



Photo Credit: Montana Ray

I am just like many students of translation — full of hope and theoretical knowledge, along with some practical experience. Studying translation means developing the ability to make decisions and follow through with them. Making these decisions requires extensive study and, more importantly, life experience. Living is the best advice I can offer to aspiring translators. After all, life itself is a translation—a never-ending process. That said, what follows are the fundamentals of translation I keep in mind as I work.

BUILDING A LESSICO FAMILIARE

Entering the author's universe is crucial. You must become familiar with their word choices, idiosyncrasies, semantics, and sentence structures. As someone who specializes in translating essays rather than fiction or poetry, I acknowledge that while style takes a secondary position, it remains significant. Focus on these elements: chapter length and structure, sentence patterns, recurring words and their placement, chapter endings, and, most importantly: the purpose behind these

choices. While it's impossible to know the author's exact intentions, you must trust your intuition. If you have the confidence to contact the author, do so. Otherwise, immerse yourself in their previous work to grasp their writing. Use highlighting tools, make annotations — let the pages absorb your thoughts and serve as reminders.

TRANSLATION AS CONTINUOUS DISCOVERY

My approach might seem unconventional: while I read the author's previous work, I don't read the book I will translate beforehand. I view translation as a journey of discovery, similar to reading. You uncover new worlds word by word. This allows for understanding through context. You don't need to translate every word right away, let the words flow and skip the one which doesn't come to you straight away. Once you've grasped the full picture, you can go back and revise what you've written.

READER-CENTRIC APPROACH

Always keep the reader in mind. Essay writers aim to spread ideas, so clarity and precision are essential. This doesn't prohibit word changes but requires careful consideration of the author's intent. Ask yourself these questions: are the readers of this book familiar with the topic? Why will they read this book? Who are they? What are the subject's specificities? It's clearly impossible to answer these questions definitively, but you should give yourself an idea of the who and why you're writing the words you're writing.

LANGUAGE-SPECIFIC CONSIDERATIONS

English-to-Italian translation presents unique challenges. English syntax is typically more concise, with fewer semicolons and commas. I strive to respect this by avoiding overly elaborate Italian sentences. Keep in mind that an Italian translation is normally 20% longer than the source text.

CASE STUDY: TRANSLATING SILVIA FEDERICI

Translating the iconic feminist thinker Silvia Federici's *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin*³, which addresses women's bodies, rights, and lives, tested my approach to translation. As a prominent voice in feminist studies, her work carries significant weight in academic discourse. She is also an Italian writer who now writes in English. Translating into Italian, my translation, *Oltre la periferia della Pelle*⁴, had to navigate the reductive landscape of Italian cultural attitudes toward women. Italy has historically viewed women primarily as mothers and daughters, with those who don't fit these roles often being labeled in problematic ways. While society has progressed, these underlying tensions

still influence contemporary discourse.

Consider this excerpt from her preface:

More importantly, surely can we conceive of experiences like maternity, childraising, and social subordination to men as constituting a common terrain of struggle for women even if it is one in which contrasting strategies may develop? Are alternative identities, such as gay, trans, and queer, less subject to fragmentation on the basis of class, race, ethnic origin, and age?

and my translation:

Possiamo davvero concepire esperienze quali la maternità, l'accudimento dei figli e la subordinazione sociale nei confronti degli uomini come terreno comune per la lotta delle donne sebbene da esso possano scaturire strategie contrastanti? Altre identità, come quella gay, trans e queer, sono meno soggette alla frammentazione sulla base di classe, etnia ed età?

This translation reflects careful choices that go beyond mere word equivalence to reflect my understanding of Federici's intent to empower rather than just describe. When translating "struggle," I opted for "lotta" rather than "sofferenza", a choice that emphasizes active resistance over passive suffering. Women as actors, not as passive individuals.

In Italian, there's a difference between ethnicity and race, which I think Federici had in mind when writing *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin*. Ethnicity refers to sociocultural aspects of a group of people whereas race refers mainly to physical features and behavior. That's precisely the reason why, in this case, I decided to use only "etnia" – we're talking about sociocultural aspects of a group of people, and not of their appearance. Elsewhere, throughout the text, I made the conscious choice to translate "race" as "razza" instead of "etnia," despite the latter being potentially more politically correct in Italian.

These choices reflect what I believe is the essence of translation work: each decision must balance faithfulness to the original text with effectiveness in the target language and culture. Translation work requires careful navigation between authorial intent and cultural context, while maintaining the political and philosophical imperatives of the source text.

Notes

1 Federici S., *Beyond the Periphery of the Skin*, Pm Press

https://pmpress.org/index.php?l=product_detail&p=1045

2 Federici S., *Oltre la Periferia della Pelle*, D Editore, <https://deditore.com/prodotto/oltre-la-periferia-della-pelle/>

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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