana Antonioli Cameroni, who translated the text, adopts, somewhat arbitrarily, a strategy of "reduction" (Malone: 1988, 15). In her translation – "dal nord soffiava asciutto e freddo l'harmattan" (Achebe: 1994, 7) – she thus omits, presumably because considered redundant, the explicit reference to "wind" (already implied by the verb "to blow" and the term "harmattan" itself)[3].

[3] Of course, one might wonder why the term should be known to an Italian audience, when Achebe himself thought it might be of difficult identification for an English-speaking audience.

On other occasions, the translator appears more respectful of the author's choices, and for instance renders the second example as

> Il suo incantesimo di guerra più potente era vecchio quanto il clan stesso. Nessuno sapeva quanto. Ma su un punto tutti erano d"accordo: il principio attivo di quell'incantesimo era stata una vecchia donna con una sola gamba. Infatti l"incantesimo stesso veniva chiamato agadinwayi, cioè vecchia donna (Achebe: 1994, 12).

The Italian text, equally proceeds by clarifying that the "*ndichie*" are "gli anziani" (Achebe: 1994, 13), that "*obi*" is "la capanna" (Achebe: 1994, 14), and that *agbala* "non era soltanto un altro modo di dire donna, ma poteva indicare anche un uomo che non aveva preso titoli" (Achebe: 1994, 13).

Alternatively, writers might resort to footnotes – like the South African Essop Patel, who stated that he would "not have a glossary, but explanatory notes relevant to history" (1992, 171) – or explain the non-English words in a glossary. This is for example the case of Rushdie who, while adopting a strategy similar to Achebe's and using repeatedly the expression "Khattam-shud" in association with other expression such as "finito", thus making its meaning clear (Rushdie: 1990, 53), in *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* (1990) also compiles a list of names derived from Hindustani words:

> **Batcheat** is from "baat-cheet", that is, "chit-chat".
> **Bolo** comes from the verb "bolna", to speak. "Bolo" is the imperative: "Speak!"
> **Chup** (pronounce the "u" like the "oo" in "good") means "quiet"; "**Chupwala**" means something like "quiet fellow" […]
> **Haroun** and **Rashid** are both named after the legendary Caliph of Baghdad, Haroun al-rashid, who features in many Arabian Nights tales. Their surname, **Khalifa**, actually means "Caliph"[…]
> (Rushdie: 1990, 217–8).

The names of the various persons depicted in the novel, thus, are not simply "names", but contribute to the meaning of the text by saying something about their personality. In order to understand this characterisation, then, the reader (both in the source and the target text) must understand the referents of the names themselves. I therefore agree with Taylor when he claims, in his *Language to Language*, that only naïve translators think that proper names are the easiest lexical items to be translated (Taylor: 1998, 53). As the example above shows, names often become dense knots of the text, where various linguistic, historical and cultural

references cross, and must therefore be translated accordingly. Generally speaking, when dealing with names, translators can:

1. maintain the name unchanged as it appears in the source text. The translator should in this case be aware of the difficulties readers might encounter in terms of pronounceability and spelling. In addition, this strategy might involve a great loss, in that the references activated by the original term are bound to remain unidentified by readers of the target text;
2. take over the name as it appears in the source language, while adding some explanation of the author's choice of that particular name. In this case, the translator might resort to a strategy of "amplification" (Malone: 1988, 15), that is the addition of some element to the source text for reasons of greater comprehensibility, either in the form of a note or of a bracketed addition. Generally speaking, amplification is required where the source language takes for granted certain components which may be cultural, semantic, linguistic or a mixture of those, but this strategy is clearly rendered redundant in those texts where, as in the example above, the author him/herself gives an explanation of his/her choices;
3. "transliterate" the proper name, that is adapt the name so as to make it conform to the phonic and graphic conventions of the target language. In this case, the translator resorts to a special case of "equation", which bears some resemblance to the calque, in that the source language word is adapted to the target language conventions. This is rather different from the "calqued expressions" I introduced above in my discussion of Okara's novel, in so far as in this case we are dealing with single words which are phonetically, graphically and syntactically adapted to the target language.
4. translate the name literally, resorting when possible to standard target language equivalent. In this case too, translators resort to a strategy of "equation", according to which a term should be translated by its one-to-one equivalent.
5. replace a name altogether with a different name which could however work in the target language. In this case, the translator resorts to the antithetical strategy to "equation" and uses "substitution" instead (Malone: 1988, 15).

Obviously, because in postcolonial texts names often correspond to English translations or transliterations of names originally intended in another language, translators who are called to render these names for example in Italian, are required to investigate the references and the meanings implied by the original names, be-

fore they were inserted in an English text.

Also in the case of proper names, then, the strategies of 'overt' and 'covert' cushioning Peter Young described in 1971 (thanks to which the author clarifies for the reader the meaning of particular expressions and proper names), simplify translators' job. However, when no indication is supplied by the author as to the meaning or the cultural / historical referent of particular words or expressions, the translator him/herself has to adopt a particular strategy.

For example, in her translation for Einaudi of J.M. Coetzee's *Youth*, Franca Cavagnoli renders the word "burgher", as "i grassi borghesi di Città del Capo" (Coetzee, 2002, 6), thus subjecting it to a process of amplification. The same kind of strategy, however, is adopted somewhat less happily on a different occasion, when a word like "wilks" – which Kincaid uses instead of the standard "whelks" in *A Small Place* (Kincaid: 1998, 57) – is translated as "molluschi" in the first instance, and is amplified immediately afterwards by the translator who, after a dash, adds: "i *wilks*, le chiocciole di mare" (Kincaid: 2000, 61). As a result, the sentence as a whole – which well exemplifies what Venuti, in his *The Translator's Invisibility*, calls a "foreignizing strategy" (Venuti: 1995, 23)[4] – sounds rather redundant, and because "amplification" is still incapable of indicating the fact that the author used a non-standard form in the source text, this strategy appears unjustified and rather ineffective.

To a certain extent, the same kind of strategy is adopted by Ettore Capriolo, who in 1998 translated Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1980). In this instance, the term "lime" is kept in the Italian version as a lexical borrowing (Rushdie: 1998, 21). The term (which appears in a footnote in italics), thus gives an exotic flavour to the Italian text, without however providing a "foreignising" effect. By now, in fact, the term has acquired a place in the Italian vocabulary. In addition, because the translator felt it necessary to amplify the cultural borrowing he resorted to in the first place and give the Italian translation as well – "limetto" (*ibid.*) – the expression "lime water" is rendered totally familiar to the target audience. Unlike the previous example from Kincaid, then,

[4] As d'Arcangelo notes, "the term is kept in the original and graphically stressed in its difference by the use of italics, but with a *domesticating component*, as the information hidden in it are made explicit so as to render *wilks* familiar to the Target readers" (2003, 3).

here the repetition of the original term, while resulting slightly redundant, does not fail to convey fundamental information, and as such it can certainly be judged effective.

When neither glossary nor notes are provided by the author, a compromise might be achieved by the translator's insertion of his/her own glossary or his/her notes. The first strategy is for example chosen by Fissore in his translation of Okara's *The Voice*, where the terms whose meaning is given in the "Glossario" – including the name of the protagonist Okolo, which is here related to the title of the book itself – are left within the text in their original form. Here are some of the definitions given in the glossary:

> Akara: *focaccia di legumi*
> Benikurukuru: *dio dell"acqua degli Ijaw*
> Foo foo: *alimento preparato con yam, la patata dolce, pestata*
> Okolo: *la voce*
> Yam: *patata dolce* (Okara: 1987, 21–2).

Alternatively, the translator might add a footnote or an endnote. This is for instance what Antonioli Cameroni does in her translation of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Here, not only does she translate the term "yam" with "ignami" (Achebe: 1994, 8), but she also adds a footnote in which she expands the swift translation provided in Okara's *La Voce* [5], and accurately explains that

> Gli ignami, sono piante erbacee volubili o lianose, a fiori minuscoli, con fusto ingrossato alla base in un rizoma tuberiforme. Originarie per lo più dei paesi tropicali e diffusamente coltivate a scopo alimentare, rappresentano un cibo nutriente e gustoso, che può essere considerato succedaneo delle patate (Achebe: 1994, 8).

Both these strategies are clearly respectful of the authors' intentions, and as such constitute discreet domesticating strategies, enabling readers to experience the texts as intended by their authors, while providing them with the necessary help to understand the meaning of particular words.

When resorting to the second of these strategies, however,

[5] Having included "yam" in his Glossary, throughout the text Fissore leaves the word in the original language, without italianicising it. As a result, readers are not reminded that they might find an explanation of the term in the initial Glossary. While still effective, the impact of the strategy adopted by the translator is therefore lessened.

translators should carefully maintain throughout the text a certain degree of consistency, identifying with precision their target audience. For instance, it is not at all clear why in Coetzee's *Gioventù*, the translator felt it necessary to insert in her text a footnote that reads "Pac: Pan-Africanist Congress, partito antirazzista sudafricano nato nel 1959" (Coetzee: 2002, 41), when immediately afterwards she refers to the Anc without further elucidating readers about its meaning. To continue the previous quotation: "da una scissione dell"Anc e messo al bando, assieme all'Anc, nel 1960" (*ibid.*). It seems in fact plausibile to assume that those readers who do know about the Anc, are also bound to know about the Pac, and vice-versa, thereby nullifying the impact and usefulness of this strategy of "pseudo-amplification".

Another problematic issue is represented by the way some of the book titles Coetzee originally inserted in his text are rendered in translation. Occasionally, these titles are translated – as in "*Sonetti a Orfeo* di Rilke" (Coetzee: 2002, 55); "*Il buon soldato*" (Coetzee: 2002, 56), and "*La duchessa di Amalfi*" (Coetzee: 2002, 139) – whereas at other times they are left in the original, as with "*Jude the Obscure*" (Coetzee: 2002, 162). In addition, the reason why we are told that the middle English expression *Agenbyte of inwit*, which is explained in a footnote as "rimorsi di coscienza", is quoted also "nell'*Ulisse* di Joyce" (Coetzee: 2002, 134) remains somewhat obscure, especially if we consider that this reference is followed, shortly afterwards, by a footnote in which the translator explains that Jude Fawley is the "protagonista del romanzo di Thomas Hardy *Jude the Obscure* (1895)" (Coetzee: 2002, 162).

If we assume that people who read texts such as Coetzee's in translation do not know characters such as Jude, presumably because not familiar with English literature, then there is no reason why they should recognise the English title of a book written by an English author, and this is probably the reason why the translator felt it necessary to translate "*Ulysses*" into "*Ulisse*", although in this case the similarity between the two languages would have made the reference perfectly clear also to the target audience. The translator should have either provided the title in Italian – on the assumption that the limitation of readers' knowledge might be caused by a linguistic barrier – or, if the limitation was considered more cultural, give more explanations as to the nature of the book in question.

A third option would have been not to provide any explanation at all and leave the text as it stands in the original. And since the reference to Hardy – unlike allusions to indigenous myths or

African languages, for example – is easily identifiable even for readers who do not have a strong back ground in English Literature, in this case this option would appear more respectful of the author's aims as a writer. As a postcolonial writer who partakes in the postmodernist production of our times, Coetzee likes to play with many intertextual and metatextual references which might result obscure to the reader. Yet, this is precisely part of the aim of postmodernist literature, which attempts to wake readers up and oblige them to fight against the passivity implied by 19th century literature, in order to participate in the creative process, activating the references introduced by the writer, finding the right connections within the text, thus constructing its meaning. Such intrusions, then, to an extent betray the original, as they make the references exploited by the author readily available to readers, who can therefore simply fall back to their comfortable passivity.

For obvious reasons translators must understand every aspect of the text, study it in depth and be aware of the context it stemmed from. Hence, the fact that Maria Baiocchi in her translation of J. M. Coetzee's *Dusklands* translates "crow" (Coetzee: 1983, 69) as "corvo" (Coetzee: 2003, 97) even though it was obvious that it should have been rendered as "piede di porco" or something similar, would be absurd even if we were not dealing with a South African author, as such translation contradicts all rules of coherence within the text and, if anything, might perpetuate Western processes of "otherisation" of the native people of Africa (in this specific case the Hottentots, who apparently cannot think of a better tool to open a wooden box than the beak of a bird).

This is actually a good example of the ludicrous effects to which a misapplication of the "convergence" strategy (Malone: 1988, 15) might lead, in so far as the term chosen in the target language from a potential range of alternatives, was the wrong one. Furthermore, because of the graphic resemblance of the English "crow" and the Italian "corvo", this mistranslation might also be understood as an example of the importance, for translators, to be aware of false-cognates and, as in this case, partial cognates[6]. Indeed, if this is generally speaking true in standard English, it becomes even more relevant in the case of postcolonial texts, where

[6] The expression "false cognate" indicates items which seem to correspond in meaning to a word in another language, but which in fact have a different meaning or cannot be used in the same kind of tenses. In the case of "partial cognates", the transparent translation is valid in some situations but not in others.

the same words or expressions we find in English, might be used with a different meaning. For instance, whereas in standard English "mammy" indicates either an affectionate appellation for "mother" (translatable perhaps as "mammina"), or, with an offensive connotation, a black woman who takes care of white children, in postcolonial english it refers to: "*una sirena che affascina gli esseri umani, provocandone la morte per acqua*" (Okara: 1987, 20). Similarly, as Tymoczo observes, Ngugi "uses the term *ridge* in a non-standard sense to refer to villages and their territory, [and] his use of the English *taste* is also non-standard: 'Did he himself taste other women, like Dr Lynd?' (*Grain of Wheat*, 157)" (Tymoczo: 1999, 26).

Conclusions:

We can therefore see the importance for translators to be sensitive to issues of register and context. Furthermore, translators should also be attentive to the fact that there are cases where, without any cushioning such as commentary, notes, or glossary, authors insert in their works terms and expressions which are clearly untranslatable, precisely because they are untranslatable. This is for example the case of the Urdu word "sharam", which approximately means "*shame*", and in fact appears as the title of one of Rushdie's novels (1983), but for which no real equivalent can be found.

If we make a componential analysis of the two terms[7], we can see that the English translation is much more restrictive when compared to the original. In the case of "shame", we could in fact identify:

[7] It was Newmark who in 1981 showed how a term can be broken down into its sense components and thus prepared for translation (within the particular context in which its translation is required) much more convincingly than by weighing up synonyms listed in bilingual dictionaries. The item, having been stripped down, so to speak, to reveal all its possible components, can be measured against the competing claims, in the target language, of near-synonyms, paraphrasal expressions, compensatory solutions or even replacement by zero, depending on the particular context of situation.

- **Essential / functional components:**
a. Embarrassing (emotive)
b. Humiliating (emotive)
c. Related to a "disgrace" or "scandal" (in war, in social life, in sexual life etc.; factual)
- **Secondary / descriptive components**
a. Vulgar
b. Loud
c. Dishonourable
d. Infamous
e. Detestable

For "sharam", however, we could also have:

- **Essential / functional components:**
a. Modest (emotive / factual)
b. Decent (emotive / factual)
c. Related to a "moral" or "virtuous" act
- **Secondary / descriptive components**
a. Courteous
b. Shy
c. Quiet
d. Honest
e. Respectable

This is why Rusdhie himself felt that the Urdu word should also appear on the cover of his book.

Obviously, such cases are particularly challenging, and sometimes translators too readily try to find expressions in the target language which can only betray the source text from a linguistic, cultural and political point of view.

Untranslatability, just like silence, as epitomised for example by Friday in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1988), is in fact a form of resistance thanks to which the ex-colonies oppose Western attempts to appropriate and obliterate their culture, language and identity. Translators, both as academicians and human beings living in a postcolonial world, must therefore accept, with Stuart Hall, that cultures are not always mutually intelligible, because that is the only way the once-colonised countries and their people can avoid being pigeon-holed into Western patterns.

After all, as Glissant states in his *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (1996), it is not always necessary to understand Others, certainly it is not even advisable to re-connect them to our image, but it is sufficient to conceive and acknowledge their existence.

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