

# **An analysis of the use of vernacular in Sebastian Barry's *Days Without End* and its Spanish and Italian translations**

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## **1. Introduction**

This chapter aims to analyse the use of non-standard language in Sebastian Barry's novel *Days Without End* (2016) and how it fares in its Spanish and Italian translations, both published in 2018 and authored by Susana de la Higuera Glynne-Jones and Cristiana Mennella, respectively. Non-standard language, which often attempts to represent particular geographical or social dialects in fiction, is arguably one of the most problematic issues facing literary translators. As remarked by Miguel Sáenz, an acclaimed Spanish translator (2000), «[d]ialect translation is not an insoluble problem but something worse: a problem with many solutions, all of them unsatisfactory».<sup>1</sup> In *Days Without End* the difficulty is compounded by the fact that non-standard language is pervasive, as it permeates the narrator's voice. The translator, therefore, is faced with the daunting task of convincingly recreating that voice with target language resources. As hinted by Sáenz, that task can be approached in different ways.

The layout of the chapter is as follows. Section 2 briefly touches upon the role of non-standard language in literature. Section 3 summarises some of the main contributions to the discussion on dialect translation. Section 4 provides an overview of the novel – plot and main themes, narrative point of view, critical reception in the English-speaking world. Section 5 deals with the key issue of function by first describing the features of non-standard English used in the novel and discussing their geographical affiliation, and then considering the narrative levels at which non-standard occurs and how it is valued by the implicit author. Section 6 provides an account of the translators' decisions as regards non-standard language in terms of the general technique used and the specific lexical and grammatical resources deployed, which may align the target text with the tone and style of the source text or otherwise. Section 7 offers some concluding remarks.

## **2. Non-standard language in literature**

It is assumed in this paper that the main question raised by the use of non-standard language in a literary work is that of its function. Standard language is non-marked, non-standard

language is marked; therefore, if an author takes the trouble of deviating from the standard, they must do so for a good reason. The most immediate reason that comes to mind is realism: a given voice is assigned non-standard features in order to imitate the way people from a similar geographical or social background speak in the real world. But matters are often not that simple. Powerful as the mimetic urge may be, it soon bumps against the limits imposed by literary convention, which tacitly decrees that using non-standard language entails not faithfully transcribing all details and nuances of a given speech form but rather selecting a number of representative features. In literary terms, then, the emphasis cannot be on realism but on the added, symbolic meaning acquired by non-standard language, which links it to aspects of characterisation, setting, plot or theme.

Mair (1992) provides a systematic framework for the analysis of non-standard language in fiction. In his elucidation of its function, he argues that three issues need to be addressed. The first is assessment of the representation. Even if that representation is governed by convention rather than mimetic realism at all costs, it may be useful to determine how it compares to that which is being represented, i.e. the particular dialect or vernacular as used in the real world. The second issue is what Mair refers to as the limits to the use of non-standard language in fiction, as it may only occur in the speech of certain characters or alternatively permeate the narrator's voice. It is, therefore, a matter of narrative levels. The third issue is the key one of valuation. What particular values are assigned to non-standard language by the implicit author? Dialects and vernaculars of all kinds are often stigmatised by society at large; but in literature they may be endowed with new values and used to highlight the plight of the marginalised, i.e. to give a voice to those who have traditionally been deprived of one. It is of the utmost importance for literary and translation scholars to pay due attention to this issue.

Mair's framework is not incompatible with other, more recent approaches to the study of non-standard language in literature or other types of discourse. The issue of values, for instance, lies at the basis of Ranzato's distinction (2016, 2) between geographical/political and psychological/semiotic dimensions of dialects. And there is a remarkable degree of overlap between the aspects put forward by Mair and key issues in perceptual dialectology as presented, for example, by Palliwoda and Schröder (2016) in their interview-based survey of knowledge of and attitudes towards a number of German dialects on the part of German speakers. These overlaps will not be pursued in the present chapter, but may constitute a solid basis for further research.

### **3. Dialect translation**

Due to space constraints, it is impossible here to provide a thorough account of the long-standing debate on dialect translation. Interestingly enough, even though Translation Studies over the last 20 or 25 years has tended to be descriptive and to shun prescription outside the areas where it naturally belongs (translator training or translation quality assessment, for example), many scholars have voiced their opinions on the best ways to render dialect in translation and the paths to be avoided. Use of the standard in the target text is endorsed by many, and other options are either viewed with suspicion or openly rejected because of their alleged unfeasibility or undesired effects. The main argument behind this position is that there is no such thing as functional equivalence between dialects of different languages (e.g. Rabadán 1991, 97; Muñoz Martín 1995, 210), even if some authors admit that standardisation may result in flattening (Hervey, Higgins and Haywood 1995). One possible alternative is

using target language colloquial features, which, by bringing register close to common speech, partly compensate for loss of dialect. Proponents of this option include Slobodník (1970), Buzelin (2000) and Lavault-Olléon (2006); Carbonell i Cortés (1999) warns, though, of possible unwanted consequences of this option on the ideological plane. On the other hand, some authors are in favour of deviating from the target language standard in order to try and capture the function of source text dialects. Julià Ballbè, a Catalan translator and translation scholar, strongly advocates the use of real target language dialects in translation (1997a, 1997b, 1998) and follows his own advice in his published translations. He had an illustrious forerunner in Catford (1965), who thought that in dialect translation human geography is more important than physical geography, and endorsed the hypothetical possibility of translating Cockney into French as *parigot*, as both are urban, working-class dialects, regardless of the geographical location of London or Paris in their respective countries. Even so, the option of resorting to real dialects is not supported by many scholars. A less radical choice for a translator who wishes to depart from the target language standard would be to select a number of non-standard features that do not conform to any particular regional variety (Hatim and Mason 1997, 107), an option dubbed by Briguglia (2009: 59) “cross-dialectal”.

All these options have advantages and drawbacks, which can be determined on the basis of several relevant factors repeatedly mentioned in the literature, such as the semiotic values associated with particular dialects, the cultural verisimilitude of target language dialects occurring in a source culture setting, whether the source text featuring dialectal language is monodialectal or polydialectal, or whether dialect occurs only in characters’ speech or colours the narrator’s voice as well. However, there seems to be general agreement on function as the guiding criterion for dialect translation. Prevalence of function undoubtedly underlies Catford’s suggestion to render Cockney as *parigot*, and is at the basis of Slobodník’s concept of “homology of functionality”. This kind of homology as the ideal goal in dialect translation has not been questioned by later scholars (Marco and Tello Fons 2016, 196).

It is important to bear in mind that most pieces of research on dialect translation are case studies, and authors are often keener on dealing with the peculiarities of the case in hand than on mapping translation options from a theoretical point of view. But some authors have attempted to provide such mappings. Some years ago (Marco 2002, 81) I presented what I thought were the available options as a tree with three forks. Braga (2016, 19-20) mentions two further lists of dialect translation “procedures”: Perteghella (2002) and Tello Fons (2011). Perteghella’s classification is intended for theatre translation and identifies five categories: dialect compilation, pseudo-dialect translation, parallel dialect translation, dialect localization and standardisation. Tello Fons’ (2011) typology, intended for the translation of narrative fiction, includes compensation, neutralisation, colloquial translation, creation of a dialect and dialectal translation. In a more recent joint article, Tello Fons and I managed to integrate our mappings of the theoretical options (variously termed *translation techniques*, *strategies* or *solution types*)<sup>3</sup> available to a translator when facing non-standard language. Our new classification (2016, 201) included four options and will be used in this chapter for analytical purposes:

- a) neutralisation, or unmarked translation, which renders the source text (ST) dialect as standard in the target text;

- b) marking the target text (TT) language by using a (highly) colloquial, informal tenor which does not involve departing from the norm, at least as far as spelling and grammar are concerned;
- c) target language norm transgression by means of a set of non-standard features which cannot be identified as belonging to any particular target dialect;
- d) target language norm transgression by using real target language dialects which can be easily identified as such by the target reader.

Translators tend to adhere to the first technique above, or at most to move between the first and the second, which can be envisaged as two points along the +/– formal/colloquial cline. It is norm transgression that entails a qualitative leap insofar as it involves using non-standard features on the graphological or grammatical level, and most translators are reluctant to follow that path. Carbonell i Cortés (1999, 92) regards standardisation as “perhaps the most frequent option”. Braga (2016, 19) claims that geographical vernaculars “tend to be neutralized when rendered into another language, thus erasing the necessary differentiation between characters or other purposes (as provoking laughter) derived from dialectal use”. In the particular case of translation into Spanish, Marco and Tello Fons (2016, 196–197) concur with that opinion: “Most Spanish translators have traditionally adhered to neutralisation, since the typical association between standard variety and written language tends to tip the balance towards this procedure”. However, as remarked in the previous paragraph, most research on dialect translation is made up of case studies, which shed no light on translation norms in Toury’s probabilistic sense. Therefore, most statements on tendencies in dialect translation must be understood as impressions based on personal reading experience rather than empirical work. But there are exceptions. Briguglia (2009) examines translations of three Italian novels with dialect markers into several languages and concludes that “the overview of translations into Spanish, English and German has shown that translators tend to ignore the rich dialectal heritage in their languages and avail themselves exclusively of the standard variety, with colloquial language sometimes coming to the surface” (2009, 259). Similar conclusions are reached by Tello Fons (2011), who analyses the Spanish translations of ten novels originally written in English from different geographical and temporal backgrounds. Thus, impressionistic claims seem to be confirmed by empirical research, scant as it is.

#### **4. Sebastian Barry’s *Days Without End* (2016): An overview**

*Days Without End* (DWE) is a multi-layered story. It is, perhaps first of all, a story of dispossession – hunger, emigration, deprivation, and the loss of dignity that comes with it all (Franco Batista 2017, 104). Thomas McNulty is the only member of his Sligo family to be spared by the potato famine that ravaged Ireland so cruelly between 1845 and 1852. Driven by hunger and desperation, he sets sail for North America in one of the so-called *coffin-ships*, and lands in Quebec before ending up in Missouri, where he joins the US army. From then on, the novel is largely a story of war. Thomas and his inseparable friend and lover John Cole fight first in the Indian Wars, rife with episodes of massacre and attempted genocide, and then in the American Civil War. The two ingredients (dispossession and war) lead Franco Batista (2017) to claim that Thomas McNulty and his like are both victims and perpetrators of trauma. Thomas was not alone in fleeing from his native Ireland as a result of a famine caused to a large extent by the country’s colonial situation and then, paradoxically, enrolling

in an army engaged in the blatantly colonial enterprise of wiping out North America's indigenous population. But *DWE* is also a love story featuring different kinds of affection. The central love affair is the relationship between Thomas and John and its ever-understated tenderness. There is also parental and filial love between the couple and their foster child Winona, a Sioux girl cut apart from her biological family by the vicissitudes of war. And finally there is a kind of communal love in the companionship and solidarity shown by soldiers in everyday military life. This weaving together of different strands is one of the defining features of the novel, as will be seen later.

As regards point of view, the narrative voice (that of Thomas McNulty himself) remains in full control of the events narrated from beginning to end. Many other voices are heard, of course. A stunning variety of characters marches before the reader's eyes, with all kinds of geographical backgrounds; but their voices are filtered through the narrator's, which thus becomes the yardstick by which everything in the story is measured.

Reviewers of Barry's novel have emphasised two basic features: the odd blend of brutality and lyricism, and the authenticity and truth of the narrator's voice. Hayden (2017) puts it neatly: "Like the earlier novel [*A Long Long Way*, set in World War I], *Days Without End* is epic in scope, the grace and lyricism of the writing in stark, unsettling contrast to the horrors described". McNamee (2016) focuses on the creative nature of Thomas McNulty's lyricism: "McNulty narrates. The making of a new world demands a new language, and McNulty has the tools for it. It is a detached, lyric voice. Wonder is never far away, whether that wonder is directed at inhumanity or at the physical beauty of his lover". Smith (2017) dwells on the narrator's attitude towards the brutality he witnesses and takes part in: "It may seem incongruous to call a novel as violent as 'Days Without End' dreamlike, but Barry's narrator is a gentle witness to brutality: neither reluctant nor rabid, but a semi-willing instrument — which is to say, like most of those who participate in war". Wigston (2017), on the other hand, insists on the truth of the narrator's voice: "Bloody though this narrative frequently is, and brutal, it is loving, too, filled with the magic of the unexpected in sentences that ring with truth — things we've never read before but in Barry's hands resound with wisdom. Of course, we think, it surely was like that. It must have been. Perhaps still is". These comments will prove relevant when it comes to assessing the role of non-standard language in the novel.

## 5. The function of vernacular in *Days Without End*

Let us start with the identification of non-standard features in the novel, which are akin to Mair's standards of representation. On a purely graphic level, we find many instances of spelling which reflect pronunciation: "musta been", "I wish I could of met myself", "sonofabitch", "musta taken", "must of felt", "sorta", "kinda built", "coulda used", etc. These spellings represent processes of vowel or consonant elision or assimilation that are common in speech (in many languages) but not usually reflected in print. They count as deviations from the standard and bring the language of the novel closer to oral, colloquial registers.

On a lexical level, there is a relatively high number of words and set phrases usually marked by dictionaries as *US English*. Here is a small sample: *got* used as a verb root ("didn't got much to crow about"), *purtier* (instead of *prettier*), *mighty* (used as an intensifier, as in "a mighty queer thing"), *tarnation* (a euphemism for *damnation*), *man* (used as an exclamation), *beady* (derived from the noun *bead* as in *to draw a bead on*, meaning 'to take aim'), *darn* or *darned* (used as intensifiers, as in "darned glad"), *hightailing it* (meaning 'to move or travel fast'), *sockdolager* (meaning 'an exceptional person or thing'). The distance

between these lexical items and the standard varies: whereas some are clearly non-standard, others are just marked as *US/North American English* and further as *informal*. Idioms such as “starved in her stocking feet”, used by the narrator to describe Ireland during the Famine, are also typically American. On the other hand, there are idioms unequivocally marked as British English, such as “something has the wind up him”, “the chief sets out his stall” and “upping sticks”. As expected, there are also typically Irish lexical and phraseological uses, such as “the same look of the arse out of his trousers”. In Irish English, the idiom *he hasn't an arse left in his trousers* is used to refer to someone with no money, particularly due to excessive drinking or gambling.<sup>2</sup> Further examples are adduced by Clark (2016): “‘hames’, as in making a hames, or a mess, of something, or ‘frocken’, a small berry found on Irish mountainsides, gathered up and sold for dye”.

On the morphological level, the following non-standard features have been found:

- regularisation of irregular simple past and past participle forms: “speaked”, “was ever knowed”;
- the opposite, i.e. the simple past and past participle forms of regular verbs become irregular by analogy with irregular verbs: “clumb a tree”. These two features were identified by McDavid (1980, 173) as characteristic of the vernacular speech of North American whites across a number of regional varieties;
- *ain't* as the negative form of *have/has* and *am/are/is*. Also identified as typical of North American whites, although it is used in some varieties of British English among others;
- reflexive pronouns: *hissself*, *theyselves*. Again, this feature was identified as characteristic of North American whites by McDavid (1980, 173) under the heading “levelling of the pattern of the compound reflexive-intensives”;
- past participle used instead of simple past: “I seen”, “the ones that shown regard”. Reed (1977, 38) claims that “*seen* as past tense is common everywhere” when referring to American dialects;
- simple past used instead of past participle: “had took back”, “were gave the job”, “had rode”;
- *be* instead of *am/are/is*: “I be thinking”. McDavid (1980, 174), in his inventory of social differences in white speech in North America, states that “the present of the verb *to be* may vacillate among *am*, *is*, *are* and *be*”;
- singular instead of plural: “six month gone”;
- *-ing* forms preceded by *a-*: “a-wandering”;
- progressive instead of simple aspect with stative verbs, such as those denoting intellectual states or states of emotion: “I guess I'm thinking”, “Then he was laughing”, “We're hoping”, “Or so I was thinking”. This is presented by Filppula (2008, 332-334) as one of the most striking features of the tense-aspect-modality systems of Irish English.

On the syntactic level, the following deviations from the standard can be observed:

- as regards subject-verb concord, non-standard uses are very common: “I is a boy”, “You sure is”, “We was asked”, “his head weren't”, “it don't care much either way”, “he weren't no more”, “Big speeches is made”. McDavid (1980, 174) claims that in the speech of North American whites, “[v]erbs may lack the third singular *-s* inflection or generalize it for all person-number forms”. He then adds that mixed usage is very common and

attributes it to dialect mixture in the United States, although this feature is not exclusive to American English;

- double or multiple negative: “I was never no different neither”, “there wouldn’t be a horse tethered no more”. This feature is common to many English varieties, including American (see e.g. McDavid 1980, 174) and Irish English (Filppula 2008, 337-338);
- subject or verb omission: “Boys would eat you for their supper quick as see you”, “Goddamn mongrel sonsabitches what they are”, “That just the army way”, “That how he saw it”. McDavid (1980, 174) mentions omission of the copula *to be*, especially in 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular *is*, as a characteristic of the non-standard speech of American whites;
- omission of *if* in conditionals: “He said they took you prisoner you would regret it”;
- double subject (sometimes called *left dislocation* of subject): “the colonel he ranges”, “that sergeant he just wrong”, “because an Indian he never plans for nothing”. This feature is not geographically marked;
- use of reflexive pronouns in subject position: “myself was Thomasina”, “myself and John Cole pushed over”. This is a very common feature of Irish English;
- the definite article (*the*) is used more freely than in standard English: “the few dollars”, “he wants her to go on to the university”. This is typical of Irish English;
- *Them* used as a determiner: “Them Indians is wore out from slaughter”, “the long dread history of cornbread in them sinks”. Again, this feature is not geographically marked;
- omission of relative pronoun: “We was cunts deserved to die of frostbite”, “Ain’t a trooper alive don’t love his horses”, “Wasn’t a man among hadn’t had his nose skinned off a hundred times”. Filppula (2008, 340) refers to “the so-called zero relative construction (also known as the ‘contact clause’)” as a commonly used means of relativisation in Irish English, even though this feature can also be found in other varieties;
- *for to* to indicate finality: “for to make ten million gems”, “They had a bear for to butcher”. This is typical of both American (McDavid 1980, 174) and Irish English (Filppula 2008, 341);
- inversion of typical word order for the sake of topicalisation of certain elements, sometimes through a cleft sentence, as in the last of the following examples: “Goddamn blackberries they were as black as”, “Blooms in my head the picture”, “and it is very glorious and crazy the feeling”, “It was a small stack of purple smoke it looked like lying there”. Amador Moreno (2005, 83) mentions “the high occurrence of cleft sentences in IrE [Irish English]” and attributes it to transfer from Irish Gaelic.

As to the geographical affiliation of the non-standard features found in Barry’s novel, the above data show that it is not always easy to draw a clear line between those found exclusively in America and those deriving from Irish English, the latter often with Gaelic as an underlying influence. Some of these features are common to both (and even other) varieties, which is only natural in view of the fact that, as has often been claimed (e.g. Hickey 2002, 54), Irish English may have exerted a remarkable influence on the configuration of American English on account of the large number of Irish immigrants seeking their fortune in the US in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. But there are other features which can clearly be ascribed either to American or Irish origin. In terms of narrative verisimilitude, this is to be expected, since Thomas McNulty, as mentioned above, lived in Sligo until he moved to America in his early teens and is still living there when he narrates the facts, now a mature man. Dialect mixture in the narrator’s voice reflects his origins and development.

However, the two varieties are not assigned equal weight – an American bias can be clearly perceived. This is confirmed by Barry himself and some reviewers of his novel. In an interview for an Australian radio station, the author (Barry 2016b) declares that Thomas McNulty is “a totally uneducated person, as is John Cole. He writes in a quite bashed version of how he would have spoken as a child and then what America has given to his language. It’s a lingo, it’s quite broken-hearted in its syntax, but also, I think, his sense of life comes through”. Clark (2016) claims that “[t]he emigrant Thomas rarely sounds exactly Irish, though the odd word bubbles up”. And McNamee (2016) concludes that “Connacht vernacular gives way to American idiom, which in turn gives way to a voice that seems called from McNulty by the land itself. You’d expect no less of Sebastian Barry. The glory is always in the language”.

The previous paragraphs address the first of the three aspects of the use of dialect in literature identified by Mair (1992), namely standards of representation. The second aspect is that of the narrative levels at which dialect is used. As remarked above, in Barry’s novel the narrator’s voice is in full control of the events narrated, including linguistic events, that is representation of speech and thought. In fact, there is no clear dividing line between the narrator’s and the characters’ voices, as the latter are not signalled through the conventional typographical means (inverted commas) and only occasionally are dialogue interventions assigned separate paragraphs. The overall impression, as far as voices are concerned, is that everything is filtered by the narrator, whose own idiom, therefore, might be colouring that of the other characters. Characters use non-standard language, with very few exceptions, and the narrator uses the kind of vernacular described in the preceding paragraphs. Therefore, this vernacular permeates the language of the whole novel.

The third aspect of the use of dialect in literature is valuation, as remarked above. When it comes to assigning values to a particular use of language as a means of interpretation, it is difficult to escape the charge of subjectivity. However, values are assigned not only by commentators but also, implicitly, by readers to make sense of a literary work beyond the basic level of plot and characters – that is inevitable. I would like to argue that the non-standard features described above do not tell the whole story as far as the expressive subtleties of the narrator’s voice are concerned. Alongside his vernacular we find indicators of a more formal register (e.g. “and all the rest of the paraphernalia of existence”) as well as a wealth of learned references of different kinds. The novel features allusions to mythological beings like Medusa or the Fates; literary works such as *Gulliver’s Travels* (“like Brobdingnag versions of what serves for our muskets”) or the Homeric poems (“but the following day he will be Homer’s Hector again”); historical references (“Indians always talk like Romans for sure”); and Biblical allusions (“Snow falling like bread of heaven that won’t feed no Israelite”). In terms of verisimilitude, this wealth of learning in someone described by his creator as “a totally uneducated person” can only be accounted for by the fact that he must have had intellectual interests between his young days as a soldier and the season of maturity when he writes this memoir. He may be formally uneducated, but by the time he becomes a writer he is no longer unread. The narrator’s style can be seen, thus, as a synthesis, a melting pot where his younger incarnation is inextricably bound to his more mature self. As seen above, the particular blend of vernacular, on the one hand, and lyricism and depth of feeling and thought, on the other, audible in the narrator’s voice, is regarded as the hallmark of the novel’s style or, at least, one of its defining features. If the vernacular factor were not present in the equation, the whole thing would be simpler and arguably less convincing. The overall valuation of vernacular as used by Barry, then, must perforce be positive, as it makes a (more



than) considerable contribution to the sense of truth and authenticity in the narrator's voice referred to by several reviewers.

## 6. Non-standard language in the Spanish and Italian translations of *Days Without End*

Two translations of *DWE* will be analysed in this paper: the Spanish one (*Días sin fin*), by Susana de la Higuera Glynne-Jones, published by Alianza in 2018 (Barry 2018a), and the Italian one (*Giorni senza fine*), by Cristiana Mennella, published by Einaudi also in 2018 (Barry 2018b). Since manual analysis is extremely time-consuming, it will be restricted to the first ten chapters of the novel, out of a total of twenty-three. That amounts to over a third of the text and can be regarded as representative of the whole.

### 6.1. *Días sin fin*

The Spanish translator chooses the first technique among the four listed in section 2 – neutralisation. There is no transgression of linguistic norms in the Spanish translation, and decisions concerning non-standard ST features are made along the +/- formal/colloquial cline. In that respect, some specific solutions might bring the TT close to the second technique above, i.e. using an informal tenor without deviating from the standard. But the overall strategy adopted for the translation rather matches the first, or at least leaves the translation poised somewhere between the first and the second.

A number of translation decisions definitely align the TT with the ST's tone and style by including a wide array of colloquial expressions, such as phraseological units (idioms, set phrases, habitual collocations, proverbs), and vulgar language. Of these two types of colloquial elements, phraseological units are undoubtedly the most prominent. Here is a representative sample (page numbers and back translations (BT) are given in brackets):

- “Nos pareció que allí estaban nuestras habichuelas si éramos capaces de buscarlas” (15) (BT: It seemed to us that there were our beans if we were able to look for them) ← “We were of the opinion our share of food was there if we sought it out” (6). *Buscarse las habichuelas* figuratively stands for seeking a way of earning one's living;
- “Cualquier hijo de vecino sabe” (20) (BT: Any son of neighbour knows) ← “Every citizen knows” (12). It is a colloquial way of saying ‘everybody’ or ‘anybody’;
- “que recogían sus bártulos y allá que se marchaban” (24) (BT: who picked up their stuff and there they went) ← “upping sticks and off they'd go” (17). Again, (*re*)*coger los bártulos* is a colloquial way to refer to ‘leaving’, often in haste or anger, even if *bártulos* literally means ‘utensils, tools, instruments that one handles’;
- “O montabas a caballo o adiós muy buenas” (25) (BT: Either you rode a horse or goodbye, that's all) ← “You rode or you died” (18). *Adiós muy buenas* is a way of referring to the end – not necessarily death, as here: it may be the end of an affair, the end of hope, etc.;
- “la peor calaña” (54) (BT: the worst kind) ← “the worst devils” (53). Saying that someone is *de mala calaña* amounts to dubbing them ill-natured;
- “ellas se ponen las botas” (58) (BT: they put on their boots) ← (“if we have nothing to gorge on,”) “they do” (58). The personal pronoun *they/ellas* refers to the flies pestering the soldiers at this point. *Ponerse las botas* means ‘to have a field day with something’ – to draw as much profit as one can, e.g. while eating.

Most of these phraseological units hold wide currency in Spanish and, therefore, their use will surprise no reader. They make the TT colloquial but do not imply departing from any norm.

It surely comes as no surprise that vulgar or taboo words should be used in the Spanish translation, as they congruently feature in the ST too as part of the general tone of the novel. Here are two examples:

- “Los huevos y el trasero duelen del carajo” (25) (BT: The balls and the bottom hurt damned bad) ← “It’s hard on the bollocks, and the lower back, God damn it” (18);
- “La orina se helaba nada más salir de la verga” (49) (BT: The urine froze as soon as it came out of the dick) ← “The piss froze as it left our peckers” (47). *Orina* is perhaps more polite than *piss*, but *verga* is a rather unpleasant word in Spanish, so no attempt is made here to euphemise.

However, these features aligning the TT with the ST’s style and tone are counterbalanced by other features that do just the opposite. Even if a certain neutrality of tenor (neither too formal nor too informal) is the key in the TT, a relatively high number of words and phrases can be found that lean towards the formal end of the cline and might even be regarded as learned. This is not wholly out of character with the narrator’s voice in the ST – as observed above, that voice may occasionally use sophisticated language and make learned allusions, as an indication that Thomas McNulty has improved his mind since the wild days of his youth. But the problem with some of these expressions in the TT is that their occurrence is not justified by their matching ST segments. On page 26, for instance, the narrator claims that “Sabíamos en nuestro fuero interno que nuestra misión iban a ser los indios” (BT: We knew in our conscience that our mission was going to be the Indians), *fuero interno* being a rather technical expression not often used in spoken Spanish. The matching ST segment says, more simply: “We knew in our hearts our work was to be Indians” (20). Later on the narrator mentions two soldiers who are under arrest and probably “vertiendo improperios” (44) (BT: hurling abuse) through the meal hatch. The ST, more sober, just says “giving out” (41). After a bout of Indian slaughter, the narrator says: “Sentí un leve ápice de tristeza por ellos” (48) (BT: I felt a slight shred of sadness for them), which translates “I did feel a seeping tincture of sadness for them” (44). Where the ST is poetic, the TT is just formal, as witnessed by the use of *ápice*. Further examples of this trend towards formality in the TT are “actos execrables” (53) (BT: “execrable acts”) as a translation of “shabby acts” (51) and “gélidos estragos” (BT: icy havoc) as a translation of “cold deeds” (51).

A second feature that does not favour the alignment of the TT with the tone and style of the ST is an excess of literalism. As remarked above, some commentators on Barry’s novel have highlighted the sense of truth and authenticity in the narrator’s voice, and this sense cannot be re-created in the TT through the use of target language expressive resources that may ring foreign to many readers. One of these resources is adjective position. In Spanish adjectives can either precede or follow the noun they modify, but post-noun position is the unmarked option. Prenominal adjectives signal qualities that are not essential to the noun and are often perceived as rhetorical embellishment. However, the fact that adjectives in English are prenominal can, in most cases, end up influencing adjective position in Spanish translations. Here are a few examples: “enorme y musculosa serpiente” (50) (BT: huge and muscular snake), “esquilmado número de hombres” (57) (BT: much reduced number of men), “grato alivio” (58) (BT: pleasant relief) or “gélidos estragos”, mentioned in the preceding paragraph. Another expressive resource that may be regarded as an instance of literalism or calque is the use of *condenado/-a* (‘damned’) as a translation of *damn*, *damned*

and other swear words in English. Most swear words in Spanish are not adjectives, so using nouns or verbs, for instance, as equivalents for English expletives would often imply major syntactic changes. It requires less effort to use adjectives, which, however, may ring foreign to Spanish ears (even though they have become partly naturalised through frequent use in dubbed films) and thereby lose some force as expletives. That is exactly the case with *condenado/-a*. On page 50 of the Spanish translation two examples can be found in a single paragraph: “condenado sargento” (‘damned sergeant’) as a translation of “damn sergeant” (48) and “condenadamente buenos” (‘damned good’) as a translation of “evil good” (48).

## 6.2. *Giorni senza fine*

The Italian translator, like the Spanish, chooses the first technique of the four listed in section 2, i.e. neutralisation, as no transgression of the linguistic norm is observable in the Italian translation either. Again, as in the Spanish translation, decisions are made on the +/– formal/colloquial cline, but with one difference: the Italian seems to lean more decidedly towards the colloquial than the Spanish. Therefore, the former might be said to be closer to the second technique (substituting target language colloquial or informal features for the non-standard ST) than the latter. In the following paragraphs a number of these features will be presented, together with elements that, more generally, align the TT with the ST’s style and tone.

On the lexical level, the colloquial tenor is heard in such expressions as *sono dolori* in “Se ti fanno prigioniero, sono dolori” (41) (BT: If they make you prisoner, there is trouble), which translates “they took you prisoner you would regret it” (53), or in the idiom contained in “abbiamo fatto buon viso a cattivo gioco”, which literally means ‘to make a good face to a bad game’ but could be regarded as a functional equivalent of *to make the best of a bad business*. The ST segment triggering the use of this phrase is “we were content to do that because we got to be” (63), which is not phraseological in nature. This solution suggests that the Italian translator is on the lookout for colloquialisms even when their use is not prompted by their matching ST segments, probably because she sees them as congruent with the overall style of the ST. The reader also comes across many vulgar or taboo words in the Italian text that render ST swear words: “porco boia” (38), which literally means ‘pig executioner’ but might be regarded as an equivalent of ‘shit’, from the English “damn it” (49); “Bastardi figli di puttana” (46) (BT: Bastard sons of a bitch), the rendering of “Goddamn mongrel sonsabitches” (59); “Stupidi indiani del cazzo” (46), which literally would mean something like ‘Stupid Indians of the dick’ and could be more functionally rendered as ‘Bloody stupid Indians’, from the ST segment “Goddamn stupid Injuns” (59). Many similar examples could be provided of this trend towards colloquial and even vulgar language, which undoubtedly accords with the ST’s tone and style.

Still on the lexical level, even though there is also a rhetorical ingredient in this trait, reference must be made to the fact that the Italian translator does not avoid repetitions. Here are two examples: “stretti stretti per restare in vita” (43) (BT: close close to stay alive; the narrator is saying that soldiers slept very close to one another because it was freezing cold) ← “sleeping close for life” (56); “Stanchi, stanchi morti, siamo tornati indietro” (31) (BT: Tired, dead tired, we went back) ← “Wearily, wearily, we walked back” (38). The repetition in the second example is prompted by the ST, but that in the first is not. As above, this signals a readiness on the translator’s part to avail herself of all expressive resources in the target language that may serve her stylistic ends. The Spanish translator does not make use of repetition in either of these cases.

An interesting aspect of the Italian translation is that Mennella often uses resources beyond the lexical level to achieve a sustained colloquial effect. One such resource is the non-use of the *passato remoto*. Italian has two verbal tenses to refer to past events (apart from the *imperfetto*, where the aspect is different): the *passato prossimo* and the *passato remoto*. The former designates past actions that bear some relevance to the present, whereas the latter refers to events that happened in the past and are perceived as remote from the present. This difference features in the verbal systems of many languages – in English, for instance, it is mirrored by the *present perfect/simple past* distinction. What is peculiar to Italian is its geographical distribution: in northern and central Italy, as well as in Sardinia, the *passato remoto* is not used at all in oral communication, whereas the opposite is true of the south and Tuscany. Both are commonly used in writing, where the semantic distinction explained above does in fact apply. Thus, by avoiding the use of the *passato remoto*, the translator adheres to the oral norm of northern Italy, where the *passato prossimo* is used for all purposes in speech, and the *remoto* is reserved for writing and perceived as more formal.

The Italian translator also exploits the possibilities offered by Italian syntax to create a sense of colloquialism and orality. Word order flexibility is deftly used to that end, either by means of direct object fronting or left dislocation through pronouns. Here are two examples of fronting of direct objects:

- “anche se lassú gli alligatori non li ho mai visti” (38) (BT: even if up there the alligators I have never seen them) ← “though I never saw alligators up there” (50);
- “Io questo ho notato” (40) (BT: I this have noticed) ← “That’s what I notice about it” (52).

Left dislocation, on the other hand, is effected through such pronouns as *ne*, *ci* or *li*, which can be used both anaphorically and cataphorically. In the following examples, reference is always cataphoric:

- “Ci avresti potuto legare cinquanta cavalli, al tronco di certe” (28) (BT: There [*Ci*] you could have tied fifty horses, to the trunk of some of them [*the narrator is talking about ancient redwood trees*]) ← “You could have tethered fifty horses to the girth of some of them” (34);
- “ce ne siamo accorti tutti, che era bello” (34) (BT: of it [*ne*] we have all noticed, that it was beautiful) ← “we all felt the fineness in it” (44);
- “iniziavamo a sognarceli, i bisonti” (43) (BT: we started to dream of them [*li*], the buffalo) ← “we started to dream of buffalo” (55).

It should be noted that both fronting and left dislocation are presumably used by the translator as part of her general effort to adjust the translated text to common Italian usage. There is nothing in the ST to trigger these syntactic adjustments, which must have been regarded as idiomatic resources in Italian that can only contribute to the sense of truth and authenticity in the narrator’s voice, already referred to.

Finally, mention will be made of another syntactic feature in the Italian translation that helps align it with the ST’s tone and style insofar as it promotes informality: non-avoidance of juxtaposition. Here is a representative sentence (Barry 2018b, 31): “Si sono alzate altre scintille, era una visione di morte, la fine del mondo, in quei momenti non riuscivo piú a

pensare, avevo la testa senza sangue, vuota, frastornata, sconvolta”. In this respect, the translation does no more than reflect the frequent use of juxtaposition in the ST. Clauses are simply placed beside one another, with no hierarchy dictated by grammar or connectives, but only commas acting as boundaries between them. Here is the matching ST sentence (Barry 2016a, 38-39): “More sparks flew up, it was a complete vision of world’s end and death, in those moments I could think no more, my head bloodless, empty, racketing, astonished”. The Spanish translation, by contrast, is more rhetorical. Even if the syntactic structure is quite similar both to that of the ST and the Italian translation, punctuation makes a huge difference (Barry 2018a, 43): “Se alzaron más y más chispas: era una visión apocalíptica del fin del mundo y de la muerte; en esos momentos, no pude pensar nada más, mi cabeza se quedó sin sangre, vacía, trémula y atónita”. The colon after “chispas” and the semicolon after “muerte” signal hierarchy and elaboration instead of mere accumulation, more typical of oral discourse.

## 7. Concluding remarks

What the previous section makes, I hope, abundantly clear is that technique categorisation does not tell the whole story when it comes to describing how non-standard language fares in translation. Both translations brought under scrutiny in this paper may be said to fall under the category of neutralisation. Neither translation deviates from the standard in its corresponding language. However, within this category there is room for difference, which is far from subtle in this case. I have tried to show that the Italian translation makes more prominent use than the Spanish of a whole range of expressive resources that tend to align the former – more markedly than the latter: the difference is of degree, not kind – with the colloquial, informal tenor prevalent in the ST. The Spanish translation shows features of this kind too, but to a lesser extent, the Italian being more consistent in their use and resorting to linguistic levels other than the lexicon. As a result, the Italian translation comes closer to the second technique listed in section 2 (marking the TT language by using a (highly) colloquial, informal tenor) than the Spanish.

If, as claimed at the beginning of this paper, the main issue about non-standard language in literature lies in aesthetic function, I would argue that the function fulfilled by this feature in the ST is better preserved in the Italian than the Spanish translation. As seen above, vernacular makes an important contribution to the ring of truth and authenticity that several reviewers of *DWE* have clearly identified in the narrator’s voice. That voice is a particular blend of Irish and American dialectal traits that can obviously not be *reproduced* in the target language; it could have been *recreated* with non-standard target language features, but neither translator took that path. Therefore, the only room left for manoeuvre lay in informal tenor, and the Italian translation may be said to have used that room to better effect than the Spanish. Once the strategic decision not to deviate from the standard has been made, using more or less colloquial features can make a difference in flavour, like so much salt or pepper on an otherwise exotic dish.

## Notes

1. All translations from languages other than English are my own.
2. I am indebted to my colleague Alfred Markey for drawing my attention to this expression, which I had overlooked.

3. As argued elsewhere (Marco 2007, 258), “a host of terms circulate within the discipline to refer to what might be paraphrased as the (form adopted by the) relationship between a source text and a target text segment”. I follow Hurtado Albir (2001) and favour the term *technique* for the concept just defined in order to avoid conceptual and terminological confusion, as *strategy* can also refer to the path followed by a translator to reach a given solution. *Technique* relates to the translation result, whereas *strategy* relates to the translation process.

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