

Language Explorers: Critical Reflexivity and Collaborative Translation

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Abstract

In this article, we review participant feedback and observational notes of the “Collaborative Translation: A Model for Inclusion” series of language learning workshops (University of Warwick, November 2016-May 2017) in order to present the advantages of the application of a specific model of collaborative translation (“Our research”) in the context of Higher Education (HE) Italian Studies in England. Situating our findings in response to existing scholarship highlighting the parallels between language learning and ethnography, and calling for the development of language learning as a critical intercultural practice (Phipps and Gonzales 2004; Roberts et al. 2001), we argue that collaborative translation is a classroom practice which can promote reflexivity in the elaboration of linguistic and cultural knowledge. We acknowledge the difficulty of meaningfully evaluating the type of knowledge that we suggest collaborative translation promotes within current assessment structures, and call for further attention to this challenge going forward.

1. Introduction

If you are lucky, you cross the language wall, and find yourself in another world. You are like an explorer, and try to notice and think about everything in a way you would never do at home, where so much is taken for granted.

Benedict Anderson, *A Life Beyond Borders* (2016: 131-132)

In his memoir *A Life Beyond Borders*, historian and political scientist Benedict Anderson describes how ethnographers cross a “language wall” to find themselves recognizing the strangeness of places and practices they previously took for granted and uncritically considered “home”. Anderson explicitly highlights the value of struggling with language learning in developing a critical reflexivity, because it is through the slow labour of coming to terms with a “foreign” tongue that the ethnographer is granted special powers of observation; “you gradually get to notice more, and yet you are still an outsider”, he argues, “the point being that good comparisons often come from the experience of strangeness” (131-132). Crucially

from our perspective as language teachers, Anderson suggests that this process often starts with words:

Indonesian, for example, has a special word, *gurih*, for the taste of rice (“deliciously pungent”, according to one dictionary). If you come from England, you are then startled to realise that the taste of rice can’t be described with a designated English word. (132)

Previous scholarship has already sought to draw out the parallels that Anderson identifies between ethnography and language learning. Celia Roberts, Michael Byram, Ana Barro, Shirley Jordan and Brian Street’s *Language Learners as Ethnographers* reports on a 1990s research project in which Modern Languages staff collaborated with anthropologists at Thames Valley University in order to explore some of the practical consequences of theories of intercultural communication that were starting to gain wider currency at the time (Roberts et. al. 2001). Roberts et al. indicate an increasing acceptance of their conclusion that “language teaching should aim to develop in learners an intercultural competence, rather than an imitation of a native speaker competence”, and offer a practical demonstration of how ethnographic practice is one way of equipping language learners with the reflexivity required to become intercultural speakers (Roberts et. al. 2001: 229). More recently, in the short and incisive volume *Modern Languages: Learning and Teaching in an Intercultural Field*, Alison Phipps and Mike Gonzalez contrast “language learning” as a commodity with a more meaningful process through which the learner critically explores “the multiple experiences and cultural resonances that are embedded in and accrue to other languages and their cultures” (Phipps and Gonzalez 2004: 27). Questioning the privileging of literature in the study of languages, Phipps and Gonzalez construe language learning instead as an encounter, and call explicitly for the development of an ethnographic reflexivity within the discipline (124).

In the current climate of a Modern Languages disciplinary crisis, with falling undergraduate admissions, a reduction of dedicated language degree courses, and the closure of University language departments (see for example Bawden 2013 and “Language Matters” 2009), the work of Phipps and Gonzalez and Roberts et al. has acquired a new significance, as discussed by Wall (2018) and Wells et. al. (2019). In this article, we focus on the feedback responses from participants and observational notes taken in the “Collaborative Translation” series of language

learning workshops held at the University of Warwick between November 2016 and May 2017 as a means of highlighting the parallels between translation, ethnography and language learning in terms of learner reflexivity, and in order to offer an example of how collaborative translation can encourage the key skill of reflexivity at different levels of language learning. We define reflexivity as the participant's critical awareness of and attention to the circumstances and values of knowledge production and their personal role within them. In particular, we focus on the somewhat neglected opportunities of collaborative translation as a critical tool for beginner language learners, and its role in bringing to the fore linguistic variety and questions of ideology in more advanced students.

In this sense, the analysis of this case study through a focus on feedback responses and observational notes seeks to reaffirm the importance of reflexivity also in teaching practice. In our role as language teachers, we often find ourselves trying to balance an inclusive, critical approach to language with the need to impart 'fixed' grammatical and lexical knowledge.¹ We discussed at length how collaborative translation could best be applied in these workshops with this goal in mind, as well as how we could practice reflexivity in our own teaching and planning. As detailed below, the workshops were supported by a feedback collection process and observational notes, with Georgia observing the sessions facilitated by Gioia and vice-versa. In other words, this article combines research-led teaching with reflective practice to explore the potential of collaborative translation in language learning.

2. Collaborative Translation at Warwick

As reported by Panzarella and Wall (2016),² the "Collaborative Translation: A Model for Inclusion" project coordinated by Jessica Griffiths (Trevitt) at Monash and Gioia Panzarella at Warwick investigated the implications of a specific model of collaborative translation developed by Griffiths in a range of contexts: literary, language teaching, migrant experience. The aim was to develop what Griffiths terms, via reference to Yasemin Yildiz's recognition of the persistence of a

¹ This tension is particularly productive when thinking of the opposition between previous language-learning methodologies based on 'grammar-translation' methods and current approaches to translation as a language learning tool. For an outline of different uses of translation in the language classroom, see Panzarella and Sinibaldi 2018.

² See this article for further details on our application of the model, rationale, and source text material choice. See also Wall and Panzarella 2015.

monolingual paradigm (Yildiz 2011: 2-6), a “postmonolingual” approach to collaborative translation; one which challenges the necessity of language skillsets by including collaborators who would be unable to complete the task alone, but can negotiate to reach the final product, thus requiring participants to combine complementary linguistic and disciplinary skillsets (“Conference paper: Collaborative translation and language learning” 2016). We applied the model at Warwick in the context of language learning by offering two sets of language workshops, Beginner Italian for fluent speakers of English and Intermediate-Advanced English for fluent speakers of Italian. Due to the larger size of the second group, and in response to the first round of participant feedback in which students suggested they would prefer more contact with a native English speaker, we introduced a second facilitator figure. Emily Roper, a BA Modern Languages finalist at Warwick, acted as a joint facilitator for two of the English workshops for Italian students.

The workshops were aimed at a non-specialist audience, primarily presenting an opportunity for students to enhance their CV. The participant response to the Italian language workshops, led by Gioia, was interesting in this respect; out of the total nine students who attended at least one workshop, only one student was studying Italian as an accredited element of her degree, with other participants primarily from History and Classics. The English language workshops, led by Georgia, relied on the cohort of Italian students spending a semester or academic year at Warwick as part of the Erasmus exchange programme, so as a group they shared a more vested interest in learning English. There was a high level of interest in this second set of workshops and we decided to cap attendance at sixteen participants to enable a greater degree of exchange with each other and with the workshop leader/facilitator. Most of this group were nearing completion or already held degrees in literature or translation with a focus on anglophone texts: of the fourteen students who participated in all sessions, three were postgraduate and eleven were undergraduate students.

In our application of the model, the departure point was a text written in the facilitator’s first language. In both sets of workshops, we highlighted that our position was that of a facilitator: we could answer questions about the source texts, but we could not provide translation solutions in the target language or comment on their accuracy. Our role was to draw attention to what, in our view, were the most salient points of each text; usually words which had perhaps particular cultural

nuances or were in some way challenging (for example, dialect or regional language, conflicting connotations, or referring to a specific practice) or, with the beginner students of Italian, grammar conventions which the students would need to understand. Instead of expecting us to comment on the solutions they proposed, students were encouraged to question us to weigh up the aptness of the solutions they elaborated in the target language; they were necessarily responsible for selecting the most effective translations.

Facilitators and students communicated in the primary language of the students which was also the target language of the translation. In other words, the facilitator acted as the source-language collaborator and the students as target-language collaborators, and the vehicular language of the session was the target language of the translation. In the English language workshops, all the students were fluent Italian speakers and the class was held in Italian but the facilitators' first language was English; in the Italian language workshops, all the students were fluent English speakers (though one student had learnt English as an additional language) and the workshops were held in English, but the facilitator's first language was Italian.

We offered a total of seven workshops; three Intermediate-Advanced English and three Beginner Italian language.³ Each of the seven sessions lasted an hour and a half. In the six workshops offered by Georgia and Gioia, there was a fifteen-minute informal introduction at the start of each session. Facilitators and students worked together for one hour on the text, and we reserved fifteen minutes for participant feedback at the end of each session. During this final fifteen minutes, students were invited to give anonymous written responses on a form which asked them the following questions (in English and Italian respectively):

What is the most useful thing you have learned this session?

What didn't you find productive?

What did you find challenging?

What surprised you about the session?

Any other comments:

³ After this first stage, we decided to capitalize on the enthusiasm of participants by opening up a competition for students to host a workshop themselves. We supported the successful applicant – Martina Severin, a postgraduate student from La Sapienza University of Rome researching the translation of Shakespeare into comics, and a participant in the Intermediated-Advanced English workshops – in organizing this final workshop on Italian regional language through a session collaboratively translating Antonello Venditti's song "Roma Capoccia". For further commentary on this session, see Severin (2017).

Participants were also invited to comment orally in the final fifteen minutes to the observer (the co-author of this article who was not delivering the session), who was present for the entire workshop but did not participate, in a separate room to the workshop facilitator(s), with any suggestions or responses to the session. The written responses to these questions and observer comments on the six workshops facilitated by the authors are the focus of our analysis below. We consider feedback from the Beginner Italian for English speakers and Intermediate-Advanced English for Italian speakers workshops separately, providing further details of the context and specific cultural dynamics we feel informed each session. In doing so, we aim to highlight how a similar reflexivity developed across both groups in spite of their distinctive needs and expectations.

3. “We took a stab in the dark here, didn’t we?”: Beginner Italian for English speakers

In English and Scottish undergraduate degree programmes, Italian is the fourth most popular language after French, Spanish and German, but it is the only language out of the four that can be studied from ab initio level at all Higher Education institutes offering Italian in England (Siciliano Verruccio 2011: 9 and 19). Almost a quarter of degree courses in Italian or featuring Italian as a named component (Joint Honours degrees or major/minor combinations with Italian) do not stipulate a language qualification in their entry criteria (12).⁴ Therefore, like our participant group, most students of Italian at University level in England take up the language from scratch, sometimes without prior experience of learning any language. This means that beginner students of Italian usually have several hours of compulsory language classes – an intensive introduction to the grammatical foundations of Italian – and one or two cultural modules in which they are grouped with students who already have knowledge of Italian to study literature, film, history, politics, or a combination of the above. According to Lasagabaster and Sierra (2010), they may or may not receive additional language support for the cultural modules and thus in application, if not in principle, the teaching of the Italian language in English HE institutions is markedly different from approaches which seek to combine teaching content with additional language acquisition, such as Content and Language

⁴ According to Siciliano Verruccio (2011), no specific language requirements are stipulated in the entry criteria of 23% of degree courses in Italian or featuring Italian as a named component (Joint Honours or Major/Minor combinations in Italian).

Integrated Learning (CLIL), which remain primarily the domain of the private sector and of EFL teaching. Though it is assumed that the types of socio-historical and aesthetic issues students will tackle in their cultural studies will be raised in their language learning classes too, in practice the extent to which language teaching incorporates cultural reflection will rely on the disposition of the teacher and their material selection.

The Beginner Italian workshops are a useful micro-context through which we can consider the benefits of using collaborative translation at beginner level. Over the following pages, we consider chronologically the feedback collected over the three sessions and observer's notes to highlight the validity of collaborative translation as a didactic tool in language teaching. Specifically, we propose that collaborative translation can be an effective means of systematically encouraging reflexivity at beginner level and stimulating students to critically engage with their learning process.

Despite initial hesitation and doubt as to their role, the responsibility of selecting the most appropriate terms and indeed the difficulty of agreeing, as a group, on a possible solution seemed to inspire participants as early as the first session. In oral feedback from the first Italian language workshop, students indicated that the responsibility of acting as the target-language translator was not, to begin with, a natural position, particularly given that they were not set the task of producing a written translation. One student also commented in the written feedback that the session "did not seem to have a direct focus, although did improve my awareness". The preliminary hesitancy students indicated in their feedback is supported by observational notes on the first workshop. Georgia's observer notes here describe the situation at the beginning of the translation session (after the initial fifteen-minute introduction) when the students had begun work on the lyrics of Daniele Silvestri's "sale" (2006), a song which plays on the multiple meanings of this word in Italian:

As facilitator, Gioia directed the students' attention towards the prevalence of the word *sale* by asking students to identify recurring word(s). They successfully guessed at one of its meanings as she encouraged them to consider in conjunction with vocabulary similar to English (*sale iodato*, *sale carbonato*). The discussion returned to the idea of 'election' and students, with only limited prompting, identified that *sale* must have more than one meaning. Students again seemed

unsure of their role of contributing translation, looking for Gioia to give a definitive answer. As a group they proposed a (impressive) translation of ‘to take office’ but then seemed unsure, because Gioia responded “maybe, that could be it”. As Gioia highlighted the three meanings encountered so far (orally); salt, hall, to take office, students seemed more confident due to her assertiveness in teaching style, but still glanced hesitantly at other members of the group. I think this was due to a combination of two factors 1) a correct answer/possible solution was never supplied and especially, 2) they did not receive validation of their answers from Gioia, who replied only with a “could be”; “might be”, and encouraged them to discuss and propose more answers. For example, when the most confident student in the group asked for confirmation on her idea that ‘salt’ could be a form of personification, Gioia replied “could be, let’s keep that in mind and come back to it later”.

It is worth stressing that at this point in their studies, the idea of multiple possible translations appeared unfamiliar to the majority of participants: in written feedback, all students expressed some form of surprise or value in recognizing that, “literal translation isn’t really possible”, as per one participant’s comment. “I gained more of an insight into how meaning differs depending on context”, another participant suggested, and the comment that “being able to learn the context and cultural references in phrases like this make them more accessible, unlike translating them literally when they would make no sense” was echoed across the forms.

By the end of the session, however, it was precisely this ambiguity that students seemed to find exciting. In the oral feedback group, participants were very enthusiastic about the session as a whole but commented especially positively about having to explain some concepts to the facilitator; “we felt like the teacher sometimes”, being in a small group and “having lots of opportunities to speak”, and the general group dynamic which was “friendly and interactive”. Students also commented positively and were surprised about the lesson styles, “I was expecting more of a lesson and to learn to say things like “Hello” and “My name is...”, and being encouraged to reflect on their own language through translation, which they identified as an element that is likely to be of long-term benefit rather than an immediate advantage, “this will indirectly help me think a lot more about language”. The didactic benefits of this reflexivity were emphasized in the written feedback. Students commented that they were both surprised by but found most useful “the

dualistic nature of the conversations” as one student put it, clarifying, “explaining English actually helped understand the Italian”:

“I was surprised in a good way by its informality and friendly environment”

“It was nice that both sides were teaching something new about their language”

“Our discussion was really interactive between all of us with so many different ideas explored”

“Looking at things in context and comparing similarities to native language – helps with understanding and reflecting on the language you’re learning and also your own native one”

“The discussion made one question things from English which is a transferable skill you can use in learning any language”.

In the second session of the English language workshops, participants seemed comfortable with their role of source-language collaborator and readily took the lead in questioning the facilitator about different connotations of words in Italian to identify possible solutions. For example, they arrived at the translation of *soggiorno* in the following way:

Facilitator: Let’s look at this word, *soggiorno*. So we know it is a room. What other word can you recognise here?

Several students: Day.

Facilitator: Yes, a room where you spend the day.

At this point different students contributed and all seemed confident in taking the lead by direct questions at Gioia.

Student L: Would you watch TV in there?

Facilitator: Yes.

Student H: Like, with sofas?

Facilitator: Yes.

Student L: Yeah, that’s a ‘living room’ (other students nodding agreement).

In this part of the session, which concentrated on understanding the vocabulary related to the home,⁵ Georgia noted students adding lots of commentary to their copies of the translation. The discussion of the word *ammezzato* was particularly

⁵ We provided an excerpt from Simonetta Agnello Hornby’s novel *Via XX Settembre* (2013).

interesting in that the group could not agree on a solution and were happy to carry on discussing other terms once they had noted several options. Whilst they were interested in the possible translations ('mezzanine', 'balcony'), and their respective connotations, which they suggested referenced class differences, they decided to leave it unresolved. In our experience, this is unusual for beginner language students, who tend to prefer more precise definitions of vocabulary. As facilitator, Gioia encouraged the students to reflect upon this doubt by commenting that she herself was not sure of the connotations of this term as used throughout Italy, but the important thing was to understand the implication of *mezzo* as 'half', though overall they did not need to be excessively guided to make this judgement. The students demonstrated increased confidence in evaluating different solutions precisely because of the questions and uncertainty raised by the group discussion. Again, this notion is supported by the written feedback responses to the second session. Students identified the learning method as one of the most useful things about the session, highlighting that it was helpful to learn new vocabulary and grammar through the historical contexts and by "translation *attempts* by looking for words similar to English" (our emphasis). The fact that such attempts may have ultimately been deemed unsuccessful by the group was irrelevant; what mattered was the discussion and the questions it raised. Interestingly, though the session was conducted entirely through this informal 'translation conversation' in which the facilitator took care to avoid grammatical terms (for example, by asking students instead to recognise 'patterns' in the words to identify function), students identified making progress in Italian grammar as one of the most useful points of the session, as well as an unexpected development. In response to question 4, "What surprised you about the session?", we received the following comments, "the learning of a new tense (in a good way though)"; "learning about tenses in a more natural way = way it is used and examples, not simply told rules"; "the depth of analysis of the text and the fact it was not just a simple speaking workshop".

By the third and final workshop, students seemed very familiar with the format and ready to work on the text, as Gioia, acting as facilitator, anticipated, "you know how it works". In the informal discussion before the session officially began, Georgia noted in her observation comments that:

All students engaged in a lively conversation about learning grammar and knowing the grammar of their native language. They made comparisons between

the English national curriculum and what they knew of the approaches of other countries, based on anecdotes and discussions with international students and housemates, suggesting that grammatical understanding of English by native speakers was poor when compared to other native speakers' understanding of the grammar of their first language(s). In this workshop, grammar was made more obvious even if grammatical terms per se were still not overly used.

Perhaps because of the smaller group size (only five out of the nine students were able to attend the final session), the feedback session after was predominantly oral with only a few written comments left. In this session, students stated they found it helpful to work on a text in which they were already familiar with some elements, but also liked the contextual/cultural insights provided by the text of the previous week so thought the workshops had offered a good balance. They spoke very positively about working as a team, "we really bounce off each other", and commended the practicality of the sessions, saying that they felt they had really learned language as it was actually used, based on how it is spoken rather than how it was written. They especially enjoyed the conversation dynamic and said "you feel like you are achieving something". The prominence given to the collaborative element of the workshops was noted also in observer comments:

When feeding back into the group, I noticed that the students themselves emphasized collaboration: "we took a stab in the dark here, didn't we?"; "That was the consensus, wasn't it?"

The written feedback also emphasized the benefits of the *method* as much as the content covered. Though students highlighted that it was useful to learn a new grammar point (negation and adverbs) and set phrases, on the whole written feedback emphasized the benefits of inferring and considering possible connotations in comparison to English, rather than focusing on the content:

"It is easier to understand a text after talking about it, even without translating, when you just discuss meaning"

"...comparing Italian and English grammar..."

"...reflecting on my own language to translate sentences..."

"Our own grammar in English is different and it's interesting to compare our own use"

The feedback comments across the three sessions indicate doubt and disagreement as productive elements of a collaborative didactic process, and one which encourages a critical understanding of languages as social constructs. The fact that students continued to reflect upon collaborative translation as a learning method throughout the three sessions, as per the above comments, indicated that it remained an innovative element, despite their increased familiarity with the model. This engagement with the learning method and in particular, their growing security with the possibility of *not* finding or agreeing upon a solution as well as with the validity of the collaborative “translation conversation” itself opens up further questions. What are the participants really learning through collaborative translation? We have stressed here that students are developing not only linguistic skills, but a critical reflexivity in their language learning, which, going forward, begs the question of how to assess their progress.

4. “Diverse cultural perspectives”: Intermediate-Advanced English for Italian Speakers

It can be said that within Italy, knowledge of English corresponds to symbolic capital on a domestic level in perhaps a more pervasive way than it does in other European countries. Contemporary “anglomania” and “anglophilia” are not merely the result of more recent transnational flows but, as Robert J. Blackwood and Stefania Tufi highlight, the pervasive product of entrenched positive cultural stereotypes of England dating back several centuries, standing in stark contrast to a pragmatic assessment of English purely in terms of communicative value and a sense of “anglophobia” identifiable amongst the governing elite of other European nations, such as France (Blackwood and Tufi 2015: 179-183).

Together with the prestige associated with English in Italy, there is also the matter of regional language/dialect, which are perceived as being less prestigious than a ‘standard’ Italian. Marked accents – as well as linguistic elements that make the origin of the speaker visible – need to be seen as elements of a diversity that characterizes contemporary Italian. As Mari D’Agostino explains, social stigmatization is a central element to consider when reflecting on linguistic variation in contemporary Italian. She points out that dialects and regional languages are not stigmatized because of linguistic characteristics, but rather because of the social functions that they perform (D’Agostino 2007: 118-123).

The participants in the Intermediate-Advanced English workshops were therefore distinct from those of the Beginner Italian workshops not only on account of their linguistic proficiency, but also in terms of their attitude towards language learning: English is considered to be an essential prerequisite for future employment rather than simply a means of supporting affiliated studies such as Classics or History or boosting the graduate skillset. Accordingly, in the first workshop, Gioia's notes as observer revealed that students were surprised and perhaps initially disappointed that the vehicular language for the session was Italian, rather than English:

The students discussed at length the decision to conduct the session in Italian: "We were more at ease and in Italian we are able to reason in a way that we wouldn't in English". Some said they wanted to attend lessons held solely in English, but after discussing with peers they realised this wasn't the objective of the course.⁶

It therefore became evident during this first session that the English workshops represented an opportunity for us as language teachers to try and create an environment in which students can develop concrete language skills (ie. learn grammar and new vocabulary as a fixed entity) and in the same moment reflect upon the contested, fluid and socially-constructed nature of the very language they are learning. In this case, according to the written feedback on the first session, there were three factors that enabled such a critically-engaged approach to language. Firstly, the choice of material. As in the first Italian language workshop, the students were asked to discuss song lyrics. The choice of lyrics composed by Australian artist Baz Luhrman, based on a piece by American columnist Mary Schmick,⁷ was a conscious tactic aimed at encouraging students to consider different Englishes and to question the authority of the native speaker. As a British English-speaker, Georgia, acting as facilitator, shared her doubts at some of the precise meanings and cultural implications of phrases which relied on knowledge of American and

⁶ *Original notes in Italian*: In particolare si è discusso la scelta di fare la sessione in italiano: "Eravamo più a nostro agio e in italiano siamo in grado di fare ragionamenti che in inglese non sapremmo fare". Alcuni hanno detto che avrebbero avuto bisogno di seguire una lezione in inglese ma discutendo tra di loro si sono resi conto che non erano queste le finalità del corso.

⁷ Baz Luhrmann, "Everybody's Free (To Wear Sunscreen)", 1999, based on the essay by columnist Mary Schmick, "Advice, like youth, probably just wasted on the young", *Chicago Tribune*, June 1997.

Australian culture, which she lacked. In their feedback, students expressed surprise at the choice of text and the discussions which arose from it:

“[I was surprised] that we had to translate an Australian text and not a British English one. But I really liked it”

“The cultural differences between both English and Australian as well as within Italy between North and South”.⁸

As the second feedback comment indicates, the diverse cultural perspectives of the workshop participants themselves was a key factor in stimulating further reflexivity, in that it stimulated students to challenge the idea of the English language as a homogenous entity and discuss the existence of multiple Englishes. Students questioned cultural constructions in both English and Italian:

What is the most useful thing you have learned in this session?

“To discuss opinions on the different ways of rendering cultural stereotypes or words in Italian according to the different regional origins of the other students”

“That there can be different points of view even from people who come from the same country, depending on where they are from”

What surprised you?

“I was surprised to see that, despite the fact that I worked with other Italians, we all came up with different translations. I think working with other people that don’t come from the same region or city as me can make the translation more complete”

“I was surprised that we were all Italian. I thought at the beginning that I was in a mixed class of Italian and English students but the fact that we were all Italian ended up being really useful as we all come from different parts of Italy and we all have different cultural perspectives”.⁹

⁸ *Original responses in Italian to the question, “Cosa ti ha sorpreso?”*: “dover tradurre un testo australiano e non inglese. Ma mi è piaciuto molto”; “le differenze culturali sia inglesi/australiani che italiane stesse tra nord e sud”.

⁹ *Original responses in Italian to the question, “Qual è la cosa più utile che hai imparato in questa sessione?”*: “scambiare opinioni sulla diversa resa in italiano di stereotipi/parole in base alla provenienza regionale degli altri studenti”; “possono esserci differenti punti di vista anche tra persone della stessa nazionalità, dipendenti dalla località di provenienza”. *Original responses in Italian to the question, “Cosa ti ha sorpreso?”*: “mi ha sorpreso vedere che, nonostante abbia lavorato con altri italiani, tutti quanti abbiamo dato una traduzione diversa”; dal confronto con persone che provengono da regioni e città diverse dalle mie penso si possa arrivare a una traduzione più completa”; “mi ha

Finally, the fact that the vehicular language was the participants' primary language, despite being an initial point of controversy, ultimately was identified by the students as useful in enabling more complex discussion:

What is the most useful thing you have learned in this session?

"To discuss with other Italian colleagues translation decisions. To approach the translation in a different way, compared to what I am used to doing in Italy"

What surprised you?

"I was surprised to hear Georgia only speaking Italian. I really enjoyed that, because it put us at ease, and we could express our ideas better"

"That the course is conducted in Italian, but I think it's the most effective way of doing this type of work, because for me it can be complicated to express concepts related to the Italian language in English".¹⁰

Seeking to capitalize on the students' interest in linguistic variety and reflexivity, the subsequent two workshops maintained a focus on regionalisms, which was assisted further by the introduction of Emily as a second facilitator figure in response to participant feedback that students had had relatively little time to discuss ideas with Georgia given the large group size. In addition to the material choice, Georgia and Emily's different accents in themselves gave rise to further discussion of the heterogeneity of English. Students who did express a preference for the second session in comparison to the first stated both orally and in their written feedback that this was due to the presence of Emily, both for the opportunity to work more with a native speaker and for the consequent focus on accents and cultural connotations, "I preferred today's workshop because of the discussion about different English accents that we had".¹¹ Gioia noted during the oral feedback

sopreso essere tutti italiani. inizialmente pensavo di trovarmi in una classe mista tra italiani ed inglesi ma il fatto di essere tutti italiani si è rivelato molto utile in quanto veniamo da località differenti in Italia e abbiamo diverse prospettive culturali".

¹⁰ *Original response in Italian to the question, "Qual è la cosa più utile che hai imparato in questa sessione?"*: "potermi confrontare con altri colleghi italiani sulle scelte da prendere nella traduzione del testo. affrontare la traduzione in un modo diverso rispetto a quello cui sono abituata in Italia". *Original responses in Italian to the question, "Cosa ti ha sorpreso?"*: "mi ha sorpreso sentire Georgia parlare solo in italiano. Mi ha fatto molto piacere perché ci ha messo più a nostro agio, potendo esprimere meglio le nostre idee"; "che il corso sia in italiano, ma trovo sia il modo più efficace per affrontare questo tipo di lavoro, perché per me può essere complicato esprimere concetti che riguardano la lingua italiana in inglese".

¹¹ *Original comment in Italian*: "mi è piaciuto di più il workshop di oggi per il discorso sulle differenze degli accenti inglesi che abbiamo introdotto".

session, that participants are increasingly aware of linguistic diversity not only in Italy but in England. They did not expect to find in England linguistic varieties with different characteristics in terms of prestige, and reflected in particular on the challenge of translating regional connotations.¹²

The fact that participants began here to consider the prestige of different forms of English is telling, because it indicates a new critical perspective: independently, they had begun to reflect on language ideology at the same time as they were developing their linguistic skills. This reflexivity was maintained in the final workshop, with a focus on idiomatic expressions.¹³ As reported previously, translating English phrases such as ‘once in a blue moon’ and ‘a big cheese’ proved to be a meeting-point for many diverse “Italies” (Panzarella and Wall 2016: 335). These are representative responses to the question posed in the written feedback, “What is the most useful thing you have learned this session?”:

“This process also gave me the opportunity to learn new words in English and Italian”

“It was all useful, I’ve learned a lot. It was fun seeing how you think differently in different languages”

“The fact that culture influences language use a lot, for example in Italian [translation] lots of the phrases featured food or references to the Church”

“The variety in idiomatic expressions according to which part of the country you come from, in both English and in Italian”

“The correspondence between English and Italian idiomatic expressions. It was interesting to note how, even between us Italians, expressions varied between regions”

“I learned a lot of English expressions, and some new Italian ones that I’d never heard before”.¹⁴

¹² *Original notes in Italian*: Presa di coscienza su diversità linguistiche non solo in Italia ma anche in Inghilterra, non si aspettavano ci fossero anche in Inghilterra varietà linguistiche con diverse caratteristiche a livello di prestigio etc. in particolare riflettono sulla difficoltà di tradurre lingue regionali.

¹³ In the final workshop, students were simply given a list of idiomatic expressions and explanations.

¹⁴ *Original response in Italian to the question, “Qual è la cosa più utile che hai imparato in questa sessione?”*: “Questo passaggio mi ha anche dato la possibilità di imparare nuovi vocaboli inglesi e italiani”; “È stata tutta utile, ho imparato moltissimo. È bello vedere come si pensa diversamente nelle varie lingue”; “Il fatto che la cultura di un paese influenzi molto le espressioni usate nella lingua, ad esempio in italiano ricorre spesso il cibo o riferimenti alla Chiesa”; “L’esistenza di diversi modi di dire a seconda della regione del paese dal quale si proviene, sia in inglese che in italiano”; “La

Given that the use of dialect/regional language often has negative cultural connotations (or is simply considered to be *lack* of ‘culture’), the fact that participants were enthused as much as by linguistic variety in Italian and English respectively as they were by unexpected similarities between Italian and English indicates how collaborative translation facilitates the creation of an environment in which students are stimulated to employ all their linguistic resources. Clearly here we were dealing primarily with two ‘major’ languages, but we feel that the students’ readiness to explore dialect and regional vocabulary as viable solutions indicates the promise of the use of collaborative translation in situations where conflict exists between dominant and minority languages.

5. How to track a language explorer? Conclusions and further questions

In his keynote address at the TransCollaborate symposium held at the Monash Prato Centre in July 2016, David Gramling was speaking specifically about translation when he suggested that there is a need to “rehearse” collaboration (Gramling 2017). Sociologist Richard Sennet, on the other hand, is contemplating conversation more broadly when he cites the value of what he calls “dialogic” discussions, or those exchanges which perhaps cannot be “resolved”, but through which participants can gain knowledge and a certain type of pleasure (Sennet 2013: 24). Unconsciously echoing one another, both Gramling and Sennet articulate the need to *practice* collaboration, to cultivate the skill of disagreeing productively. This investigation of how the labour of the craft of ‘carrying across’ a cultural artefact to a new context collaboratively is still in its early stages, but the feedback from these specific micro-contexts that this article has discussed is suggestive of the potential for collaborative translation in generating a space in which students can develop such a skill.

In the Beginner Italian workshops, we observed how doubt and disagreement in fact enhanced the participants’ confidence, interest and overall learning experience. In the Intermediate-Advanced English workshops, we saw how collaboration made evident the heterogeneity of language as a social construction, and stimulated participant reflexivity on language ideology as well as on translation as a form of cultural encounter. The relatively short timespan of this project forced us to prioritise certain aspects over others. Given our primary interest was how students

corrispondenza tra espressioni idiomatiche italiani e inglesi, è stato interessante notare come, persino tra noi italiani, i modi di dire variano tra una regione e l’altra”; “Ho imparato tanti modi di dire della lingua inglese, e alcune espressioni nuove in italiano mai sentite prima”.

felt about this type of approach, we did not collect data – for example, by designing and undertaking a formal assessment – that would allow us to draw conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the collaborative translation method in terms of language acquisition. It is also true that by focusing on key words, our workshops could be said to foreground the idea of language as a series of discrete elements as opposed to language as a ‘continuous’, all-encompassing entity; in this sense, such key words can be seen as meaningful case studies that serve as the input to the ‘translation conversation’. Case studies should not necessarily be limited to key words, though, but may include other elements that are representative, or relevant examples of cultural or social differences. Further attention to other aspects of language such as pragmatics and semiotics must be incorporated into the ‘translation conversation’ if the method is to effectively offer students a holistic perspective.

Based on our participants’ feedback, our aim is to invite further exploration of collaborative translation in HE classrooms as a means of systematically encouraging reflexivity in language learning at all levels. In both contexts, participants engaged critically with language as the object of study, but also with their own learning; they were, to return to Anderson’s image, true “language explorers”. As language teachers, our responsibility is also to recognize and track this reflexivity and engagement – to find a way of charting language learning as a form of cultural inquiry in its own right – a task infinitely more difficult than measuring linguistic competency. The challenge of just what skills should be assessed in collaborative translation, and how, was discussed informally with participants following the final sessions; in these discussions it was repeatedly suggested that assessment structures need to allow space for discussion as to how translation decisions had been reached and their efficacy. In our mind, while reflecting on descriptors that may help in designing a formal assessment for collaborative translation activities in the language classroom, this opens up opportunities for innovative forms of peer and self-assessment which can more accurately reflect collaborative translation itself as both a product and a process; put simply, the question of how to chart the path of a language explorer is one that should also be directed to the language explorers themselves.

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