

In the previous Chapter we saw that all communication, whether within or across languages, involves some kind of interpretation. This is what George Steiner had in mind when he said that "inside or between languages, human communication equals translation" (1975:47). A ST is not a static piece of language but an expression of the SL author's intention, to be interpreted by the translator as receiver of the SL message and then recreated for the TL readership. Competence in translating therefore presupposes the ability on the part of the translator to interpret the function of the SL text and to render it appropriately in the TL.

Another important aspect has, however, to be taken into consideration if a text is to be wholly appropriate in the TL, and that is *context*. Language does not occur in a vacuum; it is subject to influence from factors in its socio-cultural context. The overall meaning of an utterance has to be established pragmatically, which means taking into account not only the addressee's intentions and underlying communicative motivations but also such variants as persons participating in the speech act, the topic and the setting. To give a simple example, the Italian *ciao* is used as an informal greeting equally on arrival and departure. Thus, in translating *ciao* into English, translators need first to analyse the SL text to establish whether the context is one of coming or one of going. From this they can then deduce whether the function is saying hello or saying goodbye.

In this Chapter we shall be examining how to translate the meaning of the SL writer's message in context.

### 3.1. Context, Co-text and Context of Situation

Context is a source of meaning for every language event since it gives the hearer or reader a frame of reference within which to interpret what has been uttered or written. He delivered the punch, is ambiguous, unless we know the circumstances (both verbal and non-verbal) in which it was uttered. The interpretation of delivered and punch depends very much on the context of the utterance. Is the speaker or writer referring to a man working

for a supermarket, who has brought a type of drink called punch to someone's house or is the context that of a boxing match where someone is commenting on one of the contestant's performance. Disambiguating textual elements is crucial to both understanding the text as a whole and translation. The two possible interpretations require two different forms in Italian:

*Ha consegnato il punch.*  
*Ha sferrato un pugno.*

Initially, the term context was used exclusively to refer to the words and sentences that "go with" a text, "*con-text*" in the strict sense of the word. A text is a complex entity consisting of more than a sum of its parts as it is made up of a web of interdependent relationships which confer meaning on each other and can only be interpreted in relation to each other. But contextual features are also to be found in what goes on in the total environment beyond the physical realisation of language. We can therefore distinguish between the *co-text*, the linguistic context, and the *context of situation*, the extra-linguistic one. Making sense of a message thus involves interpreting situational as well as linguistic clues. Consider the example of *Alt*. Although this particular text only consists of one word, it is a meaningful unit with a well-defined function. The question is whether it should be translated into English as *Halt* or as *Stop*. The answer is to be found in its communicative environment (i.e. in its context of situation). If it is, for instance, on a sign on the roadside then the appropriate translation is *Stop*; if it is said by a soldier standing guard, then it is *Halt*. In both cases the purpose or function of the text is a warning or an injunction and it is the context which determines the different translations.

The *co-text* / *context of situation* distinction was first made by the anthropologist, Malinowski (1923) in his theory of context, interestingly enough, in relation to translation. Malinowski was faced with the problem of how to illustrate his ideas on the remote culture of a group of South Pacific islanders to an English-speaking public. He had transcribed a series of texts in the islanders' language but could see that they were so intimately linked to the cultural background that it was impossible to render them satisfactorily in English without including reference to it. Various alternatives were open to him: free translation, which was intelligible to an English audience but gave no insights into the source language and culture; literal translation, which conveyed the flavour of the original but was unintelligible to English readers; or translation with an extended commentary. The last solution proved the most acceptable. By placing the texts within their environment, the translation

with commentary was able to provide information not only about the immediate situation in which they were uttered but also about the total cultural background which lay behind them and which determined their significance. The former Malinowski termed the *context of situation* and the latter the *context of culture*; both, he believed, were crucial to the interpretation of the text.

These two notions are valid for every culture and every situation and are therefore an integral part of the translation process. Italian and English are not widely differing languages or cultures, so we do not normally need to resort to translation with commentary. But when we translate we need to interpret the meaning of the original text in its entirety, and this includes its context of situation and context of culture. Now let us look at these two concepts more fully; the role of *co-text* in translation will be dealt with more extensively in Chapter 5 (Text and Discourse).

### 3.2. Context of Culture

Awareness of cultural differences and similarities is essential to the interpretation of meaning. *Culture* has generally been taken to refer to the personal development of a cultivated mind (as in "she's such a cultured person") or a knowledge of a country's history and institutions as contributions to human civilisation (as in the "cultural heritage of Great Britain"). Here, however, *culture* is used in the sociolinguistic and anthropological sense to mean all socially conditioned aspects of human life: the way of life of a society. To quote the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Semiotics* (Sebeok 1986):

"Culture is the totality of the signifying systems by means of which mankind, or a particular group, maintains its cohesiveness (its values and identity and its interaction with the world). These signifying systems ... comprise not only all the arts (literature, cinema, theatre, painting, music etc.), the various social activities and behaviour patterns prevalent in the given community (including gesture, dress, manners, ritual, etc.), but also the established methods by which the community preserves its memory and its sense of identity (myths, history, legal systems, religious beliefs, etc.)."

Language is an integral part of culture and not an isolated phenomenon. The relevance of this to translation lies in the extent to which culture conditions people's behaviour and is reflected in the language they speak. An extreme view, formulated by Edward Sapir and Benjamin L. Whorf in the 1920s and 1930s, claimed that the language people speak determines their perception of reality as thought is conditioned by language. Furthermore, as languages are structured differently, language communities perceive the same reality in

different ways. This principle of language relativity, or the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis as the theory has come to be called, naturally raised the whole question of the translatability of texts. If language moulds thought so that a community's way of thinking and conceptualising are determined by the language they speak, it follows that its thought processes are culture-specific and translation is impossible. No cross-cultural communication can take place because speakers of the TL culture will not be able to conceptualise reality in the same way as SL speakers do. Colour terms and kinship terms are often cited as examples. An egg yolk is seen as being yellow by English native speakers but an Italian will speak of "*il rosso dell'uovo*". The term *infanzia* will evoke a different image of reality for an Italian than the term infancy for an English speaker. *Infanzia* covers a broader range of reference (birth to adolescence) than infancy, which is restricted to one's very early years (birth to 1-2 years old) since the remaining years up to adolescence are covered by childhood. Thus two different ways exist in English and Italian of conceptualising the same reality, namely a person's life span from 0 to 12 years old: Italians see it as one continuum while the English see it as two separate stages. Thus, it can by no means be assumed that interpretation will be made in the same way in all cultures and all languages. How late is late, for instance?

The other extreme is represented by Chomsky's principle of language universals. Translation entails the recoding of surface structures from ST to TT. The underlying deep semantic structure of the ST remains intact in the TT as it is non-linguistic and therefore universal. In theory, this signifies that any meaning can be conveyed from one language to another, and that any kind of translation is possible.

A more moderate view that enjoys wider acceptance is that "the lexical distinctions drawn by each language will tend to reflect the culturally important features of objects, institutions and activities in the society in which the language operates" (Lyons 1968:432). Members of a culture place a high value on certain behaviour, ideas or material possessions, which is reflected in their language. Eskimos, for instance, have four different expressions for the one English word for snow, denoting snow on the ground, falling snow, drifting snow, and a snow drift (Stern 1983:204); Americans have a host of words to refer to types of vehicles: automobile, convertible, limousine, sedan, station wagon, dune buggy, jeep; and Italians have a whole series of categories and subcategories for coffee: *cappuccino*, *corretto*, *ristretto*, *macchiato*, *espresso*, *lungo*, *americano*.

According to this view, the translatability of a text depends on the degree to which it is embedded in its own culture. The more culture-bound a text is, the more difficult it is to translate or rather, the more scope there is for modification. The less culture-bound a text is, on the other hand, the less it needs to be adapted to suit the TL readership and the simpler it is to translate without any or with minimum information loss. Treaties, resolutions,

declarations, and the like are internationally recognised documents and will hardly require any modification in translation.

### III. NON-THERAPEUTIC CLINICAL RESEARCH

- 1 In the purely scientific application of clinical research carried out on a human being, it is the duty of the doctor to remain the protector of the life and health of that person on whom clinical research is being carried out.
  - 2 The nature, the purpose and the risk of clinical research must be explained to the subject by the doctor.
  - 3a Clinical research on a human being cannot be undertaken without his free consent after he has been informed; if he is legally incompetent, the consent of the legal guardian should be procured.
  - 3b The subject of clinical research should be in such a mental, physical and legal state as to be able to exercise fully his power of choice.
  - 3c Consent should, as a rule, be obtained in writing. However, the responsibility for clinical research always remains with the research worker; it never falls on the subject even after consent is obtained.
  - 4a The investigator must respect the right of each individual to safeguard his personal integrity, especially if the subject is in a dependent relationship to the investigator.
  - 4b At any time during the course of clinical research the subject or his guardian should be free to withdraw permission for research to be continued.
- The investigator or the investigating team should discontinue the research if in his or their judgement, it may, if continued, be harmful to the individual.

(Recommendations from the  
Declaration of Helsinki)

### III. RICERCA CLINICA A FINI NON TERAPEUTICI

1. *Nell'applicazione puramente scientifica della ricerca clinica effettuata sugli esseri umani, è dovere del medico salvaguardare la vita e la salute dei pazienti sui quali essa viene effettuata.*
2. *Il medico deve spiegare al soggetto la natura, l'obiettivo e i rischi della ricerca clinica.*
- 3a *La ricerca clinica sull'essere umano non può essere effettuata senza il suo libero consenso dopo che egli sia stato informato; se il soggetto è legalmente incapace si deve ottenere il consenso dal suo tutore legale.*
- 3b *Il soggetto della ricerca clinica deve essere in un tale stato mentale, fisico e legale da poter esercitare pienamente il suo potere di scelta.*
- 3c *Di regola, il consenso deve essere ottenuto per iscritto. In ogni caso la responsabilità della ricerca clinica è sempre a carico del ricercatore; non ricade mai sul soggetto anche dopo averne ottenuto il consenso.*
- 4a *Il ricercatore deve rispettare il diritto di ciascun individuo a salvaguardare la propria integrità fisica, specialmente se il soggetto ha una relazione di dipendenza con il ricercatore.*
- 4b *In ogni momento durante il corso della ricerca clinica il soggetto o il suo tutore devono essere liberi di ritirare il permesso di continuare la ricerca.*  
*Il ricercatore o gli appartenenti al gruppo di ricerca devono interrompere la ricerca se essa, a proprio o loro giudizio, può, in caso venga continuata, essere dannosa per l'individuo.*

*(Raccomandazioni dalla Dichiarazione di Helsinki)*

At the other end of the scale, texts which are highly culture-specific, such as marriage certificates and obituaries may have to be considerably modified.

*È mancata serenamente la nostra dolcissima mamma*

*Elda Rossi*

*La ricordano a quanti l'hanno conosciuta e amata i figli Fabio con Lydia, Paolo con Erica, Davide con Patrizia. - I funerali avranno luogo il giorno 5 luglio ore 11, chiesa Santa Maria del Paradiso. - Vimercate, 4 luglio 1991.*

SMYTHE - On September 30th, Denise Crowther, aged 79 years, beloved wife of the late Henry Smythe, much loved mother of Angela Jones and Janet Brown, loving grandmother and great-grandmother. Funeral Service in St. Wilfred's Chapel, 29 Tite Street, Chelsea on Wednesday October 2nd at 2.30 pm.

This brings us back to the question of discourse genres. An expressive literary text is more likely to be steeped in SL culture than an informative text.

*A merenda mangiavano castagne, o pane con l'olio e l'aceto, e poi se avevano finito il compito potevano scendere a giocare in piazzetta o fra le rovine dei bagni pubblici, saltati in aria in un bombardamento. In piazzetta c'erano molti piccioni e loro gli portavano del pane o si facevano dare da Diomira un cartoccio di riso avanzato. Là s'incontravano con tutti i ragazzi del quartiere, compagni di scuola e altri che ritrovavano poi al ricreatorio la domenica, quando facevano le partite al pallone con don Vigliani che si tirava su la sottana nera e tirava calci. Anche in piazzetta a volte giocavano al pallone o giocavano a ladri e carabinieri. La nonna di tanto in tanto si affacciava al balcone e gridava di non farsi male: era bello vedere dalla piazza buia le finestre illuminate della casa, là al terzo piano, e sapere che si poteva ritornare là, scaldarsi alla stufa e difendersi dalla notte. La nonna sedeva in cucina con Diomira e rannendavano le lenzuola; il nonno stava nella stanza da pranzo e fumava la pipa col berretto in testa.*

*(Italo Svevo, La Madre)*

At tea-time they ate chestnuts, or bread with oil and vinegar, and then if they had finished their homework they could go and play in the small piazza or among the ruins of the public baths, which had been blown up in an air raid. In the small piazza there were a great many pigeons and they took them bread or got Diomira to give them a paper bag of left-over rice. There they met all the local boys, boys from school and others they met in the youth clubs on Sundays when they had football matches with Don Vigliani, who hitched up his black cassock and kicked. Sometimes they played football in the small piazza too or else cops and robbers. Their grandmother appeared on the balcony occasionally and called to them not to get hurt: it was nice seeing the lighted windows of their home, up there on the third floor, from the dark piazza, and knowing that they could go back there, warm up at the stove and guard themselves from the night. Granny sat in the kitchen with Diomira and mended the linen; Grandpa was in the dining-room with his cap on, smoking his pipe.



American football, based on and similar to rugby, was codified at Harvard in 1873. Each team consists of forty-five players specialized in defensive, offensive and other special roles (such as field goals). Only eleven players of each team, however, are on the field at any given time, one team attacking and the other defending. The first objective – and indeed the aim of the game itself – is to score points by sending or bringing the oval ball over the goal line of the opposite team by gradually conquering zones on the field. The zones are conquered either by running or throwing actions.

Before each attack or defense the players form into a huddle in which the captain lays down the strategy that will be used. There can be any number of substitutions. The protective equipment worn by the players and the strict rules, which are enforced by five to seven referees, effectively quash any unnecessary violence, which is punishable with a loss of position on the field and, in extreme cases, with the expulsion of players.

The game starts with the kicker of the A team making the kickoff and sending the ball as far down the field as possible, where two players from the B team are ready to return the kick, helped by their teammates, and do their best to avoid the tackles of the opposite team.

(Anthony De Stefano,  
"It Takes Eleven to Play",  
*Ulisse* 2000, n.64, 1989)

*Simile al rugby da cui ha preso lo spunto, il football americano è stato codificato a Harvard nel 1873. Ogni squadra è composta complessivamente da 45 atleti, specializzati in ruoli difensivi, offensivi o speciali (come quello per i calci piazzati, per esempio). In campo tuttavia si affrontano 11 giocatori contro 11, una formazione d'attacco e una di difesa, avendo la prima l'obiettivo – che è poi quello del gioco stesso – di conquistare punti mandando o portando il pallone ovale al di là della linea di fondo, o linea di meta, della squadra avversaria, mediante la graduale e successiva conquista di zone di campo, attraverso giochi di corsa o di lancio.*

*Prima di ogni azione sia l'attacco che la difesa si riuniscono in gruppo, dove il capitano impartisce il tipo di schema da adottare. Le sostituzioni sono illimitate. Le vistose protezioni e un severo regolamento, sulla cui applicazione vigilano da cinque a sette arbitri, annullano la violenza gratuita stroncandone ogni accenno con perdita di terreno sino all'espulsione.*

*La gara inizia con il kick-off effettuato dal kicker della squadra A il quale cerca di spingere la palla in profondità; dove due giocatori della squadra B sono pronti a ritornare il calcio sfruttando i blocchi dei compagni e cercando di evitare il placcaggio degli avversari.*

Vocative texts, with their focus on the TL audience, are particularly culture-bound. A SL vocative text will require adaptation to the TL culture if it is to fulfil its intended purpose, as the following example illustrates:

"Did you hear about the Irish recruits who were sent to fight in the Gulf War?"  
"No. What happened?"  
"The Mexicans sent them back".

Stereotypes are culture-specific so that the Irish are to English what the *carabinieri* are to the Italians, the Poles to the Americans, the Belgians to the French. The joke could only work in another language if the signifier denoting "being dumb" in the SL is substituted by a pragmatically equivalent one in the TL: thus, Irish in this joke would become *Carabinieri* in an Italian context. No other adjustments need be made.

Translators always need to be on the alert for SL elements of communication that may conceal subtle, almost subliminal, cultural or ideological assumptions even in apparently informative texts. Whether one calls the group of islands off the coast of Argentina *Malvinas* or Falklands reflects ideological and political attitudes bound up with culture. At times lack of sensitivity to ideologically and culturally based distinctions can lead to outright errors in both the SL and the TL. An obvious example is the misuse of England for Britain or Russia for what used to be the Soviet Union:

*Oggi il maggior esperto mondiale di sanguisughe è il dottor Roy Sawyer, un biologo americano che ha fondato, nel Galles (Inghilterra), un centro di allevamento e di ricerca.*

The Soviet Union and the U.S. have agreed not to shoot down each other's satellites, but both are certainly working on "killer" satellites and the Russians have tested one.

Rather than having a single yardstick for all texts, we would do better to speak in terms of a "sliding scale" of translatability. This would be linked to the discourse genre of the TT and the degree to which it is embedded in SL culture. Let us now turn to some practical problems in translating culture-specific textual elements.

Translation is problematic, for instance, when a situational feature relevant to the ST is missing in the TL culture. Obviously, the distance between the cultural background of the SL and TL audiences is also an important factor. Experience in translating the Bible into

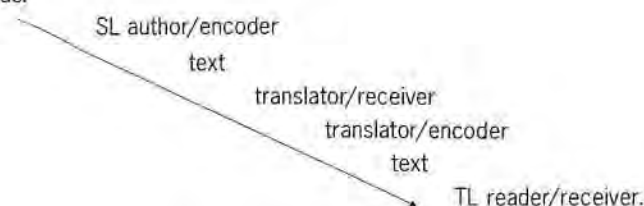
widely different cultures provided Nida (1964, 1969, 1974) with a multitude of interesting insights into interlingual cultural problems. For instance, how can an expression like God the father be made meaningful in a community where deities are all female? Or, how can Lamb of God be translated meaningfully into an Eskimo culture where lambs are unfamiliar animals? The innocence symbolised by the word lamb would pass unobserved. Nida offers Seal of God as a possible pragmatic equivalent in this particular context since the seal is both a familiar animal and naturally associated with innocence in Eskimo culture.

Another problem area concerns cross-cultural behaviour patterns. The Italian *tampornamento*, for instance, is notoriously difficult to translate into English (Bassnett-McGuire 1980:35): a slight car accident or the more colourful American English fender-bender fail to do full justice to the underlying cultural connotations concerning Italian driving habits, the frequency with which these type of accidents occur, and the weight given to them. Although Italian and English are not widely differing languages there are words or expressions that are linked to behavioural patterns and may therefore not have a counterpart in the other language. The English phrase say when, used to indicate that one's glass has been filled up sufficiently, is directly linked to English social behavioural patterns (Firth 1970:110).

An obvious example in Italian is *Buon Appetito*. Exact translation is impossible since Good Appetite is meaningless and there is no conventional English expression that fulfils the same function. Depending on the context, some ritualistically apologetic form such as I hope it's alright or I hope you like it might be appropriate or even the very colloquial Dig in or Tuck in (Bassnett-McGuire 1980). The same problem exists the other way around, since the connotations of having wine with a meal, generally associated in Britain with an important or special occasion, are completely lost in an Italian environment, where wine normally accompanies a meal. Some other pragmatically appropriate expression in the TL will have to be found to bring out the importance of the occasion.

This leads on to another important point concerning translatability: the degree to which the meaning of a text is judged as translatable is to be gauged at *text* level and not at word or sentence level. The non-correspondence of purely formal lexical and syntactic categories can be overcome and textual meaning as well as pragmatic effect preserved by means of a device called *compensation*. How compensation strategies are put to work will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 8 when we discuss the actual translation process. What needs to be stressed here is that translating is a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural communicative process between SL writer and TL reader, which takes place at textual level within a socio-cultural context. Translators act as mediators between the SL and TL cultures, as interpreters, that is, of the SL message and emitters of the same message in

the TL, thus:



Since language is an integral part of culture, translators need to be not only proficient in two languages but also familiar with two cultures: ideally, they are not only bilingual but also bicultural. They need to perceive what experience and knowledge is shared by the SL and TL cultures and what is alien to them. They will then be in a position to deal with any cultural gaps that may arise and carry out any modifications in the TL version that they feel necessary to achieving a pragmatically equivalent effect, or, if necessary, add a footnote or note to the translation (in Italian *NdT*, i.e. *Nota del Traduttore*).

«Zitto, zitto, pipistrello,  
corri avvolto in un mantello!»  
«Conosci questa canzone?»  
«L'ho sentita, mi pare» rispose Alice.  
«Non è ancora finita» riprese il Cappellaio. «Continua così»  
«Zitto, zitto, lungo il mondo  
vola e gira in girotondo».  
In quell'istante il Ghiro si scosse e, sempre dormendo, cominciò a cantare: «Zitto, zitto, pipistrello». E continuò a cantare, continuò tanto che la Lepre e il Cappellaio dovettero dargli un pizzicotto per farlo tacere.

Come si è visto nella nota precedente, questa è una canzone classica per l'infanzia, scritta da Jane Taylor nel 1806, che nel testo subisce una trasformazione. Il «bat» però non è soltanto il «pipistrello» ma è anche la «racchetta» per giocare o picchiare; ci richiama l'imminente partita di «croquet» la quale non viene giocata con mazze normali, ma con simboli allusivi come quelli del fenicottero dal collo lungo e dei porcospini che fungeranno da palle da gioco. La partita di «croquet» sarà, allo stesso tempo, trasgressione di una norma e punizione. ...

(Lewis Carroll,  
*Alice nel Paese delle Meraviglie*,  
translated by Tommaso Giglio)

A number of explanations will help to clarify the text of this translation, which has tried to remain as close as possible to the immediate, unliterary flavor of the original. Malavoglia means "Ill-will", and this nickname bestowed by the community on Master 'Ntoni's family has, like all the important names in this carefully wrought novel, a consciously sought ironic overtone. I have retained the Sicilian forms of address Compare and Comare which are, respectively, a man or a woman who has acted as a godfather or a godmother at a christening or confirmation. They were kept not only for their musical value but also because they symbolize the close relationships that exist between most of Verga's characters in this novel.

(Giovanni Verga,  
*The House by the Medlar Tree*,  
 translated by Raymond Rosenthal)

All in all, translation and cross-cultural communication can and do take place rather successfully despite cultural gaps and differences, as is shown by the bulk and variety of material that is translated into a host of languages worldwide.

### 3.3. Context of Situation

The relationship between language use and the context of situation identified by Malinowski was further developed by the linguist, J.R. Firth, who saw linguistics essentially as the study of meaning in terms of how language functions in context. He therefore worked out a set of variables which he felt had to be present in the context of situation for meaningful interaction to take place: the participants in the situation, the action taking place (verbal and non-verbal), other relevant features of the situation and the effect of the verbal action.

A similar set of variables for describing the context of situation was proposed by Hymes in his work on the ethnography of communication: the form and content of the message, the setting, the participants, the intent and effect of the communication, the key, the medium, the genre, and the norms of interaction. Once again this view of language goes beyond its formal properties to include the context of situation and the participants in acts of communication. In order to communicate effectively language users need to produce utterances which are both linguistically correct and appropriate to the socio-cultural context. In other words, communication involves not only linguistic competence (an ab-

stract knowledge of the language system) but also the ability to use and interpret language appropriately in relation to the social context. This has been termed "communicative competence" and entails knowing "when to speak, when not and ... what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner" (Hymes 1972:277). Communicative competence is thus fundamental to both intralingual and interlingual communication. *Prego*, for instance, can express various functions depending on the context in which it is used. It can function as a polite conventional reply to *Grazie*, in which case it would be translated into English as either You're welcome or Not at all; it can also mean Here You are or There you are:

- *Potrebbe passarmi quel libro, per favore?*
- *Prego.*
- *Grazie.*
- *Prego.*

"Could you pass me that book, please?"

"Here you are".

"Thank you".

"You're welcome".

or it can be a request for the addressee to repeat what was said, that is, Sorry, what did you say?

- *Potrebbe passarmi quel libro, per favore?*
- *Prego?*
- *Vorrei che Lei mi passasse quel libro.*

"Could you pass me that book, please?"

"Sorry?"

"I said, 'Could you pass me that book?'".