

## Reflections and Dilemmas of a Translator: Translating "Untranslatable" Words

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### Abstract

**Background:** This article will deal with a special and problematic argument of translation practice: the translation of those so-called untranslatable words, as well as try to shed some light on the translation of all those terms and concepts that are characterized by cultural nuances, or as we know other culturemes. Especially when faced with an editorial translation, the translator knows that the first way to have a satisfactory result is this: every translation is like placing a bet with the author's intentions. In other words, a perfect translation is impossible to achieve, even in the best case, the result of our efforts will always be an approximation. Of course, there are almost perfect approximations and other controversial ones, but it is always about approximations. The concept of fidelity is never an absolute concept, but a relative one: it is related to the text, to the moment when we translate, to the translator himself. We are talking, of course, about general rules. Fortunately, there are always exceptions. But if we remain within the scope of the general rule, we can say that this type of doubt (to approach? To move away? To soften it? Not to soften it?) becomes more frequent when we are asked to translate the so-called "cultural factors", this category, broad and not easily grasped, and this is exactly where we can include the culturemes.

**Objectives:** The translation of those so-called untranslatable words, as well as try to shed some light on the translation of all those terms and concepts that are characterized by cultural nuances, or as we know other culturemes.

**Methods:** How then can we reconcile such a reality with the conviction that translation is a tool of linguistic reflection, which can be complementary to a more advanced stage of learning? Transforming the text into a rich treasure chest, from which I occasionally derive an idea for foreign language teaching: the key that opens the chest slowly passes from the hands of the docent to those of the student.

**Results:** Texts survive thanks to translation. If we could not access by this means works written in languages we do not know, we would be very poor, and the authors themselves would not be known outside their narrow linguistic circle. The importance of translation as a means of survival, beyond subsistence, is therefore immense.

**Conclusions:** The meaning of the word "translation" is "to move, transfer, to turn a text from one language to another". In bureaucratic language "translate" also means "to accompany someone from

one place to another", especially a prisoner: the original text symbolically becomes "prisoner" in the mind of the translator and then freed and "transformed" into another language. While the translator trans/brings the text from the source language to the target language, he tries not to alter the meaning of the text, preserving the style of writing (in a poem also rhythm, rhyme and meter). The translator makes his choices according to the nature of the text and the purposes of the translation. What will be the translation strategy and who will be the model reader? It thus becomes important to render the meaning of a word or expression, even paraphrasing, that is, freely but faithful to the meaning, taking into account the effect it produces in the reader. On the other hand, fidelity to the source text should not be compulsion because as such it will only produce negative effects: Ford, introducing Pinto in Brazil, did not take into account the fact that "pinto" in Brazilian dialect means "small male genitalia". The name of the car was later changed to "Corcel" which means "horse" (Luka G. Translate some "untranslatable" words).

Literature is in relationship with the reader and his imagination. Jean-Paul Sartre said that literature "is made in language but is never given in language; It is a relationship between men and a call to their freedom. In addition to and more than being an "object", literature is "relationship". Emotions are universal and the language of emotions "speaks" all the languages of the world, but not all the words of a language have an equivalent or a (translating) word that can be considered the exact corresponding or that can be translated with the same incisiveness into another language. There are seemingly untranslatable words that contain moods and feelings that are difficult to translate; By this is meant that in the target language they cannot be summarized in one word and therefore need a short or long explanation. This is what we speak of translation *ad sensum* (a *sensu*); *ut orator* (creatively); *ut interpretes* (interpreting); etc. It is not only a question of understanding the literal meaning but also the metaphorical and symbolic value of such expressions.<sup>1</sup> In his article "The formation of words" Claudio Iacobini, among the different rules speaks of blocking: a general principle that conditions the actual use of well-formed words from a morphological point of view: "According to this principle, the entry into use of a possible word can only occur if there is not already a word that occupies the place of the potential one". Emotions are universal and the language of emotions "speaks" all the languages of the world, but not all the words of a language have an equivalent or a (translating) word that can be considered the exact corresponding or that can be translated with the same incisiveness into another language. There are seemingly untranslatable words that contain moods and feelings that are difficult to translate; By this is meant that in the target language they cannot be summarized in one word and therefore need a short or long explanation. This is what we speak of translation *ad sensum* (a *sensu*); *ut orator* (creatively); *ut interpretes* (interpreting); etc. It is not only a question of understanding the literal meaning but also the metaphorical and symbolic value of such expressions.<sup>2</sup> Each culture describes emotion and its facets in a unique way. Literary translation "simply" helps to arrive at the universal language of the human spirit and translating becomes the act of evoking feelings aroused by the words of the source text into similar feelings/concepts but with other sound-words in the translated text. Translating becomes similar to the transcription of a song or a musical work, of the main melody of a piece for orchestra or solo instrument, it is like carrying out its drafting and adaptation for a different instrument, obviously taking care of the musical genre. Preserving gender means being "faithful", everything else, with due skill, is part of the "beautiful". The literary text, as Cesare Segre (*Avviamento all'analisi del testo letterario*) says, performs an "introjection of contextual

<sup>1</sup> Iacobini C: The formation of words in the New Basic Vocabulary BULLETIN OF ITALIAN STUDIES. Vol.15, (p 119-124).

references", producing meaning within a formal ceremony. Joahna Rodda, a translator, believes that translating – manipulating the words of one language to transform them into pleasant and logical sentences equivalent in another language – is truly an art. Translation follows the same process as the initial creation of a work of art: defining the original concepts in a different succession of symbols, i.e. the words of the language into which the text is translated.

**Keywords:** Culturemes; Translation; Alignment; Loyalty; Cultural factors

## **Introduction**

A foreign language text is like a wonderful fabric where you can weave your linguistic knowledge; if you then have to "translate" this text into your native language, then the proof of knowledge in a foreign language is the occasion to add the reflection on interlingual compatibility or incompatibility. In addition, "slipping" through a language code offers the possibility of enrichment (thought processing) not only in the foreign language, but also in the native language itself. Texts survive thanks to translation. If we could not access by this means works written in languages we do not know, we would be very poor, and the authors themselves would not be known outside their narrow linguistic circle. The importance of translation as a means of survival, beyond subsistence, is therefore immense. The very role that translation has played in the development of literary systems over the centuries acquires special importance. Despite this, until recently, no one considered this activity worthy of serious study. During the so-called "cold war", thanks to the birth of automatic translation, linguists gradually began to deal with a schematic analysis of some interlanguage processes, but it was not until the Seventies that a real study of translation, first as a key factor in cultural history. This discipline has already been affirmed at the international level. What is generally understood by translation is the process by which a source language is rendered into a target language in such a way that the surface meaning of both languages is more or less similar and that the structures of the source (language) are preserved. as much as possible, but not so much as to distort the structure of the incoming language. Personally, I began to reflect on the theories and practice of translation based on the notions of language didactics, which also happens to other colleagues like me trained in a faculty of literature and philosophy: therefore, being inspired in most cases, only by experience my own as a translator. How then can we reconcile such a reality with the conviction that translation is a tool of linguistic reflection, which can be complementary to a more advanced stage of learning? Transforming the text into a rich treasure chest, from which I occasionally derive an idea for foreign language teaching: the key that opens the chest slowly passes from the hands of the docent to those of the student.

## **Objectives**

Translation, this mysterious object of desire that does not accept definition, an unidentified flying object, whose theorization was taken up first by linguistics and then by comparative literature, today enjoys a separate space of reflection between the humanities and social sciences. Translation studies, in terms of different and important designations, made by different countries, for better or for worse, constitute today a fertile and productive field of knowledge within the university and scientific community. But whether it is French or Italian traductology, or Translation Studies of the Anglo-American field, the object of translation is transformed and deformed, disguised until it takes, in some cases, clear and disturbing contours which are imposed on it by a rigid, normative thought, formulating and dogmatic Like for example that of a certain applied linguistics that continues to fill prescriptions for good translations, authorizing communiqués of medicines—medicines, poisons—as perfect equivalences and covets of loyalty. Indeed, at the heart of modern

language sciences, a moral, theological-political, of the translator has taken place and is hidden, decorated with paradigms that remain sacred; because, in reality, we have never asked them for anything other than their sacredness. They have meaning even without having a meaning, because in them it is impossible to distinguish a signification, beyond their ontology. This mania of traductologies, we continue to use them, to describe them, but without asking ourselves about their epistemic valence. As a result, there is no single definition that can clarify them, no common agreement on their status. In fact, it operates in a demagogic regime: between the links of a democratic and rational thought which hides the theological-political, sacred myth of *lectio divina*. From God the creator of the world to the author creator of the work, we pass, almost without understanding, from the sacred to sanctification. Therefore, in front of the Author - God, the translator has not been able to assume the functions of the faithful servant, as the vassal was for his master in the medieval feudalism of the West, excellence transformed into transparency. So we are talking about a morality of translation, which is also the legacy of the attraction, not a small one, that is exerted by the linguistic allure that has ignited souls in the years of structuralism, semiology and narratology. Those years when the humanities and social sciences advertised an epistemological status equal to that of the natural sciences. Hence the need for a poetics of translation and literature, which becomes the meeting point of aesthetic and linguistic thought, of a critical anthropology of translation, which clarifies the shortcomings of our tradition, of our pedagogies, beyond the sectorizations of disciplines and ideologies that fill the academic world and the common understanding of language. If structuralist poetics aimed to define what is literary, answering the question "what is a literary text?", some linguistics and some science of contemporary translation, continuing to theorize, without checking the epistemological bases, of notions such as fidelity and equivalence, do nothing but answer, under the shield of the sign and without explaining it, the question "what is literary character?", bringing back a hunt for essences outside of historical experience. The notion of poetics we are referring to is the one developed by Henri Meschonnic. Since the seventies Meschonnic has wondered about a critical poetics of speech and translation. In this case, criticism does not determine a value judgment, but a meta-critical, epistemological discussion, a poetic discussion compared to rhetoric and the history of its performances.

## Methods

The translator can also be called an actor who, putting a text on stage, undoubtedly throws something of himself into it. Translation, like theatrical interpretation, is the transmission of a text from the author to the audience through mediation, represented in the first case by the translator and in the second by the actor. Of course, there are also differences, which mainly depend on the different nature of communication, in the first case written and in the second oral. The meaning of the term "translation" can also include oral translation, so it is good to remember that here we will only refer to the written translation, due to its very special nature compared to the oral one "Putting down on paper" the translation should make the latter more careful than the oral translation, not only because "verba volant, scripta manent", but also because, at the level of understanding, accidental misunderstandings of the translator or a rough translation stands out more easily when reading than when listening. Who listens, notices and remembers the content and not the form of what is said, and this is precisely an advantage of the interpreter compared to the translator, who must use the target language carefully, because his writings will remain recorded in that form. There are different levels and possibilities of translation, either of detached lexical units or of larger parts of the text. In addition to interpreting their meaning on the basis of the context, which obviously determines the choice between different possible translations, the translator may often

find himself faced with the choice of one or more translation possibilities, all acceptable for the same context. The different possibilities all express the same meaning and the translator can choose one of them, from the most literary to the cheapest, except when the sentence is in a context that limits the translational potentiality. In conclusion, it is inevitable that the figure of the translator is not felt in a translation, even without depriving the source text of the characteristics that the author wanted to give it. Currently, a number of linguists (and especially since E.A Nida and G. Mounin) are ready to reassess the role of the translator and his inescapable presence. The translator's effort to remain invisible has often in the past led to literal translations and, consequently, it has been concluded that if the translator is to be appreciated in the original text he must feel as much as possible little, it is just as important to appreciate the fact that the translated text is readable and meaningful on the basis of a cultural universe whose vector is the target language: let's remember that the informative content of a text should be as faithful to the original, as well as that the structure of the text in the target language should reflect as faithfully as possible that of the source text, in all its syntactic, lexical and stylistic components. It is therefore the duty of the translator to adapt the text he is translating for the new public who will read it, with possible changes of content and style if they are necessary, without denying himself in this activity, accepting his role as an inevitable protagonist of this communicative process. It is natural for the translator to always remain dependent on the source language text, for his choices to be related to those the author has made before, but there is no doubt that if the source language text is to function in the same way as the one in the source language, the translator, during translation, must be placed in front of the reader in the same position as the author, in order to create a text in the target language which has the same valence as the source text. When we listen or when we read a literary work, namely a literary text, we read and understand it in an individual and special way. Therefore, we give justice to the observation of Robert Scholes who, speaking about the multiplicity of meaning of the linguistic structure, but also of the social and cultural context, says: "Meaning is never simply closed in the work (implicit), therefore it can be broken down (explained) by the researcher of language phenomena. Meaning is the constant movement back and forth between language and the text and the web of subtext, which are not in the work but are essential to understanding it." Aesthetic influence and experience differ from any other experience, therefore they are experienced by each individual in an independent way. Features are not only expressed within a language, a given language system, but also between different language systems. It is precisely this difference between different languages that expresses the complexity of language as a communication system and as a system of (multiple) connotations on a broader level. About this phenomenon, E. Sapir writes: "Language is a tool of literature, as marble, bronze or clay are the sculptor's materials. As each language has its own distinctive features, the definitions - and the internal formal possibilities of one literature are never exactly the same as those of another. Literature, shaped by the form and substance of language, has its own color and texture. The literary artist may never be aware of how the model hinders, helps, or otherwise guides him, but when the question of translating his work into another language arises, the nature of the original model is immediately manifested. All its effects are calculated or measured intuitively, with reference to the formal 'spirit' of his language; they cannot be carried forward without being lost or altered. Therefore Benedetto Croce has completely right when he says that "the work of literary art can never be translated." Even the Italian researchers of translation theory put emphasis on the function that the translator must have in the translated text, mainly underlining the special nature of the translation procedure, which requires a decoding of the text from the original language and a recoding in the target language. The proliferation of different types of "translation machines" has shown how sterile the result of a translation act is without what the human mind can put into it, in other words a readable and

pleasant skeleton and a homogeneous and comprehensible content. Some authors emphasize the active and creative function of the translator so much that they make one think almost of a rewriting of the text, speaking of a simplification of the message at the decoding stage and of a reformulation at a suitable level for the public, thought in the recodification phase. This procedure probably requires a great departure from the original text: as we had the opportunity to emphasize, it must not be forgotten that the translator must face the text with the aim of "doubling" the author. However, the translator's intervention has a different valence according to the type of text being translated. In Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur*, translations assume a role and function of essential exchange: they are the instruments of this continuous and necessary dialogue between different cultures. Dialogue often characterized by misinterpretations and misunderstandings, but the double meaning of which is an integral fact of language, and therefore of translation itself. But there are also areas where a slip runs the risk of having more serious consequences, as shown by a very beautiful film from a few years ago, *The Slumdog Millionaire*, directed by Danny Boyle and distributed in Italy under the title *The millionaire*, taken from Vikas S earup's novel *Le dodici domande* (12 questions). Who has seen it remembers what it is talking about: Xhemali is a boy who grew up in a town in Mumbai, who, at the beginning of the film, is in the television studio where the Italian version of the program "Chi vuol esser millionario" is being recorded; before the final and decisive question, the boy is arrested because he is suspected of fraud, and as he answers the questioning by the police, he rebuilds his life bit by bit. An essential characteristic of Jamal's life, as his name implies, the boy is not of the Hindu faith, but of the Muslim faith. But in the Italian translation there is a big mistake, which has reversed the meaning of one of the most dramatic scenes of the film and has led the Italian Muslim community to ask for, and receive, a public apology from Lucky Red, the film's distributor. In a painful scene, Jamal's mother is killed during an attack by a group of Hindu fundamentalists. The cry "They are Muslims, get them!" ("Jan  mylsiman , kapini!") was translated into Italian as "Sono musulmani, scappiamo!" (They are Muslims, run away), implying that the aggressors were Muslims and the attacked Hindus. Many Muslims, Italians and non-Italians, protested against this mistake (not only linguistic, but also historical, so cultural in the broadest sense of the word) but without correcting the film. For the Italian Muslim community, the episode took on the color of religious prejudice, causing a scandal. How did it end? Lucky Red officially apologized a few months after the film's theatrical release, and the DVD version of the film bears no trace of the mistake. The Hebrew ban on the formulation of God's name was not only established to limit the limitless, but also for the awareness that language in some way disrupts thought, denaturalizes it. To translate is the same as to betray, because words carry a meaning and a sound; and if fidelity at the semantic level is less attainable, that at the phonetic level is always impossible. "No problem is more related to literature and its modest mystery than that which a translation proposes," wrote Borges. After Babel, perhaps one of the most interesting pieces of translationology, not coincidentally the work of a non-specialist like Steiner, the author has pointed out how the foreign effect of alienation also exists in bilingual writers like Beckett and Nabokov, who personally took care of the translations of their texts. Lewis Carroll, with his logical paradoxes, plays with the unfair connection of these levels, showing us how a branch of a tree can bark, as it is pronounced "bao" in English, or how flowers sleep, as the garden in his language is the bed of flowers. In any case, the illusion of complete synonymy, of perfect semantic correspondence, was finally shattered by the story of Pierre Menard, the author of Borges's *Don Quixote*, in which the exact, verbatim transcription of part of the masterpiece of Cervantes by that symbolic poet, after many centuries takes on a completely different meaning. Three hundred years later, the comparison between the two texts highlights how the natural style of puzzle genius has become a bloated and pompous archaism, thus anachronistic. To be silent on the fact that Cervantes himself presented his

book as a translation from Arabic, who knows what loyalty he has preserved. While they are exhausting writers such as Landolfi, described by Montale as "an extraordinary translator of Russian and other languages, who when he wrote on his own account only translated, hiding the original in himself", the only way to respect the authentic spirit of a foreign text will be that of understanding as if it had been thought and written in our language. Umberto Eco, adhering to the concept of abusive loyalty, translated Raymond Queneau's impossible work, *Exercises in Style*, making considerable and arbitrary changes to the original. In this case, the author of the original loses the full authorship of his sentences and the translation is given an independent status, free from any relationship of subordination and subordination; as it happens after all in the theatre, where interpretation is encouraged rather than tolerated. The example of the Austrian publisher Federmeier goes exactly in this direction, who, in agreement with the authors, published a series of poems without the original text facing them, deliberately. As Armando Gnisci wrote, "literature is the cliché of changes" and the meaning of a text begins precisely with the awareness of this constant change. Every translation can be nothing but a manuscript, a rewriting, and as such has the duty to point out the changes, not to suppress; opposing both the authoritative uniformity of the publishers' language and the softening of the ideologues of literary loyalty.

## Results

The macrocategory of cultural factors includes cultural terms, words and expressions that indicate specific cultural objects, or material items that belong only to a certain culture and that, as such, do not have an equivalent in other languages (perhaps more the knowledge and the most widespread are those that indicate the names of different foods or dishes: gastronomy is full of such). But these terms do not only refer necessarily only the food. For the translator it is a big problem to solve. Because to translate such words requires a difficult choice, which oscillates between two opposite directions: that of softening and that of isolation (exclusion): in short, a text is softened, when the translator "approaches" the reader, tries to make his job easier, and he carve the word to give the reader as comprehensible a translation as possible, forgetting all (almost all) cultural distances or language roughness; whereas we talk about isolation when the translator asks the reader to "get close" to the text, and lets the rigors of the language disturb him, creating doubts in him, making him curious, without offering him simple solutions, ready or not faded source language. And then, in short, how are these cultures translated? It depends (which is also the ready answer given by literary translators). It depends on the typology of the text (is it a literary text? A tourist guide? A cookbook? A novel read on the beach?), it also depends on the reader to whom it is addressed (a child? An adult? A literate reader? A reader who just wants to relax?), it also depends on the fact that how much meaning these culturemes have in relation to the text itself? In general, three methods can be used to deal with them. Let's take a look and explain the different translation strategies: eggnog, or, as Wikipedia first explains, an alcoholic drink typical of the Christmas period popular in Great Britain, the USA, Canada and Luxembourg, the ingredients of which are milk, eggs, liqueur (rum, cognac and whiskey). A kind of *zabaione*, then, but not quite like her. Spread only in some countries and associated with a certain religious-consumerist holiday, moreover. So how can we translate this term if we encounter it in a novel? The first possibility provides that the term is not dissolved in any way: the isolation remains complete, no explanation helps the reader in his task of understanding. Often, this choice corresponds to the creation of a neologism, or a new word, using the original as a linguistic calque, writing it as it is pronounced, or copying it, or translating it word by word. This is exactly what happens when eggnog remains eggnog even in Italian, Albanian, etc. Of course, there is a risk that the reader will get disoriented, maybe he won't understand if it's a food, a drink, an animal...The second possibility is to remove the

cultureme, and then replace it with other culturemes of the host culture. But in this case the solution is not easily digested, because each of the words has a certain meaning sphere, and during this process the meaning of the translated word is completely replaced by the meaning of the word to be translated, creating in a way a short cultural circle very strange: this is what happens if the word eggnog is translated into Italian with *zabaione* or into Albanian with whiskey cream. The third most widespread translational possibility is the explanation of cultureme. In this case, the meaning of the specific term is translated in a general and neutral way, focusing more on providing information to the reader than on presenting an element of cultural enrichment, often neglecting the original meaning of the word. For example, eggnog can become "egg drink", or "typical Christmas liqueur". But it's clear that in this way all the magic of a winter eggnog prepared according to the family's ancient recipe and drinking by the fireplace waiting to open the presents is completely lost.

## Discussion

Today, learning a foreign language is often essential to communicate abroad (but not only) or even to survive for a week in a foreign city, both for work reasons and to spend holidays. But in order to fully master the language, it is necessary to understand the culture of the country where it is spoken, in order to be able to grasp even the most elusive nuances of meaning of that language: the latter are represented by the narrow circle (but not so narrow ) of the so-called "untranslatable words", a series of words that we cannot render in another language, except by means of a periphrasis. It is an argument that fascinates with its complexity: it seems as if these words are fingerprints of the language they represent, something unique and cultural. As an example of why we think above, we start from the Albanian language and for this, the rhapsody (part of the Kreshnik Cycle) by Gjergj Elez Alia will help us. The analyzed variant is taken from a text that accompanies the Italian translation, done so skillfully by Ernest Koliqi, who explains the choice made by him in relation to the Albanian term "nallban probatini". In the translation, which should be considered more than the word, translation of the verse, the intimate expressive essence of the verse/word itself is taken into account. It is precisely this essence that Koliqi tried to convey in the Italian language. Sentences or ways of saying, which express habits, beliefs, or typical aspects of mentality and judgment, which would require extended explanations in the Italian language, in order for them to be understood immediately, have been translated with some freedom of speech, and which, after all, clarifies in Italian what would have remained very dark if the translator (Koliqi) had remained faithful to the text, I believe that it represents the best way of preserving an ideal fidelity preferable to more than than that "ad litteram". Let's cite the example in question: in the rhapsody of Gjergj Elez Alia, in the part where the sister leaves with the horse to go to the farrier, we find the expression:

T'e marrsh gjogun, moter, te mejdanit  
e t' me shkojsh tu nallban probatini.

Literally:” Take the courser, sister, and go to fellow farrier”

The non-Albanian reader would not understand the term brother or, as someone else translates it, "brother by blood ". It is a Balkan custom to bond brothers by sucking a drop of blood from each other. And here are the consequences of this sacred relationship according to the laws of the Canon "Brotherhood that is created by absorbing blood from one another, prohibits marriage between "brothers", but also between their relatives". As a consequence, Nallban's proposal to Gjergji's sister is shameful, dirty, but at the same time, for Albanians, sacrilege because of an incest nature.

In the Italian translation of these verses:



Di battaglia il mio destriero prendi  
 dal fidato maniscalco rècati:  
 va sicura ché scambievolmente  
 ci succhiammo il sangue un di sui mignoli  
 Of battle my steed take  
 from the trusty farrier go:  
 go sure that mutually  
 we sucked blood on our little fingers

With words and expressions, Koliqi has tried to explain the connection - not of blood - but acquired later - making Gjergji and the farrier as two blood brothers, but it has not been possible to make it clear what is the weight of this connection which considers every relationship as an incest report for relatives, even distant ones, of two blood brothers. Staying with the same rhapsody, we also have the case of the words Bajloz or Zana, which in the case of Koliq were translated, while in the translation of Eugenio Scalabrino, they were left the same but, with the suggestion of the redactor (Renata Kristo), they were accompanied by an explanation in footnote. Thus, in Koliq's translation, the word: black Bajloz, would be translated with several choices, deciding never to repeat the same word: *rio guerriero/negro/l'uom del mare/borioso prince/*. While the Fairies of the Mountain are translated as Nymphs of the Alps. Cultural factors are all those features of the text that represent a gap between the culture of the text's origin and that of the destination, and which consequently require a close battle between the translator and the language. If we were to refer again to Umberto Eco and his book "Dire quasi la stessa cosa" he says to literally translate the expression "It's raining cats and dogs" with "piovono cani e gatti" or in Albanian "bien qen e mace", does not enrich the reader's cultural background as, for example, writing a literal translation "toccare legno" "to touch wood" instead of "toccare ferro" "to touch metal" as a sign of superstition would. Simply, it presents a surreal and disorienting situation, where the reader finds himself without coordinates. In this case, according to Eco, it is good to leave a little, and precisely from that distance, the reader will be able to derive a more accurate meaning from the text. Returning to the reflection we were making at the beginning: a mistake in the translation of a cultural factor can be very serious indeed. Let's see now another term, considered "untranslatable": only in Italy there is a term (even though Treccani calls it provincial), *abbiocco*, able to describe the feeling of drowsiness that comes after eating a abundant meal (Viaggio nel mondo delle parole intraducibili – thegmont93blog). Even in the rest of Europe, there is no lack of similar examples: in Germany one of the most popular untranslatable terms is *Schadenfreude*, which describes the joy one feels when one sees someone fail, a feeling that is not exactly positive. Related to German is Yiddish (to which some untranslatable words belong), a fusion between Germanic and Jewish languages: precisely to this idiom belongs a term whose meaning is opposed to the negative *Schadenfreude* *Firgun*, in fact, it shows the spontaneous and altruistic joy of something beautiful that has happened to someone, a display of altruism that is generally associated with extremely positive events such as the birth of a love: when you fall in love, you know that turbulent emotions are the order of the day and although it is a universal feeling in some isolated areas unique terms have survived, such as *Manamabate*, a word of the language spoken in Easter Island, which indicates the lack of appetite which shows the lack of appetite who falls in love and which describes in detail the feeling that is experienced. But on Easter Island, the passion for untranslatable words - helped by the fact that we are in one of the parts of the Earth farthest from the Continent - does not stop only at the consequences that falling in love has on a person's metabolism: another equally sharp term is *Tingo*, a word which describes the act of robbing the things of a person near us, first borrowing them, one after the other, without

returning them, an improper behavior with which sooner or later everyone faces. But let's move on our journey quickly from one continent to another: the next stop is in the cradle of humanity, the heart of Africa which with its simple and direct proverbs always amazes for the depth of the content. In the tangle of languages and dialects that branches out in the African savannah, one of the most "untranslatable" words in the world stands out: *Ilunga*, a term from the Tshiluba dialect of the Congo. I like this word<sup>3</sup> very much, either because it is full of meaning, but also because it reminds me of a teacher of mine who said "the first time is forgiven, the second is forgotten, the third is punished": the term actually indicates a person who can forgive the first time, tolerate the second time, but not the third time. I think it's a very interesting word, because, after all, in life we all feel a little *ilunga* when we decide that "next time you won't let it go easily": it's the charm of the "untranslatable" words, that thousands of kilometers away, they manage to sum up in a single word a feeling or an emotion that billions of people know. As we saw with German, one does not necessarily have to travel great distances to find an untranslatable term: moving from the cradle of mankind to the cradle of Western civilization, neighboring Greece, we find another term rich in meaning and related, in a way, with Hellenic philosophy. *Meraki* is actually the word used to explain when something is done with soul, leaving something of yourself inside the work you have done: soul, the importance of which was first studied by Greek philosophers, is so representative of that territory that there are also words dedicated to him. Even in cold Sweden there is no lack of terms that are not found in other languages: and this is the case of the poetic word *Mangata*, which describes the reflection of the Moon in water. A pure image, engraved in everyone's mind, between the forests of Northern Europe and something mythological, a universal image, which is depicted either close to us (for example Pirandello with his novel *Ciaula* discovers the Moon), or in distant places. And this will be exactly the last stop of our journey around the world: in Japan the highest form of literature is represented by haiku, and one of the exponents of this artistic form is Matsuo Basho. In one of his short creations we find exactly the image of the Moon:

“Bamboo shadow sweep the stairs, But no dust is stirred.  
Moonlight penetrates the depths of the pool,  
But no trace is left in the water.

A bamboo forest permeated by the pale moonlight that penetrates between the trunks (in Japan language, the word *Komorebi* describes all of this) and in a few verses a detailed and fascinating painting is woven into the silence. But in the static beauty of the scene, a sour note is felt at the same time, with the moon not touching the pool even though it is reflected in it: it is *Aware*, the sharp sensation (neither sweet nor bitter) that is experienced in a moment of a great beauty, conscious of the fact that it is not destined to last forever. In the Land of the Far East, philosophy and wisdom are known to have found wide space and have always been a special characteristic of Japanese thought: in such a short haiku there is also place for *Wabi-sabi*, or the acceptance of the natural life-death cycle, being aware that everything flows, is predestined to undo in a completely natural way. But in this painful sense of ephemerality, the Japanese masters of untranslatable words have envisioned a wonderful epilogue: it is the art of *Kintsugi* (also known as *Kintsukuroi*), an artisanal technique that envisages the repair of a ceramic by inserting precious metals ( gold usually), a symbol of the possibility – and hope – of an even more unique and precious rebirth of the moment when beauty seemed to have ended due to a slowly spreading crack.

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