

Keeping Regional Identities Through Translation

Abstract: The paper tackles the notion that translation builds a bridge through different languages and cultures by analyzing the double function of translation in the analysis of two ‘regional’ works: Sergio Atzeni’s *Bakunin’s Son* (1991) and *Bellas Mariposas* (1996). These translations, of which the latter consists of film subtitles, are considered in terms of ethical reciprocity, on the basis of the three common alternatives a translator has to face: a non-translation, an equivalent translation and a manipulated translation. The study claims that, from a perspective of reciprocity, translation has to imply a project where either active parties (individuals, collectivities and nations) or passive entities (texts, languages and cultures) ought not to be harmed but rather mutually benefited, aiming at ethical reciprocity. The analysis concludes that translations should strike a balance between the ethical aspects related to this field, as far as a faithful transfer of form and content from the source text into the target language is concerned.

Keywords: translation, alternatives in translation, ethics in translation, culture

1. (Dis)-Placing Cultures – The Sardinian Identity

When we speak about cultural identity, we mean the identification with a particular group based on different cultural categories.¹ From the same perspective, also the language expressing the forms of communication in each group represents a specific model of reality, “a phonic association with the universe it describes”.² Consequently, languages act as mediators between peoples and cultures, so that what represents us as a specific identity, acquires a lexical and phonological uniqueness that cannot be misunderstood. Therefore, translation can build a bridge through different languages and cultures, both “constructing and de-constructing identities, providing a means to mutual understanding either to the original text and the target one”.³ The present paper will start from these premises and explore the double function of translation in the analysis of two ‘regional’ works, known to an international audience through versions that are far from being ethically reciprocal. They are Sergio Atzeni’s *Bakunin’s son* (1991) and *Bellas Mariposas* (1996), the only two works by the Sardinian writer translated into English. These translations (the latter in the subtitles of the film version) will be considered in terms of ethical reciprocity, based on the three common alternatives a translator must face: a non-translation, an equivalent translation, and a manipulated translation.⁴ The study claims that, from a perspective of reciprocity, translation must imply a project where either active parties (individuals, collectivities and nations) or passive entities (texts, languages and cultures) ought not to be harmed but rather mutually benefited, aiming at ethical reciprocity.

¹ Ilze Bezuidenhout, *What Constitutes Cultural Identity. A Discursive Semiotic Approach to Cultural Aspects in Persuasive Advertisements* (Randse Afrikanse Universitait, 1999), 1.

² Micaela Muñoz-Calvo and Carmen Buesa Gómez, *Translation and Cultural Identity. Selected Essays on Translation and Cross-Cultural Communication* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 2.

³ Zaixi Tan, “The Translator’s Identity as Perceived through Metaphors”, *Across Languages and Cultures*, 13.1 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.1556/Acr.13.2012.1.2>.

⁴ Jeremy Munday, *Evaluation in Translation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).

2. The Reasons for an Ethics of Translation

Translation ethics started to be a serious issue in 1984 after Berman's publication *L'Épreuve de l'étranger: Culture et traduction dans l'Allemagne romantique*, where the author introduced his notion of "respecting the foreignness of the foreign".⁵ It was later claimed that "the study of translation has always been, for the most part, a speculation about ethics",⁶ although what ethics specifically means is not clear yet. An ideal model of ethics should start "asking questions about ethics",⁷ in a perspective of normative criteria that may define the best principles for both an ethical decision-making and a conscious evaluation of any translation project.

Since translation contributes to an intertextual, interlingual and intercultural connection, reciprocity is crucial in our relationship with the others, and it is one of the key elements that facilitate a mutual cultural exchange, putting, in Brisset's words, "two alterities into contact".⁸ Though often faced from a rather political point of view, the issue deserves a careful attention, especially with reference to what is defined a regional product.

Sergio Atzeni and other Sardinian writers in the contemporary literary panorama, have achieved recognition at an international level only through translations that, unfortunately, did not turn to be totally reliable, from both a cultural point of view and in terms of conservation of the identities they express. Since translation deals with culture and society, being the medium through which the target reader interprets a given people and a country, a faulty work may affect the representation of a given reality, the 'intervention' on it, the relation to the Other and the construction of a unique identity. Translators thus acquire a powerful role in terms of mediators between cultures. According to Chesterman,⁹ translation becomes a combination of strategies and norms that are governed by values: the clarity of the text, corresponding to the expectancy norm; the truth to the original text, corresponding to the relation norm; the trust between all the parts involved, corresponding to the accountability norm, and the understanding, corresponding to the communication norm. Translation ethics, then, develops both at a macro- (in the relation between the translator and the world) and at a micro-level, in a close relationship between the translator and the text. Chesterman's ideal of a translation ethics is better expressed in his *Proposal for a Hieronymic Oath*¹⁰ where he distinguishes four models of translation ethics: the ethics of representation, the ethics of service, the ethics of communication, the norm-based ethics; this suggests a model more focused on the translator's engagement, according to commitment, loyalty to the profession, understanding, truth, clarity, trustworthiness, truthfulness, justice, excellence. He also separates personal ethics from professional ethics, limiting the translator's political commitment to the personal sphere and dissuading from any other implications.¹¹

⁵ Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign. Culture and Translation in Romantic Germany*, trans. by Stefan Heyvaert (New York: SUNY Press, 1992), 4.

⁶ Rosemary Arroyo, "The Ethics of Translation in Contemporary Approaches to Translation Training", in Martha Tennent, ed., *Training for the New Millennium. Pedagogies for Translation and Interpreting* (Amsterdam: Benjamins Translation Library, 2005), 5, doi: <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.60.18arr>.

⁷ Peter Singer, "Ethics", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Online Edition, 2012.

⁸ Anne Brisset, "Alterity in Translation. An Overview of Theories and Practices", in Susan Petrilli, ed., *Translation Translation* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2003), 125.

⁹ Andrew Chesterman, *Memes of Translation. The Spread of Ideas in Translation Theory* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1997).

¹⁰ Chesterman, "Proposal for a Hieronymic Oath", *The Translator*, 7.2 (2002), 172.

¹¹ Chesterman, "The Name and Nature of Translator Studies", *Hermes. Journal of Language and Communication Studies*, 42 (2009), 13-22.

Nevertheless, when ethnocentrism is “at the heart of translation”¹², the choice of minor source texts becomes a declaration of responsibility, contributing to their ‘foreignization’, in Venuti’s words, and inclusion in a wider context.¹³ On the one hand, it may facilitate cultural exchanges and innovation in the source culture, but if the translation is poorly performed, it may give way to both stereotypes and prejudices, not only in a single reader but also in the whole community. Disappointingly, this accounts for the many legends born around Sardinia, as a land of bandits, kidnappers, and narrow-minded people.

Translation may therefore build both bridges and barriers between cultures. It has been wondered how easily this can lead to the subjugation of small communities to more dominant influences,¹⁴ implying that translators may have an enormous responsibility in depicting a people or in their building representations “taken as realities in the receptor culture”.¹⁵ Paradoxically, although close linguistic transfer is one of the main priorities to deliver knowledge and values, when a specific culture is not properly represented in translation what will suffer most is the target culture, rather than the source one, missing the opportunity to get inside the Other.

In this perspective, reciprocity entails mutual duties and commitment, which, after all, is what should permeate social relations anyway.

3. Sergio Atzeni and the Linguistic Identity

Sergio Atzeni is one of the main interpreters of the Sardinian ethnicity, who developed a narrative style out of the constraints of stereotypes, leading to a dynamic and dialectic model of identity that does not exclude, but rather incorporates the Other, and enhances its peculiarity at the same time. In a famous interview, Atzeni recognized two types of Sardinian literature: one, in the Sardinian language, that does not include any representatives at an international value; and another, in the Italian language, represented by a Nobel prize, Grazia Deledda, and many other excellent writers, such as Antonio Gramsci and Emilio Lussu. He concludes: “Denying they all have a common trait is denying reality. They cannot be defined Italian writers, simply: they are Sardinian writers who wrote in Italian”.¹⁶

Atzeni wrote *Bakunin’s son* in 1991. The novel is a collection of thirty-two interviews, released to a young journalist investigating on the controversial figure of Tullio Saba, a man who had had a remarkable role in the social and political changes of his community.

Tullio Saba was born in the 1930s in a small Sardinian village, in the mining area named Marmilla. He was called Bakunin’s son, for his father’s anarchic ideas. At the end of an adventurous life, a hero for someone, a bandit for others, he would die, lonely and devastated by cancer, in the company of a young housemaid, too ignorant to help him find a last, extreme dignity.

Bakunin’s Son was translated by John H. Rugman, an American translator, in 1996. Very little is known about him, nothing about his reasons for dealing with this project. However, a review in *Publisher’s Weekly*¹⁷ describes the book in negative terms, as “a disappointing Italian novel, in brief sections, meant to be interviews with different characters about a man named Tullio Saba”.

¹² Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility. A History of Translation*, Second Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹³ Maria Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translator* (Manchester: Saint Jerome Press, 2007), 4-5.

¹⁴ Tymoczko, *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translator*, 4-5.

¹⁵ Maria Tymoczko, “Censorship and Self-Censorship in Translation. Ethics and Ideology, Resistance and Collusion”, in Eiléan Ní Chuilleanáin, Cormac Ó Cuilleánáin and David Parris, eds., *Translation and Censorship* (Dublin, IE: Four Courts Press, 2009), 41.

¹⁶ Atzeni in Gigliola Sulis, “La scrittura, la lingua e il dubbio sulla verità. Intervista a Sergio Atzeni”, *La Grotta della Vipera*, 20.66/67 (1994), 34-41, my translation.

¹⁷ *Publisher’s Weekly* (11 March 1996), <https://www.publishersweekly.com/9780934977449>, accessed 22 March 2021.

The reviewer's opinion is sharp and does not leave much choice about any motivation to read it, apart from a brief hint to Atzeni, recognized as a writer who "cleverly retells Italian history through the recollections of people in numbered interviews".¹⁸

Margherita Heyer-Caput¹⁹, an Italian researcher, analysed the impact of Rugman's translation on American readers, starting from that blunt definition of a *disappointing Italian novel* expressed in the magazine, and revealed a clear displacement of ethnicity in the target text, that prevented the American readers from receiving the source text ethically:

An ethnical obliteration that has misinterpreted the ideal extent and the communicative power of his (*Atzeni's*) work in that "symptomatic America" he loved so much as a continent of "emerging minorities".²⁰

The choices and strategies Rugman adopted in translating *Bakunin's Son* are various and inconsistent with the general tone of the novel, failing to feature the choral dialogic process that connects the interviews in a political and moral sphere and resulting in differences between the source language and the target one.

4. Methodology

The study has compared the two versions of the novel, in a perspective of ethics of translation and reciprocity, according to the models proposed by Chesterman (2001): ethics of representation, ethics of service, ethics of communication, and norm-based ethics. These substantiate the concept of reciprocity developed through specific choices in translation: not translating; with equivalent translations; with the manipulation of the re-writing process. To this purpose data were collected both comparatively and descriptively, while the source text and the translation have been carefully analysed to identify the most common models of ethics used in the corpus. Examples, from the source text and the target one, have been listed to compare the data, and different models of translation ethics have been determined to find the dominant one. The translation of the selected corpus has been classified according to Chesterman's models of translation ethics:

- ethics of representation, based on loyalty towards the source text, as well as loyalty towards an ethical representation of the Other;
- ethics of service, based on a view of translation as a service and, consequently, the ideals comprised in it as a professional performance (not common in the analyzed texts);
- ethics of communication, based on the principle of enabling communication and cooperation;
- norm-based ethics, based on the idea that norms encode the ethical values held at a particular time, in a particular society, and that ethical behavior corresponds to behaving in agreement with these norms as socially sanctioned expectations.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Margherita Hayer-Caput, "Itinerari anglo-americani della scrittura di Sergio Atzeni. A Work in Progress", in Sylvie Cocco, Valeria Pala and Pier Paolo Argiolas, eds., *Sergio Atzeni e l'arte di inanellare le parole* (Cagliari: AIPSA, 2014), 118.

²⁰ Ibid., 118.

The following examples present models of translation ethics extracted from the corpus. Some sentences will refer to omissions in the translation of words/sentences/clauses; some will refer to any alteration of the original sense or structure and, as such, opposed to the ethics of representation. Finally, other parts of the translated text will be shown as literal transpositions of the source language into English, with a marked tendency to change or modify the original punctuation.

5. (Dis)similarities in Translation: *Bakunin's Son* (selected samples)

Source language	Target language	Comment
<i>Ma a Cagliari non conoscete nessuno?</i> (14)	<i>You know anyone in Cagliari?</i>	This is not what the interviewee wanted to say. He actually asks: 'don't you know anyone in Cagliari?', and the tone is ironic, when he realizes that the journalist doesn't have any idea who they are talking about.
<i>[...] che pure insegna l'abbicì, che è più importante che cuocere panadas.</i> (19)	<i>Teaching the ABCs is more important than cooking panadas</i>	The noun 'panadas' is not translated but kept in the original form. The translator seems to ignore what he is talking about, so it is not specified that this is a kind of local pie, filled with fish or meat, very popular in the south of Sardinia.
<i>Avrebbe chiamato in giudizio Benito perché aveva fatto la guerra? E sé stesso per quei cottimi?</i> (62)	<i>Would the director call Benito Mussolini to trial because he had led us into war? Or would he have persecuted himself for having instituted the piecework system?</i>	The translator added the dictator's surname, and this helps the reader understand who is referred to. In Italy Benito is Mussolini, but not necessarily in the rest of the world.
<i>Sei curioso di me...</i> (11)	<i>You are curious about him</i>	The translator uses a different object pronoun and shifts the interviewer's interest from the interviewee to Tullio.
<i>Tullio Saba era un bambino vanitoso.</i> (18)	<i>Tullio Saba was a very egotistical child</i>	The translator changes the adjective, and displaces the sentence from the context, where what was considered was the sudden poverty Tullio had to face and the contrast with his childhood years, when

		he would have the best dresses and shoes.
[...] <i>girava il mondo come un anticristo.</i> (21)	[...] <i>travelled the world like an aristocrat</i>	The translator changes the meaning of the noun, failing to explain that Bakunin, the Russian revolutionary, represented a dangerous antichrist in the rigidly Catholic society of the time. Aristocrats would not be so dangerous.
<i>Amici per la pelle, ché ognuno dei due volentieri gliela avrebbe fatta all'altro la pelle.</i> (29)	<i>They were best of friends. The one would have risked his neck to save the other.</i>	The translator changes the original sense of the sentence, where the writer says that despite friendship there was a hidden rivalry between the two friends, who could have killed each other. The translation gives the reader exactly the opposite idea.
<i>Quando lui lavorava a Bacu Abis, io stavo in campagna.</i> (33)	<i>While he was out with the army in Africa</i>	The translator ignores that Bacu Abis is a village in the south of Sardinia, and not in Africa.
<i>Oe no amos ne naves ne portos, ne arsenales che prima vattos. Ai, cantos feridos, cantos mortos, cantos isperdidos, cantos mutilados. Custa fit s'allegria, sos cunfortos, ch'isperaian sos soldados nostros.</i> (36)	<i>Oe no amos ne naves ne portos, ne arsenales che prima vattos. Ai, cantos feridos, cantos mortos, cantos isperdidos, cantos mutilados. Custa fit s'allegria, sos cunfortos, ch'isperaian sos soldados nostros.</i>	The text is kept in the original form, in the Sardinian language, no hint at its meaning or at the fact that it was a traditional, melancholic song, describing the mood of the men facing a disastrous imperialistic war. People used to sing it because they could protest against the regime without being understood.
[...] <i>giocavo in campagna a riconoscere le tracce della lepre, a raccogliere margherite, a nascondermi dietro un albero pensando che ero un'altra, la figlia di un padrone, e che aspettavo il fidanzato, che era ricco e che</i>	[...] <i>playing in the countryside, looking for rabbit tracks while I gathered daisies, or maybe playing hide and seek, pretending I was some rich landowner's daughter who would one day be taken away by a handsome prince on a</i>	The original text speaks about a hare, not a rabbit, much more common in the Sardinian countryside. Moreover, the word order is somewhat different, in the translation the adjective 'rich' refers to the landowner, the father the girl

<i>doveva venire a prendermi con due cavalli...(37)</i>	<i>horse...</i>	dreamt of, and not to the fiancée, as in the original text.
<i>Andavano a trovare la vedova, che non aveva voglia di vederli. (45)</i>	<i>They went to visit the widow, not that they had any interest in seeing her</i>	The translator changes the sentence subject. Originally it was the widow the one who did not want to meet people, consistently with her mood after the downfall.
<i>Ma si capiva che con me stava bene. (46)</i>	<i>But I could tell she wasn't well</i>	Again, the translation says exactly the opposite of the original text. The woman interviewed describes her good relationship with Donna Margherita, and not her state of health.
<i>[...] tosse da fumatore incallito e da silicosi. (53)</i>	<i>[...] a heavy smoker's cough</i>	The disease, 'silicosis', is omitted, although it was sadly common among miners and could have further emphasized how badly mining work had affected the protagonist's health.
<i>Dopo un'ora buona mandano su un carabiniere semplice, un ragazzo lucano. (62)</i>	<i>After a good hour they sent up a carabiniere private, a boy from Lucano</i>	The boy was 'lucano' because he came from Lucania, an Italian region, not a town.
<i>[...] arrivai laggiù in colonia, non se ne abbia a male, si diceva così, a quel tempo, e non mancavano le ragioni all'evidenza. Avevo ventisette anni. (78)</i>	<i>I was twenty-seven years old when I arrived at Montevercchio. "Don't take it so hard", I'd been told, and right off the bat I could see why.</i>	The translator changes the word order and the punctuation in the original sentence. He quotes Montevercchio, thus revealing some knowledge of the territory. It was a mining site but also a colony, according to the writer, who wanted to emphasize that even though the resources were local, properties were not. This is not clear in the translation, only focused on the protagonist's regret for his misfortune.

<p><i>Anche scontando ogni differenza dovuta all'economia di guerra, si trattava pur sempre di un calo vertiginoso, proprio nel momento in cui il mercato riprendeva a tirare verso l'alto e i prezzi salivano. (78-79)</i></p>	<p><i>Even taking into account factors such as the differences between the war economy of a bellicose nation and the post war economy of the defeated one, the decline in productivity was exaggerated, especially at a time when the market tended towards upswing and prices were rising.</i></p>	<p>The translator adds a long reflection on the economic trend of the countries involved in the mines business, but this is not in the original text.</p>
<p><i>Trovai il ritratto dopo due giorni, era in un angolo delle latrine. (80)</i></p>	<p><i>I found that picture in a corner of the bathroom.</i></p>	<p>The term used is inconsistent with the described place, a loo and not a bathroom, to make the finding even more humiliating.</p>
<p><i>Cercavo di immaginare come fosse quel mio padrone. Anche il letto sembrava da vecchio, un letto tutto di ferro smaltato, come quello che c'era nella camera dei miei genitori, nero nero. (111)</i></p>	<p><i>I tried to imagine what my master, the sick man, would be like.</i></p>	<p>The description of the man's bedroom has been omitted; he is referred to as a sick man, but this was not said in the original text. Moreover, the translator omitted to compare the man's room to the girl parents', which would have explained how she felt to him.</p>

6. *Bellas Mariposas*

If *Bakunin's son* was Atzeni's personal contribution to the miners' struggles for more human working conditions, *Bellas Mariposas* (2012) is one of Atzeni's best expressions of his belonging to Cagliari and its complicated urban frame. The film is an idea of the Sardinian film director Salvatore Mereu. The main character, Caterina, is an adolescent living in a dysfunctional family, who narrates her story through a long interior monologue. The text is appealing but also embarrassing, Caterina speaks swearing and swears speaking, with very strong and harsh expressions that only those who know the 'cagliaritano' slang can understand. The film opens with two young boys on a motorcycle passing by a mate of their same age and shouting "burdu" at him, i.e. bastard in the Sardinian language. Traditionally, the term is an insult, and, according to both local and national standards, referring to a never established paternity is offensive. However, the expression may imply a different interpretation, devoid of its original meaning, used to tease someone that is not highly estimated but unlikely to be blamed for not having a legitimate father. The translation "*Oh ugly bastard!*" anticipates the difficulties translators must face in subtitling, especially when what must be conveyed is a cultural specificity that might have no equivalence in the target language.

Subtitling is the process of adding a text to moving pictures, giving an allophone community a sense of the language that is being spoken. As such, it simply becomes a practice that consists in presenting a written text, generally on the lower part of the screen, endeavouring to recount the

original dialogues, the discursive elements in the images (letters, inserts, graffiti, inscriptions, placards, and the like), as well as the information contained on the soundtrack (songs, voices off).²¹

As such, subtitles provide a message for interpretation at a multisensorial level, namely the audio- and the visual one. They: "... appear and disappear, to coincide in time with the corresponding portion of the original dialogue and are almost always added to the screen image at a later date as a post-production activity".²²

However, the comprehension of the message in the source text can be limited in terms of cultural specificity, for the spatial-temporal constrictions inherent in the means itself and that may weaken the semiotic transfer of the spoken language into the written one.²³ As a matter of fact, subtitling works in a limited space ("a maximum of two lines"²⁴), with a limited number of characters ("forty English letters and spaces"²⁵) for each line. The latter also depends on the devices used to watch the product, on the font/type of the letters and on the higher/lower frequency of capital/small letters. Temporal limits are strictly connected to the spatial ones, as well as to the viewers' speed in reading (which, in turn, is linked to other variables such as the viewers' age, education, social rank...). Gottlieb formulated the "12 CpS rule", arguing that a subtitle in two lines, comprising thirty-six characters, should stay on the screen for 6 seconds, with an average of twelve characters per second.²⁶ The calculation is approximated, for the above said variables and for the type of syntactic structures, so the cultural specificities featured in the film require the viewer a variable amount of time to understand. Any failure in translating these cultural specificities, however, implies the risk of *culture bumps*, that is what occurs, in Archer's words: "when an individual has expectations of a particular behaviour within a particular situation and encounters a different behaviour when interacting with an individual from another culture".²⁷

Confronting culture bumps, film viewers:

[...] feel disconnected [...] and adopt coping strategies to relieve their discomfort. A primary strategy is to attempt to understand the motive for the Other's behavior, assuming this understanding will alleviate the anomie that emanated from the culture bump.²⁸

According to Pedersen,²⁹ retention is the translating strategy that keeps the Target Text closer to the Source Text and culture, allowing the cultural specificity to get to the target one unvaried. It is the most popular strategy but does not provide the target viewer with a proper interpreting support. Specification is true to the original text but enriched with information defining the cultural element in the Target Culture or Target Text, with more details than the ones provided in the Source Text. On the other hand, in direct translation, the cultural specificity does not lose the semantic value, because no adaptations or integrations are considered. Generalization is the strategy closer to the target viewer, since the original element is substituted with a more general one, often in combination with a

²¹ Jorge Diaz Cintas, "Subtitling. The Long Journey to Academic Acknowledgement", *The Journal of Specialised Translation*, 1 (January 2004), 15.

²² Georg-Michael Luyken, *Overcoming Language Barriers in Television* (Manchester: The European Institute for the Media, 1991), 31.

²³ Jan Pedersen, 2011, *Subtitling Norms for Television. An Exploration Focusing on Extralinguistic Cultural References* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2011), 18.

²⁴ Henrik Gottlieb, "Subtitling", in Mona Baker, ed., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (Shanghai, CN: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2005), 245.

²⁵ Luyken, *Overcoming*, 43.

²⁶ Pedersen, *Subtitling*, 20.

²⁷ Carol M. Archer, *Living with Strangers in the U.S.A.. Communicating Beyond Culture* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2012), 17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 335.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

translation. In substitution the translator vehiculates the cultural specificity by paraphrasing different cultural-specific elements, either in the target culture or in other transcultural elements. With omission, the translator faces two possible choices, opting for this strategy “responsibly, after rejecting all alternative strategies, or irresponsibly, to save him/herself the trouble of looking up something s/he does not know”.³⁰

The study will try to identify the cultural specificities interpreted in the subtitled version of *Bellas Mariposas*, in a perspective of ethics and reciprocity of translation, as already argued in the analysis of *Bakunin’s Son*. The following are representative samples, where the translator basically resorts to two different strategies: equivalence, depriving the text/subtitle of meaningful references to the local culture; and omission, revealing a total disregard for the specific cultural identity the translating project was expected to represent.

Source Language (Sardo-Cagliaritano)	Target Language (English)	Comment
<i>Ma ita gazzu!</i>	<i>What the fuck!</i>	The expression is translated literally. The original sense of fun and irony is not always perceived
<i>Calloni!</i>	<i>What a jerk!</i>	Sardinian swearing does not always aim at offending, sometimes it just expresses ironical sympathy
<i>Minca, ita è, mi ollisi lassai a solu?</i>	<i>Are you leaving me alone, then?</i>	The reference to the male sexual organ is omitted. Instead, the term is commonly used as a filler word in everyday speech
<i>L’as callonis!</i>	<i>Don’t be a pain!</i>	The translation is not literal, the reference to male sexual organs is omitted, the ironical expression loses power
<i>Fill’e bagassa!</i>	<i>Son of a bitch!</i>	Literal translation, but the regional expression is also used to express amusement and even sympathy
<i>No pighis po culu a mei!</i>	<i>Don’t screw me around!</i>	The expression has different references. In the local mentality, sodomy is the worst

³⁰ Ibid, 9.

		insult.
<i>Cravadiddu in su culu!</i>	<i>Shove 'em up in your ass!</i>	Translation is literal but without the ironical hints it originally had.
<i>Sesi calloni!</i>	<i>You are a dickhead!</i>	The expression is sympathetic, not always offensive, but the literal translation hides it.
<i>Babbo si fa i cazzi che vuole!</i>	<i>Dad does what he damn wants!</i>	The translation is a literal one. In this case the two versions correspond, and the swearword has the same power.
<i>Come minca è che si chiama</i>	<i>What's his fucking name?</i>	The male sexual organ is hinted at, the taboo word loses its original sense and becomes just a filling word
<i>Dai, cazzo, siediti!</i>	<i>C'mon, sit down!</i>	The filling word is omitted, the expression loses urgency and power
<i>Esti una bagassedda!</i>	<i>She's a little hooker!</i>	The swearword in Sardinian does not always refer to moral habits, it is also a term of endearment, quite common in lower classes

As it can be noticed, male sexual organs are constantly referred to (*minca, calloni, is callonis*). The translator occasionally omits the term, in an attempt to lighten up the tones and the atmosphere in the scenes (*'Dai, cazzo, siediti' - C'mon, sit down!; Minca, ita è, mi ollisi lassai a solu - Are you leaving me alone, then?*), or simply because (s)he takes for granted everybody knows what they really mean; in other cases (s)he substitutes the original term with a different (and more orthodox) one (*L'as callonis - Don't be a pain; Calloni! - What a jerk!*), avoiding any references to what the story hints at, the '*cagliaritanità*', or the identification with a complex and unique cultural specificity. These interpretations are justified by the difficulty of the linguistic features implied, at the same time there is no justification for the annihilation of the social reality they connoted. Equally, the direct and mere translation of swear words into their English equivalent corresponding to THAT part of the body or THAT physiological function, is reductive and superficial, and does not convey the peculiar use of the term in the Sardinian language and, in particular, in the variety called '*cagliaritano*'. Expressions like '*sesi calloni*', '*fill'e bagassa*' in reality reveal an ironic approach to life, meant to make fun of human flaws, almost tender if pronounced in a specific intonation, but, disappointingly, this does not emerge

in the subtitles. Undeniably, in the transference from a language (particularly a minority one) something gets inevitably lost. For this reason, authors sometimes provide footnotes or glossaries of the most common regional expressions, often even explaining them, to avoid betraying the source text through omissions and substitutions. However, this is possible in narrative texts, not in subtitles, and in this specific example of subtitles for an English-speaking audience the ‘*cagliaritanità*’ (or the geo-specificity) seems to fade away scene after scene, despite the realism of the actors’ performance, none of which was a professional.

7. Conclusions

Translation can build a bridge through different languages and cultures, providing the tools for mutual understanding and appreciation of cultural specificities. Too often minor realities have been penalized by misshaped interpretations of these specificities, filtered through stereotypes and prejudices that ‘faulty’ translations contributed to perpetrate. The analysis of Sergio Atzeni’s *Bakunin’s son* and *Bellas Mariposas*, translated into English for a more international audience, raises the issue of ethical reciprocity, and the need to establish priorities during any translation process, so as to limit any possible harm to both active parties and passive entities. In this perspective, the three alternatives provided comprised not-translating, equivalent translation and manipulated translation, a model that has been verified, to test its validity, in the only two attempts made so far to translate Atzeni’s works, where both the writer and his geo-specificity come to be shared with a wider audience through different media, with remarkably different results. Assuming culture as a dynamic process, any bridge between different realities should integrate values, representations and linguistic features that change from people to people, determining the low ‘translatability’ of some cultures, and the risk to give the reader/viewer of a target audience a distorted image of a specific text. Admittedly, translators have the specific responsibility to preserve this cultural identity, in an ideal model of reciprocity where texts, languages and cultures may interact at equal levels. A deeper knowledge of specific cultures, maybe some cooperation between the author and the commissioner (when possible) can improve the shortcomings inherent to the text and avoid cultural misunderstandings, as it has been shown in the translation of specificities in *Bakunin’s Son* or the swearing in *Bellas Mariposas*, where, although manipulation occasionally proved to enhance the effect of the original expression, it also spoiled and dis-placed the peculiarity of the Source Language at the same time. Therefore, the core of the issue is avoiding harm to the source culture; a literal translation may appear as a clumsy attempt to avoid this risk, but it may also lead to a sterile interaction between communities, where any mutual interest vanishes with the last lines of a text, either in a novel or in a subtitle. If the essence of translation ethics is realizing mutual benefits and minimizing harms, the two works analysed have some merit because they contributed to make the writer known in other parts of the world. From this point of view, it cannot be neglected that, after all, the more visibility is given to other identities, the more cultural common ground can be shaped between our own identity and the identity of the Other.³² At the same time, omissions and manipulations have levelled specificities in the reception of the target reader or audience, taking for granted that the latter had a previous knowledge of a given people and country. And when reciprocity fails in connecting the two parties, it may only lead to personal assumptions or inferences, which, ethically speaking, is not a minor issue at all.