

The Representation of Central-Southern Italian Dialects and African-American Vernacular English in Translation: issues of cultural transfers and national identity

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ABSTRACT

Multilingualism has been a critical issue for centuries, since the presence of multiple languages within a single community of speakers represents a challenge to traditional notions of national identity based on “one language for one nation” (Meylaerts 2010: 227). In Translation Studies, multilingualism has only recently begun to receive attention as translation scholars realize that translational treatment of subnational varieties of a language might represent an (im)balance of power among the language varieties.

This study compares the representation of dialect in original and translated novels in the Italian/English language pair in order to determine the general norms for treating multilingualism in translation and the political implications of those norms. In other words, is linguistic heterogeneity of the source texts (STs) homogenized in the target texts (TTs) by adopting the standard variety, or is this heterogeneity preserved? And if so, how? Moreover, this study analyzes whether the strategies adopted by translators vary depending on the time period and the socio-political context during which the novels and the translations were published.

The hypotheses claim that, the TTs would show fewer traces of dialect and display a more homogenized language. In so doing, the TTs would have a limited ability to ‘give voice’ to minority groups and subvert the institutional imposition of a standard language; at the same time, the TTs would reinforce the idea of a nation with a unified language. Secondly, I hypothesize that the strategies adopted by the translators are influenced by the social and political context of the target culture in the attempt to meet the needs and expectations of the intended readership.

This project analyzes the dialect used in the novels adopting the empirical approach of corpus-linguistics. The texts used for the analysis are compiled in a corpus and annotated in such a way that *ParaConc* is able to recognize the dialect in the STs, retrieve the segments in which dialect is present along with the corresponding segments in the TTs, and provide the number of occurrences. Once the search is completed, the data obtained is compared in order to determine the presence of any patterns. The second question this study attempts to answer refers to the influence of the target culture on the strategies adopted in the translation. This question is answered by analyzing the socio-political context of the target culture in the historical time of the translation.

The findings from the data analysis confirm the hypothesis regarding the existence of specific patterns governing the translation of dialect in novels when the Italian/English language combination is considered. The dialect included in the STs is mostly rendered in the TTs

using standard language. In contrast, it does not seem that the second hypothesis is confirmed. The data analyzed shows that the socio-political context of the target culture does not influence translators' strategies. One interesting pattern that emerged and was not expected was the use of foreign words in the target language to compensate for the loss of dialect.

KEYWORDS: AAVE, Central-Southern Italian dialects, dialects in translation, multilingualism, (sub)national identity, translation strategies.

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