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K–DRAMA IMPACTS AND BEYOND IN ITALY

A cura di

VALERIO **D'ANGIOLINO**

Contributi di

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INTRODUZIONE

VALERIO D’ANGIOLINO[1]

Questa raccolta di saggi si concentra su quello che ormai è un fenomeno innegabile e che riscuote riconoscimenti a livello mondiale: i media coreani. Il successo di *drama, webtoon,* film e romanzi provenienti dal paese del “Calmo mattino” ormai è talmente grande che perfino chi non ha interessi specifici inerenti alla Corea o all’Asia usufruisce, o almeno è esposto, ai media coreani. Opere di enorme successo quali *Squid Game* (Hwang Dong-hyuk, 2021), Sweet *Home* (Lee E., Jang Y., Park S., 2020) e il vincitore dell’Oscar *Parasite* (Bong Joon-ho, 2019) non sono che le ultime e più evidenti di un gran numero di produzioni artistiche coreane che nel corso del tempo hanno saputo conquistare un pubblico inizialmente diffidente e farsi spazio tra una produzione occidentale ormai sempre più ristagnante e, come prova il gran numero di *Reboot* e *Remake* degli ultimi anni*,* dipendente dalle opere del passato, incapace di trovare nuove idee. Il successo dei media coreani non si limita però alle solo opere cinematografiche, ma spazia anche alla musica, ai fumetti e alla letteratura.

Il “paese del calmo mattino” sta conquistando il proprio posto nel mondo non solo con la forza della propria economia, ma con il mezzo più bello a disposizione dell’essere umano, quello dell’arte e della cultura.

La qualità di queste produzioni è dovuta all’eccezionale numero di talenti presenti nella penisola coreana ed anche ad una sapiente gestione dei fondi e di promozione di prodotti culturali da parte del governo coreano, che avendo appreso la lezione del Giappone, ha ormai ben compreso quanto sia cruciale il *Soft Power* e di come possa rivelarsi "arma" più efficace di quelle reali per conquistarsi simpatie e consenso all'estero.

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[1] Sapienza – Università di Roma.

Gli articoli sono interamente in inglese, in modo da poter essere consultabili da parte del più ampio pubblico possibile e poter aggiungere ognuno il proprio tassello nell'edificio della coreanistica, contribuendo a far crescere accademicamente un campo di studio a cui per troppo tempo non si è forse data la giusta attenzione, almeno finché la *Hallyu*, la *Korean wave,* ha travolto il mondo, rendendo palese anche nell'ambiente universitario quello che da anni era chiaro a tutti: la Corea e la cultura coreana hanno tanto da offrire e non sono certo da meno degli ingombranti vicini.

La maggior parte dei saggi qui presenti sono tratti da una conferenza tenutasi all'Università "La Sapienza" di Roma nel 2022, intitolata "*Squid Game* and the key factors of Hallyu: dissecting the socio-cultural impact of K-Dramas in Italy" e prendono infatti spunto dal celebre *drama* per approfondire alcuni punti della lingua e della società coreana.

Il volume si apre con "*Romanization and Translation in Squid Game*" di Anna Astorino, in cui l'autrice prende in esame i sottotitoli in italiano del celebre *drama* coreano e l'ampio utilizzo che in essi si fa della romanizzazione di alcuni termini in coreano senza note esplicative o commenti da parte del traduttore che rendano più semplice la comprensione ad un pubblico magari non addentro alla cultura coreana nelle sue varie incarnazioni sociali o culinarie. Questa scelta è solitamente adottata per preferenze personali del traduttore, perché un termine è ritenuto di ampio uso anche al di fuori del suo ambiente d'origine ma anche per questioni più pratiche quali tempo e spazio nei sottotitoli.

L'autrice propone quindi uno studio ed una comparazione dei vari casi in cui si è preferita una romanizzazione alla traduzione e viceversa, cerca di trovare il possibile motivo che ha portato gli autori dei sottotitoli a preferire l'uno o l'altro metodo e prova a proporre una diversa soluzione a seconda dei casi quando lo ritiene possibile.

Il secondo articolo, di Bianca Terracciano, utilizza sempre "*Squid Game*" ma ne propone un'analisi semiotica. Secondo l'autrice prodotti dell'industria culturale coreana quali *drama*, K-Pop e film, pur mostrando il mantenimento di una tradizione, manifestano allo stesso tempo l'innovazione apportata dall'influenza e dalla potenza dell'economia coreana, dimostrando come la narrativa dei media costruisca il concetto di "coreanità" nel mondo, in quanto ognuno di questi prodotti possederebbe qualità tali da sodisfare i criteri di una "etica della persistenza" di caratteristiche che contribuiscono a definire una cultura, i cui limiti sono sempre messi alla prova dal contatto con l'esterno, con il forestiero ma la cui continuità e vitalità sarebbe assicurata da continue immissioni di nuovi spunti.

"*Korean Speech Levels: An Analysis of their Practical Use and Meaning*" è il titolo del terzo saggio, scritto da Clelia Paniccia e Clarissa Mioli. Le autrici mettono il focus sull'uso dei livelli del parlato della lingua coreana. Per meglio comprenderne l'utilizzo pratico nella vita reale, invece di estrapolare singole frasi, sono analizzate intere conversazioni.

Il quarto articolo, a firma Irene Lustrissimi, si intitola "*From Webnovel to K-Drama through the OSMU Strategy: The Case of Touch Your Heart*" in cui viene analizzato, utilizzando il *drama* "*Touch Your Heart*" (Park Joon-Hwa, 2019) come *case study,* il fenomeno della strategia OSMU, acronimo di "*One Source Multi-Use*", ovvero il processo con cui una Proprietà Intellettuale (IP) viene adattata da un media digitale ad un altro: una *web-novel* in un *web-toon* ed infine in un *drama* e se questa strategia abbia influenzato in qualche modo lo scarso successo di *Touch Your Heart* a causa dei cambiamenti apportati per adattare il prodotto dall'originale *web-novel* al *drama.*

Sung Kyoung Suk firma il quinto articolo intitolato *"Korean Historical Period Film as a Form of Social Critique and Public Pedagogy Focused on Attorney (2013) and Ode to My Father (2014)"* in cui spiega la relazione tra i film ambientati in determinati periodi storici e la società da un punto di vista socio-cinematografico insieme ai fattori culturali e sociali che ne hanno determinato il successo. Basandosi sul presupposto che i film rappresentino una realtà sociale ed allo stesso tempo una appropriazione culturale del passato, l'articolo analizza i due film coreani "*Attorney*" (Yang Woo-suk, 2013) e *"Ode to My Father"* (Yoon Je-kyoon, 2014).

Il sesto articolo, scritto Chung Somin si occupa di un altro dei gioielli della Corea: la sua letteratura. In questo caso però si tratta di un contributo ancor più prezioso in quanto prende in considerazione l'opera dello scrittore nordcoreano Paek Namryong la cui voce è riuscita ad eludere la cortina di ferro che ammanta il suo paese grazie al suo valore letterario. L'opera viene pubblicata in Corea del Nord nel 1988 e sembrerebbe quindi non avere intenti sovversivi, cercando di raccontare una storia ambientata certo in un paese dalla situazione politica particolare, ma che non per questo non può avere un suo valore letterario al di là della testimonianza politica. Questo suo valore viene riconosciuto anche all'estero ed infatti nel 2011 esce una prima edizione francese e nel 2020 viene tradotta in inglese e pubblicata dalla Columbia University Press. Viene proposto un parallelo tra lo spazio temporale del racconto e il tema in esso affrontato del matrimonio e del divorzio ed interpretato come espressione della sensibilità e delle emozioni della Corea del Nord e del suo popolo, del suo unico e personale linguaggio culturale.

Antonella Gasdia è l'autrice del settimo articolo, "*Female Voices in Divided Lands: Han Kang and Christa Wolf and Literary Memory*", che costruisce un ponte tra due scrittrici apparentemente lontane nello spazio e nel tempo: Han Kang, scrittrice sudcoreana nata a Gwangju nel 1970, e Christa Wolf, scrittrice nata nell'allora Germania dell'Est nel 1929. Si sottolinea come la memoria, il ricordo, e la trasmissione dello stesso il vero punto d'incontro tra le due scrittrici oltre al successo che le due hanno avuto in patria e all'estero e l'efficace rappresentazione della propria realtà attraverso i propri personaggi.

A chiusura del volume Irene Chianese sposta il discorso sul piano economico-sociale, cercando di comprendere se e come la recente pandemia di COVID-19 abbia inciso sulla vita lavorativa delle donne coreane analizzando dati del Korean Labor Instituite (2022).

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ROMANIZATION AND TRANSLATION IN *SQUID GAME*

ANNA ASTORINO

1. Introduction

When watching the series *Squid Game* with Italian subtitles on, one thing that one cannot fail to notice is the presence of words in romanization. These words have no explicative notes nor a comment from the translator to accompany them which would have made their understanding easier for a non-Korean speaking audience or for one not accustomed to Korean culture.

It is not to be forgotten that subtitles must respect the boundaries imposed by subtitling practice itself, namely space and time limits. For this reason, it is not always possible to provide useful explanations without infringing these rules. Furthermore, we must consider the fact that sometimes terms related to cultural aspects do not easily lend themselves to be translated. Like Jan Pedersen in "*How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?*" points out, one of the biggest obstacles or difficulties in translation is the rendering of such terms part of the Source Language that do not have an equivalent in the Target Language. He goes as far as referring to them as translation crisis points[1].

What I propose here is a study of those cases in which a word is not translated but romanized, comparing them to those other cases in which the expression was translated instead. I will attempt proposing a reason and, or the translation strategy followed to reach such a result, and eventually try to understand if an alternative solution could have been suggested.

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[1] J. Pedersen, "How is Culture Rendered in Subtitles?," *Challenges of Multidimensional Translation: Proceedings of Marie Curie Euroconferences*, MuTra, Saarbrücken, 2005, pp. 113-114.

2. Interlingual Translation

Among the three kinds of translation individuated by Roman Jakobson, subtitling of a series falls into the interlingual category, because it requires the transformation of a Source Text (ST), that is the text in its original language and structure, to a Target Text (TT), a second language. With the particularity that very often in subtitling the spoken language is not rendered as such in the Target Text, but in a more written form[2]. In fact, Pedersen highlights the issue that in subtitling parts of spontaneous speech are erased[3].

Of course, the aim of a translator is to close the distance that separates the text from the audience of the TT. In order to do this the most important thing is trying to render the TT as natural as possible. This need may vary from work to work and from translator to translator, without forgetting the kind of audience the translation is directed at. We can imagine the work of translation as a two-way arrow that has the SL and TL as its extremes, some texts might lean towards one end or the other (s. Fig. 1).

The translator will try to shorten the gap between the Target Audience and the text as much as possible, inducing the viewer to feel a sense of familiarity with the work. For example, reshaping parts of the text to make it more similar to the culture to which the viewer is more accustomed to. Other translators might prefer

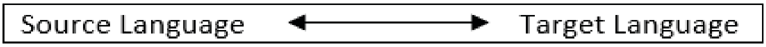

Figure 1. Source Language and Target Language.

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[2] H. Gottlieb, "Subtitles and International Anglification," in *Nordic Journal of English Studies*, vol. III n. 1, 2004, p. 200.

[3] J. Pedersen, "*Subtitling Norms for Television. An Exploration focusing on extralinguistic cultural references,"* John Benjamins Publishing, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, 2011, p. 11.

keeping their work more resembling to the original, even letting words from it to persist in the TT, for example by using Romanization. According to Jan Pedersen, Retention, which includes Romanization, is the strategy that most approaches the translation to the SL[4]. But at the same time, it is also the technique that most estranges the viewer, especially if they do not know what the term refers to. This occurs when an official equivalent is not available, a translation that is widely used and accepted in reference to a certain term. Henceforth using Retention is only one of the many ways to deal with a word. Just like stated before, this kind of approach shortens the distance between ST and TT, but to the detriment of the relationship between viewer and TT. On the opposite side of Retention lies Paraphrase with sense transfer which helps the viewer to better understand a word, an expression or anything else the translator might deem necessary. The drawback is that adding information absent in the ST tends to eat up space and according to the subtitling principles, that will be briefly illustrated in the following paragraph, needs to be well balanced.

This kind of difficulty usually arises because of culture related words, words that might be better known within a culture than in another. Effectively this is the case for the subtitling of *Squid Game* in which these words that are deeply rooted in the Korean culture do not always have an Italian counterpart, so the translator has had to operate choices in the rendering of such occasions. For this reason, instances where the word has been left in romanization, others where it has been translated and still others that have been equipped with an explanation can be found. What needs to be noticed is that once the terms are made explicit there is no need to repeat this action every time the words appear again on screen.

3. Subtitling Boundaries

When analyzing a subtitled work one of the first things that needs to be taken into account are the space and time limitations imposed on the translator's creativity. Traditionally, for what concerns the former, that is the allowed subtitle length, it should not exceed the two lines[5]. This limit was set to assist the audience in following at the same time the action on screen and the subtitled dialogue. If it were any longer, the viewer, with much probability, would incur the problem of wasting too much time reading what is being said, inevitably missing facial expressions, gestures, and any other implicit and explicit detail that could instead be useful to better understand the scene. Moreover, the accepted number of characters for each subtitle can reach a maximum of forty characters[6], preferably no more than that for the same reasons just mentioned. In the counting of the characters, spaces and punctuation marks are to be considered too, which further limits the dimension of the subtitle. Regarding the latter, the time boundary, it consists of four seconds of screen time. Enough to be comfortably read and follow the visual information displayed.

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[4] ID., "*How is culture rendered in subtitles?,*" cit. p. 116.

These boundaries imply the very limited possibility for the translator to accompany the subtitle with a comment, a note or an explanation of terms that might be unknown to the viewer of the TT that could instead be useful to enhance the comprehensibility of an elusive sentence.

4. *Squid Game* Analysis

The current section will take into analysis specific cases from the subtitles of the Netflix Series *Squid Game*. A comparison between terms proposed in romanization and terms in translation will be attempted, of course, considering the boundaries imposed on subtitling treated in the preceding paragraph. What can be noticed is that the cases that most provoke problems, or the need of a deeper study consist of words rooted in the Korean culture, words that often do not have an equivalent in Italian.

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[5] J. Díaz Cintas, "Back to the Future in Subtitling,*" Challenges of Multidimensional Translation: Proceedings of Marie Curie Euroconferences*, MuTra, Saarbrücken, 2005, pp. 21-22.

[6] E. Fois, "*Audiovisual Translation. Theory and Practice, in Between,"* vol. II n. 4, Università degli Studi di Cagliari", 2012, p. 5.

In the first episode we encounter already in the title one of the translational difficulties. In the original «무궁화 꽃이 피던 날, *mugunghwa kkoch'i p'idŏn nal*» literally: the day the hibiscus flower bloomed, there is a reference to the Korean game that is practically identical to the Italian game *Un, due, tre, stella*, with the difference that the catch phrase in Korean is 무궁화 꽃이 피었습니다, *mugunghwa kkoch'i p'yŏssŭbnida*: the hibiscus flower has bloomed. Here the translator decided to change the name and make it identical to the Italian game to arouse familiarity in the viewer through Adaptation[7], using a game that with much probability every Italian person knows.

«Potrei prenderne una ciotola e usarlo per farci una zuppa, stasera.»

"선짓국, *sŏnjitkuk*" has been translated as "*zuppa*" in Italian. This is a specific type of soup, prepared with coagulated cow's blood, it is evident that in the Italian translation there is a loss of information, caused by Generalization, that wouldn't have been avoided even by using a Romanization because very few Italian viewers would have known what kind of food was being mentioned. Furthermore, the translator had already used 67 characters for that sentence, so an explanation of what kind of soup the *sŏnjitkuk* is would not have fitted. There are instead other foods that have been proposed in romanization like *tteokbokki*.

«Ma secondo me i tteokbokki sono molto meglio.»

"*Tteokbokki*" instead offered to the viewer in romanization is closely bound to the Korean food culture. There is no equivalent in the Italian language, if not for "*gnocchi di riso*", but thanks to the visual support that explicitly shows what *tteokbokki* are, Romanization can be deemed enough. Moreover, by using the word "*tteokbokki*" 45 characters are reached, meanwhile by replacing it with "*gli gnocchi di riso*" 7 more characters would be added, like I highlighted in the preceding paragraph briefness is highly preferred.

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[7] L. Molina and A. Hurtado Albir, "Translation Techniques Revisited. A Dynamic and Functionalist Approach," in *Meta*, vol. XLVII n. 4, Les Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2002, p. 500.

«E ci aggiunga del pesce.»

"*Pesce*" is the word chosen to represent "어묵, *ŏmuk*". In reality, what the character is asking the street vendor for is a fishcake, not just any fish. Just like for other kinds of food encountered until here, it could be not very well known to most Italians, and because of space constraints Generalisation has been carried out.

«Immagino abbia già giocato a ddakji, vero?»

"*Ddakji*" is a Romanization, because specifying the meaning of this word would have required a lot of space, considering that the sentence already occupies 42 characters, it was the best decision possible. Not only because of the space boundaries, but also because the visual support helps the viewer understand how the *ddakji* game is played.

«Non avevi di che pagare il ramyeon, hai i soldi per il biglietto?»

"*Ramyeon*" is in romanization. Here the sentence already occupied 65 characters, also, nowadays *ramyeon* is relatively well known to not require an additional explanation.

"Futures" for "선물, *sŏnmul*". This is a particular example because it consists of a pun. Puns are known for their reluctance to be translated exactly because they rely on the tight relationship that ties language and culture together. The strategy followed is a Situational Paraphrase, it keeps the jovial manner of the original scene and the wordplay, but the meaning gets changed. The atmosphere and feeling are kept so that the audience can have a similar experience to that of the original viewers, but with a somewhat different sense of the joke. In Korean the hilarity arises because *sŏnmul* can mean both present and futures and in Italian the character misinterprets futures for a basketball team.

«Ci sono il Ddakji, Dabanggu, campana, Biseokchigi, acchiapparella,»

This is a highly representative case that shows at the same time how certain words have been translated and others left in their romanised form. What can be noticed here is that the translator opted for a translation when the game is a certainly known one in Italy and preferred Romanization for *Ddakji,* that had already been shown in a previous episode, and for the other games such as *Biseokchigi* that doesn't have an equivalent in Italian, and *Dabanggu* that is actually similar to the Italian game *Nascondino*, Hide and Seek in English, but is longer than the romanised form. The total length of the subtitle reaches 66 characters, therefore any choice that could have made it even longer has been discarded.

«E per le ragazze, *Gonggi*, elastici e ripiglino.»

In 47 characters both a Romanization and translations can be found. "*Elastici*" and "*ripiglino*" are easily understood by the Italian audience and do not constitute a translation crisis. Meanwhile "공기놀이, *kongginoli*", that is a game played with marbles, if translated through a Generalization could have been mixed up with other games mentioned in the series that are played with marbles too.

«*Forse oggi ci daranno patate dolci caramellate*.»

In this instance a popular Korean dish has been translated from "맛탕, *matt'ang*". There is a stark contrast between the length of the Korean word and the Italian rendering, but the translator had many characters left at their disposal, so they took advantage to explain in detail what the Korean word means.

«*Questo è l'episodio più tragico dalla Guerra di Corea*.»

In Korean the Korean War is called "6.25", but for a foreign audience maintaining the date would have been less effective than specifying that the topic is the Korean War, even though it would have made the subtitle shorter, so a Paraphrase with sense transfer has been employed.

5. Conclusion

By analyzing the Italian subtitles of the series *Squid Game* has emerged that the parts that require most pondering by the translator, and the parts that could be rendered in a large variety of ways depending on the style and intention of the translator, are the words, concepts, expressions and so on that sink their roots in the culture of the Source Language. Without any doubt, every culture has its own peculiarities that originated from a different history, relationships and contacts, customs, food and so on that are not shared by other countries. For this reason, the translator needs to find the right strategy and solution to solve what can be called a translation hardship. This arises when an official equivalent of the term is not available. It requires the translator to mobilize their creativity to best render such words. It doesn't mean though that the translator is free to render the word freely to their liking. Because subtitling is a special subcategory of interlingual translation, it must follow norms that don't apply to other kinds of translation. The norms I am referring to are the time and space constraints, set to aid the viewer in following both the dialogues rendered in translation through the subtitles and the visual information on screen at the same time. Because of this necessity the translator doesn't always have much space to explicitly clarify what a certain word means. Henceforth, the solutions can be highly varied, from a Romanization that entirely leaves the word in its original form without an explanation that instead may or may not come from the images on screen, a translation that finds an equivalent in the Target Language, a literal translation, a translation that captures only the general meaning of the term and not its specific value and so on. Broad categories in the case of this series can be identified too, words related to food and games are the richest in number that generated this sort of critical point.