Christopher Taylor

TRANSLATING PUNCTUATION
(English-Italian/Italian-English)

The grammar book explanations of the uses of the various elements of punctuation in the English and Italian languages would lead us to conclude that few problems should arise in the translation process due to the positioning of full stops, commas and the like. Undoubtedly this is largely true. The translator's main worries lie in the fields of syntax, lexis and semantics and once those problems have been resolved punctuation will probably 'sort itself out'. And yet a cursory glance at any respectable translation and its original will reveal alterations, however slight, in the punctuation pattern of the two languages. These alterations may be dictated by rules of syntax, considerations of style or questions of economy, yet the very fact that they exist invites observation and investigation.

Thus, while not exaggerating the importance of punctuation to the translator we must be careful not to minimise it. Vanoye talks of the logical function of punctuation in the avoidance of interpretation errors.

"Gli autori moderni si servono abilmente dei segni di interpunzione e delle varie risorse tipografiche per fini espressivi (impiego dei diversi segni di pause, di parentesi, trattini e rigolette, di caratteri corsivi o maiuscoli, di spazi bianchi, ecc.)" (1)

Mozzati and Saibene, quoting from I Promessi Sposi, show vividly how important punctuation is to the clear understanding of a text.

"Misericordia! cos'ha, signor padrone?"
"Niente, niente", rispose don Abbondio, lasciandosi andar tutto anente sul suo seggiolone.
"Come, niente? La vuol dare ad intendere a me? così brutto com'è? Qualche gran caso è avvenuto".
"Oh, per amor del cielo! Quando dico niente, o è
niente, o ècosa che non posso dire".
"Che non può dire neppure a me? Chi si prenderà cura
della sua salute? Chi le darà un parere?...".
"Ohimè! Tacete, e non apparecchiate altro: datemi un
bicchiere del mio vino". (2)

A translator who does not accurately translate this
punctuation (not necessarily using the same instruments
in the same places) will not capture the 'feel' that
Manzoni intended.

"Le pause, le diverse intonazioni della voce di cui ci
serviamo nel parlare per rendere più espressivo il nostro
discorso, si indicano anche nello scrivere per mezzo dei
segni di interpunzione" (3).

By comparing the grammar book definitions, the main
instrument of punctuation can be seen to have more or less
the same functions in both English and Italian. The
'comma' in English is described as representing a pause
in meaning (4), while the 'virgola' in Italian is
similarly described as representing 'una pausa ... per
dare un tono di sospensione alla voce' (5). These
definitions are rather woolly and the translator needs to
be aware of more specific uses of the comma if he is to
translate punctuation well. In English, as Newmark points
out, "it becomes critically important to distinguish
non-restrictive and restrictive relative clauses" (6).

When a list of items is to be translated the translator
needs to be aware that the Italian habit of separating
all the items with commas is not reflected in English
between the penultimate and the final item. Syntax is
crucially important in deciding whether a comma should or
should not be translated. In the sentence "Se lo vedi
prima di me, salutamelor!", the conditional clause
precedes the main clause and the literal translation
would maintain the comma. But if, for reasons of style or
whim, the translator produced the version, "Say hello to
him if you see him before I do", he would very probably
omit the comma.

In English, conjunctions (and, but, because, although,
etc.) usually replace a comma while in Italian it is
common to see a comma before 'ma', 'però', 'tuttavia' or 'sebbene'. eg., "I giocatori erano stanchi, però continuavano a combattere fino in fondo".

The 'semi-colon' in English is considered to be a sort of half-way house between a comma and a full stop while the Italian 'punto e virgola' is simply described as 'una pausa più lunga della virgola' (7). Therefore its uses tend to overlap to a certain extent with those of the comma and the full stop. It can be used to separate items in a list, for example, or to mark off subordinate clauses.

The 'colon' is 'heavier than a semi-colon' (8), while the Italian 'due punti' is 'simile al punto e virgola' (9). In both cases it is principally used to stop a sentence where a full stop may seem grammatically bizarre, or to introduce a question or a list of items or to precede further clarification or explanation. In the latter case the translator may find the device useful, given that the source writer has used a colon to provide clarification for readers within the source language. He may translate it with a colon or use some expression such as 'i.e.' or 'e.g.'.

The 'full stop' 'ends a sentence' (10) and the 'punto' 'chiude un periodo' (11). It is also, of course, used in abbreviations. The definitions given above are not precisely identical and are vague in themselves, but they suffice to show that essentially the elements they describe should be used in more or less the same way.

The 'exclamation mark' in English is referred to as 'expressing emphasis or impact' (12). The 'punto esclamativo' 'richiama modulazioni della voce nelle espressioni di dolore, gioia, ecc.' (13). Their uses would seem practically identical. Newmark points out "that in most western languages (the exclamation mark) has the same semantic force (14). He cites surprise, strong feeling, strong recommendation, emphasis, address, command, interjection and exclamation as concepts requiring the use of an exclamation mark.

Similarly, the 'question mark' is used to indicate a direct question and the 'punto interrogativo' for
'interrogazioni'. The rhetorical question also requires a question mark and this form is perhaps more common in Italian. The English translator may often wish to translate the Italian rhetorical question with a statement or vice-versa. An example will be seen later.

In other, less common elements of punctuation we begin to find some divergences. If the acute and grave accents can be considered elements of punctuation, then clearly the virtual absence of these indicators in English constitutes a real gap, though of no relevance at all to the translator (unless the translator is totally ignorant of phonetic norms within the source and target language, in which case he should never be tackling the translation in the first place). Similarly, the use of the apostrophe in the English genitive is not mirrored in Italian, but any translator would know this. More importantly, although the apostrophe is used in both English and Italian for letter ellipsis, the Italian use is constant while the English usage is not considered correct in formal writing, except in the case of reported speech. While 'C'è' will invariably replace 'Ci è' in an Italian written text, the various forms 'don't', 'won't', 'shouldn't', etc. will not be found in formal texts but will be replaced by the complete forms 'do not', 'will not', 'should not', etc. A translator would need to be aware of certain English idiomatic uses of the apostrophe such as 'We'd better watch our p's and q's.' or 'in the 1960's'. Here then, punctuation differences that can lead to translation difficulties have been identified. Anyone who has marked translation into English or compositions by Italian students will be aware of these 'traps'.

Both English and Italian make use of two types of brackets, round brackets and square brackets. The round version would seem to have the same purpose in both languages, cf. 'for a parenthetical remark' (15)/ 'per racchiudere un pensiero secondario (16). However, when we turn to the use of square brackets in the two languages we find a rather striking difference. Bailey lists the English uses: to tell the reader that a mistake in a quotation is not your own; when you quote material which
requires brief clarification; when you omit unnecessary words from a quotation and therefore use ellipsis and need to reconstruct the grammar (17). Morosi, on the other hand, talks about the uses of 'parentesi quadra' as being used 'esclusivamente nelle operazioni aritmetiche' (18). It is therefore obvious that it is not possible to translate square brackets from English into Italian, even though Newmark, writing at a later date, almost confirms Morosi's affirmation saying that 'square brackets are not much used except in logic' (19).

The uses of 'inverted commas' and 'virgolette' would seem to be virtually identical, that is, to enclose direct speech and to emphasise a word or phrase. Newmark, however, lists nineteen separate uses of inverted commas in his book *Approaches to Translation*. He refers to unfamiliar technical terms, names of new inventions, neologisms, words used ironically and so on. But in all cases, the essential function of inverted commas is to make the enclosed word or phrase stand out in context. Where a single word or word group is involved the inverted commas usually enable the translator to translate literally, as any reservations about the use of the word in the source language have been highlighted by the commas themselves. Winston Churchill's 'iron curtain' became 'cortina di ferro'. Only if the word is peculiar to the source language and culture will it be transcribed or omitted. Inverted commas can, in fact, be a useful tool to the translator when he is doubtful about the use of a particular term in the target language. It is perhaps a cowardly device but may, on occasion, serve a purpose. The chances of its being abused are, of course, manifold yet, as Newmark points out, 'it has often been abused by writers' (20). So the translator must be doubly on his guard, both in his translation of and his use of inverted commas.

Another problem lies in the type of inverted commas used. In fact, it would be more helpful to use the English expression 'quotation marks', given that in Italian the equivalent instruments do not necessarily resemble commas. In English we tend to use double
inverted commas (" ") for speech and single inverted commas (’’) to emphasise words (though there is no strict rule about this, merely a largely adhered-to convention). In Italian, although the usage is the same, the 'quotation marks' often take the form of diametrical-ly opposing arrows ( ) situated at a point halfway between the top and bottom of the normal letter space, *eg* Come stai? If commas are used they are often inverted vertically as well as horizontally at the beginning of the quotation *eg*, Bene, grazie*. Furthermore, in Italian, the dash (la lineetta), rather than in its use of representing a break in thought, is being used more and more as a type of quotation mark. *eg*, -Spero di vederti domani-

At times the dash merely introduces the quote and does not close it.*eg*, - Lo spero anch'io. It should be pointed out also, that the dash, in English, should be used circumspectly, as other devices, such as brackets or simple commas, are often more effective in that they are less bombastic. The English concept of understatement is reflected also in punctuation. Swan, however, does mention that 'especially in formal writing, dashes are often used to add afterthoughts. *eg*, We'll be arriving on Monday morning - at least, I think so' (21). The double dash (=), used in Italian to divide a word at the end of a line, is not found in English usage.

The 'hyphen' fulfils the same function as its Italian counterpart 'il trattino' though here it is practically impossible to formulate any rules or match any examples which could be of use to the translator. The fact that 'il trucco' in Italian becomes 'make-up' in English is not very instructive about how to translate the hyphen. As the rules governing the use of the hyphen are vague within the English language, it would be foolhardy to try to formulate a set of guidelines for translators. It is tempting to go into such syntactical areas as adjective position to explain hyphen translation (dagli occhi blu' becomes 'blue-eyed') or the use of single words as opposed to compounds ('piscina' is 'swimming-pool') or compound nouns instead of constructions in Italian with
the function word 'di' ('fellow-workers' for 'compagni di lavoro') but as there are no firm rules it is dangerous ground.

The use of dots (usually three ...) to mark an interruption in a sentence is dealt with by Bailey under the general heading of 'full stop'. In the Italian grammar book 'i puntini' are treated separately but shown to have the same function.

Thus, from this brief résumée, it may be seen that while the Italian-English or English-Italian translator need not be particularly dismayed by certain discrepancies in punctuation usage between the two languages, he should at least be on his guard so as not to fall into any errors outside those awaiting him in the written word.

This study will now examine a series of texts to see how experienced translators have dealt with the question of punctuation, both from English to Italian and vice-versa. Purely for the sake of order each element of punctuation will be examined in turn.

The Comma

The text that follows is the first paragraph of Chapter One of William Thackeray's Vanity Fair.

While the present century was in its teens, and on one sunny morning in June, there drove up to the great iron gate of Miss Pinkerton's academy for young ladies, on Chiswick Mall, a large family coach, with two fat horses in blazing harness, driven by a fat coachman in a three-cornered hat and wig, at the rate of four miles an hour. A black servant, who reposed on the box beside the fat coachman, uncurl'd his bandy legs as soon as the equipage drew up opposite Miss Pinkerton's shining brass plate, and as he pulled the bell, at least a score of young heads were seen peering out of the narrow windows of the stately old brick house. Nay, the acute observer might have recognised the little red nose of good-natured Miss Jemimah Pinkerton herself, rising over some geranium pots in the
window of that lady's own drawing-room (22).

The translation is Augusta Grosso Guidetti's:

All'inizio di questo secolo, in una luminosa mattina di giugno, giunse al grande cancello di ferro dell'istituto per signorine tenuto dalla signorina Pinkerton, in Chiswick Mall, una capace berlinetta tirata da due floridi cavalli in splendido armes, e guidata da un florido cocchiere in parrucca e tricornio, alla velocità di quattro miglia all'ora. Un servo negro, che sedeva a cassetta accanto al florido cocchiere, allungò le gambe storte non appena l'equipaggio si fermò di fronte alla scintillante targa della signorina Pinkerton, e mentre suonava il campanello, almeno una ventina di giovani testolini spuntarono dietro le strette finestre della solenne vecchia casa di mattoni. Anzi un osservatore acuto avrebbe potuto riconoscere persino il nasino rosso della buona signorina Jemima Pinkerton, che spuntava sopra alcuni vasi di geranio collocati sul davanzale della finestra del suo salotto (23).

It can be seen that, in spite of the length of the sentences, the use of commas has been faithfully reproduced in the translated version, supporting the hypothesis, outlined on page one, that punctuation need not greatly worry the translator. However, if we examine the first paragraph of Chapter Two of the same novel:

When Miss Sharp had performed the heroic act mentioned in the last chapter, and had seen the Dictionair, flying over the pavement of the little garden, fall at the length at the feet of the astonished Miss Jerima, the young lady's countenance, which had before worn an almost livid look of hatred, assumed a smile that perhaps was scarcely more agreeable, and she sank back in the carriage in an easy frame of mind, saying, "So much for the
Dictionary; and, thank God, I'm out of Chiswick (24).

we find that the translator has found it necessary to modify the punctuation more than somewhat:

Quando la signorina Sharp ebbe compiuto l'eroica azione menzionata nel precedente capitolo, ed ebbe veduto il dizionario, volò oltre il marciapiede del giardinetto, cadere quant'era lungo ai piedi della stupefatta signorina Jemima, il volto della giovinetta, che prima aveva un'aspetto di odio, quasi livido, si aprì ad un sorriso che forse non era affatto più gradevole; ed ella si lasciò ricadere sui cuscini della vettura con un'aria soddisfatta, dicendo: Ecco fatto, per il Dizionario; e, grazie a Dio, sono fuori di Chiswick! (25).

The first five commas are faithfully reproduced but then we come across the first change. As the translator cannot translate 'an almost livid look of hatred' literally with 'un quasi livido aspetto di odio' because it defies the rules of Italian syntax and presumably because she does not wish to translate it with 'un aspetto quasi livido di odio' because it offends her sense of style, she opts for 'un aspetto di odio, quasi livido', thus necessitating the addition of a comma that is not found in the English version.

As the English text does not suffer this extra interruption, the sentence flows on and merely requires a comma after the word 'agreeable'. The Italian sentence, having been subjected to an extra pause, requires a semi-colon at this juncture. The punctuation of the two texts then differs all the way to the end of the paragraph. Thackeray's comma before the direct speech is replaced by a colon. A comma and an exclamation mark are added and the quotation marks differ in the manner outlined above.

Looking at Alexander Fainberg's translation of Cesare Pavese's Le Case, we find that the treatment of the punctuation again requires our attention. Here is the
original opening to Pavese's story:

Sono un uomo solo che lavora, e tutte le mattine aspetto la domenica. Non dico che questo giorno mi piaccia, ma faccio festa come tutti perché un riposo ci vuole. Una volta, quando ero ancora ragazzo, pensai che, se avessi lavorato anche la domenica, sarei diventato uomo prima degli altri, e mi feci dare la chiave dell'officina. Tutte le macchine erano ferme, ma io preparavo il lavoro del lunedì in poco tempo, e poi giravo nello stanzione vuoto, tenendo l'orecchio e godendomela (26).

Fainberg, doubtless well aware of Pavese's idiosyncracy in the use of language, stemming largely from his Piedmontese upbringing, translates well but finds it necessary to re-arrange the author's punctuation:

I am a man who keeps to himself and goes to work, and every week I look forward to Sunday. I can't say I like the day, but I take it off like everyone else because one must have a rest. Once, when I was still a boy, I thought if I worked on Sunday as well I should grow up to be a man more quickly than other people, and I got them to give me the key to the workshop. All the machines were still, but I got Monday's work ready in no time and then wandered about the huge empty place with my ears pinned back, enjoying myself (27).

The first two sentences offer no problems. However, in the third sentence, whereas the Italian requires five commas to mark the pauses necessary for a clear understanding on the part of the reader (one could point to the use of the conjunctive in 'se avessi lavorato' as a prime mover here), Fainberg makes do with three.

In the fourth sentence Fainberg again uses fewer commas - two as opposed to three - but, more interestingly, he puts them in different places. Pavese's comma after 'in poco tempo' is rendered in Fainberg's transla-
tion solely by the conjunction 'and', whilst the opposite occurs at the end of the sentence when Pavese's 'e', following the expression 'tendendo l'orecchio' (which has no direct English equivalent) is substituted in Fainberg's version by a comma. The reason here is that the non-equivalent expression 'with my ears pinned back' begs a comma in English before a present participle phrase. In the next sentence:

Mi piaceva specialmente che potevo andarmene quando volevo e non facevo come i miei colleghi, che in quell'ora giravano in bicicletta, all'osteria o in collina (28).

there is a clear example of different syntax requiring different punctuation:

What I liked specially was that I could go just when I wanted to, and that I wasn't doing what my mates were doing at that moment, riding their bikes either on the way to the pub or up the hill (29).

We find an interesting juxtaposition of commas and 'that'/'che' resulting in a perfect translation of meaning. Here, par excellence, the punctuation of the sentence can be seen as an element fully deserving of the translator's attention. Having said before that conjunctions in English usually substitute commas, now is the moment to point out that the 'comma + and' construction is always at the disposal of the writer, as Bailey explains so colourfully in his 'comma Fanboys' concept (30). Here this device allows the translator to repeat the relative pronoun 'that', required by his use of two different auxiliaries in 'could' and 'wasn't'. The Italian only uses the auxiliary in the first clause. The Italian requires the 'che' after the first comma because of the position of the adverb of time which the translator incorporates into his second main 'that' clause relying on a present participle to complete his sentence.
The Semi-colon

With regard to the use of the semi-colon, we can compare Evelyn Waugh's satirical novel *Decline and Fall* with its 1981 translation by Giovanni Fletzer. At the beginning of Part Two, in the following paragraph:

Margot Beste-Chetwynde had two houses in England — one in London and the other in Hampshire. Her London house, built in the reign of William and Mary, was, by universal consent, the most beautiful building between Bond Street and Park Lane, but opinion was divided on the subject of her country house. This was very new indeed; in fact, it was scarcely finished when Paul went to stay there at the beginning of the Easter holidays (31).

Waugh uses a semi-colon after the emphatic 'indeed'. It is required by the 'in fact' which follows, as this expression serves to reiterate the previous proposition more strongly. The pause is stylistically necessary and a comma would not suffice. Yet Fletzer, in his version:

Margot Beste-Chetwynde aveva due case in Inghilterra, una a Londra e l'altra nello Hampshire. La sua dimora londinese, costruita sotto il regno di Guglielmo e Maria, era universalmente riconosciuta per il più bel palazzo tra Bond Street e Park Lane, ma non tutti erano d'accordo sulla sua casa di campagna. Era una costruzione recentissima, in realtà non era ancora ultimata quando Paul vi andò ad abitare all'inizio delle vacanze di Pasqua (32).

makes do with a comma, even though he retains the emphasis in 'recentissima' and translates almost literally with 'in realtà'. We must deduce that the comma in the Italian sentence, in this case, has more power than its English equivalent.

Let us now look at Chapter Eight of the same novel and see how Fletzer this time substitutes a semi-colon for a comma:
Happily enough, it did not rain next day, and after morning school everybody dressed up to the nines. Dr. Fagan appeared in a pale grey morning coat and spongebag trousers, looking more than ever jeune premier; there was a spring in his step and a pronounced sprightliness of bearing that Paul had not observed before. Flossie wore a violet frock of knitted wool made for her during the preceding autumn by her sister. It was the colour of indelible ink on blotting paper, and was ornamented at the waist with flowers of emerald green and pink (33).

Per fortuna l'indomani non pioveva, e, dopo le lezioni del mattino tutti si vestirono da festa. Il dottor Fagan comparve in giacca grigio pallido e pantaloni di stoffa spugnosa, con un'aria più che mai da jeune premier; c'era qualcosa di elastico nella sua andatura e una grande vivacità nel suo modo di fare che Paul non aveva mai notato prima. Flossie portava un abito di lana violettera, confesionatole dalla sorella l'autunno precedente. Aveva il colore dell'inchiostro indelebile sulla carta assorbente; ed era ornato alla vita da fiori rosa e verde emerald (34).

At the beginning of the paragraph we find that the translator mirrors Waugh's use of the semi-colon after 'jeune premier', dictated by the presence of two main clauses in both languages. However, later in the paragraph, Waugh uses merely a comma after 'blotting paper'. The comma followed by the conjunction 'and' is a common device in English for joining two independent, though connected, clauses. Fletzzer, however, uses a semi-colon after 'carta assorbente', even though the sentence continues with the conjunction 'ed.'. Indeed, it is difficult to find the reason for Fletzzer's use of the semi-colon here. C.A. Sambugar, in his book Armonia e Stile points out that a 'virgola' is usually used 'per separare le parti di un periodo in sostituzione della congiunzione "e"' (35). If the conjunction remains, then theoretically
there would be no need for a comma, let alone a semi-colon. In English, the 'comma + and' construction is not rare, though one often substitutes the other, but 'semi-colon + and' is decidedly unusual. Sambugar refers to the use of the semi-colon in Italian as being 'per separare le proposizioni di un periodo, specialmente se esso è troppo lungo' (36). The sentence in question, by normal Italian standards, is not of excessive length, but Sambugar adds 'Tali proporzioni devono essere simili o strettamente legate dal senso o dal soggetto' (37). The subject of the two clauses is the same and by this definition Fletzer is justified even if his choice of punctuation may not be echoed by all writers. Flexibility and writers' licence should not be ignored, especially if clearly discernible rules cannot be identified.

In the comparison of David Murray's translation of 'L'oro di Napoli' by Giuseppe Marotta we find divergence in the use of the semi-colon but a different factor may be involved:

E una volta, per qualche interminabile mese, scrissi lettere d'amore a mia madre. Avevo, rammento, di totto anni; il tempo in cui ero operaio del Gas a Napoli; mia madre serviva ancora il conte M., che da via dei Millesi era trasferito al Monte di Dio; lavava e stirava per lui le più belle camice inamidate del mondo, spolverava e spazzava, diceva al telefono: (38).

And once, for interminable months, I wrote love letters to my mother. I was, I recall eighteen; the period when I was a workman with Naples Gas (1), my mother still worked for Count M., who from via dei Mille had moved to Monte di Dio; for him she washed and ironed the loveliest starched shirts in the world, dusted and swept, said on the telephone (39):

Murray does not put a semi-colon after Naples Gas but substitutes a comma. However, the reason for this may simply be that a semi-colon would have obstructed his footnote number. Another hypothesis (and I profer my
apologies in advance to Mr. Murray and the Quattroventi publishing house) is that a mistake has been made, either by the writer or by the printer. I shall be presumptuous enough to suggest that a semi-colon would in fact be required after 'Naples Gas'. Apart from this enigma we can observe that Murray adopts Marotta's pattern of semi-colons in the rest of the text.

The Colon

Discrepancies regarding the use of the colon are easily found. Agatha Christie's full stop before direct speech (taken from 'Death on the Nile'):

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.
"I may be, Madame." (40)

becomes a colon in Enrico Piceni's translation:

Poirot crollò le spalle:
"Può anche darsi, madame". (41)

There is no rule involved here and thus it would seem to be purely a matter of personal taste on the part of the writer. Much more thought quite clearly went into Melville Best Anderson's translation of Dante's *Inferno*:

Ma io perché venirvi o chi'l concede?
Io non Enea, io non Paolo sono:
Ma degnò a ciò nè io nè altri crede
Per che, se del venire io m'abbandono,
temo che la venuta non sia folle:
se' savio; intendi me' ch'i non ragiono (42).

But wherefore I? Who grants me such a dream?
Aeneas am I not, nor am I Paul,
nor to myself nor to others worthy seem.
Whence, if I dare to yield me to thy call,
I tremble lest the going prove insane:
my words are to the wise, thou knowest all (43).

Here we see the colon in the second line become a comma whereas the colon at the end of the fifth line is
maintained, although elsewhere in the passage too the punctuation differs markedly from the original. The reason here is clear. Anderson's free approach, 'in accordance with the exigencies of time and requirements of English idiom' (44), leads him to make substantial alterations to the original Dante to the extent of not rendering the original in any way accurately. The liberties he takes with the Italian syntax and lexis are further reflected in fundamental punctuation modifications.

In the first line, the English form of interrogative inversion persuades Anderson to make two questions out of the original line in Italian, removing in the process a verb (possibly the strength of 'wherefore' as opposed to 'perche' governs this choice) and adding a noun (here we must refer back to the previous verse to see the connection). In the second and third lines Anderson changes Dante's colon (the colon - ma' construction is not unusual in Italian) for a comma. Here, his choice of punctuation is governed by his use of the 'nor ..., nor...nor' construction. The last line merits discussion by text analysts and literary critics as well as translation theorists. The archaic language requires the repeated use of the apostrophe in the Italian but Anderson's free translation (using the archaic form 'thou' to maintain the register) differs so profoundly from the original that any discussion of punctuation choice here is pointless.

The full stop

The translator is often faced with the problem of whether to maintain the source writer's sentence structure or whether, at times, to alter it to his own devices, that is, to make two sentences out of one or vice-versa or even effect more complicated changes. Examples of the judicious use of the full stop are numerous. The reasons are equally numerous: to cut short an unwieldy sentence in the target language, to lengthen and smooth out a rather 'staccato' sounding series of sentences, to avoid a clumsy verb sequence and so on. It might be though that in the fairly predictable style of
the 'thriller' this kind of reasoning would be less necessary. Yet here is an example from Page One of the South African thriller writer Wilbur Smith's novel The Sound of Thunder and its translation by Paola Campioli:

Thirty-seven years old, no longer a young man, and it was time to buy the farm. He knew the one he wanted and he knew exactly where he would build the homestead - site it close to the lip of the escarpment so that in the evenings he could sit on the wide stoep and look out across the plain to the Tugela river in the blue distance (45).

Trentasette anni, non sono più un giovane. E' arrivato il momento di comprare la fattoria. Aveva già scelto il terreno e il luogo preciso in cui avrebbe costruito la sua casa: vicino al bordo della scarpata, in modo da potersi sedere in veranda, la sera, a guardare oltre i pianori, nella lontananza blu, il fiume Tugela (46).

The reason for splitting the first already short sentence into two lies in Campioli's rather unusual use of the first person in the first clause, a practice not continued in the rest of the paragraph. In fact, in the next sentence, she returns to the use of the third person. The change in person creates two separate clauses that cannot be separated by a simple comma.

To move away completely from literary translation, the following recipe from 'Sicilia e le isole in bocca' by Michele Perriera and the translation in English by Viviana Bertolli may be examined:

Normalmente insieme alle pannelle, si offrono i cazzilli sorta di supplì di patate semplificati, ottenuti setacciando 1 kg. di patate bollite e aggiungendo alla purea piuttosto densa, poco aglio tritato, prezzemolo, sale e pepe. Si formano poi delle crocchette ovali, che si frigono in olio di semi ben caldo. Nella Sicilia orientale usano passare le crocchette nella chiara d'uovo battuta e
nel pangrattato prima di friggerle (47).

Besides the panelle they usually offer the cassilli a sort of simplified potato croquettes. Mash 1 kilo of boiled potatoes and enrich the so obtained thick mash with little chopped garlic, parsley, salt, pepper. Then shape many oval croquettes and fry them in very hot oil. In the eastern Sicily, before frying the croquettes they are used to dipping them into beaten egg white and breadcrumbs (48).

The latter splits the first Italian sentence into two, substituting a full stop for the comma after 'croquettes'. The translation is appalling and yet the translator appears to have some knowledge of English recipe norms when she substitutes an imperative for the gerund led clause. The change in punctuation here is quite justified in terms of register.

The exclamation mark

While the use of full stops across languages is somewhat erratic it might be supposed that the use of the exclamation mark would not be subject to such variations. An exclamation is an exclamation in any language, surely? By and large this holds good but interesting examples of discrepancy exist. The following is a letter from Becky Sharp to Amelia Sedley in Thackeray's 'Vanity Fair':

With what mingled joy and sorrow do I take up the pen to write to my dearest friend! Oh, what a change between today and yesterday! Now I am friendless and alone; yesterday I was at home, in the sweet company of a sister, whom I shall ever, ever cherish! (49).

There is a rather liberal use of the exclamation mark, reflecting the young lady's eager (if dishonest) emotions. Guidetti, in her version:

con quale sentimento misto di gioia e di dolore prendo la penna per scrivere alla mia più cara amica! Oh! ohe mutamento fra oggi e ieri! Ora sono senza amici, sola; ieri ero in una casa accogliente,
nella soave compagnia di una sorella, che mi sara sempre tanto, tanto cara! (50)

goes so far as to add a further exclamation mark after the 'Oh' in the second sentence. This may, in fact simply reflect normal Italian usage. An exclamation mark is always put after exclamation words (Ah!, Ehi!, etc.). However, Mozzati and Saibene show that if 'Oh' is followed by a further exclamative remark it does not necessarily take the exclamation mark itself. 'Oh, che sant'uomo!' (51). Therefore we may assume that the translator merely wished to give more bite to Becky Sharp's already emotive missive to her friend.

In David Murray's translation of Lucio Mastronardi's *Il Maestro di Vigevano*, Murray demonstrates the same concept in reverse by eliminating an exclamation mark from the original.

*Dopotutto, sarà stata un'azione malvagia, ma farmi passare per sciocco per tanti anni, far passare come mio figlio un figlio avuto da chissà chi, è un'azione ancora più malvagia!*, mi dissi (52).

"After all, it may have been a wicked action, but to let me pass as a fool for so many years, to let me pass as my son, a son had by who knows who, is an even more wicked action". I told myself (53).

Murray obviously does not see the long, articulated sentence as an exclamation whereas Mastronardi was interested in the shock effect of the idea expressed. The monologue nature of the utterance may also have dissuaded Murray from re-proposing the exclamation mark. A far more serious matter, which transcends the realm of this study, is that the translation is wrong! It can be seen that the error in interpretation clearly led Murray to split the suspect phrase 'to let me pass as my son, a son had by who knows who' with a comma thereby totally changing the meaning of the original Italian 'far passare come mio figlio un figlio avuto da chissà chi'.

*The Question Mark*
The use of the question mark is more or less the same in both Italian and English, as we have seen from the previous definitions. What will persuade a translator to omit, substitute or add a question mark to the target text is simply whether or not the final translated sentence or clause is interrogative or not. Let us examine this passage from Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*:

> At times, again, I was obliged to resolve all into the mere inexplicable vagaries of madness, for I beheld him gazing upon vacancy for long hours, in an attitude of the profoundest attention, as if listening to some imaginary sound. It was no wonder that this condition terrified - that it infected me (54).

> Altre volte, dovevo vedere in tutto questo soltanto il segno della pazzia poichè mi accadeva di trovare Usher a guardarne nel vuoto - e così restava per lunghe ore - nell'attitudine di chi ascolti, con attenzione profonda, qualche immaginario rumore. Ci si può meravigliare che il suo stato mi opprimesse e che, anzi, provocasse in me una specie di contagio? (55).

The writer is describing his state of mind after being in the company of the unnerving Roderick Usher. In Vittorini's translation (above) it can be seen that the latter has introduced a question form with 'Ci si può meravigliare che ...?', maintaining the meaning of the verb (wonder) yet altering the syntax. The question is rhetorical, but as was mentioned earlier, the Italian use of the rhetorical question often replaces the English statement. The English version here is simply not interrogative.

An interesting use of the question mark is found in Carlo Cassola's 'I poveri'.

> Ha fatto domanda da dieci parti, ma dappertutto ha avuto la stessa risposta. E sì che mio marito, lei lo conosce? non è per nulla esigente. Si adatterebbe
a far qualsiasi lavoro, pur di portare il pane a casa (56).

Wishing to maintain a conversational style in the dialogue, Cassola punctuates in such a way as to communicate the intonation to the reader, as well as the message. Anthony Rhodes, in his translation, faces a dilemma. He must either take the liberties that Cassola takes or respect the canons of English syntax, punctuation and meaning. In fact, he chooses a middle course:

He's tried ten places. The same reply from all of them. And you know, my husband - he's not at all demanding. He'll do any work - if it brings in food for the family (57).

The question form is not adopted but the verb 'to know' is used for 'sapere' (la situazione) and not to translate 'conoscere' (il marito). Dilemma resolved.

The Dash, Dots, Brackets

An important point that has so far been neglected is a certain idiomatic use of punctuation on the part of the original author (or, indeed, of the translator). Observing how Carlo Coardi translates John Steinbeck's 'The Grapes of Wrath' we come across some bizarre usage. In this tiny extract:

If a bank or a finance company owned the land, the owner man said, The Bank - or the Company - needs - wants - insists - must have - as though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them (58).

Steinbeck's repeated use of dashes may give the required impetus to the speaker's utterance but is deviant in grammatical terms. Coardi, in his translation, conforms more to accepted norms in his use of punctuation:

... una banca, o una società finanziaria, i
rappresentanti dicevano: La Banca (o la società) intende ... vuole ... ha bisogno ... esige ... quasi che la Banca o la Società fosse un essere mostruoso, dotato di intelletto e sentimento che li tenesse prigionieri tra i suoi tentacoli (59).

The dashes which enclose 'or the Company' are replaced by brackets, and rightly so, as the extra information supplied is indeed of a parenthetical nature. Steinbeck's first dashes do not have the same purpose as those that follow, which separate a series of verbs in ascending order of vehemence. He could have used commas, but there is no connective (and/or) between the final two verbs in the series, and presumably the dashes were meant to add bite to the remark. But why not distinguish them from those enclosing 'or the Company'?

Coardi, interestingly, substitutes dots for the second series of dashes. He is correct to do so: the lack of connective between the final two items and the lack of any kind of object, indicates an open-ended sentence, requiring the use of the three dots (see above).

The necessity to accommodate syntactic and morphological modifications with punctuation changes has been discussed, yet, even when the translator renders the original practically 'word for word' he will still opt for his own personal punctuation very often. Here is a passage of Umberto Eco's best-selling Il Nome della Rosa and the translation by William Weaver:

Quando ci vedemmo l'ultima volta in Umbria? Ricordi?
Ero stato appena guarito dai miei mali per l'intercessione di quella donna meravigliosa ... Chiara de Montefalco ... mormorò con volto radioso, Chiara ...
... Quando la natura femminile, per sua natura così perversa, si sublima nella santità, allora sa farsi il più alto veicolo della castità più pura. Guglielmo, (lo stava afferrando per un braccio, convulsamente) sai con quale ... feroce - st, è la parola giusta - con quale feroce sete di penitenza ho tentato di mortificare in me i palpiti della
When we saw each other the last time in Umbria — remember? — I had just been cured of my ailments through the intercession of that marvellous woman ... Clare of Montefalco ... he murmured, his face radiant. Clare ... When female nature, naturally so perverse, becomes sublime through holiness, then it can be the noblest vehicle of grace. You know how my life has been inspired by the purest chastity, William — he grasped my master's arm, convulsively — you know with what ... fierce — yes, that's the word — with what fierce thirst for penance I have tried to mortify in myself the throbbing of the flesh, and make myself wholly transparent to the love of Jesus Crucified ... (61)

The translation remains remarkably close to the original text but observe how a question mark can become a dash and another dash can appear. Later the English writer uses dashes instead of Eco's brackets. No light decision was made here; Eco's novel is full of parentheses (marked by brackets) and Weaver practically always copies them. Why does he not do so on this occasion? An interesting question of tense arises here. Whilst this part of the translation is extremely faithful to the original, as already mentioned, Weaver strays slightly away from Eco in his tense usage in the parenthetical clause. Weaver's simple past gives the idea that the action took place at that moment whilst Eco's past progressive implies that Guglielmo's arm was already being grasped. Thus, in the first case, dashes are used to isolate the incident, whilst in the second (and original) case brackets are adopted to give secondary information.

Right, surely, is on Eco's side but it is not the purpose of this study to investigate the limits of a translator's licence.

Nowhere does the translator have more freedom of expression than in the translation of poetry. Inevitably
the translator must aim for equivalent effect at the cost of syntactic transposition, and, equally inevitably, the punctuation of verse often differs greatly from the original. Observe how in Giuseppe Conte's translation of Blake's Introduction to his 'Songs of Innocence', the translator, amongst other modifications, substitutes a finite verb form for the non-finite participle and dispenses with Blake's commas at the end of each line, yet inserts one after his finite 'rideva' where Blake's participle required none:

Piping down the valleye wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me:

Suonavo lo suolo per un selvaggio cammino
Suonavo canoni di allegria e di piacere
Quando vidi sopra una nuvola un bambino
Che rideva, e mi disse: (62)

Staying with Blake, in Roberto Sanesi's translation of the Book of Ahania, the translator is confronted with a pause in the last line of the verse here quoted, provided by Blake's dash:

The Globe shook, and Urizen, seated
On black clouds, his sore wound anointed;
The ointment flow'd down on the Void
Mix'd with blood - here the snake gets her poison!

Il Globo tremò, e Urizen, seduto
Su nuvole nere si ungeva la ferita dolorante;
Commisto a sangue, l'unguento fluiva nel Vuoto -
Da qui il serpente ricava il suo veleno! (63)

Of all the options open to him, Sanesi has largely kept the English syntax and the dash, making allowance for the change in the Italian word order, appears in the same place. What is altered here is the metre and the pausing that the reader applies, of no significance
semantically, but relevant to translation procedure.

It is for the literary critic to decide whether, later in the same poem, the translation,

\begin{quote}
For when Urizen shrunk away
From Eternals, he sat on a Rock,
Barren - a Rock which himself,
From redounding fancies, had petrified.
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Poiché quando Urizen sfuggiva
Gli Eterni, sedeva su un arida roccia - una Roccia
Che aveva egli stesso impietrita
Da fantasie traboccanti (64).
\end{quote}

is as poetically valid as the original yet the very fact that the translator has altered the syntax, with the concomitant re-positioning of dash and commas, begs the question.

Looking finally at English translations of dashes from the Italian we find, in David Murray's selection of Italian texts translated into English, that the quotation marks applied in English are all represented by dashes in the original.

\begin{quote}
eg, - Bartolomeo, nessuno vi obbliga ... non in aiuto mio. E il Re - (65)
\end{quote}

This usage was mentioned earlier, in the introduction. Another interesting point which refers back to that very same section of the introduction concerns the fact that the book was printed in Italy and thus the quotation marks have the form of double enclosing arrows, in this case of the same size as a non-capital letter without a tail (i.e., an 'a' or an 'e') with the base always corresponding to the base of all letters. Here, minor differences in English and Italian printing-presses may force the translator's hand, but a survey of written Italian at all levels will show that the printing presses would seem to reflect long-established writing habits.

The Hyphen

An examination of translation problems arising from
use of the hyphen would seem to be at best a purely academic exercise. The ruling on when and when not to use a hyphen is not clear within the English language. There are useful guidelines and there are indeed cases where a hyphen is definitely required but there are vast areas of grey. We might normally expect to find 'Lieutenant-Colonel' with a hyphen, though not 'tenente colonello', though this is not sacrosanct. Consequently, the translator will look to the rules of word formation in his own language, or his own notion of what these rules are, to resolve any problems here. What else can Isabel Quigly do in her translation of Natalia Ginzberg's La Madre but translate 'tavola a pranzo' with 'dining-room table' and 'a merenda' with 'at tea-time'? (66)

This, of course, is a different point. The lexical item itself contains the hyphen in one language and not in the other.

To return to the idiomatic use of punctuation, an original author may produce anomalies with hyphens as well. This song by the folk-singer Bob Dylan, Ballad for a Friend, is a case in point:

Sad I'm a-sittin on the railroad track,
Watchin' that old smokestack.
Train is a-leavin' but it won't be back.

Years ago we hung around,
Watchin' trains roll through the town
Now that train is a-graveyard bound.

The folk song idiom provides us with 'a-sittin' and 'a-leavin' and, even more alarmingly, 'a-graveyard bound'. Alessandro Roffeni, in his translation,

Sto seduto triste sui binari
Guardo quel fumaiolo.
Il treno sta parendo ma non tornerà più.

Amni fa ce ne andavamo in giro,
A guardare i treni che passavano per la città.
Ora quel treno è diretto al cimitero (67).
wisely ignores these intruding hyphens. Of course, he has no choice as the hyphenated words are nor reproducible in Italian, though perhaps a more adventurous translator would have looked for a similar device to provide rhythm and to aid scansion.

The list of examples could go on ad infinitum and surely here lies the proof that, whilst clearly not being the most important element in a translation, the use of punctuation in a source text should not be taken for granted and any translator must be prepared to examine, maintain, modify or, if necessary, dispense with the elements of punctuation adopted by the original author.

It would take a monumental task of statistical analysis to try and establish a series of norms for translators in their treatment of punctuation in all possible cases and the results would probably not reward the effort. This study has made some observations of what causes translators to modify punctuation. In the general sense we can look to questions of syntax and style as being the most important dictators of punctuation change. Syntactically, the kind of choices that translators make between commas and conjunctions, or combinations of the two, the use or relative pronouns or participles and the positioning of main and subordinate clauses seem to be very important. Stylistically, the choice between genuine interrogative and rhetorical questions, between infinitives and imperatives, between finite and non-finite verbs or between different verb tenses seem to be particularly relevant to punctuation choice. At times a translator may even switch from third to first person or vice-versa, may wish to introduce a question form where one does not exist in the original, may opt for non-equivalent expressions where there is no direct correspondence or may wish to provide extra pauses in his sentences, all of which affect punctuation. The need to produce equivalent effect or onomatopoeic effects through, for example, alliteration will also influence a translator. Idiosyncratic use of language or genuine mistakes on the part of the source writer or, on the other hand, downright the mistranslation on the part of the translator, will again
result in modified punctuation. In the final analysis, the translator should heed the words of Harry Shaw, writing for the McGraw Hill Handbook of English: 'Every mark of punctuation is effective if it helps the reader understand. The presence or absence of every mark is harmful if it impedes the flow of thought from your mind to the reader' (68).

If the translator bears this in mind, then no matter how much he feels it necessary to rearrange the original text, he will fulfil his obligation to the reader.
5) F. Morosi, La Tua Lingua, Firenze, G. D'Anna, 1970, p. X111.
7) F. Morosi, op.cit. p. XV.
8) R.F. Bailey, op.cit. p. 37
9) F. Morosi, op.cit. p. XV.
11) F. Morosi, op.cit. p. XV.
13) F. Morosi, op.cit. p. XV11.
14) P. Newmark, op.cit. p. 173.
16) F. Morosi, op.cit. p. XV11.
18) F. Morosi, op.cit. p. 25.
20) P. Newmark, op.cit. p. 173.
24) W.M. Thackeray, op. cit. p. 46.
26) C. Pavese, Le Case in Penguin Parallel Texts,


29) C. Pavese, op.cit. p. 31.

30) R.F. Bailey, op.cit. p. 23 (The letter FANBOYS stand for the conjunctions 'for', 'and', 'nor', 'but', 'or', 'yet', and 'so', which may follow a comma).


33) E. Waugh, op.cit. p. 59.

34) E. Waugh, op.cit. p. 63.


36) C.A. Sambugar, op.cit. p. 22

37) C.A. Sambugar, Ibid.

38) G. Marrotta, L'Oro di Napoli, in Translate into English, Urbino, Quattroventi, 1984, p. 16.


41) A. Christie, Death on the Nile, trad. E. Piceni, Milano, Mondadori, 1979, p. 89.


44) M.B. Anderson, ibid.


48) A. Cardella, ibid.
49) W. M. Thackeray, op. cit. p. 75.
50) W. M. Thackeray, op. cit. p. 115.
51) A. Mozzati e C. Saibene, op. cit. p. 48.
64) W. Blake, ibid.
Università degli Studi di Trieste

Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori

Pubblicazioni: Direttore Responsabile Franco Crevatin

Serie Conferenze:


Serie Monografie:

1. Miscellanea di Studi in Occasione del Ventennale della Scuola – 1982
2. L. FUROIS – Pour une lecture de Mémoires d'Hadrien roman de Marguerite Yourcenar – 1983
3. O. ROSSETTI – Vita e Morte di Emile Ajar – 1983
4. L. FUROIS – La dimensione dell'amore in "Le Hussard sur le toit" di Giono – 1983
8. V. BOSCHIAN SCHIAVON – L'interpretazione simultanea di discorso letto – 1983
13. M. DEL PILAR GIMENEZ REINA - Cuaderno de ejercicios practicos lengua espanola (Primero ano) - 1983
15. L. MEAK - La selezione dell'informazione per l'interpretazione simultanea della letteratura medica - 1983
17. R.M. JEWETT - Theme and Structure in the Plays of T.S. Eliot - 1983
18bis M.M. MECHEL - Fachsprache im konstrastiven Feld
20. V. BOSCHIAN SCHIAVON - Velocità di parola e interpretazione simultanea - 1983
23. L. TONELLI - Überlegungen zur natürlichen Phono: Kontrastive Analyse des Boznerischen und des Südtiroler Italienischen - 1984

Serie Glossari:

1. A. OTTOGALLI - Dizionario Russo-Italiano di Pellerizia - 1983
4. P. ROSSI - Glossario tecnico del legno dal francese in italiano e dall'italiano in francese - 1983
5. A. OTTOGALLI - La ricerca lessicografica per la compilazione di un dizionario: un discorso metodologico - 1983
8. M.M. MECHEL - Per un linguaggio settoriale: lessico fondamentale di elicoltura - 1983