

NEGOTIATING  
IDENTITIES ON  
STAGE:  
POLITICAL AND  
NON-POLITICAL  
CORRECTNESS  
IN TRANSLATING  
EUROPEAN  
PERFORMANCES  
INTO ENGLISH

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THEATRE AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

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- This research underscores the preserving stereotypical elements like “Italianness” in theatrical representations. It explores the delicate balance between authenticity and political correctness, revealing how these cultural stereotypes impact linguistic translation and audience perception.



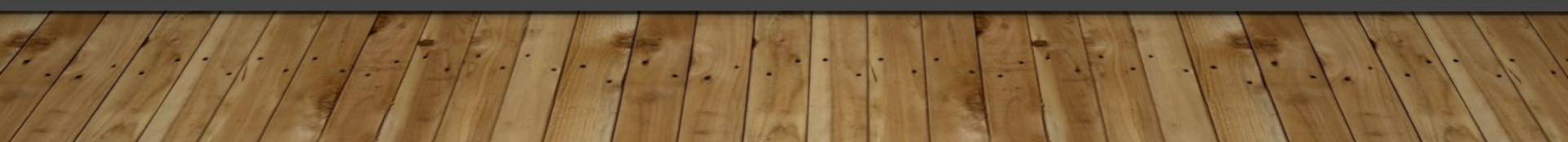
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At the base of any study of translation, there is Cicero's *De oratore*.

Here, Cicero discusses:

- word by word**
- meaning by meaning**

In *De optimo genere oratorum*:

- He reproduces Greek rethor Aeschines not as an interpreter
  - but as on orator
  - reproducing Aeschines' *vis*
  - but in a language conform to the Roman language and style
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In facing (and working on) a translation of a theatre play, we have to consider, first of all, **the aspect of the (kind of) commission and destination.**

What is the destination of our translation?

- Translated play as **literature** → publication → reader
- Translated play as a **working document** → staging → multiple figures (director, producer, performers, audience)

Mary Snell-Hornby → Polemics in the '50 → Hans Rothe's translation of Shakespeare in German

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The double nature of the theatre text/play appears in the critical debate in the 60s and 70s.

Susan Bassnett defines the theatre text/play as:

**“much more than a literary text, it is a combination of language and gesture brought together in a harmonious frame of timing”** (Susan Bassnett-McGuire, ‘Translating spatial poetry: An examination of theatre texts in performance’, in James S. Holmes, Jose Lambert, Raymond. Van de Broeck editors, *Translation: New Perspectives in Literary Studies*, Leuven: ACCO, 1978, p. 161)

Introducing new key concept such as:

- **patterns of tempo-rhythm**
- **basic undertextual rhythms.**



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In her “Translation Studies”, Susan Bassnett writes:

**“To begin with, a theatre text is read differently. It is read as something *incomplete*, rather than a fully rounded unit, since it is only in performance that the full potential of the text is realized. And this presents the translator with a central problem: whether to translate the text as a purely literary text, or to try to translate it in its function as one element in another, more complex system”.** (Susan Bassnett, *Translation Studies*, Routledge, 1988, p. 120).



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What is the role of a translation? and the what about the role of the translator?

S.Aaltonen:

**“The first category of translators are those whose only connection with the stage is the translation work. They are fairly powerless and their relationship to the dramatic text is comparable to that of an actor. The text sets the parameters of the work, and both the translator and the actor must bow to the text. Their role is seen as that of mediators rather than of creators. The second category are translators who work within the theatre, such as dramaturges or directors. They exercise more power and retain this power when they work as translators. As translators they are closer to being creators than mediators. They can, if they so wish, make adjustments or interpret the text according to need”.** (S. Aaltonen, ‘Translating plays or baking apple pies: A functional approach to the study of drama translation’, in M. Snell-Hornby, Z. Jettmarová, K. Kaindl editors, *Translation as Intercultural Communication*, Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1997, p. 92).

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Reba Gostand:

**“Drama, as an art-form, is a constant process of translation: from original concept to script (when there is one), to producer/director’s interpretation, to contribution by designer and actor/actress, to visual and/or aural images to audience response... there may be a number of subsidiary processes of translation at work”**. (Reba Gostand, ‘Verbal and non-verbal communication: Drama as translation’, in Ortun Zuber editor, *The Languages of Theatre. Problems in the Translation and Transposition of Drama*, Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1980, p. 1).





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What is the role of a translation? and the what about the role of the translator?

- Phyllis Zatlin → Translators will adapt themselves according to the destination of the translation → however a poor translation doesn't work → a translation must always be a new text → translator as a dramaturg
- Patrice Pavis → translator as a dramaturg

**“The translator is a dramaturg who must first of all effect a macrotextual translation, that is a dramaturgical analysis of the fiction conveyed by the text”.** (Patrice Pavis, ‘Problems of translation for the stage: interculturalism and post-modern theatre’, in H. Scolnicov, P. Holland editors, *The Play Out of Context. Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 27).

# HOW TO “TRANSLATE” DIALECT IN THEATRE?

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Manuela Perteghella → 5 possible ways:

- dialect compilation;
- pseudo-dialect;
- translation into a parallel dialect;
- dialect localization;
- standardization.



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E.g. Eduardo De Filippo → issues

- Italianised Neapolitan or Neapolitanised Italian → into → English(es)

**“Many people have asked me how one manages to translate from the Neapolitan – apparently implying that the rendition of a ‘dialect’ into English poses more or different problems than would a more widely known language”. (Anthony Molino, “Introduction”, in Eduardo De Filippo, *The Nativity Scene*, translated by Anthony Molino with Paul N. Feinberg Toronto: Guernica, 1997, p.14).**

# AN EXAMPLE OF PARALLEL DIALECT TRANSLATION

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**Eduardo De Filippo's *Napoli milionaria* → Scouse in Liverpool**

- “Peter Tinniswood’s decision to present his adaptation in the accents of his native Liverpool, on the face of it, a touch perverse”.
- Similarity between Naples and Liverpool have a “wicked, cruel effervescence”
- “Liverpool speech-rhythms”
- “a working-class authenticity and spares us the delight of listening to British actors sounding like a convention of ice-cream vendors”.

(Annalena McAfee, *Scouse Resources*, Evening Standard, 28 giugno 1991)



# AN EXAMPLE OF DIALECT LOCALIZATION TRANSLATION

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**Eduardo De Filippo's *Natale in Casa Cupiello* → Eduardo De Filippo's (and Mike Stott's) *Ducking Out***

“The next decade saw the opposite approach applied to a De Filippo play, whereby his work was brought home to the audience through a process of a complete acculturation, to the point where it was relocated to the country of the language of the audience”. (Gunilla Anderman, *Europe on Stage – Translation and Theatre*, London: Oberon Books, 2005, pp. 260-261.)

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## What is the “-nness”?

- Gunilla Anderman → Italianness → the theatrical “-nness”;
- Edward Said → Orientalism;
- “-nness” and Orientalism → Stereotypes;
- Stereotypes → Cultural Hegemony;
- Cultural hegemony → Cultural appropriation.



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What is the “-ness”?

- Gunilla Anderman → Italianness → the theatrical “-ness”

E.g.:

**“I would urge actors not to use Italian accents – much as I like the movie *Moonstruck*, these are not plays about Italian-Americans. We don’t do Chekhov with Russian accents or Ibsen with Norwegian accents. The plays are not farces. As with all comedy, the truer it is the funnier it will be.”** (Maria Tucci, “Translator’s note”, in Eduardo De Filippo, *Four Plays*, translated by Maria Tucci, Hanover: Smith and Kraus, 2002, p. XIII).

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## “-ness” and cultural appropriation

- **Cultural appropriation** is the adoption of an element or elements of one culture or identity by members of another culture or identity. This can be controversial when members of a dominant culture appropriate from disadvantaged minority cultures.
- **Cultural denigration** refers to when someone adopts an element of a culture with the sole purpose of humiliating or putting down people of that culture.
- **Cultural appreciation** is the respectful borrowing of elements from another culture with an interest in sharing ideas and diversifying oneself.

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The 4 forms of appropriation:

- **Cultural exchange:** the reciprocal exchange of symbols, artifacts, rituals, genres, and/or technologies between cultures with roughly equal levels of power.
- **Cultural dominance:** the use of elements of a dominant culture by members of a subordinated culture in a context in which the dominant culture has been imposed onto the subordinated culture, including appropriations that enact resistance.
- **Cultural exploitation:** the appropriation of elements of a subordinated culture by a dominant culture without substantive reciprocity, permission, and/or compensation.
- **Transculturation:** cultural elements created from and/or by multiple cultures, such that identification of a single originating culture is problematic, for example, multiple cultural appropriations structured in the dynamics of globalization and transnational capitalism creating hybrid forms.

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A main in problem in textual and staging practices

1. From the **Ghost Writer** (“a person whose job it is to write material for someone else who is the named author”) →
2. To the **Ghost translator**
3. And the “**Visible Adaptor**”.
4. Who is the **Visible Adaptor**?

A main in problem in textual and staging practices

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E.g.:

“Because of the Neapolitan dialect it is very hard to translate de Filippo well, so (as with *Saturday, Sunday, Monday*) **we got a literal translation done and then gave it to Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall**. Even so, the style of de Filippo is very hard for English actors to grasp: while we were rehearsing *Saturday, Sunday, Monday* it all became desperately unfunny for a while and after one particularly awful run through Franco lost his temper and shouted —The audience will teach you this play. He was right, of course: after three nights of previews we knew what we were doing, and the same has happened again with *Filumena*. That’s not altogether surprising: [...] he’s a great believer in rewriting his plays after they’ve been tried with an audience”. (Interview with Joan Plowright in Sheridan Morley, *Joan Plowright feeling free*, Times, 29 October 1977).



What is the “-ness”?

- Gunilla Anderman → Italianness → the theatrical “-ness”.
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E.g.:

**ROCCO**                      **Buona sera.**

*Rocco goes over to his mother and kisses her.*

**FEDERICO**                **Nice to see you, Signora Rosa.**

**ROSA**                        **Buona sera, Federico.**

**FEDERICO**                **Buona sera, Cavaliere.**

**PEPPINO**                  **Buona sera to you.**

(Eduardo De Filippo, *Saturday, Sunday, Monday*, adapted by Keith Waterhouse and Willis Hall, London: Heinmann, 1978, p. 19)



A main in problem in textual and staging practices

- Gunilla Anderman → Italianness → the theatrical “-nness”
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E.g.:

**“As in the case of Pirandello in his first English phase, London productions of De Filippo’s plays in the 1970s attempted to capture the spirit of ‘Italianness’ by taking the audience to the original text through the addition of ingredients popularly associated with Italian life and culture. By means of Italian food and drink, animated conversation and mock accents, stereotypical images were created of a different country and its culture as seen through English eyes, often resulting in comic aspects. Adhering to this model of adaptation, the translated text is provided with *a comic set of signs denoting Italianicity*, as pointed out by Susan Bassnett in her discussion of British productions of De Filippo’s work of this earlier period”. (Gunilla Anderman, *Europe on Stage – Translation and Theatre*, London: Oberon Books, 2005, pp. 260-261).**

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Conclusion

**HOW TO TRANSLATE IN/FOR THEATRE?**

