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“Unfaithful to the translation” (Borges): On special in specialised translation

This chapter focuses on specialised translation from the perspective of what different areas within it have in common and what makes it special and distinctive, rendering it a worthwhile profession for the large number of translators that make it a fulfilling, lifelong activity. This “special” thread is intertwined with a sketch of Federica Scarpa’s contribution to specialised translation as relevant translation studies evolved – from functional theories to the cultural turn when pragmatic and quality concerns started taking centre stage, and beyond, to what seems to be the current technological turn. The underlying assumption is that specialised translation is essentially governed by the requirements of communication in the target language and culture and as such it is the original that can end up being unfaithful to the translation and not vice versa.

Keywords: specialised translation, translation strategies, translation quality, faithfulness

1. Introduction

A lover of paradox and a wit, Jorge Luis Borges, in “Sobre el *Vathek* de William Beckford (On William Beckford’s *Vathek*)” (1943/1952), famously stated that “[e]l original es infiel a la traducción (the original is unfaithful to the translation)” (see also Campbell 2018). He regarded Saintsbury’s translation into English as superior to Beckford’s original in French, a language that he considered unsuitable to convey the horrors of *Vathek*’s story. At the time, reflections on translating in the West still focused largely on the debate over rendering the source text word for word or sense for sense – the core of translation studies since antiquity – and translation was largely regarded as second best. Borges drew attention to the fact that a source text can be different from or even

inferior to its translation because it is the context that decides what the target text will [should?] be like. As such, his statement can not only apply to translation in general, but also to all the areas of translating, including specialised translation, where close renderings of originals would not fit the requirements in the target language and culture, for whatever reason(s). In other words, Borges's paradox can be a powerful metaphor to explore the situational and cultural contexts that call for and/or result in such "deviation" from the source text that it is the original rather than the translation that ends up appearing unfaithful.

Translation has often had a bad press because "translated texts can never be 'the real thing'" (House 2018: 9) and inevitably lead to translation loss. However, translation can also be seen positively as an improvement on the original (Kelly and Zetzsche 2012), for example when texts that are badly written need adaptation or rewriting before they can actually be translated. Specialised translation has also been defined in a negative sense as "non-literary" in an oversimplification of what it takes to translate an LSP text beyond finding the equivalent terminology in the target language (Rogers 2015: 20) and by positing two extremes of the translation spectrum – literary vs specialised – that amounts to comparing what are regarded as two incommensurable activities with no consideration of what they have in common. Over and above that, specialised translation has often been invisible. In a description of Holmes/Toury's map of translation studies (Toury 2012: 4), Munday (2016: 19) refers to specialised translation indirectly amongst "text-type restricted theories" for which he gives "literary, business and technical translation" as examples and when outlining translation aids in the applied branch (2016: 20), where software (machine translation, CAT tools), collaboration (online forums, crowdsourcing, expert informants) and reference (term bases, glossaries, dictionaries, online searches, parallel corpora) seem to fit more a description of specialised than literary translation. Even in his discussion of the van Doorslaer "map" (Munday 2016: 22; cf. van Doorslaer 2007) developed for Benjamins' Translation Studies Bibliography, specialised translation is mentioned indirectly through some of its components in one of the subdivisions of translation studies: "field (political, journalistic, technical, literary, religious, scientific, commercial)". Specialised translation thus seems to suffer from double invisibility, the general invisibility of translation

and its own special kind, if only some of its types are mentioned by way of example. It may well be for this reason that – with the notable exception of Rogers (2015) – most books on specialised/specialist translation in English refer to specialised translation as “technical translation” (Wright and Wright 1993: 1; Schubert 2010: 350). Starting from Pinchuck’s *Scientific and Technical Translation* (1977) through the volume edited by Wright and Wright – *Scientific and Technical Translation* (1993) where, however, “technical translation” “includes not only the translation of texts in engineering or medicine, but also such disciplines as economics, psychology and law” (1993: 1) – to Byrne’s *Technical Translation* (2006) and Olohan’s *Scientific and Technical Translation* (2016) or relevant entries in *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Baker and Saldanha 2020),¹ to name but a few, the narrower focus has resulted in more detailed accounts, while necessarily failing to stress what is shared in specialised translation and excluding fields such as medical and legal translation.²

Only in Vandepitte’s (2008) remapping by identifying four foci or orientations – process, discourse, cause and result – that can also be all covered in so-called “umbrella” studies does specialised translation feature as “translation of texts within LSP” among register translation studies which “focus on a particular type of register: religious translation (incl. a.o. Bible, Torah, and Qur’ān translation), the translation of political texts and of texts within LSP (Language for Specific Purposes), which covers business, advertising, tourism, academic, legal and technical texts” (Vandepitte 2008: 579). In the ensuing ontology proposed for discussion, “specialized” translation is listed as a synonym – albeit with lower frequency – of LSP translation, which includes the narrower

1 In the latest edition of the *Encyclopedia* (3rd, 2020) the only relevant entry is Olohan’s “Scientific translation”. The second edition (2009), featuring Olohan’s “Scientific and technical translation”, did a little better than both the third and the first edition (1998), which had no entries on specialised translation. This gap in a highly regarded reference work for translation studies together with the entries on terminology contained in all editions only confirms Rogers’ (2015) assumption that to this day the problem of specialised translation is largely seen as finding the equivalent terminology in the target language.

2 By contrast, other traditions such as the German one tend to deal with specialised translation as an umbrella concept (cf. Hann 1992; Schmitt 1999; Stolze 2013).

areas of academic or scientific translation, translation of tourist texts, translation of business communication or economic translation, legal translation and technical translation (2008: 587).

In this paper I will investigate specialised translation from the perspective of what different areas within it have in common and what makes it special and distinctive, and renders it a worthwhile profession for the large number of translators that make it a fulfilling, lifelong activity. In my argument, I will intertwine this “special” thread with a sketch of Federica Scarpa’s contribution to specialised translation as relevant translation studies evolved – from functional theories to the cultural turn (Snell-Hornby 2006) when pragmatic and quality concerns started taking centre stage, and beyond, to what seems to be the current technological turn (Fantinuoli 2016: 299). The underlying assumption will be that specialised translation is essentially governed by the requirements of communication in the target language and culture and as such it is the original that can end up being unfaithful to the translation and not vice versa.

2. Methodology

A history of translation studies through the relevant turns identified by Snell-Hornby (2006) from the pragmatic turn in the 1960s and 1970s and the cultural turn of the 1980s to the interdiscipline of the 1990s and the technological turn of the 2000s will form the general framework of this study. It will be supplemented with a discussion of text typologies in translation to trace the evolution of studies from the original literary/non-literary dichotomy and Reiß and Vermeer’s categories (1991: 120–1) to more complex representations on a cline from literary translation to special language translation in Snell-Hornby’s integrated approach (1988: 32), Bell’s text types and forms (1991: 205) and Göpferich’s pragmatic typology of specialised texts (1992: 194) later translated and adapted by Wright (2011: 250). This historical overview aims to contextualise Scarpa’s work in translation studies as well as to highlight her contribution. It also serves the

purpose to outline the “special” features of specialised translation as they were uncovered.

Within the general framework of the field/discipline around and through Scarpa’s work, what is “special” in specialised translation will be investigated in a top-down approach from discourse through syntax to terminology. This does not only reflect Scarpa’s method from her early writings on the topic to her more recent volume on *Research and Professional Practice in Specialised Translation* (2020) but is also meant to stress that there is much more to a special language text and hence to its translation than what was originally regarded as its single distinctive feature, that is, terms. A top-down approach from broader to more locally restricted concerns is regarded as all the more necessary to dispel the negative view of specialised translation as a mere exercise in finding equivalent terms in the target language. Clearly, an enterprise of this kind requires examples to illustrate and support statements. In translation studies this is normally achieved by building or referring to a corpus. In this case, however, specialised translation is considered in all its breadth and diversity and choosing one area – say, scientific translation – would defeat the objective. For this reason, examples will be extracted from different corpora as applicable and used as typical of the corpus, though reference will only be made to the actual text the example is taken from.

Trying to outline what is “special” in specialised translation with a view to showing that it is the original that is unfaithful to the translation in Borges’s sense involves an analysis of the strategies adopted in translating to ensure that the target text reads naturally as if it had originally been written in the target language. “Native-like” writing requires attention to pragmatic aspects to achieve high quality in translation. Pragmatic and quality issues are topics Scarpa has returned to over and over again in her research and are thus the underlying approaches in this paper.

3. Analysis and discussion

Thanks to the development of speech-act theory (Austin 1962; Searle 1969) and text linguistics (Halliday 1976; de Beaugrande and Dressler

1981) on the one hand and a translation sociology (Holmes 1988) on the other, in the pragmatic turn of the 1960s and 1970s, translation started becoming independent both of linguistics and of comparative literature.³ With the introduction of the more dynamic concepts of *discourse* and *norm* beside the famous Saussurean distinction between *langue* and *parole*, target-oriented approaches started to develop by investigating regularities in translating that pointed to what was regarded as appropriate in given contexts (Snell-Hornby 2006: 37; Scarpa 1997: 5). Outlining these developments in an article on functional equivalence and text typologies in translation, Scarpa (1997: 3–4) cites Jakobson’s notions of equivalence in difference and the essential difference between languages “in what they *must* convey and not in what they *may* convey” (Jakobson 1959: 236) as examples of an approach that was still predominantly linguistic. By contrast, she refers first to Nida’s (1964) idea of communicative translation as pragmatic choice between formal and dynamic equivalence and secondly to Firth’s concept of “function in context”, later developed by Halliday in the three main features of discourse, *field*, *tenor*, and *mode*, adopted in translating – for example by House (1981) – to guide decisions in the translation strategies to be chosen. House’s “covert” translation is the typical strategy in specialised translation, where

un testo che non è marcato dal punto di vista pragmatico [...] ottiene nella cultura di arrivo lo stesso status che avrebbe avuto se fosse stato direttamente creato nella lingua di arrivo [‘In the target culture, a pragmatically unmarked text gains the same status it would have been granted if it had originally been written in the target language’] (Scarpa 1997: 8).

The 1980s witnessed a change of paradigm, as evidenced in descriptive studies of the semiotic function of (literary) translation in the target culture as system by the so-called Manipulation School (Hermans 1985) and the functional approaches of *skopos* theory and translatorial

3 Considerations of space do not allow me to expand on developments in translation studies that are not strictly relevant to specialised translation. Though in first introducing the turns of the discipline I refer to changes at a general level, i.e. affecting both literary and specialised translation, I shall then narrow down description to what is relevant to the latter only.

action (Reiß and Vermeer 1984; Holz-Mänttari 1984) to (non-literary) translation. Though widely different in focus, in a shift of perspective, both the Manipulation School and *skopos* theory posed the target culture at the centre of translating. For specialised translation, *skopos* theory was highly relevant in that it approached translation from the perspective of its intended purpose in the new functional, cultural, and linguistic situation of the target language in what was often referred to as a dethroning of the source text (Snell-Hornby 2006: 51–54). In this context, translatorial action was also important because it placed the actual work of professional translators within a team and translation as one of the stages in the process of target text production. Scarpa (1997: 16) points out that Reiß's typology based on Bühler's *Organon-Modell* of the three macrofunctions of language – expressive, conative and referential – is limited because it is too rigid and does not allow for the inherent multifunctionality of texts. By contrast, she refers to Newmark's classification (1981, 1988) based on the same model as much more sophisticated and flexible (even if based on the semantic/communicative translation dichotomy) because it allows for the multifunctionality of texts, it includes Jakobson's three additional functions – poetic, phatic and metalinguistic – and requires the identification of the author's intention, the type of receivers, the source/target text context and the style besides establishing the main function of the text (Scarpa 1997: 16–17). To avoid the dichotomies – Nida's formal/dynamic, Newmark's semantic/communicative, House's overt/covert – that had dominated the previous decades, in the late 1980s Snell-Hornby (1988: 32) proposed that translation studies be regarded “as an integrated and independent discipline within a prototypical framework covering all kind of translation, from literary to technical” (Snell-Hornby 2006: 70). Introducing pragmatic concerns within the debate on functional equivalence, Scarpa (1997: 8–9) mentions Gutt's (1991) use of descriptive and interpretive resemblance based on Sperber and Wilson's (1986) pragmatic relevance theory to stress that in translating text functions vary depending on the objectives of communication, that is on factors depending on the situation – a concept also stressed by Bell (1991: 170).

The native-like quality of the text to be achieved through pragmatically functional equivalence and considerations of relevance in the

context of situation is discussed by Scarpa in one of her early papers (1992) on specialised translation. Here, revision aimed at the “non-anglicization” of a geographic text consisted in two main strategies operating at discourse level: 1. greater conciseness to achieve an Italian native-like quality of the text through pragmatically functional equivalence and 2. cultural adaptation (Scarpa 1992: 80). Though expressed through categories that Scarpa (2001, 2008a, 2020) would later place more and more firmly within the context of cultural studies in translation – most notably Katan’s (1997, 1999/2007) – conciseness and adaptation are early attempts at description of “special” features of LSP texts that call for competence and creativity to be appropriately relayed in specialised translation. Conciseness requires a good grasp of the target language conventions of the genre, including a distinction of the different amount of information required in low-context and high-context cultures (Katan 1997: 41). In the following example, taken from *Lakeland Bread Maker Instruction Booklet*,⁴ in the “Troubleshooting” section (p. 37) where each problem is assigned a possible cause and a solution, the English low-context culture requires an explicit indication of the conditions governing each solution, i.e. a timeframe when a solution can be implemented, that Italian high-context culture considers easy to infer from the context and leaves out, thus turning out to be more concise:

4 <https://www.lakeland.co.uk/content/documents/62168_doc_1.pdf>. Accessed 4/12/2022. The Italian translation was made by the students of the English specialised translation 1 module (2022–2023) within the postgraduate course in Modern Languages for International Communication and Cooperation at the University of Padua based on a parallel/comparable corpus of bread maker instructions as evidenced by choices such as Italian ‘liquidi’ for English ‘liquid’ or the infinitive to render instructions (‘reduce’ → ‘ridurre’, ‘use’ → ‘utilizzare’, etc.).

Problem	Possible cause	Solution
4. Top and sides cave in. 4. <i>Il pane si è afflosciato.</i>	Too much liquid.	Reduce liquid by 15ml, 3 tsp <u>next time</u> or add a little extra flour.
	<i>Liquidi in eccesso.</i>	<i>Ridurre i liquidi di 15ml o aggiungere un po' di farina.</i>
	Too much yeast.	Use amount recommended in recipe or try a quicker programme <u>next time</u> .
	<i>Lievito in eccesso.</i>	<i>Utilizzare le quantità consigliate nella ricetta o un programma più rapido.</i>
	High humidity and warm weather may have caused the dough to rise too much.	Chill the water or add milk straight from the fridge.
	<i>L'elevata umidità e il caldo hanno fatto lievitare troppo l'impasto.</i>	<i>Usare acqua fredda o aggiungere latte da frigo.</i>

Conciseness can be achieved in Italian by using a more general description which involves replacing the subject “Top and sides” with “pane” (“loaf”), avoiding redundancy in phrases such as “little extra flour” (“un po’” “di farina” without adding “in più”) and providing what would be the logical sequence of actions: in English “Chill the water” obviously presupposes “next time” as once used for a dough water cannot be extracted to be chilled for reuse, but in Italian the chilling process can be omitted in “usare acqua fredda” where “fredda” can be interpreted both as meaning “cold” and “chilled”. The further specification “milk straight from the fridge” confirms that liquids at low temperature have to be used. Finally, Italian relies on the title of the section, “Possible cause” to omit the modal “may” in “may have caused the dough to rise too much” and just gives the cause as a statement, “hanno fatto lievitare troppo”, instead of the hedged form “possono aver fatto lievitare troppo”.

Similar strategies are described with reference to software localization in a later paper (cf. Scarpa 1999) with a focus on adaptation to the target culture, accuracy, brevity and clarity. In the bread maker

instruction booklet above, guidelines as to how the product can be disposed of cannot be translated without considering the rules for recycling electricals in the target country. Therefore, translators need to retrieve the formula that is normally used in Italy in similar circumstances as shown below in the multilingual booklet of the *Panasonic Bread Maker Instructions*:⁵

RECYCLING YOUR ELECTRICALS Along with many other high street retailers, Lakeland has joined a scheme whereby customers can take their unwanted electrical products to recycling points set up around the country. Visit www.recycle-more.co.uk to find your nearest recycling point.

**Smaltimento di vecchie apparecchiature
Solo per Unione Europea e Nazioni con sistemi di raccolta e smaltimento**

Per un trattamento adeguato, recupero e riciclaggio di vecchi prodotti vi invitiamo a portarli negli appositi punti di raccolta secondo la legislazione vigente nel vostro paese. Con uno smaltimento corretto, contribuirete a salvare importanti risorse e ad evitare i potenziali effetti negativi sulla salute umana e sull'ambiente. Per ulteriori informazioni su raccolta e riciclaggio, vi invitiamo a contattare il vostro comune. Lo smaltimento non corretto di questi rifiuti potrebbe comportare sanzioni in accordo con la legislazione nazionale. [...]

The examples above can be regarded as attempts to “italianise” or “not to anglicise” the target text. Further categories that can be identified in this process include the different level of formality that is regarded as appropriate in English and Italian to convey content. In the example below, taken from a well-known university textbook on economics, the register was made more formal through paragraph restructuring to avoid repetition by joining the last sentence of the first paragraph with the first of the second one to avoid cohesion by repetition with a relative clause followed by a clause introduced by a gerund, thus resulting in an increase of syntactic complexity that is typical of native Italian writing in this context. Cultural adaptation consists in lexical choices belonging to a more formal register – “two sources”/“le determinanti”, “people”/

5 Cf. <<https://www.manualeuso.it/panasonic/sd-2511/manuale>>. Accessed 20/12/2022. Interestingly, the formula used for the European Union includes reference to the legal consequences of non-compliance with regulations for disposal that is not mentioned in the Lakeland booklet.

“i cittadini”, “do not come at the same time”/ “non vengono percepiti nel momento in cui si devono sostenere”.

Two Sources of Money Demand

Transactions Demand for Money. Why do people need money? The primary reason is that people’s incomes and expenditures do not come at the same time. For example, I might be paid on the last day of the month, but I buy food, newspapers, gasoline, and clothing throughout the month. If I made all my purchases the very instant that I got paid, then I would have no need to hold money for the rest of the time. The need to have money to pay for purchases, or transactions, of goods, services, and other items constitutes the *transactions demand for money*.

Figure 25–4 illustrates the mechanics of the transactions demand for money. This figure shows the average money holdings of a family that earns \$3000 per month, keeps it in money, and spends it during the month (Samuelson and Nordhaus 2001: 520).

Le determinanti della domanda di moneta

La domanda transazionale di moneta. Perché i cittadini hanno bisogno di denaro? Il motivo principale è che i redditi non vengono percepiti nel momento in cui si devono sostenere delle spese. Per esempio, una persona potrebbe essere pagata l’ultimo giorno del mese, ma acquistare generi alimentari, giornali, benzina e articoli di abbigliamento per tutto il mese. Se effettuasse tutti gli acquisti nel momento in cui viene pagata, non avrebbe bisogno di detenere moneta per tutto il tempo. La necessità di avere denaro per pagare gli acquisti, o le transazioni di beni, servizi e altri articoli costituisce la domanda transazionale di moneta, di cui la Figura 25,4 illustra il funzionamento mostrando la disponibilità monetaria media di una famiglia che guadagna 3000 euro al mese, li tiene in valuta e li spende nel corso del mese. (Samuelson and Nordhaus 2002: 514).⁶

Scarpa was to return to the concept on non-anglicisation later on in her work, though from the perspective of the influence of English on Italian special languages (2015), where she identified processes operating at text level on the structure of information – mainly of academic discourse – for example in the rhetorical organisation of an increasingly explicit classification (Scarpa 2015: 237–238) and the personification

6 Samuelson, Paul A. / Nordhaus William D. 2001. *Economics*. Seventeenth Edition. Boston/New York: McGraw-Hill. Italian translation by Zanoni, Carla / Musacchio, Maria Teresa 2002. *Economia*. Seventeenth Edition. Milano: McGraw-Hill.

of constructions calqued on the English “this section will deal with [‘questa sezione tratterà di’]” or the like (Scarpa 2015: 239). Among other processes she detected, which are not perhaps as well-known or apparent as lexical calques but have an equal impact on Italian, there are syntactic structures borrowed from English such as violations of Italian grammar as in “persone che sono state diagnosticate con” instead of “persone cui è stato diagnosticato” and the spread of progressive forms of tenses, though the Italian linguist Cortelazzo sees this more as an internal development of Italian despite the difficulty of demonstrating it (Scarpa 2015: 235). Whether referring to textual, syntactic or lexical/terminological influences, though, Scarpa stresses that these processes are caused more by rushed writing or translation by field experts or non-professional translators that do not reflect on the quality of the communication they produce. This leaves much scope to investigate the writing skills of professional translators in relaying the special features of LSP communication.

In the next example, taken from TUIMP, a project to popularise astrophysics through a series of booklets for children from nine to 99 years old, the Italian translation takes account that the present continuous tense in “The Earth’s metallic core is spinning and creates a magnetic core” actually suggests a process sequence as in “As the Earth’s magnetic core is spinning, it creates” which is better expressed through a simple present tense expressing a timeless process followed by a gerund indicating consequence in Italian:⁷

In some places the crust contains deep caverns with water. Near the bottom, magma heats the water. When the water boils, steam rises to the surface and is expelled as a column of hot water: a geyser. The Earth’s metallic core is spinning and creates a magnetic field, which acts like a huge magnet. Several species of animals, such as migratory birds and dolphins, use the magnetic field to navigate (Fierro and Stasinska 2022).⁸

In alcuni punti la crosta presenta caverne profonde piene di acqua che viene riscaldata dal magma in prossimità del fondo. Quando l’acqua bolle, il vapore sale in

7 For more information about the project, see <<https://arxiv.org/ftp/arxiv/papers/1806/1806.02671.pdf>>. Accessed 20/12/2022.

8 The *TUIMP 25 The Earth* booklet can be retrieved from the project’s website at: <<https://www.tuimp.org/booklet/25>>. Accessed 20/12/2022.

superficie e fuoriesce sotto forma di potente getto di acqua calda, cioè di geyser. Il nucleo metallico della Terra ruota creando un campo magnetico che agisce come un'enorme calamita. Diverse specie di animali, come gli uccelli migratori e i delfini, lo utilizzano per orientarsi (Fierro and Stasinska forthcoming).⁹

The personification of the abstract concepts of “rock evidence” and “computer modelling” as agents which is calqued in the Italian translation does not violate Italian grammar, but reads unnaturally in the latter case in popular science Italian. However, in Italian the time indication “4.3 billion years ago – about 200 million years after Earth’s formation” is rightly placed earlier, just after the cohesive “Secondo questo scenario” in sentence-initial position:

If the Moon had formed elsewhere in the Solar System, its rocks would be very different from Earth’s. If it had formed from the same molten raw materials as the Earth, it would be expected to be a mini version of Earth, and have a larger metallic core. However, the rock evidence points to the Moon being made from material gouged from Earth’s surface after the planet had solidified. In the last decade, computer modelling of possible impacts has suggested an event now dubbed the Big Splash. In this scenario, a Mars-sized planet (named Theia, after the mother of the Moon in Greek mythology) hit Earth 4.3 billion years ago – about 200 million years after Earth’s formation (Mitton et al. 2012: 187).

Se la Luna si fosse formata altrove, le sue rocce sarebbero molto diverse da quelle terrestri. Se si fosse formata a partire dallo stesso materiale terrestre allo stato fuso, ci si aspetterebbe che fosse una versione ridotta della Terra e avesse un nucleo metallico più grande; mentre l’analisi delle rocce indica una formazione della Luna a partire da materiale asportato dalla superficie terrestre dopo la solidificazione del pianeta. Nell’ultimo decennio i modelli computerizzati dei possibili impatti hanno suggerito un evento, ora soprannominato Big Splash. Secondo questo scenario, 4,3 miliardi di anni fa, circa 200 milioni di anni dopo essersi

9 The Italian translation is not published yet as it is one of the new booklets that students of the English specialised translation 1 module (2022–2023) within the postgraduate course in Modern Languages for International Communication and Cooperation at the University of Padua are currently working on. Students translate the booklets in groups following the brief sent by Grazyna Stasinska, the TUIMP project coordinator, intermediate versions are discussed to arrive at a final version which is then revised by an Italian astronomer. The author wishes to thank Dr. Grazyna Stasinska for her help and support and Dr. Giorgia Peluso at the University of Padua for kindly revising the Italian translations.

formata, la Terra si scontrò con un pianeta delle dimensioni di Marte (chiamato Teia, la madre della Luna nella mitologia greca) (Mitton et al. 2017: 187).¹⁰

In the 1990s translation developed into an interdiscipline, i.e. a field of research which drew on neighbouring disciplines, “not only language and literary studies, but also semiotics, ethnology, sociology and psychology” (Snell-Hornby 2006: 71) sparking a discussion of translational norms as culture-specific aspects (Toury 1995; Nord 1997), though Toury’s reference to unstable norms which vary over time and were termed “conventions” in the German-speaking world (Nord 1991) engendered some confusion. Norms, rules and conventions were supplemented by the concept of meme (Vermeer 1997; Chesterman 1997), which involved consideration of professional standards of translation ethics. Another major contribution for specialised translation was Sager’s (1994) exploration of the translation process against the background of information technology. Scarpa brings all these strands of research together (2001, 2008a, 2020) to develop her own approach to professional translating where strategies are informed by socio-cultural and pragmatic considerations combined with the requirements of quality and the challenges of emerging technologies and multimodal genres.

At the core of her approach there is the concept of context, both as the socio-cultural pragmatic situation that applies in different instances of specialised translation and as the cognitive pragmatic situation consisting of “previous knowledge, intentions, expectations and beliefs” (Scarpa 2019: 279) that govern communication and lead to target text acceptability in translation. To show how flexible and dynamic this approach is and how special it makes professional specialised translation, I would finally like to explore a case study where both situationality – i.e. the sociopragmatic context, generally referred to as the vertical dimension of specialised discourse – and intentionality – in terms of presuppositions or “background assumptions in the process of communication” (Scarpa 2019: 284) and inference as a reference-tracking

10 Mitton, Jacqueline / Hughes, David W. / Dindwiddie, Robert / Johnson, Penny / Jackson, Tom 2012/2017. *The Astronomy Book. Big Ideas Series*. London: Penguin Random House. Italian translation by Sorgo, Roberto 2017. *Il libro dell’astronomia. Grandi idee spiegate in modo semplice*. Milano: Gribaudo.

system – vary from source to target text and operate both at the general level of discourse and at the level of smaller units in text such as terms. This implies that to ensure relevance and acceptability, specialised translation includes processes of rewriting, transediting and transcreation.¹¹

In the following case study, an *Economist* article from “Free exchange”, a column providing updates on research in business, economic and finance meant for market operators – hence written at the level of expert to practitioner – is translated as part of the column “Economia e lavoro” for the general readership of the Italian magazine *Internazionale*. In translation, the article opens with some forms of transcreation, that is recasting the source text in a new language while preserving the intended content (Perderson 2014; Ulrych 2015) or newsworthiness. As can be seen below, in Italian the column title is supplemented with an additional reference to society that is supposed to make the topic relevant to the lay public, in the headline any reference to the science of economics is replaced with a description of the article topic and the standfirst inviting readers in English to refresh their memories about economic arguments of the relationship between wealth and birth rates is turned into a summary of the article content followed by a reminder of the authoritativeness of the source (“scrive l’*Economist*”):

Free exchange

The new economics of fertility

Richer societies mean fewer babies. Right? (*The Economist* 17 September 2022)
Economia e lavoro Società

I paesi ricchi tornano a fare figli

The Economist, Regno Unito

In occidente il crollo delle nascite sembra rallentare. Ma molto dipende dalla capacità dei governi di aiutare i genitori a conciliare lavoro e famiglia, scrive l’*Economist* (*Internazionale* 1481 7 ottobre 2022 p. 108)

11 For a detailed analysis of rewriting, transediting and transcreation in a different field, i.e. *Science* articles on vaccines popularised for publication in *Internazionale*, see Musacchio and Zorzi (2019).

It is clear from the very beginning that the situationality and the presuppositions in the source and target text are very different. After a reference to a statement on the topic by Pope Francis, the source text provides some background to current research by referring to two well-known, related concepts in economics, trade-off¹² and opportunity cost.¹³ In the Italian translation these concepts undergo a process of rewriting, that is a metalinguistic process that reinterprets or manipulates content to achieve different pragmatic objectives compared to the source text, as the economic focus becomes a social and personal one (“trade-off between ‘quantity and quality’ of children” → “il ruolo centrale del rapporto tra ‘quantità e qualità’ della procreazione”; “And as women’s working options expand, the opportunity cost of their time will grow, making the trade-off between family and career more difficult” → E con le maggiori possibilità lavorative per le donne è sempre più difficile conciliare la carriera con la famiglia):

Economists have long considered such a slowdown inevitable. In the best-known model of fertility, popularised by Gary Becker, a Nobel-prizewinning economist, and others in the 1960s, there is a central role for the trade-off between “quantity and quality” of children. As countries grow richer and the returns to education rise, it is expected that families will invest more in a smaller number of children. And as women’s working options expand, the opportunity cost of their time will grow, making the trade-off between family and career more difficult (*The Economist* 17 September 2022).

Da tempo gli economisti considerano inevitabile il rallentamento della crescita demografica. Nel modello della fertilità reso famoso negli anni sessanta dal premio

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- 12 A trade-off is “the requirement that some of one good or one objective has to be given up to obtain more of another. The need to trade off goods or objectives against one another is a sign of economic efficiency: if it is possible to get more of one good without accepting less of another, or to achieve one objective without sacrificing another, the economy is not Pareto efficient” (Black, John / Hashimzade, Nigar / Myles, Gareth 2009. *Oxford Dictionary of Economics*. Third Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 454).
- 13 The opportunity cost is “the cost of something in terms of an opportunity foregone. Opportunity cost is given by the benefits that could have been obtained by choosing the best alternative opportunity. For example, for a farmer the opportunity cost of growing wheat is given by what they would have earned if they had grown barley, assuming barley is the best alternative” (Black, John / Hashimzade, Nigar / Myles, Gareth 2009. *Oxford Dictionary of Economics*. Third Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 324).

Nobel Gary Becker e da altri ricercatori emerge il ruolo centrale del rapporto tra “quantità e qualità” nella procreazione. Quando un paese diventa più ricco e crescono gli effetti positivi dell’istruzione, le famiglie tendono a investire più risorse su un numero minore di figli. E con le maggiori possibilità lavorative per le donne è sempre più difficile conciliare la carriera con la famiglia (*Internazionale* 1481 7 ottobre 2022 p. 108).

What follows marks instead a failed attempt at transediting as a pragmatic translation strategy to smooth and improve TT readability (Chesterman 1997: 112). The translator rightly assumed that target language readers would encounter problems in making sense of the “downward-sloping trend”, an economic concept expressed through mathematics, and thus introduced a subheading “Inversione di tendenza” to smooth reading. However, “downward-sloping trend, has turned into something of a reversed-tick mark” rendered as “andamento decrescente, comincia a dare segni di risalita”, still makes for difficult reading for lay people in Italian and should have been glossed and transedited by relying on the possibility to create cohesion with the subheading, for example by stating “il rapporto tra istruzione e fertilità, in base al quale in passato a una maggiore istruzione corrispondeva una minore fertilità, mostra un’inversione di tendenza”:

But when looked at within countries, the new pattern of fertility becomes clearer. A paper published by Michael Bar of San Francisco State University and co-authors shows that in America the relationship between education and fertility, which used to be a downward-sloping trend, has turned into something of a reversed-tick mark. Women with advanced degrees have slightly more children than college graduates. A similar pattern holds when looking at income. The authors argue that the growing availability of child care has reduced the difficulty of the trade-off between family and work (*The Economist* 17 September 2022).

Inversione di tendenza

Tuttavia, esaminando la situazione interna a ogni paese, la nuova tendenza emerge più chiaramente. Uno studio pubblicato nel 2018 da Michael Bar, della San Francisco state university, e dai suoi colleghi ha riscontrato che negli Stati Uniti il rapporto tra istruzione e fertilità, in passato caratterizzato da un andamento decrescente, comincia a dare segni di risalita. Le donne in possesso di una specializzazione post-laurea hanno leggermente più figli di quelle laureate. Un dato simile emerge se facciamo riferimento al reddito. Gli autori dello studio sostengono che la crescente disponibilità di servizi per l’infanzia abbia ridotto le difficoltà per le donne che vogliono conciliare famiglia e carriera (*Internazionale* 1481 7 ottobre 2022: 108).

Failed transediting is offset by a successful attempt at creating cohesion at the end of the article by referring back to the subheading “Inversione di tendenza”:

Yet the worse the problem becomes, the harder governments will work to combat it. And as they experiment, evidence will build about which responses are the most effective. The covid-19 pandemic may also end up helping. It delayed many families’ decisions about whether to have children, but in time it may turn out to have had a more positive impact. The rise of working-from-home should make working with children easier. In his speech the pope lamented those people who chose to look after pets instead of children. Maybe that trade-off will lessen, too.

Nel corso degli anni scopriremo quali risposte saranno più efficaci. La pandemia di covid-19, in quest’ottica, potrebbe rivelarsi un bene. Il virus ha spinto molte famiglie a rinviare la decisione di avere un figlio, ma in futuro potrebbe avere anche effetti positivi. La diffusione del lavoro da casa, infatti, potrebbe permettere di conciliare meglio il lavoro e la gestione dei figli. Nel suo discorso, Francesco ha criticato le persone che decidono di occuparsi degli animali domestici invece dei figli. Forse anche questa tendenza finirà per invertirsi (p. 109).

Translation is undergoing a new turn where technology plays a major role; in particular, machine translation raises fears that it may entirely replace human translators. Though neural machine translation has greatly improved output which reads more and more like a text written in the target language, its content may differ to a greater or lesser extent from that of the source text. Consequently, a good share of the translators’ work will lie in revising machine translation texts, and pragmatic skills in identifying situationality and intentionality and relaying it flexibly and dynamically will be essential.

4. Conclusions

In this paper I have tried to suggest that though specialised translation concerns a variety of topics, it has special features that cut across the different areas and render it an interesting, creative activity that does not deserve to be referred to disparagingly as “non-literary”. The underlying idea that I have explored is that the overriding requirement of relaying special discourse content suitably for the intended target readers

gives translators scope to create target texts that can even differ widely from their sources to comply with discourse conventions in the target language and meet the needs of the target public. In this sense, specialised translations are “autonomous” texts that have to read like native-language discourse and as such can make originals appear unfaithful.

In my argument, I have intertwined this “special feature” thread with a sketch of Federica Scarpa’s contribution to specialised translation as relevant translation studies evolved. What I have been meaning to show is that Scarpa’s research has constantly been in line and even anticipated developments in translation studies, as her early work on non-anglicising Italian translations clearly indicates. Her research has also been informed by regular contact with translation service providers and freelance translators – especially the many successful professional translators she has educated and trained over her long career at the University of Trieste – in a fruitful approach to translation where professional practice feeds back on theory but is in turn influenced by developments in translation studies. This is also testified by one of the overriding concerns in her research, translation quality, whose different required levels – depending once again on context – are guidelines for work in specialised translation.

I would like to conclude on a personal note. Many years ago, David Clyde Snelling – after seeing Federica presenting at a conference in Milan – asked in (mock) alarm whether that day he had witnessed the birth of a Trieste school of translation studies. Looking at Scarpa’s work over the many years she has taught and done research in the field, one can safely say that there is indeed a school of specialised translation studies in Trieste where Federica has played a central role as her three monographs on the topic attest.

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