From:
Thinking Italian Translation
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Preliminaries to translation

as a product

Chapter 1 viewed translation as a process. However, the evidence we had for the process was a *product* – a gist translation and an exegetic translation. It is as a product that translation is viewed in the present chapter. Here, too, it is useful to examine two diametric opposites: in this case, two opposed degrees of freedom of translation, showing extreme SL bias, on the one hand, and extreme TL bias, on the other.

At the extreme of SL bias is **interlinear translation**, where the TT does not necessarily respect TL grammar, but has grammatical units corresponding as closely as possible to every grammatical unit of the ST. Here is an interlinear translation of an Italian proverb:

È meglio l'uovo oggi che   Is better the egg today than

la gallina domani.   the hen tomorrow.

Normally only used in descriptive linguistics or language teaching, interlinear translation is of limited use. It is actually an extreme form of the much more common **literal translation**, where the literal meaning of words is taken as if straight from the dictionary (that is, out of context), but TL grammar is respected. Since TL grammar is respected, literal translation very often unavoidably involves **grammatical transposition** – the replacement or reinforcement of given parts of speech in the ST by other parts of speech in the TT. A simple example is translating 'Ho fame' as 'I am hungry': the TT has a subject pronoun where there is none in the ST, and the ST noun is rendered with a TL adjective. A literal translation of the proverb would be: 'The egg today is better than the hen tomorrow.' We shall take literal translation as the practical extreme of SL bias.
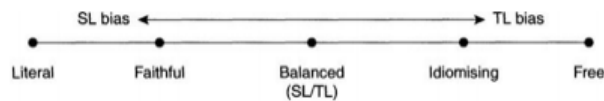
At the opposite extreme, TL bias, is **free translation**, where there is only a global correspondence between the textual units of the ST and those of the TT. A free translation of the Italian proverb above might be: 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush'. Here, the implied message of the ST is made explicit, but the grammar is different and the image of poultry is replaced by that of a bird and a bush. This is also an example of what we shall call communicative translation. A **communicative translation** is produced when, in a given situation, the ST uses an SL expression standard for that situation, and the TT uses a TL expression standard for an equivalent target culture situation. 'A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush' is thus a standard cultural counterpart to 'È meglio l'uovo oggi che la gallina domani', and in most situations would be a suitable translation. The use of cultural counterparts is standard for many conventional formulae that do not invite literal translation. Public notices, proverbs and conversational clichés illustrate this particularly clearly, as in:

Non calpestare l'erba.	Keep off the grass.
Buon appetito.	Enjoy your meal.
Prego.	You're welcome/Don't mention it.
È nato con la camicia.	He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth.

Clearly, communicative translation apart, this degree of freedom is no more useful as *standard practice* than interlinear translation, because potentially important details of message content are bound to be lost.

Between the two extremes of literal and free translation, the degrees of freedom are infinitely variable. However, in assessing translation freedom, it is useful to situate the TT on a scale between

extreme SL bias and extreme TL bias, with notional intermediate points schematised as in the following diagram, adapted from New-mark (1981: 39):

SL bias ⟵──────────────⟶ TL bias

● ● ● ● ●
Literal   Faithful   Balanced   Idiomising   Free
                        (SL/TL)

The five points on the scale can be illustrated from the simple example of one person criticising other people's behaviour: 'Non es-iste alcuna giustificazione per il loro comportamento.'

INTERLINEAR	Not exists any justification for their behaviour.
LITERAL	No justification exists for their behaviour.
FAITHFUL	There is no justification for their behaviour.
BALANCED	Their behaviour was not acceptable.
IDIOMISING	They really shouldn't have done that.
FREE	They were out of order.

Before going any further, we should define what we mean by an **idiomising translation**. This is one that respects the ST message content, but typically uses TL idioms or familiar phonic and rhyth-mic patterns to give an easy read, even if (as in our example) this means sacrificing nuances of meaning or tone. By **idiom**, we mean a fixed figurative expression whose meaning cannot be deduced from the literal meaning of the words that make it up, as in 'questo è *un altro paio di maniche*', '*il mio cavallo di battaglia* è la matem-atica' and so on. Note that 'idiomising' is not synonymous with 'idiomatic': throughout this book, we use the term **idiomatic** to denote what sounds natural and normal to native speakers – **a lin-guistic expression** that is unexceptional and acceptable in a given context. Thus, in our five examples of degrees of freedom, the last four are certainly idiomatic, but only one of them is an idiomising translation.

Note that although the last TT is very free and colloquially plausi-ble, it is not a communicative translation, because it is not the *stan-dard* expression in the given situation. (For this particular situation, there *is* no standard expression.) Its freedom is therefore gratuitous and might well be considered excessive: it might be out of character for the speaker to use 'out of order' in this sense, and the TT is in any case avoidably different in message content and tone from the ST.

Equivalence and translation loss

In defining communicative translation, we used the term 'equiva-lent target culture situation'. As a matter of fact, most writers on translation use the terms 'equivalence' and 'equivalent', but in so many different ways that equivalence can be a confusing concept even for translation tutors, let alone learners. Before going further, then, we need to say what we mean, and what we do not mean, by 'equivalence' and 'equivalent'. We shall not go in detail into the philosophical implications of the term 'equivalence': this is not a book on translation theory. Holmes (1988), Koller (1995), Nida (1964) and Snell-Hornby (1988) between them provide a useful in-troduction to the question.

The many different definitions of equivalence in translation fall broadly into one of two categories: they are either descriptive or prescriptive. Descriptively, 'equivalence' denotes the relationship between ST features and TT features that are seen as directly corre-sponding to one another, regardless of the quality of the TT. Thus, descriptively, the following pairs of utterances are equivalents:

Sempre per l'alimentazione carburante produciamo oggi carcasse per pompe di diverso tipo.	Always for the fuel's feeding we are now manufacturing frames for pumps of various type.
Windows knows every part of your PC, inside and out, so it	Windows conosce ogni elemento del vostro PC a menadito, così

can send your work to the right place. It also knows all the rules for storing and retrieving files, so you can find your work without a lot of hassle.

può inviare il lavoro al posto giusto. Inoltre, poiché conosce tutte le regole per archiviare e recuperare i file, potete trovare il vostro lavoro senza troppe difficoltà.

Prescriptively, 'equivalence' denotes the relationship between an SL expression and *the* canonic TL rendering of it. (By 'canonic', we mean 'generally accepted as standard'.) So, prescriptively, the following pairs of utterances are equivalents:

Ho sonno.   I'm sleepy.
Avanti!   Come in!
Direi di no.   I wouldn't say so/I don't think so.

An influential variant of prescriptive equivalence is the 'dynamic equivalence' of the eminent Bible translator Eugene Nida. This is based on the 'principle of equivalent effect', the principle that 'the relationship between receptor and message should be substantially the same as that which existed between the original receptors and the message' (Nida 1964: 159). Nida's view has real attractions. As we shall suggest throughout the book, there are all sorts of good reasons why a translator might not want to translate a given expression literally. A case in point is communicative translation, which may be said to be an example of 'dynamic equivalence' (cf. Nida 1964: 166: 'That is just the way we would say it'). However, there is a danger that trainee translators might see 'dynamic equivalence' as giving *carte blanche* for excessive freedom – that is, freedom to write more or less anything as long as it sounds good and does reflect, however tenuously, something of the ST message content. This danger is a very real one, as translation tutors will confirm. It is in fact a symptom of theoretical problems contained in the very notion of 'equivalent effect', most notably the normative ones.

To begin with, who is to *know* what the relationship between ST

message and source-culture receptors is? For that matter, is it plausible to speak of *the* relationship, as if there were only one: are there not as many relationships as there are receptors? And who is to know what such relationships can have been in the past? *L'inferno*, *Pinocchio*: each is, and has been, different things to different people in different places – and indeed, different to the same person at different times. In any case, few texts have a *single* effect even in one reading by one person; the more literary the text, the less likely this is. And these problems apply as much to the TT as to the ST: Who is to foresee the relationships between the TT and its receptors?

All this suggests that, the more normative the use of 'equivalence', the more the term risks being taken to imply 'sameness'. Indeed, it is used in this way in logic, sign-theory and mathematics. In mathematics, an equivalent relationship is one that is objective, incontrovertible and, crucially, reversible. In translation, however, such unanimity and reversibility are unthinkable for any but the very simplest of texts – and even then, only in terms of literal meaning. For example, if 'Mi piace questo vino' translates as 'I like this wine', will **back-translation** (that is, translating a TT into the SL) automatically give 'Mi piace questo vino', or will it give 'Questo vino mi piace'? The answer depends on *context* – both the context of the ST utterance and that of the TT utterance. The fact is that the simplest of contexts is usually enough to inhibit the reversibility that is crucial to equivalence in the mathematical sense.

Insofar as the principle of equivalent effect implies 'sameness' or is used normatively, it seems to be more of a hindrance than a help, both theoretically and pedagogically. Consequently, when we spoke of an 'equivalent target culture situation', we were not using 'equivalent' in a sense specific to any particular translation theory; we were using it in its everyday sense of 'counterpart' – something different, but with points of resemblance in relevant aspects. This is how the term will be used in this book.

We have found it more useful, both in translating and in teaching translation, to avoid an absolutist ambition to *maximise sameness* between ST and TT, in favour of a relativist ambition to *minimise difference:* to look, not for what is to be put into the TT, but for what

one might save from the ST. There is a vital difference between the two ambitions. The aim of maximising sameness encourages the belief that, floating somewhere out in the ether, there is the 'right' translation, the TT that is 'equivalent' to the ST, at some ideal half-way point between SL bias and TL bias. But it is more realistic, and more productive, to start by admitting that, because SL and TL are fundamentally different, the transfer from ST to TT *inevitably* entails difference – that is, loss.

It is helpful here to draw an analogy with 'energy loss' in engineering. The transfer of energy in any machine necessarily involves energy loss. Engineers do not see this as a theoretical anomaly, but simply as a practical problem that they confront by striving to design more efficient machines, in which energy loss is reduced. We shall give the term **translation loss** to the incomplete replication of the ST in the TT – that is, the inevitable loss of textually and culturally relevant features. By 'culturally relevant' features, we mean features that are specific to the SL and the source culture and which make the ST what it is. The term 'translation loss' is intended to suggest that translators should not agonise over the loss, but should concentrate on 'reducing' it – that is, controlling and channelling it.

Admittedly, the analogy with energy loss is imperfect: whereas energy loss is a loss (or rather, a diversion) of energy, translation loss is not a loss *of* translation, but a loss *in* the translation process. It is a loss *of* textual effects. Further, since these effects cannot be quantified, neither can the loss. So, when trying to 'reduce' it, the translator never knows how far there is still to go. Despite the limitations of the analogy, however, we have found it practical for translating and teaching. Once the concept of inevitable translation loss is accepted, a TT that is not, even in all important respects, a replica of the ST is not a theoretical anomaly, and the translator can concentrate on the realistic aim of channelling translation loss, rather than the unrealistic one of seeking the 'right' TT. Indeed, one of the attractions of the notion is that it frees translators actually to exploit translation loss – to introduce any loss, however major, that enables them to implement the strategy fully. Quite apart from any

need for compensation in actually doing the translation, the brief itself may require a gist translation, or an exegetic translation, or an adaptation for children or immigrants, or for the stage or radio, and so on.

In sum, as we shall see throughout the course, translation loss is only to be regretted when it prevents successful implementation of the translator's strategy, that is, if it means the TT is not fit for purpose.

Using the term 'loss' rather than, for instance, 'difference' may seem unduly negative. It is indeed meant to be negative, but constructively so. The danger in talking of 'translation difference' is that 'difference' might be understood in a trivial sense: 'Of course the ST and TT are different – just look at them, one's in Italian and the other in English'. 'Loss' is more likely to direct attention to the *relation between* ST and TT as terms in a system of relationships, rather than to the texts themselves (cf. 'just look at them') as static, substantial, autonomous entities. Crucially, 'loss' is a reminder that, if you are reading a translation of *Il Gattopardo*, you are not reading *Il Gattopardo*, you are reading a reading of it.

A few very simple examples, at the level of the sounds and literal meanings of individual words, will be enough to show some of the forms translation loss can take and what its implications are for the translator.

There is translation loss even at the most elementary level. For instance, true SL–TL homonymy rarely occurs, and rhythm and intonation are usually different as well. So, in most contexts, 'cane' and 'dog' will be synonyms, and there will be no loss in literal meaning in translating one with the other. But 'cane' and 'dog' sound different: there is phonic and prosodic translation loss. Of course, in a veterinary textbook, this loss does not matter. But if the ST word is part of an alliterative pattern in a literary text or, worse, if it rhymes, the loss could be crucial; it depends on the purpose of the translation.

Even if the ST word has entered the TL as a loanword (e.g. 'allegretto', 'chiaroscuro'), using it in the TT entails translation loss in at least two ways. English-speakers pronounce 'allegretto' differ-

ently from Italians; so using it in an English TT involves loss on the phonic level. In any case, 'allegretto' still sounds somewhat foreign in English, despite its long use as a musical term, so that using it in an English TT introduces a touch of foreignness that is not present in an Italian ST, and thereby loses the cultural neutrality of the ST expression. These losses will virtually never matter, of course. Indeed, in a spoken TT, pronouncing 'allegretto' in an authentic Italian fashion could actually increase the translation loss, not reduce it: on top of the lexical foreignness (absent in the ST), it might increase the phonic foreignness (also absent in the ST) and introduce a comic pretentiousness, which, again, is completely absent in the ST. In some contexts, this translation loss could well matter rather a lot.

In the opposite sort of case, where the ST contains a TL expression (e.g. 'box' in an Italian ST), loss may occur due to ambiguity. Take the product 'box bambini' sold by an Italian online company. In English, the juxtaposition of 'box' and 'children' would be unclear. Beyond suggesting some kind of container, there is no immediate link either lexically or semantically. The standard equivalent for the same object in current English is 'playpen', which would be used when transferring the ST 'box' in this context. The loss here is flagrant, due to the use of a different word, but it is completely insignificant. However, we would not say, as an Italian might, 'Metti il bambino nel box' (Put the child in the box), which is not only confusing, but has unpleasant implications. The problem – such as it is – arises from the narrowing of the meaning of 'box', once transplanted into Italian.

A similar example with 'box' is the use in Italian (and other languages as a loanword) to mean 'a garage': adverts in Italian refer to 'box auto' for sale or rent. The use of 'box' in the auto context in English is normally associated with products for use with cars, not garages. Thus, 'Vado a mettere la macchina nel box' (I'll put the car in the garage) incurs a similar translation loss.

The use of 'exotic' terms from a third language used in the ST (e.g. from Latin, used in a legal context in either Italian or English) results in a translation loss where the same form is not directly transferable between the ST and TT; depending on context, the solution in such cases may be a gloss or exegetic translation to explain the concept.

Loanwords from a third language often result in translation loss. French loanwords are relatively common in Italian, but these same items may not be current in English, or have the same value. For example, the word 'défaillance' (which is usually written in Italian without the acute accent on the first vowel) is used in both French and Italian to signal a failure of some kind, commonly in sport and medicine. An Italian cross-country rally report (source: www.acisportitalia.it – Campionato Italiano Cross Country Rally 2014) runs: '… non sappiamo bene a cosa imputare la defaillance che sta rallentando la nostra corsa', referring to a series of technical problems that has hit the rally team. Given that the French word is not in common use in English, the TT requires adaptation ('technical problems') to render the meaning. This solution results in a loss of exoticism and economy compared with the ST.

As this example suggests, it is important to recognise that, even where the TT is more explicit, precise, economical or vivid than the ST, this difference is still a case of translation loss. Some authorities refer to such differences as 'translation gains'. It is certainly true that the following TTs, for example, can be said to be more grammatically economical, sometimes even more elegant and easier to say, than their STs. But these so-called 'gains' are by the same token grammatical, phonic or prosodic failures to replicate the ST structures, and are therefore by definition instances of translation loss:

ST	TT
Portamonete.	Purse.
Imposta sul valore aggiunto.	Value added tax.
Exchange equalisation fund.	Fondo rettificativo.
Multiple re-entry visa.	Visto multiplo.
Blind in one eye.	Guercio.

Conversely, if we reverse these columns, we have a set of TTs that are perhaps clearer, more precise or more vivid than their STs: these

TTs, too, all show translation loss, because the ST structures have been violated:

ST	TT
Purse.	Portamonete.
Value added tax.	Imposta sul valore aggiunto.
Fondo rettificativo.	Exchange equalisation fund.
Visto multiplo.	Multiple re-entry visa.
Guercio.	Blind in one eye.

If translation loss is inevitable even in translating single words, it is obviously going to feature at more complex levels as well – in respect of connotations, for example, or of sentence-structure, discourse, language variety and so on. There is no need to give examples just now: some will arise in Practical 2, and plenty more later on, chapter by chapter, as we deal with these and other topics. For the moment, all we need do is point out that, if translation loss is inevitable, the challenge to the translator is not to eliminate it, but to control and channel it by deciding which features, in a given ST, it is most important to respect, and which can most legitimately be sacrificed in respecting them. The translator has always to be asking, and answering, such questions as: Does it *matter* if 'I like this wine' does not reflect the nuance between 'Mi piace questo vino' and 'Questo vino mi piace'? Does it matter that 'box' is exotic in Italian and not in English or if 'È nato con la camicia' is phonically, rhythmically, grammatically, lexically and metaphorically completely different from 'He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth'? There is no once-and-for-all answer to questions such as these. Everything depends on the purpose of the translation and on what the role of the textual feature is in its context. Sometimes a given translation loss will matter a lot, sometimes little. Whether the final decision is simple or complicated, it does have to be made, every time, and the translator is the one who has to make it.

Practical 2

2.1 Translation loss

Assignment 1

(i) You have been commissioned to translate for publication in English the book from which the following ST is taken. Discuss the strategic decisions that you have to take before starting detailed translation of this extract from the ST, and outline and justify the strategy you adopt.
(ii) Translate the text into English.
(iii) Paying special attention to cases where you managed to reduce significant translation loss, discuss the main decisions of detail you took, explaining what the loss was and how you reduced it.

Contextual information

The text is taken from 'La cucina aristocratica napoletana' by Franco Santasilia di Torpino, published by Sergio Civita Editore (1988), which provides recipes and anecdotes about historic aristocratic cuisine in Naples. The term 'Monzù' is a corruption of the French 'Monsieur', and referred to the chefs working for the Bourbon aristocracy and the court.

ST

Monzù Aquilino lavorava esclusivamente se coadiuvato da almeno due "sguàtteri" (termine napoletano per indicare gli aiutocuochi), perché le sue mani preziose e creative non potevano essere con-

taminate dalle operazioni di pulizia di piatti e pentole. Egli si era formato alla scuola dei cuochi di Casa Savoia, nel Palazzo Reale di Napoli e si rese celebre per un segreto culinario che mi ha stupefatto per la sua raffinatezza: eseguiva un brodo perfetto con le modalità più classiche e lo versava bollente nella zuppiera. Prima di servirlo, sospendeva per il collo con uno spago un pollo ruspante perfettamente arrostito, rosolato e croccante e lo immergeva lentamente nel brodo due volte, per poi estrarlo edliminarlo! Veniva così servito un brodo sublime con un retrogusto di pollo arrosto. Grandezza dei Monzù!

Assignment 2

(i) You have been asked to translate the following text into English. Assume that the text in English will appear on a tourist information website and that you are translating the text before the event takes place.
(ii) Before translating, predict the main words and phrases that you feel will be most challenging and explain why.
(iii) Translate the text into English.
(iv) After translating, compare your items in (ii) with the challenges that you eventually encountered in the translation. Were these the same or different?

Contextual information

The text is an extract taken from 'Autunno ad alta quota e all'insegna del gusto' by Luca Romano, which appeared on the website of the Italian daily *Il Giornale* in September 2013, in the 'Viaggi' section.

Dal 21 settembre al 6 ottobre 45 rifugi delle Dolomiti rimarranno aperti oltre la data consueta di chiusura. La stagione in alta quota viene prolungata all'insegna delle bellezze naturalistiche delle Dolomiti, Patrimonio

Naturale dell'Umanità, e del gusto: agli escursionisti sarà infatti offerta la possibilità di abbinare una bella camminata godendo dell'incanto della montagna nel suo vestito autunnale, ad un pasto tipico della tradizione enogastronomica trentina. […]

Con la pancia piena e il palato appagato, potrete godere delle suggestioni autunnali delle Dolomiti: per questa edizione de "I rifugi del gusto", i gestori delle strutture hanno confezionato una proposta vacanza molto vantaggiosa.

2.2 Degrees of freedom; translation loss

Assignment

(i) Which of the following TL proverbs incurs the least translation loss of the proverb 'Chi tardi arriva male alloggia'?

(a) Beggars can't be choosers.
(b) The early bird catches the worm.
(c) First come first served.

(ii) Translate the text below, then analyse any translation loss incurred in your translations, and the implications arising.

Contextual information

The text is from *Outlet Italia – Viaggio nel Paese in svendita*, by Aldo Cazzullo, Mondadori, 2007, p.89; Cazzullo is a journalist writing about how progress has affected Italian society. In this short passage, he focuses on Rome.)

Il ristorante, la trattoria, l'osteria, la pizzeria sono luoghi importanti dell' identità romana. Un tempo li si trovava a Trastevere, dove accade ancora di consumare ottimi pasti funestati però da venditori di carabattole di ogni tipo.