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Identifying and Translating Orality in Literature: an Italian-English case study

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Abstract

The translation of dialogue and oral varieties of language in literature is an understudied avenue. This article explains the strategies and reasoning behind the translation of the orality in the short story *Concorso* by Ingy Mubiayi, translated from Italian to English. *Concorso* addresses issues of immigration, identity, bureaucracy and family in a style marked with orality and humour, firmly situated in an Italian context. The ways in which written versions of an oral Italian variety can be reproduced in English are shown through context-based examples, approached through a source-oriented translation lens.

Introduction

Reproducing orality is an understudied aspect of literary translation. While audio-visual translation is predominantly concerned with dialogue, with its particular limitations, marked orality occurs frequently in literary texts and presents its own translation issues. When I translated the short story *Concorso* (which I titled *The Examination*) by Ingy Mubiayi into English, one of the most significant challenges was recreating the colloquial, casual style throughout both the narration and the dialogue. While literary translation does not have to be concerned about character limits and timing like subtitling, there are no audio-visual cues like location, costume and sound to indicate the cultural context of a text, only the author's words.

Concorso is the story of a girl named Hayat, who is Arab, Italian and culturally Muslim. She is contemplating her future career options in Italian bureaucracy, and going to the police station to seek career advice, when she is obliged to help another Arab woman named Aziza, whose son has gone missing. Hayat's sister and mother both get involved in trying to find Ibrahim, the son, traversing Rome, negotiating with other migrants in outer-city neighbourhoods, and eventually going to find Ibrahim in the nearby town of Frascati.

Concorso's main themes are identity, family relationships, the situation of migrants in Italy and society's attitudes towards them. Mubiayi uses both orality and humour to convey them to her readers. The colloquial first-person style creates the effect that readers are being told a story by the narrator, who directly expresses her thoughts and feelings about the events occurring, and shows us the world of the story through her eyes (Bernardelli and Ceserani 83). The orality of *Concorso* is achieved through register, discourse markers, and morphosyntactical organisation, identified as the neo-standard variety of Italian with elements of the colloquial form (Berruto, *Sociolinguistica Dell'italiano Contemporaneo* 152–53).

My macro strategy for this translation was source-oriented, sometimes also known as foreignization, from Venuti's seminal work (Venuti). This means that I aimed to keep as closely to the source text (ST) as possible, retaining culture-specific references and terms where appropriate. In terms of the orality in the text, identifying the variety of Italian used and rendering it in equivalent terms, without giving Mubiayi's characters a falsified, region-specific sociolect was integral to the strategy.

Studies of orality in literary translation

In the 1980s, Berman wrote of the “deforming tendencies” in translation, which he felt were identifiable techniques, used “largely unconsciously,” to assimilate STs to the target language (TL) and culture. For orality particularly, Berman identified “ennoblement” as producing a target text (TT) more elegant than the original, simplifying it and removing any perceived “clumsiness,” arguing this shows disrespect for the ST. He also advised against translating vernaculars by transferring them into a vernacular of the TL, to “exoticize” it, as doing so “ridicules” the original (Berman 250). He does point out vernaculars and differences in language can be distinguished in translation, providing the example of the French translation of Thomas Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, but only names them as “varieties” of French, not specifying further (Berman 252).

Cavagnoli discusses the importance of maintaining orality in translation, focusing on repetition in literary texts, specifically from English to Italian. In example passages she demonstrates how some authors use repetition for impact, flow and style in their writing, and so the tendency to synonymise in translation is detrimental. Ignoring markers of orality means changing the intentions behind the text (Cavagnoli 38–41).

Assis Rosa, in an analytical study, examines orality used to indicate sociocultural status, particularly marginality, arguing that it changes a target reader’s impression of a text and its characters (Assis Rosa 222). She identifies three strategies historically used to translate orality: normalisation, centralisation, and decentralisation, all detrimental to the perception of the text. Normalisation translates marked discourse as standard, centralisation turns “less prestigious” discourse more prestigious, but still non-standard, and decentralisation turns standard discourse less prestigious (Assis Rosa 214). Focusing on Portuguese translations of Charles Dickens’ work, Assis Rosa finds that most translations have normalised orality, removing the impression of “otherness” that distinguishes characters in the ST. If orality is not maintained, the characterisation and distinction between characters and narrator is eliminated and gives target readers a different impression of the text.

Gadd Colombi also discusses needing to make careful choices when translating orality to maintain sociolects present in the ST. Understanding the construction of a character’s sociolect in the source language (SL) allows the translator to make choices that render it correctly in the TL. While smoothing over orality is detrimental, it is equally important to not make it too informal or use uncommon or archaic words and expressions, unless present in the ST. Similarly, when there is lexical variation in the orality of the ST, but the TL does not offer as many appropriate alternatives, the translator must employ creative strategies to not ignore this in the TT (Colombi 63-65).

In 2004, Spunta published a comprehensive study of representations of orality in Italian literature from the 1970s to the 1990s. It explores how orality has manifested in literature alongside the development of new forms of communication and media, such as email and television. She asserts that orality and literacy exist on a continuum, not as a dichotomy, citing Berruto’s work as the basis, and identifies neo-standard Italian as the variety used by many writers in Italian literature (Spunta 300–01). Spunta’s research does not come from a translation perspective, but the features of orality in Italian are described through analysis of a variety of authors, giving points of reference for translation.

Analysing orality in *Concorso*

To identify the variety of language in this story, Berruto’s continuum of Italian most accurately encompasses the range found within the language (Berruto, *Sociolinguistica Dell’italiano Contemporaneo* 21). The three axes of his continuum are:

1. **The diastratic:** the social and educational characteristics of the speaker.
2. **The diaphasic:** the situation and level of formality being used.
3. **The diamesic:** the communicative medium.

This covers all possible registers, situations and methods the language is used in, and describes the kind of language used by any given speaker. While there are other models proposed, such as the ones proposed by Sabatini (1985) and Sanga (1981), Berruto's is the most comprehensive and flexible. Berruto's continuum provides the analytical framework to identify the variety or varieties of language present in the text, which is the point of departure for determining how to emulate the style in translation. Initial analysis indicates the text employs orality in its narrative style, and so the research focuses on literature concerning features of orality in Italian and the translation of orality.

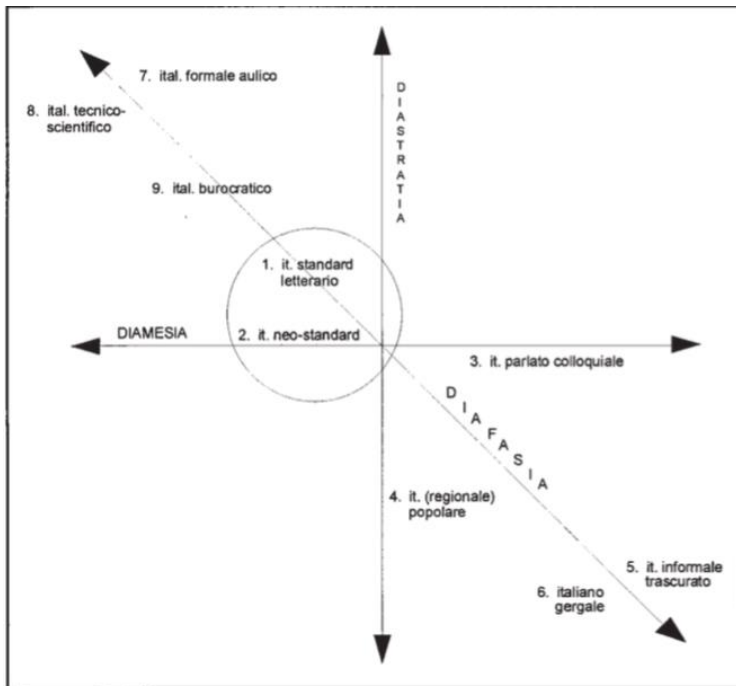


Figure 1 Berruto's continuum of the Italian language (Tosi 42).

While there are brief examples of other varieties in *Concorso*, only the main one will be analysed in detail. This variety encompasses both Hayat's narration and the majority of the dialogue between characters familiar to each other, namely Hayat's sister, her mother, and her friends. The variety and register Mubiayi uses reflects what Berruto identified as "neo-standard" Italian, with elements of colloquial Italian, particularly in dialogue (Berruto,

Sociolinguistica Dell'italiano Contemporaneo 139–52). This is consistent with Spunta's finding in *Voicing the Word* that authors use different elements of neo-standard Italian to situate their writing on the continuum between literacy and orality, blurring the traditional distinction between spoken and written varieties of language (Spunta 295–96). Mubiayi's style is not experimental, as she does not include markers of *italiano parlato-parlato* ("spoken-spoken Italian") such as pauses, repetition and incomplete sentences, but uses discourse markers and a register that gives the sense of story being told orally without getting in the way of retelling the events in a logical, clear manner (Berruto, "Varietà Diamesiche, Diastratiche, Diafasiche" 43–44). The whole story is also either in present tense or *passato prossimo* (past perfect), rather than the more traditional *passato remoto* (remote past) used in Italian literature for narration. This distinction cannot be shown through tense choices in English, as its past tense options, present perfect and simple past, do not share the same functions as the two Italian past tenses and are commonly used in both spoken and written English (Kinder and Savini 393–94).

Mubiayi uses elements of oral, colloquial Italian to give readers a sense that we are hearing Hayat's thoughts as they flow, being told the story directly with all her true thoughts and feelings, rather than through a third-person, omniscient narrator. While for the most part her narration flows logically, and there are a few instances of syntactic dislocation in either

narration or dialogue, the register is casual, and she uses colloquial expressions and markers as if she were relaying the story to someone in real time. This lessens the perceived distance between the readers and Hayat, especially effective in reinforcing the Italian (“nat[a] e cresciut[a] a Roma,” “born and raised in Rome,” (Mubiayi 111)¹ part of her identity. Below I explain the reasoning behind my choices, as I tried to strike a balance between being true to the source text, and creating a similar, natural style of orality in my translation that did not remove all traces of her Italianness.

Recreating orality in translation

Throughout *Concorso*, Hayat’s long, flowing sentences, while common in Italian in general, make for difficult reading in English at some points. I chose to use contractions throughout my translation, not just in dialogue but also in Hayat’s narration (“don’t” instead of “do not”; “I’m” instead of “I am”), to help imitate this flow, even when sentences had to be split in English for readability. This also helped recreate the casual register of neo-standard Italian Mubiayi uses. The only exception to this rule was in some cases where Mubiayi has included stressed pronouns (such as *io* (I) or *tu* (you)) for emphasis in front of conjugated verbs, or rare occasions where the text called for more emphasis in English and using an uncontracted form of the verb allowed me to render this in translation. Contractions are a major signifier of colloquial registers of English, and so this was a choice made on the macro level to maintain that overarching tone in translation (Heim 462).

Discourse markers

One of the ways Mubiayi imitates orality in the text is through discourse markers; she frequently uses words that serve to stress and articulate meaning, but have little semantic value (Gaetano Berruto, *Sociolinguistica Dell’italiano Contemporaneo* 146). While many of these markers of neo-standard and colloquial Italian have direct equivalents in English, they often sound unnatural as they do not fit the flow or have the same colloquial meanings contained in one word like in Italian. Therefore, a direct translation of many of these terms is not sufficient or could even be detrimental to recreating Mubiayi’s style in translation.

According to Berruto, semantically “poor” connectives signal colloquial Italian or *italiano parlato*. Tosi then divided these connectives into five categories: to preface remarks (1), gain time (2), emphasise consequences (3), negotiate meaning (4), and seek agreement or sympathy (5). The discourse markers that frequently appear in this text are listed accordingly below (Tosi 53).

(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
<i>magari</i>	<i>cioè</i>	<i>non so</i>	<i>sì</i>	<i>guarda</i>
<i>mica</i>	<i>così</i>	<i>(mi) sembra</i>	<i>certo</i>	<i>eh(i)</i>
<i>niente</i>	<i>ecco</i>	<i>probabilmente</i>	<i>vero?</i>	<i>sai</i>
<i>ma</i>	<i>insomma</i>			<i>dai</i>
<i>vabbè</i>				<i>scusa</i>
				<i>capito?</i>

Some of these markers have equivalents that work well in colloquial English. For instance, “scusa” is easily rendered as “sorry” in a colloquial register, and “vero?” as “really?” or a tag question. In this article, however, I focus on the terms (bolded in the list above) that I found

¹ All translations my own unless otherwise stated.

most difficult to render in English, either because their meaning does not correspond easily, or the English equivalent does not fit the casual register and explain how I compromised or compensated to keep the effects of Mubiayi’s style. As Umberto Eco wrote, “...sapendo che non si dice mai la stessa cosa, si possa dire quasi la stessa cosa”. - “...knowing one can never say the same thing, one can say almost the same thing,” (Eco 10). These examples are only potential renderings of these phrases; I attempt to contextualise my choices in accordance with the text, in the hope it offers ideas for other translators who face this kind of situation.

mica

Mica is difficult to render because it is a negation adverb that is standalone marker of colloquial Italian and can take on several meanings in English, depending on context, most of which are neutral when translated on their own (Kinder and Savini 286–87). It is most commonly translated as “not”, but like the Italian *non*, this is a standard, neutral translation. By using *mica*, Mubiayi is signalling the casual register Hayat is using in both her narration and dialogue. In lines where *mica* is part of a question, there is no way in English to use something other than a neutral negative construction. Instead, to compensate, I added tag questions to the negative statements to render the effect of a more conversational way of constructing questions in English, as shown below:

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
«Magda! Mica vorrai entrare lì dentro?».	“Magda! You don’t want to go in there?”	“Magda! You don’t really want to go in there, do you? ”
«... Mica siete dei servizi sociali?».	“You’re not from social services?”	“You’re not from social services, are you? ”
Non sarà mica arrivata l’ora x?	Hour X won’t have arrived?	Surely Hour X hasn’t arrived?

Without the addition of the “really” and “do you?” added in the first example, the translation is a very neutral statement that is devoid of both the disbelief Hayat is expressing to her sister, and the casual tone she employs. Likewise, despite just meeting the girls, the old man is suddenly very casual when he is worried they have come to take Ibrahim away, and the literal translation makes his question sound neutral or even polite. I did not add a tag question to the last instance, since it was not part of dialogue, and “surely” better conveys Hayat’s tone of disbelief that there is activity in the bathroom at home.

In statements, “not” or “at all” are again neutral constructions that do not capture the tone; to compensate I added other adverbs for emphasis in the following cases:

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
Mica perché sono nera devo per forza essere impegnata.	Because I’m black I don’t have to necessarily be engaged.	Just because I’m black I don’t necessarily have to be an activist.
Per esempio, mica si può più parlare al bagno.	For example, one can’t speak in the bathroom.	For example, you just can’t speak in the bathroom anymore .

Poi la libreria al bagno non serve mica .	Plus the bookshelf in the bathroom isn't needed.	Besides, the bookshelf in the bathroom isn't even needed anyway .
«In commissariato non c'è mica gente che ti può sostituire così <i>d'amblee...</i> »	“At the police station there's not any people who can substitute you so quickly...”	“At the police station there's just not anyone at all who can replace you so <i>immediate-mont...</i> ”
«Chiamiamo i carabinieri! È il loro lavoro! Mica quello di una banda di pazzi disadattati come noi.»	“Let's call the <i>carabinieri</i> ! It's their job! Not one for a group of crazy misfits like us.”	“Let's call the <i>carabinieri</i> ! It's their job! Definitely not one for a gang of crazy misfits like us.”

In the instances above, I have added adverbs that do not exaggerate the negation that *mica* signals and have adapted them to the context of each sentence. For example, while “just” is a frequently recurring compensation, in the last example “just not” would not fit the context of Hayat exclaiming how ill-suited their group is to the rescue mission, but “definitely not” expresses the exasperation in her statement. In my translation of the second last example («In commissariato non c'è **mica** gente che ti può sostituire così *d'amblee...*»), I chose to change the French word in translation to one more recognisable to an English speaker, so that the joke of the policeman attempting to sound smart was not lost on Anglophone readers. Mubiayi has spelled the word phonetically in Italian, and so I have done the same in English.

cioè

I found that the literal meaning of *cioè*, “that is,” was too stilted or formal for the register I was aiming to create in English. Once again, one alternative to suit the tone did not fit all contexts, but two seemed to fit most cases:

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
Cioè io parlavo...	That is I talked...	Well I talked...
...perché a casa sei autorizzato a vestire «in borghese», cioè a capo scoperto...	...because at home you are authorised to dress “in plain clothes”, that is with your head uncovered...	...because at home you're allowed to dress “in civvies,” as in with your head uncovered...
Cioè , va inteso tutto così letteralmente?	That is, is it intended so literally?	As in , does it have to be understood that literally?
Cioè , stava tutto il tempo lì...[?]	That is, was he there all the time...[?]	As in , was he there all the time...[?]

Quelli che conosco, cioè con cui ho scambiato qualche chiacchiera...	Those I know, that is with whom I have exchanged a few words...	Those I know, well those I've exchanged a few words with...
...e non avessi questo cognome che comincia per <i>Abd</i> , cioè servo...	...and if I didn't have this surname that starts with <i>Abd</i> , that is, "servant"...	...and I didn't have this surname that starts with <i>Abd</i> , as in 'servant'...
«Sì, cioè no.»	"Yes, that is, no."	"Yes, well , no."
...cosa sono riuscita a capire: cioè niente.	...what I have managed to understand: that is, nothing.	...what I've managed to understand: that is , nothing.
Cioè in un campo nomadi.	That is, into a nomad camp.	As in , into a nomad camp.
...alla base, cioè a casa loro.	...to the base, that is, their house.	to base camp, as in to their house.

"As in" is the lower register equivalent of "that is" in most cases where Hayat is expanding on what she means or explaining a word or phrase, and I chose "well" in the cases where she is retracting what she has just stated. I used the literal "that is" where it fit the emphatic flow of the sentence, to show she understands nothing.

insomma

Insomma literally means "in summary," but is more commonly used as a filler or connector word to signal that the speaker is summing up the essential information they want to convey. Its pragmatic meaning is closer to "so" in English, which does fit in some cases, but is still a neutral construction that does not convey as much of a casual tone in every situation, especially if the rest of the sentence in Italian does not contain any other markers of orality (Kinder and Savini 439–42).

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
Insomma , siamo musulmane.	In summary, we are Muslim.	I mean , we are Muslim.
Insomma non si poteva pensare troppo a quello che c'era scritto nel «Libro»...	In summary, what was written in the "Book" could not be thought of too much...	Basically , they couldn't think about what was written in the "Book" too much...
Insomma , il nostro signor bagno è corredato di...	In summary, our excellent bathroom is furnished with...	So our top-notch bathroom is furnished with...
Insomma , io credo che si possa lavorare per migliorare la giustizia terrena...	In summary, I believe that one can work to improve earthly justice...	Basically , I believe that you can work to improve earthly justice...
Insomma , tutto quel fervore, quel modo di parlare...	In summary, all that fervour, that way of talking...	Basically , all that fervour, that way of talking...

Insomma , l'unico risultato è...	In summary, the sole result is...	So the only result is...
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The three options I have used in English all serve the same pragmatic purpose of summarising or listing information. In most cases, “basically” fit the more casual tone, and so I used it when Hayat is explaining her thoughts or a situation to the readers. The “I mean” in the first example better fits Hayat’s tone and the way she is comparing her and her sister’s thoughts and beliefs. The two instances of “so” were to reflect the filler quality in Italian, because “basically” is less of a filler in English and more of a signal of summary.

certo

Certo is used to both express agreement or highlight something the speaker thinks is a given within the context (Kinder and Savini 441). It is mainly used with this function when Hayat is expressing something she thinks is obvious, particularly when she is being sarcastic.

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
Certo , di lasciare il motorino lì non mi va per niente.	Certainly, leaving the scooter there I don’t feel like at all.	Of course , I don’t feel like leaving the scooter there at all.
Certo , vallo a dire all'assicurazione che l'ho lasciato nella terra di nessuno!	Certainly, go tell the insurance company that I left it in the land of no-one.	Oh sure , go tell the insurance company that I left it in no-man’s land!

The first example is Hayat signalling she is about to say something she thinks is obvious, but she has no other option, and “of course” is more colloquial than “certainly” in this instance. I added an “oh” at the beginning of the second example because the sarcasm is less obvious in English without it. *Certo*, when followed up by a sarcastic remark evokes a certain intonation in an Italian reader’s mind, and “oh sure” rendered this connotation more effectively in English.

sì

Another choice I had to consider was the translation of *sì*. In standard Italian, there is only one way to express “yes” when there are multiple variations in English, such as “yeah,” or “yep,” which signal colloquial register. Since this is a major marker of colloquial register in English, it felt appropriate to change the following instances of *sì* in the source text to “yeah” or another form of agreement where “yes” sounded stilted.

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
« Sì , sto bene, non ti preoccupare.»...	“Yes, I’m fine, don’t worry.”	“ Yeah , I’m okay, don’t worry.”
«Che è successo? Stai bene, sì ?».	“What has happened? You’re well, yes?”	“What’s happened? You’re okay, right ?”

In the first instance, Hayat is quickly reassuring her sister on the phone, so “yeah” instead of “yes” felt more appropriate in English. In the second instance, “yes?” at the end of a sentence sounds very formal in English, but “yeah?” tends to be only used in certain regions, and I did

not want to give my translation a particular vernacular, which would disrespect the ST and jar readers (Berman 250). “Right?” is more natural but regionally neutral.

ma

The use of *ma* in colloquial Italian, particularly at the start of sentences or clauses, is difficult to translate as it is often a filler or signals the introduction of a question. As a filler, it has little semantic value, close to “um” or “er” in English. With questions, it can literally mean “but do you...?”, however this can sound unnatural or formal in English. It is versatile as a connective, and so requires different words of a similar register in English.

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
«Abbi pazienza, ma lo sai cosa farebbero i carabinieri?».	“Be patient, but do you know what the <i>Carabinieri</i> would do?”	“Hang on, ‘ cause you know what the <i>Carabinieri</i> would do?”
«Yaya - così mi chiamano affettuosamente gli intimi – ma ci fai o ci sei?».	“Yaya – as my closest affectionately call me – but are you stupid or just pretending?”	“Yaya,” – as my nearest and dearest affectionately call me – “are you being stupid or what? ”
Ma che ne sa questo ragazzino?	But what does this little boy know about it?	What does this little boy know anyway?

In these examples, they all served as introductions to questions, but all required different choices to both render them natural to English orality and make sense grammatically. The second example is an example of emphatic use, and so I chose to put an emphatic “or what?” at the end of the English sentence instead.

vabbè

Vabbè is a contraction of *va bene*, meaning “okay” or “all right”, and is often used in colloquial spoken Italian. Mubiayi’s use of the contraction instead of the full phrase is a key marker of orality early in the text. The closest equivalent of the contraction in English would be shortening “okay” to “kay”, however this did not fit the context or tone where it was used in the ST. Given that its use is restricted to one passage in the text and is used three times to emphasise a point, it was important the translation should be consistent each time to maintain the repetitive impact (Cavagnoli 38–41).

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
Vabbè le lotte giovanili...	Okay, the struggles of youth...	I get it , the struggles of youth...
Vabbè capire che non siamo...	Okay, understanding that we are not...	I get it , seeing that we’re not...
Dico, vabbè tutto...	I say, it’s all okay...	I mean, I get it all...

The difficulty in translating this word is that even though it is a very short, quick contraction, it contains a third-person singular verb that sets up the rest of the sentence. In English, a similar verb in addition to the “okay” lengthens the quick, dismissive manner Hayat is using to express her exasperation. To compensate, I turned the expression in to a first-person construction, “**I** get it”, so the remainder of the sentence makes sense in English without much modification and maintains the meaning of Hayat accepting these things her sister wants to do.

Colloquial constructions

Another marker of colloquial Italian is vocabulary and expression choices that denote a less formal register (Berruto, *Sociolinguistica Dell'italiano Contemporaneo* 143–48). They are often idiomatic, and so I tried to use appropriate colloquial equivalents, even if the idiomatic element was lost.

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
Ce l'avevo quasi fatta!	I almost did it!	I almost made it!
Non mi va più, tutto qui.	It doesn't go for me anymore, that's it.	I just don't feel like it any more, that's all.

“Made it” is the more idiomatic expression in this case, as she is referencing completing something on time, rather than completing a particular action. The construction “indirect personal pronoun + *va*” is a colloquial form of expressing that something is good or okay for someone. The verb “to go” is not used the same way idiomatically in English like in Italian, so “feel like it” seemed the best way of expressing how things were not sitting right with Hayat anymore.

Left Dislocation

Dislocazione a sinistra or “left dislocation” is a trait examined in both neo-standard and colloquial Italian (Tosi 54). It is a form of morphosyntactical organisation that introduces the theme at the beginning of the sentence and emphasises the comment or new information on it in the second half, and usually restates the theme as a direct object pronoun instead (Berruto, “Varietà Dialesiche, Diastratiche, Diafasiche” 48).

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
Troppe scelte, è questo il problema.	Too many choices, it is this the problem.	Too many choices, that's the problem.
Gli altri invece li divido per luogo di conoscenza.	The others instead I divide them by place of acquaintance.	Whereas the others I divide by place of acquaintance.
Eppure quelle due parole le capisco benissimo...	But those two words I understand them very well...	Nonetheless those are two words I understand well...
«Certi tratti della storia non li ho capiti».	“Certain features of the story I didn't understand them.”	“I didn't understand some aspects of the story.”

As the literal translations show, the direct object pronoun does not make sense in English, so I either omitted it or rearranged the sentence. I tried to keep the way the sentence was constructed, even if in some cases that meant moving the verb. This way of organisation still often lends itself to colloquial English, allowing me to leave the original emphasis within sentences. However, as the last example shows, at times I reverted to SVO word order to make the sentence less stilted in English.

Swearing and emphatic expressions

Profanity is used sparingly in the text and is generally not very strong. It is used both to mark the colloquial register, mostly in an emphatic manner for Hayat to express her feelings about the situation. The strongest instances of swearing were *cazzo*, used twice, which I translated as

“shit” both times, but rendering one as “oh shit” to make it a more natural exclamation in English.

There are other emphatic occurrences such as *accidenti* and *mannaggia* which I translated as “dammit” as the closest expression of annoyance that was not too vulgar in meaning (Kinder and Savini 435). The other mild swearing used multiple times is *cavolo*, which literally means cabbage, but is a mild curse often used in place of the stronger *cazzo*, (similar to substituting “crap” for “shit”). As it was used in different positions in the sentence, I had to translate it several different ways.

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
I miei amici sono solo italiani, cavolo!	My friends are only Italians, [cabbage] dammit!	My friends are all Italians, dammit!
«...farebbero un sacco di domande del cavolo. »	“they would do a load of cabbage questions.”	“...[they] would ask a load of crap questions.”
Dove cavolo siamo capitate?	Where the cabbage have we ended up?	Where on earth have we ended up?

The second example is hard to show as a literal translation, because while some dictionaries show mild, non-vulgar words such as “rubbish” and “nonsense” for *cavolo*, it is a stronger term than that, hence my use of “crap” – it is not vulgar, but not neutral either. In the third instance, “hell” would be the most accurate way of rendering Hayat’s bewilderment, however in the very next sentence she makes a reference to the house they have just left as “hell,” and so the repetition seemed odd when it was not there in Italian. References to hell are not typical in Italian swearing, so the alternative I used is more neutral, though still emphatic.

A lot of swearing in Italian draws on religion, particularly Christianity, whereas most swearing in contemporary English is based on sex or the body. The strength of religious swearing in English and Italian also differs, which can make it difficult to translate (Maher 370). An example of this is Mubiayi’s use of *santo* in the text, which as an adjective means “holy,” but can have either a similar connotation to “bloody” and “damn” or “blessed” when used emphatically. This double connotation is lost in English, which Mubiayi has also employed for humorous effect when Hayat uses it in relation to her devout Muslim sister.

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
...e andare tutti i santi giorni a pregare in moschea...	...and to go all the holy days to pray in the mosque...	...and go every blessed day to pray in the mosque...
Santa mia sorella e santo Corano!	My holy sister and holy Qur’an!	Bless my sister and bless the Qur’an!

I tried to retain the exasperated, emphatic nature in the first example, but the clever play on “holy/damn day” is lost in English. The second occurrence was the most difficult to translate, as the phrase is used in an ambiguous place. Hayat seems to be using *santo* in the sense of gratitude to her sister and her religiousness for being able to calm the man aggressively questioning why they are looking for Aziza’s house. Therefore, the more positive “bless” seems appropriate, transformed into a more natural verb formation in English.

Lei form

Another element of orality I faced challenges with was the “Lei” form of speech, or where characters should have used it but did not. Italian has two main forms of address: the informal *tu* and formal *Lei*, which in English both mean “you”.² Any time Italian speakers address someone, they are faced with a conscious decision, because their choice of pronoun also dictates the verb forms they will use (Musumeci 434). English does not distinguish between a formal and informal “you,” but in *Concorso Mubiayi* uses the two Italian forms to convey character’s attitudes and characteristics. I chose to add other markers of formality in English, because leaving them as unmarked would change the way TT readers perceived the characters (Assis Rosa 222).

Italian	Literal translation	My translation
«E io cosa dovrei fare adesso? Secondo lei cosa dovrei fare? Ma tu guarda in che paese mi tocca vivere!»	“And I what should I do now? According to you what should I do? But look in what country have to live!”	“So what should I do now? In your opinion <i>sir</i> , what should I do? Look at what sort of country I have to live in!”
«Ma lei cosa farebbe al posto mio? Eh? No, mi dica ? Eh?»	“But sir what would you do in my place? Eh? No, tell me? Eh?”	“But what would you do in my position <i>sir</i> ? Eh? No, please tell me. Eh?”
«Lui sta bene. Non ti preoccupare. Tu dillo a sua madre che non si deve preoccupare.»	“He’s fine. Don’t worry. You tell it to his mother that she must not worry.”	“He’s okay. Don’t worry. You go tell his mother that she doesn’t need to worry.”

In the first example, I chose to translate *lei* as “sir” in addition to the possessive “your,” to make the level of politeness clear, but italicising the word to show his implied sarcasm. The next sentence uses the idiomatic expression *tu guarda*, which I chose to make a more neutral “look at,” without the pronoun, in English.

In the second example, while the police officer is frustrated with the man, he maintains the *Lei* form, so I added “sir” again to signal formality in English. The second part is a polite command (“*mi dica*”), so “tell me” in English sounds too informal. I added the “please” to signal both politeness and the rhetorical, sarcastic nature of his request, which is punctuated by the emphatic “Eh?” after each question.

The opposite problem occurs in the third instance – Shopa, Ibrahim’s friend, is impolite to Hayat’s sister by using the *tu* form when he barely knows her. It is unclear whether he is intentionally being informal with her, or unknowingly doing so because it is not his native language. Given that later in the story there is no allusion to him speaking Italian badly, I interpreted it as impoliteness, potentially because Hayat and Magda have just been chasing him down. To emphasise how blunt his command is, I translated it as “you go tell,” to make his tone more condescending and dismissive, instead of “you tell,” which could be taken more neutrally.

² While a third form, “Voi,” exists, its use is restricted to southern Italy and is less commonly used except in select places nowadays, and is not present in this story.

Conclusion

While this is by no means a definitive guide to translating these discourse markers and terms from Italian into English, it does show that through analysis of language variety and careful consideration of TL options, a natural variety can be created in the TT without completely losing the feel of the ST. It is also important to recognise when creative choices are needed to convey the orality in the TT, even if on a micro level it seems to move away from the semantic meaning in the ST. Paired with other source-oriented strategies, such as maintaining cultural terms in context, a translator can create an evocative TT without making an author or their characters sound synthetic or from a particular English-speaking region artificially.

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