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Autore, traduttore, editore—traditori!
Conspiracy Theory and Small Languages: Icelandic¹

Viola Miglio

1. Introduction

Anybody who has devoted himself even marginally to translation studies has come across the accusatory epithet *traduttore, traditore*. Betrayal in translation means, by and large, being unfaithful to the text. This of course implies that there is such a thing as *one text*: a monolithic, unchangeable, and above all perfect entity. By definition, the translator can only alter the text in the attempt to render meaning and connotation to the audience of his foreign readers. In so far as the original text is altered in the translation, the latter can only aim at reproducing the original imperfectly.

The original text, on the other hand, can itself be “faulty,” and in that sense the translator may—willy-nilly—improve on it. The translator may not want to do so, but sometimes it may be unavoidable. In this paper I would like to explore how these cases, concepts and misconceptions fare in the world of translation from and into little known languages, taking my examples from Icelandic.

This paper will consider the relation between language and its speakers; literary tradition and its weight on the art of translation; the liberties of the translator and those of the author and the interplay between the two, as well as the lack of common referents from the “small” language² to the more widely spoken one. Examples are taken from my own work as a translator from and into Icelandic, as well as from the comparisons of translations of published texts by others.

Icelandic poses particular problems when translated into Romance languages, specifically into Italian, some of which can only be understood by making reference to Iceland’s contemporary and historical situation. Iceland was a sovereign nation from the time it was settled in the ninth century to the thirteenth century, when it became first a Norwegian colony and then a Danish one. It regained its independence from Denmark in

1944. During the years of its medieval independence it developed an important prose tradition, with masterpieces that are still little known abroad, but that constitute the backbone of the national literary pride. Icelandic is a Germanic language of the north-western branch and the medieval language is close enough to modern Icelandic that educated modern readers need little special training to approach these prose masterpieces. The modern language has evolved sparingly in syntax and especially morphology, whose intricacies are daunting not only for the foreign learner but also for the native speaker. The complexity of the language is another source of pride for Icelanders, who feel that they alone can be the repositories of this ancient linguistic and literary tradition.

2. A Small Nation with a Great Language

Iceland has 293,577 inhabitants (Hagstofa Íslands 7), of which approximately 3.6% are of foreign origin. Because they are a small nation with a proud literary past, as well as a Nobel Prize winner for literature in 1955, and due to centuries of foreign domination, Icelanders have developed a possessive relationship to their language. Standard Icelandic is, for instance, very reluctant to accept foreign borrowings if compared to other languages, and prefers to coin neologisms, which are craftily inventive, if cumbersome at times.³

The total population of Iceland has been literate for over a century and Icelanders are avid readers and writers. There are twenty-five publishers in Iceland, the main one being Edda, with another six subsidiary publishing houses in its group. 649 book titles were published in Iceland in 2004, a considerable number for such a small nation. The government usually subsidizes translation into Icelandic as an asset to Icelandic culture. Translating books for such a small market, however, is very expensive, so that most technical books, usually in English, are not translated. Children's books and novelties, especially books that have been very successful abroad, are readily translated. Translations are an important part of the books published in Iceland each year, and they make up one half to two-thirds of the total number of titles. On average between 200-300 translated

books are published every year, many of which are children's books (*Bókatiðindi*).

Icelanders, like many insular cultural groups, are very attentive to what goes on in the rest of the world; they travel a great deal, and most of them speak one or more foreign languages regardless of their level of education. This is by and large not true of bigger nations, which are usually culturally and linguistically self-sufficient, and are not expected to know a great deal about Iceland. The flow of information is therefore imbalanced, in the sense that Icelanders may know more about other cultures than other cultures about them. This is an aspect that translators must be aware of. Generally, Icelandic translations of foreign novels have no introduction or footnotes from the translator. As is customary in many countries, notable exceptions are editions for classroom use.⁴ In a novel aimed at the general public, if the translator or the editor sees it fit to do so, the footnote is substituted by textual interpretation and expansion.⁵

3. Cultural Transposition

As an example of difficulty in cultural transfer, I will briefly discuss "Splunkuný línuýsa!" (which roughly translates into "Extremely Fresh Haddock!"), a poem by Ísak Harðarson, a contemporary Icelandic poet, whose trademarks are clever puns and wordplay, as well as serious existentialist topics. This is not one of his more serious poems, but even in its simplicity, based on the double meaning of the word *lína*, a 'line' as in a fishing tool or a poetic line, it poses some problems for its translation into Italian. My literal translation into English is shown side by side with my Italian translation, the original Icelandic is in note 6.⁶

"Extraordinarily fresh
longline haddock!"

Now you bite this line
drags you down
To this one which is then
tied to

"Nasello speciale freschissimo!"

Ora abocchi a questo verso che ti that
trascina giù
Questo che si annoda a sua volta a
verso

This one and together they
will see to it to lure you
To this point and now you
are four
No five lines too late to
remember
The golden rule: "Never
swallow
The first word!"

O, codhead,
This poem is your undoing

Questo ed insieme ci pensano loro
ad adescarti fin
Qui e proprio adesso
sei quattro
No cinque versi in ritardo per
ricordarti della
Regola d'oro: "Non mandare mai
giù
La prima parola".

O, testa di baccalà,
Questa poesia è la tua fine!

This is the first poem in Harðarson's 1989 collection, and I believe that it is intended to be a warning to the reader, a kind of "alienation effect" requesting an alert readership to exercise critical sense while reading the poems. The poem attracts the reader by offering extremely fresh haddock. The offer is particularly attractive because of the type of fish—haddock is fished for the local market in Iceland, whereas cod is exported, since it is not considered to taste as good. The victim reads on, until it is too late, and at the closing of the poem, not only has the haddock turned into cod, but also the catch is revealed to be the reader him/herself.

The English literal translation is intended to show that another Germanic language has the advantage of cognates, as well as similar cultural referents. The title in Icelandic, "Splunkuný línuýsa!" is something a fishmonger might say; in that sense it needs to be something acceptable in that parlance. However, precision of translation here cannot be achieved unless one is ready to sacrifice normality. A longline is the type of fishing implement used to catch haddock, and the lines tied to other lines reflect the structure of the tool. In this case, the cultural reference that is unknown to Italians is that it is widely believed in Iceland that fish caught by longline fishing is fresher and of higher quality than the fish caught by trawler nets, and iced on the high seas. This may be well known in an island community whose main income depends on fish, but average Italians would not even recognize the Italian word for longline,

palangaro. The same would probably apply to an average English reader, but 'longline' is at least more transparent in its components than *palangaro*.

In Italian, however, even haddock is problematic. *Eglefino* is a somewhat technical term that may not be used even at the fishmonger's. Given that in Iceland haddock is a better version of cod, and that the two species are related, I opted in Italian for *nasello* 'hake,' which is related to cod but appreciated in Italy as more valuable than cod. The derogatory turning point at the end of the poem, where the reader is addressed as 'dunce,' i.e. codhead, I translated in a similar way. *Testa di merluzzo*, 'codhead,' would sound peculiar but not particularly offensive. On the other hand *baccalà*, 'dried and salted cod,' is also used as 'dunce' in Italian and that is what I chose.

As compensation for the loss of the double meaning in 'line' as 'fishing line' and 'verse,' I used the word *verso* for poetic line and later (end of line one) the preposition *verso* 'towards' to restore the wordplay. 'Swallow' in the sixth line is also meant both literally, as the fish swallows the bait and gets caught on the hook, and, figuratively, as ingenuously believing all that is offered to one. English has a fishing metaphor 'fall for something hook, line and sinker,' but this omits the literal sense of swallowing the bait, so in English I would still opt for 'swallow' instead. Italian uses *bere*, 'to drink,' for 'ingesting something' and 'believing ingenuously,' but this verb can hardly be applied to a fish. So I opted for *mandare giù*, which means both 'swallow,' in the literal sense, and 'to put up with something unpleasant,' also because the adverb *giù* 'down' used in the idiom can refer back to the vortex created by the first lines to drag the reader down.

Harðarson's poem was intended to show that cultural transposition is often problematic, all the more so when it is couched in simple, everyday language, because it means that its roots are deeply set in the community where the phrasing originates. In these cases, the same effect of the original can only be maintained by sacrificing the literal correspondence of terms, while attempting to keep close to the original in spirit.

4. The Urban Arena and the Dilemmas of the Anti-Hero

The novel *101 Reykjavík* by Hallgrímur Helgason was received with mixed feelings in Iceland but is possibly the most widely read Icelandic novel in the rest of the world, much more well-known than the novels for which Halldór Laxness won the Nobel Prize in 1955. It has also been turned into a film.

The mixed feelings of the Icelanders had to do with a number of characteristics of the novel. A novel such as *101 Reykjavík* could not be appreciated by the Icelandic cultural establishment, made up of 'prudes and professors, selection committees and colorless men that could not distinguish poetry from pulp even if they were dragged through another 17 universities' (Helgason, "Hlynur Björn"). The book is an explicit and loud social criticism of modern Icelandic culture, both the pop culture of Generation X and younger, and of the more ambiguous hypocrisy of upper middle class Reykjavík, with evident jabs at the bureaucracy of the welfare state, and at wider reaching social problems such as alcoholism. Generation X is represented by Hlynur Björn, the main character and his friends, with its evident American influence, its cynicism, its strutting and fretting and signifying nothing. The upper middle classes are represented by Holmfrídur (Hofy), Hlynur's occasional bedfellow, who wears a nose stud and flaunts an iconoclastic attitude, but lives in her Laura-Ashley-clad apartment in the basement of her parents' villa in the suburbs.

Hlynur Björn is an unemployed thirty-four year-old man who refuses to do anything but watch cable TV and porn videos, masturbate, surf the net, and spend time in the many Reykjavík bars drinking beer and popping ecstasy pills. He still lives with his indulgent mother. The plot thickens when Hlynur's mother starts a lesbian relation with Lolla, a woman he is attracted to. He ends up making Lolla pregnant, which puts him in the problematic position of being the father and "stepbrother" of her child.

This anti-hero would be undoubtedly difficult to identify with if it were not for his indefatigable sense of humor, his imaginative sarcastic jabs, and his linguistic creativity. Hlynur's dilemmas are modeled on Hamlet's character, but in this novel there is no real tragedy; therefore, the tragic hero becomes a pathetic anti-hero and adapts to the circumstances, rather

than perishing trying to rectify the wrongs of the world. It is true that Hlynur does nothing but "spew sentences": after looking around Hofy's totally aseptic flat, he comments (in my literal translation shown here):

"Here there is nothing to drill into" [...] but she did not understand, not even after I said "except into you."

"You are always saying some weird sentences" she said then and repeated so: "You and your sentences - Is that one of your sentences?"

My life in sentences. *Life sentences.* [in English in the original]

Hofy is a straight-laced chick with a stone in her nose.⁷ That is the cornerstone marked by a shiny plaque that gives one a totally wrong idea about the building. Her soul is in slo-mo. One starts to yawn the moment she opens her mouth. (Helgason, *101 Reykjavík* 29)⁸

The translator into English, Brian FitzGibbon, has a very good version, which would not show my point because it is less faithful to the original text:

"Some nice drill work you've done here" ... but she didn't get it, not even after I added, "all you need now is a good screw."

"You always come out with these sentences", she said "you and your sentences".

My life in sentences. *Life sentences.*

Hofy is a square with a stud in her nose. It's a glistening plaque on a foundation stone that belies the rest of the building. (FitzGibbon 19-20)

The English translator of this novel has the same disadvantage of the French translator of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Many English intrusions and wordplay based on English-sounding Icelandic will be lost, and they are important because they are meant to show that the younger generations of Icelanders are much less concerned about the pureness of their language than previous ones.

Helgason is not upholding this trend; one should not forget that by all common standards, those whose speech is littered with anglicisms are the

very young (teenagers) or those who cannot or will not grow up. He is very likely making fun of both parties, the very conservative purists, who cannot tell "poetry from pulp," and the part of Generation X that is made up of good-for-nothing party animals as well as some bright individuals who choose to be good-for-nothing and exploit the Scandinavian type of welfare state, instead of their mental abilities, such as Hlynur.

If the English reader necessarily loses some of the puns and will never know how much English slang permeates the Icelandic text, the translator has an enormous advantage over his Romance brethren. English and Icelandic are Germanic languages, so that cognates are abundant and the derivational processes in morphology are similar, if not the same. This means, as my translation of the passage above aimed at showing, it is easy to keep puns or metaphors and assonances. FitzGibbon chose not to maintain the wordplay between 'stone' (the stud in Hofy's nose) and the metaphoric 'cornerstone' of her being, but he has an easy solution later on in the book, when Hlynur is talking about his brother-in-law:

It's just that Magnús husband of hers. Hey. Magnús. Nag-mús. Nag mouse. That's what he is, a nagging, nibbling mouse. All belly and mouth. And nothing in between but the frequent passage of food. (FitzGibbon 63)⁹

The Italian translator is not so lucky to be able to preserve the wordplay between a proper name and the rodent. She is, however, fortunate and clever enough to find an assonance with the cultivated adjective 'magno,' which in Latin meant 'large, great,' and is still used in Italian in historical names such as *Alessandro Magno* 'Alexander the Great,' *Carlo Magno* 'Charlemagne,' and has the very felicitous homophone *magno* as in the first person of the non-standard Italian verbal form *magnà(re)* 'to eat':

Se non fosse per quel Magnus. Ehi. Magnus. Magno. Il nome gli sta benissimo. Praticamente è tutto bocca e stomaco, con qualche accessorio fra le due cose. (Cosimini, 101 *Reykjavík* 72)

It is unfortunate that she misunderstands the last phrase of the excerpt above, which is literally "And usually something along the way between the two" ("Og yfirleitt eitthvað á leiðinni þarna á milli", Helgason, 101

Reykjavík 76), meaning 'food.' Cosimini changes it to "con qualche accessorio fra le due cose" (lit. 'and some accessory in between'), leaving the reader to wonder about what he could have between mouth and stomach, usually a fairly straight passageway.

Returning to the passage about life sentences mentioned above, Cosimini is more literal in her translation:

"Qui non c'è bisogno di trapanare" ... ma lei non l'ha capita e non ha capito nemmeno quando ho aggiunto: "se non te".

"Parli sempre con queste tue frasi" disse lei allora, e me l'ha detto altre volte. "Tu e le tue frasi"; "Questa è una delle tue frasi?"

La mia vita in frasi. Life sentences.

Questa tipa, Hofi, è una stressante con il piercing nel naso. Ha una pietruzza luccicante che da un'impressione del tutto sbagliata della struttura generale. (Cosimini, 101 *Reykjavík* 27-28)

Leaving the English intrusions in the Italian translation may seem obvious, but it is still an important decision on the part of the translator as well as the editor, given that generally the average Italian is not as fluent in English as the average Icelandic reader. Arguably, however, the readers approaching Helgason, even in translation, are not average readers, and may well be more versed in English.

The Italian could have been more poignant, perhaps translating the relevant line using an Italian idiom as "Una vita a sputare sentenze. Life sentences" or possibly even sacrificing the English with a chiasm: "Una vita a sputare sentenze. Sentenze a vita".¹⁰ Cosimini's translation has the advantage that it does not interpret the text for the reader, who then, unaided, must make the connection between *frase* 'sentence' in the grammatical sense and its English translation to get the assonance with his rather dark, sarcastic comment about being trapped in his witticisms, "life sentences."

Cosimini's overall felicitous style, however, is marred by her frequent misunderstandings of the text. The straight-laced Hofy is described in the same excerpt above with the Icelandic word *streitari*. This is not in the dictionary, but because the verb *streita* is, which means 'to stress', or, in Italian, 'stressare', Cosimini takes the leap of faith and translates *streitari* as

stressante, meaning 'someone who stresses people out'. *Stressante* does have the advantage of being one of those buzz words overused by teenagers,¹¹ but it is inaccurate; *streitari* is a neologism based on the assonance with the English word 'straight,' in the meaning of 'straight-laced,' and by extension "conventional," "unadventurous." FitzGibbon, who has lived in Iceland for about ten years and seems to have a better feel for the language, translates *streitari* as 'square' (63). He manages to maintain the slangy feel of the original without trampling over the meaning. In Italian, *tipa normale* could have been a better solution, if not very slangy. But syntax could have helped the first part of the sentence to sound more teenage-like, for instance:

Questa tipa, Hofi, è una normale con una pietruzza al naso. Questa pietra luccicante è la chiave di volta che dà un'impressione del tutto sbagliata della struttura dell'arco. (Helgason, *101 Reykjavík* 29)¹²

Something along these lines could have kept the architectural imagery of the foundation stone and the building (in the original and in FitzGibbon's version) and the parallel with the previously mentioned piercing in the nose. A stone in the nose (especially introduced by the preposition + article *al*, typical of expressions such as *anello al naso* 'nose ring,' *palla al piede* 'ball and chain') would be interpreted easily as a piercing.

No one is immune from mistakes, of course, and I hope that I have shown that both Cosimini and FitzGibbon have very felicitous moments and render the style of the original well. But while FitzGibbon is only one of the translators from Icelandic into English, Cosimini has become in the last five years by and large the *only* translator from Icelandic into Italian, translating six major novels, including Laxness's most famous one, *Independent People*.¹³ If Cosimini stumbles on so many little details of contemporary and readily understood Icelandic, how do complex authors such as Halldór Laxness and Thor Vilhjálmsson fare in her translations? Cosimini was hopefully more careful with those texts, since she admittedly recognizes the great responsibility of translating authors such as Laxness (Cosimini, "Gente Indipendente"). She certainly has the merit of having made accessible some of the jewels of this little known literature to Italian readers.¹⁴

5. Melissa P. and the Weight of Icelandic Tradition

One Hundred Strokes of the Brush Before Bed by Melissa P., a best-seller in Italy in 2003, is a novel based on the explicit diary of the sexual adventures of a schoolgirl from Catania while she supposedly looks for real love and falls in the predatory hands of a series of big bad wolves. I had the opportunity to translate this novel into Icelandic and I will briefly mention some points that have arisen from my translation as well as Lawrence Venuti's 2004 version into English.

The language does not pose particular interpretative problems: it is plain, and more formal than would be expected from the writings of a sixteen year-old girl, with few frills other than the abstractions typical of Italian teenagers when dealing with important existential issues such as love and interpersonal relationships. Normal metaphorical use in Romance languages is, however, badly tolerated in English,¹⁵ and Icelandic is similar in this tendency, so that I was often forced to make abstractions more tangible, as required by the editors.

The protagonist is sassy, and wants to project this image; she does so by trying to sound aloof and unconventional in her writing: she does not address her diary as "Dear Diary," but simply as "diary," which implies detachment, lack of affection, in the same way that she uses "mother" instead of "mom" in her text. I discussed the possibility of translating simply "Diary", just as Venuti does in the English translation, but the editors informed me that it was unacceptable in Icelandic, simply because it deviated too much from common usage.

Also unacceptable is "foreignizing" the text; any attempt at introducing foreign elements was expunged from my version and substituted by standard Icelandic phrases. Venuti gives the text local color by leaving Italian words and phrases that would be intelligible to the English reader in the English text: "Ciao, bella", "signorinas", "brava" (100, 119, 120). When Melissa breaks up with her math professor, who sees in her just a Lolita, the Italian has the definitive and dramatic "Addio, Lolita", which Venuti renders as "Adieu, Lolita" (147). In order to remark the unusual Italian expression, I first suggested *farvel*, which is a Danish word used also in Icelandic, a cognate of English 'farewell', but the editors substituted it

mercilessly with formal Icelandic *Vertu sæl, Lolita*, which does not feel dramatic at all, just somewhat stilted.

In one scene, Melissa brings her professor-lover a pair of her knickers as a complex metaphor for her feelings; Venuti translates part of the relevant passage as follows:

Now smell that part of me which lies exactly in the centre between Love and Sensuality: It is my Soul, which seeps through my fluids. [...] As you see, my Soul too wishes to be desired and gives off its smell, the female smell. [...] (131)

This time I could not be moved, but it took me a while to win the resistance of the editors who insisted that souls do not smell in Icelandic. Of course they do not in Italian either, but they happen to in Melissa P.

Finally, as an example of the author's betrayal of the text, I would like to mention a phrase – and there are a few in the book – that leads Venuti astray.¹⁶ Melissa P. is waiting to go up to the apartment of the young man who will become her first lover. She is impatient in the street below his house and rings the buzzer earlier than the agreed time. She suddenly sees him in the window about to pull up the blinds *a dorso nudo*, literally 'with a bare back' (Venuti has "I glimpsed his naked back" 19). What the inexperienced writer means (or the clumsy typesetter?) is really *a torso nudo*, "bare-chested," which is a common Italian idiom (unlike *a dorso nudo*), and makes more sense since the man is about to pull up the blinds and therefore facing *towards* the window. In cases like this, where the author "betrays" the language unwittingly, the translator can only improve on the original. If s/he does not do so, either the editor or the reader will attribute the mistake to the translator, certainly not to the author.

As a further confirmation of the author's betrayal and of translators being misunderstood in their endeavors, I would like to mention a paragraph from an otherwise very poignantly written review of the book by Nadia Gilani:

Finally to address the awkward situation of translation. It's not easy and it doesn't really work. Lawrence Venuti manages to retain a semblance of what the Italian should sound like, albeit often

stilted and clumsily with use of cringe worthy synonyms for male genitalia such as 'member' [...] The language is thus, not as compelling and absorbing as it could be, and this novel has the infuriating effect of making you feel helpless and incapable, wishing you could read and understand the superior Italian original. (par. 10)

I have mentioned before that the Italian is rather plain, certainly not as colloquial as might be expected of a sixteen-year-old diary writer, but it is certainly not an "acerbic, poetic style" as the reviewer for the *Telegraph* wrote (Johnston, par. 14). Venuti fully respects and renders the style of the original, down to the curious uses of 'member,' 'phallus' and all the other stilted names for male genitalia that Melissa P. chooses to introduce in her narrative. If the writer does not write well the reader always tends to make a scapegoat out of the translator, even if, in this case at least, the punishment is fully undeserved.

6. Conclusion

In some traditions there is no monolithic text; the author can go back and improve on it forever, or the performer gives it a different flavor with each retelling of the poem, or more than one manuscript contains the text of the work in question. Perhaps literary critics and translators should relax their views as to what is an acceptable deviation from the original.

Increased communication between translator and author has resulted in translations that are more akin to a rewriting of the original text than a translation in the most widely accepted meaning of the term, which is expected to follow the original text as faithfully as possible, not change, add, or delete words, paragraphs, or whole concepts present in the original version. This process does not go unnoticed in the case of translations of closely related languages. Readers of Manuel Rivas's works in Spanish have often criticized one of his translators, Dolores Vilavedra, because of the supposed liberties she takes with the Galician original (Vilavedra, p.c.). Little do they know of the ongoing battles between author and translator because Rivas insists that some parts of the text need to be rewritten and not just translated in the strict sense.

The publishing house and the editors can also exert considerable pressure on the translator, of different kinds as we have seen in the examples above. The “need” to translate quickly seems to be encouraged by a certain type of contemporary author, who feels that it is better to be translated (and marketed) as fast as possible, and possibly published at the same time as the original in different countries, even if this implies that the text is translated inaccurately.¹⁷ The question remains as to why some literary works are felt to have a “best by” date by their very authors. In this sense there is, then, a real conspiracy to betray the integrity of the text, and all the parties involved may become *traditori*.

In the case of little known languages, the situation is even more problematic, because of the lack of common referents that make it impossible for the foreign reader to assess the correctness of the text independently. The translator is the reader’s only access to the world of “small” languages. But exactly because translators working from small languages can get away with murder (or rather betrayal) much more easily than translators working from, and into, widely spoken languages, they have a moral duty to be precise and not hide their mistakes or limitations behind the aura of exoticism that may envelop little known cultures.

Notes

1. My most heartfelt thanks to Annette Levine and the editorial board for their infinite patience, to Brian Frazier for discussion of translation theory and practice, as well as formatting help, and to Óskar Holm Halldórson for discussion of Ísak Harðarson’s poem.
2. I use “small language” in the technical sense of a language with a small number of native speakers, usually under one million.
3. Inventive is the word for ‘computer’ *tölva*, coined by eminent scholar Sigurður Nordal by splicing the word for ‘number’ *tala*, with the word for ‘prophetess’ *völva*. On the other hand, technical terms such as ‘fuselage’ *flugvélarbolur* (literally ‘body of flying machine’) are usually cumbersome.

4. The recent edition of Lorca’s *Yerma* (2004), the first bilingual edition of a book in Iceland, is an excellent example: (in note one on p. 13) the translators even explain how surnames are given to children in the Hispanic world, which is not excessive considering that Icelanders still use a patronymic system.

5. An example of text “interpretation” is the following. A part of the elaborate Icelandic Christmas tradition is preparing *laufabrauð* “leaf bread”, which is fried, decorated wheat bread. This tradition is mentioned in *101 Reykjavík*, one of the novels whose translations I will be analyzing. If it were not a book aimed at the general public, surely *laufabrauð* would warrant a footnote. In the versions I read, the English translator leaves it as ‘laufabraud’ without further explanation, the Italian one interprets the text and uses the words *carta musica*. This is a bad equivalent for *laufabraud* because, except for the fact that both types of bread are flat, they have nothing else in common (one is fried the other baked, one is a special festivity bread the other is every day shepherd fare); moreover, *carta musica* is a regional term from Sardinia which is unlikely to be understood generally by Italians.

6. „Splunkuný línuýsa!” Nú bítur þú á þessa línu sem dregur þig niður á / Þessa herna sem svo aftur er hnýtt í / Þessa og saman sjá þær til þess að lokka þig / Hingað og nú ertu þegar orðinn fjórum / Nei fimm línum of seinn tilað minnast / Reglunnar gullnu: „Gleypstu aldrei / Við fyrsta orðinu!” / Ó, þorskhaus, / Þetta ljóð er þinn bani. (Harðarson, Ísak. *Síðustu hugmyndir fiska um líf á þurru*. Reykjavík: Iðunn, 1989.)

7. The fact that she wears a stud in her nose was mentioned two paragraphs before the one translated, where her unconventional looks are contrasted with her “straight-lacedness.”

8. „Hér þarf ekkert að bora” [...] en hún skildi það ekki og ekki heldur eftir að ég bætti við „nema í þig” / „Þú talar alltaf í einhverjum setningum” sagði hún þá og sagði aftur. „Þú með þínar setningar” - „Er þetta svona setning?” / Líf mitt í setningum. Life sentences. / Hófi er streitari með stein í nefinu. Hann er hornsteinn með glampandi skildi sem gefur gjörsamlega

ranga mynd af byggingunni. Hún er með sál sýnt hægt. Maður fer alltaf að geispa ef hún opnar munninn.

The Icelandic original is usually found in an endnote. Unless otherwise mentioned, translations from the Icelandic into English or Italian are my own.

9. Bara þessi Magnús hennar. Hey. Magnús. Nagmús. Passar. Hann er bara munnur og magi. Og yfirleitt eitthvað á leiðinni þarna a milli. (Helgason, 101 *Reykjavík* 76).

10. *Sentenza* means 'maxim, aphorism', but also 'judgment, verdict, opinion.' *Sputare sentenze* means easily passing judgment on other people, one of Hlynur's favorite pastimes. He is a *sputasentenze*, a wiseacre.

11. Can it have been a conscious stylistic choice on Cosimini's part? Maybe, since she translates it again in a similar way later in the book, when talking about Hlynur's sister, described as *iperstressata* 'very stressed out', on page 72 of the Italian version. The frequent mistakes of interpretation of the Icelandic do raise some doubts however about Cosimini's proficiency in the language.

12. Hófi er streitari með stein í nefinu. Hann er hornsteinn með glampandi skildi sem gefur gjörsamlega ranga mynd af byggingunni.

13. There is another translator, Fulvio Ferrari, who has translated two novels, both by the same author. He is a good translator, but his activity is not comparable either in bulk or importance to Cosimini's work.

14. She is also very active in promoting her translations on sites that deal with Iceland as a tourist destination. Cosimini, Silvia. "I più grandi scrittori d'Islanda." *Zoooom* 26 May 2003. 14 March 2005 <<http://www.zoooom.it/documenti/0/100/100/106/islanda.htm>> and "Islanda da leggere, Islanda da viaggiare". *EDT* (2005). 14 March 2005 <<http://www.edt.it/comunita/mappamondo/mappa34/islanda.shtml>>.

15. See the wonderful discussion of this topic in the first chapter of Parks, Tim. *Translating Style. The English Modernists and Their Italian Translations*. London: Cassells, 1996.

16. See Viola Miglio. "Conspiracy theory and translating small languages: the case of Icelandic". Ms. Dept. of Spanish and Portuguese, UCSB, 2005 for a longer, more detailed version of this paper.

17. As mentioned by John Treat in his discussion of Haruki Murakami's work in his talk "Translating Japanese Literature since the Mid-1980s". *Translation Studies Research Focus Group*, UCSB. 2 March 2005.

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