Università di Firenze Dipartimento di Formazione, Lingue, Intercultura, Letterature e Psicologia

L-11 Corso di Studio in Lingue, Letterature e Studi Interculturali III anno Lingua Inglese 2 (12 cfu)

Corso di Traduzione in Lingua inglese John Gilbert

Lezione a distanza del 10.03.20

The text to be translated is an extract from the novel ***Lo strano caso del cane ucciso a mezzanotte*** (title in italics because it is a novel, a book) by **Mark Haddon**. This is the extract:

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Mezzanotte e 7 minuti. Il cane era disteso sull’erba in mezzo al prato di fronte

alla casa della signora Shears. Gli occhi erano chiusi. Sembrava stesse correndo su

un fianco, come fanno i cani quando sognano di dare la caccia a un gatto. Il cane

però non stava correndo, e non dormiva. Il cane era morto. Era stato trafitto con un

forcone. Le punte del forcone dovevano averlo passato da parte a parte ed essersi

conficcate nel terreno, perché l’attrezzo era ancora in piedi. Decisi che con ogni

probabilità il cane era stato ucciso proprio con quello perché non riuscivo a scorgere

nessun’altra ferita, e non credo che a qualcuno verrebbe mai in mente di infilzare un

cane con un forcone nel caso in cui fosse già morto per qualche altra ragione, di

cancro per esempio, o per un incidente stradale. Ma non potevo esserne certo.  
 Aprii il cancelletto di casa della signora Shears, richiudendolo dietro di me.

Attraversai il prato e mi inginocchiai vicino al cane. Gli appoggiai la mano sul muso.

Era ancora caldo.  
 Il cane si chiamava Wellington. Apparteneva alla signora Shears, che era

nostra amica. Abitava dall’altro lato della strada, due case più in là, sulla sinistra.  
 Wellington era un cane barbone. Non uno di quei barboncini tutti bei pettinati, no,

uno di quelli grossi. Aveva il pelo riccio e nero, ma quando lo si guardava da vicino  
 ci si rendeva conto che sotto quella cosa arruffata la pelle era di un colore giallo

pallido, come quella di un pollo.  
 Accarezzai Wellington e mi domandai chi l’avesse ucciso, e perché.

(…)

The original text was written in English (pub. 2003) and the Italian translation (pub. 2003) is by Paola Novarese, so our translation into English is what is referred to as a **back** **translation**, that is a translation of a translated work back into its original language. As an exercise, back translations are interesting because they allow us to reflect on the choices made by the translator in rendering the original source language (SL) text in the translated target language (TL) text.

The  **genre** of the text is narrative (a mystery novel) and it seems to be intended both for young and mature adult readers. The **narrative voice** is in the **first person** and the narrator is a **character** in the novel, the **protagonist**, a 15-year-old boy. It is not possible to tell from the limited information given in the extract, but later in the novel it becomes clear that the narrator is affected by behavioural difficulties, high-functioning autism or Asperger's Syndrome. Indeed, in addition to fictional entertainment, the **purpose** of the novel is also to raise the readers’ consciousness about autism.

The style is **descriptive narrative** through the **point of view** of the first person narrator. The **function** of the extract is that of the first four paragraphs of the **first chapter** in the novel, which strangely enough is numbered 2 because the narrator-protagonist is fascinated by prime numbers and the chapters are numbered according to the sequence of the prime numbers. The novel begins ***in medias res****,* that is with the plot already underway and with no introductory background information, and the opening lines serve to establish the **time** *(Mezzanotte e 7 minuti)* and **place** *(prato di fronte alla casa della signora Shears)* of the **setting**.

The **register** appears to be **neutral**, although some verbs seem somewhat **formal** *(trafiggere, conficcarsi, scorgere, infilzare…).* The **tone** of the first person narrator appears to be **detached**, **unemotional**. In terms of the **paragraph structure**, the first is relatively long, the third is medium length, while the second is quite short and the fourth is only one sentence and only one line. The first and the third paragraphs are reflective, with no action taking place, while the short second and fourth paragraphs contain actions on the part of the narrator. This paragraph structure creates an interesting rhythm, holding the attention of the reader and tending to put stress on the actions in the second and fourth paragraphs. With regard to the **sentences**, the first sentence is actually not a sentence at all as it has no verb, but telegraphically it serves to establish the time of the setting, almost like stage directions for the theater. There are many simple sentences, but the ninth sentence (first paragraph) is syntactically quite complex. The finite **verb constructions** include the *imperfetto, congiuntivo imperfetto, presente indicativo, trapassato prossimo, passato remoto, condizionale* and *congiuntivo trapassato.*

In terms of **culturally-restricted terms**, there are *il prato di fronte a casa, cane barbone* and *barboncini***. Idiomatic expressions** include *dare la caccia a, da parte a parte, in piedi* and *più in là*. **Particular problems** include the pronouns to use for the dog (he or it?), the phrases *sembrava che stesse correndo,*  *tutti bei pettinati* and *quella cosa arruffata*, and the terms *cane barbone, barboncino* and *muso.* Now that the style and various features of the SL text have been analysed thoroughly, we are ready to begin our TL translation.

The original English **title** of the novel was *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, which the author took from a quote in Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes short story “Silver Blaze” (pub. 1894; fiammata/vampata di argento?). “In the night-time” is rather unusual English (old-fashioned? literary?). The translator renders the title in Italian as *Lo strano caso del cane ucciso a mezzanotte,* adding the information about the dog being killed, which was not in the SL text. Perhaps this was a good TL solution, as the more literal *Il caso curioso del cane nella notte* sounds strange, inadequate. Probably the best back translation into English would be ***T****he* ***S****trange* ***C****ase of the* ***D****og* ***K****illed at Midnight* (notice capital letters!).

Our translation begins with the **number 2** (for what is actually the first chapter) and then the translation of the first line of the novel **“Mezzanotte e 7 minuti.”** There is no verb and it is extremely direct, telegraphic, establishing the time setting for the novel’s opening. I would translate it without a finite verb as “Seven minutes past (BE-NAE\*) / after (NAE) midnight.” The original English was “It was 7 minutes after midnight.” The first person narrator is fascinated by numbers and in fact he uses the number 7 and not the word. It is interesting to note that the English author has his 15-year-old English narrator use the preposition “after”, usually considered North American usage, and not the more British “past.” Per-haps this is an indication of how North American English is changing British English, especially that of the younger generations. And finally, the Italian translator adopts a strategy of ellipsis in the TL text, omitting the finite verb phrase “It was,” thereby creating a more dramatic tone with the telegraphic “Mezzanotte e 7 minuti.”

Next is the sentence **“Il cane era disteso sull’erba in mezzo al prato di fronte**

**alla casa della signora Shears.”** The word ‘prato” is usually translated as “meadow,” but here “il prato di fronte a casa” would be the typical Anglo-American “lawn,” the so-called “prato inglese.” I would translate this sentence as “The dog was lying (or perhaps “lay”) on (preferable to “in”) the grass in the middle of the lawn in front of Mrs (BE) / Mrs. (NAE) Shears’ house (preferable to “home.”). My translation corresponds to the original English text.

**“Gli occhi erano chiusi.”** With parts of the body, English uses the possessive adjective and not the definite article, but which one for this dog, the impersonal “its” or “his”? It is not clear, but if one reads the entire extract, including the last sentence “Accarezzai Wellington e mi domandai **chi l’avesse ucciso**, e perché,” then it seems to me that the personal pronouns “he” and “him” and the possessive adjective “his” are the best solution, the way one would speak of a pet. However in the original English the narrator uses the impersonal “it” and “its.” It sounds strange, but perhaps the author has the narrator “speak” like this to underline the detached, unemotional tone of his point of view. My translation: “His eyes were closed/shut.” The original English: “Its eyes were closed.”

**“Sembrava stesse correndo su un fianco, come fanno i cani quando sognano di dare la caccia a un gatto.”** The first problem is the imperfect subjunctive “stesse.” The more grammatically correct translation would be: “It seemed/appeared/looked (or “He looked”) as if he/it were running,” but a 15-year-old boy (even an English one) might use the more informal, more NAE “like he was running.” Another possibility would be “He/It seemed/appeared to be running.” In the phrase “come fanno i cani” the correct English would be the conjunction “as” or “the way” and not the preposition “like” which is extremely common however in informal and NAE. The idiomatic Italian “dare la caccia” here is used to mean “rincorrere” not “andare a caccia di,” and so should be translated with “to chase (after)” or “to run after,” not “to hunt”. Possible translations: “It/He looked as if he were running on one/his/its side/flank, the way/as/(like) dogs do when they dream that they are chasing/running after a cat.” Another possibility: “when they are dreaming about (preferable to “of”) chasing a cat.” The original English: “It looked as if it was running on its side, the way dogs run when they think they are chasing a cat in a dream.” How would you have translated that into English?

**“Il cane però non stava correndo, e non dormiva.”** One possibility: “But/How-ever the dog was not running, and (he/it was) not sleeping.” Another possibility: “The dog, however, was not running, and neither/nor was he/it asleep.” The original English: “But the dog was not running or asleep.” **Il cane era morto.”** Original English: “The dog was dead.” **“Era stato trafitto con un forcone.”** Possible translations: “He/It had been stabbed/speared/run through with/by a garden fork (BE) / pitchfork (NAE).” Original English: There was a garden fork sticking out of the dog.” How would you translate that in English?

**“Le punte del forcone dovevano averlo passato da parte a parte ed essersi conficcate nel terreno, perché l’attrezzo era ancora in piedi.”** Possible translations: “The prongs/tips (also “tines/ends/points”) of the pitchfork must have gone all the way through it and (got) stuck in/into the ground because/since it (preferable to “the tool”) was still standing/upright.” Another possibility: “Probably the prongs of the garden fork had pierced right through/gone through him/it from one side to the other.” The original English: “The points of the fork must have gone all the way through the dog and into the ground because the fork had not fallen over.” How would you translate: “the fork had not fallen over”?

**“Decisi che con ogni probabilità il cane era stato ucciso proprio con quello perché non riuscivo a scorgere nessun’altra ferita,”** Possible translations:

“I decided that with/in/by all probability/in all likelihood

“I decided that (it was) most likely that

the dog had been killed precisely (preferable to “exactly”) with that because/since/as I was not able to/could not see/make out/notice any other wound (preferable to “injury”),”

could see no other wound,”

“**e non credo che a qualcuno verrebbe mai in mente di infilzare un cane con un forcone nel caso in cui fosse già morto per qualche altra ragione, di cancro per esempio, o per un incidente stradale.”** “and I don’t believe/think that

anyone (stronger than “someone”, which is also possible) would/could ever think of stabbing

it would ever come to someone’s mind/occur to anyone/cross somebody’s mind to stick

a dog with a pitchfork if it/they (a generic dog more than a pet, but possible also “he”) were (also “was”) already dead/had already died for/due to some other reason/another reason, of/for cancer for example, or because of a car/(traffic/street/road) accident.” **“Ma non potevo esserne certo.”** “But I could not be sure/certain (of it/that).” Original English: “I decided that the dog was probably killed with the fork because I could not see any other wounds in the dog and I do not think you would stick a garden fork into a dog after it had died for some other reason, like cancer for example, or a road accident. But I could not be certain about this.”

Indent paragraph. **“Aprii il cancelletto di casa della signora Shears, richiudendolo dietro di me.”** I would translate “cancelletto” simply as “gate” and not “little gate” which sounds awkward and unnecessary. “I opened the gate to Mrs/Mrs. Shears’ house and closed it/closing it again behind me.” Original English: “I went through Mrs Shears’ gate, cloysing it behind me.”

**“Attraversai il prato e mi inginocchiai vicino al cane. Gli appoggiai la mano sul muso.”** “Vicino a” or “accanto a”? “I walked across/crossed the lawn and knelt (BE) / kneeled (NAE) by/next to/beside the dog. I put/laid/placed my hand on his/its nose/muzzle (preferable to “snout”).” Original English: “I walked onto her lawn and knelt beside the dog. I put my hand on the muzzle of the dog. **“Era ancora caldo.”** The dog or his nose? “Warm” not “hot” for “caldo.” It/He was still warm. Original English: “It was still warm.”

Indent paragraph. **“Il cane si chiamava Wellington.”** “The dog’s name was Wellington/The dog was named/called W.” Original English: “The dog was called Wellington.” **“Apparteneva alla signora Shears, che era nostra amica.”** He/It belonged to Mrs/Mrs. Shears, who (not “that,” not a defining relative clause: there is a comma) was our friend. Original English: “It belonged to Mrs Shears who was our friend.” (No comma!). **“Abitava dall’altro lato della strada, due case più in là, sulla sinistra.”** She lived on the other/opposite side of the street/across the street, two houses down/further on/down/up, on the left.” Original English: “She lived on the opposite side of the road, two houses to the left.” Why “road”? Usually “street” in urban or residential centres.

Indent paragraph. This was the most problematic paragraph to translate in the entire extract. **“Wellington era un cane barbone.”** Original Ensh: “Wellington was a poodle.” **“Non uno di quei barboncini tutti bei pettinati, no, uno di quelli grossi.”** This is not a complete sentence as it lacks a verb. “Not one of those all well-groomed/neatly brushed/nicely combed/well-coiffed (little/small/miniature) poodles, no, one of those/the big ones.” Original English: “Not one of the small poodles that have hairstyles, but a big poodle.” Hair-styles? for dogs?! How would you translate that?

**“Aveva il pelo riccio e nero, ma quando lo si guardava da vicino ci si rendeva conto che sotto quella cosa arruffata la pelle era di un colore giallo pallido, come quella di un pollo.”** Perhaps the most difficult phrase to translate in the extract is “quella cosa arruffata.”He/It had curly, black hair, but when you looked at him/it closely/(from) close up, you realized/could realize that under that shaggy/scruffy/dishevelled/rumpled fur/coat/hair/(stuff?), his/its/the skin was (a) pale yellow (color), like (that of/the skin of) a chicken(’s).” Original English: “It had curly black fur, but when you got close you could see that the skin underneath the fur was a very pale yellow, like chicken.”

Indent paragraph. **“Accarezzai Wellington e mi domandai chi l’avesse ucciso, e perché.”** “I petted/stroked/caressed Wellington and (I) wondered/asked myself who had killed him/(it?), and why.” Original English: “I stroked Wellington and wondered who had killed him, and why.”

**(…)**

If you have any questions about your own translation solutions which were not dealt with in my translation exposition above, please send them to me at [john.gilbert@unifi.it](mailto:john.gilbert@unifi.it)

The next time you are at the university in Via Santa Reparata, you can leave your translation in my mailbox.

\*N.B. BE = British English; NAE = North American English.