

Re-using translation to teach language

Focus on verb tenses

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Introduction

In recent years translation has shifted from being a mere *tool for teaching language* to a *fully-fledged discipline*.

Translation Studies studies everything that has to do with translating and translations.

Background

The branch of the discipline from which the main innovations have emerged is the descriptive strand, based on

- a historical-cultural approach to translation
- the systematic observation of translations as practical case studies (actual translation performance)
- the view of translations as autonomous entities belonging to the receiving culture

Interdisciplinary perspectives

In the descriptive approach, translations are studied from many different interdisciplinary perspectives.

A variety of methodologies are used, which has broadened the scope of translation.

There are not yet many applications of this approach to language teaching.

So...

Exploring potential applications

- The following activities start to explore the potential applications of the descriptive approach to translation in language teaching.
- Two useful applications of this approach to translation are OBSERVATION and DISCUSSION.
- Certain verb tenses in English differ considerably from Italian.

Extract 1 Roddy Doyle

Translate the extract, paying special attention to verb tenses.

The Gigglers **have been doing** this work for thousands of years. All this time they've **been giving** the Treatment to men and women who are mean to children.*

How was Mister Mack mean to children?

*Good question, and the answer is coming up soon. But now we'll **go** on to the next chapter.*

(The Giggler Treatment, by Roddy Doyle)

* *Gigglers*: furry, baby-sized creatures who give the Treatment (poo on the shoe) to adults who are mean to children.

The published translation

Now compare your version with this one.

*E' un sacco di tempo che i Ridarelli fanno questo lavoro. Da migliaia di anni **affibbiano** il loro trattamento alle persone sgarbate con i bambini.*

Che cosa aveva fatto il signor Mack ai suoi bambini?

Ottima domanda, e la risposta arriverà prestissimo.

*Ma adesso **passiamo** al capitolo successivo. (Il trattamento Ridarelli, trad it. di Giuliana Zeuli)*

Extract 2 Roald Dahl

Translate the extract, paying special attention to verb tenses.

*She decided that every time her father or her mother was beastly to her, she **would get** her own back* in some way or another. A small victory or two **would help** her to tolerate their idiocies and **would stop** her from being crazy.*

(Matilda, Roald Dahl)

**get one's own back: get some kind of revenge*

A published translation

Now compare your version with this one.

*Decise che si **sarebbe vendicata** in qualche modo tutte le volte che i suoi genitori l'avessero trattata con cattiveria. Le ci **voleva** una piccola vittoria, ogni tanto, per aiutarla a sopportare la loro stupidità e impedirle di impazzire.*

(Matilde, trad. it. di Francesca Lazzarato e Lorenza Manzi)

Extract 3 Roald Dahl

Miss Honey said, "You had better forget everything I told you this afternoon."

*"I **won't promise** to do that," Matilda said "but I **will promise** not to talk about it to anyone any more, not even to you." [...]*

*"I **won't promise** to stop thinking about it, though," Matilda said. "I've **been thinking** about it all the way back from your cottage."*

(Matilda, Roald Dahl)

A published translation

Now compare your version with this one.

La maestra disse “Forse sarebbe meglio che tu dimenticassi quello che ti ho raccontato questo pomeriggio”.

*“**Non** te lo **posso promettere**” disse Matilda, “ma ti **giuro** che non ne parlerò con nessuno, neanche con te”.[...]*

*“E **non posso** nemmeno **prometterti** di non pensarci più; anzi, non **ho fatto** altro per tutta la strada...”*

(Matilde, trad. it. di Francesca Lazzarato e Lorenza Manzi)

Extract 4 Samuel Beckett

CLOV: I have a flea! I'll **go** and get the powder.

(*Endgame*, by Samuel Beckett)

The published version

CLOV: Ho una pulce! [...] **Vado** a prendere la polvere.

(Finale di partita, tr. it. di Carlo Fruttero)

Reflecting on the translations

Look back at the verb tenses in bold and observe how they shift when they are translated in Italian. Then answer the following questions:

1a) How is the *present perfect continuous* in the “*duration form*” (*have been doing...’ve been giving... ’ve been thinking + **for /all...***) rendered in Italian?

Reflections (1b)

It is usually rendered by the present tense, as shown in extract 1 (*È ... affibbiano*), but it can also be rendered by the Italian *passato prossimo*, as shown in extract 3 (*non ho fatto altro per...*).

Reflections (2a)

What time do the actions expressed by *will* (i.e. *we'll go on...I won't promise...I will promise... I'll go and get*) refer to?

Reflections (2b)

They refer to the present time (now): *But now we'll go on...*

3a) What function does *will* express here?

Reflections 3b

But now we'll go on...

Here *will* expresses an instant decision, or a promise.

4a) How are these uses of *will* rendered in Italian?

Reflections 4b

Instant decisions / promises / offers of help in Italian are expressed by the present tense: *i.e. passiamo...non posso prometterti...giuro...vada.*

Reflection 5a

Look back at extract 2. What tense is used to express Matilda's decision to punish her parents?

Reflection 5b

The present conditional, the so-called “*future-in-the past*”: *would get her own back...would help*

6a) How is it rendered in Italian?

Reflection 6b

In the first case it is rendered by the past conditional tense (*si sarebbe vendicata*), while in the second it is rendered by an Italian *imperfetto* (*voleva*).

This makes the register more familiar and more suitable to express the inner thoughts and feelings of a young girl like Matilda than the more formal past conditional (*avrebbe aiutata*).

Exercise from Italian to English

Here are some Italian sentences containing verb tenses similar to the ones observed above, for translation and discussion in class:

È tutta la settimana che **nevica**.

Era dal 1987 che l'Italia non **batteva** la Francia.

– Se non mi sbrigo, **perdo** il treno!

- Ti **do** un passaggio in stazione!

Avvisarono che **sarebbe arrivato** in ritardo.

Answers

It **has snowed** all week.

Italy **had not defeated** France since 1987.

– If I don't hurry up, I'll **miss** the train!

- I'll **give** you a lift to the station.

They said he **would arrive** late.