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PLACING ITALIAN IDIOMS IN A FOREIGN MILIEU: A CASE STUDY

Jorge Leiva Rojo
Gloria Corpas Pastor
Universidad de Málaga

Abstract: Written literature is usually considered to be ideal for the study of phraseological units. Rossana Campo's novels are not just one more source to analyse the translation of phraseology, but a perfect combination of both written and spoken language: it is not possible to refer to her style without mentioning orality. She aptly reproduces in writing the typical conversational styles of Italian youngsters in a vivid, lively way. Campo's literary productions are an unmistakable mixture of inner thoughts, narrations and dialogues, all amalgamated with interjections, swearwords, and unfinished, chaotic discourses. Her novels include a variety of idioms, colloquialisms, informal turn-takings, and elaborate—but apparently spontaneous—conversational exchanges. Despite the key role that phraseology plays in Campo's writing, there is still a surprising scarcity of studies devoted to this topic. This paper sets out to explore the translation of phraseological units in *Mientras mi niña duerme*, the Spanish version of Rossana Campo's sixth novel, *Mentre la mia bella dorme* (1999). This paper is mainly concerned about the translation strategies applied to render the various aspects of meaning that a phraseological unit conveys in the foreign, social and cultural target community.

1. Rossana Campo, a conversation-novel master

Rossana Campo (Genoa, 1963) has been called by some critics, such as Walter Pedullà, as the only living Italian female writer that has a prominent sense of humour. Hers is a caustic, ironic and unpretentious writing—*unpretentious* in the sense of her writing not wanting the reader to see her writing proficiency, but showing disinterestedly an astonishing dominion of language. The language she uses is direct, hasty, almost a transcription of spoken discourse, and this is the reason why she avoids any evidence of *writer-made* invention. Her language within the novels therefore consists of elements that belong to a low-class, colloquial tone, but surprisingly accompanied with countless references to literary, cinematographic and musical works, what makes of her writing an amalgam that is, just apparently, natural, not elaborated.

The so-called “ragazza terribile della letteratura” (Romani, 1997: 27) writes about women. Her writing is, therefore, a female—but nor feminist—one due to her being a woman (Barilli, 1999), because “uno scrittore o una scrittrice non possono non descrivere situazioni legate al proprio sesso” (Campo, in Guglielmi, 1992). Hers is, in short, a *female writing* which is understood in a different way, since it is conceived counteracting female narrative and, in general, nowadays' novel writing. (Caserza, 1992)

2. *Mentre la mia bella dorme* and its translation into Spanish

As usual in her novels, the main character of *Mentre la mia bella dorme* is a wild and ironic, marginal but autonomous, romantic but feminist Italian girl (L. Guglielmi, 1999b), whose name, besides, is kept unknown for the reader. Unlike in other novels, where the general impression was that Rossana Campo was ruled by a writing for writing's sake, now Campo

uses a detective novel to tell the story of a pregnant crime reporter who works for a Parisian newspaper. In Campo's sixth novel dialogs appear in the narration directly, with no quotation marks. As a consequence, not only a more fluent rhythm appears, but also a voice and level confusion is caused, which highlights the figure of the main character (Trecca, 1999).

Mentre la mia bella dorme has been translated into two languages: German (Scherz Verlag) and Spanish (Ediciones Barataria). According to the information provided by the Italian publishing house Feltrinelli, a translation into French should be available at the Librairie Athème Fayard, but no evidence about it has been confirmed by the aforementioned publishing house.

Mientras mi niña duerme is the title the Spanish version of *Mentre la mia bella dorme* received. It was published by Ediciones Barataria in 2007, in the "Mar Negro" collection. Its translator, Laura Calvo Valdivieso, has been working as a freelance translator since 1999 till present time, and her working languages are English and Italian, apart from Spanish and Catalan. Her expertise areas are fiction and non-fiction books; English, Italian, Catalan and Spanish Literature; Social Sciences; Literary Theory and Criticism; Linguistics; and History. Calvo Valdivieso, who was awarded a PhD degree in Comparative Literature at the University of Barcelona, has translated books and articles that have been published by a variety of editors, e.g. Grijalbo, Mondadori, Crítica, Funambulista, Dykinson and Alianza.

3. Translating *Mentre la mia bella dorme*'s idioms into Spanish

Unfortunately, no references to the usage of phraseological units by Campo appear in the reviews about her works when defining her language. In the case of Italian reviews, we consider this may reflect a notorious lack of theoretical studies about Italian phraseology, especially when compared to other languages, such as English, German or Spanish. Nonetheless, independently of the status of Italian phraseology research, phraseological units are a cornerstone for Rossana Campo to build a language whose main aim is to faithfully imitate the language her characters speak in the situations they live. Therefore, in *Mentre la mia bella dorme*, the language has to be vivid, precipitate, non-elaborated and, not to forget, that of an Italian speaker woman who lives in Paris.

The relevance of the translation of phraseological units to determine the quality of a translated text is beyond doubt. As Corpas Pastor (2000a: 132) points out, the way idioms are translated is a powerful, significant means to study the reception of a given work and its potential influence over the literary canon of the target system.

For our purposes, we will use Corpas Pastor's (1996: 20) well-known definition of phraseological units as multiword lexical units composed by at least two graphical words (and a whole sentence as its upper limit), which are further characterised by a high frequency of co-occurrence of its components and by various degrees of institutionalisation, i.e. formal frozenness, inner fixation and semantic specialization or opacity.

The classification of phraseological units we have followed for this paper is also the one provided by Corpas Pastor (1995, 1996 and 1998). Although it was originally conceived for both English and Spanish, it was later adapted to Galician (Ferro Ruibal, 1998), Valencian/Catalan (Guia, 1999; Sancho Cremades, 1999), Basque (Esnal, 2001; Kaltzakorta, 2001) Arabic (Assam, 2004), Polish (Sosinski, 2006) and, partially, to German, French, Hungarian, Italian and Romanian (Corpas Pastor, 2000a; 2000b). Due to space limitations, in this paper we will just analyse the translation of phraseological units belonging to spheres II

(locutions) and III (phraseological utterances, containing proverbs, routine formulae and the like). Collocations (sphere I) are not specifically dealt with here.

For clarity's sake, the acronyms we will use in the comparison of the two works—the original version and its translation into Spanish—are MMBD (*Mentre la mia bella dorme*) and MMND (*Mientras mi niña duerme*); At the time, SL ('source language'), TL ('target language'), ST ('source text') and TT ('target text') are also used. As for the different procedures that a translator can apply when translating phraseological units, it is necessary to make a distinction between indirect and direct procedures (Corpas Pastor, 2001).

3.1. Indirect procedures

The first category includes four different procedures (i.e. equivalence, paraphrase, omission and compensation). Due to space restrictions, we will analyse in more detail two of them (paraphrase and compensation), for being more relevant for our research. As for the two remaining procedures, equivalence is not treated since it is the canonical procedure and therefore the most used one, especially when somatisms, i.e., constituents that denote parts of the body, are involved and when a non phraseological equivalent is the best translation option. The reason to omit compensation in this study is however a different one: it is a mere anecdotic procedure in Laura Calvo's translation of *Mentre la mia bella dorme*.

3.1.1. Paraphrase

Paraphrase of the semantic and pragmatic content is a well-distributed procedure. Although strongly criticised by scholars such as Baker (1992) or Wotjak (1982), evidence proves that it is a somehow common procedure when translating phraseological units. In MMND, however, just a few remarkable examples can be found. The most notable example is the following, in which the verbal locution *fare a pezzi qualcosa* ('romperla', ZIN) has been translated through the expression *hacer trapos* instead of by using the fully equivalent verbal locution *hacer pedazos [algo o a alguien]* ('Destrozarlo totalmente', DEA).

ST: *Io bevo ancora un po' di caffè prima che si raffreddi, e cerco di tenere duro con la vescica per non pisciare lì in piedi vicino al banco. Dico, sempre con molta calma: La tua maglia non esiste più.*

Cosa? Fa lui supernervoso.

L'ho fatta a pezzi e mi ci sono pulita le scarpe.

COSA? dice ancora lui e io mi chiedo come ho fatto a amare e a soffrire per tutto questo tempo per un essere così miserabile. (MMBD, 62)

TT: *Yo bebo un poco más de café antes de que se enfríe, e intento retener mi vejiga para no mearme allí de pie junto a la barra. Le digo, siempre con mucha calma: Tu jersey ya no existe.*

¿Qué?, dice él supernervioso.

Lo hice trapos y luego me limpié los zapatos con él.

¿QUÉ?, dice de nuevo y yo me pregunto cómo he podido amar y sufrir durante todo este tiempo por un ser tan mezquino. (MMND, 82)

Although the TT version may seem to contain an erroneous translation of *pezzi* or, furthermore, an apparently equivalent phraseological unit, *trapos* has in this case a non-idiomatic, literal meaning. This becomes evident through the reading of a previous paragraph:

ST: *So benissimo di cosa sta parlando, era un golf arancione un po' da finocchio che gli aveva regalato la mamma, una roba morbida e costosa. L'ho distrutto, l'ho caspeltato, ci sono salita sopra, l'ho tirato, ci ho strappato i bottoni e le maniche e poi l'ho usato prima per togliere la polvere e poi una volta che pioveva l'ho messo sopra lo stuoino all'ingresso e mi ci sono pulita le scarpe piene di fango.* (MMBD, 62)

3.1.2. Compensation

Unlike the German version of *Mentre la mia bella dorme*, a myriad of compensation cases can be found in *Mientras mi niña duerme*. From our point of view, this is due to Laura Calvo's permanent concern to get a text that is as rich in phraseological units as the ST, so that eventual cases of *sanitization* are avoided. An example of this can be found already in the first pages of *Mientras mi niña duerme*, where the non-phraseological syntagm *una sensazione di pace* is translated as an adverbial locution, *de buenas* ('De buen humor, alegre y complaciente', DRAE), instead of using a literal translation for it (*una sensación de paz*), which would have worked as well.

ST: *Quando sono uscita dal cinema avevo una sensazione di pace dentro e poi dopo un po' avevo voglia di menare le mani. Così sono andata dal parrucchiere e ho deciso per un taglio radicale.* (MMBD, 8)

TT: *Cuando salí del cine estaba de buenas y al cabo de un rato ya tenía ganas de pegarme con alguien. Así que me fui a la peluquera y me decidí por un corte radical.* (MMND, 6)

Another case of compensation can be found in the following example, where the translator has decided to use a verbal locution, *no decir [ni] pío* ('No decir nada; permanecer callado o no hablar de cierta cosa', DUE), as an equivalent of the non-phraseological syntagmatic expression *non ho ditto niente*. As a consequence, the TT is rather more expressive than the ST and matches the colloquial, laid-back general style of all the dialogues within Rossana Campo's novel.

ST: *Lei non ha raccolto, ha detto ancora: E un'altra cosa, lo sai che devi frenarti un po' con l'alcohol, eh? E con le sigarettem sì, lo sai no? Io qui non ho detto niente. Lei mi molla una tonnellata di libro con tanto di foto e illustrazioni, dice: Se vuoi dai un'occhiata a questo.* (MMBD, 9)

TT: [...] *pero ello no lo pilla y sigue: Y otra cosa, ya sabes que tienes que cortarte un poco con el alcohol, ¿eh? Y con los cigarrillos, ya lo sabes, ¿no? Yo no digo ni pío. Ella me suelta un mamotreto lleno de fotos y dibujos: Si quieres, échale un vistazo a esto.* (MMND, 7-8)

The English proverb *Hell is paved with good intentions* helps us define Laura Calvo's sporadic, but remarkable and noticeable, approach to the compensation procedure. This is evident when, due to her efforts to imitate Campo's style, a non-equivalent Spanish phraseological unit is provided in the TT in cases where there was none in the ST. The last example we provide to illustrate this procedure shows the usage of a rather diatopic and diastatic marked phraseological unit. Calvo does not translate the non-phraseological

syntagm *scelgo il meglio* for a syntagm equivalent in Spanish, such as *selecciono* or *cojo la mejor*, but for a nominal locution, *canela fina* ('(inf.) Lo mejor de lo mejor', DFEM). In our opinion, the above phraseological unit is incorrect from a dual perspective: on one hand, *il meglio* refers to a single VCR tape, while *canela fina* concerns the whole collection of tapes. On the other hand, as we mentioned, *canela fina* seems to be deeply rooted to Spain. This is shown by CREA, with just seven occurrences, six of them having an idiomatic meaning and being registered in texts from Spain, while the remaining one originates in Costa Rica and has a literal meaning, i.e. 'ground cinnamon.'¹ Moreover, this phraseological unit might evoke in a Spanish speaker's mind images related to flamenco and, more generally, to Spanish folklore.² In short, this permanent concern for compensation leads Calvo to fall into domestication's clutches, a trend defined by Venuti "as an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values" (Venuti, 1995: 20) that does not help to portray Rossana Campo's characters. After all, the ST never hides that the speaker is Italian.

ST: *Io prendo una cassetta della mia raccolta Le leggende della boxe. Scelgo il meglio. Stiamo parlando dell'incontro Muhammad Ali-George Foreman, Kinshasa, 30 ottobre 1974, una delle cose più belle. Nella bosse e in assoluto, voglio dire.* (MMBD, 14)

TT: *Yo saco una cinta de mi colección Leyendas del boxeo. Canela fina. Estamos hablando del encuentro Mohamed Ali-George Foreman, Kinshasa, 30 de octubre de 1974, una de las cosas más hermosas. Del boxeo y del mundo, quiero decir.* (MMND, 14-15)

3.2. Direct procedures

The second group of procedures for the translation of phraseological units comprises three techniques: loan, calque and pseudo-equivalence. Since no significant cases of calque have been noticed in Calvo's translation, we will just analyse some instances of the two remaining translation procedures.

3.2.1. Calque

Calque is the procedure that provides us with some of the most interesting examples in this analysis of the translation of phraseological units. That is the case of the verbal locution *sputare veleno* ('parlare mostrando il proprio rancore', ZIN), whose equivalent for the Spanish version is the expression *escupir veneno*. In spite of its three occurrences in CREA (one of them with a literal meaning) and *veneno* having also a figurative meaning ('Malevolencia puesta en lo que se dice', DPLE), it should not be considered a verbal locution. This is furthermore confirmed by a combinatory dictionary, REDES: *veneno* should

¹ This evidence is also supported by the results provided by search engines: the vast majority of occurrences of *canela fina* with a literal meaning originate in Latin American websites.

² Unfortunately, we have not been able to find documental corroboration to this, apart from the fact that, out of the almost 60,000 occurrences of the string "*canela fina*" that Google retrieves from websites from Spain, more than 3,600 of them also contain the term *flamenco*.

be used along with *soltar*. However, *escupir veneno* is completely understandable by a Spanish speaker, which makes of this an almost unperceivable calque.

ST: *Dice: Quello! È un furbo, è un disonesto, la vuole sapere una cosa?*

Sì.

Non ha mai avuto una lira. È uno che vive alla giornata.

Non fa il modello? chiedo io

Modello! fa lei e continua a sputare veleno su quel pezzo di ragazzo. Dice: Lo sa che ha una moglie, in Africa? (MMBD, 59)

TT: *Dice: ¡Ése! Es un fresco, un vivalés, ¿quiere saber una cosa?*

Sí.

No ha tenido nunca un céntimo. Vive al día.

¿No trabaja de modelo?, pregunto yo.

¡Modelo!, suelta y continúa escupiendo veneno sobre ese pedazo de tío. Dice: ¿Sabe que tiene una mujer en África? (MMND, 78)

In the following excerpt, an interesting case of calque can be noticed when translating the Italian proverb *Il silenzio è di oro* ('è sempre opportuno praticare il silenzio, la riservatezza', DISC), since a modified apparent phraseological unit is used, *si el silencio fuera de oro*. Although the supposed sanctioned expression, *El silencio es oro*, should according to logical reasoning not be considered a proverb in Spanish —there is no dictionary we have been able to find it in and just an occurrence is registered in CREA—, there is a chance it will become a phraseological unit in Spanish in the future. Calque is undoubtedly a way of creating phraseological units, and in this case Italian might not be the only language originating the presence of this calque in *Mientras mi niña duerme*. As a matter of interest, there is a fully equivalent proverb in Catalan, one of the two Laura Calvo's mother tongues (the other being Spanish), *El silenci és or*, which is registered in some dictionaries. This fact leads us to think that, in this case, calque is the result of direct interference due to the translator's bilingual background.

ST: *Io m'installo a un tavolino vicino alla vetrina e prendo una birra. Lui ne prende un'altra, ma più grande della mia. Ci mettiamo seduti e rimaniamo zitti per un po', ho l'impressione che se il silenzio è d'oro qui stiamo per diventare ricchi. (MMBD, 35)*

TT: *Yo me instalo en una mesa cercana al ventanal y tomo una cerveza. Krasicki toma otra, pero más grande que la mía. Permanecemos callados durante un rato, tengo la impresión de que si el silencio fuera de oro, nos íbamos a forrar. (MMND, 42)*

The translator's tendency to calque is also evident when facing two phraseological units in the TL. In such a situation, it is noticed that the equivalent which appears to be formally closest to the SL unit is the one to be chosen. Some cases of this behaviour may be seen in the Spanish translation of *Mentre la mia bella dorme*. For example, the Italian verbal locution *fare scena* ('Possedere la capacità di richiamare l'attenzione e l'interesse degli spettatori', ZIN), which can be translated into Spanish as the verbal locutions *montar un número* ('Acción extravagante o inconveniente con que se llama mucho la atención', DRAE), *dar/montar el/un espectáculo* ('Realizar una acción inconveniente o que provoca escándalo', DFEA) or *hacer/dar una escena* ('Ponerse en actitud patética, con palabras o gestos teatrales y, generalmente, insinceros', DUE) or *montar una escena* (Not found in neither general nor phraseological dictionaries but registered in REDES). Out of the four possible options, the

translator has opted for the last one, being more similar to the SL's locution although less frequent in the TL—just three occurrences are registered in CREA.

ST: *E così ho immaginato qualche milione di volte di incontrarlo per la strada, o in un ristorante, per caso. Ho immaginato anche di fare una scena in pubblico, tipo tirargli un paio di cazzotti, una cosa così.* (MMBD, 60)

TT: *Así que he imaginado un millón de veces que me lo encontraba por la calle o en un restaurante por casualidad. También he imaginado que le montaba una escena en público, como propinarle un par de puñetazos, algo así.* (MMND, 80)

3.2.2. Pseudo-equivalence

One more procedure for the translation of phraseological units is noticed in Laura Calvo's work. This procedure, called *pseudo-equivalence*, consists of creating in the TT the effect of a real phraseological unit which is either partially or fully equivalent to the one in the ST. Such a new coinage, akin to pre-existing SL phraseological units, usually reproduces the formal and semantic pattern of the ST phraseological unit. However, on closer inspection, the apparent equivalent unit used in the TT simply shares a family resemblance with other real TL phraseological units as regards their inner components and even their base figurative image (Corpas and Leiva, 2005: 67).

Not many cases of this procedure have been registered in *Mientras mi niña duerme*. One of the most patent examples is the following one, in which, the Italian syntagm *piegare le labbra* has been translated, through a compensation process, as the apparent phraseological unit *torcer los labios [un poco hacia abajo]*, where an influence from the verbal locution *torcer la boca* ('Volver el labio inferior hacia alguno de los carrillos, en ademán o en demostración de disgusto', DRAE) can be noticed.

ST: *Lei ha piegato un po' in giù le labbra, ci è rimasta mala e ha detto, Cazzo anche te adesso mi fai vivere un rifiuto.* (MMBD, 13)

TT: *Ella tuerce los labios un poco hacia abajo, le ha sentado mal y me dice: Joder, ahora tú también me haces sentirme rechazada.* (MMND, 13)

4. Conclusions

In this paper we have dealt with phraseological units, a relevant text building mechanism in Rossana Campo's novel *Mentre la mia bella dorme*. Our study has shown that equivalence is not the only procedure that has been used when facing the translation of phraseological units. Contrary to what is widely claimed—Pendersen (1997: 105), for example, considers that "literary translations contain fewer idioms that originals do", out of all the procedures mentioned here, compensation is one of the most important ones in the case of Calvo's version. It could be the case that Laura Calvo is somehow aware of the major role that phraseology plays in Rossana Campo's characterization of her writing style.

One more relevant finding is the ratification of calque and pseudo-equivalence as a procedure of extreme importance for creativity in languages. Although heavily criticised by some scholars—Hernández Penela (1987: 101) considers them to be unacceptable—it is unquestionable that they are nowadays almost the only procedures responsible for neological phraseology. Also, loan, calque and pseudo-equivalence can be claimed to be useful resources for the translator to stick to the ST and not to fail into domestication techniques that may

damp the Italian features that Rossana Campo likes to emphasise in her novel. This becomes even clearer when comparing calque with compensation or equivalence by using a Spanish-rooted phraseological unit, such as the aforementioned case of *canela fina*: the result is, undoubtedly, far away from Rossana Campo's original intention —a dramatic 'Spanish domestication' of a 'wildly Italian' source text.

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