

### 3.5. Dialect

The form of language may vary according to who is speaking, in the sense of *who* or *what* the speaker is. This includes geographical varieties (regional dialects) as well as social varieties (social dialects), temporal dialect and idiolect. They are related not to the *use* to which language is put in a given situation but to the *user*. These user-related varieties of language differ from register: while dialects are essentially saying the same thing in different ways, registers are saying different things. Dialects tend to differ phonologically, lexically and grammatically but not semantically.

3.5.1. A major distinction in *geographical dialect* in the English-speaking world is, of course, between British English (BrE) and American English (AmE). The Canadian standard of English is very close to the American and coincides in nearly all aspects, although both AmE and BrE spellings may be found. The problem of choosing one variety in preference to the other crops up in all forms of translation into English, from technical manuals to literary texts. Although phonological differences are of marginal importance to the translation of written texts, the translator still has to face quite a number of variations in spelling, vocabulary and grammar. There is nothing for translators to do but accept that differences exist and be as knowledgeable about them as they can. When translating from an Italian ST, the translator must take into account whether the text is destined specifically for an AmE or BrE target audience. If a research article is, for instance, to be submitted for publication to an American journal, it is advisable to use American conventions. BrE is preferable when the translation is aimed at a European English-speaking audience. Both BrE and AmE are acceptable for a world-wide audience. When geographical dialect is not an important factor, translators can choose whichever they are most at home with. As always, however, consistency is of utmost importance to text coherence.

Apart from pronunciation, the main differences between the two geographical varieties fall under the headings of spelling, grammar and syntax, vocabulary and punctuation. Some examples are given below. AmE items are given as the first alternative and BrE items as the second.

Most of the *spelling* differences between AmE and BrE fall into the following groups, although exceptions do exist.

-am - -amme: program - programme. The AmE spelling program is also used in BrE when referring to computers.

-er - -re: center - centre. BrE distinguishes meter meaning a measuring device (as in

thermometer) from metre, a unit or scale of measurement (as in kilometre or poetic metre). AmE uses meter in both senses.

-o - -ou: color - colour; favorite - favourite; mold - mould.

-lyze - -lyse: analyze - analyse. The noun form in both AmE and BrE is -lysis: analysis, paralysis.

-ize - -ise/-ize: specialize - specialise/specialize; civilize - civilize/civilise. The differences in spelling of the verbs is carried over into the spelling of derived nouns and adjectives: organizer - organiser/organizer; recognizable - recognisable/recognizable. On the other hand, certain verbs are almost always spelt with -ise in both AmE and BrE: advertise, advise, compromise, devise, disguise, exercise, improvise, revise, supervise, surmise, televise, etc.

-s - -ce: defense - defence; offense - offence. BrE has -ce for the noun and -se for the verb: licence, license; practice, practise.

-l - -ll: traveling - travelling; woolen - woollen. Notice that with the past tense or past participles of verbs AmE also has -ll if the last syllable is stressed: rebelled.

-og - -ogue: dialog - dialogue.

Apart from these major groups there are also individual words that are spelt differently, for example: bank check - bank cheque; gray - grey; tire - tyre; airplane - aeroplane.

Grammar and syntax also differ to some extent in the two varieties. The use of the article is not constant, for instance, as can be seen from the following examples:

at the end of the term  
to go to a university  
ask for information at the desk

at the end of term  
to go to university  
ask for information at reception

Another difference can be seen in the expressions in future and in the future. In BrE the meaning of 'beginning now', 'from now on' is expressed by in future; AmE uses in the future, which in BrE will have the meaning 'at some point in the future'.

Compare the following examples:

BrE We regret we will not accept exchange goods **in future** (from now on)

BrE There will be better prospects for language graduates **in the future** (at some point in future time).

The use of prepositions may also differ in the two varieties of English at times. The AmE *from Monday through Friday* corresponds in BrE to *from Monday up to and including Friday*, which could be more simply but with a touch of ambiguity be phrased as *from Monday to Friday* (does this include Friday or not?). Further examples include:

different than	different from
speak with	speak to
he hasn't eaten in weeks	he hasn't eaten for weeks
to fill out a form	to fill in a form
a quarter after four	quarter past four
she wrote her friend	she wrote to her friend
he is a member in a society	he is a member of a society

Confusion may sometimes result from differences in the use of prepositions, as in the case of *on sale*. In AmE it means that goods are being sold at a reduced price; in BrE it indicates that the goods are simply offered for purchase. The BrE equivalent of *on sale* is *in a sale/in the sales*, while the AmE equivalent of the BrE *on sale* is *for sale*.

- It *Tutta la merce è in saldo.*  
 AmE All the merchandise is **on sale**.  
 BrE All the goods are **in the sale**.

- It *Hai visto i piatti giapponesi in vendita alla Rinascente questa settimana?*  
 AmE Have you seen the Japanese dishes **for sale** at Bloomingdales this week?  
 BrE Have you seen the Japanese dishes **on sale** at Selfridges this week?

Pronoun reference varies slightly between AmE and BrE. In BrE consistency in the use of the pronoun *one* is mandatory.

*Non si può sempre fare quello che si vuole.*  
**One** cannot always do what **one** wants.

AmE will allow a mixed use of pronouns.

**One** cannot always do what **he** wants.

Although there are not many morphological differences between the two varieties, the past participle form of the verb *to get* is worth mentioning: AmE *get, got, gotten*; BrE *get, got, got*.

- It *Ha preso un'altro premio Oscar!*  
 AmE She's **gotten** another Oscar!  
 BrE She's **got** another Oscar!

In AmE *accommodations* is always plural, whereas in BrE it is always singular.

- It *Com'era la sistemazione?*  
 AmE What were the **accommodations** like?  
 BrE What was the **accommodation** like?

The form of an adverb or preposition may also differ: *afterward* – *afterwards*; *backward* – *backwards*; *downward* – *downwards*; *sideward* – *sideways*; *toward* – *towards*.

By far the greatest differences between AmE and BrE are lexical. There are words which reflect a cultural divergence between Great Britain and the United States: in other words, objects or concepts that only exist in one culture. In the United States, for instance, there are such things as the *Ivy League*, which has no BrE equivalent; whereas AmE has no corresponding concept for the British Honours degree or A-levels.

The British and American university systems present quite a few lexical problems for translators. The British system has basically four tenured ranks for teaching staff: lecturer, senior lecturer, reader, professor. The American system has two ranks which are normally tenured, associate professor, (full) professor, and one which is sometimes tenured, that of assistant professor.

Certain monosemous words in one variety have a direct synonym in the other: *station wagon* – *estate car*; *highway* – *motorway*; *checking account* – *current account*; *cookie* – *biscuit*; *garbage* – *rubbish*. Polysemous words are more problematic since their range of meanings overlap in most but not all cases in AmE and BrE. For instance, *faculty* covers the meanings in both varieties of 'ability', 'power', 'capability'. In addition, however, in AmE it means 'teaching staff', whereas in BrE it means 'a division of a university', such

as faculty of law.

Thus, the sentence:

We were very much impressed by the law faculty.

Would be understood in AmE primarily as referring to the staff, and in BrE as referring primarily to the buildings, equipment and organisation. This is also due to the fact that the BrE meaning would actually be covered by law school in AmE.

The greatest confusion is, however, caused by words which exist in the two varieties but which have totally different meanings.

potato chips	crisps
french fries	chips or french fries
sidewalk	pavement
pavement	road
first floor	ground floor
second floor	first floor

The differences in punctuation between AmE and BrE are not striking, but they are worth noting nevertheless. When inverted commas are used in AmE, punctuation (full stops or commas) are placed at the end *within* the inverted commas:

AmE "I sure hope you make it on time."

whereas BrE places the punctuation *outside* the inverted commas:

BrE "I really hope you make it on time".

In expressions of time a full-stop is used between hours and minutes in BrE, 11.15 a.m., while AmE prefers a colon, 11:15 a.m. In AmE the colon ends the salutation of a business letter (Dear Mr Jackson:) while the comma ends that of a friendly letter (Dear Michael,). In BrE the comma is used in both cases.

AmE and BrE are constantly influencing each other and the boundaries between the two varieties are now getting fuzzier. The traditional interchange of literature and the press

has been intensified in recent decades by jet travel, satellite communications, radio, television and films. Powerful forces are at work to bring the two streams of English closer together in every field. Increasingly, British and American experts in every field are changing places with one another through various interchange schemes and when they write articles and textbooks they do so for the whole of the English-speaking world. These factors all work together to make the divergence between the two geographical varieties narrower and narrower. Interestingly enough, however, the interaction between American and British is now largely from east to west and there is a growing number of Americanisms entering British usage.

3.5.2. There is rarely complete cross-cultural overlap in *social dialects* and their pragmatic effect. At times social dialect may be difficult to render in the TT and an equivalent effect is obtained by choosing a regional dialect. Translators will generally have to take into account the dialect's function: why has the writer chosen to use this form of language? It is the intended effect that is inherent in the dialect that should be identified by the translator and then rendered functionally with a suitable equivalent in the TT. Let us see how the translator of Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* has dealt with the problem of translating Cockney into Italian. In his Introductory Note Francesco Saba Sardi writes:

Ho risolto il problema ricorrendo a un "orribile" impasto linguistico: un misto di dialetti padani, tra l'altro, in quanto matrice latino-celtica, i più vicini alle sonorità, astruse e pregnanti, del *cockney* ... Sicché, Eliza, suo padre, gli spettatori che assistono alle esibizioni del linguista-Pigmalione sotto la pioggia, parlano, nella mia versione, un misto di veneto, piemontese, lombardo, persino ligure, con prevalenza della favella che ha corso (una favella "inquinatissima") nell'area milanese.

Translating Italian regional dialects into English poses much the same problem. Which dialect is to be chosen in representation of the ST dialect? The obvious pitfall in choosing one dialect in preference to another is to create unintended effects. Since regional dialects often express a social hierarchy, strong adverse reactions may be aroused in the TL community by attributing low social status to a dialect that enjoys quite a high status. Within the Veneto region of Italy, for instance, the dialect of Venice is considered much more high-ranking socially than those of any of its neighbours (e.g. Padua, Treviso), and would therefore be inappropriate in rendering Cockney. This is probably why the translator of *Pygmalion* chose a potpourri of dialects.

THE FLOWER GIRL. Oh, sir, dont let him charge me. You dunno what it means to me. Theyll take away my character and drive me on the streets for speaking to gentlemen. They—

THE NOTE TAKER [*coming forward on her right, the rest crowding after him*] There, there, there, there! who's hurting you, you silly girl? What do you take me for?

THE BYSTANDER. It's all right: he's gentlemen: look at his boots. [*Explaining to the note taker*] She thought you was a copper nark, sir.

THE NOTE TAKER [*with quick interest*] Whats a copper's nark?

THE BYSTANDER [*inapt at definition*] It's a—well, it's a copper's nark, as you might say. What else would you call it? A sort of informer.

THE FLOWER GIRL [*still hysterical*] I take my Bible oath I never said a word—

THE NOTE TAKER [*overbearing but good-humored*] Oh, shut up, shut up. Do I look like a policeman?

THE FLOWER GIRL [*far from reassured*] Then what did you take down my words for? How do I know whether you took me down right? You just shew me what youve wrote about me. [*The note taker opens his book and holds it steadily under her nose, though the pressure of the mob trying to read it over his shoulders would upset a weaker man*]. Whats that? That aint proper writing. I cant read that.

THE NOTE TAKER. I can. [*Reads, reproducing her pronunciation exactly*] "Cheer ap, Keptin; n' haw ya flahr orf a pore gel."

THE FLOWER GIRL [*much distressed*] It's because I called him Captain. I meant no harm. [*To the gentleman*] Oh, sir, dont let him lay a charge agen me for a word like that. You—

THE GENTLEMAN. Charge! I make no charge.

(Bernard Shaw, *Pygmalion*)

LA FIORAIA. Oh, sciur, non lasi mica che mi accusano. Lei sa no che cosa che vuol dire per me. Mi rovineranno la reputazione e mi sbatteranno sulla strada solo per aver parlato a un sciur. Loro...

L'UOMO DAL TACCUINO [*facendosi avanti a destra della ragazza, mentre gli altri gli si affollano alle spalle*]. Da brava, da brava! Chi ti fa niente, sciocca? Per chi mi hai preso?

IL TALE. È tutto un sbalio, l'è un sciur; guardaci le scarpe. (Rivolto all'uomo del taccuino) La ragazza a creduto che lei era un soffia, sciur.

L'UOMO DAL TACCUINO (con improvviso interesse). Che cos'è un soffia?

IL TALE (incapace di spiegarlo). È... Be', l'è un soffia, no? Come si dice, se no? Uno che informa, no?

LA FIORAIA (ancora isterizzata). Giuro sulla bibbia, giuro, che ho mai di' una parola, me...

L'UOMO DEL TACCUINO (imperioso ma di buon umore). E piantala una buona volta! Ho forse l'aria di un poliziotto?

LA FIORAIA (ben lungi dall'essere rassicurata). E allora perché metteva giù quel che me diseva? Come faccio a sapere che trascrive giusto? Mi facci vedere cusa l'è che a scritt de me, (L'uomo spalanca il taccuino e glielo pianta sotto il naso, sebbene la pressione della folla che cerca di leggerlo al di sopra delle sue spalle sia tale che travolgerebbe un tipo meno robusto di lui.) Che cus'è? Quella mica è una scrittura giusta. Sun mica capace di leggerla.

L'UOMO DAL TACCUINO. Io sì. (Legge, riproducendo esattamente la pronuncia della ragazza.) «Su con la vita, capitano, e crompi un fiur da una pora tusa.»

LA FIORAIA (ancor più preoccupata). È perché ci ho detto capitano. Non volevo mica offenderlo. (Al gentiluomo) Oh, sciur, non facci una denuncia conter de me per una paroleva così. Lei...

IL GENTILUOMO. Denuncia! Io non faccio nessuna denuncia.

(Bernard Shaw, *Pigmaliione*, translated by Francesco Saba Sardi)

There is no easy solution to the problem of how to translate dialect. As always the translator's bicultural awareness of the subtleties involved in regional and social language differences serves as a guideline. It should be borne in mind, of course, that opting for a standard form in the TT instead of selecting a social dialect is by no means a satisfactory compromise since it is bound to lead to a loss in the effect intended in the ST.

3.5.3. *Temporal dialect* refers to changes that occur in language through time. It is often possible to assign a text to a certain age or period of time simply by looking at the type of language used. Sensitivity to lexical and grammatical features that signal a temporal dialect is an important aspect of translation. This is true not only of texts from earlier periods but also of comparatively modern texts. Ultramodern lexical items may be so new that they cannot be traced in any dictionary. The way to deal with these (if the author is not available for consultation) is either to coin an equivalent term in the TT or to paraphrase. Keeping up with neologisms of this kind is one reason why extensive reading in both L1 and L2 is a must for all translators. A recent term used in the Italian press, for instance, to refer to conservationists and animal lovers who carry their fervour to extremes is *ecoterrorista*; a possible English translation, found in the newspapers, might be animal rights activist. In the following text the ST writer quotes an already consolidated "futuristic" term and then coins two others, *autobus delle stelle* and *oltrecielo*.

Già si parla di un "sistema spaziale di trasporto" o, con un tocco in più d'immaginazione, di "autobus delle stelle". In effetti, il biglietto di andata e ritorno per quell'"oltrecielo", cui il nostro sguardo arriva soltanto con l'aiuto dei telescopi, non è più il remoto sogno di Jules Verne.

(Giulio Nascimbeni,  
"Il biglietto per l'oltrecielo",  
Il Corriere della Sera, 15 aprile 1981)

These neologisms can be rendered in English by *starbus*, on the lines of *skybus*, a well-worn term in charter aviation, and *overskies*, again playing on the already existing term *overseas*.

There is already talk of a "space transport system", or on a rather more imaginative note, of a "starbus". In fact, the return ticket "overskies", which our gaze can only reach with the aid of telescopes, is no longer Jules Verne's distant dream.



Whether to reproduce the temporal dialect of the ST or not generally depends on who has commissioned the translation and its ultimate purpose. The choice varies from trying to reproduce the language of the time, as for instance in translations of Shakespeare, or to aim for a contemporary variety, which would prove comprehensible to a wider TL audience. Once again the key word is coherence: archaic forms cannot be mixed in with modern forms, unless of course this is a deliberate stylistic deviance of the ST.

The desire to make *The Tempest* more accessible, while preserving the flavour and effect of the original, led Edoardo de Filippo to use a different geographical rather than temporal dialect: he chose to translate the play into his Neapolitan dialect rather than into standard Italian.

ARIEL (*sings*)

Full fathom five thy father lies,  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
Nothing of him that doth fade,  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.  
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.

(*Burden*) Ding dong.

Hark, now I hear them, ding dong bell.

FERDINAND

The ditty does remember my drowned father.  
This is no mortal business, nor no sound  
That the earth owes—I hear it now above me.

PROSPERO (*to Miranda*)

The fringed curtains of thine eye advance,  
And say what thou seest yond.

MIRANDA

What is't?—a spirit?

Lord, how it looks about! Believe me, sir,  
It carries a brave form. But 'tis a spirit.

(William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*)

ARIELE (*canta*)

*Nfium' a lu mare  
giace lu pate tujo.  
L'ossa so' addeventate de curallo,  
ll'huocchie so' dduje smeralde...  
E li spoglie murtale, tutte nzieme  
se sono trasfurmate:  
mò è na statula de marmole  
prigiato, sculpito e cesellato!  
Li ninfe de l'oceano sunarranno  
campane a morto ogni ora!*

VOCI SPARSE

*Din, don, dan!*

ARIELE

*Lì ssiente?*

FERDINANDO

*Sì, li ssemto! Din, don, dan!  
Chist' è suono ca parla 'e papà mio...  
mun è nu suono umano,  
vène da ll'alto,  
è cosa ultraterrena.*

PROSPERO (*a Miranda*)

*Guardanno addò lu dito mio te nzegna,  
che vide tu llà bascio?*

MIRANDA

*Che d'è, nu spireto?  
Cumme se guarda attorno!  
Tène nu bell'aspetto,  
è cumme fosse umano,  
ma credo ch'è nu spireto.*

(Edoardo de Filippo, *La tempesta*)

3.5.4. *Idiolect* is the most individual of user-related varieties of language and refers to a person's idiosyncratic speech habits at a particular time in life. It includes such idiosyncrasies of language as frequently-repeated words, structures, and favourite expressions. Consider the following example taken from Werlich (1983:251). The personal form of figurative language used by Churchill in this excerpt from his book *The Roar of the Lion* indicates that painting represents an outlet for his aggression. Churchill states that he puts

**slashes of blue** on the absolutely **cowering canvas**. Anyone could see that it could not **hit back**. No evil fate avenged the jaunty violence. **The canvas grinned in helplessness before me**. The spell was broken. The sickly inhibitions rolled away. I seized the largest brush and **fell upon my victim** with berserk fury. I have never felt in awe of a canvas since.

It is sometimes difficult to establish the uniqueness of idiolect on the basis of a short text but it can be very important within longer stretches of discourse like a novel or a speech. It is advisable to maintain idiolect in the TT since it is either a component of a writer's personality or, in fiction, it may be used to add depth to a character.

Idiolect is closely linked to style. A major distinction between idiolect and style, however, is that style entails a conscious choice aimed at producing a particular effect, whereas idiolect is an unconscious expression of an individual's personality. Stylistic variations in language use related to conscious choices on the part of the user and their relevance to translation will be our concern in the following chapter.