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ANDREA MACCIÒ

## **The Different Lives of Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*: An Italian Case Study**

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### **Abstract**

In stage translation, the intercultural nature of drama and the varied addressees (actors *and* audience) of the target play demand a flexible strategy. Performability rightfully remains a fundamental feature, only recently legitimized, of any translation written for the stage. However, the relationship between translation, adaptation and rewriting is equally important in shaping the target play.

This paper aims to introduce the director's vision of the source play and of its possible dramaturgical improvements as a further reason behind the blurred boundary between translation and adaptation in theatre. *Rumori fuori scena*, the Italian version of Michael Frayn's *Noises Off*, serves as the case study for a contrastive analysis which, in addition to the source text and its published translation, analyses the script currently being staged. The words of the translator and of the professionals involved are then essential to understand the practice of theatrical translation in all its steps, in order to truly devise a comprehensive theoretical framework of the issues involved in the operation.

**Key words** – stage translation; adaptation; Michael Frayn; *Noises Off*; Italian theatre

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Research has acknowledged that theatrical translation «is not limited to interlingual transfer»<sup>1</sup>. In the light of the cultural centrality of theatre and of the prominent role of translation in intercultural communication<sup>2</sup>, the complex phenomenon of translating a foreign play for the target stage deserves careful consideration. Among the many issues are the cultural influence exerted by the target context on the one hand, and the need to write lines which could be performable in the target language on the other.

As for the first point, theatre is deeply intertwined with the culture which generates it,

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<sup>1</sup> Cristina MARINETTI, "Transnational, Multilingual, Post-dramatic: Rethinking the Location of Translation in Contemporary Theatre", in Silvia BIGLIAZZI, Paola AMBROSI and Peter KOFLE (eds.), *Theatre Translation in Performance*, Abingdon-New York, Routledge, 2011, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> See David KATAN, "Translation as Intercultural Communication", in Jeremy MUNDAY (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Translation Studies*, London-New York, Routledge, 2009, pp. 74-92; Anthony J. LIDDICOAT, "Translation as Intercultural Mediation: Setting the Scene", «Perspectives: Studies in Translation Theory and Practice», 24 (2016), pp. 347-353; Ovidi Carbonell CORTES, Sue-Ann HARDING (eds.), *Routledge Handbooks in Translation and Interpreting Studies*, New York, Routledge, 2018.

to the extent that it contributes to the audience's education<sup>3</sup>. Theatre mirrors reality, so the play will be deeply connected to its space and time, striving towards a relevant role in the cultural development of a given society. For instance, G.B. Shaw thought that

*A Doll's House* will be as flat as ditchwater when *A Midsummer Night's Dream* will still be as fresh as paint; but it will have done more work in the world; and that is enough for the highest genius<sup>4</sup>.

Intercultural theatre comes to life when the play travels outside its borders: the source play is inevitably absorbed by the target culture, becoming a hybrid whose original features coexist with new, specific ones<sup>5</sup>. As for the second issue, illustrious actors and directors – from Jean Vilar to Dario Fo – often complained about translated plays which «do not breathe»<sup>6</sup>. Writing a performable theatrical language is a challenging task whose secrets and techniques (relevant in translation) have not yet been fully analyzed.

This article argues that an interdisciplinary approach and a synergy between the theoretical dimension and the practice of the stage are essential to understanding stage translation<sup>7</sup>. Far from a «distrust of theory»<sup>8</sup>, this article aims at offering a case-study which proves that including the theatrical practice is essential in building a theory truly focused on its object of study. Stage translation goes beyond the interlingual problem and embraces negotiation between different cultural sensibilities, practices, techniques<sup>9</sup>, as demonstrated by the abundance of case studies that «blur the boundaries between adaptation and translation»<sup>10</sup>, documented by recent research<sup>11</sup>.

Stage translation calls for the analysis of the interlinguistic/ intercultural problems between the source and target culture as well as a study of the way the lines are tailored on the target language. However, these elements alone might do not guarantee an adequate understanding of the phenomenon: for instance, they cannot provide a satisfying explanation for shifts deriving from practical performative problems. Only by

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<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey RICHARDS (ed.), *Sir Henry Irving: theatre, culture, and society: essays, addresses, and lecture*, Keele, Ryburn Pub., 1994, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup> Hanna SCOLNICOV, Peter HOLLAND, *The Play out of Context: Transferring Plays from Culture to Culture*, Cambridge-New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Patrice PAVIS, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, translated by Loren Kruger, London-New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Ton HOENSELAARS, *Shakespeare and the Language of Translation*, London, Arden Shakespeare, 2004, p. 137.

<sup>7</sup> Roger BAINES, Cristina MARINETTI, Maria PERTEGHELLA, "Introduction", in BAINES, MARINETTI, PERTEGHELLA (eds.), *Staging and Performing Translation: Text and Theatre Practice*, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> Silvia BIGLIAZZI, Paola AMBROSI, Peter KOFLER, "Introduction", in Silvia BIGLIAZZI, Paola AMBROSI, Peter KOFLER (eds.), *Theatre Translation in Performance*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2013, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> The encounter between the Western and the non-Western theatrical traditions are the core of cross-cultural theatre, which encompasses intercultural, multicultural and post-colonial theatre. Jacqueline LO, Helen GILBERT, "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis", «TDR», 46. 3 (2002), pp. 31-53.

<sup>10</sup> Katia KREBS, *Translation and Adaptation in Theatre and Film*, London-New York, Routledge, 2014, p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> See So-Rim LEE, "Translation, Adaptation, and Appropriation in Brook's *Mahabharata*", «New Theatre Quarterly», 34.1 (2018), pp. 74-90; Kara REILLY, "Richard Cumberland's 'The Jew' and the Benevolence of the Audience: Performance and Religious Tolerance", «Eighteenth-Century Studies», 48.4 (2015), pp. 457-477.

including the performative dimension can the analysis be complete. Stage translation provides new arguments to the understanding of the relationship between the dramatic text and the performance<sup>12</sup>, the latter being the dimension where the text is manipulated in many ways. Such manipulation, achieved by means of translation and adaptation, is a direct consequence of the intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions embedded in intercultural theatre<sup>13</sup>.

The case study here presented extends the analytical look to the process which leads to the final performed text, shedding light on some of the reasons behind the manipulation. Firstly, as an Art whose survival mostly depends on economic results, drama needs to weight both the expectations and the habits of the target audience<sup>14</sup>. Classic plays and prominent playwrights represent a safe investment, while new plays usually struggle for visibility; when they cross their original borders, their identity and features are fully renegotiable to make them fit for the target stage. Secondly, the playwright's position in the Canon needs to be considered<sup>15</sup>: the more central the author, the more reluctant to changes the target approach, shaped by the critical narration, will be. For instance, Ducis's creative rendition of *Hamlet* seems outrageous today given that Shakespeare's fame has grown immeasurably over the centuries, while it was accepted when, far from being a literary or dramatic pillar, the Bard was deemed a playwright with a disputable sense of dramaturgy<sup>16</sup>. Thirdly, shifts from source to target play<sup>17</sup> might be generally explained by linguistic issues depending on cultural differences<sup>18</sup>. Some features of the source play might be emphasized according to the target audience's expectations.

The director's involvement in the recreation of a play might seem an obvious fact, but the extent to which his/her decisions influence the target play has not been properly

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<sup>12</sup> From strictly linguistic perspectives (see Mick SHORT, *Exploring the Language of Poems, Plays, and Prose*, London-New York, Longman, 1996), the text needs to be understood before being performed and the activation of schemata (see Roger C. SCHANK, Robert P. ABELSON, *Scripts, Plans, Goals and Understanding: An Inquiry into Human Knowledge Structures*, Hillsdale, Erlbaum, 1977) compensates the lack of visual aid. Studies reinforcing the position of the performance (see Roger M. BUSFIELD, *The Playwright's Art: Stage, Radio, Television, Motion Pictures*, New York, Harper, 1971; Piermario VESCOVO, *Entracte: drammaturgia del tempo*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2007) claim that dialogue is only fulfilled by the actor's interpretation (see Anne UBERSFELD, *Lire le théâtre*, Paris, Éditions Sociales, 1977) and clearly distinguish between the text prior to the performance and the text being performed (see Mick WALLIS, Simon SHEPHERD, *Studying Plays*, London-New York, Oxford University Press Inc., 2002; Marco DEMARINIS, *Semiotica del teatro: l'analisi testuale dello spettacolo*, Milano, Bompiani, 1982; Gigi LIVIO, *La scrittura drammatica: teoria e pratica esegetica*, Milano, Mursia, 1992). The stylistic perspective (see Susan MANDALA, *Twentieth-century Drama Dialogue as Ordinary Talk: Speaking between the Lines*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007) is useful in detecting the features of dramatic language, but the path which leads to the performance cannot be discarded.

<sup>13</sup> LO, GILBERT, "Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis", p. 32.

<sup>14</sup> See Paola PUGLIATTI, *I segni latenti*, Messina, Firenze, 1986, p. 16.

<sup>15</sup> Andre LEFEVERE (ed.), *Translation, History, Culture: A Sourcebook*, London-New York, Routledge, 1992, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> See Anna Maria CRINÒ, *Le traduzioni di Shakespeare in Italia nel Settecento*, Roma, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1950.

<sup>17</sup> Source and target text (or play) are here used as technical terms. For a discussion of the metaphorical use of the terms 'source text' and 'target text', see Rainer GULDIN, *Translation as Metaphor*, New York, Routledge, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Linda HUTCHEON, *Theory of Adaptation*, London-New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 150.

considered. This influence becomes crucial in intercultural theatre, where the balance of power between the playwright and the director changes: «the director does not subordinate himself to another author; his source is only a pretext»<sup>19</sup>. In the Twentieth century «directors were *but* translators who must render the playwright's intention precisely»<sup>20</sup> and their choice of improving the text going against the literal sense of the text was ethically condemned. In intercultural theatre, however, the director is the centre of the culturalization process, the «unifying object»<sup>21</sup> whose dominant narrative<sup>22</sup> actively shapes the final target play. The ways the director of the target play affects and influences the translator's approach to the source text needs to be analyzed in order to fully understand the process beginning with the translated text and ending with performance on the target stage.

A contrastive examination of the linguistic/cultural problems alone is rarely sufficient to fully explain and understand the shifts in the target play: other issues specifically related to theatre are involved. The understanding of stage translation is limited and partial unless the dramaturgical decisions leading to the target play are included in the study of the phenomenon. This contribution focuses on Michael Frayn's *Noises Off* and its Italian version, *Rumori fuori Scena* (translated by Filippo Ottoni and directed by Attilio Corsini), to widen the analysis of the factors which influence the process conducive to the target play. Firstly, the analysis aims to demonstrate the importance of a collaborative relationship between the director and the translator. Secondly, it aims to show the extent to which the target text is shaped by the director's dramaturgical vision.

As a perfect example of metatheatre, *Noises Off* (from now on, *NO*) pivots around actors trying to stage a farce. Farce is a genre which exerts a great fascination upon Frayn, who said:

Farce has always been regarded in his country, in fact everywhere, as rather downmarket, popular entertainment. When I first started writing farces, interviewers would ask me 'why do you do farces?' why don't you write about life as it is? [...] I mean, it seems to be that everyday life has a very strong tendency towards farce, that is to say, things go wrong<sup>23</sup>.

The inspiration for *NO* came to Frayn by watching his own play *The Two of Us* from backstage<sup>24</sup>. Complying to the features of farce, which involves every-day situations and «'slices of life' dramatically and comically distorted but still very close to reality»<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> HUTCHEON, *Theory of Adaptation*, p. 82.

<sup>20</sup> Jeane LUERE, "Remarks of Playwrights and Directors", in EAD. (ed.), *Playwright versus director: authorial intentions and performance interpretations*, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1994, p. 14. Emphasis mine.

<sup>21</sup> PAVIS, *Theatre at the Crossroads of Culture*, p. 177.

<sup>22</sup> See Coleen Shirin MACPHERSON, "A New Vision for Intercultural Theatre Practice: From Toronto to London to Cairo with *First Draft*", «Canadian Theatre Review», 72 (2017), pp. 110-114.

<sup>23</sup> Merritt MOSELEY, *Understanding Michael Frayn*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 2006, p. 109.

<sup>24</sup> Malcolm PAGE, *File on Frayn*, London, Methuen Drama, 1994, p.31.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara CANNINGS, "Towards a Definition of Farce as a Literary Genre", «The Modern Language Review», 56. 4 (1961), pp. 558-560, p. 558.



without a definite plot<sup>26</sup>, *NO* shows the chaotic dress rehearsal of a play and the reality of theatre life<sup>27</sup>. Respecting the farcical «recalcitrance of objects»<sup>28</sup>, characters struggle with items which do not perform as they should; the play also generously portrays the «fall of dignity»<sup>29</sup> exposing characters to mockery and panic which, according to Frayn, is another key feature in farce<sup>30</sup>. *NO* «has as its first act a pastiche of traditional farce; as its second a contemporary variant on the formula; as its third, an elaborate undermining of it»<sup>31</sup>. In Act I, the company is involved in a challenging dress rehearsal; Act II proves that everyday theatrical life, with its crisis and fights, is even more farcical than fiction; Act III sees the explosion of all the internal conflicts in the company with disastrous but hilarious consequences. The power of the farce comes from the situation, and the play needs time to build the story before letting the conflicts explode: the third act is then pivotal in the dramaturgical structure of the farce<sup>32</sup>, as the Italian director, Attilio Corsini, also knew.

In *Noises Off* the comic effect depends on various factors. Firstly, it pivots entirely on the lines, whose language resumes and intensifies the elements of everyday conversation<sup>33</sup>, discarding neutral or lacklustre expressions. Secondly, the comic effect is built by both lines and action; thirdly, it can be solely based on gestures and facial expressions. According to Stephenson, dialogue is the key of a successful farce<sup>34</sup>, which makes it an essential feature to preserve in translation. The strong sociocultural ties of humour often require emancipation from the source text: if chained to the original text and its author, the target play will not be effective in performance<sup>35</sup> for the «languages of the scene»<sup>36</sup> will not overlap. Filippo Ottoni, who translated the play into Italian, believes that «what makes English people laugh may leave us indifferent» (phone interview, November 2014<sup>37</sup>), which is a basic rephrasing of Tymoczko's definition of

<sup>26</sup> Irving HOWE, «Farce and Fiction», «The Threepenny Review», 43 (1990), pp. 5-6, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Act I is set the night before the opening of the farce *Nothing On*: director Lloyd tries to go through a dress rehearsal which gets constantly interrupted by the actor's questions and problems. In Act II the the action takes place backstage before and during the performance. The relationships within the company have become more complicated and are rapidly deteriorating. The performance of *Nothing On* is affected by missed cues, forgotten lines, misplaced props and falling trousers. Act III shows the demise of the company. The actors change the play considerably, making mistakes and trying to dissimulate. They all manage to get to the end of the play and their happy ending.

<sup>28</sup> HOWE, «Farce and Fiction», p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> HOWE, «Farce and Fiction», p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> PAGE, *File on Frayn*, p. 31.

<sup>31</sup> PAGE, *File on Frayn*, p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> PAGE, *File on Frayn*, p. 32.

<sup>33</sup> CANNINGS, «Towards a Definition of Farce as a Literary Genre», p. 558.

<sup>34</sup> Robert C. STEPHENSON, «Farce as Method», «Tulane Drama Review», 5.2 (1960), pp. 85-93, p. 90.

<sup>35</sup> According to Hutcheon, however, playwrights «like to think that they're the sole author of everything that happens on stage» (HUTCHEON, *Theory of Adaptation*, p. 79) and interpret every modification as an interference: they might not welcome nor understand any change to their creation.

<sup>36</sup> Gigi LIVIO, *La scrittura drammatica: teoria e pratica esegetica*, Milano, Mursia, 1992, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> The citations reported are the result of the author of this article's conversations with Filippo Ottoni and Viviana Toniolo, who agreed to share the creative process which led to the translation and the performance of *Rumori fuori scena*.

«comical paradigm»<sup>38</sup>. A variable amount of rewriting or modifications might then be necessary: style, tone and dialect are the resources of the target language which greatly contribute to the comic effect, as well as sentence structure, lexical choices and language variety<sup>39</sup>.

As for the specific features of the target culture comedy, Italian humour is polarized. According to Paolo Consigli, a pagan and hedonistic side of Italian humour coexists with a Christian and moralizing one<sup>40</sup>, with a regular emphasis on farce and sexual allusions. This leads to believe that the farcical aspects of *NO* might harmonize well with the target culture humour and that modifications based on differences between comic backgrounds could be easily avoided. However, the Compagnia Attori & Tecnici fired the first translator for having produced a word-by-word translation:

Since the [first] translation didn't work, we called Filippo Ottoni [...] His translation was wonderful: you read it and you understand it's funny. I remember I was in bed, reading it and laughing out loud, because it had all that it was supposed to be there (Viviana Toniolo, personal communication, September 2014).

Despite the apparent similarities related to the farcical mood, the first literal translation of the play was not satisfying enough from a performative perspective. In order to reach the goal of laughter (pivotal in a farce), the cultural roots of humour often force the source text and the translation to go separate ways.

Moreover, since drama translation calls for quick and dynamic lines which adequately match the action, both language and comic situations need to be enhanced when necessary<sup>41</sup>. As Ottoni revealed, being involved in the creative process of the show offered him a guideline and a clear plan, very useful to emancipate effectively from the source text, especially considering that «literal translations never work. They are changed» (Ottoni, phone interview, November 2014). Ottoni also revealed that working as an active part of the team and knowing what the director expects from the text is crucial for the translator to stay in control: «I agree with changing what does not work, but this has to be done the way the director wants. Doing my way is useless. I think this is what a good translator must do» (Ottoni, phone interview, November 2014), that is, to devise a way to start pushing the text where the director will ultimately lead it. This does not mean that the lines written by the translator will not be modified later. In this sense, Viviana Toniolo, Corsini's partner, is equally clear:

<sup>38</sup> Jeroen VANDAELE, "Humour in Translation", in Yves GAMBIER, Luc VAN DOORSLAER (eds.) *Handbook of Translation Studies*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2010, pp. 147-152, p. 150.

<sup>39</sup> See Dirk DELABASTITA "A Great Feast of Languages: Shakespeare's Multilingual Comedy in *King Henry V*", «The Translator», 8.2 (2002), pp. 303-340. Research on translating humour mainly lingered on wordplay and punning, considered harder to translate than «cultural-based humour» or «reality-based humour» (Brigit MAHER, *Recreation and Style: Translating Humorous Literature in Italian and English*, Amsterdam-Philadelphia, John Benjamin Publishing Company, p. 6), where function (assessing the importance of the comic moments in the overall text) becomes crucial for a successful translation.

<sup>40</sup> Paolo CONSIGLI, "Humor in Italy", in Avner ZIV (ed.), *National Styles of Humor*, New York, Greenwood Press, 1988, pp. 133-151, p. 135.

<sup>41</sup> As Bergson said, the comic effect stems from the contrast between what a character wants to communicate and what happens to him/her while trying to communicate (Henri BERGSON, *Il riso. Saggio sul significato del comico*, translated by Federica Sossi, Milano, Feltrinelli, 2011, p. 17).

When you go on stage you realize that some things *need* to change: a phrase might be too long or some words too literary. Words get cut or changed because the audience has to understand everything and arrive at the final goal: to laugh (Toniolo, personal communication, September 2014).

It emerges that the philological respect for the source text is not the main concern in comedy, especially when the strong sociocultural roots of humour require a precise translation strategy.

The overview of the issues raised by the translation and the outline of a clear target-oriented approach in the process leading to the Italian script are the necessary introduction to the following contrastive analysis. The purpose is to detect the nature of the shifts from *NO* to *Rumori Fuori Scena* (from now on *RFS*).

The Italian translation of the play (also by Filippo Ottoni) was first published by Costa&Nolan in 1985 (two years after the first Italian performance<sup>42</sup>). For this article, however, the Compagnia Attori & Tecnici shared the video recording still used by the company to revise *RFS* for each year's new run. The deep differences between the lines of the published play and the lines performed by the actors confirm the fluidity of the dramatic text. The editorial translation of *RFS* does not mirror the text performed on stage and it cannot be used as the sole reference in a study whose objective is to analyze theatrical translation from the practitioners' perspective. However, as one additional version of the play, a comparison between the editorial translation (meant for the reader) and the script obtained from the video recording (hence, used in performance and meant for the actors) will allow a clearer view of the difference from Frayn's source text. The following study will then involve three different texts: the English source play (*NO*), the 2005 edition of the Italian translation (*RFS* 1) and the script (*RFS* 2). The analysis will privilege the translating techniques which mirror a precise dramaturgical vision related to the medium itself, such as amplification and rewriting<sup>43</sup>. The lines here presented are taken directly from the video recording, with a brief description of what actors do on stage to clarify the action.

The first examples which demonstrate how the director can influence the identity of the target play and its translation involve swearing and sexual references. In a farce, laughter is a priority. Vulgarity usually ensures safe and fast results, for it does not act on the propositional meaning but on the evocative meaning<sup>44</sup>. Vulgarity adds an emotional weight to the lines and emphasizes them while economizing on words, so it can be unexpectedly useful to empower certain moments of the play without adding original material. While

<sup>42</sup> *Rumori fuori scena* debuted on Dec. 4, 1983 at the Teatro Flaiano in Rome.

<sup>43</sup> Lexical shifts originating from linguistic or cultural interferences were present and tackled. «We were in weekly rep together in Peebles» (Michael FRAYN, "Noises Off", in ID., *Plays: 1*, London, Methuen 1997, pp. 359-522, p. 383) becomes «Abbiamo fatto insieme i carri di Tespi» (Michael FRAYN, *Rumori fuori scena*, translated by Filippo Ottoni, Genova, Costa&Nolan, 2005, p. 28) in *RFS1* and it is further reduced in *RFS2*: «è con lui che sono entrata in arte». Philip's reference «If Inland Revenue finds out we're in the country [...] » (FRAYN, "Noises Off", p. 389) is explicitated in both translation and script: «Se l'ufficio delle imposte viene a sapere che siamo tornati [...] » (FRAYN, *Rumori fuori scena*, p. 32). Close translation is avoided also for allusions to Oxfam: «I'll give it to Oxfam with the other one» (FRAYN, "Noises Off", p. 441) becomes «Adesso la nascondo in un posto dove non la ritrova di sicuro» (FRAYN, *Rumori fuori scena*, p. 66).

<sup>44</sup> Fay R. LEDVINKA, *What the fuck are you talking about? Traduzione, omissione e censura nel doppiaggio e nel sottotitolaggio in Italia*, Torino, Eris Edizioni, 2011, p. 14.

swearing is barely noticeable in *RFS1* (aligned with *NO*), it becomes quite noticeable in *RFS2*. The amplification mainly involves the lines of the director, Lloyd (Raul in *RFS2*), and Roger (Gerry in *RFS2*), the most irritable actor of the company.

*Ex 1 NO. LLOYD:* Take the sardines off with you<sup>45</sup>.

*RFS2. RAUL:* Quando esci di scena... portati via QUELLE CAZZO DI SARDINE!<sup>46</sup>

*Ex. 2 NO. ROGER:* [...] I mean, I'm just, you know<sup>47</sup>, in case anyone's looking at all this and thinking 'My God'<sup>48</sup>!

*RFS2. GERRY:* Perché se qualcuno vedesse quello che stiamo facendo potrebbe anche dire: e che cazzo ... (Act III)

According to Viviana Toniolo, the first performances were even richer in swearing. After Corsini's death, however, that aspect was softened at the audience's request. Sexual references have also been boosted wherever possible. *RFS1* already adopts some truly clever solutions:

*NO. ROGER (the bathroom door opens, Roger closes it):* oh, and a client. I'm showing a prospective tenant over the house [...] she's thinking of renting it... her interest is definitely aroused<sup>49</sup>.

*RFS1. GARRY (la porta del bagno si apre, Roger la richiude):* ah! C'è anche una cliente [...] è molto eccitata all'idea di prenderlo ... in affitto, naturalmente<sup>50</sup>.

The verb 'arouse' in the source text clearly leads to a sexual allusion, but it is mitigated by the subject, 'the interest'. In *RFS1*, Ottoni was able to exploit a fortuitous linguistic coincidence. The same line is translated with a word choice immediately suggesting a sexual encounter, using an anaphoric reference and moving the explanatory house-renting part at the end of the line. In *RFS2*, the amplification is evident in the new lines (absent in *NO* and in *RFS1*):

*RFS2. GERRY:* Eh...passavo da queste parti, ho aperto la porta e... oh! E... mi son detto... Oh! Quanta polvere... Che faccio, la scopo... La casa, naturalmente... Eh, c'è qui anche una cliente, stavamo per concludere... Sull'appartamento, voglio dire [...] È molto eccitata all'idea di prenderlo... l'appartamento. (Act I)

In colloquial and informal spoken Italian, the verb 'scopare', means both "to sweep the floor" and "to screw", while the verb 'concludere' (which indicates a successful economic transition in standard Italian) also refers to a sexual encounter which is sure to happen. Moreover, the noun for 'house' in Italian is feminine, so the object pronoun 'la' can ambiguously refer both to the house or to Vicky, Gerry's lover: a reference to the dusty floor was added to exploit such an ambiguity. Furthermore, at the end of the line, the same

<sup>45</sup> FRAYN, "Noises Off", p. 375.

<sup>46</sup> (Act I). Capital letters indicate the screaming attitude of the actor.

<sup>47</sup> Roger's frequent fillers are preserved in *RFS2* (mainly translated as «capito, no?»). They often come at the end of Gerry's lines to add rhythm but they are strategically avoided if the line stands on its own, as in this example.

<sup>48</sup> FRAYN, "Noises Off", p. 499.

<sup>49</sup> FRAYN, "Noises Off", p. 373.

<sup>50</sup> FRAYN, *Rumori fuori scena*, p. 22.

solution is reprised by the masculine pronoun ‘lo’, which, paired with the verbs ‘eccitare’ and ‘prendere’, immediately evokes the male reproductive organ. The malicious reference is again redirected by Gerry himself, specifying he was referring to the ‘appartamento’ (“flat”, also a masculine word, which matches the verb ‘to take’ as in “to rent”). The amplification pivots around the same core topic of the source text, with the addition of new linguistic material which draws from a consolidated tradition of sex jokes.

Another amplification involving the exploitation of sexual double meanings is found in Act I, where the actors desperately look for Selsdon/Amedeo:

*NO. LLOYD:* Split into two, there’s a front and a back. And instantly we’ve lost him<sup>51</sup>.

*RFS2. RAUL:* Diviso in due, c’è un davanti e un didietro. *Stando noi nel davanti ce lo siamo subito perso nel didietro...*

Not only does *RFS2* play on the similarity between the noun ‘dietro’ (“back”) and ‘didiietro’ (a colloquial synonym of “bottom”), but it also exploits the possible confusion between the verb ‘perdere’ (“to lose”) and ‘prendere’ (“to take”): all these linguistic elements evoke a quite vulgar expression and, metaphorically, someone who is tricked or in trouble (in this case, the rehearsal cannot continue without Amedeo).

The addition of sexual puns and allusions aims to empower the target text while respecting the features of the farce. *RFS1*, presumably translated by Filippo Ottoni alone, did not experiment with additions as much as *RFS2*: this leads to thinking that it was the collaboration with the director which allowed Ottoni (or maybe Corsini himself) to detach his translation from the source text.

Adaptation often extends to the features of some characters (for instance, moving from screen to stage<sup>52</sup>), while fewer changes are expected in translation. The following examples show that stage translation can change the characters’ traits for the benefit of the performance. The evolution of Selsdon (*NO*) into Amedeo (*RFS2*) is indicative of the will to build a character’s specific features around the target culture. The modifications are part of the performing process: Corsini worked on empowering the comic impact of Amedeo’s scenes. For instance, in Act I Amedeo recalls one of the many times he forgot to arrive on time for a performance. The amplification aims at emphasizing his funny clumsiness and his old age:

*NO. SELSDON:* I was having a little postprandial snooze at the back of the stalls so as to be ready for the rehearsal<sup>53</sup>.

*RFS2. AMEDEO:* Stavo facendo un pisolino postprandiale giù nelle ultime file, aspettando che toccasse a me<sup>54</sup> [...] Non avrò mica saltato la prima, eh? [...] No, perché mi è già

<sup>51</sup> FRAYN, “Noises Off”, p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> Eva ESPASA, “Performability in Translation: Speakability? Playability? Or just Saleability?”, in Carol Ann UPTON, *Moving Target: Theatre Translation and Cultural Relocation*, Manchester, St. Jerome Publishing, 2000, pp. 49-62.

<sup>53</sup> FRAYN, “Noises Off”, p. 384.

<sup>54</sup> A direct translation of «so as to be ready for the rehearsal» was avoided despite the absence of particular linguistic problems. However, ‘per essere pronto per le prove, or ‘così da esser pronto per le prove’ is not as

successo di saltare una prima, sapete? Ci fu un certo scompiglio. Eravamo a Liverpool, nel 1934, e voi vi ricorderete com'era a quei tempi...

In the following passage, the scene revolves more explicitly around Amedeo's hearing impairment than the source text.

NO. SELSDON: I met Myra Hess once [...]  
 LLOYD: From your entrance, please, Selsdon.  
 SELSDON: Well, it was during the war, at a charity show in Sunderland...  
 LLOYD: Thank you, Poppy!  
 SELSDON: Oh, not for me, it stops me sleeping.  
 RFS2. AMEDEO: Io l'ho conosciuta, sai, Giacinta Galletti... [...]  
 RAUL: Riprendiamo dalla tua entrata?  
 AMEDEO: Ma sì era sfollata, abbiamo anche fatto uno spettacolo insieme tra le truppe...  
 RAUL: Amedeo sei divino ma adesso basta!  
 AMEDEO: Un piatto di pasta con un bicchiere di vino a quest'ora me lo farei proprio!

Keeping the pun based on Poppy (the assistant's name and the plant) would have implied a close translation with an uncertain outcome. A simple game of assonances achieves the same result more efficiently in the target language. Here is one more example of Amedeo's enhanced comic character:

NO. SELSDON: So, what are they offering? One microwave oven. What? Fifty quid? Hardly worth lifting it. ...junk...junk...junk... if you insist...<sup>55</sup>  
 RFS2. AMEDEO (*speaking to an imaginary colleague back stage*): Tu fai il palo che io faccio il carico ma senza fretta... tanto nel pomeriggio non ho altri impegni (*notices the receiver is out of place and he picks it up*) Pronto? / È un'ora che aspetta? / Squire, Squire e come si chiama l'altro? / E che ne so io, adesso faccio il carico... / che cosa offre la piazza vediamo un po' / oh, un forno a microonde / e quanto ci si può fare? Venti sterline? Non vale la pena di portarlo via / questo è una porcheria, questo è una porcheria, questo è meglio di niente / quando dicono che l'età della pensione è dura dicono il giusto / questo è proprio un furto da pensionato.

In *NO*, Selsdon enters playing the Burglar and begins to examine the items in the house, predicting their value. In *RFS2*, Amedeo's debut lines refer to a backstage accomplice. The receiver of the phone had not been put back from a previous conversation (a further independent deviation from the source) and Amedeo picks it up, starting a conversation with someone who, as the audience learns, has been waiting on line the whole time. Having been mentioned before, the reference to 'Squire' is already familiar. Amedeo ends by philosophizing on the bitterness of his life as a retired burglar, which helps the audience sympathize with him. This example confirms that amplification in *RFS2* tends to avoid inserting original material: the expanded part refers to already known facts or names. The reference to retirement is clearly devised to engage the Italian audience.

While the playwright's determination against all modifications in the target play sometimes complicates the intercultural communication, Frayn wisely proves to be

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fluid and as synthetic as the final choice, which proves that the performability of the lines is a primary concern of stage translation.

<sup>55</sup> FRAYN, "Noises Off", p. 411.

aware of the different destinies of his play in translation, as he says in the introductory *Author's Note* in *Plays I*<sup>56</sup>. He is willing to embrace convincing modifications which aim at the target audience's positive reception. It is worth noting that the heaviest interventions in *RFS2* concern the ending of the acts: they need to be impactful given their importance in the overall play. While Act I of *NO* and *RFS1* simply features a few lines by Selsdon, *RFS2* ends with a 'Sardine Song': a small musical number, a simple choreography in which all actors sing an elementary tune. Minor as it might appear, its inclusion was the director's idea.

The ending of Act II starts moving in a different direction in terms of character development and dramaturgical devices. In *NO*, Frayn's most exploited (maybe even abused) way of creating dialogic chaos consists of organizing the scene around a core dialogue whose development plods by constant and sometimes repetitive interruptions which Corsini and Ottoni expunge, making the overall dialogue fluid and less disjointed. Far from being driven by objective cultural differences, this decision reflects divergent dramatic visions concerning the optimal dialogical structure<sup>57</sup>, which gives a different emphasis on certain characters or actions.

*NO* shows Poppy trying to make a confession to Lloyd. Her lines are not indicated in the scene direction, which means that if the play is read, the development of the action is left to the reader's imagination. At the end, Poppy screams her pregnancy, interrupted by Selsdon's repeated search for cues, a typical example of Frayn's dialogical organization:

*NO. POPPY (screams to Lloyd in despair): I'm going to have a...*

*SELSDON (flings the front door open): Good old-fashioned plate of what...?*

*POPPY: ... baby!*

*Selsdon goes back on stage. poppy claps her hand over her mouth, horrified*<sup>58</sup>.

Despite Poppy's revelation being the key moment, the act ends with Lloyd accidentally sitting on a cactus. In *RFS1*, Poppy, whispering at first, complains about Lloyd's absence and his daily rehearsals; then, according to the stage direction, Lloyd offers her some whisky and she starts to speak a little louder, revealing that she knows of Lloyd's other woman. Finally, when Lloyd still seems not to have heard, she starts screaming. *RFS1* clarifies the meaning of the conversation which was only roughly indicated in the source text, but reprises its ending, with Lloyd's last line and the scene with the cactus<sup>59</sup>. In *RFS2*, Poppy's confession stands out with a slightly hysterical scene (probably expected by an Italian audience) and it is fully emphasized by erasing all interruptions. The lines of Lella – Poppy's new name in *RFS2* – have been greatly amplified with references to her loneliness in order to enhance the audience's sympathy for this broken-hearted assistant. Lella's revelation ends the act.

<sup>56</sup> FRAYN, "Author's Note", in "Noises Off", p. 360.

<sup>57</sup> See Manfred PFISTER, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, translated by John Halliday, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

<sup>58</sup> FRAYN, "Noises Off", p. 491.

<sup>59</sup> FRAYN, *Rumori fuori scena*, p. 117.

RFS2. LELLA: Senti io adesso ti devo proprio parlare. Eh, sì, lo so che non è il momento adatto, ma con te non è mai il momento adatto. Io continuo a telefonarti, ma non ci sei mai. Lo so che hai da fare tutto il giorno, ma non ci sei neanche la notte, e neanche al mattino ti trovo ma, e non so dove vai...

*Raul kisses her on her forehead and starts to walk away.*

LELLA (*raising her voice*): No, no, no, non cercare di blandirmi; io ora ti dirò tutto quello che ti devo dire, perché appena calerà il sipario tu andrai in camerino da Lisa, lo so. Ti ho visto sai, che le regalavi un cactus! non sono mica cieca! E poi riprenderai il treno per Roma. Comincio a capire come funzioni, Raul, scommetto che te la fai con qualcuna del *Giulietta e Romeo*. Ah, ma questa volta non puoi cavartela così! (*raising her voice again*) e allora bello mio sturati le orecchie, perché io sono INCINTA! (*The other actors quietly stop performing, silence – and the curtain-fall*).

Act III offers a theatrical lesson on comic timing, self-control and theatrical discipline, without which the whole performance falls apart. Its comic effect comes from repetition: the audience, who knows the lines, understands the actor's frantic improvisation. Critics underlined the weaknesses of the third act, so pivotal in a farce<sup>60</sup>. As Viviana Toniolo highlights, «we saw the show in London and we noticed that Act III was really long, and there was little laughing» (personal interview, September 2014), but they attributed the issue to their scarce linguistic knowledge.

When we read it in Ottoni's translation we understood: Act three did not work because it was telling private matters, pregnancies and stuff, right on stage. You just need to show the audience what was on Act I, everything they already know, so they can laugh at the actors, their fights, their mistakes. If you propose fights with words instead of facts, one simply doesn't believe it. So, Attilio [Corsini] cut it all out (Toniolo, personal interview, September 2014).

Corsini tackled the dramaturgical issues from the beginning of the act. *NO*, in fact, starts with Tim and Poppy apologizing for the delay while a fight between Belinda and Dotty is audible off stage.

*NO*. TIM: Good evening ladies and gentlemen (*he removes the Burglar's cap*). [...]

We apologize for the slight delay in starting tonight, which is due to circumstances...

BELINDA (*off, screaming but indistinguishable*): Hands off Freddie! All right?

DOTTY (*off, screaming but indistinguishable*): You're the one who's trying to get their hands on Freddie!

TIM: ... Due to circumstances...

DOTTY (*off, screaming but indistinguishable*): You don't own him, you know!

TIM: ... beyond our control ...

*The sound of a slap, off, and Dotty screams in pain, off*<sup>61</sup>.

RFS2 highlights the fight between the two actresses by showing it on stage in all its comic violence (instead of leaving it to the spectator's imagination): the background for the following action is set in less than thirty seconds.

<sup>60</sup> «Act II [...] is also a forceful argument for farce's value as human comedy. Perhaps nothing could top it, and Act III doesn't always succeed» (PAGE, *File on Frayn*, p. 33).

<sup>61</sup> FRAYN, "Noises Off", p. 492.



According to Viviana Toniolo, modifications aiming at improving the play bring excellent results<sup>62</sup>. The ending of Act III proves Corsini's will to produce the best play possible: so convincing was this new solution that Frayn decided to use Corsini's ending after having seen the Italian performance. In *NO*, three characters playing *The Burglar* are tricked into coming on stage by the cue "I've heard of this getting stuck with a problem, but this is ridiculous". One by one, the three actors repeat their lines, triggering ironic comments by their colleagues on stage. They all turn to Lloyd (among the burglars), paralysed in stage-fright: Flavia takes control of the situation by, quite literally, putting the words in Lloyd's mouth. One by one, all the objects mentioned throughout the play (doors, sardines, a phone, bags and boxes) are frantically chased. The act ends with an improvised wedding between Lloyd and Poppy.

In Corsini's opinion, such dramatic structure needed improvement. He preserved the three entrances of the Burglars, which harmonize well with the general feeling of disorganization. However, *RFS2* focuses on rhythm, with the fast pace of the action – emphasized in the performance – contributing to the farcical and paradoxical mood. Whenever possible, the actors nervously try to hold on to their lines (by now well known to the audience) to keep the performance going. For instance, Gerry catches Raul's casual reference to the police to recover his lines ("ora scendo giù e chiamo la polizia"), but chaos prevails again when the phone starts to ring by itself, forcing the actors to go back to improvising. Undismayed, Lisa sticks to her lines, mechanically repeating them even when they are completely disconnected from the situation. The crescendo culminates with Amedeo's closing line: "Quando arriva il momento che la vita offre soltanto dolori ed incertezze, non c'è niente di meglio che ... Una buona tazza di tè!", which ends the act and the play. Corsini acknowledged Frayn's idea of chaos, reinterpreting it.

Translating a play is to devise solutions which go beyond the inter-linguistic dimension. The case study shows Ottoni and Corsini's target-oriented approach: they considered the audience's dramatic expectations and the director's artistic direction: these were the focus around which major changes were developed. Modifications of the source text might not be driven exclusively by cultural interference<sup>63</sup>, but also by a different view of the best dramatic structure to produce laughter.

Having been running in Italy for thirty years, *RFS* is now probably seen as a classic. As a play whose strength is to talk about theatre, it certainly has a universal appeal<sup>64</sup>, but the analysis showed that modifications were still needed to facilitate its success. Michael Frayn does not compare to classic playwrights in terms of expectations and critical evaluation, which erased all philological pressures on the source text. Thanks to Filippo Ottoni and Viviana Toniolo's contribution, the analysis benefits from the practitioners' vision of the play: acting in terms of what is dramaturgically efficient,

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<sup>62</sup> Frayn's 1998 *Copenhagen*, also translated by Filippo Ottoni, is a further example. «The Italian version is half as long as the English one and *that is why it has been successful*. Frayn saw *Copenhagen* with me. He was silent. He understood the play had been appreciated. But he also realized the play had changed» (Ottoni, phone interview 2014).

<sup>63</sup> References to Inland Revenue, for instance, have been domesticated or neutralized.

<sup>64</sup> FRAYN, *Rumori fuori scena*, p. 9.

they pursued a mini-max strategy<sup>65</sup>, like translators. Corsini was able to shape his version of the play thanks to Ottoni's constant support: a collaboration between translator and director is the only way for the translator to be involved in the process and produce a text truly tailored on the performance. In this case, Corsini and Ottoni operated on the source play by amplifying, cutting and rewriting, which confirms the fluid nature of the dramatic text. In *RFS2* many interventions are motivated by the inconsistencies in the dramatic development of the source text, whose potential was still clear to Corsini. Being the text one of the elements of the theatrical dynamic but not its invariable centre, the comic force of the NO was improved as Corsini saw fit: the play was a farce, and its goal was to make the audience laugh. However, sometimes *RFS2* pushes on sex jokes as the easiest and safest choice to get to that goal, trying to force them in the lines instead of defining innovative ways to improve the writing.

The analysis of *RFS1* and *RFS2* highlights the factors and the complex framework which influence the transposition of a foreign play into the target stage as well as the importance of practitioners' experience for a full understanding of the identity of the target play and the requirements of stage translation.

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<sup>65</sup> Susan BASSNETT, *Translation Studies*, London-New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 42.

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