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## NARRATIVE AND ORALITY: A CASE STUDY

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### Abstract

Orality used as a discursive strategy in written texts is nothing new. However, it could be said to be one of the most promoted strategies in contemporary literary production. Through the analysis of Marco Malvaldi's novel *La briscola in cinque* and its translation into Spanish, by Juan Carlos Gentile Vitale, I will illustrate the process through which the elements that characterize orality (at least, conventionally) are translated from one language to another. Dialogism will be especially relevant to this study, as well as its expressivity, the role of dialect and its relationship with humor.

**Keywords:** Literary Translation. Dialect. Dialogism. Humor. Marco Malvaldi.



## 1. Introduction

Marco Malvaldi, while working as a Chemistry researcher at the University of Pisa, achieved instant success with the first novel he published, *La briscola in cinque* (2007), and his success has grown with his subsequent works. *La briscola in cinque* opens the (until now) pentalogy of the BarLume<sup>1</sup> and it is here in this bar, in the imaginary Tuscan village of Pineta, that the greater part of the action takes place.<sup>2</sup> It is a series of detective stories whose mysteries will be solved by Massimo, owner and waiter of the bar together with his veteran regular customers: four elderly gentlemen (one of whom is Massimo's grandfather) who chat, rant, argue, play cards and help unravel the crimes using colourful and informal language.

Italian book critics are in agreement that, more than the story in itself, or rather, in addition to the story, this pentalogy is characterized by the way in which language is used; how the story is told. If there is one thing that sets these novels apart, it is their communicative immediacy; for the bridge that is constantly built between the narrator, the characters and the readers. For this reason I consider the observation made by Goetsch to be very pertinent (1985: 218, *apud* Brumme 2012: 16) “that ‘feigned orality’ is part of the appellative function appropriate for fictional texts and is integrated, together with other strategies, in the general rhetorical resources of these” (my translation). Consequently, this appellative function will be the one that directs the strategies adopted when translating orality. Therefore, always bearing in mind that dialogism is the principal element in *La briscola in cinque* (together with the irony personified by the main character, Massimo and by the elderly

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1. It is followed by *Il gioco delle tre carte* (2008), *Il re dei giochi* (2010), *La carta più alta* (2012) and *Il telefono senza filo* (2014), all published by Sellerio. *La brisca de cinco* and *El juego de las tres cartas* were both translated into Spanish and published by Destino in 2012 and then re-edited as a trilogy together with *El rey de los juegos* in Círculo de Lectores in 2013. All these books have been translated by Juan Carlos Gentile Vitale.
  2. Juan Carlos Gentile Vitale explains in a note the wordplay contained in the name of the bar: “BarLume” means sparkle or glimmer as well as light. Written as one word, both forms of the word can be taken to be the name of the establishment: Bar Light Sparkle. (Malvaldi 2012:18)

gentlemen's cunning), it is easy to reflect on the translation of orality using this novel as a starting point, extracting examples to present the different aspects in this work.

## 2. Written Speech

It is well-known that orality is elusive in the written text and especially in literary texts that do not manage to imitate it faithfully (we would be faced, on the contrary, with a transcription, not a recreation). Written speech serves to filter many of the phenomena that characterize speaking (anacolutha, false starts, interruptions) and expedite the reading. Many designations have been given for this capture of the oral in the written word. We can begin with the *parlato-scritto* ('written speech') of Nencioni (1983: 175) or the concept of "fictional orality" defended by Brumme (2012: 33), understood as "the evocation of language of communicative immediacy in fictional texts, whether literary or audiovisual, distinguished by *daily* or real *orality*" (my translation). The definition "mimesis of orality" proposed by Narbona (2001) or López Serena (2007) is also often used, as is the "prefabricated orality" of Chaume (2004: 168) applied to audiovisual translation. From my point of view adjectives such as "simulated", "prefabricated" and even "fictional", although very revealing, still bear connotations of unnaturalness that do not convince me sufficiently: it is as though the very definition assumes the impossibility of transferring orality to a printed text and no matter that I myself began the present paragraph pointing to this impossibility, as Genette warned (1966: 156), all imitation is imperfect, because if it were not, it would not be an imitation. Therefore, Nencioni's wonderful oxymoron "written speech" is the best synthesis and is devoid of (pre)judgements.

Let us start from the premise that in the very action of reading a series of mental processes contribute to the enjoyment (in all the meanings of the word) of a piece of writing. The intonation, may I remind you, is an intrinsic element of orality. But when we read, although we make no sound, we do intone: we are helped by punctuation marks, the syntax and any possible indications the author might give us. Those of us engaged in the teaching of languages know that intonation is a sign of understanding: errors in emphasis are cognitive errors. Thus, the function of the dialogizing element in a novel is that we "hear" the different voices speaking (the appellative function that Goetsch (1985) referred to above: "hey, listen to my characters, they are speaking"): the greater the skill of the narrator, the greater authenticity and vocal plurality. That orality, written orality, is perceptible and analizable is indisputable, and we agree on the existence of features that allow us to recognise a written text

as “oral”, to begin with by the insertion of the dialogue or the monologue whether punctuated or not, or the use of resources such as parataxis, certain connectors, exclamations and so on, as well as the chosen lexical repertoire. As Narbona (2009: 116) stated (my translation):

[in] literature based on fiction it is also possible to feign all the modalities used in the language, including those belonging to prototypically colloquial orality (...) Such a literary experiment or experience, a highly risky one and not within everyone's reach, needs help from accomplices and seasoned readers, able to engage with ever more diversified texts and discursive genres.

It has often been repeated that if the translator is a privileged reader, it is possible to undertake this experiment without further ado, using the resources available in his or her language and within a series of conventions.

But why does the translation of orality appear to bring up a series of problems that do not arise in standard language? The expressive need of literature forces it to search for formulas to become as plausible as possible in the characterization of places, happenings and personages and this plausibility takes place, as far as Italian is concerned, when the *conventionally* (my italics) literary language is forsaken for what Coletti (1993: 357-363) has called “*il trionfo dell'italiano medio*”, the triumph of average Italian. Although the forsaking of what is conventionally literary is a recursive element in literary tradition (literature renews itself periodically surpassing what had been previously conventionally literary), let us say that today we should not be surprised to find speech written down: approximating speech belongs to the current literary convention. And we already have a tradition which, regarding the translation of this expressive modality, demands that under the present rules, written speech be translated as such and not as standard language, even though certain aspects (to be treated below) appear to be untransferable.

Hence, translated orality is a reality,<sup>3</sup> a reality that, furthermore, influences the new written orality in a stream of interferences. Antonelli (2006: 8) explains how young Italian authors do not look to the literary tradition of their country for inspiration: they look at the cinema and television for inspiration or at any rate, at Anglo-American narratives read in translation. Thus, translation becomes a route of literary exploration and contamination and clearly in Italian literature, the influence of neorealism in respect of the dialogues through the experiments with the use of dialects and a language that reflects how the characters would really speak was decisive, as was the

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3. And not only with regard to literatura: cfr. San Vicente and Morillas 2014.

absorption of American authors through the endeavours of publishers, led by Vittorini (Turi 2011).

Brumme (2012: 47-48) mentions some works that document the linguistic change by way of translation and reminds us, for example, of the exemplary case of the translation into German of *The Catcher in the Rye* that signified a renovation of the literary system in the same way as it did in Italian. The register had to be widened to accommodate Holden's voice (Morillas 2008). Gradually then, orality marks have become more common in translations. Brumme herself (2012: 229, my translation) points out in the conclusions to her work that a distinction must be made

between the resources that are new and therefore, break conventional rules in the source culture and those that are to a greater or lesser extent, conventional (...) In this sense, it is understood that a first translation of a ground-breaking work may require, once the innovations are accepted in the target culture, a new and more daring version than the one presented originally. It must not be forgotten that the schema between the conditions of creation and reception adjusts to the sociocultural conditions of each era and literary language undergoes transformations over time. Thus, some resources, albeit novel at one time, can become generalised.

We could therefore state that today, although we are translating works that use colloquial structures for the first time, we are not translating colloquial language for the first time.

### Question of Syntax

To sum up simply then, conversation and humour are the two characteristics that define *La briscola in cinque* (and, I insist, the rest of the pentalogy). As I have mentioned, the tone of the novel is basically colloquial-informal. This desire to achieve colloquiality shows itself in various ways in *La briscola in cinque*, which we see below and already the beginning of the book is almost a statement of intent:

#### Example 1

Cuando empiezas a tambalearte sobre las piernas; cuando te enciendes otro cigarrillo para que pasen otros cinco minutos (aunque la garganta te arda y tengas la boca tan pastosa que parece que te hayas comido un neumático) y que así también los demás se enciendan uno y os quedéis ahí todavía un rato; en fin, cuanto todo eso ocurre, ha llegado verdaderamente la hora de irse a la cama.

Eran las cuatro y diez de la mañana en pleno agosto y tres chicos estaban de pie junto a un Micra verde. Habían bebido más de lo estrictamente necesario; el propietario del Micra, más que los otros, que trataban de convencerlo de que no condujera. (11).<sup>4</sup>

We need no explicit indicator to realise that the voice of the first paragraph is not the same voice as the speaker in the second paragraph (or, at least that is how I interpret it). In the first paragraph we have a long sentence that expresses the thoughts of one of the youths who are all about to go home and are plucking up courage before taking that step. Through this interior monologue (these are plentiful all through the novel and we shall see another in Example 6) an empathic relationship with the facts being recounted is established because the reader has the possibility of first-hand knowledge of the main character's thoughts and can feel with them. We could elevate the statement contained in the sentence to an axiom, one could say gnomic, through use of the present, that establishes an impersonal and dialogic second person singular *you* that involves readers who can almost feel their own tottery legs as if they were part of the group featuring in the action.

In the second paragraph a new voice, that of the narrator, confirms that the youths are tipsy. Let us imagine that this is a male narrator whom we could identify as the author of the novel. He is the omniscient narrator who, by including that "more than strictly necessary" forsakes an aseptic description to endow the narration with subjectivity (one of the inherent features of dialogism) and establish a relationship of complicity and camaraderie with the readers. We find dialogicity in the very dialogue and we also find it in utterances such as we have just seen, that show a will to establish a more direct contact, to shorten the distance between the writer and the reader.

Other features of dialogism, or conversation if one prefers, contribute to add a colloquial tone to the text (alluding only to some features): the presence of anaphoras, repetitions, juxtaposed and coordinated sentences. In the first paragraph we also find a parenthetical sentence, a concessive that includes an exaggerated comparison, typical of dialogue language. It adds another element to describe the situation bringing the narration closer to the ground of intersubjectivity.

Consequently, in these first lines of *La briscola in cinque* the tone of the novel is set (and will be maintained throughout the whole book): the pitch that will mark the relations between the characters, the omniscient narrator

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4. The number in brackets refers to the page of the book cited.

and the reading public. If the sound track of horror films plays an important role in maintaining tension in the spectator, in the text under review, verbal strategies, close to the idea of orality that Malvaldi uses, are looking to make it clear that a) the connection to be made with the reader is an informal and cordial one and b) humour will be present throughout the work that upholds the informality referred to. Or, to put it another way: Malvaldi proposes an easy read of an easy book.

But what we have seen, in fact, is the beginning of *La brisca de cinco*, not that of *La briscola in cinque*, which we shall look at below, contrasting the original text with its Spanish translation (by Juan Carlos Gentile Vitale as we have mentioned), the English translation (by Howard Curtis) and finally the back translation of the Spanish translation, so that we can appreciate what type of correspondence is established between the texts. I have opted to begin by citing the translation because under normal circumstances, this would be the choice of a reader who does not read Italian and their idea of Malvaldi's writing would be that suggested by the translation.

The tone marked by the author will also determine, obviously (or at least should do so), the translation strategies employed, which in this case must accommodate the colloquiality that appears to be inherent in the narration or that, as we have just seen, at least is present in the translation.

### Example 1 bis

Quando cominci a ciondolarti sulle gambe, quando ti accendi un'altra sigaretta per far passare altri cinque minuti anche se hai la gola che ti brucia e la bocca talmente impastata da credere di aver mangiato un copertone, così anche gli altri se ne accendono una e si sta lì ancora un po', insomma quando è così è veramente ora di andare a letto.

Erano le quattro e dieci di mattina, in pieno agosto, e tre ragazzi stavano in piedi accanto a una Micra verde. Avevano bevuto più dello stretto necessario, il proprietario della Micra più degli altri. Altri che ora stavano cercando di convincerlo a non guidare. (13)

Cuando empiezas a tambalearte sobre las piernas; cuando te enciendes otro cigarillo para que pasen otros cinco minutos (aunque la garganta te arda y tengas la boca tan pastosa que parece que te hayas comido un neumático) y que así también los demás se enciendan uno y os quedéis ahí todavía un rato; en fin, cuanto todo eso ocurre, ha llegado verdaderamente la hora de irse a la cama.

Eran las cuatro y diez de la mañana en pleno agosto y tres chicos estaban de pie junto a una Micra verde. Habían bebido más de lo estrictamente necesario; el propietario del Micra, más que los otros, que trataban de convencerlo de que no condujera. (11)



When you start swaying on your legs, when you light another cigarette to kill five more minutes even though your throat is stinging and your mouth is so furred up you feel like you've eaten a tarpaulin, and then the others also light cigarettes and linger a while longer— when all that happens, then it really is time to go home to bed.

It was ten after four in the morning, in the middle of August, and three young men were standing next to a green Nissan Micra. They had all drunk more than was strictly necessary, the owner of the Micra more than the others, and the others were now trying to persuade him not to drive. (15)

When you begin to feel tottery on your legs; when you light up another cigarette to while away another five minutes (even though your throat is burning and your mouth feels as if you had eaten a rubber tyre) and all the others light up as well and you hang around for a while longer; when this happens it is really time to go to bed.

It was ten minutes past four in the morning in the middle of August and the three youths were standing next to a green Micra. They had drunk more than was strictly necessary; the owner of the Micra more than the others who were trying to dissuade him from driving. [Back translation of the Spanish translation]

As Narbona Jiménez insists (2001: 195), “It is clear that the degree of colloquiality reached depends basically on the syntactic patterns used” (my translation). Perhaps this is what is first noticed in this fragment in which syntax is the most defining element, and not the vocabulary used as happens in other parts of the novel. Let us look, for example, at how punctuation marks change from the ST to the MT or in how typical discursive markers in colloquial language, like *insomma* (Flores Acuña 2003), are translated. But the changes produced in punctuation, mentioned already, and which serve to help us find a suitable intonation when we read, may change the rhythm of the narration slightly (faster in Spanish from my point of view while the Italian reproduces the slowness typical of alcoholic impairment) but not the tone of the narration. Or, in other words, and this is the reflection I wished to make with the first example, neither structures nor isolated elements are translated. What needs to be translated is a climate, a verbal atmosphere, if I may use the expression.

#### 4. Question of Expressiveness

The writer who introduces dialogicity with all its possible deviations from the rules, and uses it as a literary tool, a decorative element or creator of atmosphere and more often than not as a characterising feature of his personages, evokes, or if we prefer, recreates an atmosphere and communicative situation that will familiarise readers with the places and inhabitants of the narrative universe during the reading. At the same time, and when the idiosyncrasy of a particular character is unique, it will produce a period of alienation as the reading public will have to accustom themselves to the expressive manner

of the personage, to his or her idiolect until they are able to identify them. (The success of Camilleri and his Montalbano saga, for example, lies in this identification of the personage and his speech as does the success of Malvaldi and his pentalogy of BarLume). And that which at the beginning is the most unfamiliar for readers is precisely and paradoxically, that which will help them to come closer to the world of fiction. In these cases one may talk of a familiarising alienation.

## Example 2

– E il caffè?  
 – No me l'ha fatto.  
 – Non te l'ha fatto? E perché?  
 – Dice che è troppo caldo.  
 – Ma saranno cazzi mia se è troppo caldo o no per bere il caffè? Già che c'è quel cauterio della mi' figlia a contammi le sigarette, ora anche il barrista ci si mette a preoccupassi della mi' salute? Ora mi sente!!  
 Ampelio Viviani, anni 82, ferroviere in pensione, discreto ex ciclista dilettante e incontestato trionfatore della gara di moccoli introdotta (ufficiosamente) all'interno della festa dell'Unità di Navacchio per ventisei anni consecutivi dal 1956, si alza fieramente con l'ausilio del bastone e si dirige garibaldino verso il bar.  
 -Guardalì com'è partito stavolta, sembra Ronaldo!  
 -Per come regge il bastone? (21)

– ¿Y el café?  
 – No me lo ha puesto.  
 – ¿No te lo ha puesto? ¿Por qué?  
 – Dice que hace demasiado calor.  
 – ¡Es problema mío si hace demasiado calor para tomar un café! ¡Ya tengo bastante con la pelmaza de mi hija contándome los cigarrillos, ahora también el camarero se preocupa por mi salud! ¡Me va a oír!  
 Ampelio Viviani, ochenta y dos años, ferroviario jubilado, discreto ex ciclista aficionado e indiscutible triunfador del concurso de palabrotas (extraoficial) de la fiesta de L'Unità\* del municipio de Navacchio durante veintiséis años consecutivos, desde 1956, se levanta furiosamente con auxilio del bastón y se encamina, garibaldino, hacia el bar.  
 –¡Mira cómo ha acelerado esta vez, parece Ronaldo!  
 –¿Por cómo sostiene el garrote? (19)

\*Nombre con el que se conoce a los festivales organizados periódicamente en numerosos municipios de Italia primero por el Partido Comunista Italiano, después por el Partido Democrático de la Izquierda y finalmente por los Demócratas de Izquierdas y que debe su nombre al periódico *L'Unità*. (N. del T.)

“What about my coffee?”

“He didn’t make one.”

“He didn’t make one? Why?”

“He says it’s too hot.”

“What do I care if it’s too hot or not to drink coffee? As if it isn’t enough my daughter counting the cigarettes I smoke, now the barman starts worrying about my health? Let me deal with him!”

Ampelio Viviani, 82 years old, retired railroader, decent former amateur cyclist and uncontested winner of the cursing competition held (unofficially) as part of the *Unità* festival at Navacchio from 1956 for twenty-six consecutive years, gets proudly to his feet with the help of his stick and heads boldly for the bar.

“Look at him go, he looks like Ronaldo!”

“It must be the way he holds his stick!”  
(22-23)

- And the coffee?

- Hasn’t made it for me.

- Hasn’t made it for you? Why not?

- Says its too hot.

- It’s my problem if it’s too hot to drink coffee! I’ve got enough on my plate with that nuisance of a daughter of mine counting my cigarettes without the waiter worrying about my health! They are going to get a few words from me.

Ampelio Viviani, eighty-two years old, retired railwayman, middling ex-amateur cyclist and undisputed winner of the extra-official cussing contest in the *L’Unità*\* festival in Navacchio for twenty-six years running, since 1956, stood up furiously with the help of his stick and walked impetuously towards the bar.

- Look at him running, looks like Ronaldo!

- From the way he’s holding his stick? (19)

\* Name of the festivals held periodically in many municipalities in Italy, first organised by the Italian Communist Party, then by the Democratic Left Party and finally by the Left-wing Democrats. They owe their name to the newspaper *L’Unità* (N. of T) [Back translation of the Spanish translation]

This is the presentation of Ampelio, Massimo’s grandfather: Massimo, his grandson, does not want to serve him a coffee, not because it might not agree with his grandfather but because it is too hot to be bothered to make it. For twenty-six years running Ampelio has won the Navacchio cussing competition. Remember this piece of information. However, we are at the beginning of the novel and we have yet to see Ampelio in all his glory. Perhaps for this reason the translation offered of *Ma saranno cazzi mia* (with that dialectal *mia*) is *Es problema mío* (‘It’s my problem’). And here we are entering the field of expressiveness and its different forms that constitute the essence of orality and therefore, of its translation.

Many previous analyses (Rojo López and Valenzuela Manzanares 2000; Soler Pardo 2013) have shown that when “fucking” has to be translated into Spanish, there is no statistical correspondence between ST and MT because, among other reasons, “fucking” often functions as a mere intensifier when placed before a noun. The same can be said of the very Italian expression *cazzi miei*, translatable in the majority of cases as “my business”, “my problem.”

The elucidation of this type of expression, commonly used in daily speech, diminishes the perception of the offensive term of the user or the hearer and at the same time, determines its translation which, although the expressive level may be reduced, usually corresponds (and I emphasise “usually”) to the frequency of use of one or another formula in one or another language. To put it another way: translating *saranno i cazzi mia* as “my problem” is an adequate translation both from the semantic and pragmatic points of view. In both cases the underlying message is “mind your own business and leave me in peace.” However, remember the information included in the description of the personage. In this case it would have been appropriate to add a little more emphasis to the translation, offering something like “And what the hell does it matter to him?” There is in fact a change of subject but that does stress the use of the swearword in favour of the cussing prestige of Ampelio, one of his characteristic features.

The use of a dialect as a catalyser and filter of vulgar language is very common. Among other things, the dialect serves to attenuate the stammers and stutters of certain utterances: it has a euphemistic function. Evidently, in *La briscola in cinque* we not only find swearwords in dialect (in this case Livornese vernacular) but since this is an expression of spoken, colloquial language, it will not be unusual to find utterances that use this, mixed with Italian. Malvaldi himself explained in an interview (Paloscia 2010, my translation) why he uses it:

I, on the other hand, only make the characters, who come from a social stratum that cannot express itself in any other way, speak in the vernacular, like three of the four elderly detectives: Ampelio, retired railwayman, Del Tacca, ex-local council employee and Rimediotti but not Aldo: he is an intellectual and speaks an elegant, out-moded Italian.

As Ricci (2013: 88) has stressed, it is normal that thrillers, because of their need to present themselves as a parodic or a reliable chronicle of reality, are full of syntactic and lexical features that aim to recreate colloquiality. Consequently, the dialogues are imbued with phrases in dialect that mark typical situations of the genre or that, as Malvaldi himself explains, determine the social stratum of a character. Although the perspectives of dialect undergo a process of adjustment, the identification dialect-social stratum is perpetuated in works of fiction, as is the generalised tendency to translate dialectal features using diastatic features.

Ricci, based on various studies, also (2013: 84) stresses how, in the *gialli* (whodunit) there is a greater presence of dialect than in other types of popular novels. And although the representation of the dialects is not always perfect,

she continues to explain, using the Italian-dialect bilingualism as a splash of colour to liven up the dialogues is almost the rule.

In the Spanish translation of *La brisca de cinco* we do not find a trace of the use of dialect, a trend in the majority of translations of the last decades (Brumme 2012: 44), although the marks of orality remain. The appellative *barista* for Massimo, that is someone who works in a *barre* ('bar') in the vernacular, is inevitably lost (although a "barrista" in Spanish could be someone who works behind a bar). As I have mentioned, as soon as the dialect becomes part of the dialogue, apart from serving to characterize the personages, it assumes an expressive and sentimental function that must not be neglected.

Rosa (2015: 5) makes use of the parameter "prestige" within the diastratic axis of language to identify the different strategies followed when translating orality. The normalization (or standardization), the centralization (moving to a more prestigious but not normalized discourse) and decentralization (when a less prestigious discourse is translated) are the three strategies that this author individualizes (Rosa 2015: 6). In this way, she emphasises, we may find a different communicative situation and be facing a variation in the degree of prestige of the language used. In the case of *La brisca de cinco* and the (non) translation of the dialect, strictly speaking we cannot talk of normalization. As the dialect belongs to an informal speech context, we should refer to a process of centralization: we are still in the sphere of the colloquial but we have forsaken the dialect and its implications. For the third option, that of decentralization, we have the example of the translation of the word *bastone* for which there are two equivalents in Example 1, 'bastón' [cane] and 'garrote' [stick]. The second option immediately refers to a rural environment through its village-elderly person-rusticity chain of images.

## 5. Question of the sentimental encyclopedia

There are other features in this example connected with orality (I am deliberately leaving aside questions such as repetitions, syntactic inversions etc.) that are also connected with expressing feelings, features present in both the dialogue and in the purely descriptive part that, together with the subjectivity and the affectivity, involve the reader.

Alongside the profanities that are typical of a casual conversation and the use of dialect, we discover references to a common shared experience on which the sentimental encyclopedia of the protagonists (the adjective *garibaldino*, *L'Unità* festivals, Ronaldo) is built. This shared experience, which is what allows communication between persons, or in this case between personages, is as difficult to transfer as the dialect (that appears to merit, I insist "bula" [licence for

not translating]), or even more so, when it is considered that the new recipient public of the text do not share or participate in this sentimental encyclopaedia. For this reason Malvaldi's Spanish translator added a footnote to explain the *L'Unità* festivals. I believe (and anyone who has had to explain cultural aspects in a footnote will agree with me) that to explain the political, historical, traditional and culinary implications of *L'Unità* festivals in a few words is difficult. Hence the translator chose to describe them dispassionately from the historical point of view more than the sentimental, to avoid becoming part of the dialogue himself (since footnotes can interfere with the development of the narrative).

The reference to Ronaldo needed no explanation, nor did the adjective *garibaldino*, with its connotations of audacity, impulsiveness and rebellion that are included in Italian dictionaries. These connotations are also easily understood by a reader of Spanish although the Spanish Royal Academy's dictionary (DRAE) does not, for example, include the lemma "garibaldino."

Cultural elements are not, evidently, exclusive to orality. But we have all taken part at some time or other in a conversation about something or someone who we do not know and we feel out of place. In this sense the work of the translator in *La brisca de cinco* has been to make sure that no reader is left out of the conversation. But when too many elements have to be explained it is easy to lose interest in the narrative because the conversation is interrupted. Hence, writers who are aware that the world is both large and small at once will try to administer the excessively idiosyncratic elements in small doses and translators will try not to introduce too many footnotes even though the editor has said nothing about this (I do not know if this was the case here). This could be why Juan Carlos Gentile Vitale adds an amplification on certain occasions (see below example 3 among others) or substitutes one reference for another instead of using a footnote (example 4) so that the reading does not suffer unwanted interruptions.

### Example 3

(...) Somigliava vagamente a Guccini, a proprio agio su quel piazzale come Fvancesco [sic] sul palco. (...) (34-35)

He had a vague resemblance to the singer Francesco Guccini, and seemed as much at ease in that parking lot as Francesco did on stage. (34)

(...) Tenía un vago parecido al cantante Francesco Guccini, y estaba tan en su salsa en aquella explanada como Guccini en el escenario. (...) (34-35)

(...) He looked vaguely like the singer Francesco Guccini, and he was at home on that esplanade as Guccini on stage. [Back translation of the Spanish translation]

## Example 4

Massimo rientrò al bar e fu accolto da una festosa ovazione dei vecchietti.  
-Alla grazia di Derrick! (118)

When Massimo got back to the bar, he was greeted by a cheerful ovation from the old-timers.  
“Three cheers for Sherlock Holmes!” (103)

Massimo regresó al bar, donde fue acogido por una festiva ovación de los viejecitos.  
-¡A la salud de Sherlock! (122)

Massimo went back into the bar and was greeted with a joyous ovation from the old gentlemen.  
-Cheers to Sherlock! [Back translation of the Spanish translation]

The greeting formula *alla grazia di* is typical of Tuscany and exhibits the pleasure with which the elderly gentlemen receive Massimo, comparing him with Derrick, the protagonist of a popular German television series shown in Italy. The substitution of Derrick by Sherlock speeds up the narrative and since we are not dealing with an “autochthonous” cultural element, the change is justified by the author’s and the translator’s desire to maintain the liveliness of the discourse. In Example 3 the information that Guccini is a singer and his first name is added to give first-time readers of the novel sufficient information to research his type of music or his personal appearance.

In Example 5, however, the substitution is different. Malvaldi (or the narrator of his work) calls the elderly grandads *senato*. Although the visual representation of this term in Italian is immediate –I believe– this is not the case in Spanish as the image that comes to mind is more of the Senate Chamber of Parliament and not a group of venerables pondering over a matter. In the Spanish version we read ‘Imserso’, that immediately refers to the state organised holidays for senior citizens, akin to Saga Holidays in the United Kingdom. (I confess that this translation perplexes me somewhat.) We could understand this change as a humouristic resource that looks for the readers’ immediate comprehension, precisely through the familiarising alienation (Is there such a thing as Imserso in Italy?) or the visual representation of pensioners. Let us look at one of the recurrences:

### Example 5

(...) Il senato, fuori all'ombra del tiglio grande, stava giocando a canasta e quindi non faceva casino come al solito, una volta tanto. (...) (120)

The senate was outside in the shade of the big lime tree, playing canasta and so not kicking up the usual fuss, for once in a while. (106)

(...) Fuera, a la sombra del tilo grande, el Imsero jugaba a la canasta, por lo que, por una vez, no armaba follón como de costumbre. (...) (126)

(...) Outside in the shade of the big lime-tree the Saga Holidays Club was playing canasta and for once were not making their normal rumpus. [Back translation of the Spanish translation]

## 6. Question of Character

I have mentioned the conventionality in which the representation of orality is inserted, and in which there are a series of linguistic mechanisms that make us realise we are before a text of one type or characteristics, and not of another as in Example 1 where it was clear that the intention was to represent the colloquial. It is what Freunek (2007: 28-30 *apud* Brumme 2012: 29-30) calls “evocation” and is what allows us to recognise orality when it is presented in written form. Cadera (2011: 42) has also borrowed this concept and explains it thus:

the evocation refers to the effect emerging from the interpretative potential of the reader of resources of feigned orality. The inclusion and implication of these resources in the literary discourse will determine whether the language convinces the reader and therefore, evokes aspects of orality.

Just as there is a convention in the evoking of orality, there are conventions in the translation of written speech. It is, for example, what allows the translation of “fucking” as ‘puto’ or ‘jodido’, a deviation of the pragmatic norm that has become a norm itself (Rodríguez Medina 2005: 271), or what allows us to find exclamations such as “¡Diablos!” (‘What the hell!’):



## Example 6

Boia de'. Non si respira dal caldo. Te guarda per questo affettaminchia del Fusco mi vado a chiappare la madre di tutte le insolazioni, accidenti alla sua di madre, quel tegamaccio marcio senza manico. Questo era tutto quello a cui Massimo era in grado di pensare, mentre andava verso il commissariato. (66)

Damn. Can't breathe in this heat. Look at me, for that pain in the ass Fusco I'm going to catch the mother of all sunstrokes, damn him, and his mother for good measure. This was all Massimo was able to think as he walked to the station. (58)

¡Diablos! El calor no te deja respirar. Ya verás que por culpa de ese pichafloja de Fusco me voy a pillar la madre de todas las insolaciones, me cago en su puta madre, esa sartén sin mango. Esto era todo lo que Massimo estaba en condiciones de pensar mientras se dirigía a la comisaría. (67)

Damn! The heat doesn't let you breathe. You'll see that it will be the fault of that limp dick Fusco if I get the mother and father of sunstrokes. Fuck him and her mother, such as handleless pan That was all Massimo was able to think about as he made his way to the police station. [Back translation of the Spanish translation]

*Boia de'* is an exclamation typical of the Livornese dialect, an emphatic and blasphemous wild card that has no immediately equivalent expression in Spanish. Aja Sánchez (2011) quite rightly insists on the pragmatic value of exclamations while Spitzer (1922: 67), on his part, underlines that "they show the humour and will announce the frame of mind of the speaker before the message is actually formulated" (my translation). And, as if the translator had taken these statements into consideration, he has opted for an idiosyncratic expression that evokes the orality and the situation. He has opted for the expression '¡Diablos!'. We now have before us a translation that makes use of a typical expression in oral literary language, translated as the equivalent of another expression typical of oral language. We could say that here the translation is neither a mimesis nor a copy. It is a caricature, a caricature that underlines the features of the element characterized – the orality represented in writing.

The question is that when translating a written-spoken discourse, we go from its representation on the written page to its oral representation in order to be able to capture it once again on the written page in an endless game of orality/writing. What would we say in "real life" in our language in Massimo's situation? What oral representation would we make of his comment in our language?

Together with this exclamation (although it appears in the original without any exclamation mark) there is another expression that also seems

quite peculiar, *tegamaccio marcio senza manico*. To ascertain if this was one of Massimo's own inventions or an Italian idiom I resorted to Internet. Apart from the quote in Malvaldi's novel, I found references in few web sites (see for example Battista 2000) but with the same content: the expression appears in a text published in *Il Vernacoliere*, probably in the July 2000 number to judge by the publication date of the page I cite, a text (on the word *uccello*) that the web sites transcribe. *Il Vernacoliere* defines itself as a "humourous, disrespectful monthly satirical magazine published in Italian and the Livorno dialect." For those who are not familiar with it, it is a magazine similar to the Spanish *El Jueves*, the British *Private Eye* or the French *Charlie Hebdo*. It has a wide circulation in Tuscany, the region where Malvaldi lives and I wonder if by chance our author did not have a copy or a cutting from *Vernacoliere* at hand when he was searching for inspiration on the speech of his personages.

According to *Il Vernacoliere*, Catullus called Lesbia "o sine manubrio putridissima olla' (or *tegamaccio marcio senza manico*)" although for all my searching, no reference of this verse appears in the work of Catullus. *El Dizionario del lessico erotico* (Boggione and Casalegno 2004: 621) in turn confirms that the term *tegame* serves to designate both the male sexual organ and mainly the female organ (no trace of Catullus in the citations collected). In any event, and thanks to that *me cago en su puta madre* it is clear that police chief Fusco's mother lacks honorability in Massimo's eyes; as well as a whore, she is useless, a pan without a handle.

In the expressivity that characterizes this last example, we observe how the technique of compensation used by the translator is able to keep up the degree of irritation (and bad language) in Massimo's thoughts. The translation of vulgar and substandard language must not lose sight of the illocutionary force of the utterances (starting with that *tegamaccio* and ending with the thoroughbred verb *chiappare* or the imaginative *affettaminchia*), nor of the pragmatic context and linguistic creativity that characterizes them (Morillas 2012).

## 7. Conclusions

Throughout this work we have considered different aspects linked with translation of written speech on an ascending scale of translating difficulty, starting (Example 1) with the essential function of syntax in the representation of oral discourse and ending with the translation of profanities (Example 6).

The use of written speech and specifically of dialogism constitutes a fundamental resource to confer a specific inflexion on a literary work. In the case of *La briscola in cinque* the general tone is uninhibited, colloquial and establishes a conversation between friends with a desire to include the patrons of

BarLume as well as the reading public of their adventures in its cordial circle. The humour acts as the cohesive element between the story and the reading public/personages: expressivity (with the use of certain locutions and words) understood as an element generating empathy (through shared references) is a constant.

It is clear that Malvaldi's intention is to establish direct contact with the readers of his novel. The dialogism is plural and is not strictly limited to the dialogue: it consists of the commentaries of the different characters who talk between themselves and even to themselves and of the omniscient narrator. The main purpose is to tell a story and we know that a narrative cannot exist without a recipient and hence we must make a reference to the appellative function of the dialogue.

On the other hand it is clear that when we translate orality and we analyze its translation we cannot forget that the text is an aggregate and must be understood as such: as a whole in which the compensation technique is an excellent instrument for finding a balance between the elements of the original text that vary when they are transferred from one language to another. We must, furthermore, and I insist once more, bear in mind that it is a question of reproducing the timbre of the work, its communicative and pragmatic dimension and that in the analysis of translations, contrastive entomology is mean.

In the decisions made while translating, therefore, faced with a text such as the one that has served as an example, we must remember:

- a) the relationship established between the work and the reading public,
- b) the type of relation established between the personages,
- c) the characterization of the personages by their way of speaking (including the use of dialect),
- d) the importance of clearly defining the part of the emotional encyclopedia shared by the protagonists of the novel, which must also be shared by text receivers, and
- e) the pragmatic value of the different communicative situations assembled in the novel.

Lastly, we must accept the paradox that we are unable to think in written speech before we have read it, before we have recognised it in writing. In addition, when we do this, when the written speech is recognised there is an uncomfortable discord; although we wished to write orality, written is written and that is what we read. This paradox applies both to written speech and its translation.

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