

Cross-cultural Adaptation as a Form of Translation: *Trans-lating* Food in the UK Italian Community

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Abstract

This article provides a sociolinguistic qualitative analysis combined with translation aiming at bridging different fields of investigation which may be useful in detecting linguistic forms of cross-cultural adaptation and hybridisation. It is mainly driven by the idea of investigating the complex experience of Italian immigrants who settled in Bedford and Peterborough in the 50's, adopting an interdisciplinary framework which will examine contemporary practices of cultural hybridisations in the UK. Pinpointing all those cultural elements emerging from the creative linguistic forms of cultural positioning enacted by the Anglo-Italian community, the present work aims at detecting cultural elements of diasporic heritage which, by recreating and fostering a sense of community and cultural identity, seem to demand new kinds of linguistic analyses.

A corpus of 57 restaurant menus was collected in catering businesses of Anglo-Italians from Bedford and Peterborough in July 2013 through fieldwork research and analysed in order to decode typical translation practices that, consciously or unconsciously, the informants may adopt in their diasporic workplace as a reflection of their hybridised identity.

I

Introduction: Italians in the UK

Almost 100,000 people in England and Wales claimed Italian as their “main language” these days, and according to the last 2011 national census, 125,000 people claimed to be of Italian origin. The largest concentration is still in the town of Bedford¹, where about 30% of Bedfordians are of Italian origin; nonetheless, other communities related to the one in Bedford show large proportions of Italians who arrived in the UK, mainly as a result of labour recruitment in the 1950s by the London Brick Company in the southern Italian regions. Nowadays, the town of Peterborough also has a consistent concentration of Italians; 8,000 started arriving in the 1950s with the first flow of migrants and went on for another decade or so².

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the Italians from Bedford and Peterborough show similarities as well as differences. Earlier results collected by means of a questionnaire survey revealed quite a significant use of Italian and an extremely strong ethnic identity perception within the Bedford composite hybrid community of speakers³. Sometimes people feel bound to more than one community, especially when it comes to third generation members who, despite being perfectly integrated into mainstream British society (which represents

their L1⁺), maintain their feeling of belonging to the minority community, as in the case of the Bedford Italians⁵. This generation becomes the most suitable example of mixed-identity, as it stands between two identities while sharing some distinctive traits⁶. In the light of this coexistence, code-switching chiefly characterises 1st generation speakers who learn lexis of the new language and integrate it into their mother tongue; but viceversa it may also affect second and third generation speakers: they may borrow the community language's constructions, introducing them into English-based discourse⁷.

Social networks represent another incredible resource when documenting the "Italianness" mentioned above. There is a strong desire to maintain an Italian identity and the maintenance and spread of both the Italian language and culture can be witnessed on Facebook. This has previously been demonstrated by Balirano and Guzzo⁸ in their study of the Anglo-Italian ethnolect on Facebook.

The use of Anglo-Italian contributes to the construction of an online Italian diasporic identity, and this specific ethnolect plays an important role in the creation of a post-diatopic variation used by the Italian community in the English speaking world. In particular, among other linguistic features, we should be looking at code-mixing/switching. Balirano and Guzzo's analysis highlights how the Anglo-Italian community succeeds in building a very positive image of Italy based on values of heritage (such as the family, and Italian food), and how, by means of linguistic in-group mechanisms, the ethnic community seems to be able to foster a sense of belonging leading towards the formation of an Italian identity.

2

Translatability and untranslatability: code-switching cultures

Translation provides an uncluttered question about the complex relationship between language and the way one can linguistically perceive reality. In Whorf's and Sapir's terms⁹, there is always an opposition triggered by different views of reality: although the external visible world is the same for all of us, the linguistic expressions referring to the different segments of reality are often very diverse. Therefore, language affects reality and the way we perceive the external features of objects is inevitably influenced by the range of words available in our language to describe those characteristics. If languages segment reality differently, we would expect a different "world view" according to the language we speak. Therefore, certain phenomena of reality may appear in excessive detail in one language while there is only a collective name for them in another one: different terms indicating the several types of pasta in Italian may be condensed in one or more hypernyms, for example "spaghetti", "vermicelli" or "linguine" can be seen in a relationship of hyponymy with "pasta", exclusively employed as a superordinate term in languages other than Italian. Therefore, the very idea of "Italianness" connected to the way Italians perceive reality through their language is necessarily kept also when speaking an L2 in order to maintain and reinforce an Italian identity abroad and to spread both the Italian language and its culture.

When reality does not travel in translation, the alternating practice of code-switching seems to come as an aid to fully linguistically render those bits of the cultural world which would remain silent or unspoken in another language. As Molinsky describes it, cross-cultural code-switching occurs when speakers deliberately alternate the use of two languages in

interaction modifying one code to accommodate «different cultural norms for appropriate behaviour» in another language¹⁰. In other words, codes-switching also implicates deviation from one's cultural norms in order to engage in behaviour appropriate to a foreign culture.

Code-switching, therefore, may be considered as a very important performative, identity act which works to redesign the boundaries of one's own culture. The practice of code-switching or even code-mixing seem to trespass the cultural borders between the linguistic concepts of translatability and untranslatability by bridging different cultures once language and translation do not fulfil their tasks¹¹.

Homi Bhabha defines cultural translation as a performative act, as «the staging of difference»¹² which can be interpreted as a characteristic, if not prerogative, of migrant cultures, as «a mutual and mutable» representation of cultural difference where hybridity becomes a «third space» which enables other positions to emerge, reshaping negotiation and meaning. These assumptions lead me to assess that the potential of hybrid identities is with the innate knowledge of *transculturation*¹³, that is the ability to transverse two cultures and to translate, negotiate and mediate affinity and differences within a dynamic of exchange and inclusion.

The word «translation» comes, etymologically, from the Latin *transducere* meaning «bearing across» and as Rushdie maintained: «having been borne across the world, we are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling obstinately to the notion that something can also be gained»¹⁴. Languages performing this «bearing across» within themselves are both «source» and «target» in a process of cultural transposition and I argue that this is the case of the language of the Italians in the UK. The Anglo-Italian emerging ethnolect is a form of translation which replaces English whenever it cannot linguistically represent the ethnic roots and culture of the speaker. This ethnic variety works both as the «source» and the «target» language. It is a form of translation in the sense that Anglo-Italians are «*trans*-lated people», and although most of the time some elements of Italian culture are lost in translation, the Anglo-Italian ethnolect also gains something through the process of translating into the new «target» and hybridised culture.

Translation studies have brought to the fore the fact that in every act of translation the source text is inevitably transformed. This kind of transformation in diasporic contexts is mainly realised by the employment of linguistic devices such as the mixture of different accents, norm-deviant syntax, code-switching, code-mixing, double-voiced discourse or alternative forms of semantic collocations with the aim of representing the lives and adventures of hybrid speakers who, rather than speaking English, are intentionally portrayed as «translated» into English¹⁵.

Starting from these considerations, my research questions evolve around the following critical queries: can translation be interpreted as a metaphor of diasporic language identity, as a creative act of political and cultural transformation within an Italian diasporic community of practice? If so, which linguistic variables are capable to act as markers of identity within translation in a diasporic setting? Can «translation» be seen as a signal of (ethnic) identity in itself in the speech of bilingual speakers? In order to answer the above questions, a combination of sociolinguistic participant observation of written hybrid language use and fieldwork data collection was applied to translation.

Thus, in order to understand the implications of diasporic creativity and translation, the traditional notion of translation as a solely linguistic or textual activity for the achievement

of semantic equivalence between texts will not be applied¹⁶. Translation will be therefore intended in this study as a creative act of political and cultural resistance within a diasporic community of practice.

Sociolinguistic concepts and techniques revealed to be extremely useful to better understand communicative acts and specific situational contexts. Translation can be seen as a product of a communicative act in itself, promoting language change or preserving distinctive features of a speech community.

3

Corpus and methods of analysis

Combining translation studies with sociolinguistics can be useful to show new insights within the study of migrant communities of practice as well as contribute to the growth of new and multifaceted methodologies which could be applied to translation studies. Very little has been said about variationist sociolinguistics and translation and one of the aims of the present paper is to discuss the concept of translation with the community of Italians in the UK.

In order to explore language and translation, when translation is seen as a specific situational context, a corpus of naturally occurring written data was ethnographically collected in July 2013. The data are drawn from participant observations in Bedford and Peterborough. Specifically, a corpus of 57 menus was collected in restaurants, pizzerias, kiosks, take-away and cafés. The collection is still ongoing and further results will be discussed in further applications.

In selecting informants, a network paradigm was applied¹⁷ to reconstruct the network of relations and provide an adequate picture of the transnational nature of the Italian migration to the UK. Adopting this approach, all the menus were selected on the basis of their businesses' membership to the Italian community and are linked to each other through kinship, friendship, or community acquaintanceship. A "friend of a friend" technique based on Milroy¹⁸ and Eckert¹⁹ was used and there was active participation in the life of the community. Moreover, all the involved informants provided information on their age, ethnic background, and home language, as well as contextual information about the ownership of the menus, which are the result of the informants' personal adaptations of Italian menus, and their permission for the data to be used for linguistic analysis and academic purposes. As for the informants' migration background and duration of residence in the UK, all speakers belong to the same Italian community. Speakers with a debatable membership to the community were excluded from the analysis. For this reason, speakers who had only recently migrated to town were also left out of the present analysis.

4

Translating cultures: linguistic variables and strategies

"Domestication" and "foreignisation"²⁰ are two frequent but very contrasting strategies in translation, regarding the degree to which translated texts conform to the target culture. Domestication is the strategy of making text closely conform to the culture of the language

being translated to, which may involve the loss of information from the source text. Foreignisation is the strategy of retaining information from the source text, and involves deliberately breaking the conventions of the target language to preserve its meaning. These strategies have been debated for several years and in different cultural environments²¹.

Venuti²², in particular, considered foreignisation as a means of fighting the prevailing position of the English-language culture in translation. The two notions of *foreignisation* and *domestication* are respectively connected to a “word-for-word” type of translation, which means they can be regarded as means of transferring literally the source text into the target text, preserving linguistic and cultural differences between two language systems, and “sense-for-sense” strategies of translation which aim at a more fluent and intelligible target text. The former strategy aims at taking the reader over to the foreign culture, making him or her see the cultural and linguistic differences²³, whereas domestication wants to bring the foreign culture closer to the reader in the target culture, making the text recognisable and familiar. As a result, the original passages were transformed into the target equivalent rather than simply translated, often through the deletion or substitution of elements typical for the source culture only.

Balirano²⁴ adds a new tool to more traditional translation strategies by introducing a cultural transmuting strategy, which he terms “translAction”. This novel approach to translation in hybridised contexts does not only operate in terms of conformity and social identification, but also in terms of cognitive re-organisation and discourse attuning in order to further facilitate comprehension. The strategy applies to translation in contexts where the speakers belong to different ethnic groups and it mainly revolves around the idea that diasporic art or any form of migrant representation is to be considered as a voluntary and cognitive action whose underlying conceptual frames need to be brought to surface.

I would like to apply the strategy of “translAction” to the corpus under scrutiny with the aim of pinpointing all those cultural elements emerging from the creative linguistic forms of cultural positioning enacted by the Anglo-Italian community. As a matter of fact, I argue here that cultural elements of diasporic heritage by recreating a sense of community and cultural identity, seem to demand new kinds of linguistic analyses. Therefore, a corpus of restaurant menus through translation will be closely examined as the metaphor of the informants diasporic identity. Thus, in order to understand the implications of diasporic creativity and translation, the traditional notion of translation as a solely linguistic or textual activity for the achievement of semantic equivalence between texts will be reconsidered in different terms. Translation is seen here as an act of identity and cultural transformation; and as such it has the power to change the representations it creates and re-creates. It is the metaphor for “Italianness”, a social practice which seems to be used as a hybrid representation, to re-place, re-locate and re-root Italian into English.

Moreover, in the analysis that follows, an attempt at combining sociolinguistic tools and translation studies for the examination 57 restaurant menus collected in catering businesses of Anglo-Italians from Bedford and Peterborough will be adopted. The study aims at decoding typical translation practices that, consciously or unconsciously, the informants adopt in their diasporic workplace as a reflection of their hybridised identity.

The first marker of identity which stands out as an evidence of Italian identity carried out by means of “translAction”, is the case of linguistic single switch. A series of single switch occurrences takes places in the present corpus. According to Gumperz code-switching is

the juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passages of speech belonging to two different grammatical systems or subsystems [...] as when a speaker uses a second language either to reiterate his message or to reply to someone else's statement²⁵.

In sociolinguistics instead, Woolard defines code-switching as «the investigation of an individual's use of two or more language varieties in the same speech event or exchange»²⁶. However, as in the case of the corpus under investigation, I would like to engage with Nerghes definition of code-switch as a tool to persuade the reader or the hearer in order to draw their attention. Nerghes in fact maintains that:

code-switching will draw the participant's attention and will enhance their motivation to carefully scrutinize the message presented [...]. Code-switching is an effective strategy that leads to systematic processing of information especially when associated with strong arguments²⁷.

and of course this seems to perfectly apply to the type of code-switching Anglo-Italians produce in English.

In the following occurrences from the present corpus of 118,431 tokens, we can easily detect a single switch (78%):

1. Baby *polpette meatballs* in a tomato & basil sauce
2. *Napolitana* sauce
3. Baby *calzone* filled with ragù & mozzarella

In [1], the noun “Baby” is a premodifier of the Italian code-switched term “polpette” which is immediately followed by the redundant English lexical compound “meatballs”, that is in fact a direct and unnecessary translation of the preceding Italian token. The Italian word “polpette” is a form of cultural translation which has the cognitive function of translating for the client but also to reinforce the position of the diasporic subject. The Anglo-Italian restaurateur works as the cultural agent or creator who *translActs* in order to position himself as different from the context where he lives. It is a clear example of linguistic power at work since this form of translation goes beyond the traditional strategy of “foreignisation”. It is the atypical construction – single switch followed by direct translation of the same token – which creates a linguistic interference determining the hybrid position of the creator of the text.

Moreover, in [2] and [3], the Italian code-switches “Napolitana” and “calzone” introduce a geographical reference to a specific area of origin of the writer. I would define this atypical, the reader should bear in mind that the corpus is written and meant to be read by English clients, code-switch strategy as a “variational code-switch”. The occurrence “Napolitana” has the strength to present linguistic variation but in a very peculiar form of Italian standardisation. As a matter of fact, the regional adjective “Napolitana” in its “variational code-switched” position is a derivation of the Southern dialectal word “Napulitane” which my Southern Anglo-Italian informants hyper-corrected with “Napolitana” as a mental projection of what the standard variety of Italian might have been to them. *TranslAction* again is at stake here since it is the creative use of translation by diasporic subjects that operates a personal and cultural translation of the language vis-à-vis their culture. Moreover, the regional term “calzone” refers to a specific kind of pizza type, distinctive of Southern Italy.

Another important linguistic feature, typical of translation which can be taken under scrutiny, is represented by the accommodation of the original Italian dish offered on the menus with a more traditional or comprehensible English noun or phrase. Most of the time, it is an accommodation by mistake which has the function of signalling a clear marker of identity. In particular, accommodation takes place through two distinct forms: morphological and phonological simplification.

4. *Penne arrabbiata*
5. *Linguini* Jardiniere
6. *Radiccio* and provolone cheese
7. *Pane & burro*

In [4] and [5], we can notice the ellipsis of the necessary Italian definite article (*la*) preceded by a preposition (*a*) and resulting into the articulated Italian preposition *alla*. The two phrases, despite not adopting the English morpho-syntactical structure of pre-modifying position of the adjective (**arrabbiata penne*), seem to accommodate by means of an unconscious translation the original Italian construct in favour of the English structure, thus eliminating the Italian article and the preceding preposition (*alla*), e.g. “penne *alla* arrabbiata” or “Linguine *alla* giardiniera”. Moreover, from a phonological view point, *transAction* strategy operates in adapting the Italian token “giardiniera” (a kind of sauce with vegetables) with the more English sounding “*Jardiniere”, a possible direct calque from Neapolitan, or more general Southern Italian dialects. Whereas, the word “*Linguini” is another example of accommodation by mistake based on a mispronunciation, therefore misspelling, of the Italian noun “Linguine”. The same phonological simplification takes place with the word “*radiccio”, originated from the Italian *radicchio* (/ra'dikkjo/), but spelt according to the English pronunciation (/rɑ'di kɪʊ/) which inevitably results in an alteration of the final (mis)spelling. As for [7], although both forms and spellings of the tokens in the phrase are correct in Italian (bread and butter), no Italian menu from Southern Italy would display such an entry as a dish, which therefore seems to indicate rather a desire to accommodate an English taste than a proper dish from Italy. This is an obvious commercial strategy but it may also be seen as a way to culturally adapt a cultural system to the target context. It is, therefore, a form of *transAction* since it tends to epitomize a hybrid positioning of the diasporic subject in the attempt of re-rooting his ethnic background.

Another important marker of identity which comes directly from the work of a specialist translator working in the field of cultural language contact is evident in [8] and [9]’s use of a typical translation strategy which, completely unexpected in a restaurant menu, is to be found mainly in the translation of post-colonial novels: explicatory endnotes or translator notes.

8. Aperitivo – aperitif
The Italian pre-dinner drink
9. Stuzzichini – appetisers
The Italian pre-dinner nibbles

The diasporic creator of such a specialised text, the menu, just like an expert translator, positions him or herself by helping the *others*, that is to say his/her English clients, to understand

what they may expect to be served when ordering an “aperitivo” or “stuzzichini”. Apart from the obvious foreignisation technique or rather exotic strategy usually adopted in translation practices, he/she culturally translates his/her very Italian social habit preceding proper food consumption by *transActing* from one cultural and linguistic code to the other. This form of translation is to be seen as a form of proper *transculturation* which typically epitomises diasporic subjects in their hybridised new contexts. Translation can be seen as a signal of (ethnic) identity in the speech of bilingual, multicultural and diasporic speakers.

5

Conclusions

To conclude, the different but overlapping fields of translation studies, sociolinguistics and cultural studies have brought to the fore the importance of key issues linked to the far-fetched concept of a “globalized” world. Yet, these different disciplines are still somewhat mutually exclusive since they erroneously keep excluding each other’s findings despite the inevitable overlap in some of their basic foundations.

This work has tried to connect and bridge various fields of investigation since the guiding principles are mainly driven by the idea of unearthing the complex experience of immigrants which can only be perceived by employing an appropriate interdisciplinary framework in order to examine contemporary difficult forms of cultural hybridisations in the UK. In addition, Fernando Ortiz’s idea of *transculturation* can be useful in detecting linguistic forms of cross-cultural adaptation and hybridisation²⁸. This construct includes more than transition from one culture to another: *transculturation* consists of merging different concepts while presenting the idea of the creation of new cultural phenomena which Ortiz called *neoculturation*. Furthermore, not only is it useful to employ the construct of *transculturation* in conceptualizing processes at different levels, but the actual manifestations of the processes of *transculturation* may also provide real solutions in the field of translation. Therefore, cross-cultural adaptation is a form of multicultural translation. Translation becomes an identity marker and *transl-aCtions* are adopted to render acts of identity to re-place, re-locate and re-root Italian into English through the creation of a post-diatopic ethnolect and the construction of a community of practice: the Italian diasporic community in the UK.

Notes

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2. M. Tubino, R. King, *Italians in Peterborough: Between Integration, Encapsulation and Return*, Research Papers in Geography, Geography Laboratory, University of Sussex, Brighton 1996; M. Cereste, F. Bagnoli, *Aliens Order. A Photographic History of the Italian Community in Peterborough 1951-2001*, Premier Communications, Peterborough 2001; M. Di Salvo, “Le mani parlavano inglese”: percorsi linguistici e culturali tra gli italiani d’Inghilterra, Il Calamo, Roma 2012; Guzzo, *Multilingualism...*, cit., pp. 233-57; S. Guzzo, A. Gallo, *Migration and Multilingualism in the UK: the case of the Italian communities in Bedford and Peterborough*, in M. Di Salvo, P. Moreno, R. Sornicola (a cura di), *Multilinguismo in contesto transnazionale. Metodologie e progetti di ricerca sulle dinamiche linguistiche degli italiani all’estero*, Aracne, Roma 2014, pp. 81-112.

3. Guzzo, *Multilingualism and Language Variation in the British Isles*, cit., pp. 233-57.

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5. Guzzo, Gallo, *Migration...*, cit., pp. 81-112.
6. P. Garner-Chloros, *European Immigrant Languages*, in D. Britain (ed.), *Language in the British Isles*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 325-40.
7. Le Page stated that everyone creates systems for its verbal exigency «so that they shall resemble those of the groups with which from time to time he may wish to be identified» (Le Page et al., *Further Report in the sociolinguistic survey of multilingual communities*, in "Language in Society", 3, 1974, in M. Stubbs, *The Other Languages of England: Linguistic Minorities Project*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1985, p. 131); B. Cervi, *The Italian Speech Community*, in S. Alladina, V. Edwards (eds.), *Multilingualism in the British Isles*, vol. 1, Longman, New York 1991, pp. 214-27; A. Tosi, *Immigration and bilingual education: a case study of movement of population, language change and education within the EEC*, 1984, in S. Guzzo, *Bedford Italians: Morphosyntax and Code-Switching for Ethnic Identity*, in A. Ledgeway, A. L. Lepschy (a cura di), *Le comunità immigranti nel Regno Unito: il caso di Bedford*, Guerra, Perugia 2011, pp. 97-118.
8. G. Balirano, S. Guzzo, *The Anglo-Italian ethnolect as a means of identify formation in Computer Mediated Cross-Communication*, in M. Bondi, S. Cacchiani, G. Palumbo (a cura di), *CLAVIER 09 – Corpus Linguistics and Language Variation*, "RILA – Rassegna Italiana di Linguistica Applicata", a. XLIII, nn. 1-2, Bulzoni Editore, Roma 2011, pp. 137-62.
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10. A. Molinsky, *Cross-Cultural Code-Switching: The Psychological Challenges of Adapting Behavior in Foreign Cultural Interactions*, in "Academy of Management Review", 32, 2, 2007, p. 624.
11. Cfr. J. J. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1982; L. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*, Routledge, London-New York 1995; D. Katan, *Translating Cultures*, St. Jerome Publishing, Manchester 1999; M. Baker, *In Other Words*, Routledge, New York 2011.
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13. D. Taylor, *Transculturating Transculturation*, in B. Marranca, G. Dasgupta (eds.), *Interculturalism and Performance: Writings from PAJ*, Performance Arts Journal Publications, New York 1991.
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15. Baker, *In Other Words*, cit.; Venuti, *The Translator's...*, cit.
16. Baker, *In Other Words*, cit.
17. J. Boissevain, *Friends of Friends: Networks, Manipulators and Coalitions*, Basil Blackwell, London 1974.
18. L. Milroy, *Language and Social Networks*, Blackwell, Oxford 1987.
19. P. Eckert, *Linguistic Variation and Social Practice*, Blackwell, Oxford 2000.
20. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, cit.
21. M. Baker, *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, Routledge, London-New York 1998; Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, cit.; J. Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies. Theories and Applications*, Routledge, London-New York 2001.
22. Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility*, cit.
23. *Ibid.*
24. G. Balirano, *Indian Diasporic Aesthetics as a Form of Translation*, in R. Ciocca, M. Laudando (eds.), *Indiascapes. Images and Words from Globalised India*, in "Anglistica ΔΙΟΝ. An Interdisciplinary Journal", 2009, pp. 87-96.
25. Gumperz, *Discourse Strategies*, cit., p. 225.
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