

Translating Scottish Poetry

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It is often argued that translators must mediate between two languages and two cultures: but there are cases in which more than two languages and cultures are at stake, and in those cases translators have to base their work on a sound sociolinguistic basis. Translators of Scottish poetry, and of Scottish literature in general, must grapple with Scotland's 'within-group multilingualism', i.e., with the fact that many writers alternately use English and Scots. In what follows, the three traditional methods used to render this alternation are described, and a fourth method is proposed; also, the variables are examined which come into play when the source text is not only synchronically, but also diachronically removed from the translator.

Se dice que los traductores tienen que intermediar entre dos lenguas y dos culturas: pero a veces el acto de traducción implica más que dos idiomas y dos culturas, entonces los traductores tienen que fundar su mismo trabajo sobre un profundo conocimiento de la situación sociolingüística. Los que traducen poemas escoceses, y en general la literatura escocesa, tienen que afrontar una situación de "multilingüismo interno", que en literatura se traduce en el uso alternado de inglés y Scots. En lo expuesto se describen los tres métodos tradicionales para reproducir esta alternancia, y se propone un cuarto método; además, se examinan las variables que entran en juego cuando entre el texto de origen y el traductor hay una distancia no solamente sincrónica, sino diacrónica.

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Palabras clave: Lengua Inglesa y Escocesa, Literatura Escocesa, Lingüística Aplicada, Sociolingüística, Traducción.

1 INTRODUCTION: LANGUAGE, TIME, PLACE, TRADITION

The conscientious translator of Scottish poetry, and of Scottish literature in general, must dabble in sociolinguistics and language history, as well as literary criticism and translation studies. Scotland is a multilingual land, characterized by what J.A. Fishman terms ‘within-group (or intragroup) multilingualism’ – a situation in which ‘a single population makes use of two (or more) “languages” or varieties of the “same language” for internal communicative purposes’ (Fishman 1971/1972: 15). In this case, there are two ‘varieties of the “same language”’ – English and Scots – and, though less widespread, a language belonging to a different Indo-European family – the Gaelic. In what follows, I will deal with the dualism English/Scots, i.e., the two tongues which are mastered and spoken by most Scottish people, and used as alternative or complementary languages by a number of Scottish writers. Just as Scottish people choose either Scots or English according to personal preferences, topic, domains of language behaviour, role and power relations, register, so writers’ choices may well be personal, but have cultural and sociolinguistic roots and consequences. If the translator is to be a cultural mediator (Taft 1981: 53), he/she has to take all these aspects into consideration and inform his/her reader about them, either within the text or in the notes and commentary.

The mediation can be further complicated by the introduction of variables which distance the source text not only from the translator and his/her reader, but also from the contemporary Scottish reader: if the source text was written in a different epoch from the ‘present’ or the ‘immediate past’, and in an earlier version of English and/or Scots, the translator must decide if and how to reproduce its diachronic dimension. In André Lefevere’s terms, ‘the freedom of the theme is [...] inevitably circumscribed by the concentric circles of language, time, place, and tradition’ (Lefevere 1975: 19). Now, whereas language is an element

which the translator can not but take into account, the elements which Lefevere terms *tpt* (time, place, tradition) take up more importance as the cultural and literary gap between author and translator becomes wider. According to Lefevere, the translator, when faced with a source text displaying *tpt* elements which distance it from the target culture, must choose one of five strategies: 1) he/she can simply ignore the problem; 2) he/she can produce a calque and not worry about the reader's understanding of it; 3) he/she can produce a calque and furnish it with explanatory notes; 4) he/she can translate *tpt* elements as he/she translates language; 5) he/she can elucidate the text by means of amplification and paraphrase (Lefevere 1975: 85-92).

As Schleiermacher wrote almost two centuries ago, the translator must often choose whether the burden of translation is to be borne by the reader or by the original author (Schleiermacher 1816: 152): but what Schleiermacher called the two 'methods' of translating produce countless techniques through which the translator can make his/her readers acquainted with the referential, rhetorical, and stylistic properties of the source text; in what follows, some of these techniques will be reviewed as a series of Scottish-Italian 'bi-texts' (Harris 1988) from various epochs are examined.

2 CONTEMPORARY SCOTTISH POETRY: ENGLISH AND SCOTS

The most typical problem for the translator of contemporary Scottish literature is the co-presence in the same text of English and Scots. The first half of the twentieth century saw a heated debate between the supporters of Scots as a national literary language (Hugh MacDiarmid) and those who were convinced that Scottish writers had to write in English because Scots was a dead or dying tongue (Edwin Muir). For a Scottish writer of the twentieth century, choosing either language, or both, is no mere literary dilemma: it is a cultural and a political issue which the translator has no way of incorporating in his/her target text, if notes and commentaries are not considered part of the target text. Admittedly, the translator must not translate the dialect (or the language variety) itself, but the function that dialect (or language variety) has in the source text (Newmark 1988: 194-95): nevertheless, part of the reason for using Scots, part of its function, resides precisely in its cultural and political significance

– if Scots is used in order to identify the narrator, or a character, as Scottish, how can we reproduce that function in the target text?

Though there are a number of twentieth-century texts written in Scots *or* in English, there are also many texts which are based upon linguistic dualism. In fictional prose, for instance, English is traditionally reserved for the narrative parts, Scots for the dialogues. A classical example is George Douglas Brown's *The House with the Green Shutters* (1901), the first great novel of modern Scottish literature:

In a dull little country town the passing of a single cart is an event, and a gig is followed with the eye till it disappears. Anything is welcome that breaks the long monotony of the hours, and suggests a topic for the evening's talk. 'Any news?' a body will gravely enquire; 'Ou aye,' another will answer with equal gravity, 'I saw Kennedy's gig going past in the forenoon.' 'Aye, man, where would *he* be off till? He's owre often in his gig, I'm thinking –' and then Kennedy and his affairs will last them till bedtime. (Douglas Brown 1901/1985: 41)

In un noioso paesello di campagna il passaggio di un solo carro è un avvenimento, e un calesse viene seguito con gli occhi finché non scompare. Si accoglie con piacere qualsiasi cosa spezzi la lunga monotonia delle ore, e suggerisca un argomento per la chiacchierata serale. "Novità?" chiederà uno, con aria grave; "Oh, sì, [Oh yes]" risponderà un altro con aria altrettanto grave, "Ho visto passare il calesse di Kennedy, stamattina. [I saw Kennedy's gig passing, this morning]" "Ah sì? E dov'è che andava? Lo prende un po' troppo spesso quel calesse, secondo me – [Did you? And where is it he was he going? He rides a bit too often in that gig, I think]" e a quel punto Kennedy e i suoi affari sarebbero loro bastati fino all'ora di coricarsi.

As shown by the back-translations of the characters' speeches, such a version bridges the gap between characters and narrator, a gap that is one of the main stylistic features of the novel (the narrator, probably a native who has studied in England like the author, is at the same time a knowing chronicler of the small community he describes and a stranger to it). Of course, the Italian language, like any language, provides the translator with the means to render this distance: the dialogues (which in the above version are rather dull) can become more colloquial, dialectal, even syntactically and morphologically incorrect ('Sì eh? Ma indov'è

che va? Fra un po' lo consuma, quel calesse'): but the dualism English/Scots, which has a precise cultural and political significance, is lost in any case, and can be recovered only by means of explanatory notes and commentaries.

An alternative solution is for the translator to produce a cultural adaptation of the text. An Italian region can be substituted for Scotland, the Italian dialect of that region substituted for Scots (the house with the green shutters can become a farmhouse in the Italian countryside). But in our epoch, even though 'adaptation' has been described by many as a permissible translation procedure (cf. for instance Vinay and Darbelnet 1958/1977: 52-54), such texts are not considered translations 'proper', and can be produced only by well-known authors who can 'sign' the end product as if it was entirely their own.

A lot of twentieth-century Scottish poetry is based upon linguistic dualism. In poetry as in prose, English and Scots can be used in isolation: but when they are combined within a single work, English is usually the narrator's language, the language of written speech and of established culture; Scots the characters' (or some characters') language, the language of oral speech and of family conversations.

This is shown very neatly in the opening lines of 'Condensation', by Glaswegian poet and playwright Liz Lochhead:

After a two and a half years with His Mother,
We were no longer love's young dream
When me, him and the weans got a hoose o' wur ain
In a four-in-a-block in this scheme. (Lochhead 1991: 16)

The English spoken by this young disillusioned woman is itself full of colloquial turns of phrase like 'a two and a half years' and 'in this scheme'. The code-shift from English to Scots ('a hoose o' wur ain', 'weans') marks a further descent into the language of everyday family life.

Since in Italy there are no two languages standing in the same relation as English and Scots, the Italian translator must reproduce the effect by different means. Most translators, faced with a passage such as this, would choose one of three methods. First of all, the translator can

ignore the problem altogether, and translate the whole passage in plain Italian, as if the source text was written only in one language – a solution which does not seem a solution at all, and yet is of some use when the original is printed alongside the translation, above all in those cases when the target text serves as an illustration of the source (school textbooks, cribs). What is lost can then be recovered by adding notes and commentaries:

Dopo un due anni e mezzo con Sua Madre,
 Non eravamo più la giovane coppia da sogno
 Quando io, lui e i bambini mettemmo su casa
 In una quadrifamigliare in questo progetto.

Secondly, as with *The House with the Green Shutters*, the translator can substitute Scots with a social or a geographical dialect of the target language. As Hatim and Mason point out, there are dangers associated with this method: if ‘rendering ST dialect by TL standard has the disadvantage of losing the special effect intended in the ST [...] rendering dialect by dialect runs the risk of creating unintended effects’ (Hatim and Mason 1990/1992: 41). The use of dialect transfers the ‘situation’ of the original into a different context, and turns a translation into something of a cultural adaptation. Furthermore, rendering Scots by an Italian dialect is risky if the source text is not humorous or the translator is not a proficient speaker of that dialect. The risk is that of incurring ridicule:

Dopo un due anni e mezzo con Sua Madre,
 Non eravamo più la giovane coppia da sogno
 Quando io, lui e i babèn trovammo una cà cl’era nostra
 In una quadrifamigliare in questo progetto.

Thirdly, the translator can render the effect obtained through code-switching in the original by different means, i.e., by lowering the register *within* the standard variety of the target language or by interspersing his/her translation with spelling and grammar mistakes. The drawback here is that by choosing this strategy, the translator equates speaking Scots with making mistakes and employing a low register, thus perpetuating a cultural prejudice which may not be warranted by the source text. Furthermore, the ghost of one or another Italian dialect is always lurking behind every attempt to write incorrect or informal Italian:

Of course, none of these methods is fully satisfying: the first method is simplistic, the second and the third create misunderstandings and court ridicule. The translator, of course, will choose the method or the combination of methods which he/she thinks best given the particular source text he/she has to translate, the needs of those who take part in the transaction (readers, initiator, publisher, author, the translator him-/herself), and the conditions in which the target text or the bi-text will be published (with the original facing the translation or not, in a literary magazine or in a school textbook).

2.1 A fourth method? Synthetic Scots

By considering source texts written in English *and* Scots, I seem to be giving it for granted that the dualism English/Scots is relevant only when actualized through code-switching. But that dualism is so strong that it leaves some traces even on those texts where only one of the two languages is used: a Scottish novel or long poem written entirely in English is no oddity; but a Scottish novel or long poem written entirely in Scots evokes the ghost of English. For most Scottish writers, Scots is the language of family and everyday life, English the language of formality and education. Therefore, writing a whole novel or poem in Scots is a conscious choice, and presupposes an exclusion which is often undeclared, but not without reason or consequences. How can the translator, then, reproduce the marks of that exclusion within the target text?

Hugh MacDiarmid's long poem *A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle* can serve as both an illustration and a solution of this dilemma. In his masterpiece, written almost entirely in Scots and published in 1926, MacDiarmid managed to turn a dialect (or a bundle of dialects) into a full-fledged literary language. For a spell, Scots became one of the languages of European modernism, on a par with English and French:

I amna fou' sae muckle as tired – deid dune.
It's gey and hard wark coupin' gless for gless
Wi' Cruivie and Gilsanquhar and the like,
And I'm no' juist as bauld as once I wes. (MacDiarmid 1992: 26)

Sono stanco più che ubriaco. Esausto.
E' un duro lavoro, tracannare bicchiere su bicchiere

Con Cruivie e Gilsanquhar e quelli come loro,
 E io non sono più quello di una volta.
 [I am tired rather than drunk. Exhausted.
 It's hard work, gulping down glass after glass
 With Cruivie and Gilsanquhar and the like,
 And I am not the man I used to be.]

The above Italian translation was produced for a literary magazine in which source texts are published alongside target texts, and is written into a language which sacrifices prosodic and metrical precision to accurately reproduce the referential dimension of the lines. Furthermore, as shown by the English back-translation, in this version no attempt is made at signalling the fact that Scots, and not English, is the language of (almost all) the original. It is true that since Scots is considered by MacDiarmid to be on the same cultural and literary level as English, it would be misleading to translate it into an Italian dialect or into incorrect Italian. Nevertheless, part of the significance of the original lies in the fact that it is written almost entirely in Scots – a characteristic which endows it with a linguistic strength the target text does not display.

A possible solution is contained in the source text itself, suggested by Hugh MacDiarmid's 'invention' of 'synthetic Scots': 'synthetic Scots', as used in *A Drunk Man* and in various other short poems of this early period in MacDiarmid's career, is a language which exists yet is not to be found anywhere, a new tongue made up of various actual and literary Scottish dialects. By analogy with synthetic Scots, in translating a novel or a long poem (that is, a work which gives him/her room for experimenting), the translator can try to give shape to a 'synthetic' Italian which reproduces the Scots terms used in the original and goes alongside the Italian if the source text is characterized by the dualism English/Scots. This 'synthetic' language can be of literary or dialectal origin, found or invented, and ideally would come to replace Scots not only on a particular occasion, but also in other works by the same translator, and, if the cultural operation is successful, in translations done by other professionals.

3 TRANSLATING MIDDLE SCOTS

Problems of a different sort arise when the source text is not only

at a geographical, but also at a temporal remove from the translator and his/her readers, thus complicating the question of how Lefevere's *tpt* elements can be rendered, substituted or explained in the target language/culture. James S. Holmes points out that the translator must choose whether to employ 'archaizing' or 'modernizing' techniques on three different levels – 'linguistic', 'literary', and 'socio-cultural' (Holmes 1971/1978: 37): on the linguistic level, the translator must decide whether to employ the current standard version of the target language or an earlier one; on the literary level, he/she must decide how to render the metric and prosodic forms and conventions of the original; on the socio-cultural level, he/she must decide whether those social and cultural references which may be difficult or incomprehensible to his/her readers have to be kept, obliterated, or modified.

The applicability of this model and the urgency of these choices become evident if a sample text like the opening stanza of William Dunbar's *The Thrissil and the Rois* is analyzed for the problems it poses and the possibilities it offers. Dunbar's poem is an allegorical celebration of a royal marriage, written in highly aureate language and in a metrical form suited to the theme ('rhyme royal', a stanza made up of seven lines rhyming ABABBCC). It opens on the traditional description of the awakening of nature at the beginning of spring:

Quhen Merche wes with variand windis past,
And Appryll had, with hir silver schouris,
Tane leif at nature with ane orient blast;
And lusty May, that muddir is of flouris,
Had maid the birdis to begyn thair houris
Amang the tendir odouris reid and quhyt,
Quhois armony to heir it wes delyt;

In order to produce an 'archaizing' version of this stanza at all levels, the translator must find historical equivalents for its language, literary form, and cultural context. As for the latter, it would perhaps be improper to modify the traditional natural description, with its reminiscences of the *Roman de la rose* and the *Canterbury Tales*: the literary allusion is perhaps less obvious to the contemporary reader than to the reader/listener of the fifteenth century, but that can be remedied through a footnote. The linguistic level poses a stronger dilemma: Dunbar's Middle Scots is at

a great temporal and geographical remove from today's Scotland and Italy, and that distance would disappear were the stanza to be rendered in contemporary Italian. As for the form, if it is easy enough to reproduce the structure of the stanza (it can be done, though it is difficult to recreate all the rhymes), we must ask ourselves how to render Dunbar's iambic pentameters. Italian prosody is almost entirely syllabic, whereas English prosody is half accentual, half syllabic.

There is no single strategy to produce an 'archaizing' version, or, for that matter, a 'modernizing' one: the translator of poetry, as James S. Holmes has written, is a 'metapoet', i.e., he/she has to make his/her choices not only as a 'secondary author', but also as a literary critic (Holmes 1969/1978: 11), and with an eye to the context in which his/her version will be published. In producing a version of the whole poem for an Italian literary magazine, I thought it expedient to render the Scottish iambic pentameters with Italian hendecasyllables, Dunbar's Middle Scots with Petrarch's Tuscan (or, the imitation Tuscan of Petrarch's successors). This variety of Italian, or Tuscan, was chosen for both literary and pragmatic reasons: on the one hand, Petrarch's Tuscan was the most popular Italian idiom in the British isles between the end of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth centuries; on the other, the use of a concise poetic diction, where elisions could be employed, made it easier to contain the ten syllables of the Scottish line in the eleven of the Italian. If one remembers that the stanza form and the rhymes had to be kept as well, the translation became a sort of tour de force, for the reader even more than the translator:

Fuggito Marzo e' suoi cangianti venti,
 E poi ch'Aprile e le argentate piogge
 Levaron l'ultima bufera a Oriente,
 La madre d'ogne fior, splendente Maggio,
 Facea gli augelli cominciar lor canti
 D'in tra i teneri bocci e bianchi e rossi,
 Dalla dolce armonia a gioia mossi;
 [Once March and its changing winds had flown,
 And when April and its silver rains
 Had taken away their last storm in the East,
 The mother of all flowers, dazzling May,
 Made the birds begin their song

Between the tender red and white buds,
Moved to joy by this sweet harmony;]

This version of the first stanza, because of the effect of ‘closure’ of metre and rhyme, can appear perfectly well-done: actually, in order to obtain the ‘archaizing’ effect, some inaccuracies have been committed. First of all, the tenses are different: the past perfect of the source text, which should be matched by Italian *trapassato prossimo* or *remoto*, and which was followed in the second stanza by the simple past (Italian *passato remoto*), has been rendered, for the sake of brevity, with Italian *passato remoto* from the third line onwards. Secondly, some details of the description have been altered: April ‘taking its leave of nature’ in the source becomes April ‘taking away its last storm’ in the target text; in the source, the birds’ song was ‘harmony which it was a delight to hear’, while in the target text the birds are moved to joyous singing by the harmony of the flowers. The translator, if he/she wants to write a full-fledged ‘archaizing’ version, must pay a price in terms of micro-textual precision.

Obviously, such a translation can be of some use if it is to be read by men and women of letters: it would perhaps be wrong to submit it to a widely-distributed publishing house or to one printing school or university schoolbooks. If a wider audience were to be addressed, the translator could choose the first of the three methods outlined above, i.e., produce a ‘crib’ for the reader to decipher the original; or he/she could write a ‘modernizing’ version at the formal and linguistic levels. Such a version would allow the translator to follow more accurately the *consecutio temporum* and the descriptive details:

Quando Marzo se ne fu andato coi suoi venti cangianti,
E Aprile, con le sue piogge d’argento,
Si fu congedato dalla natura con una bufera a oriente,
E la bella Maggio, la madre dei fiori,
Ebbe fatto intonare agli uccelli i loro canti
Fra i teneri odorosi fiori rossi e bianchi,
La cui armonia era una gioia udire;
[Once March had gone with its changing winds,
And April, with its silver rains,
Had taken its leave of nature with a storm in the east,

And beautiful May, mother of flowers,
 Had made the birds strike up their songs
 Among the tender red and white flowers,
 Whose harmony it was a joy to hear;]

This version does not renounce all rhetorical ornamentation, as seen in the web of rhyme/assonance/consonance (cangianti/argento/oriente/canti/bianchi; fiori/udire): but the liberation of the poem from the cages of rhyme and metre makes for livelier lines. It is to be noted that it would have been difficult to write a version displaying ‘archaizing’ features at the formal level and ‘modernizing’ features at the linguistic level, because the hendecasyllables need the condensation of Petrarch’s Tuscan. At the socio-cultural level, however, the poem is not ‘modernized’, if not for the estranging effect produced on the original material by the ‘modernizing’ form and language.

3.1 A compromise

The translator is fortunately not compelled to choose only one ‘archaizing’ or ‘modernizing’ option at each level, just as he/she is not compelled to choose only one ‘foreignizing’ or ‘domesticating’ strategy in translating contemporary works written in English and Scots. In the actual process of translating, different techniques and strategies are used at different points of the ‘bi-text’. In translating a poem written in ‘middle Scots’, the translator may well mix Petrarch’s with Montale’s Italian, rhymed hendecasyllables with unrhymed longer lines – also because at any stage of his/her work, the translator is concerned not so much with what is right and correct as with what is possible and feasible.

A compromising strategy yields excellent results in translating William Fowler, a Scottish poet who followed James VI of Scotland when he moved to London to become James I. Fowler’s sonnets are of good, but not of the highest, quality, and therefore, the translator need not be afraid to make them worse:

Newe wondar of the world, one mo then seaven,
 whose presence was my pryde and absence payne,
 whils this vyld pest in distance heth vs driven,
 I equal absence loss with deaths agayne:

for quhen by her we mortallye lye slayne,
to the immortall thrones our soule dois flie,
euen so my harte in this impatient payne
abondons this my corss and fleyes to thee.
deathe maks vs leave the derest things we see,
this pest depryvs me of your heunlye face;
deathe cruell is, so absence is to me;
deathe full of frayes, all ioyes doth absence chase:
yet death putts end to all our noysome caire,
bot in this absence myne reuius the maire. (Fowler 1914: 160)

This sonnet is a very good sample of Fowler's technique. Fowler's models are Italian, above all Petrarch and Petrarch's imitators (in this case, the starting point is poem CCCIX of Petrarca's *Canzoniere*: 'L'alto et novo miracol ch' à di nostri'). Fowler's sonnets, though, are not translations but free imitations: here as elsewhere, he picks up the first line from Petrarch and writes a modified version of that line which gives him the cue to write an original poem. Fowler's imitation is free in form as well as in language, because he prefers the English to the Italian sonnet form.

I translated this sonnet for a literary magazine, more precisely for an issue about the English (and Scottish) imitators of Petrarch. Therefore, also given Fowler's methods, I thought that the allusion to Petrarch had to be perceptible but not direct; that the form of the sonnet could be free – neither the Italian nor the English form; that the sonnet had better be written in a half 'archaizing', half 'modernizing' language, half Petrarch's Tuscan, half contemporary Italian. The resulting poem is more readable than the 'archaizing' version of Dunbar:

Del mondo nuova, ottava meraviglia,
gioia se resti, doglia quando parti,
questa peste in esilio ci ha mandati,
nella distanza ch'è come una morte:
come quando senz'anima si giace
ai troni eterni volano le anime,
così il mio cuore pesto senza pace
la mia carcassa lascia, e vola a te.
La morte tutto ciò che amiamo invola,

tuo volto celestiale questa peste;
 sì fera la morte, sì per me distanza;
 la morte pena, non meno l'assenza:
 ma morte pone fine ad ogni cura,
 assenza ogni mia cura aumenta ognora.
 [Of the world new, eight wonder,
 joy if you remain, grief if you go,
 this plague has exiled us,
 in the distance which is like a death:
 as when one lies soulless
 and one's soul flies to the eternal thrones,
 so my beaten heart which has no peace
 leaves my carcass, and flies to you.
 Death steals away all we love,
 this plague your heavenly visage;
 as fierce death, so distance is to me;
 death grief, absence no less grief:
 but death brings every care to an end,
 absence increases my care more and more.]

This version is close to both Fowler's original and Fowler's models, and yet it adheres to neither. It is written in hendecasyllables, but the rhymes are more or less free (the sonnet form is neither Italian nor Scottish): I have put in a rhyme, an assonance or a consonance wherever possible, and at all costs only in the final couplet. The target text modifies the diction, the syntax, the tenses, and the rhetorical organization of the source rather freely. From the point of view of poetic diction, modern ('pesto', 'carcassa') and archaic ('doglia', 'fera', 'cura') words are combined. From the point of view of syntax, 'archaizing' clauses ('come quando senz'anima si giace') are set beside less estranging ones ('ai troni eterni volano le anime'). Since Fowler's is a free imitation of an Italian sonnet, the translator produces a sort of imaginary original of the Scottish sonnet, but in such a way as to make it readable for the contemporary reader.

4 CONCLUSION

In his famous essay on translation, 'Des tours de Babel', Jacques Derrida notes one common shortcoming of translation theories, that in

dealing with the passage from one language into another ('des passages d'une langue à l'autre') they usually do not consider the possibility that a text be written in more than one language ('la possibilité pour des langues d'être impliquées à *plus de deux* dans un texte'). What Derrida has in mind are those literary texts whose authors, like James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*, employ more than one language to explore the possibilities of literature and human communication (Derrida 1987: 207-208). Such extreme cases demonstrate that very often, it is not enough for the translator to possess expert knowledge of two languages and two cultures: for there are source texts which force him/her to have at least a passing acquaintance with languages and cultures other than those directly implicated in the transaction.

The translator of texts belonging to bilingual or multilingual countries (or, to countries where two or more varieties of the same language are spoken) is in a slightly different situation, and has to face slightly different problems. In order to translate adequately, or at least consciously, the translator has to possess sociolinguistic notions about the environment which has produced the source text – i.e., notions about the settings, participants, purpose, key, and channels which motivate the use of one code or another (Coulthard 1977: 42-46). Once he/she has reached an understanding of the sociolinguistic context of situation of the source text, he/she is left with his/her doubts as to rendering: how can those variables be transferred or accounted for in the target text?

The translator of old texts, written in an outdated form of the source language, has to face similar dilemmas and to ask him/herself similar questions – for after all, from the translator's point of view, diachronic layers are technically equivalent to synchronic ones; a text written in Middle Scots posits an implicit dualism between Middle and Contemporary Scots, just as a contemporary text may posit an implicit or explicit dualism between Scots and English. Again, even if the translator is in possession of the necessary historical notions to fully understand the original, those notions define a range of possibilities but leave the final decisions in the his/her hands.

As always happens in translation, the answers to all questions and doubts are ultimately atomistic – each translator, faced with each single translation task, will choose different strategies – but not empirical: for

the translator's strategy will at best be dictated not only by personal taste, but also by a thorough knowledge of the sociolinguistic situation and historical development of the source language and culture.

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