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Translation and its fictions: pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation in focus

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Abstract

This article asks whether and what differences exist between the notions of pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation. Although they are both ultimately untranslated texts, their respective definitions acknowledge the possibility that each category may be taken as a translation. To answer its research question, the article examines the distinctive features of pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation across three primary sources that showcase traits common to both categories. First, the analysis sets these two notions against the backdrop of a fictional subtext which informs translation theory, demonstrating how pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation feed into this subtext. It then goes on to investigate the function of paratexts and culture-specific items in the three primary sources. Finally, the article identifies the different intentions underpinning pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation: while the former explicitly aims to be perceived as a translation, the latter is not written to be consumed as a translated text.

Keywords: pseudotranslation, partial cultural translation, fictions of translation, paratexts, culture-specific items

1. Introduction

The debate in Translation Studies about what translation is and what it is not has problematised concepts at the core of translation theory. Noting that consensus on the nature of translation is seldom reached, Bassnett (1998, 26-27) introduced the idea of “collusion”, a kind of compromise between writer and reader over cases in which “a translation may not be a translation”. It is as though readers, as Bassnett (*ibid.*) suggests, established a tacit agreement on what a translation is, hence colluding “with the usages of that term ‘translation’” without having a precise idea of what it implies. Starting from this premise, Bassnett examines cases in which texts that may be taken as translations are, in fact, untranslated, ranging from pseudotranslation and self-translation to travel accounts. Similarly, Hermans (2013, 83) called for “more diversity than even a prototype approach can encompass” in connection with our understanding of translation. Consequently, this article does not aim to distinguish translation from non-translation, but to explore the interstices between two text types that are problematic insofar as they can be perceived as translations, even though they are not translated texts. These text types are pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation. The former is, by now, thoroughly researched, described as a “text that is presented and/or widely received as a translation, but for which no single corresponding source text has ever existed” (Maher 2019, 382). The latter, on the other hand, was proposed relatively recently by Klaudy and Heltai (2020) and is still under-explored.

The overarching issue of Klaudy and Heltai's study is the phenomenon of *cultural back-translation*. This phenomenon is defined as the “*translation into a target language (TL) of texts that are not translations themselves but describe a culture different from that associated with the SL [source language] and contain CSEs [culture specific elements] imported from the TL culture*” (2020, 44, emphasis in the original). Rather than cultural back-translation, this article focuses on the ‘source texts’ underpinning it. In the definition above, Klaudy and Heltai specify that these source texts are not translations, which is at odds with the idea of back-translation itself, understood as “the translation of a translated text back into its original language” (Son 2018, 89).¹ Klaudy and Heltai (2020, 44) also observe that when writers represent cultures distinct from the language they use, they deal with culture-specific elements pertaining to those cultures by adopting translator-like solutions, such as domestication and foreignization. Being “embedded in a different culture, a text of this type may give the impression that it is a translation”, even if “there is no ‘original’ text” involved in this translation process (ibid.). Klaudy and Heltai name this text type *partial cultural translation*. Based on this brief description, partial cultural translation is primarily characterised by culture-specific items belonging to a culture not traditionally associated with the text's language, and by the likelihood of it being perceived as a translation though it is not derived from a source text. This last point is reminiscent of pseudotranslation.

Both partial cultural translation and pseudotranslation rely on readers perceiving them as translations. The conceptual liminality of partial cultural translation in relation to other forms of (non-)translation is currently poorly defined. This article, therefore, identifies the points at which this concept comes into contact with neighbouring concepts. Given the fundamental similarity between pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation, the article asks how and to what extent these two text types differ. It investigates these two notions along three lines of enquiry. The first section of the analysis considers how pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation relate to other conceptual fictions informing translation theory, as well as to translingual writers' works. The second and third sections zoom in on structural and textual features, examining

¹ Klaudy and Heltai (2020, p. 44) refer to the concept of “textless back translation” defined by Tu and Li (2017, 1) as “the kind of back translation in which the translator retranslates China-themed works written in English [...] back into Chinese”.

paratextual aspects and the presence of culture-specific items, respectively. The conclusion identifies distinctions and overlaps between these two notions.

This analysis is built on existing scholarship on pseudotranslation, and compares it with the relatively new idea of partial cultural translation. Previous research on related topics appears to focus on either pseudotranslation or culture-specific items in isolation. The study that most closely relates to the comparative aim of this article is by O'Sullivan, who analyses English-language crime fiction set in Italy and compares it to "a kind of pseudotranslation" (2005, 66). Similarly to O'Sullivan, Maher (2013, 149) looks at the same kind of fiction, defining its authors as "pseudotranslators". Maher (2019, 390) observes elsewhere that these texts "are quite open about their authorship", which suggests that they "are perhaps not pseudotranslations in the strictest sense of the word". Seemingly for chronological reasons, O'Sullivan and Maher do not use the same terminology proposed by Klaudy and Heltai. However, they touch on points akin to their idea of partial cultural translation, recognising the affinity between pseudotranslations and texts representing a cultural dimension distinct from the language in which they are written. Both O'Sullivan and Maher subsume texts resonant with partial cultural translation under the notion of pseudotranslation, though they remain cognisant that there are, indeed, differences.

To answer its research question, this article takes three primary sources in Italian as case studies: Giuseppe Vella's *Libro del Consiglio di Egitto* [Book of the Council of Egypt] (1793), Antonio Tabucchi's *Donna di Porto Pim* [Lady of Porto Pim] (1983/2012), and Diego Marani's *Nuova grammatica finlandese* [New Finnish Grammar] (2000/2022). These texts are, respectively, a historiographical forgery, a collection of short stories, and a novel. The choice of these sources is based on the need to narrow down the focus of this study to works that are characterised by a strong presence of culture-specific items belonging to cultures other than that of the language in which they are written, while also being reminiscent of pseudotranslation. The point of selecting three sources that share features proper to both translation categories is to identify analogies and differences between these two categories where they become apparent. Because the article focuses on specific features of a small number of primary sources, a close-reading methodology is used. By examining Italian-language materials, the article remains in the

Italian context explored by O'Sullivan (2005) and Maher (2013), but expands the scope of existing research to include different literary genres and historical periods.

2. Translation is stranger than fiction

An underlying idea of fiction pervades the way in which translation-related phenomena are sometimes conceptualised. This idea has been expressed explicitly and implicitly, with different meanings and implications. For instance, the portmanteau word 'transfiction' introduced by Kaindl (2014) describes fiction that represents translation and translators as theoretical input for translation theory. There are also more veiled ways in which translation and fiction are interwoven in the same discourse. The well-known category of pseudotranslation is representative of this situation. However, even when a text is indeed a translation, fiction may creep up on the readers, whose perception of that text may not be clear-cut, and therefore, result in what Boase-Beier calls a conceptual blend (2011, 67). This blend is fictional in that it is "a creative cognitive structure, not a thing", whereby "the book [translated into English] is also represented in their [the readers'] mind [...] as an English book" (Boase-Beier 2011, 67-68). Alvstad (2014, 271) goes even further, arguing that translations are built on a pact that rhetorically invites readers to receive them "as if they were the originals". Translation scholars have also demystified conceptual fallacies entrenched in translation theory, pointing out how these are ultimately fictional. This is the case with the extensively discussed notion of equivalence and the invariance-based expectations it has engendered both within the scientific discourse and to the lay public eye. Cronin (2000, 109) exploded the myth of a translation as an exact replica of its source in a different language, defining it as an "untruth". Along the same lines, Kaindl (2018b, 161) listed equivalence as the first of "the innumerable fictions" in Translation Studies. This demystification finds further resonance when considering that the notion of the source text is also typically accompanied by an "illusion of originality", as shown by Ivaska and Huuhtanen (2020, 316). Going to the root of Translation Studies, Baer (2020) addressed the western, Eurocentric view on the discipline's origin as a myth.² In sum, fiction relates to translation theory in at least three ways: as an epistemological basis to re-think translation (transfiction), as a

² By West, Baer (2020, 235) means "a cultural construct promoted by the global North".

fabrication or make-believe textual practice (e.g., pseudotranslation), and as a fallacy (e.g., equivalence).

Pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation feed into this interplay of fiction and translation theory. The prefix 'pseudo' and the qualifier 'partial' already suggest that something is concocted or missing. As Toury (2012, 47) explains, pseudotranslations violate the Source-Text postulate – and the idea of a postulate itself is “posited rather than factual” (ibid., 28). In the case of partial cultural translation, the phenomenon’s terminology points to a missing source text, conveying the idea of partiality. Further confusion stems from the fact that the term pseudotranslation has been used to indicate a “wide range of literary products”, as Rambelli (2009, 209) notes. Literary products refer here to Genette’s *Palimpsests* ([1982] 1997) – where, among others, the concepts of hypotext/hypertext, pastiche, and imitation are considered – and the article by O’Sullivan (2005) mentioned above. Rambelli (2009, 209) identifies the common denominator of these products in their imitation of the relationship between source and target texts where the source text is not real but an abstraction. Rambelli goes on to explain that “at the very moment in which a pseudotranslator writes a text, he or she also shapes its source text by gathering together all the elements of the source culture they aim to transfer into their own culture” (ibid.). Toury’s analysis of pseudotranslations expands on this aspect of the pseudotranslator’s work. His case study of *Papa Hamlet*, an 1889 pseudotranslation passed off as a German translation of a Norwegian text, points to the pseudotranslators’ acquisition of items specific to the source culture in more nuanced terms than Rambelli’s. Arno Holz and Johannes Schlaf, the pseudotranslators in question, gathered Scandinavian-like “linguistic, textual and literary features” not through direct access to Norwegian literature and culture, but deriving them from existing German translations of Scandinavian literature (Toury 2012, 59). Although pseudotranslation may be now seen as “a thing of the past”, readers’ and critics’ understanding of authorship and texts as translations is dependent on cultural and historical factors, and these variables can problematise the identification of pseudotranslations (Maher 2019, 388).

The ways in which cultures are perceived as one’s own or someone else’s also play a role in establishing what (non-)translation is. Languages and cultures are in a fluid, dynamic relationship rather than locked into nation states as separate compartments (Gentes and

VanBolderen 2022, 370, Kellman 2020, 5, Baynham and Lee 2019, 15-16). This fluidity leads the discussion to translingual texts, another type that may fall into the category of translation, despite having no source text. Translingualism refers to the production of literary works “in more than one language or in a language other than one’s native tongue” (Kellman 2020, vii). Sometimes, these texts are described as self-translations (Cordingley 2019, 361). In these cases, however, self-translation refers to narratives of personal metamorphosis, “the writing and mental processes of migrants or those inhabiting multilingual spaces” (ibid., 353), rather than to author and translator being the same subject. Klaudy and Heltai (2020, 63) explicitly acknowledge the similarities between “a ST for cultural back-translation”, i.e., a partial cultural translation, and “bilingual postcolonial” writers’ works, only mentioning “mental translation” in passing. However, they highlight that in “cultural back-translation authors write in their native language about a different culture” (ibid.), relying on several external sources (ibid., 48). Their study considers three texts by writers who have English as a native language and no or very little command of Hungarian, the language connected to the culture they represent in their texts (ibid.). Klaudy and Heltai (ibid.) explain that these writers had to rely on information and explanations obtained through research and provided by friends and family members who emigrated from Hungary and acted as cultural experts. Reliance on external sources as opposed to first-hand personal experiences is arguably indicative of a less profound involvement in the described culture than that of translingual writers. Notably, translingual writers typically inhabit in-between cultural spaces and undergo processes of deep personal change (Nergaard 2021, 170). Thus, their narratives stem from their own lived experiences, and find expression in forms of life-writing like translingual memoirs (Besemeres 2022, 7), rather than relying on relayed stories and research, in the way that partial cultural translations do.

A difference between pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation can be traced back to the reason why they represent cultures different from their authors’ own. Existing literature on pseudotranslation has amply demonstrated that pseudotranslations are often rooted in ideological ground and their fruition can play out against wider contexts of cultural and political tensions (Maher 2019, 383, Kupsch-Losereit 2014, 191, Tahir-Gürçağlar 2014, 518, Toury 2012, 51). On the other hand, although referring to partial cultural translation with varied

terminology, scholarship on this kind of text does not seem to identify ideological ends. O'Sullivan (2005, 66) points out that “[t]hese texts might be considered pseudotranslations, although not strictly pseudotranslations in Toury’s sense in that they are in no way explicitly stated to be translations, nor do they seem aimed at bringing something new into the target culture”. O’Sullivan (ibid.) argues that, although not typical pseudotranslations, these texts “behave and are consumed as translations”. A text that makes extensive use of culture-specific items like partial cultural translation might include these items for several reasons that can vary based on the historical and geographical contexts in which the text originates. These reasons may include current affairs, wars, natural disasters, political scandals, sporting and other events of a transnational scope, all of which may or may not be capitalised on in the marketing of the final product. Referring to Anglo-Italian novels akin to partial cultural translations, Maher (2013, 153-154) notes that these “pseudotranslations (of sorts) written in [...] English, and served up with generous helpings of exoticism”, have had “enormous success”. This resonates with a point already raised by O’Sullivan (2005, 74), who saw the success of English-language crime fiction set in Italy as preparation for the reception of actual English translations of Italian-language crime fiction. The inclusion of culture-specific elements and exotica, then, could also work as a procedure to implement a marketing strategy based on linguistic and cultural differences (see Kluwick 2009, 77). Generally, as Maher (2019, 383) explains, “pseudotranslation can be a convenient marketing technique if the purported source language and its cultural production are popular in the target culture”.

These observations suggest that pseudotranslations, besides being untranslated, make use of culture-specific items, the key characteristic of partial cultural translations. In both cases, such items may or may not be used as part of a marketing strategy. The use of cultural and linguistic references in both text types pertains to cultures unrelated to that of the pseudotranslator and the writer of partial cultural translations. Texts written by translingual authors, like translingual memoirs, differ from partial cultural translations in this respect, as they represent subjects inhabiting different cultures at the same time. This section has also shown that texts akin to partial cultural translations have been addressed as a subcategory of pseudotranslation, and the overlap of terminological choices in existing research poses a

challenge to the identification of the differences between these text types. The following two sections move on to analyse paratexts and culture-specific items in the three primary sources, so as to complement theoretical observations with textual evidence.

3. Paratexts

Paratexts are a component common to the three primary sources analysed here. Introduced by Genette as “thresholds of interpretation” (1997), paratexts were then incorporated into Translation Studies, and are one of the features typically considered in conjunction with pseudotranslations. Strümper-Krobb (2018, 202) sees them as a space of authorial attribution “where the forgery [...] is acted out”. Kupsch-Losereit (2014, 198) refers to the text-proper, the pseudotranslation, as the “staging” of its paratexts. Alvstad (2014, 272-273) argues that the “imitation of translational paratexts in non-translated books” triggers the same translation pact proposed by actual translations, through which readers are invited to take the translation they are reading as untranslated.

These dynamics can be observed in Vella’s *Libro del Consiglio di Egitto*, a well-documented case of pseudotranslation (Pappalardo 2018, Freller 2008, 2004, Scinà 1827). From 18th-century Sicily, Vella went down in history as a forger and a counterfeiter, with his story being fictionalised by Leonardo Sciascia in his novel *Il Consiglio d’Egitto* [The Council of Egypt] (1963/2019). Vella’s story plays out against a backdrop of cultural and political tensions. The two antagonistic parties involved in these clashes were the Sicilian monarchy and the Sicilian nobility, establishing strong competition for centralised control over territories, and fighting to preserve their feudal privileges, respectively. In this context, taking advantage of fortuitous circumstances, Vella pretended to have found ancient Arabic manuscripts that could put the nobility’s privileges at risk and, consequently, support the monarchy (Freller 2004, 83). Vella, who had Maltese origins, declared himself well-versed in Arabic and began his profitable career as a pseudotranslator. Vella obtained special benefits for his pseudotranslation, which was supported by the monarchy and the clergy (Freller 2008, 60). Figure 1 [here], for instance, shows that Vella was appointed professor of Arabic for his publication. His hoax resulted in a make-believe work of historiography, which covered the period 1074-1119, when Sicily was governed first by the Arabs

and then by the Normans, peoples whose habits are also thematised in Vella's work. Vella introduces himself as a translator from the outset of his book, which is framed by an elaborate paratextual apparatus. The colophon page makes clear that his work is a translation in the subheading, where the use of italics emphasises "*TRADOTTO DA*" [*translated by*] Giuseppe Vella (see figure 1). Vella's letter to the king follows, in which the apparently haphazard discovery of the Arabic manuscripts is contextualised, and his translation work is introduced, with Vella "nella volgar lingua dall'Araba traducendo" [translating into vulgar (Italian) from Arabic] (Vella 1793, v). Then the pseudotranslator provides an "AVVISO DEL TRADUTTORE AI LETTORI" [the translator's note to readers], where technicalities about the source text and its translation are explained, such as the peculiar writing system of the manuscript, which Vella himself adapted from Arabic (ibid., xv-xvi). This paratextual component, in other words, works as a legitimising preamble. It also recounts how Vella's translations were examined by illustrious scholars, and under quite convenient circumstances at that. Translatorship, rather than authorship, is highlighted to reject responsibility for the text's thorny political content. This is also confirmed by the way Vella signs off this letter as "umilissimo suddito" [most humble subject] (ibid., xiv), which highlights his servitude rather than agency. The source text is introduced as a "chance discovery" (Kupsch-Loosleit 2014, 193), and technical details and the scrutiny of other experts strengthen the translation's contextual verisimilitude and *bona fides*. This elaborate introductory paratext is consistent with the function typically attributed to pseudotranslations' paratexts summed up by Maher as an "impression of authenticity" (2019, 389).

The pseudotranslation-like nature of Tabucchi's *Donna di Porto Pim*, in which the use of culture-specific items is also notable, is not as evident as in the previous source. Tabucchi's work is a composite collection of short stories, fragments, stories within stories, and texts with an essayistic, factual tone about the Azores archipelago. In this respect it is significant to notice that Tabucchi, as a translator and a professor of Portuguese, was an expert in Portuguese language and culture and visited the Azores in the 1980s (Tabucchi 2006). He described that experience as a "metaforica circumnavigazione attorno a me stesso" [metaphorical circumnavigation around myself] (ibid.). In effect, the first-person storytelling gives the impression of an authorial confession. The opening prologue, the first paratextual section, includes the author's explanation

of his “disponibilità alla menzogna” [propensity for deception], and how this inclination results in a mixture of facts and fiction, dreams and texts, in a similar way to travel literature (Tabucchi 1983/2012, 9-11). The feeling of travel literature is intensified by the fact that the first-person narrator counts himself among foreigners and travellers. This is particularly notable in the titular short story “Donna di Porto Pim. Una storia” [Lady of Porto Pim. A Story], told from the perspective of an Italian writer, an outsider on the Azores. The prologue ends with an indication of place and date. An appendix follows the texts-proper and closes the paratextual apparatus, including a map, notes on the Azores, and the titles of other books mentioned throughout the narration. Rather than justifying the translated nature of the text-proper, as is often the case with pseudotranslations (Strümper-Krobb 2018, 200, Hagedorn 2006, 44), paratexts in Tabucchi’s work have a different, twofold function. On the one hand, the prologue contains a description of the author’s poetics, which intertwines facts and imagination. On the other, the appendix seems to corroborate the credibility of the account by means of factual details, including dates, a bibliography, and geographical indications. This last observation is reminiscent of the use pseudotranslators make of paratexts, but in *Donna di Porto Pim* there is no mention of translation in the paratext. In fact, the connection between Tabucchi’s work and translation does not surface so much at the paratextual level as in a form somewhat akin to transfiction, “an aestheticized imagination of translatorial action” (Spitzl 2014, 364). The Azorean narrator explicitly refers here to the plurality of languages spoken in Porto Pim (Tabucchi 1983/2012, 79-81), suggesting that a considerable part of this story emerges from translation acts. In his analysis of Tabucchi’s short story, Italiano (2016, 120-121) – who also examines Tabucchi’s work through the lens of pseudotranslation – observes that “the Portuguese speaking archipelagic environment compels the narrator writing in Italian to render everything that has been formulated in Portuguese, either actually or supposedly, [...] in Italian”. Italiano’s focus is on the coexistence of different languages within the same monolingual text and how this enacts “a chain of linguistic transfers” (ibid., 124). Italiano’s analysis is informed by Sternberg’s notion of *translational mimesis*, which refers to the procedures through which messages conveyed in different languages are represented and

reported into a generally monolingual text (Sternberg 1981, 221).³ Given that references to linguistic transfer and exchanges in Tabucchi's work are found in the text-proper rather than in its paratext, his short stories are somewhat reminiscent of transfiction rather than pseudotranslation, in that they offer a fictionalised representation of characters who act both as narrators and translators in multilingual contexts. In the short story "Donna di Porto Pim", for example, the narrator addresses the Italian visitor as follows: "sei straniero e fai finta di parlare come noi" [you are a foreigner and pretend to speak like us] (Tabucchi 1983/2012, 78-79). The yarn the narrator spins unfolds in Portuguese, but is presented in fluent Italian. The narrator then gives permission to the Italian-speaking visitor to relay his story, which entails a translation act since the Italian visitor is also a writer – and possibly Tabucchi's own fictionalisation or alter ego (ibid., 87). In this case, the translation mimesis technique used is that of "explicit attribution": the linguistic difference between the Azorean narrator and the Italian writer is made explicit rather than being effaced, as it includes a "direct statement [...] concerning the language [...] in which the reported speech was originally made" (Sternberg 1981, 231).

Translation is replaced by language learning in Marani's *Nuova grammatica finlandese*, which also makes uncommon use of paratexts. A quote in Finnish from a poem by Paavo Haavikko opens the novel. A prologue follows that provides most of the information necessary to contextualise the story, introducing the trope of the retrieved manuscript. The plot revolves around a soldier who is severely injured during the Second World War and, as a result, loses his memory as well as his ability to speak. The Finnish neurologist Petri Friari rescues the soldier and reports his story in the novel's prologue. Assuming that the soldier is Finnish based on scant clues, the neurologist tries to piece together his story and re-teach him the Finnish language. The soldier's narration given in his journal is not only introduced but constantly punctuated by doctor Friari's notes. The reader eventually gets to know that the protagonist is not Finnish, but an Italian soldier, Massimiliano Brodar. From a narratological perspective, Marani's novel can be read as a fictionalisation of editorial dynamics. Consistently with the soldier's condition, his journal is poorly written, confused, hardly comprehensible at times, and therefore it is thoroughly edited

³ Deganutti has provided a comprehensive analysis of translational mimesis procedures, including latent multilingual strategies in literature, defining them as "the presence of other languages in a text even when they are not immediately perceptible" (2022, 2).

by the neurologist with the help of a nurse. A manuscript is found, as is often the case in fiction (Hagedorn 2006, 43), and then edited and published by someone else. This novel, therefore, intermingles doctor Friari's editorial notes, always in italics, with pages of the soldier's journal, which instead are unmarked, appearing in standard upright, roman font type. Based on Genette's theoretical framework, Massimiliano Brodar's journal, which includes grammar exercises, letters, and personal reflections, represents a fictionalised "intimate epitext", a text of a diaristic nature "in which the author addresses himself" (Genette 1997, 372). Thus, in *Nuova grammatica finlandese* Marani fictionalises and juxtaposes the two paratextual dimensions, para- and epitexts, weaving them together into a multi-layered narrative. This juxtaposition blurs the line between text-proper and paratext. Acts of translation are not found throughout the book, as both the journal and its edited version are supposed to be in Finnish. Although references to "grammar mistakes and stylistic shortcomings" can be an indicator for pseudotranslation (Kupsch-Losereit 2014, 199), in this case they are to be traced back to Massimiliano Brodar learning Finnish not only as a second language, but also in compromised psychophysical conditions. In the last part of the paratext, the epilogue, doctor Friari explains how Massimiliano Brodar, author of the manuscript, believed to be Sampo Karjalainen because of his flawed hypothesis about his identity. The epilogue also reveals an unresolved tension between the neurologist and his patient only hinted at in the prologue. Brodar is aware that Friari "forse vedeva nella mia sventura specchiata la sua" [perhaps saw his misfortune mirrored in my own] (Marani 2000/2022, 26), one's story of displacement resonating with the other's. It turns out that when he was a child, the neurologist had had to flee from the civil war that broke out in Finland because of his father's political orientation and move to Germany. In the epilogue, Friari admits that "era la mia salvezza che inseguivo" [it was my own salvation that I was chasing] (ibid., 187, emphasis in the original). The juxtaposition of the soldier's and the neurologist's narration and the consequent framed narrative, therefore, might serve the neurologist as a way to come to terms with his own story, rather than fabricating someone else's, as is the case with pseudotranslations.

The use of paratexts varies across the three primary sources. In Vella's work they perform the typical functions attributed to paratexts in pseudotranslations. In Tabucchi's and Marani's

works, instead, they give insights into the author's poetics, and contextualise and intersect with the story, respectively. On a continuum, paratexts are least redolent of pseudotranslation in Marani's novel, with Tabucchi's work occupying a median position between Vella's and Marani's texts.

4. Culture-specific items

Whereas paratexts are one of the most distinctive characteristics of pseudotranslation, culture-specific items are the key feature of partial cultural translation, as emerges from Klaudy and Heltai's definition (2020, 44). However, this does not imply that pseudotranslations do not accommodate such items. In this regard, Maher (2019, 385) highlights "the special capacity of pseudotranslation to present foreignness and the exotic in a way that can be especially meaningful to the domestic readership" when reflecting current "domestic concerns". Focus on culture-specific items in pseudotranslations also shifts the attention from the procedures used to translate these items, as is most often the case (e.g., Buts, Hadley, and Aboomar 2022, Turzynski-Azimi 2021, Marco 2019, Aixelá 1997), to the function they perform in a not necessarily translated text. Turzynski-Azimi (2021, 409) notes that "CSIs denote elements of the source culture which are transparent to the source culture community but are either absent from the target culture or differ in their sociocultural connotation". The representation of cultural elements and contexts specific to cultures with which the author may not be familiar arguably problematises this explanation.

When the pseudotranslator knows little about the source culture, culture-specific items can be inaccurate and hence may not tally with the source context. In Vella's case, for example, the distance between the pseudotranslator and the culture he describes is not only cultural, but spans contexts historically far from each other, i.e., Sicily in the Middle Ages and in the 18th century. In Vella's pseudotranslation, *Libro del Consiglio di Egitto*, culture-specific items are found in conjunction with the representation of the Sicilian Middle Ages ruled by Normans and Arabs. These elements were arguably used by Vella as a further device to make his work seem more authentic, along with the counterfeit correspondence between rulers past. They include toponyms (e.g., Chajro, Mahadia), names and ranks (e.g., Emir Jahya ben Ismael, Califa), months

and other Arabic temporal indications (e.g., Rāgeb, Ramadan). Inconsistencies and cultural discrepancies in Vella's representation of Sicily's Arabic past drew criticism to his work as inaccurate and mendacious, although the culture-specific references he used were meant to enhance its credibility. About thirty years after the publication of Vella's volumes, the historiographer Domenico Scinà (1827, 314) noticed how the habits that Vella attributed to the Arabs in Sicily were distant from their actual customs. This is also echoed in Leonardo Sciascia's fictionalisation of Vella's story, where one of the characters ironically comments on how Vella converted the Muslims of Sicily, getting them to behave according to Christian habits (Sciascia 1963/2019, 46). In other words, Vella ended up domesticating the Arabs' presence in Sicilian history by adapting their habits to a Christian imagery, which is arguably indicative of his limited knowledge of Arabic traditions. According to Venuti (2008, 50), domestication is employed to create the illusion that the translated text is not a translation based on the assumption that, by means of domestication, the receivers' familiarity is not challenged by an uncanny target text. Vella's aim is quite the opposite, as he introduced his work specifically in the form of a translation. His work was eventually unmasked as a fraud precisely because of his poorly informed domesticating tendency.

Culture-specific items also occur with a high frequency in Tabucchi's *Donna di Porto Pim*. Talking about travel books in the prologue, the author explains that they offer "un *altrove* teorico e plausibile" [a theoretical and plausible *elsewhere*] (Tabucchi 1983/2012, 9). This is reflected and implemented by culture-specific items across the short stories, provided by a narrator whose perspective is that of an outsider on the archipelago and whose role is often that of a translator, too, considering the Portuguese-speaking setting of the collection. Culture-specific items in Tabucchi's stories are mainly extralinguistic and range from toponyms (e.g., São Miguel, *Aldeia*) and artifacts (e.g., *padrão*, *atafona*, *alminhas*) to items of clothing (*balandrau*). These elements are presented in italics and an explanation is generally provided for them in the form of a stealth gloss. This solution resonates with the point raised by Klaudy and Heltai (2020, 44) that authors of partial cultural translations deal with culture-specific items behaving like translators, for instance recurring to foreignizing or domesticating strategies. Moreover, the presence of culture-specific items in Tabucchi's work is clarified by Italiano's analysis of this text. On the basis of

Sternberg's notion of translational mimesis, Italiano (2016, 117) draws attention to "the mimetic effort with which [...] literary art represents the reality of heterolingual discourses through [...] writing, which is usually unilingual". As he translates for his audience, Tabucchi's narrator reports in Italian what has been said in Portuguese and, in doing so, he spins a yarn rich in references to the Azorean imagery. Seen from this perspective, culture-specific items in *Donna di Porto Pim* are not functional to making the text appear as a translation in order to reject the responsibility arising from it, as is the case for Vella's work. Rather, they provide Tabucchi's stories with a vivid setting, the same setting in which those items were not textualised but seen, used, and experienced, and then transposed into that mixture of facts and fiction mentioned by the author in the prologue. In "Donna di Porto Pim. Una storia", for instance, the Portuguese-speaking narrator addresses the Italian-speaking visitor directly, saying "le canzoni che hai ascoltato erano *pesinhos* e *sapateiras* per i turisti" [the songs you heard were *pesinhos* and *sapateiras* for tourists] (Tabucchi 1983/2012, 78). In this specific passage, the translational mimesis technique used is that of "selective reproduction", whereby "the original heterolingual discourse" surfaces intermittently through selected items (Sternberg 1981, 225). In this case, these selected items are culture-specific, referring to songs in Portuguese being sung specifically for tourists.

Something similar happens in *Nuova grammatica finlandese*. In this novel, references to Finland's history, language, and culture abound. The protagonist, who is taught the language by pastor Koskela, describes his classes as "un corso accelerato di finlandesitudine" [an accelerated course of Finnishness] (Tabucchi 1983/2012, 100), referring not only to Finnish grammar and vocabulary, but also to the cultural dimension they evoke. References to Finnish culture include toponyms (e.g., Viipuri, Katajanokka), given names, typical products (e.g., *koskenkorva*), and several references to the *Kalevala*, an epic of special significance in the Finnish tradition. In addition, references to Finnish grammar are found, for instance a praise of the abessive case, "la declinazione delle cose che mancano" [the declension of missing things] (Marani 2000/2022, 83). Like in Tabucchi's stories, these references are usually followed by a stealth translation, or explanatory interpolation. It is also worth noticing that isolated words and entire sentences are sometimes reported in Finnish, generally accompanied by their translation into Italian. However, given the language learning dynamics informing the book, these explanations are supposed to be

intralingual and hence occur in Finnish, rather than interlingual exchanges, as also noted by Pireddu (2006, 364). In this sense, Marani's novel echoes Sternberg's notion of translational mimesis, like Tabucchi's work. However, while Tabucchi does not obliterate linguistic exchanges and translation, Marani tends to use forms of a "homogenizing convention" (cf. Sternberg 1981, 224), as all its characters communicate in Finnish, with culture-specific items signalling this state of affairs.

5. Conclusion

Considering that the notion of pseudotranslation has been used to encompass texts akin to partial cultural translations, this article has asked about the possible differences and overlaps between these two translation categories. The article has shown that pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation feed into a fictional dimension underlying translation theory, as they are both described as translations although neither is derived from a source text. To identify their differences and analogies, the article has examined existing literature on these topics and compared three literary works that contain features associated with these two translation categories, i.e., paratexts and culture-specific items.

From the analysis of scholarship on pseudotranslation, two main distinctions between pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation have emerged. First, pseudotranslations highlight their nature as translated texts, especially by resorting to paratextual spaces, while partial cultural translations are not presented as translations. On the contrary, in partial cultural translations emphasis is placed on authorship. Second, pseudotranslations are often based on an ideological agenda, as is the case with Vella's pseudotranslation. Although this ideological dimension cannot be aprioristically extended to every pseudotranslation, the connections between ideology, cultural tensions, and pseudotranslation are notable in existing Translation Studies literature. Klaudy and Heltai (2020), instead, do not seem to identify ideology as a distinctive trait of partial cultural translation. The representation of cultures through culture-specific items provided in texts of this kind might depend on a variety of factors, ranging from the author's preferences to events of global interest. Another difference can be singled out based on Toury's excursus on pseudotranslation. Toury (2012, 59) mentions here linguistic and literary

features gathered from existing translations in conjunction with the writing of *Papa Hamlet*. Partial cultural translation, instead, uses items that refer not so much to overarching literary conventions and trends but to geography and history, artefacts, and products of the culture represented. In this sense, culture-specific items may or may not serve to implement marketing strategies.

The comparative analysis of the three primary sources has complemented these theoretical observations, identifying more nuanced differences between pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation. *Nuova grammatica finlandese* and *Donna di Porto Pim* report in Italian what is supposed to have been said in Finnish and Portuguese, respectively. Accordingly, these texts make extensive use of translational mimesis. Consistently with the text-proper, the paratexts of these works introduce the reader to cultures (Finland and the Azores) other than the language in which they are written (Italian). This paratextual function is arguably a trait of partial cultural translations that further research could confirm. Instead of pointing to the text-proper as translated, therefore, paratexts in partial cultural translations serve to introduce readers to the cultural world where the story is then set. Culture-specific items in the three primary sources are meant to intensify the plausibility of what takes place in a culture other than that of the intended target reader. For Klaudy and Heltai (2020, 44), culture-specific items are the key feature of partial cultural translations, but these items can also be found in pseudotranslations like Vella's. In between the poles of pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation, there is arguably a spectrum of textual features that approximate a text to one or the other pole. In this case, Vella's historiographical forgery represents the pole of pseudotranslation, and Marani's novel that of partial cultural translation. Tabucchi's *Donna di Porto Pim*, instead, does not fall precisely into one category or the other. Rather, it shows traits reminiscent of transfiction, as it uses translation as a narrative device instead of being presented as a translated text. This text also stems from the author's first-hand experience of the Azores and contains reflections of an existential tone. Given the several overlaps between the two text types in evidence, it can be argued that what makes a distinction between them possible is their ultimate intention. Vella's text places apparent emphasis on its translated nature especially by means of paratexts. In Marani's and Tabucchi's works, instead, such emphasis is not found. From their textual features,

it does not seem to be the case that these texts were marketed or meant to be received as translations. These findings, combined with those of existing literature, provide an answer to the article's research question. In sum, neither pseudotranslations nor partial cultural translations are translated texts. However, a pseudotranslation is crafted specifically as a translated text and explicitly aims to be taken as a translation, whereas a partial cultural translation, as suggestive of a translated text it may be, is not typically meant to be consumed as a translation. The main difference, therefore, is the way in which these text types aim to be received. Based on this difference, it can be argued that they are, to some extent, distinct (non-)translation categories.

Limits to these findings are posed by the materials and the methodology chosen for this analysis. The distinctions between pseudotranslation and partial cultural translation identified by this article are drawn from the comparative analysis of three primary sources based on a close reading. Were other and/or more materials considered and analysed by means of a different methodology, different conclusions may be reached. Based on this article, future research could identify texts akin to partial cultural translation and analyse them in larger numbers as a discrete category, adopting distant-reading techniques. These techniques may confirm the findings of this article, identifying similar functions of paratexts and culture-specific items in other partial cultural translations, as well as singling out more distinctive features of this text type. Existing literature on partial cultural translation has considered texts authored in English about Hungarian (Klaudy and Heltai 2020), Italian (Maher 2013, O'Sullivan 2005), and Chinese (Tu and Li 2017) culture and history. Future research may investigate partial cultural translations written in languages and about cultures that have not been explored yet. Reception-oriented research might offer new insights into readers' own perception of texts identifiable as partial cultural translations. These approaches, in concert, may lead to a clearer definition of this (non-)translation category than that provided by Klaudy and Heltai (2020, 44), which is functional to their concept of cultural back-translation.

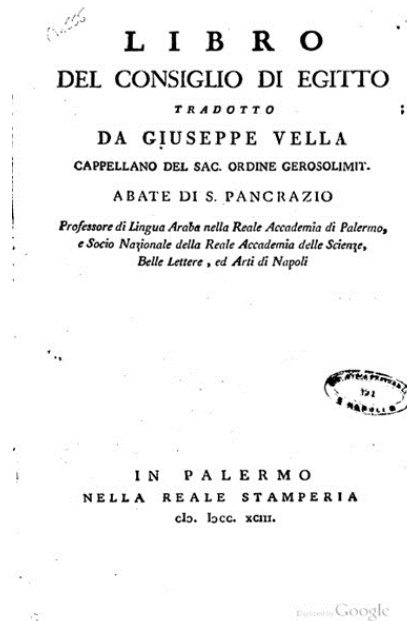


Figure 1

Disclosure statement

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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