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Authorial voice in scientific writing: Stephen Pinker's books and their Italian translation as a case study

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1. INTRODUCTION

Translating a scientific text is a task that always poses a number of very interesting issues to the translator. Of course, the issue which is often seen as most important is the one concerning lexis (Salmon, 2003; Cortelazzo, 1994): the accuracy and precision of choosing exactly that one right word, more often than not coming after a long research work among corpora and monolingual technical dictionaries. Luckily these days the translator's heavy workload is made much lighter by the vast quantity of resources available online (corpora, thesauri, online dictionaries, encyclopedias, downright online libraries and so on). Does this mean that all translating problems have now been reduced to almost nothing? No, not at all. As a matter of fact, another and maybe more difficult problem every translator has to face is the one that relates to metadiscourse, namely the author's linguistic and rhetorical manifestation in the text itself.

Different languages have different expectations about which linguistic items and devices are more or less accepted in a given genre, due to the fact that, even remaining inside a single language, «metadiscourse is integral to the context in which it occurs and is intimately linked to the norms and expectations of particular cultural and professional communities» (Hyland, 1998, 438). It follows, then, that such expectations will be different in communities which are indeed similar (e.g., the scientific community and/or the broad public to which popular-scientific books are aimed) but situated in the context of a different culture. In this paper, the focus is on the differences and similarities between English and Italian popular-scientific texts and on

the problems that may and do arise during the translation process. The consequence of different expectations in English and Italian readers is that the examination of the text preceding the translation itself should not only be carried out with regard to lexical accuracy, but also with regard to the norms and expectations concerning metadiscourse in that given genre for both languages: what is accepted and what is not, what could be considered a conscious deviation from the norm the author made to underline a specific passage or utterance and how it could be best rendered in the translation while maintaining illocutionary and perlocutionary effects (Yule, 2003). This is very important: otherwise, a large part of the message the author wished to convey would be irremediably lost.

One could question the real importance of this concept. After all, science, and, as a consequence, scientific writing, has always been considered a simple objective reporting of an external reality (Hyland, 2001, 207), and authors concerned with science were expected to go to great lengths to avoid mentioning human agency, presenting facts as such. While this strategy is still presented as the best one in many style manuals and textbooks (Rowntree, 1991; Scarpa, 2001) as well as in genre literature (Bruschi, 1999), conflicting advice and especially new tendencies are arising, recognizing the author a greater margin for bending the rules and expressing their presence in authorial voice.

Two main reasons can be identified for such an ongoing process: first, the need for self-promotion, which originated as a necessary consequence of the fact that it is increasingly difficult to attract a minimum of attention in such a very crowded area as scientific literature (Harwood, 2005); second, the fact that scientific writing, and consequently technical translation as well, have an intrinsic creative factor in themselves, as much as any other writing activity (Scarpa, 2001, 72; Newmark, 1988, 81-88).

The issues examined in this paper were first scrutinized in the first stages of the research carried out in preparation for a Master of Arts Degree thesis, and are now here discussed in a deeper, more focused analysis that concentrates solely on the use of first person singular pronouns in translation. However, this study still recounts only the preliminary results of a work that will necessarily be much longer and involve further and extended investigation on a larger corpus. This article intends to show the existing differences in the use of first person singular pronouns in English and Italian scientific texts (in the broadest sense of the term, since both papers appearing in scientific journals and books aimed at a more general public are considered), and therefore to illustrate the difficulties the translator faces and a few strategies that can be employed to solve such problems. Following this introductory section, the motivations for corpus selection and the method employed will

be outlined. This is then followed by a close scrutiny of English and Italian general norms and expectations concerning the use of first person singular pronouns in scientific writing, focusing principally on self-promotion. Then, the actual translation choices are presented, analyzed and motivated with regard to their effect on the reader. A final summary outlines a synopsis of the paper and additional starting points for further research.

2. CORPUS ANALYSIS AND METHOD

Stephen Pinker's book *The Stuff of Thought. Language as a window into human nature* (2007) was originally chosen as the object of a case study due to the interesting characteristics it presents from the point of view of a translator. First of all, it had not been translated into Italian, and still has not been so far ... Those works were bestsellers in the United States¹ and in Italy the books are extremely popular as well, therefore the Italian publishing house will probably be interested in publishing the latest book as well.

Apart from possible professional use of the text, Pinker's *The Stuff of Thought* is interesting also as far as language is concerned. This book is quite different from the usual popular-scientific book, both Italian and English, because of the highly creative use Pinker makes of language. As a matter of fact, this book could be considered a mix of scientific reporting and popular literature. In order to be more specific, referring to Jakobson's model of the functions of language (1960) it can be said that the main linguistic and communicative purpose of this text is a contribution to the public understanding of science, and to reach this aim the text balances the referential function carefully, in that the main topic relies on describing an external reality, and the phatic function, since Pinker goes to great lengths to keep in close contact with the reader, continuously making references to the presence of an invisible audience (*suppose ... , imagine ... , you would ... , let's get back to ... , questions*). Very interestingly, in this text the metalingual and poetic function are also realized: while the former can be expected, the latter can indeed be a surprise in the scientific context.

The main constituent of this text is a discussion of scientific data and experiments about what can be explained by language with regard to the

¹ *The Blank Slate: the modern denial of human nature* [*Tabula rasa: perché non è vero che tutti gli uomini nascono uguali*, published in Italy by Mondadori] and *The Stuff of Thought: language as a window into human nature*, the very same book analyzed in this paper, were both *New York Times* bestsellers in the year 2003 and 2007 respectively.

mechanisms of the mind and how thoughts are related to words. These topics are interspersed with a very high number of examples coming from the most varied sources. While any scientific book that aims to reach a broad public must necessarily present a number of examples to help an inexperienced reader to cope with complex issues, this book is different in that it takes them from very popular contexts. To illustrate this point, many examples can be found, coming from movies and situation comedies, but also comic strips from the most popular comics, as *Calvin & Hobbes*, and popular jokes taken both from Internet competitions and from everyday conversations. It should not be surprising, then, that reviews describe Pinker's books as «attractively written» (*New York Review of Books*, 27/09/2007) and «highly entertaining» (*New York Times*, 23/09/2007). Given what has just been said, it offers some interesting challenges to a translator, in particular the problem of «poetry (in the broadest possible sense of the term) as an untranslatable item» (Jakobson, 1966, 63).

The second and possibly even more interesting issue the translator has to tackle in this text is the author's use of self-reference with first person singular pronouns and how the reader is addressed, two sides of the same coin and the main topic of this paper. Namely, as will be explained later, in Italian scientific reporting the use of / is highly advised against, and as a general rule Italian tends to be more formal and to maintain a greater distance from the reader in metadiscourse, thus avoiding much of the self-promotional direct appeals that will instead be found in Pinker's book. As could be predicted, this gave rise to a number of conflicting choices while this text was being translated and to a desire to delve deeply into the matter.

Since at this stage the corpus of the study is still limited to Pinker's book and therefore very narrow, no statistical credibility could be warranted, but for the time being the limited findings of this preliminary research only aim to shed some light over a problem that many translators encounter but to which very little time is devoted during their training.

3. ANALYSIS AND THEORY: AUTHORIAL VOICE IN SCIENTIFIC REPORTING

3.1. *The English language*

In English, the use of the first person pronoun in scientific reporting has its advocates and its detractors. The traditional view of scientific and academic

writing states that, since research is a purely empirical and objective process, human agency is not part of the action and as such it has no right to be present in the description of indisputable and replicable facts (Hyland, 2001, 208). This view has some notable supporters, as for example Albert Einstein (1934, 113). More recently, this idea of scientific prose as «author-evacuated» (Geertz, 1983) is still supported by many textbooks and style manuals, especially for the «hard sciences» (Harwood, 2005, 1208). However, it is also true that as much as the use of / in scientific research may be officially frowned upon, it is nevertheless very often transgressed (Hyland, 2001, 209) and has become truly pervasive in current academic communication (Afros & Schryer, in print). More often than not, the use of / is interpreted as a self-promotional technique (Harwood, 2005; Afros & Schryer, in print; Hyland 1998; Hyland 2001). Following Afros & Schryer (in print), promotion is defined as the ascription of positive values to the reported research and supporting views and of negative value to dissenting views. The need for self-promotion is now felt and therefore indulged in more keenly than ever before (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995), due to the fact that more and more scientific research is being published and consequently it is more and more difficult to get one's own work first published by the most prestigious journals in the field and then noticed in the crowd (Harwood, 2005, 1209). This is probably one of the reasons for Pinker's creative use of language as well: as a matter of fact, his book does truly stand out from the others for the presence of such «pop culture» items as were detailed before and also for his use of metaphors and informal language. Another reason for the use of / – a reason that for many aspects could also be considered related to self-promotion – is the need to demonstrate the presence of an individual, innovative contribution to the scientific community, one that is worth gaining official recognition from the academy (Hyland, 2001, 209). The necessity for such a personal commitment in presenting one's research is officially supported by more than one voice (Cherry, 1988 and Kuo, 1999, among many others).

Since these considerations about the use of first person singular pronouns are closely connected with the concept of metadiscourse, and as such with the fact that those ideas must be seen inside a community and with respect to their general norms and expectations, it is very interesting to note that for the English language the admonishments against self-mention are less strict in the case of interaction with specialized audiences and more so with general readers (Wilkinson, 1992). This is exactly the contrary of what happens in the case of the Italian language, whose general rules in the field will be examined later. In fact, Pinker seems to go for the Italian point of view: this can be inferred from a comparative analysis juxtaposing chapter 8 of *The Stuff of Thought* and an article he recently wrote together with Nowak

and Lee, «The Logic of Indirect Speech» (in print). The subject of the latter is exactly the same as that of chapter 8 (namely, indirect speech and its use for purposes different from politeness), to the point of quoting the very same examples and using the same game theory charts. The only difference in content is that the article holds a deeper elaboration of the game theory part and the analysis of some linear functions. But there is another and very remarkable difference between chapter and article, and it lies in the use of first person pronouns. Whereas the chapter shows a good number of instances of *I* as a self-promotional item (precisely, it appeared eleven times, including possessive adjectives and pronouns), the corresponding *we* in the article appears only eight times, three of which can be considered instances of inclusive *we*, acting as discourse guide and pooling together authors and readers. Obviously, no instance of self-promotional *I* appears in the article, apart from utterances quoted as examples, since the article has three authors, namely Pinker, Nowak and Lee: in this case, *we* replaces *I* as self-promotional pronoun and authorial voice. Five against eleven, even accounting for the different number of words, is still a considerable difference, especially noting that four out of five appear in the introductory part (following Harwood's and Hyland's theory, one of the places where self-promotion is mostly used, to convince the reader that the article is worth reading), and hence they appear to be virtually absent from the overall discourse.

Bearing in mind what has just been said, it can be noticed that *I* is used mostly in *ethos* appeals (Hyland, 2005), invoking the writer's personal credibility and trustworthiness: Pinker chooses the first person singular when he is expressing his own personal opinion or motivation, to emphasize the novelty of his remarks, or reporting directly what he did, thus underlining the method employed (Harwood 2005), as can be seen in the following examples:

1. No one, *to my knowledge*, has ever been arrested for bribing a maitre d'
2. Take a more subtle example *I have experienced* in real life
3. The examples with which *I began* the chapter
4. *As far as I can see*
5. This, *I believe*, is the real nature of the concept of face.

In this last example the choice of putting a self-reference between commas, far from downplaying it as would standardly be the case, highlights the personal commitment of the author, since by interrupting the flow of the sentence the reader is forced to pay attention to it (Douthwaite, 2000, chapter 4). Moreover, this is not a simple self-reference but one with great modality

commitment in the truth of what is being recounted (to be explained in the following paragraph, with regard to Simpson's modality).

Instead, when the focus is on a *logos* appeal (Lindeberg, 2004), on purely rational grounds, either related to discipline-specific topics or general plausibility, the first person plural is preferred:

6. Often *we ignore* the literal meaning of a request until it is called to *our attention*
7. *Our words* are as much a part of *our social selves* as *our appearance and demeanor*, and so a mistaken-identity plot can lay bare some of the ways *we cloak our intentions* in language
8. *We need* to know what «face» is, and why *we have* emotions like embarrassment, shame [...]

More specifically, *we* is used when the author wishes to involve the reader in the example, putting both actors on exactly the same level, both independently performing exactly the same mental operations and both slowly progressing in a quest towards knowledge. Otherwise, when general truths are enunciated, the lexical item *people* is preferred.

9. Even in the bluntest societies, *people* don't just blurt out what they mean but cloak their intentions in various forms of politeness, evasion, and euphemism.
10. It assumes that *people* in conversation always cooperate.

In this particular sphere *reader*, *speaker* and *hearer* can be considered similar in their use as *people* in *logos* appeals.

As announced a few lines above, another aspect of the analysis of the use of first person singular pronouns considers them in the context of the sentences in which they appear and, as a consequence, could relate them to the idea of modality (Simpson, 1993, 49). According to Simpson, modality expresses the writer's (or speaker's) opinion about the truth of a proposition expressed by a given sentence, or, more generally, the writer's attitude towards a situation or event. It has already been stated that understanding the author's viewpoint is very important in order to fully grasp, and then translate, the text meaning in all its nuances and the author's goals: therefore, modality is one of the most important linguistic devices in this sphere (Douthwaite, 2007) Modality can be expressed in various forms: deontic (related to duty and permission), boulomaic (related to desire or lack thereof), perception (related to what can be perceived by human senses) and epistemic (Simpson, 1993,

47). This latter modality is the most interesting one for the scope of the present analysis, since it expresses precisely the writer's confidence (or lack thereof) in the truth of a proposition. The great use Pinker makes of this particular device can be seen in the great epistemic commitment he puts into sentences like

11. *I'm sure* a merchant listening to an advisory from the local racketeer on the many accidents that can befall a store doesn't see it that way

This is a classic example of epistemic modality following the structure BE ... TO. It could be argued that the epistemic commitment in this utterance is weakened by the presence of *can* expressing a less convincing deontic modality; however, the point here is Pinker's commitment to the truth of the merchant's reaction and not necessarily in the words of the racketeer he had already quoted before as an example of indirect speech not being used for politeness (*Nice store you got there. Would be a real shame if something happened to it*). Of course this is not the only means an author can employ to express his commitment: other examples are modal auxiliaries, modal adverbs, evaluative adjectives and adverbs, generic sentences and verbs of knowledge, prediction and evaluation (Simpson, 1993). Many examples of the author's commitment expressed through modality can be found throughout the text; it appears that his favorite devices are lexical verbs, as can be seen in the sentences quoted in examples [2] to [5] and again in what follows:

12. *I think* this is being used as a signal

13. *I suspect* that's a different emotion

It is necessary to mention that modality is not limited to the linguistic items mentioned in these lines: from a stylistic point of view, it is context-dependent and in the final analysis can only be understood if factors in addition to grammatical categories (namely, the various symbolizing devices and their interplay with elements both inside and outside the text) are taken into account (Douthwaite, 2007, 113).

After broaching all these topics for the English language, first person pronouns use in the Italian language will now be considered.

3.2. *The Italian Language*

In order to determine to what extent and in what circumstances first person singular pronouns can be used in Italian texts, it is first necessary to establish

what genre the text belongs to. Following Sabatini's categorization, the focus is on the communicative intention and on the strictness imposed on readers' interpretation, that is, whether the communicative message is more or less ambiguous, how much room is left for the reader to freely interpret the intended message (Sabatini, 1999). Therefore, the key is the strictness or elasticity, from the semantic point of view, of the text content. It is important to note that such strictness or lack thereof is not something the author can choose completely on his own: it depends on the context, which is made up by general norms and usage that have developed and have been established in any given cultural community (Sabatini, 1999). Normally, according to Sabatini's model, scientific texts are considered highly constraining («molto vincolanti») since the main function is the cognitive function, their descriptions are very often highly formalized and statements are either positive or negative, with no personal or affective evaluation. As can be easily inferred, such a genre cannot comprise a text with many sentences offering personal opinions, comments, metaphors and wisecracks. However, it is also difficult to confine within the strict boundaries of statistical analysis and numerical measurements the so-called «soft» sciences (Becher, 1989), which rely less on watertight and exactly replicable laboratory experiments and more on the interpretation of facts.

As a result, Pinker's book fits better among *on-average constraining texts* («mediamente vincolanti»), and can easily be grouped together with *exposition-discussion texts*, that is, texts aiming to explain things to *those who do not know* (Sabatini, 1999, 84) in which the adherence of the reader's interpretation to the writer's message is less important than the process of knowledge enrichment. As a matter of fact, Pinker has much more in common with this latter category: the pronouns are used as a sort of discourse guide, orienting the reader both by repeating what has already been said and by preparing for what will follow (Harwood, 2005), all the same reiterating the newsworthiness of the claims.

Hence, since this kind of text does not need to establish a strict bond constraining the interpretation of any and every statement, a higher amount of freedom is given to the linguistic choices the author can make: for example, in order to heighten the coefficient of elasticity (in interpretation, of course) of the text, elements from the spoken language can be added.

However, this does not mean that everything is permitted. After all the bond definitely exists, even if it is not as strict as a statute article (Sabatini, 1999): while Sabatini certainly admits that sometimes *on-average constraining texts* can display characteristics more fitting to *less constraining texts* (poetry, literature, drama and so on), as happens with Pinker's creative language and use of metaphors, the two categories are nevertheless separated and each should adhere to its specific, few but fundamental norms. Moreover, it has

to be borne in mind that the general structure of the Italian language expects more formality, in every genre of written language (Mortara Garavelli, 2001): more technical jargon, more complex syntax, greater distance between reader and writer (Scarpa, 2001), exactly the very same distance that, as said before, Pinker is trying to eliminate. Even though it can be said that nowadays in Italian scientific/technical texts there is a tendency towards morphological and syntactical simplification, due to the contact with English models (Dardano, 1994), there are still many differences between the two contexts. In particular, Italian scientific texts normally do not use a number of linguistic devices which are considered too informal for the topic. These devices are: ellipsis, direct questions, sentences between brackets, exclamatory sentences, direct speech and first person singular pronouns as the expression of the author's voice (Sabatini 1999). Pinker breaches the rule in that he uses all these devices (even if not massively, one or two instances of every one are found in the chapter on which the analysis focuses (Chapter 8: *Games People Play*), apart from pronouns), stretching the rules, norms and expectations of this context to their limit thus expressing his creativity in self-promotion. However, this creativity also increases the risk of obtaining an opaque text (Snell-Hornby, 1988, 120-124) since at times too much creativity can endanger precision and therefore make the understanding of the text more difficult. But this is not the focus of this article; instead, these considerations show that the use of first person singular pronouns are actively advised against, to the point of being considered a violation of a general norm. For the scientific context, be it communication between specialists or communication addressed to the general public, the Italian language favors the passive voice, impersonal sentences (with *one* as the subject) or plural pronouns, and, more specifically, more third person plural pronouns than first/second person plural pronouns, the ones Pinker mostly uses. Still it must be said that the use of the first person plural pronouns (inclusive or exclusive *we*) is considered acceptable for *on-average constraining texts* (Sabatini 1999).

4. TRANSLATION

It has already been stated that it is very important, for a translator, to make the right choices in order to keep the flavour of the text as similar as possible to what the author himself had written. Therefore, not only does lexis have to be as precise and as accurate as possible, but also other subtler factors have to be kept in mind. One of the most interesting of all is the «angle of telling» (Simpson, 1993), the point of view expressed by the author, that should not be distorted in

the translation process. Normally this is something that is overlooked in scientific texts, since, as has already been stated many times, scientific texts try to be devoid of a human point of view, stressing the fact that the result of the experiment (in the broadest sense of the word, both in «soft» and «hard» sciences) will always be the same, no matter who performs it (Short, 1996). But Pinker's book has a few features in common with literary texts, the first of which is exactly the intrusion of the author's voice inside the flow of writing². Then, the existence of such a similarity between a scientific book and literary texts makes it possible and even almost mandatory to check for point of view and try to carry it forward to the Italian translation, as much as possible given the Italian-speaking public's expectations regarding a scientific essay and the general norms and rules regulating it. Of course, it must be kept in mind that

The linguistic features in the text do not constitute the meaning in themselves; rather they constrain readers from inferring unreasonable meanings and prompt them towards reasonable ones (Short, 1996, 8).

As a consequence, it is not important to translate word for word; on the contrary, the problem is to find the Italian words that will guide the reader on a similar path of reasoning.

As regards the point of view, the two vital factors governing the use of *I* in this text and consequently in the translation are:

1. *I* as self-promotional item;
2. *I* as device to signal social deixis (Short, 1996, 272), or better, the lack of social distance between writer and reader.

These two factors are strictly intertwined in a single strategy, set up by the author's linguistic choices. He negotiates the social distance already mentioned, the relationship to the people he is addressing his words (his readers) and tries to shorten such distance as much as possible through various linguistic devices, partly by talking directly to the reader in appeals (*suppose* ...), partly by including reader and writer in the same inclusive *we*, and partly by offering his own views to critical scrutiny without hiding behind passive or impersonal voices. And at the same time his authorial style, consisting of the linguistic choices quoted in this paper that create his recognizable way of writing, is his best promotional strategy, since it distinguishes his work from that of others in the field.

For all these reasons, if the translation of Pinker's book were to be done

² Another one, for example, could be the use of metaphors.

keeping in mind only Italian standards for the production of scientific texts, the result would be a complete distortion of its meaning. However, even the contrary must be considered carefully: as has already been said, English does not completely condemn the use of first person singular in scientific texts wherever they occur, while in Italian it is still very much frowned upon, and the translator does not want the reader to find the text too far from the usual norms, because if it is too distant from the reader's expectations it could be taken less seriously than it deserves.

The careful analysis of the English point of view about the use of the first person singular is very important in order to see whether any items are foregrounded (i.e., deviating from the norm: Douthwaite, 2000), because if some linguistic devices have an estranging effect on the English-speaking reader, and have therefore been chosen in order to have that precise effect, the translator has to find equivalent linguistic choices with equivalent estranging effect on the Italian reader, equivalence being one of the most important goals of translation (Nida & Taber, 1982).

After having considered all these factors, which is indeed part of the complex task of the translator, it is now time to see what the result in the translation process could possibly be according to this analysis. It is important to remember that, as in any translation process, the choices presented, motivated and explained below are exactly that: choices, meaningful and justified selections of words that could, however, be very different if the approach itself had been different. These linguistic choices do not claim to be the only possible or even the best ones, but only the ones for which most evidence was found in the current literature, namely, in the works of the authors quoted in this paper. Moreover, the translators who worked on Pinker's previous books made choices that are very similar to the ones that will now be detailed.

It would clearly impossible to keep all instances of Pinker's authorial voice in first person singular pronouns as they were: as Sabatini and Scarpa have demonstrated (as reported in the previous section), an Italian reader would consider them highly deviant from the general norm, and thus their use would create foregrounding and implicatures (Douthwaite, 2000). This would not necessarily be a problem in itself: it is a problem because those implicatures did not always exist in the original text, and it is not part of the translator's task to create additional meaning. In order to avoid this, a few different strategies might be employed:

- changing the first person singular pronoun into a first person plural pronoun, thus keeping the sense of «close distance» between reader and writer but avoiding a personal claim. Moreover, this is rather general knowledge than knowledge belonging exclusively to the writer or to the scientific community, and this choice makes the reader feel part of the discourse:

EN: Though no one, *to my knowledge*, has ever been arrested for bribing a maitre d', Feiler felt like the kidnapper in Fargo (*Ibidem*, 399)

IT: Anche se nessuno, *per quanto ne sappiamo*, è mai stato arrestato per aver corrotto un maitre, Feiler si sentiva come il rapitore in Fargo

- changing the first person singular pronoun into a passive voice / impersonal voice; this will make the text marginally less informal than the English text, suiting the expectations of the Italian public:

EN: In the first chapter *I offered* some examples of direct speech (*Ibidem*, 374)

IT: Nel primo capitolo *sono stati presentati* alcuni esempi di discorso indiretto

- completely erasing the verb and replacing it with an adverbial phrase, especially when the sentences regard general truths on which anyone could easily agree, or when it would appear redundant because the cotext makes it clear that the author is obviously speaking about himself:

EN: *The examples with which I began* the chapter [...] are hardly examples of a speaker being polite (*Ibidem*, 392)

IT: *Gli esempi all'inizio* del capitolo [...] difficilmente potranno essere considerate esempi di cortesia da parte di chi parla

EN: *I'm sure* that a merchant listening to an advisory from the local racketeer on the many accidents that can befall a store doesn't see it that way (*Ibidem*, 392)

IT: *Di certo* un negoziante che ascolta i consigli del malavitoso locale sui molti incidenti che possono capitare ad un negozio non la vede così

EN: *As far as I can see* this takes Market Pricing out of the realm of human nature, and there seem to be no naturally developing thoughts or emotions tailored to it (*Ibidem*, 409)

IT: *Per quello che si può vedere*, il Prezzo di Mercato si situa quindi al di fuori della natura umana e apparentemente non è in atto nessuno sviluppo di pensieri o emozioni.

EN: Or take a more subtle example that *I have experienced in real life* and *have explored* in an experiment (*Ibidem*, 421)

IT: Oppure, *prendiamo* un esempio più sottile sperimentato *realmente in prima persona e analizzato* in un esperimento.

- maintain even in Italian the first person singular pronoun, when the author's personal opinion is expressed as a means for self-promotion, as stated earlier. As such, it is considered foregrounded in the English language (after all, the writer's purpose is that such statements should be noticed as much as possible): consequently it could be possible to transpose the same choice in the Italian language without running the risk of creating new

implicatures, since that additional meaning is already to be found in the English text:

EN: This, *I believe*, is the real nature of the concept of «face» that was bandied around by Brown and Levinson without a satisfying theory (*Ibidem*, 405)

IT: *Sono convinto* che questa sia la vera natura del concetto di «faccia» di cui discutevano Brown e Levinson senza una teoria soddisfacente

EN: At other times they define it as a desire for sympathy, but *I suspect* that's a different emotion, more closely tied to communality (*Ibidem*, 405)

IT: In altre occasioni la definiscono come un desiderio di comprensione, ma *sospetto* che questa sia un'emozione differente, più legata alla condivisione

EN: *I think* it is being used as a signal that the basis of a relationship is communality rather than authority (*Ibidem*, 408)

IT: *Ritengo* venga usato per segnalare che la base della relazione è la condivisione e non l'autorità

EN: *I don't know* the answer, but here are some ideas (*Ibidem*, 416)

IT: *Non conosco* la risposta, ma ecco alcuni spunti

EN: Though *I think* that mutual knowledge is the deepest explanation for why people play along with indirect speech even when they can see through it, the other five explanations are not incompatible with it (*Ibidem*, 422)

IT: Anche se *credo* che la conoscenza reciproca sia la spiegazione più approfondita dei motivi per cui le persone stanno al gioco del discorso indiretto anche quando possono vedere cosa c'è dietro, le altre cinque spiegazioni non sono incompatibili.

As can clearly be seen, the four strategies are employed in a dynamic and flexible way: each one should be selected according to context, in order to keep the illocutionary effect as close as possible to the translated text. In general, it can be said that *I* might be maintained first of all in cases of self-promotional authorial voice, giving priority to instances when the author expressed personal claims or findings, especially when it happens in the context of a comparison with other authors or earlier data, and a replacement with impersonal or passive voice could be preferable when the focus is on recapitulating previous items or methodology already mentioned in the book. All examples are taken from Pinker (2007, 373-425).

5. CONCLUSION

If any conclusion can be drawn from this paper, it is that conclusions are still far away. As can be seen very clearly in the analysis of these few examples, no general rule can yet be inferred about the translation of first person singu-

lar pronouns from English to Italian. Perhaps further analysis not only of literature but also of already translated texts both from scientific journals and from books aiming at the popularization of science (as Pinker's) could help translators with more general norms or at least with some ideas about common use. These last words should better be considered a summary of work already done and of some expectations about what still has to come.

This paper aimed to shed some light over an issue that many translators are facing nowadays, the use of first person singular pronouns in science. While traditionally scientific books and papers were expected to be as impersonal as possible, the problem is becoming more and more widespread, as English-speaking journals show a trend towards the use of self-mention as a self-promotional item. Pronouns and possessive adjectives are used to guide the reader through the text, state personal opinions and claims, report on innovative or particularly reliable methodology and for acknowledgements. Even though this new trend is partly trickling down into Italian scientific papers, English and Italian languages still have both distinct and similar expectations regarding the use of *I* in scientific literature.

The English language, as has already been said above, tends to be accepting more and more the use of self-promotional *I*, especially for scientific papers. The Italian language, on the contrary, still expects more formality and impersonality on the part of the writer, not only in *highly constraining* texts as is often the case with a scientific paper of a pure hard science, but also in *on-average constraining* texts such as scientific essays and contributions to the popular understanding of science.

Pinker's book *The Stuff of Thought* shows a good number of instances of first person singular pronouns; therefore, a chapter is scrutinized to focus on these pronouns and offer some examples of how they could be translated respecting both the self-promotional message conveyed by Pinker and the general norms and expectations of the Italian public about such a book. Since even for the English language so many personal pronouns could be considered an instantiation of foregrounding, as a deviation from the general norms, it can be decided to keep at least a few of the instances where they occurred. More specifically, the use of *self-promotional I* might be especially important for the sake of the message when it expressed the author's personal beliefs, claims and conclusions to which he had come following his line of reasoning, or where he was pitting his ideas against someone else's. As a consequence, when *I* is being used in such a fashion it could be translated with a first person singular pronoun in Italian, or with an equivalent linguistic item (possessive adjectives, verbs and so on). At other times, when the author is simply recapitulating what had been done in the previous chapters, or when he is offering examples on which any general audience could agree on the ba-

sis of common sense, other linguistic choices could be made: replacing the pronoun with a passive or impersonal voice, changing the verb from first person singular to first person plural (thus keeping the author's angle of telling, textually constructing both writer and reader as participants with the same understanding and goals), or completely erasing the verb. It soon becomes clear that for now no general rule can yet be inferred for such a process: the choice about how to translate the first person singular pronouns depend crucially on cotext and context. Therefore, it is impossible to completely eradicate self-promotional devices unless one wishes to completely distort the textual meaning.

As has already been stated, this paper is preliminary research: such limited findings will soon be expanded and supplemented by a deeper study of English self-promotional writing and also by checking the previous practical experience of other translators. Hopefully sufficient material will be gathered in order to be able to offer the translator at least a few guidelines on general norms and expectations in different contexts, thus easing and speeding up the translation process.

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