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The other Ferrante: the translator who brought Elena Ferrante and her literary world to the USA

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Abstract

Translation is not an easy matter, very often translators have to deal with texts that are not at all easy to translate and transport from one cultural context to another. This dissertation seeks to explain the difficulties in translating Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels into English by the author's official translator Ann Goldstein (who has also become the face of this enigmatic writer, whose true identity is unknown) focusing precisely on the saga of "My brilliant friend" and the various linguistic issues and difficulties in translating Neapolitan expressions into English. More precisely this thesis will examine the translation strategies used by the translator, the reason why they were used and some cases in which they lack accuracy.

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INTRODUCTION

Translating non-standard language is always a challenge for translators, as such languages are always steeped in social and cultural features. A translator who faces challenging cases of translation can therefore rely on a variety of strategies, developed by translation studies, that can help to make non-standard language comprehensible for foreign readers. This dissertation explores specifically the difficulties found by the translator, Ann Goldstein, in translating the novels belonging to Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Quartet (a subtitle introduced in the English version of the novels) due to the strong influence of the Neapolitan context, which influences the language of the work and the narrative itself. The aim of this thesis is to analyse the translation techniques used in cases of non-standard language translations such as this one, and to understand how useful the various translation procedures can be, in order to adhere to the socio-cultural context of the original work. The response of the critics will be explored, as may prove to be relevant for the popularity of the works abroad. The reasons for this success will be identified and explained and finally the analysis of the English translation of the novels will be carried out on the basis of concrete examples taken directly from the Neapolitan Quartet, and the procedures implemented by the translator will be highlighted and clarified.

In the first chapter, the characteristics of prose fiction, the genre of these novels, are outlined and the approach of translation studies to this genre will be made clear, taking into account how influential this genre may be on a large scale. The extent to which culture influences language and consequently translation will later be examined. Further on, an explanation concerning the meaning of non-standard language will be provided, as well as the main characteristics of Neapolitan dialect and the reasons for which it is so relevant in Ferrante's works. Finally, a theoretical overview of translation strategies will be outlined and a range of them will be discussed in relation to Goldstein's translation strategies, in particular: Adaptation, Domestication, Foreignization and Non-Equivalence at Word Level, followed by some useful examples that will clarify the notions.

In the second chapter, a first section will be dedicated to all the novels that are part of the Neapolitan Quartet, related to all of their English versions. In the subsequent section, a short biography of the translator will be presented, aiming to set her work in its background in order to better clarify some of her translation choices. Afterwards, an investigation will be carried out into all the factors that have contributed to the foreign success of the English versions of the books, notably the enthusiastic reaction of the US critics and the highly acclaimed HBO television series, followed by an analysis of the turnaround in Italian critics after this achievement. A concluding part of the chapter will be devoted to an analysis of the language and vocabulary employed by Ferrante in her writing, in conjunction with her relationship with Neapolitan dialect, which plays an important role in the novels, notably when contrasted with Italian.

The third and last chapter proposes a translation analysis, departing from Goldstein's approach to translation up to the linguistic analysis of some fragments extracted directly from the Neapolitan Quartet, deemed useful to note and explain the techniques that the translator employed to render faithfully the elements present in the original texts, which were hard to translate. The difficulties that these novels present, as reported by Goldstein, will be highlighted through examples selected from the novels. At the end, a section will be addressed to some cases of lack of effectiveness of the strategies used by the translator, which were not well suited to the English version.

CHAPTER 1 TRANSLATION THEORY

This thesis discusses the difficulties in the translation of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels into English, given by the impossibility of faithfully rendering certain expressions of the Neapolitan language and culture, in the target language and consequently, the various strategies used to cope with these difficulties. In the first part of the chapter, I will specifically analyse the genre of this literary work and the translation approach to this genre, and also the concept of translating culture, while in the second part I will explain what kind of strategies can be useful in cases of difficult translation like this one.

1.1 TRANSLATING FICTION

In her interesting analysis Hu (2018) suggests that the translation of fiction is much more complicated than the translation of other genres, since it deals not only with bilingual, but also with bi-cultural and bi-social transfer, including the whole complex of emotions, associations and ideas that intricately connect the languages of different nations to their lifestyles and traditions. Adopting a similar position, Bassnet (1980) argues that the notion that a novel has somehow a simpler structure than a poem and is consequently easier to translate, is erroneous and the reason for the spread of this notion is the smaller number of statements made by prose translators regarding their methodology compared to those of poetry translators.

Prose fiction has a much greater social influence than other literary genres; a best seller can have millions of readers, and sometimes popular novels are adapted into movies, which further increases their audience. Exercising a social influence on a large scale is sometimes also the aim of novelists who may regard their literary works as emissary of social messages (Hu, 2018). For this reason, the translation of fiction works has a social impact on a large scale. In the same vein, Ribò (2019) notes that prose fiction is particularly effective in communicating ideologies without necessarily affirming or recognizing them. There are several ways of communicating the ideological positions of the novelists: for example, the author may embrace an ideology implicitly, transmitting them through the story-world or the narrative discourse, so that the novel does not become an actual ideological commitment, or on the contrary, he may explicitly

embrace an ideology trying to convince the readers of the rightness of the principles claimed in the work. Novelists can also make a critique of society and of the dominant ideologies without necessarily embracing an alternative ideology, or even turn out to be ambivalent by embracing some ideologies to characters and ideologies opposed to other characters.

The reproduction of style can be considered the fulcrum of fiction translation, and for this reason, Hu (2018) highlights the importance of style which can be very useful in distinguishing one novel/story from another.

1.1.2 DEFINITION OF FICTION

As mentioned in the previous section, fiction is a literary genre and, in this regard, we have to specify that criticism divided literature into different categories/genres: poetry, drama and prose fiction. I will focus on prose fiction because it is the genre of Elena Ferrante's books, as they're written in the 2000s, years in which, as Ribò (2019) asserts "modern writers overwhelmingly tell their stories in prose". First I will report the definition of prose that the author gives us: "prose is written or spoken with the pattern of ordinary or everyday language, without a metrical structure. Verse, on the other hand, is written or spoken with an arranged metrical rhythm, and often a rhyme". There is a large volume of published studies describing this genre: for example, Hu (2018) defines prose fiction as a genre which is characterized by the telling of an invented story and specifies that the language used in this genre is a prose language which does not follow the principles of rhyme, rhythm or metrics. Another definition of fiction is provided by Baker (2009: 185), who defines fiction as a genre which "refers to imaginative works, generally in prose, and encompasses short stories and plays as well as novels".

The most common prose narrative consists of novels and short stories which can take different forms, such as the novel/satirical story, the novel/gothic story, science fiction, etc. Ribò (2019) points out that both short stories and novels are modern genres that have had their development and popularity only fairly recently, starting with the European Renaissance. These modern genres of prose fiction were mostly influenced by classic epic poetry such as Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* or the Hebrew Bible, which is full of short stories. A broadly similar point has also been made by Baker (2009) who

says that the genre of “novel” emerged in the 18th century and was distinguished by its colloquial language and realistic representation of people, places, feelings and actions. Immediately after its birth, the realist novel became a cultural standard that has remained so to the present day.

Whatever the form or type of narrative, Hu (2018) draws our attention to some general features of prose narrative. First of all, we have the “narrative technique”, which includes all the information related to the “point of view” in the work. Secondly there is “characterization”, which encompasses significant information about the characters and the growth they have throughout the story. The “theme” is another relevant feature of prose narrative and consists of the moral issues raised for the characters or for the reader. Then there is the “plot”, which usually consists in an ordered and organized sequence of events and actions, and last but not least, one of the most important features of this genre, is the “style”. As far as narrative prose is concerned, we have two types of style one is the “authorial style”, that is, a way of writing that belongs recognisably to a particular writer: this way of writing distinguishes the writing of one author from that of others, depending on the different historical periods, the different views of the world of the authors, etc. The other notion of style is that of “textual style”, i.e., style intrinsically linked to meaning. Just as you can say that the authors have a style, the same goes for the texts. When we look at the style of a text, we need to look at the language choices that are intrinsically linked to meaning and effect on the reader. Elements such as lexical and grammatical structuring, coherence and cohesion of speech and rhetorical figures should be taken into account when analysing the style of a literary work.

While Hu (2018) focusses on the general features of prose narrative, Ribò (2019) is more concerned with the difference between long and short stories. He points out that on the one hand the essential qualities for a well-written story are “density, concentration and precision” because short stories cannot afford too many digressions, they need to focus on a few characters, a limited number of environments, and just one sequence of events. On the other hand, novels can focus on multiple characters who will evolve, the plot can be enriched with subplots and unexpected occurrences that add

dynamism and interest to the novel, and the author can add digressions or commentaries without compromising its form.

The novel has always had a particular affinity with both travel and translation: as Bassnet (2019) observes, the translator is an interpreter who brings the text written in a language to the attention of readers who may not know it and is therefore responsible for the journey of a text that crosses an interlingual border. Polezzi (2001) examined the relationship between travel and translation, stating that both are influenced by the norms and expectations of the target culture. Exactly as translators, writers of travel stories model the material according to the target culture, and in both cases, readers must trust them, relying on the veracity of their versions (whether linguistic or cultural).

1.2 TRANSLATING CULTURE

1.2.1 DEFINITION OF CULTURE

The term “culture” has two basic meanings. The first, of ancient origin, indicates a process of individual formation, based on the learning of certain knowledge, the aim of which is the balanced and complete development of the human personality. The second meaning, formed between the 18th and 19th centuries, indicates instead the set of ways of living, expressing and thinking that characterize any human group (*Enciclopedia Treccani* online).

As regards the relationship between culture and translation studies, we can start a reflection on the suggestion of Erikson et al. (2001:162) who subsequently affirmed that the focus should have been the study of "dispersed networks in cities or institutions [or] communities of intercontinental migrants". Along these lines, Baker (2009) cites Jenks (1993) who claims that “with the development of disciplines such as cultural studies, a distinctly different meaning has emerged, with culture understood as an ideological force operating on society” and we can consider this definition as one of the closest to the modern conception of culture which has strengthened over the years. She goes on saying that to date, the majority of translation scholars agree that a professional translator should have (inter)cultural competence (Kelly 2005:74) in order to deal in the best possible way with a translation since the meaning of a text is often context-dependent (Baker, 2009).

1.2.2 CULTURAL INFLUENCE ON LANGUAGE AND TRANSLATION

As Geng (2013) explains, translation of culture is a subject in its own right and is much harder to master than other types of translation. The influence of culture in the translation of words and sentences is in fact very important when dealing with a translation of a text steeped in culture such as that of Elena Ferrante. Geng goes on asserting that translating culture does not mean making one culture conform to another and that translation is a kind of action through which different nations can communicate their own thought and culture, because the language of a country inevitably reflects its culture. Commenting on this topic Geng cites Smith (1987) who states: "Culture is made up of all the shared products of human society" referring to the way of life of a society as a whole, with its customs, laws, language ideals and traditions. Likewise, Kramersch (1998) asserts that language is the principal means whereby we conduct our social lives and that when it is used in context of communication it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways. Language expresses cultural reality because words refer to common experience of the people who use it, they express facts, ideas or events that are communicable thanks to their reference to a stock of knowledge about the world that similar people share.

Members of a particular culture have certain things in common, a certain way of life, a certain way of behaving, certain values and beliefs, certain customs, certain gestures or certain foods and language is the symbolic representation of their people, and includes its historical and cultural background, as well as its approach to life and ways of living and thinking. As a result of this reflection, we must not only consider language as made up of the vocabulary and grammar, but we must also absorb the social rules that govern the way we should use the vocabulary and grammar in concrete situations (Geng, 2013). Adopting a similar position, Bassnet (1980) says that "language is the heart within the body of culture, and it's the interaction between the two that results in the continuation of life-energy".

1.3 TRANSLATING A NON-STANDARD LANGUAGE

Translating a non-standard language is much more challenging than translating a standard one. First of all, we must distinguish a standard language from a non-standard

one. The former is defined as the official language of a country, which is used also by the government, by the majority of people and is also taught in schools, while the latter is a kind of variety which can develop in parallel with the official language of the country and which is used by a minority of people or by a specific group, for example, different regional dialects (Cambridge Dictionary). These kinds of non-standard varieties may include regional dialects or slangs, which are very informal languages variety, usually spoken rather than written, used especially by particular groups of people: in our case, Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels are set in Campania, an Italian region. At this point, it is important to point out that, as Maturi (2023) states, in Italy vulgar dialects (a medieval term) developed long before the official language: the dialects known as 'primary dialects' are those that originated directly from Latin and are much older than Italian, which was formed only in the 13th/14th century from the Florentine dialect and its diffusion was gradual: until the 19th century, it spread in written form or in formal speech, without ever penetrating into the everyday use of the common population. After the unification of Italy in 1861, Italian also spread into private and informal uses of the language. Therefore, we can say that in the past, anyone born in Campania acquired their local dialect as their mother tongue, regardless of the social stratum or cultural level to which they belonged. Certainly, the more educated or wealthy had the economic and cultural possibilities to learn and use Italian as well, but the use of dialect in daily life was universal and not an indication of a scarce education. Over the years, however, this interclass dialect-speaking has been reduced and gradually lost in the more cultured and wealthy classes in Naples, to the advantage of Italian-speaking. Vice versa, dialect has been preserved in the everyday use of the underprivileged social groups.

This transition is accompanied by a stigmatisation of the dialect, now typical only of the lower classes. Up to the twentieth-century collective imagination according to which, on the one hand, Neapolitan was related to ignorance, illegality, social and moral degradation and, on the other hand, an element of regret for a past and values doomed to be lost. In the first decades of the new millennium, however, we have observed a reversal of this negative connotation, with the rise of a new approach to Neapolitan, the revaluation of the dialect seen as a cultural asset in danger of extinction and as an

indispensable part of the social and cultural environment. In this period, in fact, the use of dialect in the performing arts, such as music and theatre, and in literature, as in the case of Ferrante's novels, flourished.

As De Rogatis (2018) asserts between the 1950s and 1960s, the area of the *rione* represented a typical linguistic condition, in which the vast majority of speakers were native dialect speakers who either had no relationship with the Italian language or had it only in relation to limited areas (the first grades of education and television). Neapolitan dialect has a strong influence on the way the characters in the books express themselves and we will see this in more detail in the remaining chapters in which I will analyse a variety of extracts from the novels in which this contraposition is evident. In order to translate a non-standard variety translators can use a range of translation strategies, which are useful to give the target text the same meaning and the same intention as the source text, giving it the same nuance of significance. To better understand these mechanisms Federici (2011) asked what we need to consider when discussing dialect translation. He maintains that translators' creativity can be encouraged by the plurality of choices of solutions and reactions to individual cases. According to him, the translation of non-standard varieties is characterised by a large multitude of challenges, but this multitude is also paralleled by a considerable assortment of methodological approaches.

A broader perspective has been adopted by Assis Rosa (2012) who argues that when dealing with the translation of literary varieties, it is necessary to face certain contextual norms that constrain or motivate translation decisions and consequently, research in translation studies must go beyond a mere comparison of source and target languages and texts.

1.3.1 TRANSLATING CULTURE-SPECIFIC ITEMS

Translation has much to do with the cultural context, which is almost always imbued in texts. On the one hand, the difference between cultures is very important in the translation of literary texts, but on the other hand we can hypothesize that there are languages and cultures which are more similar and closer to each other than others. Supporting this view, Larson (1984: 95-6) writes that when cultures are similar, there is less difficulty in translating, because both languages will probably have terms that are

more or less equivalent for the various aspects of the culture. Thus, a translator must take into account many factors in order to perform his/her task well: he must consider that every text is related to its own culture and that the reception of a certain cultural context may change depending on whether the culture of reception is similar to the original one or is completely different (Geng, 2013). There is a consensus among linguists who discussed this topic: Newmark (1998:103) suggests the existence of some 'cultural words' that are easy to detect since they are associated with a certain language and cannot be literally translated; Baker (1992: 21) refers to such cultural words calling them 'culture-specific items', and similarly Nord (1997: 34) uses the term 'cultureme' to describe them.

He defines cultureme as "a cultural phenomenon that is present in culture X but not present (in the same way) in culture Y". An example of this phenomenon can be the Welsh term *hiraeth* which designates a sort of nostalgia that the Welsh feel for the Wales of the past, imbued with a sense of sadness and regret. *Hiraeth* is a nostalgia for a place to which it is impossible to return, a melancholy for the lost places of the past. It has something in common with Portuguese *saudade*, which designates a nostalgia for someone or something that was loved and then lost (Sanders 2014).

1.4 TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

According to Lörcher (1991:76), a translation strategy is "a potentially conscious procedure for the solution of a problem which an individual is faced with when translating a text segment from one language to another". As Guerra (2012) suggests, these procedures have been widely critiqued because of the lack of unanimity on what name should be given to them (procedures, techniques, strategies or methods are often related and used as synonyms). These denomination problems occur because the procedures sometimes overlap, they only categorise differences in terms of language and not usage, or focus on the translation results rather than the translation process. Nevertheless, there have been many attempts to catalogue and list these procedures in order to improve the acquisition of translation skills, as knowing and comparing them is certainly necessary to achieve a proper translation. Guerra (2012) cites one of the main taxonomies used to classify them, or at least the best known, that of Vinay and

Dalbernet (1958) called the 7-strategy theory, asserting also that other authors have reformulated and added new procedures, or broken down the aforementioned ones into distinct subcategories.

In the following sections I will present specifically the strategy of adaptation, the concepts of domestication and foreignization theorized by Venuti (1995) and the problem of non-equivalence at word level theorized by Baker (1992), as I consider them useful in understanding the work that the American translator Ann Goldstein has done with Elena Ferrante's novels.

1.4.1 ADAPTATION

We can start this section using the definition of Vinay and Darbelnet (1958), who list adaptation as their seventh translation procedure: “adaptation is a procedure that can be used whenever the context referred to in the original text does not exist in the culture of the target text, thereby necessitating some form of re-creation”. Along the same lines, Baker (2009) subsequently proposes a selective list of the necessary conditions for this technique to be used, of the ways in which adaptation is implemented.

On the one hand there are the procedures used by the adapter which can be the “transcription of the original” which is the word for-word reproduction of part of the text in the original language, the “omission” which is the elimination of part of the text while the “expansion” is the addition of source information, or the “exoticism” is the substitution of stretches of slang, dialect, nonsense words, etc. in the original text by rough equivalents in the target language (sometimes marked by italics or underlining). On the other hand, the most common conditions which cause translators to resort to adaptation are for example the “cross-code breakdown” which occurs when there are simply no lexical equivalents in the target language, or the “situational or cultural inadequacy” which happens when the context referred to in the original text do not exist or do not apply in the target culture; then there is the “genre switching” which happens when a change from one discourse type to another is required – for example, from adult to children’s literature – which often entails a global re-creation of the original text. These conditions, which may also exist simultaneously, lead the translator to choose between two types of adaptation: one of them is local adaptation, while the second one is global adaptation.

Since local adaptation is relegated to some specific parts of the original work, it does not affect the text as a whole, but rather helps in the fluidity of the translation for the readers of the target language. Global adaptation, on the other hand, is used to modify the whole initial text, in order to transpose the concepts and the general meaning of the original work into the target language, sacrificing all the formal elements and semantic meaning.

1.4.2 DOMESTICATION AND FOREIGNIZATION

The concepts of “domestication” and “foreignization” describe two opposing ways (or strategies) of translation. Gambier (2011: 40-42) reported that the method of “domestication” is often used to refer to the adaptation of a translated text to the cultural context of arrival or of culture-specific terms, while the “foreignization” method is used to refer to a translational approach that tends to preserve the original cultural context, in terms of settings, names and so on. But we have to specify that these two terms were first introduced into modern Translation Studies by Lawrence Venuti (1995). Venuti (1995:17-39) asserts that at that time, ethnocentrism and imperialism often resulted in the approach to translation, thus making the translator more and more invisible. According to him, the analysis of the translations of the past can show us alternative solutions.

“Domestication”, for Venuti, can represent a sort of standardization of all translated language, or it can be inherent in every translation, since “Translations, in other words, inevitably perform a work of domestication” (Venuti 1998:5). “Foreignization”, the counterattack against “domestication”, can consist of many different kinds of practices, from the choice of source texts to practices of deviation (archaization of language, insertion of explanatory notes or glossaries, leaving words or expressions in the original language in the text). Venuti maintains that “translation is the forced substitution of the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text with a text that is intelligible to the reader of the target language”. Calabrò (2011) makes a similar point claiming that domestication and foreignization, are two different approaches to translation. The first involves a translation that mitigates the cultural differences between the source and

target languages by conforming the original text to the pre-existing cultural values, beliefs and representations of the target language. The second implies, on the contrary, an ethno-deviant pressure exerted on those values in order to register the linguistic and cultural difference of the foreign text, with the result of sending the reader abroad. However, this is only possible if the cultural codes prevailing in the target language get disrupted. (Calabrò 2011).

1.4.3 NON-EQUIVALENCE AT WORD LEVEL

First of all, I would like to clarify the definition of equivalence. As Bassnet (1980) asserts “the translation of idioms takes us a stage further in considering the question of meaning and translation, for idioms, like puns, are culture bound”. Translation should be made not on the basis of the linguistic elements of the sentence, nor on the basis of a corresponding or similar image contained in the phrase, but on the basis of idiomatic function: the source language phrase should be replaced by a target language phrase that fulfills the same intention in the target language culture. In this case the translator's bilingual competence helps him only in the negative sense of telling him that any “equivalence” in this case cannot be “found” but will have to be “created.” In his definition of translation equivalence, Popovic (1976) distinguishes four types: the first is linguistic equivalence, which implies linguistic homogeneity given by a word-for-word translation; the second is paradigmatic equivalence, in which there is equivalence of the elements of grammar, which Popovic considers more important than lexical equivalence; the third is stylistic (translation) equivalence, in which there is functional equivalence of the elements in both the original and the translation; and finally textual (syntagmatic) equivalence, in which there is formal equivalence.

Conversely, Nida (1964) identifies two types of equivalence, formal and dynamic, where formal equivalence “focuses attention on the message itself, both in form and content”. As Bassnet (1980) points out, Nida calls this type of translation “gloss translation,” which aims to enable the reader to understand the source language context as much as possible. On the other hand, dynamic equivalence is based on the principle of equivalent effect, according to which the relationship between receiver and message must be identical to that between the original receivers and the source language

message. This is consistent with the works of other linguists such as Bassnett (1980) who states that equivalence in translation, therefore, should not be considered as a search for sameness, since sameness cannot exist even between two target language versions of the same text, far less between the source language version and the target language version. Along the same lines, Baker (1992: 17-18) gives her definition of non-equivalence at word level: a phenomenon which occurs when the target language does not have an equivalent word precise enough to express every nuance of the one used in the source language. Baker (1992:21-26) highlights many common problems of the non-equivalence: at first, she mentions the culture-specific items as a problem which can appear when the word used in the source language expresses a concept totally unknown in the target language. As mentioned, these concepts refer to specific cultural items, religious beliefs, social customs, types of food or political bodies. An example of an abstract English concept which is notoriously difficult to translate into other languages is the one expressed by the word *privacy*. “Privacy” is a very 'English' concept which is rarely understood by people from other cultures so a translator can find difficult the translation of this term.

Another problem can arise when the source-language concept is not lexicalized in the target language: in this case the word to be translated expresses a concept that is known in the target language but is not lexicalized, and therefore does not have a specific word to express it. For example, the word *savoury* has no equivalent in many languages, although it expresses a concept which is easy to understand. Translators may find it difficult when the source-language word is semantically complex; often a source language word, even though it is a single word, can have a set of meanings that can be very complex, since languages by their nature synthesize even complex concepts into coincident forms.

There are also cases where the target language makes different distinctions in meaning than the source language, and it may be difficult to get readers to understand the exact nuance of meaning of the original text, or it may be difficult to pick a nuance that is not mentioned in the original text. This is because what may be relevant in some languages and cultural contexts may not be relevant to others, creating these barriers to translation.

For example, Indonesian makes a distinction between going out in the rain without the knowledge that it is raining (*kehujanan*) and going out in the rain with the knowledge that it is raining (*hujan-hujanan*). English does not make this distinction, with the result that if an English text referred to going out in the rain, the Indonesian translator may find it difficult to choose the right equivalent, unless the context makes it clear whether or not the person in question knew that it was raining.

There are some cases in which the target language may lack general words indicating the semantic field because it only has specific words to define that particular concept (hyponyms). Or in other cases it can manifest the exact opposite of the above. The target language lacks specific words (hyponyms) to describe certain concepts, while it has only general forms. So far, we have talked about the many problems that non-equivalence can cause a translator, but Baker also provides some strategies that professional translators can use to deal with them. The first is the strategy of the “translation by cultural substitution” and using this strategy, translators replace a word or expression typical of the source language with a target language that does not have the same meaning but is predicted to have a similar impact on the reader of the target language.

The second one is the “translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation”. This strategy is particularly common when it comes to specific elements of culture. In these cases, the translator uses the loan word of the source text and then explains its meaning, so that if the word is used again in the text, it can be understood by everyone. And the third one is the “translation by omission”. Sometimes the translator may also choose to omit a word or phrase used in the source text, but it is not of fundamental importance and does not affect the reader’s understanding of the text. This strategy is often used when the explanation of the word or expression in question would be too long and complex and could cause the reader to be distracted. Of course, this strategy presupposes an inevitable loss of meaning from the original text and is therefore seldom and sparingly used, only when the fluidity of the text can be seriously affected by lengthy and complex explanations.

CHAPTER 2

FERRANTE'S LITERARY WORLD

In this chapter, the focus is on the Neapolitan Quartet, consisting of four novels written by Elena Ferrante and translated into English by the American translator Ann Goldstein. After a preliminary overview of the reasons behind the foreign success of the translated versions of the books and the influence of this success on the Italian criticism, there will be an analysis of the author's language and the role of Neapolitan dialect in the tetralogy.

2.1 ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF FERRANTE'S NOVELS

The novels taken into account in this dissertation are the four novels which are part of the tetralogy 'My brilliant friend', also known as the Neapolitan novels or Neapolitan Quartet, written by the pseudonymous Italian author Elena Ferrante. The series includes *L'amica geniale* (2011), *Storia del nuovo cognome* (2012), *Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta* (2013) and *Storia della bambina perduta* (2014). All of the Neapolitan novels, which were first edited in Italy by Edizioni e/o, have been translated into English by Ann Goldstein for the publishing house Europa Editions (New York) and the English-language titles of the novels are *My brilliant friend* (2012), *The story of a new name* (2013), *Those who leave and those who stay* (2014) and *The story of the lost child* (2015).

In 2004, publishers Sandro and Sandra Ferri, owners of the publishing house "Edizioni E/O" based in Rome, decided to open an American branch of their publishing house called "Europa Editions". They introduced Ann Goldstein to Elena Ferrante's books since they were looking for a translator to publish Ferrante's novel *The Days of Abandonment* in English (Tremonti 2015). Ann Goldstein has been working as a translator for more than 15 years. Her first translation was that of an essay contained in *Checkov in Sondrio* written by the Italian author Aldo Buzzi, first published in *The New Yorker* in 1992. Goldstein graduated in literature at Bennington College in 1971 and joined the staff of *The New Yorker* in 1974 as a proof reader. In 1987 she was promoted to editor and became the head of the copy department, a role she held until 2017. During her career she received numerous recognitions including the Pen/Renato Poggioli prize

in 1994 for translating Aldo Buzzzi's collection *Journey to the Land of Flies and Other Travels* and a prestigious fellowship with the Guggenheim Foundation (Guggenheim).

As a consequence of Ferrante's anonymity, her translator Ann Goldstein does not know her personally, despite the working relationship that has bound them for many years, since Goldstein started the translation of Ferrante's novels *I giorni dell'abbandono* (2002) and *L'amore molesto* (1992), the first two of Ferrante's books published by Europa Editions. The two have always communicated through Ferrante's Italian editors, Sandro Ferri and Sandra Ozzola of Edizioni e/o, the only ones who know the writer personally, as testified by the letters addressed to them contained in *La Frantumaglia* (2003:11-21).

2.2 FERRANTE FEVER

As Goldstein herself asserted (Dodson, 2016), when *The days of Abandonment* was published in 2005, it was well received but did not have a significant impact on the US literary world. The turning point was James Wood's article published in *The New Yorker* in 2013, after the American release of *My brilliant friend*. Gradually the "Ferrante fever" began. The question of the author's anonymity intrigued English-speaking readers and more and more often the translator's presence was requested at debates, discussions and events, to represent Ferrante as her "avatar" or rather "the face of Ferrante". This case is very peculiar among others because the translator is given almost as much importance as the writer.

This assumption is supported by Goldstein herself (Dodson 2016) who claims that this attention toward her gave rise to a golden age for translators, bringing the importance of their role and their work into the spotlight. The expression "Ferrante fever", as De Rogatis (2018) observes, was born in a New York bookstore in 2015 and refers to the addiction aroused from Elena Ferrante's books and the related media and literary excitement.

2.3 THE IMPACT OF THE TELEVISION SERIES

One of the elements that contributed to the outbreak of “Ferrante Fever” is the TV adaptation of *My brilliant friend* co-produced by HBO and the Italian broadcaster RAI. The TV series went into production in the summer of 2017 and the first season was first broadcast in the US on the HBO channel and in Italy on RAI 1 in November 2018. The second season premiered in Italy on RAI 1 in February 2020, while in the US it premiered on the HBO channel in March 2020. The third season premiered in Italy on RAI 1 in the US on HBO in February 2022. All three seasons were broadcast in English-speaking countries in the original language with English subtitles¹. The TV series consists of eight episodes for each season, amounting to a total of 24 episodes. The fourth season was announced by RAI and HBO on 22 March 2022² and had its world premiere at the 23rd Tribeca Festival held in New York in August 2024 (Rai, 2024).

All of the scripts were written by Elena Ferrante, Francesco Piccolo (2014 Strega Prize), Laura Paolucci and Saverio Costanzo, who is the director of the first two seasons³. Daniele Luchetti directed the third season⁴, and Laura Bispuri is the director of the fourth and final season⁵. Critics had contrasting opinions about the TV adaptation; it impressed many critics such as Miranda Popkey, who called the series “a re-creation, competent and faithful, of the events described in the novels of Ferrante's Neapolitan Quartet”. According to Popkey (2018): “the performances are convincing, the movement from scene to scene is pleasurable, the music is complementary but

¹ Wikipedia, L'amica geniale (serie televisiva).

[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27amica_geniale_\(serie_televisiva\)](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%27amica_geniale_(serie_televisiva))

² Warner Bros. 2024. HBO and RAI renew “My Brilliant Friend” for a fourth season. Warner Bros. Pressroom. <https://press.wbd.com/na/media-release/hbo-0/my-brilliant-friend-story-new-name/hbo-and-rai-renew-my-brilliant-friend-fourth-season>

³ Rai Ufficio Stampa. 2018, December 4. HBO e RAI annunciano la seconda stagione de “L'amica geniale”. Rai.it. <https://www.rai.it/ufficiostampa/assets/template/us-articolo.html?ssiPath=/articoli/2018/12/HBO-E-RAI-ANNUNCIANO-LA-SECONDA-STAGIONE-DE-LAMICA-GENIALE-c526165f-01de-402b-9106-e4a117187f6e-ssi.html>

⁴ Rai Ufficio Stampa. 2020, April 30. RAI e HBO annunciano la terza stagione de “L'amica geniale”. Rai.it. <https://www.rai.it/ufficiostampa/assets/template/us-articolo.html?ssiPath=/articoli/2020/04/RAI-e-HBO-annunciano-la-terza-stagione-de-Lamica-geniale-982b54d0-bf59-4cc4-b596-26932898c10b-ssi.html>

⁵ Rai Ufficio Stampa. 2023, January 30. L'amica geniale: In corso riprese della quarta stagione diretta da Laura Bispuri. Rai.it. <https://www.rai.it/ufficiostampa/assets/template/us-articolo.html?ssiPath=/articoli/2023/01/Lamica-geniale-in-corso-riprese-della-quarta-stagione-diretta-da-Laura-Bispuri-fa43185a-950d-49b3-81fc-a299cedbd123-ssi.html>

unobtrusive, and the set decoration is impeccable". A similar position was expressed by Daniel D'Addario (2018), who claimed that the series was a "translation of the novel to the screen that retains some of its literary qualities".

Conversely, the series did not fulfil the expectations of many critics including Nicole Clark (2018), who called it a "mediocre HBO series". According to Clark (2018), the script's "obsessive fidelity" to the novel damaged the series, since it emphasises the "wrong details". She stated that in the novels, the narrative was built around the world view of Elena Greco (Lenù), who narrated the events that had shaped her life and her friendship with Lila. "The novel is structured around her waves of adolescent emotions", while in contrast, the HBO adaptation is structured around very literal events that happen in the city and tend to culminate in specific cases of physical violence and despair, and this is much less impactful than the narrative in Ferrante's novels (Clark, 2018).

In certain ways, however, it turns out that the TV series enriched the novels: according to Popkey (2018), the Italian casting directors, Sara Casani and Laura Muccino, were said to have managed in populating the neighbourhood with very "sloppy, wrinkly, and distorted" faces, more than many American readers could have imagined for these characters. She goes on to say that beauty is often only an indicator of class, and the cast directors tried to convey the misery, the class struggle of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood through the appearance of the actors (Popkey 2018).

Lastly, there is the linguistic dimension: Ferrante's novels are written in a fairly standard Italian, but on screen, the life of the neighbourhood is translated into a very vivid dialect, in comparison to the voice of the elderly Lenù (the narrator) who speaks with accurate and correct diction. The contrast (the clarity of the narration against the urgent chaos of the dialogue) is an indicator of the distance between the world Lenù aspires to and the one she was born into (Popkey 2018). Ferrante herself commented on the use of dialect in the screen adaptations of her books, in her correspondence with the Italian director Mario Martone⁶ during the production of his movie based on Ferrante's novel

⁶ Letters contained in the book *La Frantumaglia*, 2003.

L'amore molesto. Ferrante said she was pleasantly impressed by the way the director was able to inhabit the empty verbal space left by the dialect in the novel, because, as well as in the Neapolitan novels, in *L'amore molesto* the language is a standard Italian. In the movie, however, the dialect had no choice but to emerge in certain moments: in the book the intrusive presence of dialect was often implicit, but on the screen, it necessarily had to be made explicit. Ferrante says that Martone's use of dialect contributed greatly to the emotion the film provokes. The background noises and unscripted dialogues contribute to the "dialectal flood" which often surrounds the characters in her books and which most of the time is an intimidating signal and a recall of the language of childhood violence (La Frantumaglia 2003: 30-31).

2.4 LITERARY CRITICISM DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ITALY AND THE USA

2.4.1 THE RECEPTION OF FERRANTE'S NOVELS

It is appropriate to point out that the Italian reception of Ferrante's novels occurred during the years 2011-2015, while the American equivalent took place in 2012-2015. Years therefore passed between the Italian and the foreign reception, and as Schwarz (2020) claims, Italian critics changed a great deal after the good foreign reception and after the beginning of "Ferrante Fever". Schwartz (2020) adds that the American reception of *My Brilliant Friend* began in the fall of 2012, in conjunction with the Italian publication of *Storia del nuovo cognome*. The first volume of the Neapolitan Novels in English, was immediately acclaimed by critics.

For instance, on *The Boston Globe*, Eugenia Williamson called Ferrante a "genius of the avant-garde" and encouraged people to "read anything that bears her name"⁷ and there soon followed the publication of James Wood's article "Women on the Verge", which as mentioned above, represented a turning point for Ferrante's popularity abroad. Wood's (2013) enthusiastic review placed Ferrante in a literary and cultural context: "My Brilliant Friend may remind the reader of the neorealist films of De Sica and Visconti, or perhaps of Giovanni Verga's tales of Sicilian poverty" and according to Schwarz (2020) comparing Ferrante to the national icon Giovanni Verga was a decisive step.

⁷ Eugenia Williamson, 'My Brilliant Friend by Elena Ferrante,' *The Boston Globe*, October 20, 2012 in Schwarz (2020)

2.4.2 THE REASON FOR AMERICAN SUCCESS

One might ask why US critics were so enthusiastic about these Neapolitan novels. De Rogatis (2015) offers a number of reasons. First, there is the representation of the city of Naples and the oscillation between its contradictions. Then there is a new model of female identity that includes both archaic and contemporary features, the length of the narrative, similar to the length of American television series, and finally, its analogies with the author's presumed biography⁸ (she is is a pseudonymous author whose identity is unknown)⁹. Along the same lines, Quart (2015) feels that what probably fascinated American readers is the sensational social ascent of the protagonist. Such economic ascents have become a rarity in American literature, where usually the poor have simply made the mistake of being born to the wrong parents and tend to remain poor. In Ferrante's novels, Elena leaves a poor neighbourhood in Naples to study in Florence on a scholarship, marries and joins a wealthy family of academics, and becomes a writer. According to Quart (2015), there was a time in American literature when these disparities and deprivations could have been the focus of fiction. Instead, one needs to transport oneself to Ferrante's fictional Naples to read a story that is willing to happen again in the United States.

Similarly, Marsilio (2015) states that "this is a saga and world-fiction¹⁰ destined, from the conception, to be launched on a worldwide scale, given the simplicity of the language and syntax and the clever construction of the plot." Marsilio (2015) goes on to say that the label of *Neapolitan Novels* as a subtitle is entirely absent from the original version. Perhaps this strong geographical localization is the only exception to the typical rules of world fiction and contributed to the novel's foreign success since outside Italy the description of a stereotypical south is probably still widespread. This factor possibly represents a potential key to the interpretation of Ferrante Fever.

⁸ De Rogatis, 'Elena Ferrante and Made in Italy' in Schwarz (2020).

⁹ <https://www.edizionieo.it/review/4005>

¹⁰ The concept of world fiction refers to a pre-packaged narrative for wide circulation due to established aesthetical criteria and forms, and largely non-literary strategies in order to ensure a massive editorial launch: the novels of Paulo Coelho are an example. World fiction is mostly characterized by the setting in places with a supranational character, suitable for a globalized reader and by possible trans-codification into television and/or film fiction (Marsilio 2015).

2.4.3 STORY OF A NEW NAME

Schwarz's analysis (2020) points out that after the publication in English-speaking countries of the second volume of the Neapolitan Novels (in September 2013) entitled *The Story of a New Name*, American critics were again enthusiastic about it. For example, in the New York Times, Joseph Luzzi (2013) considers Ferrante from a historical-literary perspective, drawing parallels with Alessandro Manzoni's classic masterpiece, *I promessi sposi* (The Betrothed), comparing the scene in which Lenù throws Lila's notebooks into the Arno to Manzoni's famous visit to Florence in order to improve his Florentine ("risciacquare i panni in Arno").

2.4.4 THE CHANGE OF ITALIAN CRITICISM

Schwartz's analysis (2020) however, brings to light that compared to reviews of the second part, Italian reviews of the third volume of the tetralogy, *Storia di chi fugge e chi resta* (2013), express a more understanding attitude toward Ferrante. The international success of the work has been considered by many reviewers, such as Anna Folli in the *Gazzetta di Parma*¹¹ and Annalena Benini in *Il Foglio*¹², who repeatedly reiterate the appreciation of international critics. So, the overall picture that Schwartz (2020) highlights is that the reviewers of the third volume recognize that they are facing an impressive contribution to contemporary Italian literature.

Schwartz's analysis (2020) of these reviews demonstrates that the attitude of Italian critics toward the *L'amica geniale* tetralogy changed significantly between 2011 and 2015. While prior to her international success Ferrante was barely compared to a few other writers, by the end of the Quartet she is being compared to some of the greatest Italian and world authors. In support of what has been said so far, as Schwartz (2020) highlights in the Italian reviews of the fourth and final volume of the Quartet, *Story of the Lost Girl Child* (2014), most critics comment on Ferrante's international success, for example Pier Luigi Razzano in *Repubblica* who wrote "Ferrante has conquered the world"¹³

¹¹ <https://www.edizionieo.it/review/3538>

¹² <https://www.ilfoglio.it/articoli/2013/12/09/news/le-amiche-geniali-55886/>

¹³ Napoli- Marrone, 'Ferrante's last Naples'; Razzano, 'Elena Ferrante end of saga in Schwartz (2020).

2.4.5 NEGATIVE ITALIAN CRITICISM

There are some exceptions, however, some critics such as Romano Luperini reviewed the *Neapolitan Novels* negatively even after their international success. Luperini (2015) makes a negative criticism of the last novel of the tetralogy *Story of the lost child*, stating that he found it a gloomy set of monotonous dynamics: "the psychological dynamics, the political events of that period and the landscape are described only with generic and clichéd allusions, [...] the narrative voice blurs, explains and mediates erasing any dramatic potential, [...] the language is bleached, the style constantly uniform." The critic, however, raises a question that prompts a very interesting reflection. He wonders if his negative review depends on an unconscious amount of sexism, considering that, on the other hand, many of his female colleagues (whom he greatly esteems) liked the works very much and that they had inspired very serious essays and studies about it.

Paolo di Paolo (2014) also remained on his negative judgment, saying that although "a miracle happened to Elena Ferrante that happens to very few Italian authors: being discovered and celebrated in America", calling this popularity "disproportionate" and asserting that "American readers and critics like Ferrante's novels because the plots are well-oiled, the narrative style is solid, the language is plain, and Naples is a background that stands there like a tourist print with Vesuvius and the gulf". Finally, he wonders why some "sophisticated and exigent" Italian litterateurs such as Fofi and Guglielmi have honoured her so much.

2.5 FERRANTE'S LANGUAGE / CULTURE IN THE TETRALOGY

2.5.1 THE INCIPIT OF THE STORY: DIALECT AND ITALIAN IN THE ADULT ELENA

From the very start of the story, which we can find in the first pages of the first book *My brilliant friend* (2012: 15-19) we can see the initiation of a process that will be repeated throughout the tetralogy: in the opening chapter, the protagonist, Elena Greco, receives a phone call from the son of her childhood friend, Lila Cerullo, who has mysteriously disappeared. The news activates the memory and narrative device, which covers in the

first volume the years of childhood and youth of the two girls, from the beginning of their friendship to Lila's marriage. In the second volume the narration focuses on the adolescence of the two friends, their first love troubles, Elena's university studies and her becoming a writer, while in the third volume it focuses on their adult life, the end of their marriages and the difficulties in affirming themselves and being mothers. In the last volume, Ferrante tells the slow end of their friendship, due to the disappearance of Lila's daughter and her consequent physical and mental decline that will lead to her disappearance in turn. After the first few pages, the narrator's Turin present disappears and her Neapolitan past decisively emerges on the scene (Benedetti, 2012).

2.5.2 DIALECT AND HOSTILITY

The distinction between Italian and Neapolitan dialect is therefore immediately perceived. The dialect takes on a negative connotation in almost the entirety of the saga, because it is confined to the cruelty of life in the Neapolitan suburb where the two friends grew up. The life in the *rione* heavily affects the way the characters communicate. As Benedetti (2012) states, Lila's "meanness" is soon defined as a reflection of the world around her and as a defence device. That of the *rione* was a world where local bullies could force a girl into a car without anyone even thinking of reporting them, where both a compliment and an insult could lead to violent assaults, where money had mysterious origins and parental abuse was the norm, where the prevailing tribal hierarchy violently impose itself. It is Elena herself who describes the life in the neighbourhood:

Non ho nostalgia della nostra infanzia, è piena di violenza. ci succedeva di tutto, in casa e fuori, ogni giorno, ma non ricordo di aver mai pensato che la vita che c'era capitata fosse particolarmente brutta. la vita era così e basta, crescevamo con l'obbligo di renderla difficile agli altri prima che gli altri la rendessero difficile a noi¹⁴ (*L'amica geniale*: 33).

¹⁴ "I have no nostalgia for our childhood, it was full of violence. Everything used to happen to us, in the house and outside, every day, but I do not remember ever thinking that the life that happened to us was particularly bad. Life was just like that; we grew up with the obligation to make it difficult for others before others made it difficult for us" (my translation).

The ambivalence between badness and goodness that coexists in Lila's character emerges through her way of expressing herself: Benedetti (2012) states that Lila possesses a marked linguistic awareness, an ability to dominate the dialect:

Parlava sempre in dialetto come tutti noi ma all'occorrenza sfoderava un italiano da libro, ricorrendo anche a parole come *avvezzo*, *lussureggiante*, *ben volentieri*¹⁵ (*L'amica geniale*: 44).

The dialect is thus a self-defence shield, the linguistic counterpart of her “meanness”:

[...] aveva la lingua affilata, inventava soprannomi umilianti e pur sfoggiando con la maestra vocaboli della lingua italiana che nessuno conosceva, con noi parlava solo un dialetto sferzante, pieno di male parole, che stroncava sul nascere ogni sentimento d'amore¹⁶ (*L'amica geniale*: 57).

2.5.3 DIALECT AS AN OBSCURE PRESENCE

According to Alfonzetti (2020), dialect plays a fundamental role in the narrative development of the novel, despite its being a silent character: it occurs exclusively in the form of metalinguistic annotations, in which the author clarifies that a certain protagonist speaks in dialect, although the reported speech contains no dialectal elements. In support of this thesis, Benedetti (2012) also claims that in the tetralogy, dialectal expressions are very rare, while conversely the annotations indicating the specific linguistic usages of the characters are numerous:

Antonio mi diceva parole d'amore in dialetto, me le diceva nella bocca, sul collo, incalzante¹⁷ (*Storia del nuovo cognome*: 25)

Lila cercò di tranquillizzarmi, tentò persino di farmi dimenticare che aveva di nuovo detto male del mio libro. Cominciò in dialetto e poi attaccò a parlare in quel suo italiano delle grandi occasioni che non finiva mai di sorprendermi¹⁸ (*Storia della bambina perduta*: 275)

¹⁵ ‘She always spoke in dialect like the rest of us but when necessary she exhibited a bookish Italian, recurring to words like *avvezzo*, *lussureggiante*, *ben volentieri*’ (my translation).

¹⁶ ‘[...] she had a sharp tongue, she invented humiliating nicknames, and even though she used Italian words that no one knew with the teacher, with us she only spoke a rude dialect, full of bad words, that killed at birth any feeling of love’ (my translation).

¹⁷ ‘Antonio spoke words of love in dialect, he spoke them in my mouth, on my neck, insisting’ (Story of a new name, translated by Ann Goldstein).

Librandi (2019) argues that as regards linguistic solutions, Ferrante uses non-standard methods. Ferrante's language neither coincides with classic multilingual literature nor with a neutral writing of Italian without interference. In the first three novels, dialect rarely appears, but acts as a silent presence, that at the same time is intrusive. The author successfully makes us imagine its sound. This effect is achieved by inserting metalinguistic notations into the prose of the novels. Consequently, there are considerably fewer metalinguistic notations referring to Italian, as there is no need to justify the use of the standard language. They are mostly used to specify the type of Italian used by the characters, to emphasise its degree of grammatical correctness or formality, sometimes emphasising its inadequacy in relation to the context:

Arrivai al collegio piena di timidezze e di goffaggini. Mi resi conto subito che parlavo un italiano libresco che a volte sfiorava il ridicolo, specialmente quando, nel bel mezzo di un periodo fin troppo curato, mi mancava una parola e riempivo il vuoto italianizzando un vocabolo dialettale: cominciai a faticare per correggermi. Sapevo poco o niente di galateo, parlavo a voce molto alta, masticavo facendo rumore con la bocca: dovetti prendere atto del disagio degli altri e tentare di controllarmi¹⁹ (Storia del nuovo cognome: 331-332).

Dede ed Elsa parlavano un buon italiano, ma a volte le sentivo dalla finestra o mentre salivano le scale, e mi accorgevo che soprattutto Elsa faceva uso di un dialetto molto aggressivo, a volte osceno. La rimproveravo, lei fingeva di pentirsi. Ma sapevo che ci voleva molta autodisciplina per resistere al fascino della maleducazione e a tante altre tentazioni²⁰ (Storia della bambina perduta: 259).

Mi venne in mente che fosse ormai una questione linguistica. Lei ricorreva all'italiano come a una barriera, io cercavo di spingerla verso il dialetto, la nostra lingua della franchezza. Ma mentre il suo

¹⁸ "Lila tried to soothe me, she even tried to make me forget that she had again been critical of my book. She started off in dialect and then began to speak in the Italian she brought out on important occasions, which never failed to surprise me" (Story of the lost child, translated by Ann Goldstein).

¹⁹ "I arrived at the university very timid and awkward. I immediately realized I spoke a bookish Italian that at times was almost absurd, especially when, right in the middle of a much too carefully composed sentence, I needed a word and transformed a dialect word into Italian to fill the gap: I began to struggle to correct myself. I knew almost nothing about etiquette, I spoke in a loud voice, I chewed noisily; I became aware of other people's embarrassment and tried to restrain myself" (Story of a new name, translated by Ann Goldstein).

²⁰ "At home, Dede and Elsa spoke a good Italian, but occasionally I heard them from the window or coming up the stairs, and I realized that Elsa especially used a very aggressive, sometimes obscene dialect. I reprimanded her, she pretended to be sorry. But I knew that it took a lot of self-discipline to resist the lure of bad behaviour and so many other temptations" (Story of the lost child, translated by Ann Goldstein).

italiano era tradotto dal dialetto, il mio dialetto era sempre più tradotto dall'italiano, e parlavamo entrambe una lingua finta. Bisognava invece che sbottasse, che le parole diventassero incontrollate²¹ (Storia della bambina perduta: 352).

2.5.4 FERRANTE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH DIALECT

The reasons for these linguistic choices are explained many times by Ferrante herself, in several interviews and books. Ferrante (Repubblica 2017) states that rather than imitating dialect and faithfully reproducing it, she has always preferred to describe its role, given that “le imitazioni letterarie dell'oralità dialettale [...] mi hanno sempre infastidita, specie quando neutralizzano con l'ironia una lingua che sentivo violenta e che mi metteva ansia”.^{22/23} The author affirms that she has always privileged narrating “real things” and describing them meticulously (Ferrante, 2021: 47-48), and for this reason she collected many pages of notes from her direct experience. These allowed her to create characters out of people she had met: she wrote down their gestures and ways of speaking, describing landscapes and social dynamics, and in doing all this she tried to let the dialect have its place “despite the discomfort” (Ferrante, 2021: 52-53).

According to Ferrante (2021), without its language, Naples could not be faithfully portrayed. Several important passages in *L'amore molesto* and in *L'amica geniale* were originally written in dialect, but were ultimately removed or transformed into Neapolitan-style Italian by the author. This is because dialectal vocabulary and syntax, as soon as enter the writing, seem even more false to her than Italian. She felt that transcription should give an effective mimesis of orality, but on the contrary, it seemed to her that once written, Neapolitan was sterilised and lost the passion and sense of danger that it had often communicated to her (Ferrante, 2021:106-107).

Ferrante explains that in her childhood and adolescence, Neapolitan dialect was the language of rude male vulgarity, the language with which he was addressed in the street,

²¹ “It occurred to me that it was now a linguistic question. She resorted to Italian as if to a barrier; I tried to push her toward dialect, our language of candour. But while her Italian was translated from dialect, my dialect was increasingly translated from Italian, and we both spoke a false language. She needed to explode, lose control of the words” (Story of the lost child, translated by Ann Goldstein).

²² Olimpia Zagnoli's interview on Repubblica, 3 July 2017 in Alfonzetti (2020).

²³ “Literary imitations of dialectal orality [...] have always annoyed me, especially when they neutralise with irony a language that I felt was violent and that made me anxious” (my translation).

or conversely, the “sugary language with which women were circuited” (Ferrante, 2021:106-107). She therefore decided that dialect was more effective, in literary making, to be used not as a habit of realistic storytelling, but as a “rivolo sotterraneo, una cadenza dentro la lingua, una didascalia, un disturbo della scrittura che di colpo irrompe con poche parole di solito oscene” ²⁴ (Ferrante, 2021:107).

2.5.5 FERRANTE’S VOCABULARY

Benedetti (2012), underlines that in Ferrante's fiction there is a constant need to create a vocabulary which can be close to her own personal experience. In Ferrante's literary production, dialect is not the vehicle of affectivity and authenticity as it is conventionally known, but rather is a language that forces a very young subject to accept his family and social reality, without choice. Dialect is made up of fractured sounds, disconnected from grammar; it is a language that is not chosen, not studied, not controlled, a language that can bring to light childhood traumas.

2.5.6 SMARGINATURA

In her works, Elena Ferrante coined new expressions, one of which is the very famous *smarginatura* translated into English, with difficulty, by Ann Goldstein as “dissolving margins”. In *L’amica Geniale*, Lila experiences this sensation to which she gives the name *smarginatura*, which causes a sudden dissolving of the margins of people and things:

Le era accaduto per la prima volta di avvertire entità sconosciute che spezzavano il profilo del mondo e ne mostravano la natura spaventosa²⁵ (*L’amica geniale*: 87)

Le stava accadendo la cosa a cui ho già fatto cenno e che lei in seguito chiamò smarginatura. Fu—mi disse—come se in una notte di luna piena sul mare, una massa nerissima di temporale avanzasse per il cielo, ingoiasse ogni chiarore, logorasse la circonferenza del cerchio lunare e formasse il disco lucente

²⁴ “Subterranean trickle, a cadence within the language, a caption, a disturbance in the writing that suddenly bursts in with a few usually obscene words” (my translation).

²⁵ “It had happened to her for the first time to experience unknown entities breaking the margins of the world and showing its frightening nature” (my translation).

riducendolo alla sua vera natura di grezza materia insensata. Lila immaginò, vide, sentì, come se fosse vero, suo fratello che si rompeva²⁶ (*L'amica geniale*: 172).

Che le persone, ancor più delle cose, perdessero i loro margini e dilagassero senza forma è ciò che ha spaventato più Lila nel corso della sua vita²⁷ (*Storia del nuovo cognome*: 355)

For Benedetti (2012), the *smarginatura* refers to the perception of reality beyond appearances, in a sort of epiphany, and the importance of this phenomenon in *L'amica geniale* is underlined by the fact that it is associated with one of the novel's rare chronological annotations, 31 December 1958. De Rogatis (2018) defines the *smarginatura* as “the loss of the borders which define forms [...] the escape from the pre-established margins of conventional reality”. Lila gave this definition on 23 November 1980, when she was terrified by the earthquake in Naples:

Usò proprio smarginare. Fu in quell'occasione che ricorse per la prima volta a quel verbo. [...] disse che i contorni di cose e persone erano delicati, che si spezzavano come il filo del cotone. Mormorò che per lei era così da sempre, una cosa si smarginava e pioveva su un'altra, era tutto uno sciogliersi di materie eterogenee, un confondersi e rimescolarsi. [...] un'emozione tattile si scioglieva in visiva, una visiva si scioglieva in olfattiva²⁸ (*Storia della bambina perduta*, 2014: 161-162).

2.5.7 ITALIAN AS AN ESCAPE ROUTE

As Benedetti (2012) points out, the microcosm of the protagonists' native suburb in *L'amica geniale* imposes itself as the only existing reality until Lila proposes to Elena to go to the seaside, passing through a tunnel that defines the demarcation between the two universes.

²⁶ “It was - she said to me - as if on a full moon night over the sea, a black mass of thunderstorm would advance through the sky, devour all brightness, consume the circumference of the lunar circle and form the shining disc, reducing it to its true nature of raw senseless matter. Lila imagined, saw, felt, as if it were true, her brother breaking” (my translation).

²⁷ “The fact that people, even more than things, lose their edges and expand without any shape is what frightened Lila the most throughout her life” (my translation).

²⁸ “She actually used *smarginare*. It was on that occasion that she first employed that verb. [...] she said that the margins of things and people were delicate, that they broke like the thread of cotton. She murmured that for her it had always been like that, one thing slipping away and raining down on another, it was all a melting of heterogeneous matters, a blending and shuffling. [...] a tactile emotion dissolved into a visual one, a visual one dissolved into an olfactory one” (my translation).

The adventure then enables Elena to perceive, for the first time, the possibility of escaping from the world of the *rione* (this episode can be linked to one of the author's childhood memories evoked in *La Frantumaglia*: 180-83). Benedetti (2012) goes on to say that compared to the enclosure represented by the dialect, Italian in the tetralogy promises openness to the future, rationality, and rules in order to put one's inner world in order. The emancipation of the protagonists therefore passes through the acquisition of Italian, while dialect on the other hand generates discomfort and represents an irrational, archaic and tribal dimension.

Along the same lines, Librandi (2019) states that in the novels, Italian and dialect are complementary, with the former being the language in which the texts are written, and the latter being the idiom spoken by most of the characters imagined by the reader. Ferrante also incorporates this inner struggle into the narrative, when Elena, writing her novel, is struggling over which dose to assign to Italian and dialect:

[...] l'autrice del libro ponderoso che stavo limando – o a volte riscrivendo – e che sarebbe uscito presto. Nella prima versione – mi dicevo – ho messo troppo dialetto. E cancellavo, rifacevo. Poi mi pareva di averne messo troppo poco e ne aggiungevo²⁹ (*Storia della bambina perduta*, 2014: 256).

In Ferrante's novels, dialect appears but is silent, because the narration is entirely rendered in standard Italian, which in some cases may suggest a translation from dialect (Librandi, 2019):

Non mi voglio calmare, gridò, strunz, riportami subito a casa mia, quello che hai detto adesso lo devi ripetere davanti a quegli altri due uomini di merda. E solo quando pronunciò quell'espressione in dialetto, *uommen'e mmerd*, si accorse di aver spezzato la barriera dei toni compassati di suo marito³⁰ (*Storia del nuovo cognome*: 33)

²⁹ “[...] the author of the ponderous book I was shaping - or sometimes rewriting - and which would be out soon. In the first version - I was telling myself - I put too much dialect. And I was deleting, rewriting. Then I felt I had put in too little and I added more” (my translation).

³⁰ “I don’t want to calm down, she shouted, you piece of shit, take me home right now, repeat what you just said in front of those two other shit men. And only when she uttered that expression in dialect, shit men, *uommen’e mmerd*, did she notice that she had broken the barrier of her husband’s measured tones (Story of a new name, translated by Ann Goldstein).

Lì pare che sia stato inventato il gioco di menare *le prete*, le *petriàte* che facevamo anche noi da bambine, ti ricordi, quando Enzo mi colpì in fronte – ho ancora la cicatrice – e si disperò e mi regalò un serto di sorbe³¹ (*Storia della bambina perduta*, 2014: 425).

There are a few lines marked by metalinguistic notations that suggest that they were spoken in dialect but are reproduced in the narrative in neutral Italian:

Volevo che dicesse nel napoletano sincero della nostra infanzia: che cazzo vuoi, Lenù, sto così perché ho perso mia figlia, e forse è viva, forse è morta, ma non riesco a sopportare nessuna di queste due possibilità, perché se è viva è viva lontano da me, sta in un posto dove le succedono cose orribili³² (*Storia della bambina perduta*, 2014: 352).

³¹ “It seems that the game of throwing the *prete* was invented there, the stone throwing that we did as girls, you remember, when Enzo hit me in the forehead—I still have the scar—and he was desperate and gave me a garland of sorb apples” (Story of the lost child, translated by Ann Goldstein).

³² “I wanted her to say in the authentic Neapolitan of our childhood: What the fuck do you want, Lenù, I’m like this because I lost my daughter, and maybe she’s alive, maybe she’s dead, but I can’t bear either of those possibilities, because if she’s alive she’s alive far away from me, she’s in a place where horrible things are happening to her” (Story of the lost child, translated by Ann Goldstein).

CHAPTER 3

GOLDSTEIN: THE BRILLIANT TRANSLATOR

This chapter presents an analysis of the cultural and linguistic solutions adopted by Ann Goldstein in her English translations of Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan novels. The aim is to understand and analyse the translation strategies adopted by the translator, who deals with complex linguistic issues and a variety of challenges, since the original text is written entirely in standard Italian. In the first part I will illustrate Goldstein's overall approach to the original text; in the second part I will carry out a translation analysis in accordance with the strategies presented in chapter 1; and in the last part of the chapter, I will highlight some of the passages that seem to have lost their deeper meaning in the translation from Italian into English, precisely because of the lack of effectiveness of the techniques used by the translator.

3.1 GOLDSTEIN'S APPROACH

In this section, I will illustrate Ann Goldstein's approach to translation starting from her interviews in which she talks about her relationship with Ferrante's language.

Goldstein (Preston, 2020) explains her method of translation, which involves the early drafting of a first version in which she tries to remain as faithful as possible to the original text, keeping intact, as far as possible, the order in which the words appear. This first version is subsequently followed by a careful revision and, very often, by the shaping of the language into standard English, which nevertheless has some suggestions of Italian. Goldstein describes this process by saying:

In my first draft I look at the Italian; in the second I am still working with the Italian and trying to solve problems I couldn't solve first time around. Then, eventually, I try to read just the English, without the Italian, but I never can, because there's always something I need to go back to check. Sometimes I find I've gone too far away from the Italian; sometimes I find I need to go further away³³

Regarding her style, Goldstein considers herself a mostly literal translator, due to her job as a copy editor and proof-reader at the New York times that forced her to “deal with words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs” (Richards, 2016). She also asserts:

³³ <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/sep/12/ann-goldstein-i-try-to-make-it-really-clear-that-i-am-not-elena-ferrante>

my job is to try to help writers express themselves as well as they can—not to say what I think they should say or the way I think they should say it. As a translator I am engaged in a similar process, except that I am making many more interpretive choices. As an obvious example, a word in the original may have many meanings, many connotations, but as the translator you have to decide which meaning is most important in a particular situation or context. Or you might make the decision on a more poetic basis: what sounds best (Richards, 2016).

According to Goldstein, the responsibility of translators is not to recreate the text, nor to explain or comment on it, but to improve or elaborate on something the author has written (Richards, 2016). Goldstein also collaborated with an editor during the translation of Ferrante's novels: Michael Reynolds of Europa Editions. According to the translator, it is very useful to have an editor who reviews the work carried out by the translator, who, being human, can always make mistakes (Dodson, 2016).

3.2 THE CHALLENGES OF THE NEAPOLITAN QUARTET

As explained in Chapter 1, translators who approach the translation of a text written in non-standard language can rely on a wide range of translation strategies that may help in cases of difficulty. Since Ferrante's Neapolitan novels are imbued with Neapolitan culture, and sometimes dialect is present, Goldstein had to face numerous challenges, which required her to use different strategies.

3.2.1 SLANG AND DIALECT

As Goldstein herself asserts, one of the greatest difficulties was to deal with Ferrante's language and style: the novels are written in standard Italian and seem very easy to read, but occasionally uncommon idiomatic expressions and/or Neapolitan words appear, and Italian speakers claim to hear a certain Neapolitan inflection in her language (Westenfeld, 2020), as we can see in the following examples:

TABLE 1

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
Pinuccia ebbe un sorrisetto perfido e rispose con una formula dialettale: si sta	With a treacherous half smile, Pinuccia offered a formula in dialect: she's

imparando. Non chiesi cosa (Storia del nuovo cognome:30).	learning. I didn't ask what (Story of a new name:30).
[...] tu ti pensi che mi puoi comandare a bacchetta, tu ti pensi che io non sono capace di dire basta, e invece ti sbagli, sai tutto ma non sai che se adesso esci con me da quella porta, se mo' io ti dico va bene e ce ne andiamo ma poi scopro che vedi a scuola, e chissà da che altra parte, chillu càntaro di Nino Sarratore, io ti uccido [...] (<i>Storia del nuovo cognome</i> : 22).	[...] you think you can order me around, you think I'm not capable of saying That's enough, and yet you're wrong, you know everything, but you don't know that if you go out of that door with me now, if now I tell you O.K. and we go out, but then I discover that you see that jerk Nino Sarratore at school, and who knows where else, I'll kill you, Lenù [...] (Story of a New Name: 22).

As Ferrante declares, the expression *si sta imparando* is dialectal, since the standard expression in Italian would be *sta imparando* “he is learning”, a progressive periphrasis describing a process that begins before and lasts beyond the time of the expression itself³⁴. The expression *tu ti pensi* is also dialectal, since the standard Italian expression would be *tu pensi*, i.e. pronoun + verb; the expression *mo'* is a term that in regional Italian means “now or a little while ago”³⁵ while the expression *chillu càntaro* is an insult in dialect that uses the Italian word *càntaro* meaning chamber pot to insult a person³⁶. Ferrante uses dialect here because the character who is pronouncing this sentence is Antonio, a friend of Elena's, who comes from her neighbourhood, and uses dialectal forms in his speech.

3.2.2 FERRANTE'S SYNTAX

A further difficulty encountered concerns Ferrante's complex syntax: Goldstein states that many English readers complained about the long and convoluted sentences. Goldstein goes on to say that in Italian, in a way, the prose and thus the syntax are a little more flexible. She found this aspect a challenge, especially in capturing the intensity and density of Ferrante's long sentences in English (Tremonti, 2015). The

³⁴ <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/consulenza/stai-leggendo-la-risposta-sulla-perifrasi-progressiva-stare-gerundio-del-verbo-stare-e-del-verbo-essere/1413>

³⁵ <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/mo/>

³⁶ <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/cantero/>

following is an example of a very long and complex sentence, which includes both indirect speech and free indirect speech, which in Italian reports discourse in an indirect form, but which, unlike what usually happens in indirect speech, is not introduced by verbs such as say, support, affirm, declare etc:

[...] tu ti pensi che mi puoi comandare a bacchetta, tu ti pensi che io non sono capace di dire basta, e invece ti sbagli, sai tutto ma non sai che se adesso esci con me da quella porta, se mo' io ti dico va bene e ce ne andiamo ma poi scopro che vedi a scuola, e chissà da che altra parte, chillu càntaro di Nino Sarratore, io ti uccido, Lenù ti uccido, e perciò pensaci, lasciami qua subito, si disperò, lasciamo che è meglio per te, e intanto mi guardava con occhi rossi e grandissimi, e pronunciava le parole aprendo molto la bocca, gridandomele senza gridare, con le narici dilatate, nerissime, e in faccia una tale sofferenza che pensai forse si sta facendo male dentro, perché le frasi, gridate così nella gola, in petto, ma senza esplodere nell'aria, sono come pezzi di vetro tagliente che gli stanno ferendo i polmoni e la faringe (*Storia del nuovo cognome*: 23).

Goldstein decided to maintain the distinctive length and difficulty of the sentence, by translating almost all of it literally, without changing punctuation or syntax:

Lenù, look at me, look me in the face: you think you can order me around, you think I'm not capable of saying That's enough, and yet you're wrong, you know everything, but you don't know that if you go out of that door with me now, if now I tell you O.K. and we go out, but then I discover that you see that jerk Nino Sarratore at school, and who knows where else, I'll kill you, Lenù, so think about it, leave me here this minute, he said in despair, leave me, because it's better for you, and meanwhile he looked at me, his eyes red and very large, and uttered the words with his mouth wide open, shouting at me without shouting, his nostrils flaring, black, and in his face such suffering that I thought Maybe he's hurting himself inside, because the words, shouted in his throat like that, in his chest, but without exploding in the air, are like bits of sharp iron piercing his lungs and his pharynx (*Story of a New Name*: 23).

3.3 TRANSLATION STRATEGIES USED IN THE TETRALOGY 3.3.1

ADAPTATION IN GOLDSTEIN'S TRANSLATIONS

One of the strategies Goldstein adopted the most in the Neapolitan novels is adaptation. As we have seen in the first chapter, this strategy involves various procedures used by the translator, which, as Baker (2009) pointed out, may be “transcription of the original”, i.e. the literal reproduction of a part of the original language text, “expansion”, i.e. the addition of source information, or “exoticism”, i.e. the replacement

of traits of slang, dialect, nonsense words, etc. in the original text with approximate equivalents in the target language (sometimes marked by italics or underlining) (Baker, 2009). One of the most note-worthy uses of this strategy by the translator is that of the words *stradone* and *rione*, which, despite having the same importance in the novels, are treated by Goldstein with two different procedures.

On the basis of the plot of the novels, we can start by saying that the Neapolitan Quartet begins with the story of the childhood of the two protagonists, Elena Greco, known as Lenù and Raffaella Cerullo, known as Lina or Lila, narrated by the 60-year-old Lenù, who, in order to take revenge for the disappearance of her friend, begins to write about their story, despite her promise to Lila never to write about her. The story is therefore about the life of these two girls born in a very poor suburb of Naples, a grey and dark place, a district made up of small buildings divided into two halves by a large main road, called *stradone* by the narrator. This word will appear many times in the first novel and in all the following ones, as most of the characters' stories will take place in the *rione*.

These two words are very important as they represent, in the urban geography of the novels, the space in which the protagonists and almost all the characters of the work were born and grew up, as great importance is generally attributed to the spaces reactivated in the reader's perception, or in other words, to the mental mechanisms “through which the readers project themselves, with their imagination, within the represented space” (Bernini and Caracciolo 2013: 38, 37-42 in Turchetta 2020). The word *rione* is not strictly a Neapolitan word: in the Italian language it is used as the equivalent of *quartiere*, both in a specific sense, with reference to the administrative division of certain cities, and in a generic sense³⁷. As we see from the very beginning of the story, the translator chooses to use the practice of domestication³⁸ by translating the word *rione* with the word *neighbourhood*, which in American English corresponds to an area with characteristics that make it different from other areas, while in British English

³⁷ Treccani online: <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/rione/>

³⁸ The strategy of “domestication” involves a translation that mitigates the cultural differences between the source and target languages by conforming the original text to the pre-existing cultural values, beliefs and representations of the target language (Calabrò, 2011).

it corresponds to the area of a town that surrounds someone's home³⁹. This choice may be related to the appeal to readers from the United Kingdom and English-speaking countries in general, who find in Ferrante's Naples Leeds and Glasgow, Yorkshire (De Rogatis 2018:11), or many North American cities such as Milwaukee, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, examples of the post-industrial era (Turchetta 2020: 3). It is therefore highly possible that English-speaking readers may well identify with Ferrante's world when reading the word *neighbourhood*.

On the other hand, the word *stradone*, which is a big street, also appears from the very beginning of the narrative, and is translated by Goldstein with the procedure of the “transcription of the original” which is the literal reproduction of part of the text in the original language. Only at the first appearance of this word there is a small explanation added by the translator to help the readers to imagine the urban space of the neighbourhood, divided into two halves by this large street, as there appears to be no convincing equivalent in English.

TABLE 2

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
La donna camminava dall'altro lato dello stradone con passo lento, portando in mano un cartoccio da cui, con l'altra, prendeva e mangiava (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 36).	The woman was walking slowly from one side of the stradone , the wide avenue that ran through the neighborhood , to the other, carrying a paper bag in one hand from which, with the other, she was taking something and eating it (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 36).

Goldstein herself claims that since the Italian language has many diminutives and augmentatives:

she decided to keep the word *stradone* in the end, because there was no good equivalent. That is because Italian has superlatives, a large number of words ending in

³⁹ Cambridge vocabulary online: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/neighbourhood>

-issimo, which have a precise effect in Italian but no exact equivalent in English (Begley, 2015).

TABLE 3

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
[...] era un dato di fatto, come il rione , le sue case bianchicce, l'odore miserabile dei pianerottoli, la polvere delle strade (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 47).	[...] it was a fact, like the neighbourhood , its dirty-white houses, the fetid odor of the landings, the dust of the streets (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 47).
Per lo stradone , durante la notte, passano camion enormi e trasportano roba che ci può distruggere più della bomba atomica (<i>Storia della bambina perduta</i> : 260).	Big trucks pass by on the stradone at night, transporting stuff that can destroy us faster than the atomic bomb (<i>Story of the Lost Child</i> : 260).

The strategy of adaptation is also used in the work for most of the toponymy of the city of Naples: Goldstein (Harvey, 2016) further argues that the Neapolitan novels have several references to external events, to world affairs, to culture, to politics, to the city of Naples, and that in terms of translation, some of the most difficult parts of the work were the descriptions of Naples, which in the novels is described through the eyes of the narrator who frequently wanders through the streets of the city.

TABLE 4

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
Attraversai via Garibaldi , salii per i Tribunali , a piazza Dante presi un autobus. Andai su al Vomero , prima a via Scarlatti , poi alla Santarella . Dopo calai giù in funicolare a piazza Amedeo (<i>Storia del nuovo cognome</i> : 328).	"I crossed Via Garibaldi , went along the Tribunali , at Piazza Dante took a bus. I went up to the Vomero , first to Via Scarlatti , then to the Santarella . Afterward I descended in the funicular to Piazza Amedeo (<i>Story of a New Name</i> : 328).
Avevo visto negli anni l'avvento della nuova stazione ferroviaria, il fiacco	Over the years I had seen the advent of the new railway station, the dull tower of the

svettare del grattacielo di via Novara , i veleggianti edifici di Scampia , il proliferare di costruzioni altissime e splendenti sopra il pietrame grigio dell' Arenaccia , di via Taddeo da Sessa , di piazza Nazionale . Quegli edifici, immaginati in Francia o in Giappone e sorti tra Ponticelli e Poggioreale [...] si erano mutati in tane per disperati (<i>Storia della bambina perduta</i> : 325).	skyscraper on Via Novara , the soaring structures of Scampia , the proliferation of tall, shining buildings above the gray stone of Arenaccia , of Via Taddeo da Sessa , of Piazza Nazionale . Those buildings, conceived in France or Japan and rising between Ponticelli and Poggioreale [...] become dens for the desperate (<i>Story of the Lost Child</i> : 325).
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Occasionally, the toponymy is accompanied by a brief clarification to help readers understand the point of the town being referred to, but only if it is relevant to the plot.

TABLE 5

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
[...] la gente le volte che aveva bisogno di scarpe nuove non andava più dal ciabattino del rione, andava nei negozi del Rettifilo [...] (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 111).	[...] when people needed new shoes, they no longer went to the neighborhood shoemaker, they went to the stores in the center of town , on Rettifilo [...] (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 111).

Goldstein affirms that in the fourth volume, the city is seen as a place of great beauty, of deep and complex history, and that the specific history of post-war Italy plays a role: she states that throughout the books, the reader experiences the history of Italy in the way anyone might experience it. In other words, the reader does not hear about these events by way of the news or by someone telling the story (Tremonti, 2015). In fact, we notice that throughout the course of the story, the reader indirectly witnesses to several political and contemporary events that involve the narrator as a politically active citizen in a historical period overwhelmed by political changes. What seems relevant is that Goldstein in these cases translates these passages literally but in certain cases uses the English equivalent words to ensure that English readers understand all the historical

references. The reader will notice that in the books the background is imbued in history and politics, starting with the economic boom years in which the protagonists were born, and their discovery of politics.

Aveva detto che gli sarebbe stata grata sempre per tutte le cose che le aveva spiegato: il fascismo, la resistenza, la monarchia, la repubblica, la borsa nera, il comandante Lauro, i missini, la democrazia cristiana, il comunismo (*L'amica geniale*: 180).

She had also said that she would always be grateful to him for all the things he had explained to her: Fascism, the Resistance, the monarchy, the republic, the black market, Comandante Lauro, the neo-fascists, Christian Democracy, Communism (*My Brilliant Friend*: 180).

Imparai da lui cose terribili sullo stalinismo e mi spinse a leggere i libri di Trockij, grazie ai quali si era formato una sensibilità antistalinista e la convinzione che in Urss non c'erano né il socialismo né tantomeno il comunismo [...] (*Storia del nuovo cognome*: 335).

I learned from him terrible things about Stalinism and he urged me to read Trotsky; as a result, I developed an anti-Stalinist sensibility and the conviction that in the U.S.S.R. there was neither socialism nor even Communism [...] (*Story of a New Name*: 335).

As the narrative progresses, it is possible to perceive in the background the atmosphere of rebellion against imperialism that characterised the international context in the 1960s and 1970s, when events such as the Vietnam War, Che Guevara's actions and Mao-Tse-Tung's Chinese revolution profoundly influenced the global consciousness (D'Aurio, 2019); the reader can perceive this through various statements of the characters.

Nino, capii, era sì critico verso gli Stati Uniti e non gli piaceva che gli americani avessero una base militare a Napoli, però era anche attratto dal loro modo di vita [...] Gli disse che Pearl Harbor e Hiroshima erano due cose non confrontabili, che Pearl Harbor era un atto di guerra vile e Hiroshima era uno scervellato ferocissimo vendicativo orrore, peggio, molto peggio, delle decimazioni naziste (*Storia del nuovo cognome*: 224).

Nino, I saw, was so critical of the United States and didn't like the fact that the Americans had a military base in Naples, but he was also attracted by their way of life [...] She told him that Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima were two things that couldn't be compared, that Pearl Harbor was a vile act of war and Hiroshima was an idiotic, fierce, vindictive horror, worse, much worse, than the Nazi massacres (*Story of a New Name*: 224).

Incalzandosi l'un l'altra, passarono senza soluzione di continuità ai bombardamenti sul Vietnam del Nord, alle rivolte studentesche in quel campus e quell'altro, ai mille focolai di lotta antimperialista in America Latina e in Africa (*Storia del nuovo cognome*: 408-409).

Following each other in rapid succession, they moved on, without interruption, to the bombing of North Vietnam, to the student revolts on various campuses, to the many breeding grounds of anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America and Africa (*Story of a New Name*: 408-409).

In Italy, labor movements inspired by Marxist theories demanded rights and dignity for workers, denouncing capitalist exploitation and alienation. Simultaneously, the student protests of 1968, arising from the discontent of lower-class youth, expressed a radical critique of the educational and productive systems, seen as mechanisms for perpetuating social inequalities (D'Aurio, 2019). The reader also witnesses, indirectly, the development of trade unions when Lila becomes an exploited worker at the meatpacking factory where she works after escaping the neighbourhood, and Pasquale involves her in the labour struggles. These struggles had already begun in the mid-1960s, when workers went on strike demanding wage increases and fairer salaries. The average worker, both the symbol and protagonist of the protests, was one who was exploited and humiliated, performing alienating, if not dehumanizing, tasks and subjected to the employer's authority. The strikes, carefully planned and well-organized, aimed to slow down or even halt production (D'Aurio, 2019).

La spinse a iscriversi al sindacato, anche se lei non voleva e lo fece solo per fare uno sfregio a Soccavo, che non avrebbe visto la cosa di buon occhio. Le portò opuscoli di vario genere, molto chiari, molto essenziali, su temi tipo la busta paga, la contrattazione, le gabbie salariali [...] la trascinò insieme a Enzo e al bambino alla Riviera di Chiaia, a una manifestazione per la pace in Vietnam che si trasformò in un fuggi fuggi generale: pietre che volavano, fascisti che provocavano, poliziotti che caricavano [...] (*Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta*: 103)

He pushed her to join the union, even though she didn't want to and did it only to slight Soccavo, who wouldn't like it. He brought her pamphlets of various kinds, very clear, concise, on subjects like the pay package, collective bargaining, wage differentials [...] He took her with Enzo and the child to Riviera di Chiaia, to a demonstration for peace in Vietnam that turned into a general stampede: rocks flying, fascists stirring things up, police charging [...] (*Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay*: 103)

Furthermore, the reader witnesses the *Anni di Piombo* (Years of Lead), a period of violence marked by bombings and killings carried out by right- and left-wing extremist groups, such as the Red Brigades and far-right terrorists. This era is remembered for the assassinations of magistrates and political figures, culminating in the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro (D'Aurio, 2019). In the novels, this historical period is narrated by the protagonist through the figure of her friend Pasquale, a far-left militant regarded as a terrorist:

Si dilungava anzi soprattutto su quest'ultimo, ipotizzando che fosse stato o la punta visibile di un conflitto tra famiglie camorriste o un'esecuzione a opera del "pericoloso terrorista Pasquale Peluso, nato e cresciuto nel quartiere, ex muratore, ex segretario della sezione locale del Partito comunista" (*Storia della bambina perduta*: 273).

He went on at length about the latter, hypothesizing that it had been either the visible point of a conflict between Camorra families or an execution at the hands of the "dangerous terrorist Pasquale Peluso, born and raised in the area, former bricklayer, former secretary of the local section of the Communist Party" (*Story of the Lost Child*: 273)

3.3.2 IDIOMATIC EXPRESSIONS IN GOLDSTEIN'S TRANSLATIONS

It is appropriate to begin this section by specifying the definition of 'idiomatic expression'. As Baker (1992) asserts, the term refers to a fixed linguistic pattern that allows little or no variation in form. Typically, the words that are part of idiomatic expressions cannot be reordered, nor can they be deleted, added, or substituted; moreover, the grammatical structure of idiomatic expressions cannot be altered. Additionally, these expressions have meanings that cannot be deduced from their individual components. Such linguistic patterns can create challenges in translation due to the difficulties in conveying the precise meaning that an idiom communicates in the target language. It is important to note that idioms containing culture-specific items are not necessarily untranslatable. Rather, it is not the specific items an expression contains but the meaning it conveys and its association with culture-specific contexts that can render it untranslatable or difficult to translate. There are various strategies that can be useful for addressing the translation of idiomatic expressions. For instance, one strategy involves using an idiom in the target language that conveys approximately the same meaning as the idiom in the source language and is composed of equivalent lexical

items; however, such correspondences occur only occasionally. Another strategy may involve identifying an idiom or fixed expression in the target language that carries a similar meaning to that of the source idiom but is constructed with different lexical elements.

In other words, this entails finding two expressions that utilize different lexical items to express more or less the same idea (Fernando and Flavell, 1981, in Baker, 1992). When it is not possible to find a corresponding expression in the target language, or when it seems inappropriate to use idiomatic language in the target text due to differences in stylistic preferences between the source and target languages, paraphrasing the idiom may be advisable. This allows the translator to explain its meaning in simpler terms. Goldstein adopts this technique when dealing with certain Italian idiomatic expressions, attempting to adapt them to the English context and culture, as English speakers might not grasp their meaning. This frequently occurs with idiomatic expressions, which are adapted to equivalent or similarly meaningful expressions in English.

TABLE 6

Source text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
Ma ce l'hai il sangue nelle vene o no? Quello è il figlio di chi ha ammazzato tuo padre, quello è un comunista di merda, e tu stai qua a guardare come balla con la guagliona con cui volevi ballare tu? (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 146).	Are you some kind of a sissy? That's the son of the man who killed your father, he's a lousy Communist, and you stand there watching him dance with the girl you wanted to dance with? (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 146).

The Italian expression *non avere sangue nelle vene* which figuratively means to lack strength or energy⁴⁰, is translated into English with an equivalent idiom, *sissy*, which is informal and disapproving (also spelled "cissy"). It refers to a boy whom other boys dislike and mock because they perceive him as weak or interested in activities typically

⁴⁰ Treccani online: <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/vena2/>

associated with girls, or more generally, to a person who is weak and cowardly (i.e., lacking bravery)⁴¹. As Baker (1992) asserts, an idiom in the source language may have a very close counterpart in the target language which looks similar on the surface but has a totally or partially different meaning. Based on this definition, we can state that the translation of this idiomatic expression has produced this misrepresentation as well.

TABLE 7

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
[...] chiesi ironica ma anche stupita che uno come lui, curvo, con gli occhiali spessi, quei ridicoli capelli e l'aria, il linguaggio di chi sta sempre sui libri, si sentisse in dovere di fare il paladino di Francia come i ragazzi del rione (<i>Storia del nuovo cognome</i> : 405).	[...] I asked sarcastically, but at the same time amazed that someone like him, stooping, with thick glasses, that ridiculous hair, and the aura, the language of someone who is always at his books, felt it his duty to be the knight in shining armor like the boys of the neighborhood (<i>Story of a New Name</i> : 405).

The expression *Paladino di Francia*, which in Italian refers to the knights of Charlemagne in the Carolingian cycle and the Chanson de Roland, and figuratively means a defender and/or a loyal and selfless supporter⁴², is replaced in English by the idiomatic phrase *knight in shining armor* which means someone who rescues you from a difficult or dangerous situation⁴³. This translation removes the historical reference to convey the meaning more effectively. In this case Goldstein employs the technique explained by Baker (1992) which consists in identifying an idiom or fixed expression in the target language that conveys a similar meaning to the source idiom but utilizes different lexical components. In a distinctive way, Goldstein replaces some Italian idiomatic expressions with equivalents from other languages that are more familiar or

⁴¹ Cambridge vocabulary online: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/sissy>

⁴² Treccani online: <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/paladino/>

⁴³ Cambridge Dictionary online: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/knight-in-shining-armour>

widely used in English-speaking countries. For example, in the case of the expression *avere carta bianca* which in Italian means to have complete freedom of action⁴⁴, the translator selects the French expression *carte blanche* which is well-known in English and also means complete freedom to do something⁴⁵.

TABLE 8

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
“Vedrai che sarai trasferita a piazza dei Martiri, signó, e avrai carta bianca”. “Carta bianca, carta nera, toglitelo dalla testa, sto bene dove sto” (<i>Storia del nuovo cognome</i>: 281).	“You’ll see, you’ll move to Piazza dei Martiri, signò, and you’ll have carte blanche”. “Carte blanche, carte noir, get it out of your head, I’m fine where I am” (<i>Story of a New Name</i>: 281).

3.3.3 FOREIGNIZATION IN GOLDSTEIN’S TRANSLATIONS

The strategy of foreignization refers to a translation approach that seeks to preserve the original cultural context, including settings, names, and other elements (Gambier, 2011: 40-42). This method is employed by Goldstein in certain passages where the original context is maintained, even to the detriment of English readers' comprehension:

TABLE 9

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
Aveva trovato mia madre che immobile, gli occhi sbarrati, sussurrava rivolta al soffitto: madonna, fammi morire subito, e tremava in tutto il corpo per lo sforzo di sopportare il dolore (<i>Storia della bambina perduta</i>: 194).	She had found my mother, who, motionless, eyes staring, was whispering at the ceiling, Madonna, let me die soon, her whole body shaking with the effort of enduring the pain (<i>Story of the Lost Child</i>: 194).
Esclamò: oh Madonna, espressione che	She exclaimed: Oh Madonna, an

⁴⁴ <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/carta-bianca>

⁴⁵ Cambridge Dictionary online: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/carte-blanche>

non le avevo mai sentito usare (<i>Storia della bambina perduta</i> : 164)	expression I had never heard her use (<i>Story of the Lost Child</i> : 164).
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The word *madonna*, which in Italian refers both to the Virgin Mary and to an exclamation or invocation pronounced in the presence of sudden danger, or to convey various feelings such as disappointment, dissatisfaction, impatience, or irritation⁴⁶, could be translated into English; however, it would lose its folkloric connotation.

TABLE 10

Original text	English version
[...] mammà ha appena fatto sessant'anni, Lenù, la mamma di tuo cognato, la suocera di tua sorella, vediamo cosa dici adesso, vediamo se continui a fare la maestrina (<i>Storia di chi fugge e di chi resta</i> : 302).	[...] mamma 's just turned sixty, Lenù, the mamma of your brother-in-law, your sister's mother-in-law, let's see what you say now, let's see if you continue to play the schoolmistress (<i>Those Who Leave and Those Who Stay</i> : 302).

The dialectal word *mammà*, which means *mum* or *mother*, is reported by Goldstein in the English version, in order to preserve the Neapolitan connotation of the discourse, as it is very common in spoken Neapolitan and is one of the most frequently used words.

3.3.4 NON-EQUIVALENCE AT WORD LEVEL IN GOLDSTEIN'S TRANSLATIONS

Non-equivalence at word level is a phenomenon which occurs when the target language does not have an equivalent word precise enough to express every nuance of the one used in the source language. Baker (1992:21-26) provides us some procedures useful to deal with these problems. The first procedure of this strategy is that of the "translation by cultural substitution" used to replace a word or expression typical of the source language with a target language that does not have the same meaning but is predicted to have a similar impact on the reader of the target language. Another procedure is the "translation using a loan word or loan word plus explanation". This strategy is

⁴⁶ Treccani online: <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/madonna/>

particularly common when it comes to specific elements of culture. In these cases, the translator uses the loan word from the source text, sometimes adding some kind of explanations it, so that if the word is used again in the text, it can be understood by everyone. This procedure is used by Goldstein when translating typical Italian food.

TABLE 11

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
Era presto, non c'era ancora il brusio della domenica, i venditori di nocelle e mandorle tostate e lupini (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 130).	It was early, there wasn't yet the Sunday commotion, the sellers of roasted hazel nuts and almonds and <i>lupini</i> (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 130).
[...] furono fatte le cose molto in grande: abbondavano le sciu, i raffiuoli a cassata, le sfogliatelle, le paste di mandorla , i liquori, le bibite per i bambini e i dischi con i balli, dai più consueti a quelli all'ultima moda (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 143).	[...] things were done on a grand scale: there was an abundance of cream puffs, pastries with <i>cassata</i> filling, <i>sfogliatelle</i>, almond pastries , liqueurs, soft drinks, and dance records, from the most ordinary to the latest fashion (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 143).
Meno male che Nella da un certo punto in poi venne a tenermi compagnia sul terrazzo portandomi un' orzata (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 225).	Thankfully Nella, at some point, came to keep me company on the terrace, bringing me an <i>orzata</i> (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 225).
[...] avrebbe preparato l'insalata di rinforzo , e il brodo di gallina, e gli struffoli , senza riposare nemmeno un poco [...] (<i>Storia del nuovo cognome</i> : 413).	[...] and prepare the <i>insalata di rinforzo</i> , and the chicken broth, and the <i>struffoli</i> , without resting for a moment [...] (<i>Story of a New Name</i> : 413).
Una volta ce ne avevano parlato Nino Sarratore e sua sorella Marisa, con il tono di chi trovava normale che ci si andasse ogni tanto a mangiare i taralli e i frutti di mare (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 70)	Once Nino Sarratore and his sister Marisa had talked about it, in the tone of those who found it normal to go every so often to eat <i>taralli</i> and seafood (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 70)

As we can observe, most of the food items are translated by Goldstein using a loanword, while in some cases, such as *sciu* or *raffioli*, they are replaced with English equivalents, specifically *cream puffs* and *pastries*, because these Neapolitan desserts are less known abroad and target readers might not be able to visualize them in context. Additionally, the typical games of the protagonist's Neapolitan childhood are translated using this strategy, as there is no equivalent word in English that accurately conveys the nature of the game.

TABLE 12

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
Facemmo anche gare lunghe con i tamburelli [...] (<i>Storia del nuovo cognome</i> : 223).	We also had long games of <i>tamburello</i> [...] (<i>Story of a New Name</i> : 223).
Lì pare che sia stato inventato il gioco di menare le prete , le petriàte che facevamo anche noi da bambine, ti ricordi, quando Enzo mi colpì in fronte – ho ancora la cicatrice – e si disperò e mi regalò un serto di sorbe (<i>Storia della bambina perduta</i> : 440).	It seems that the game of throwing the <i>prete</i> was invented there, the stone throwing that we did as girls, you remember, when Enzo hit me in the forehead—I still have the scar—and he was desperate and gave me a garland of sorb apples (<i>Story of the Lost Child</i> : 440).

3.4 LACK OF EFFECTIVENESS IN THE FINAL TRANSLATION

In some cases, the strategies employed by Goldstein have not been effective in conveying the same nuances of meaning in the English versions of the novels as intended by the author in the original texts. This phenomenon frequently occurs when insults present in the original text are translated into standard English, whereas in the original, they often appear in dialect.

TABLE 12

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
Mio padre, a sentire quella stranezza, insultò in modo molto osceno il ferroviere-poeta. Mia madre disse che qualcuno si sarebbe dovuto incaricare di spaccare a quell'uomo di merda la testa di merda che aveva (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 123).	My father, hearing that strange news, insulted the railway-worker poet obscenely. My mother said someone should undertake to bash the disgusting head of that disgusting man (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 123).
Invece i pochi uomini che frequentavo, tutti coltissimi, si travestivano volentieri da popolo basso, erano divertiti da donne che facevano finta di essere vaiasse (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 232).	But the few men I saw, all highly educated, willingly pretended to be lower-class, were amused by women who acted like sluts (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 232).
[...] non sai con chi hai a che fare, mappina (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 372)	[...] you don't know who you're dealing with, you are nothing (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 327).

The colloquial Italian expression *uomo di merda* refers to a person of little worth⁴⁷. Goldstein chose to translate it with the adjective *disgusting*, which means extremely unpleasant or unacceptable⁴⁸. While this translation conveys to the target language readers that it is an insult, it does not fully capture the original meaning. The same is true for the dialectal words *vaiasse* and *mappina*. *Vaiassa* is a Neapolitan term that originally meant *servant* or *maid*, but more recently has been used (within the local context) as a synonym for a woman of low social status, coarse, vulgar, and prone to brawling⁴⁹. Goldstein translated it as *slut* which in English refers to a woman who has sexual relationships with many men without any emotional involvement⁵⁰. This choice diminishes the original meaning of the insult, just as translating the dialectal term *mappina* as *you are nothing* undermines its connotation of being a treacherous and

⁴⁷ <https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/di-merda>

⁴⁸ https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/disgusting#google_vignette

⁴⁹ https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vaiassa#cite_note-Messina-2

⁵⁰ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/slut>

dangerous person in Neapolitan⁵¹. Another ineffective strategy selected by Goldstein could be the lack of explanations for cultural references or Italian wordplay that lose their meaning in English.

TABLE 13

Source Text (ST)	Target Text (TT)
[...] ora vedi quanto spazio, l'unica cosa vecchia è il Maschio Angioino, però è bello, piccerè, due maschi veri ci sono a Napoli, papà tuo e quello lì" (<i>L'amica geniale</i> : 134).	[...] now see all the space, the only old thing that left is the Maschio Angioino, but it's beautiful, little one, there are two real males in Naples, your father and that fellow there (<i>My Brilliant Friend</i> : 134).

The Maschio Angioino, also known as Castel Nuovo, is a medieval castle-palace that became a center of culture during the reign of Robert of Anjou, hosting artists, physicians, and literary figures such as Giotto, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Under the Aragonite crown, it evolved into the modern fortress that we know today, adapted to meet new military needs⁵². In Italian, the adjective *maschio* means male, but it also refers to the main tower of medieval castles and Renaissance fortifications, which is taller and sturdier than the surrounding defensive structures and contains the most important areas of the fortress. Additionally, it connotes virility, embodying the physical or moral strength typically associated with masculinity⁵³. This leads to a play on words that Elena's father makes to his daughter: "the only male in Naples is your father because he is the most virile of all." The meaning of this phrase is lost in the English translation, as the significance of this term is not explained.

3.5 CONCLUSION

Conclusively, we can confirm that most of the translation strategies used in the process of Ann Goldstein's translation of the tetralogy, as demonstrated by the examples, were effective and played a significant role in immersing the target text readers in Elena Ferrante's world, in the strongly culturally characterised Neapolitan world of the novels.

⁵¹ <https://dettinapoletani.it/bwl-knowledge-base/mappina/>

⁵² <https://www.comune.napoli.it/maschioangioino>

⁵³ <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/maschio/>

Some instances were more challenging than others and as we have witnessed in the last paragraph, some strategies were not very effective in enabling the target text readers to clearly understand all the references made in the novels and/or the idiomatic expressions and words transcribed from Italian.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation explores the range of strategies that can be useful for translators who have to face the translation of non-standard language, which can be very demanding, and at the same time examine this specific case of translation, which involves the sociolinguistics aspects of the Neapolitan culture. I have tried to analyse the complex relationship between this dialect and Neapolitan culture, which strongly influences everything that has contact with it. The Neapolitan Quartet, for example, is a series of novels which does not present many explicit elements of the Neapolitan language and culture, but it is inevitably imbued with this strong cultural background. In these novels Elena Ferrante, tries not to use Neapolitan dialect but to favour standard Italian, yet her writing is unavoidably marked by a regional inflection and by external socio-cultural factors that forcibly become part of her language and narrative.

The difficulty of translating a series of novels that are strongly characterized by their local background is the starting point of this dissertation and is the central theme around which the entire work is structured. The thesis begins by offering a theoretical overview of translation in general, with a particular focus on the translation of prose fiction and non-standard language varieties. In this first part, the definition and the characteristics of prose fiction are provided, as well as the definitions of standard and non-standard language, moving through the translation of culture, which is a very relevant factor that influences language a great deal. Here the focus is on Neapolitan dialect and its historical overview, since Naples is one of the most important characters in the novels. Subsequently, an outline of specific translation strategies, used in cases of challenging translation, is presented. A section, in fact, is dedicated to the explanation of the strategies of Adaptation, Domestication and Foreignization, and Non-Equivalence at word level, since they may be helpful in a difficult translation such as that of Ferrante's novels.

The dissertation then investigates the reasons behind the international success of Ferrante's novels, focusing on whether Ann Goldstein's translation played a role in enhancing their global reception. It also examines the subsequent shift in Italian critical perspectives. Through this analysis, the study aims to underscore the significant

differences between the original text—written in standard Italian with influences from Neapolitan dialect—and the English version, translated into standard English using the aforementioned techniques. For this reason, a section is dedicated to Ferrante's language, since it is not simply standard Italian. In her writing, Ferrante affirms that it is almost impossible to portray Naples without its language, yet she does not solely use dialect in her novels. The peculiarities of her non-standard writing are analysed through some examples, especially the metalinguistic notations, written in neutral Italian, which specify when a character is using dialect, the invented words such as *smarginatura*, and the relationship between Italian and dialect which are always in contrast.

The elements mentioned so far contribute to increasing the level of difficulty in the English translation and for this reason Goldstein employed some translation strategies in order to maintain in the best way possible the original sense and the cultural references and connotations of the source text. Inevitably sometimes these techniques do not work effectively and something is lost in translation. The words that are written in dialect in the source text are transcribed by Goldstein most of the time, but when read in a standard English context they can lose some of their nuances of meaning.

The conclusion I can deduce after an exhaustive analysis of the techniques used by Ann Goldstein in this translation is that translation studies have elaborated some extremely efficient strategies for the translation of non-standard languages and as consequence translators are provided with a wide range of choices to translate works with a strong territorial and cultural nature. This individual case of translation, which has given both author and translator worldwide popularity, could be considered the hallmark of challenging translations and encourage translators around the world to pursue a translation that may appear difficult by taking advantage of the many strategies provided by translation scholars.

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SUMMARY IN ITALIAN

Questa tesi analizza la traduzione inglese dei romanzi della quadrilogia “L’amica geniale” di Elena Ferrante, realizzata dalla giornalista e traduttrice, Ann Goldstein. Uno dei punti chiave di questa tesi è lo studio del metodo di traduzione di Ann Goldstein e le strategie che sono state utilizzate per affrontare problemi più o meno ardui, tipici delle traduzioni di testi scritti in una lingua non-standard. La finalità di questo studio è quella di riuscire a stabilire, dopo un’analisi traduttologica di alcuni estratti tratti dai quattro libri facenti parte della quadrilogia, quali strategie siano state adottate da Goldstein e in quale misura esse siano state efficaci nel trasmettere nella lingua d’arrivo, le corrette sfumature di significato trasmesse dalla versione originale. È doveroso precisare che le difficoltà nella traduzione di questi romanzi, sorgono non solo dal forte carattere culturale di cui i romanzi sono intrisi, ma anche dalla lingua utilizzata da Ferrante, che non è propriamente un italiano standard, bensì un italiano che presenta in parte un’inflessione regionale Campana e in una minima parte, espressioni dialettali napoletane. Questo è anche il motivo per cui la versione inglese della quadrilogia è arricchita dal sottotitolo “Neapolitan Novels” o “Neapolitan Quartet”. L’analisi è partita da un capitolo teorico sulla traduzione, che specifica il genere dell’opera, ovvero quello della narrativa in prosa e dell’approccio dei cosiddetti “translation studies” a questo genere, e che in seguito chiarisce il significato del termine “cultura” e di quanto questo fattore influenzi sia il linguaggio che la traduzione. Si è evidenziata successivamente la differenza tra lingua standard e non standard, in modo da categorizzare la lingua di Ferrante sotto la definizione di lingua non standard, e si è presentato un prospetto teorico sulle strategie di traduzione, con una successiva spiegazione dettagliata di quelle utilizzate da Goldstein. Una volta analizzata la teoria della traduzione, ho cercato di approfondire la questione del successo globale dei romanzi, dei pareri della critica estera ed italiana e di quanto la versione inglese abbia influito sul clamoroso successo di questa tetralogia. Dopodiché ho cercato di descrivere con più precisione il linguaggio di Ferrante, il suo rapporto con il dialetto e in che misura esso penetri la narrazione. L’ultimo capitolo è dedicato all’analisi dei quattro romanzi, sulla base delle strategie esposte nel capitolo teorico, e alla spiegazione dei casi particolari in cui queste tecniche sembrano non aver sortito l’effetto desiderato nella traduzione finale. Di seguito è spiegato con più precisione il contenuto della tesi riassumendo ogni capitolo:

Nel primo capitolo vengono spiegati concetti teorici legati alle caratteristiche letterarie e linguistiche dei romanzi persi in osservazione. Uno di essi è il genere letterario della quadrilogia, che corrisponde al genere della narrativa in prosa, genere che comunemente tratta racconti inventati, scritti in prosa, la cui lingua non segue i principi di rima, ritmo e metrica. Molti studiosi, come Hu (2018) affermano che, per quanto riguarda la traduzione, il genere della narrativa presenta maggiori difficoltà rispetto ad altri generi, data l'implicazione di elementi socioculturali, ad esempio le emozioni, le associazioni e le idee che collegano le lingue alle tradizioni e agli stili di vita delle diverse nazioni. A seguire viene approfondito il ruolo della cultura nella traduzione. Prima di tutto è bene chiarificare che il termine cultura ha due significati di base: il primo, indica un processo di formazione individuale, basato sull'apprendimento, che punta allo sviluppo della personalità umana; il secondo invece, indica l'insieme dei modi di vivere, di esprimersi e di pensare, propri di un qualsiasi gruppo umano. Studiosi come Jenks, Kelly e Baker, hanno poi ridefinito il termine cultura come "forza ideologica operante sulla società", motivo per cui è evidente che la cultura eserciti una grande influenza anche sul linguaggio di un popolo; di conseguenza un traduttore dovrebbe avere competenze interculturali che gli permettano di gestire al meglio una traduzione, dato che spesso il significato di un testo è influenzato dal contesto. Partendo da queste riflessioni, con l'obiettivo di arrivare a delineare il profilo del linguaggio utilizzato da Ferrante nei suoi romanzi, ho specificato le differenze tra lingua standard e lingua non standard. In linguistica, la prima viene definita come lingua soggetta a codificazione normativa e che vale come modello di riferimento per l'insegnamento scolastico, gli enti governativi e la maggior parte degli abitanti del cui paese è lingua ufficiale; la seconda invece viene definita come una variante linguistica sviluppatasi in parallelo alla lingua ufficiale, usata da una minoranza o un gruppo specifico di persone. Come è facile da intuire, il dialetto Napoletano utilizzato da Ferrante saltuariamente, fa parte del secondo gruppo. In Italia abbiamo avuto uno sviluppo particolare della lingua, infatti i dialetti volgari anche detti "dialetti primari", si svilupparono molto prima della lingua italiana ufficiale e derivavano direttamente dal latino. La lingua italiana invece nacque dal dialetto fiorentino e si diffuse nel nostro paese solo dopo l'unità d'Italia, nel 1861. Per quanto riguarda il dialetto Napoletano abbiamo anche qui uno sviluppo quasi contrario alle norme: originariamente in Campania il dialetto rappresentava la lingua madre

indipendentemente dallo status sociale. Con il tempo, tuttavia, è rimasto in uso solo tra le classi meno abbienti. Questo cambiamento ha portato a una stigmatizzazione del dialetto, scomparsa quasi del tutto nel nuovo millennio grazie ad un recupero del napoletano, considerato ormai un patrimonio culturale. Considerando i vari fattori linguistici e letterari che caratterizzano i romanzi di Ferrante, ho evidenziato alcune delle strategie di traduzione che Ann Goldstein ha utilizzato nella traduzione. È bene specificare che le strategie di traduzione sono comunemente definite come procedure utilizzate consapevolmente da un traduttore per risolvere i problemi che si possono presentare durante la traduzione di un testo da una lingua ad un'altra. Le strategie analizzate in questa tesi sono principalmente l'"adaptation", "domestication", "foreignization" e "non-equivalence at word level". Studiosi come Vinay e Darbelnet hanno definito l'"adaptation" o adattamento come una procedura utile quando il contesto a cui si fa riferimento nel testo sorgente non esiste nella cultura del testo d'arrivo, richiedendo così una qualche forma di ri-creazione. Esistono varie procedure che il traduttore può utilizzare, partendo dalla trascrizione letterale di una parte del testo sorgente in lingua originale, includendo l'eliminazione di una parte del testo o l'aggiunta di una spiegazione al termine trascritto dal testo sorgente, arrivando infine alla sostituzione di espressioni gergali, dialettali o parole inventate, presenti nel testo sorgente, con equivalenti approssimativi nella lingua d'arrivo. Molti studiosi come Calabrò, Venuti e Gambier hanno definito "domestication" e "foreignization" due approcci differenti alla traduzione. Il primo implica l'attenuazione delle differenze culturali tra la lingua sorgente e la lingua d'arrivo, conformando il testo originale agli usi, alle credenze e ai valori della cultura di arrivo. Il secondo, al contrario, registrare la differenza linguistica e culturale del testo straniero, con il risultato di "portare" il lettore in un contesto estero. L'ultima strategia descritta è la "non-equivalence at word level". Prima di parlare di questa strategia, è importante chiarire il concetto di equivalenza, ampiamente analizzato negli translation studies. In linguistica il termine equivalenza si riferisce alla capacità di rendere nella lingua d'arrivo il significato di una parola o espressione idiomatica della lingua sorgente. L'equivalenza non deve corrispondere necessariamente ad un'aderenza precisa o letterale tra le parole, rappresenta piuttosto una soluzione utile a preservare l'intenzione e l'impatto del testo originale, adattati però al nuovo contesto linguistico e culturale. In linea con quanto detto, viene data poi la

definizione di “non-equivalence at word level”, descritta da Baker come un fenomeno che si verifica quando nella lingua d’arrivo non esiste una parola equivalente sufficientemente precisa per esprimere ogni sfumatura di quella usata nella lingua sorgente. Questo problema insorge comunemente a causa di elementi specifici della cultura, come credenze religiose, costumi sociali, tipi di cibo o istituzioni politiche, ma può essere affrontato con svariate strategie: il traduttore può scegliere di sostituire una parola o un’espressione tipica della lingua sorgente con una della lingua di arrivo che non ha lo stesso significato, ma che si prevede avrà un impatto simile sul lettore della lingua di arrivo, o in alternativa può utilizzare nel testo d’arrivo, il termine trascritto letteralmente, preso in prestito dalla lingua sorgente, spiegandone il significato.

Il secondo capitolo è incentrato sullo studio di tutte le caratteristiche del mondo letterario di Ferrante, partendo dalla versione inglese dei libri della tetralogia. Mi è sembrato opportuno iniziare con una breve biografia della traduttrice Ann Goldstein, utile a delineare il suo profilo lavorativo e inquadrare in base ad esso l’attitudine che ha nella traduzione, oltre ad indagare sulla scelta, che si è rivelata vincente, da parte di Sandro e Sandra Ferri, editori di Ferrante in Italia. La traduttrice ha lavorato per anni nella redazione del New York Times come redattrice e come revisora. Questo lavoro la ha resa una traduttrice con uno stile abbastanza letterale, come afferma lei stessa, ma le ha permesso di imparare l’italiano e di avvicinarsi al mondo della traduzione. Il primo romanzo di Ferrante che Sandro e Sandra Ferri vollero pubblicare nella nuova casa editrice americana Europa Editions, fu *I giorni dell’abbandono*, uscito in Italia nel 2002. Quando il romanzo uscì negli Stati Uniti, nel 2005, fu ben accolto, ma non ebbe un grosso impatto sul pubblico statunitense. La nascita dell’interesse nei confronti di Ferrante e la sua ascesa si registrarono solo anni dopo, quando nel 2013 il critico James Wood pubblicò sul New York Times il suo articolo “Women on the verge” in cui lodava il nuovo romanzo di Ferrante *L’amica geniale*. Da quel momento la popolarità di Ferrante negli Stati Uniti crebbe a vista d’occhio, dando origine alla “ferrante fever” fenomeno che ha portato la scrittrice pseudonima alla fama mondiale, fama dovuta anche all’adattamento televisivo targato RAI e HBO. Questa grande popolarità fu influenzata dalla traduzione inglese dei romanzi che è stata ampiamente lodata su più fronti, soprattutto per quanto riguarda la scorrevolezza della prosa e l’eccellente lavoro

di adattamento nella lingua d'arrivo. La parte finale del capitolo è dedicata alla lingua di Ferrante, al suo rapporto col dialetto napoletano e al contrasto che esso assume nella narrazione, contrasto che diventa uno dei temi cruciali della saga. Durante il corso della narrazione, il dialetto assume una connotazione fortemente negativa, viene spesso relazionato alla violenza tipica dell'ambiente in cui le protagoniste sono cresciute: un quartiere molto povero della periferia di Napoli. L'analisi sociolinguistica approfondisce il contrasto tra i due codici linguistici da un lato il dialetto, che riflette la durezza della vita nel rione, dall'altro la lingua italiana diventa il simbolo del riscatto sociale. Il dialetto pertanto, risulta come una presenza quasi invisibile nel testo, apparendo raramente nei dialoghi diretti, ma costantemente evocato attraverso annotazioni metalinguistiche che chiariscono come e quando i personaggi parlano in dialetto. Le ragioni alla base delle scelte linguistiche di Ferrante vengono spiegate più volte dall'autrice stessa in interviste e libri: la scrittrice afferma che, piuttosto che imitare il dialetto, ha sempre preferito descriverne il ruolo, poiché le imitazioni letterarie dell'oralità dialettale la sterilizzano e la rendono poco veritiera.

Il terzo e ultimo capitolo è incentrato sull'analisi delle traduzioni in inglese dei romanzi della tetralogia. Vengono inizialmente elencati e approfonditi gli elementi del testo sorgente che sono risultati particolarmente problematici per la traduttrice Ann Goldstein. Uno dei problemi principali è proprio quello del dialetto, che nonostante compaia raramente ha messo a dura prova la traduttrice, in quanto tradurre una lingua non-standard porta maggiori difficoltà. Oltre questo problema, nel processo di traduzione si è presentato un altro problema importante, ovvero quello della sintassi di Ferrante, che risulta molto complicata a causa dei periodi lunghi e dell'abbondanza di frasi subordinate e frasi ripetute. La traduttrice, come risulta dall'analisi, ha scelto nella maggior parte dei casi di mantenere questo tipo di sintassi artificiosa e ridondante anche nella versione inglese, risultando però ugualmente efficace nella resa dei concetti. Viene poi sviluppata un'analisi specifica sull'utilizzo delle strategie di traduzione, la cui teoria è stata spiegata nel primo capitolo, attraverso estratti dai libri sorgente. La prima strategia analizzata è l'"adaptation", che Goldstein sceglie di utilizzare la tecnica della trascrizione letterale di molte parole del testo sorgente: questo è il caso della parola *stradone* la più emblematica tra gli esempi proposti, poiché è anche quella che si ripete

più volte nel corso dei libri. Nella narrazione, lo *stradone* è la grande strada principale che divide il rione in due metà. Goldstein decide di trascrivere la parola italiana data l'assenza di un termine equivalente adeguato nella lingua d'arrivo. Questa scelta viene effettuata anche nel caso della toponomastica italiana, con parole come *via Garibaldi*, *piazza Dante*, *Vomero*, *Scampia e Ponticelli*, che vengono trascritte letteralmente nella traduzione inglese. L'analisi presenta anche una sezione sulle espressioni idiomatiche, che vengono definite come modelli linguistici fissi che non permettono variazioni e i cui significati non possono essere dedotti dai singoli componenti. La traduzione di questi elementi linguistici risulta particolarmente difficile, come possiamo notare dal lavoro svolto da Goldstein, che ha trasformato espressioni fortemente connotate storicamente e culturalmente, come *paladino di Francia*, in espressioni idiomatiche inglesi che sortiscono lo stesso effetto nel lettore, nonostante venga leggermente cambiato il lessico, come l'equivalente *knight in shining armor*. L'ultima strategia analizzata è quella della non-equivalence, che permette al traduttore di prendere in prestito parole dalla lingua sorgente e trasporle nella lingua d'arrivo, talvolta aggiungendo una breve spiegazione. Nel caso dei romanzi napoletani, questo tipo di traduzione si può riscontrare quasi in tutti i nomi di cibo, come *lupini*, *cassata*, *sfogliatelle*, *struffoli*, *taralli*, che vengono trascritti in italiano anche nella versione inglese. Un'ultima sezione è dedicata ai casi particolari in cui le strategie di Goldstein non risultano efficaci nella resa totale delle sfumature di significato del testo sorgente, come è accaduto ad esempio per gli insulti quali *vaiasse e mappàna*, che tradotti come *sluts e you are nothing*, hanno perso alcune sfumature di significato, restituendo al lettore un'idea sbagliata, oltre a levigare la caratteristica rusticità di queste parole che non fanno parte dell'italiano standard ma che in inglese vengono tradotte con un linguaggio standard. Un risultato analogo, risulta essere quello ottenuto in corrispondenza di elementi culturali specifici che non vengono spiegati nel testo d'arrivo, suscitando confusione nel lettore straniero, come ad esempio il gioco di parole “*due maschi veri ci sono a Napoli, papà tuo e quello lì* (n.d.r. riferendosi al “Maschio Angioino”)” per esprimere il concetto celato dietro al binomio Maschio = virilità, che nella versione inglese non viene esplicitato, lasciando i lettori che non conoscono la lingua sorgente senza una spiegazione o senza alcun riferimento. In conclusione possiamo dire che la maggior parte delle strategie utilizzate da Goldstein hanno sortito l'effetto desiderato e sono state utilizzate in modo

efficace, ma nonostante la varietà di strategie e soluzioni fornite dai translation studies, in alcuni casi, la traduzione non è stata sufficientemente efficace, nonostante abbia contribuito alla fama mondiale dei romanzi e della scrittrice.