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TRANSLATING OF UKRAINIAN LITERATURE INTO ITALIAN: CONTINGENT DIFFICULTIES AND CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Abstract. *The article aims to discuss some of the contingent difficulties which slow down the process of translation of Ukrainian literary works into Italian and the reasons why Ukrainian literature is little known to the average Italian reader. Some cultural-linguistic recommendations will be proposed.*

Key words: *literary translation, Ukrainian, Italian, Ukrainian literature.*

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ПЕРЕКЛАД УКРАЇНСЬКОЇ ХУДОЖНЬОЇ ЛІТЕРАТУРИ ІТАЛІЙСЬКОЮ МОВОЮ: КОН'ЮНКТУРНІ ТРУДНОЩІ ТА КУЛЬТУРНО-ЛІНГВІСТИЧНІ РЕКОМЕНДАЦІЇ

Анотація. *Твори української художньої літератури мало відомі в Італії широкому загалу. Поети та класики XIX і XX ст., зокрема Тарас Шевченко, Леся Українка, М. Коцюбинський та ін., відомі тільки певній публіці, яка складається переважно з учених-славістів. Спорадичні зусилля з боку окремих італійських та українських*

Актуальні проблеми української лінгвістики: теорія і практика

літературних перекладачів, спрямовані на популяризацію української художньої літератури, до цього часу не мали успіху через низку взаємопов'язаних причин. Така ситуація зумовлена як внутрішніми лінгвістичними проблемами перекладу, так і зовнішніми труднощами. Останні фактори та деякі культурно-лінгвістичні рекомендації є об'єктом дискусії у статті.

Ключові слова: літературний переклад, українська мова, італійська мова, українська література.

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ПЕРЕВОД УКРАИНСКОЙ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИТАЛЬЯНСКИЙ ЯЗЫК: КОНЪЮНКТУРНЫЕ ЗАТРУДНЕНИЯ И КУЛЬТУРНО- ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ РЕКОМЕНДАЦИИ

Аннотация. Произведения украинской художественной литературы мало известны в Италии среднестатистическому читателю. Такие поэты и классики XIX и XX вв., как Тарас Шевченко, Леся Украинка, М. Коцюбинский и др., знакомы только определенной публике, состоящей преимущественно из ученых славистов. Спорадические усилия со стороны отдельных итальянских и украинских литературных переводчиков, направленные на популяризацию украинской художественной литературы, до настоящего времени не были успешными из-за ряда взаимосвязанных причин. Они касаются как внутренних проблем перевода, так и внешних затруднений. Именно последние факторы и некоторые культурно-лингвистические рекомендации являются объектом исследования в статье.

Ключевые слова: литературный перевод, украинский язык, итальянский язык, украинская литература.

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Introduction

Ukrainian literary works are known in Italy among an extremely restricted number of scholars, mainly working in the field of Slavonic, and particularly Ukrainian, Studies. With the exception of a few relevant Ukrainian national poets and writers, such as Taras Ševčenko², Lesja Ukrajinka and a few more, mainly known to intellectuals, the majority of Ukrainian authors both of the 19th and 20th centuries remain largely obscure for the large mass of Italian readers. This state of affairs is also due to the fact that in departments of Slavic Studies and in courses of comparative European language and literatures, Ukrainian either occupies a marginal role or, in most cases, is non-existent.

The sporadic efforts made by a few Italian and Ukrainian translators to popularize Ukrainian literary works in Italy have so far had limited success for a number of concomitant reasons, such as lack of accessible translations, cultural bias towards ‘non-mainstream’ language and literature often seen in western Europe through the filter of Russian culture; absence of financial support and difficulty in publishing individual translations; shortage of basic linguistic instruments, for example adequate dictionaries.

The most recent socio-political and conflictual upheavals of Ukraine (2014-15), and the large-scale Ukrainian Economic migration to, although contributing to a better knowledge about this country, still do not seem to have awakened an interest in Ukrainian culture *latu sensu*. These and other related problems will be discussed in the next sections.

1. Translations from Ukrainian into Italian

Our outline of the translation activity accomplished in Italy between the late 19th and the beginning of the 21st century is based on the more meticulous descriptions made by Pahl’ovs’ka [9, p. 104-109] and Brogi [2, p. 231-234].

² In the text I am going to use the scientific (also known as linguistic and /or academic) transliteration. My choice is motivated by the fact that it basically relies on phonemic principles and on a solid scholarly tradition. Therefore the č, š, ž, c will stand for ch, sh, zh, ts.

Even though the first translations of Ukrainian literary works into Italian were started in the second half of the 19th century, "Ukrainian literature, both as an object of study and as translation activity, attracted some of the most talented Italian Slavists mainly in the 20th century [2, p. 231].

Among the translations carried out in the 19th century, one needs to mention Stahl's translation of "Marusja" (1879) based on the French version of Marko Vovčok's tale. Ukrainian popular songs were also translated by Marco Antonio Canini (1822-1891) and collected in his "Il libro dell'amore: poesie italiane raccolte e straniere" (Book of Love) [4]. It is worth mentioning that the first efforts to translate T. Ševčenko were made at the end of this century.

Gogol's works on Ukrainian themes and their translation from Russian into Italian also contributed to an awakening of interest in Ukrainian culture, thus favouring the knowledge about Ukrainian lands, folklore and literature. The translation of Taras Bul'ba was reprinted a few times (Milan 1877, 1882, Udine 1902). "Ukrainian tales", translated by A. Forti (1883, 1889) were published in Florence which was at the time the centre of Ukrainian Studies. At about the same time, Paolo Emilio Pavolini (1864-1942) published in Venice a poetic collection called "Poesie tradotte dal magiaro, greco moderno e piccolo russo" (Poetry translated from Magyar, modern Greek and little Russian, 1889).

The 20th century was marked by an increased interest in Eastern European culture associated with a more systematic exchange between Italian and Ukrainian literature. This was characterized by a deep interest in Ukrainian, and particularly Ševčenko's poetry. The Ukrainian journalist and singer Mlada Lypovec'ka translated a few poems by the Ukrainian national poet which were published in the journal "La voce dell' Ucraina" (The voice of Ukraine, 1919, N. 10, 12), and later appeared in a book entitled "Taras Scevcenko, Liriche ucraine, versione, prefazione e note di M. Lypovec'ka, adattamento italiano di C. Meano, Milano 1942" (Taras Ševčenko, Ukrainian Lyrics, version, preface and noted by M. Lypovec'ka, adaptation in Italian by C. Meano). Lypovec'ka, besides Ševčenko, also translated a few poems of Ivan Franko, edited in the journal "La Campana".

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In the first half of the 20th century partial works by M. Vovčok, V. Stefanyk, M. Kocjubyns'kyj saw the light of day thanks to the efforts of L. Salvini who published in Florence an "Anthology of Ukrainian tales" [7; 8, p. 139-161].

The years following the second world war, for well-known historic and socio-political reasons, were characterized by a slowing down of cultural exchanges between Soviet Ukraine and Italy with a consequent decrease in the number of translations. This situation continued, with some exceptions, (cf. Giovanni Crino's translation of some poems by L. Ukrajinka which were published in "Il Contemporaneo" (1960), with a foreword by M. Bažan), throughout the 1960s and 1970s [1].

The 1980s saw a gradual increase in the cultural and literary contacts between the two countries which reached a renewed level of interest, both in Italy and elsewhere in Europe, after Ukraine regained its independence (1991).

Since the second half of the 1990s, the literary translation scene in Italy has been represented by the following mainstream translators: Oksana Pacht'ovs'ka, Giovanna Brogi, Mar''jana Prokopovyč, Paolo Galvagni, Lorenzo Pompeo and, to a lesser extent, in terms of quantity, Giovanna Siedina and Olena Ponomareva. A list of translations can be consulted on the website of the Italian Association of Ukrainian Studies [14] and in Brogi [2, p. 231-239].

With regard to Pacht'ovs'ka, one can agree with Brogi, that her translation competence is fundamental in the diffusion of Ukrainian poetry in Italy. She combines in fact a "poetic gift" with a sound knowledge of Ukrainian and Italian in rendering the fine points of Ukrainian poetry [2, p. 232]. A collection of verses, entitled "La poesia ucraina oggi: l'esistenza come resistenza" (Ukrainian poetry today: existence as resistance), by poets such as Lina Kostenko, Vasyl' Stus, Mykola Vinhranovs'kyj, Jurij Andruchovyč, Oleh Lyšeha etc., was published by the scholar in the journal "Si scrive" [5, p. 71-157].

Brogi has had the merit of having cultivated and made available Ukrainian literary works in Italian translation also among non-specialists.

The newest publication in co-authorship with Pacht'ovs'ka is the book "Taras Ševčenko. Dalle carceri zariste al Pantheon ucraino" (Taras Ševčenko. From tsarist gaols to the Ukrainian Pantheon, 2015). It should be pointed out that one of the translations was carried out by Siedina. Apart from a rather extensive introductory chapter devoted to the poet's biography, his ideas, leit-motifs and a closer examination of some lyrics and short poems, e.g. Son, Velykyj l'och (Misteria) etc., the second half of the volume contains translations into Italian (with parallel texts in Ukrainian) of the most popular poetry and verses of the Ukrainian national poet.

At present it is still premature to advance a stylistic evaluation of the translations. In the authors' words "they gave up the idea of re-creating poetical texts" but they tried "to reproduce, in the best way, the verse rhythm and the chromatic of the images". In the original quotation they wrote: "Rinunciando a creare dei testi poetici ... cercando di riprodurre nel miglior modo possibile il ritmo del verso e la coloritura delle immagini" [3, p. 8].

Prokopovyč, besides being famous in Ukraine for her massive translation of Umberto Eco's novels and other Italian writers and poets, has often cooperated with her Italian colleagues, translating verses also into Italian, e.g. Andruchovyč's Echidina etc. [18].

Galvagni and Pompeo, thanks to their constant work which began in the second half of the 1990s, can be viewed as the most prolific translators of Ukrainian poetry and prose. The former has translated verses of Taras Ševčenko, Lesja Ukrajinka, Bohdan Lepkyj, Ivan Franko, Oleksandr Irvanec', Ivan Malkovyč, Halyna Petrosanjak, Jurij Andruchovyč, Jurij Izdryk, Natalija Tkačuk, Oleksandr Oles' (cf. the journal "Slavia" 1998, 2004, 2005, 2010) etc.

Pompeo has translated Andruchovyč's *Moscoviade* (Besa, Lecce, reprinted in 2009) and the novel by Oksana Zabužko *Pol'ovi doslidžennja z ukrajins'koho seksu*, translated as *Sesso ucraino: istruzioni per l'uso* (Ukrainian sex: instructions for use, Besa, Lecce 2008, in cooperation with G. Kowalski and M. Prokopovyč). The

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title, as observed by Brogi, manages to keep the provocative intent of the Ukrainian original and to conceal the real content of the work. Of the two, internationally most famous contemporary Ukrainian writers, there are no other works translated into Italian. Worth noting is the interest in fairy tales of different literary provenance. Pompeo translated a collection of Ukrainian fairy tales entitled "Fiabe ucraine" (Ukrainian fairy tales, 2002). A second collection of Ukrainian fairy tales "I cavalieri di re Lev e altre fiabe dall'Ucraina" also provides a parallel text edition (see: Gallo & Gordiyenko 2010) with a brief commentary on the Ukrainian language.

It is interesting to point out that a few translations carried out by Pompeo, whose publications had already been announced by main Italian editors such as Mondadori, were not published, for unknown reasons. This was the case, for instance, of his translation of Andruchovyč's *Dvanadecat' obručiv* ("I dodici anelli" / The twelve rings). Žadan's novel "Depeche mode", also translated by the latter and edited by Castelvechi (Rome, 2009), has not met the same degree of success in Italy as it had in other European countries [2, p. 234].

Siedina has often cooperated with Brogi and Pacht'ovs'ka in fulfilling different literary and translation projects. She translated Ševčenko's verses (piece of poem) "Son" (The dream), which is available both in internet [17] and in the newest book by Brogi and Pacht'ovs'ka [3].

Ponomareva, besides translating verses from the Ukrainian war front in the Donbass area (2014-15) published on the cultural-journalistic site "Libertates" [16], also translated a tale by Malerba Luigi "L'ufologo" (Енелознавець; the Ufologist) which appeared in the literary journal "Vitčyzna" / Вітчизна 1998, № 1-2 [11].

The new millennium has undoubtedly marked a rapid increase of prose works in Ukraine associated with an inevitable advance in translations of Ukrainian literary prose in Europe and, to a lesser extent, in Italy. This radical change is explainable both in terms of a recent process of Euro-integration of Ukraine and large Ukrainian migration waves to Italy. Nonetheless literary translation from Ukrainian literature remains an essentially academic field of interest.

2. Translating from Ukrainian into Italian: contingent difficulties

One can distinguish between internal and external translation problems. The former concerns the actual translation approaches and techniques, and the problems which arise during the translation process. They will only be hinted at for they do not primarily concern the aim of this paper. The latter are connected with the practical difficulties in promoting and diffusing Ukrainian literary translation in Italy.

One can agree with Brogi [2, p. 233] that most of the newest Ukrainian works have been translated within a relatively short time and this has probably affected the final result. If prose translation seems to be easier compared to poetry, it must be underlined that contemporary Ukrainian prose is highly innovative from a language and stylistic point of view, for example, the use of different language codes relying on different sociolinguistic varieties, neologisms, or foreign words. Moreover the lack of adequate and comprehensive Ukrainian-Italian bilingual dictionaries, at least, until not long ago, has undoubtedly increased the level of intrinsic difficulties.

As to the external problems, one of the main difficulties, in our opinion, is connected with the scanty knowledge most people have traditionally had about Ukraine and the lack of Ukrainian Studies in Italy. The existing institutions where the Ukrainian language and culture is taught are concentrated in only two cities and are basically dependent on the personality of the two leading Ukrainianist scholars: Brogi-Bercoff and Pach'lovs'ka. The Slavic department of Milan State University focuses on the teaching of Ukrainian literature and provides courses for students with various philological backgrounds. On the other hand, the chair of Ukrainian Studies at the University of Rome "La Sapienza", besides Ukrainian literature, concentrates more on didactic aspects of language teaching, especially meant for second generation Ukrainian students.

The Italian Association of Ukrainian Studies (Associazione Italiana di Studi Ucraini, abbreviated to AISU, whose main aim is the promotion of Ukrainian Studies in Italy and whose publications are also available on the internet [12; 13]), seems to be a mere

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framework establishment subordinated to the research guidelines chosen by the few leading Ukrainianists who work in Italy.

The undertakings of the above mentioned scholars in popularizing Ukrainian culture in its broad meaning, and, consequently, translations of Ukrainian literature, are certainly remarkable. Nevertheless their efforts are individually motivated and tend to involve an extremely restricted circle of young scholars of their own personal choice. Brogi, and particularly Pach'lovs'ka, do not seem to think in terms of expanding Ukrainian research schools and encouraging the foundation of new chairs of Ukrainian Studies in Italy. It is clear that a small and sterile academic environment is not able to generate a larger group of hypothetical translators and/or Ukrainianists with a broader profile. This limitation is directly related and partially justified by the fact, already pointed out by Brogi [2, p. 236], that Italian educational policy, particularly after the so called "Bologna process", aims at reducing the superfluous number of humanities disciplines. This approach tends to eliminate a priori all language and literatures considered either "minor" or marginal within a logic of economic and market convenience. Most Italian rectors and deans, before operating a drastic cutting of certain languages and literatures, do not ask themselves about the potential impact a language like Ukrainian might have. For these and other interrelated reasons, the potential number of students who could become qualified translators from Ukrainian into Italian remains highly insufficient. Additionally, the profession of translator is widely looked down upon in Italy, being often associated with a low and sporadic income. Translations from non-mainstream languages, such as Slavic languages (except Russian) are not always appreciated and encouraged by publishing houses. Correct in this respect is Brogi's remark [ibid.] that Italian publishing houses, unlike their Austrian, German, Swiss counterparts, adopt a marginalizing and provincial approach to printing literary works of lesser known literatures. Additional, but not irrelevant, hindrances to the portrait presented above can be summarized in the following points:

2. The number of book-consumers/readers in Italy is considerably lower than in other European countries such as Austria, Germany,

France. This situation has deteriorated further since the coming of internet and social networks.

3. The majority of Italian media is orientated towards a "product" which can meet a generalized consensus rather than promoting 'new' cultures. It is economically safer to invest in reprinting renowned literary works of world literature, e.g. English, Russian etc., rather than Ukrainian, Bulgarian, Hungarian etc.;

4. Small and specialized publishing houses on non-mainstream cultures/literature encounter a series of practical difficulties due to bureaucratic, financial problems and business competition.

We can fully agree with the remark that the training of good translators is complicated by the lack of academic specialists in this field and that recent university reforms require more managerial and didactic skills rather than focussing on the improvement of research quality [2, p. 236]. On the other hand, we are not quite convinced that translation ability should be a mandatory and an essential criterion for evaluating a candidate's knowledge when selecting a university lecturer for the departments of languages and literatures. It is a well-known fact that translation ability is a specific expertise which should not to be confused with language, linguistic and/or literary knowledge. It should simply be considered as an additional merit.

Last but not least, translators from Ukrainian into Italian and from Italian into Ukrainian have always lamented the lack of an adequate bilingual dictionary. In our own experience, translators were compelled to use the medium of a third language, such as Russian, English, French or German. This hindrance seems now to have been removed since the publication of the first comprehensive Ukrainian-Italian and Italian-Ukrainian bilingual dictionary, available on the Ukrainian book market since the end of 2014. At the present stage we are not able yet to evaluate the linguistic and lexicographic standard of this new dictionary since we have not had access to this new lexicographic work.

3. Cultural-linguistic recommendations

Independently from the actual number of Ukrainian literary works allegedly translated into Italian³, which, if compared against the great

³A relatively recent estimation fixed the approximate number of Ukrainian literary translations into Italian to a dozen [2, p. 237]. Considering the few years

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quantity of translations carried out in German and English speaking countries, is undoubtedly restricted, the cultural-linguistic approach to improving the actual situation and translation activity from Ukrainian should adopt a few concomitant steps.

First of all, it is necessary that Ukrainian ministerial institutions start an active campaign promoting a supporting the study of their own language, funding Institutes of Ukrainian Culture, on the model of the Russian "Russkij Mir". They should establish assistantships and exchange programmes with the main departments of Slavic languages: Venice, Naples, Florence. It is illogical that many second generation Ukrainian students in Italy, who want to obtain a degree in Ukrainian, must enroll in Russian courses since most university departments dismiss their request for Ukrainian with the sentence that in Ukraine one can also speak Russian and conduct business in this language⁴.

Secondly, Italian university lecturers, especially those teaching and working in "minor" fields, regardless of their research sphere, should launch constant and organized protests against the widespread model that a "university is NOT a business and should NOT be run like a business".

Thirdly, and ideally, teachers and university lectures in the arts and humanities should openly ask the media to broadcast, at least once a week, programmes devoted to the multifold aspects of European and world culture in its broad meaning.

Finally, Italian scholars, besides the two already mentioned leading Ukrainianists, working in Ukrainian Studies ought to have the opportunity to obtain incentives, even in mixed form (e.g. Ukrainian-Italian funds, private-public etc.), if they undertake literary translation from Ukrainian.

elapsed since the above mentioned paper was written and the translations which appeared in the past year, we can suppose that the total number of translated literary works should be attested around the twenty units.

⁴These and similar statements were often heard at the university of Naples "L'Orientale" which in a not too distant past used to boast a solid department of Slavonic Studies.

Final remarks

We can conclude by underlining the fact that only a well-planned and organized interaction of the recommendations expressed above can lead to a change in the attitude Italian readers and institutions have towards literary works and translations of non-mainstream languages such as Ukrainian. The accomplishment of a better integrated cultural policy of Ukrainization will consequently involve more respect for the often neglected profession of the literary translator.

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