

**“ERA IL DISCRIMEN TRA SOCIO DOC, ELEGANTIARUM MAGISTER...” OR  
TRANSLATING CODE-MIXING FROM ITALIAN INTO RUSSIAN. THE CASE OF  
7 UOMINI 7. PERIPEZIE DI UNA VEDOVA BY SILVANA GRASSO**

MARIA SHCHERBAKOVA\*

UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA

**Abstract:** This paper examines the translation problems related to multilingual issues in the literary text. In particular, we will consider the translation from Italian into Russian of the short novel *7 uomini 7. Peripezie di una vedova* by the contemporary Sicilian writer Silvana Grasso. The main issue lies in identifying, along the translation path, a continuous lexical and stylistic compromise for the purpose of not losing the expressive effect desired by the author through the use of code-mixing. Starting from the theoretical framework provided by Katharina Reiss e Hans Vermeer focused on the Skopostheorie, there will be an analysis of the translation of the mentioned book and, consequently, translation proposals in Russian, yet analyzing the results on their validity. Therefore, it will be set as a further objective to investigate the solutions related to the linguistic-cultural contrast generated by code-switching and the way to apply specific translation methods focusing on the target reader. The scarcity of documentation and studies pertaining to translating code-mixing highlight the importance of this research which arises from the need to fill the gap inherent in the diatopic aspect of the Italian language in the translation field.

**Key words:** Sicilian dialect, code-mixing, diatopic varieties, short novel, neologisms

## 1. Introduction

Code-mixing can be considered one of the most challenging issues in translation studies. Thus, this paper aims to provide a new point of view on a problem in lack of a framework and only a few studies nowadays. The paper will present a translation into Russian of the Italian short novel by Silvana Grasso, containing extensive use of the Sicilian dialect, neologisms and the use of ancient Greek and Latin. The case here presented is unusual since the mixing of codes we will consider includes several diatopic varieties of the same language and other languages at once. Therefore, it seems challenging to translate from a language with a variety of codes (Italian) into another language that does not contain dialects as such in its everyday life (Russian). The literary work we will focus on is a storehouse of cases of mixing linguistic codes, which is the reason why we choose to

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\* maria.s\_95@hotmail.com



consider it in our study. The process of translation of the short novel *7 uomini 7. Peripezie di una vedova* identified some problems that subsequently determined the use of certain translation transformations – lexical, grammatical, lexico-grammatical, as well as stylistic – due to the lexical heterogeneity of the text. In addition to transformations, the central translation strategy of this work was the Skopostheorie, which streamlined the translation process and helped to bring to the fore all those tasks that would later help with recreating the source text (ST) in the target language (TL).

The result of this study will be a translation of the novel from Italian into Russian and a post-translation analysis of the strategies used. In addition, this paper will provide a theoretical outline of the translation of texts with diatopic variety and multiple linguistical codes to apply when translating from languages rich in dialects.

## 2. Skopostheorie as Valuable Theoretical Framework

*Skopostheorie* was developed as the basis for a general theory of translation that can capture beliefs about particular languages and cultures. Initially, this theory was developed in the late 1970s by two linguists, Hans Vermeer and Katharina Reiss (Vermeer and Reiss 2013), and was later supplemented by the work of Christiane Nord and others. *Skopostheorie* started from a non-schematic and non-rigid concept of “equivalence”: within this framework the criterion of equivalence does no longer pertain linguistic structures but rather consists in the purpose of the translation act, which rose to the apex of the translator’s decision-making hierarchy.

Skopostheorie must be introduced by considering it in a broader communicative context. To contextualize it, let us look at the statements of some scholars who have investigated the link between communication theory and translation. Hellmut Riediger (2018: 10-11) argues that translation is an integral part of the wide range of human communication phenomena. Reiss emphasizes that interlingual translation can be defined as a bilingual mediated communication process, which usually aims to produce a text in the target language that is functionally equivalent to a text in the source language, and where the translator becomes a secondary sender. According to Reiss the source text is “a measure of everything in the translation” (Reiss 1998: 70) both from a textual and lexico-grammatical point of view. Reiss emphasizes the importance of initially identifying **textual genre** to maintain the functional equivalence of the text, meant as a unit. In order to explain what equivalence means, Reiss recalls Fritz Güttinger's “result-oriented translation” theory, which states that any translation aims to obtain the same communicative result of the source text, which implies reproducing its meaning in the target text effect (on the reader). Therefore, wishing to clarify further what has been argued, Katharina Reiss' theory of equivalence and *Skopostheorie* are closely united by a link of mutual functionality, where the latter responds to the idea that the target text must have the same functions as the source text and its culture. In contrast, the former theory deals with the translation's mere linguistic and stylistic rendering.

Therefore, Reiss underlines the importance of the source text and defines it as the basis for recognizing the linguistic means used fulfilling the particular communicative purposes and, finally, proceeding to the pragmatic construction of the text itself: “... *the*

*establishment of the text varieties [is] of decisive importance for the translator, so that he may not endanger the functional equivalence of the TL text by natively adopting SL conventions” (Venuti 2012: 116).*

It must be said that, the problem of the relationship between language and culture has always been a topic of interest for linguists.

### **3. Diatopic Varieties and Their Role in Translation Theory**

#### **3.1. The Case of Sicilian Dialect**

A language is a verbal tool that constitutes an essential part of culture since all its structure and functioning characteristics can be considered cultural manifestations of the corresponding linguistic collective (Königs 2000: 1-17). This relationship has always aroused the interest of linguists and scholars in other related fields, including sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics.

We must bear in mind that languages are not homogeneous entities. There are diatopic varieties, that is, the lexical and structural varieties of the same language that change depending on the geographical location. In the Italian language, these varieties are represented in regional dialects in their macroscopic form, but the languages can often also have peculiar characteristics at the local level and are spoken only by a small group of people. The development of these varieties has favored exceptional mobility of forms and structures reaching, through the dialects, the local varieties of Italian and, consequently, the standard language: thus, for example, the lexical dialectal elements, purified by more characters distinctly local, they have become Italianized and, in some cases, adopted by the entire national community (De Mauro 1972: 142).

In this article, we will focus on the Sicilian dialect, which occupies a special place in the linguistic context of Italy. The awareness of the significant differences between the Italian language and the Sicilian dialect is reflected in popular culture. Sicilian dialect is widely used in its most authentic form and often influences the dialectics of those who use the Italian language. According to some scholars, it could be counted among the languages rather than retroceded to a dialect (Čelyševa 2001). The condition that makes this dialect special resides in its rich literary tradition and draws its origins from the union and mixture of many languages belonging to the Mediterranean basin whose speakers have colonized the island over the centuries (Moreschini 1984: 139-160, 267-280).

Sicilian was the language of the first courtly poetic school in the Apennines, which greatly influenced the formation of Tuscan literature and the correct Italian literary language (first half of the 13th century). The prestige of literature in the Sicilian language, particularly poetry, was relatively high, even after the diffusion on the island of the Italian literary norm (Čelyševa 2001: 142).

Sicilian belongs to the dialects of the extreme south, and in the dialectological plan, is divided into three zones: western, central and eastern. From the point of view of internal unity, Sicilian is a large group of dialects, often with significant structural differences, so the term "Sicilian dialect" is rather generic and arbitrary. The differences

within the Sicilian dialect are determined by the influences of diverse peoples and their cultures, such instance as the Greek influence on the Doric and Elymian dialects, which influenced the southern and eastern parts of Sicily and whose imprint has persisted until today, and the influence of the Anatolian peoples, especially for the areas of southern Sicily (Moreschini 1984: 13-54).

After the sixteenth century and the stabilization of the standard Italian language based on the Florentine dialect, the use of Sicilian dialect in literature decreased more and more. That is why the subsequent recourse was called “voluntary dialectism.” To this movement belonged writers such as Giovanni Verga, Luigi Pirandello, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, Andrea Camilleri, etc., whose works are presented in standard Italian with the addition of dialectal forms and syntax. The contemporary writer Silvana Grasso adopts “voluntary dialectism” in some of her literary works. It must be interpreted as a stylistic choice, since the skillful mix of Italian and dialect immediately immerses the reader in the precise social, cultural and geographical context sought by the writer.

### **3.2. Translating Dialects**

Usually, authors opt to insert dialects in their literary work for stylistic reasons: dialects are used to mark the social and cultural void between interlocutors or to introduce the subjective comments of the author himself (Čelyševa 2019: 215-228). Translating such texts, requires a solid knowledge of translation theories and strategies, which will support and guide the translator in making linguistic and stylistic choices. These strategies do not find harmonization in a single theory devoted specifically to code mixing translation but are still an emergent and ongoing research topic. Scholars do not have a unanimous view on the approach to be used for translating dialects. Some linguists, including John Catford (1965), Juliane House (2009), Eugene Nida (2003) claim that the dialect of one language can be translated into the dialect of another language, while other linguists, such as Rosa Rabadán (2007), tend to translate the dialect into the standard language, marking the translation as “said in the dialect.” Others advocate a compromise between the two currents of thought; they propose to translate the dialect into the target language by altering the lexical or stylistic elements or the register, analyzing case by case, without transforming the entire message of the source text.

### **4. Short Novel *7 uomini 7. Peripezie di una vedova***

In 2006, the first Sicilian edition of the long story (or short novel) *7 men 7* came out, and in 2019 its second edition was published, accompanied by the literary essay by Marco Bardini. The novel represents an autobiographical story concerning an exhilarating experience lived by the writer Silvana Grasso. The satirical book bordering on the unreal describes a fascinating period of a woman's existence after her husband's untimely death. The fear triggered by her sudden and early widowhood pushes her acquaintances, especially women, to a hasty and ironic search for a new partner for the writer who can protect their precious husbands from clandestine relationships. The protagonist presents herself as a woman belonging to high society; describes in detail the nautical club “The

Mussel” (It. “La Cozza”), of which she is a member and which has taken precedence over all the members of the “high” society she frequented, the bad habits and virtues of the members, and the retrograde mentality of a small town.

To contextualize the book *7 uomini 7. Peripezie di una vedova* by Silvana Grasso, it would be inappropriate to use these translation strategies since, first of all, the deliberate use of dialect, its allocation within the text, the dialect tokens and the suggestive expressions flaunted to highlight the social separations in the community in which the novel is set must be taken into consideration. Secondly, the specific characteristics of the book do not allow the use of the low register exclusively in the case of dialect because of the alternation of the use of low and high register in the Italian language operated by the author in the original work, so any use of the low register could damage the semantic integrity of the source text. Third, in addition to the Sicilian dialect, the text contains intertextual inserts of Greek and Latin mythology, often in their original language, knowledge of which implies a certain level of erudition and, therefore, the dialect translated into a low register in Russian would constitute a sharp and inappropriate contrast in the text of the translation.

Different strategies from the one mentioned above would not have generated the same sensations in the Russian-speaking reader, preventing them from immersing themselves in the Sicilian social and cultural context. It was decided to adopt the strategy of “estrangement” considering the cultural differences between the characters and highlighted within the text through the change of register the use of the Latin and Greek idioms. This stylistic choice has generated a text saturated with intertextuality and idiomatic expressions borrowed from ancient Greece and Latin, Sicilian regional variants, and neologisms that overwhelm every book chapter.

This paper is centered on a proposal for translation into Russian, made with the help of several translation techniques, which will be forwarded to the publishers for evaluation of publication. Some works by Silvana Grasso have already been translated into other languages, but the story *7 men 7. The adventures of a widow* is an exception that came out only in the Italian language.

#### **4.1. Translating Sicilian Dialect**

Many translation techniques allow transferring a text from one language to another while maintaining quality and adequacy. According to Peter Newmark (1988), any attempt to translate a regional dialect would be too artificial and tends to identify the function performed by the dialect within the original text by neutralizing the language and maintaining the expressive effect. The dialect is a unique linguistic phenomenon that occurs due to various historical and linguistic processes; consequently, it can have particular connotations in one culture and not have in another.

The dialectal discourse absolutely cannot have a semantic load or be an essential element for creating the characteristics of the characters and in the description of the environment. If the dialect plays an important role, the translator usually uses the standardization strategy, also called neutralization, or tries to make it adequate in the target language through dialectal forms (if any) or by lowering the register.

As we will notice in the following example, the use of the word “**buttanona**” appears entirely in dialect, used mainly in Sicily. Given the phonetic similarity, it was decided to adopt the calque technique so that a Russian reader could fully perceive the meaning of the lemma. The first consonant was doubled, in the translation phase, to obtain a more substantial alienation effect. Furthermore, the word “**rossodiavùli**” was created through univerbation to create a chromatic similarity, and the dialectal form is always linked to the element on which the descriptive comparison is established.

“Quello che, invece, si sapeva era che ero rossa (avevo i capelli **rossodiavùli**, nonostante il lutto!) **buttanona** per designazione ufficiale e che recitavo greco, anche centinaia di versi, in strofa saffica, alcaica, anacreontica... versi gliconei ferecratei docmiaci. Recitavo anche stasimi odi epitalami giambi.”

“То, что, знали наверняка, так это что я была рыжей (у меня были **дьявольски-рыжие** волосы, несмотря на мой траур) **ббутаной**, для официального обозначения, и что декламировала на греческом, даже сотни отрывков, сапфической строфой, алкеевой, анакреонтической... гликонической строкой, анапестом, дохмием.”

A similar strategy is also used in the following lines with the word “**annacare**,” or neutralization. On the contrary, in the second and third cases, with the word “**ruttandola**” the compensation strategy is used, in particular the stylistic compensation, translating with a word in the Russian language belonging to a very colloquial register, thus restoring the nuance of the regional dialect.

“Infungiare le labbra, scarciofare la bocca, triplettare lo sguardo – inciellando la pupilla, roteandola destrasinistra, sinistradestra, **ruttandola** – **annacare** la testa con torsione fulminea del collo e acrobatico trapezio delle vertebre cervicali.”

“Надувать губки, делать их бантиком, **стронть глазки** (возводя вверх зрачки, глаза вправо-влево, влево-вправо, вытаращивая их), **наклонять** голову с молниеносным вращением шеи и акробатической трапецией шейного позвонка.”

Therefore, we can define that the dialect can be translated either using the neutralization strategy due to the absence, generally, of the dialects in the target languages, and it can be rendered in the target language using a low register where possible, or use the descriptive strategy or by putting references in the footnotes.

## 4.2. Translating Neologisms

Neologisms and the allogenic and regional layers form the writer's primary lexicon. Among the neologisms used in this book, we can distinguish between dialect-based and Italian-based neologisms.

Let us analyze the following dialect-based neologisms:

“Dopo mezz’ora sospettai che dormisse, forse s’era **alluppato** allo **sfrantulio** lieve dell’onda.”

“Спустя пол часа я заподозрила, что он задремал, может он был **усыплен** легким шумом прибора.”

One of the meanings of the Russian word above is ‘to be put to sleep with pharmacological help,’ which was used keeping in mind the semantics of the original word, i.e. ‘to be put to sleep through the use of opium’. The word “**alluppiato**” comes from the dialectal verb “alluppiari,” meaning ‘to anaesthetise’ (from opium), and was created using suffixation. Another word used in the sentence above is “**sfrantulio**,” which was presumably created from the word “frantumare” by adding the typically Sicilian suffix “-io” and making the word onomatopoeic. So, as we can see, there are both dialect-based and Italian-based neologisms within a single sentence (Castiglione 2009: 67).

“**Infungiare** le labbra, **scarciofare** la bocca, **triplettare** lo sguardo – inciellando la pupilla, roteandola destrasinistra, sinistradestra, ruttandola – annacare la testa con torsione fulminea del collo e acrobatico trapezio delle vertebre cervicali.”

“**Надувать** губки, **делать их бантиком**, **строить** глазки (возводя вверх зрачки, глаза вправо-влево, влево-вправо, вытаращивая их), **наклонять** голову с молниеносным вращением шеи и акробатической трапецией шейного позвонка.”

The translating challenge in the above-mentioned example consisted in finding a lexical and semantic correspondence to the words “infungiare,” “scarciofare,” and “triplettare” in the Russian language. The difficulty stemmed from the metaphorical origin of the words, two of which were based on the names of vegetables: “infungiare,” which derives from “fungo,” that is “to set the lips in a shape of the mushroom,” and “scarciofare” which derives from “carciofo,” which, as we can all imagine, has a shape of the flower that opens layer after layer. In the Russian language, it was impossible to come close in morphology to the original and, consequently, the locutions used in Russian to describe various actions performed with the lips were chosen, thus maintaining the meaning but inevitably losing the form.

In the example described below, we can observe the formation of the neologism “*archailogism*” through the composition of the two Greek roots “*archèo-*” and “*-logos*.” Consulting the dictionary “Treccani” (2022), we see that “*archèo-*” [from Gr. ἀρχαῖος ‘ancient’] is the first element of compound words, derived from Greek or formed modernly, in which it means “ancient, primitive.” Subsequently, “*-logos*” (λόγος ‘word, speech, reason’) is a Greek noun variously used in philosophical and theological language. Therefore we can deduce that the word’s meaning is “ancient word” or, in standard Italian, “archaism,” which is obsolete. The strategy used here is the transliteration of the word “*archailogism*,” which, in turn, creates a neologism in the Russian language.

“L’Assemblea dei soci era un ring di contumelie, risse, neologismi e **arçailogismi** della volgarità.”

“Собрание акционеров было рингом оскорблений, драк, **неологизмов** и **арçаилогизмов** пошлости.”

### 4.3. Strategies for Translating Greek and Latin Idioms

The book *7 uomini 7. Peripezie di una vedova* is particularly unique from the point of view of language, not only for dialectal forms, realia, and neologisms but also for the presence of vocabulary belonging to languages and cultures different from the original language. This typology of texts, called "mixed texts," represents the phenomenon of multilingualism whereby, within a text, several linguistic codes meet, both at the word and sentence level. The mixed text, as it is defined by Sergej Vlahov and Sider Florin (2019) and Pierangela Diadori (2012), can represent the so-called "local spot of color" (*code-mixing*) and the phenomenon known as *code-switching*. The difference between these two phenomena lies in using one or more languages. The phenomenon of *code-mixing* is obtained by inserting, within a sentence, words that do not belong to the current linguistic code, while in the case of *code-switching*, alternating the current linguistic code with the foreign one.

Whereas *code-switching* has already been studied, translation theories on the phenomenon of *code-mixing* are still developing, and the translation strategies are to be adopted.

According to Pierangela Diadori, this multilingualism in translation can be maintained or lost, flattening into the monolingualism of the metatext, according to the translation strategy adopted and the rules that regulate its use in the various textual genres (Diadori 2012: 43).

In the following examples, we can see that the Greek words have remained intact. The reason for this choice lies in maintaining the form of the prototext. Otherwise, the translation of the Greek words would have brought an immense loss of the particular style of the work and the meaning implied in the use of Greek words.

Furiosamente, dunque, possedetti il Greco, tutti i suoi paradigmi, i suoi verbi politematici, gli aoristi cappatici, le forme più insolite e frastornanti per gli stessi docenti, del tipo *dedia* perfetto terzo da *deido* (con omega finale).

Поэтому я яростно овладела Греческим, всеми его парадигмами, его политематическими глаголами, капатическими аористами, самыми необычными и запутанными формами для тех же учителей, глаголом третьего лица совершенного вида *dedia* от *deido* (с омегой на конце).

In the translation of the text, each Greek word is accompanied by a footnote reference if the author herself has not already indicated the meaning within the text, as we can see in the following examples:

Essere buttanona e la consacrazione nei Lincei della più comune buttanaggine, ne è il Nobel, **un *mignumi*** (dal greco mescolare) di genialità e stregoneria.

Быть ббуттаной означает посвящение в ряды наиболее общих распущенности, является ее Нобелевской премией, ***mignumi*** (с греч. смешивать) гениальности и колдовства.

[...]



C'era una sorella zitella *inlocabilis* (aggettivo latino, significava impossibile da maritare) con un piede 35 e un girovita 160 cm almeno.

Была одна сестра – старая дева, *inlocabilis* (латинское прилагательное, которое означало невозможность выйти замуж) с размером ноги 35 и размером талии, как минимум, 160 см.

Some phrases are mostly entirely obscure for the Russian reader, but they add a touch of foreignness that gives the text a certain charm.

“*Tu quoque*” dicevo al foglio bianco come Cesare al suo assassino.

“*Tu quoque*” я говорила белому листу, как Цезарь говорил своему убийце.

Considering that Grasso's language consists, for the most part, of a specific lexicon, which includes both the dialectal/regional layer and the allogenic layer, the strategy of neutralisation adopted in these segments would have meant the loss of the uniqueness of Grasso's language. If the phrase highlighted above had not been maintained, the initial reference and semantic load would have been lost. Neutralisation would have nullified the historical reference in its entirety, and the strategy of estrangement would not have been respected.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper emphasizes the translator's responsibility when working on literary works, as they often face challenges in terms of lexical and stylistic choices that are difficult to resolve. Translating a text is a complex process, which requires the analysis of various linguistic and extralinguistic factors belonging to both the source and target languages and cultures. The act of translation is not based exclusively on the search for lexical equivalents; on the contrary, it is necessary to give value to the different cultural factors that characterize the text. For this reason, it is essential to analyze the original text in its particularities, but even more important is to carry out an analysis of the author's biography by mean of their narrative style, which allows us to identify their personality and ideas. One can conclude by emphasizing the importance of maintaining the presence of multilingualism in the target text to preserve the unique cultural traits of the original text. In the presence of the phenomenon of multilingualism, the translator must consider themselves "a messenger" and is responsible for reproducing not only the style but also the culture of the languages which are present in the source text.

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