

BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES
The Faculty of International Business and Economics
The Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication of ASE
11th International Conference: Synergies in Communication (SiC)
Bucharest, Romania, 26 - 27 October 2023

THE TRANSLATION OF IDIOLECTS: A STUDY ON SERGIO ATZENI'S LANGUAGE

Sara CORPINO¹

Abstract

This article tackles the topic of idiolects and their translation. According to Catford (1965), SL texts and items are more or less translatable rather than absolutely translatable or untranslatable. There are also linguists stating that we all speak a different language. For example, Hofstadter (2009) suggests that we all have a personal language, our idiolect. Crystal (2003) defines idiolect as “one’s personal dialect”, while Wales (2001) even talks about it as the equivalent of a fingerprint. With reference to translation, considering that words are a form of translation in themselves – as they translate thoughts and feelings into speeches or texts – the distance between the source version and the target one becomes even longer.

The aim of this article is to propose some reflections on the concept of cultural untranslatability in the translation field by presenting a corpus and demonstrating how some words or expressions could be interpreted – and then translated – in one or more different ways, according to the semantic meaning they are attributed.

Keywords: translatable; untranslatable; idiolects; fingerprint; thoughts

DOI: 10.24818/SIC/2023/01.08

1. Introduction

The following article will focus on language and translation, with a particular regard for idiolects. The main question of this article, as the title suggests, is “Can we translate idiolects?”. However, before introducing the concept of idiolects, an overview of the main research which led to the main question of this article will be given. Indeed, the main question was stimulated by the conduction of a translation analysis of Sergio Atzeni’s work, a Sardinian author, and some parts of this article have been extracted from this thesis.

In our article, initially, an overview of Sergio Atzeni’s life and of some of the important events in his life will be given; subsequently, his use of language will be generally presented. The next section will list some definitions scholars gave of Atzenian language and how this is generally perceived, while afterwards, a section will be dedicated to the need for defining Sergio Atzeni’s language before conducting our analysis. This section will lead to considering some different kinds of language definitions, including that of idiolects. In the next section, some reflections and examples on idiolects will be listed, whereas the final section will present the conclusions, while striving to answer our main research question: “Can we translate idiolects?”.

¹ University of Birmingham, Birmingham, The United Kingdom, saracorpino@yahoo.it.

2. *Sergio Atzeni: life and important events*

Sergio Atzeni was born in 1952 in Capoterra, a town placed 20 km from Cagliari, the main city of Sardinia. His parents were communists; his father became an important personality in the local PCI (Italian communist party), while his mother was a communist and was also the Italian Women Union's Director. He spent most of his youth in Cagliari, but in 1964-65 he lived in Orgosolo – a city in the Nuoro area, almost 190km from Cagliari – which, as the scholar Sulis wrote, will become one of the focal points of his literary definition of *Sardinia-continent*. He completed his secondary education in Cagliari, at the Classical Studies high school. He then enrolled at the Faculty of Philosophy but did not obtain his bachelor's degree, distracted by more pressing interests.

Being born in a left-wing political context, Sergio Atzeni was active in the communist student movement from an early age, eventually becoming the Director of the FGCI (Italian Communist Youth Federation). He worked as a publicist journalist, cultural operator, employed by Enel and union representative, husband and father of a daughter, Jenny.

The end of his marriage and the accumulation of personal and professional dissatisfactions lead Atzeni to a deep existential crisis that resulted in the conversion to Catholicism and to the permanent abandonment of the city and island, in 1987. Atzeni wandered around Europe for a few months, with no fixed destination in Europe, eventually ending up in Italy. He lived in Turin, the capital of the Piedmont region, until his death, apart from the period 1990-1993 which he spent in Sant'Ilario d'Enza, in Emilia-Romagna. Sergio Atzeni wrote in a short but intense 20-year period; his first work was published in 1976 and his prolific writing career was cut short by his premature death in 1995. He wrote four novels, one play and many short stories, which were also the expression of his language creation project.

3. *Sergio Atzeni's work and the language used*

In this section, an overview of Sergio Atzeni's work and language will be presented. As previously mentioned, Sergio Atzeni had a very precise language creation project. He wrote in Italian, but an Italian that is interspersed with vocabulary of Sard and of other languages associated with the island, and he also included syntactical constructions more typical of Sard than Italian. In his writings, Ramona Onnis (2016) notes an initial fear of including Sardinian language and dialect items, that then gives way to a development in his linguistic creation, and culminates with *Bellas Mariposas* (1996), characterized by an oral language influenced by Sard as well as by English and Spanish words. As one of the main features of the language the author created in his novels pertains to the search for reproducing the orality of the territory, with the inclusion of words and syntactical constructions typical of Sard or sometimes, more specifically, the language of Cagliari, having an overview of the origins of Sard was an essential preliminary step before we turn to an analysis of Atzeni's writing style.

3.1 *Sard*

Sard, like Italian, is a Romance language, one of those languages that share Latin as a common source. Posner (1996, 97) describes Latin using the metaphor of a tree, long since deceased, which nevertheless lives on in the younger plants that it has seeded: 'The Romance languages, the newer sprouts, are living versions of Latin, a root-stock that is now dead – in the sense that it is now represented only by a closed corpus of texts and that it is no longer the mother-tongue of any speaker'.

As Harris & Vincent (1998, 1) states Latin developed from a form of Italic spoken originally in a number of small communities in Latium (Lazio), in central Italy; initially the label referred to a group of dialects spoken in Italy, then it came to designate the speech of Rome and then as the Roman Empire expanded its military, political and economic influence, it became the language used across much of western and central Europe, as well as in western North Africa.

Long before Sard was officially recognised in legislation as a language on the island in 1997, ‘riconoscendole pari dignità rispetto alla lingua italiana’ (granting it equal dignity with respect to the Italian language),² it had been named as a proper language in classifications of the Romance languages. With regards to this concept, we can look at the classifications listed by Posner (1996, 197-202); Robert Hall Jr (1950), whose version of the Romance Stammbaum (family tree) is the most widely accepted; Trager (1934), who grouped Sard with Dalmation; and Žarko Muljačić (1922-2009), whose work identified twelve languages including Sard.

However, as Mensching and Remberger (2016, 270) argue, in the Sardinian context, “the notion ‘language’ must be understood in the sense of a bundle of varieties”. One of the most controversial issues of Sard is the classification of the different varieties spoken on the island. Jaberg and Jud³, at the University of Zurich, published a prestigious atlas of the languages and dialects of Italy, Sardinia and southern Switzerland, which remains a helpful record. The mapping of the dialect atlas focused on plotting the areas where distinctive items of vocabulary were used and drawing lines or isoglosses⁴ around the areas where they were used. As in Italy insurmountable natural barriers, such as the Alps, rivers and seas and in the Middle Ages also forests, posed a considerable obstacle to intercommunication, so, too, the central mountainous and inaccessible area of Logudoro was identified as the zone harbouring the prototypical Sard (*Logudorian*), in isolation from which the daughter Sard languages developed (Posner, 1996, 195).

Still, Posner (1966, 202) noted that, ‘In Sardinia as in areas of southern Italy, no dialect *koinai* have become established and nearby local languages can differ substantially.’ A *koiné* is defined by Crystal as “the spoken language of a locality which has become a standard language or lingua franca”⁵. It is important to understand something of these local languages, the ways in which they co-exist, and the controversies they engender, particularly as Atzeni’s use of some of them in his writings is so innovative.

The comprehensive list of language codes defined by International Standard ISO 639-3, which attempts to represent all known full languages, lists four individual living languages under the Sardinian macrolanguage rubric: Logudorese, Campidanese, Sassarese and Gallurese⁶. As Mensching and Remberger (2016, 270) explain, Logudorese, in the north/centre of the island, and Campidanese, in the south, are the two main varieties of Sard, “with a border zone of overlapping isoglosses in the central part of the island”. The isoglosses in the overlapping zone are sometimes grouped under the variety names Nuorese in the east and Arborense in the west. Recognition of these divisions originated in the eighteenth century, when Cetti divided the island dialects in two main areas, Campidanese in the south and the dialect of ‘Capo di sopra’ in the north, according to morphologic criteria (Ferrer, Koch, Marzo, 2017, 16).

The first paleo-comparative classifications were made by Porru (1832), Spano (1840), Angius (1853) and Madao (1872), all recognising at least two divisions (Campidanese and Logudorese) and Angius adding Arborense and Nuorese.

The following map shows the areas where the above-mentioned varieties are spoken.

² Article 2, clause 1 of the Legge Regionale 15 ottobre 1997, n. 26. Available on the official website of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia, at <http://www.regione.sardegna.it/j/v/86?v=9&c=72&file=1997026>

³ Jaberg K.; Jud J. (1928) Sprach- und Sachatlas Italiens und der Südschweiz, 8 vols., Zofingen, Ringier

⁴ Johannes K, “the space where a linguistic phenomenon exists or, by metonymic extension, the line that separates a particular linguistic phenomenon from another”, What is an Isogloss?, 2023, p.56

⁵ Crystal D. (2008). A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics, (6th ed), p.262.

⁶ SIL, ‘ISO 639 Code Tables’, Retrieved from: https://iso639-3.sil.org/code_tables/639/read?title=&field_iso639_cd_st_mmrshp_639_1_tid=All&name_3=Sardinian&field_iso639_element_scope_tid=All&field_iso639_language_type_tid=All&items_per_page=200

Figure 3: Map of Sardinia indicating where different languages/varieties are spoken.



Source: Mensching and Remberger (2016, 271)

After having learned what Sard is and after having observed some historical and classification information, our research will focus on Sergio Atzeni's language features.

4. Research on Sergio Atzeni's language

In this section we will look at some scholars' definition of Atzenian language and how this was perceived by scholars and academics. As previously explained, Sergio Atzeni had a very precise language creation project. From his first novel onwards, the author adopted a very particular linguistic style. One might say that he wrote in Italian, and yet this would not be correct. It was not a standard Italian, but an experimental one. Atzeni weaves the vocabulary of Sard and of other languages associated with the island into his Italian. In addition, he uses syntactical constructions typical of Sard, creating a unique linguistic *mélange*. In Sergio Atzeni's writings, we perceive an engagement towards binding together different languages or linguistic substrates linked to the island of Sardinia.

Furthermore, Sergio Atzeni's characters communicate in a language which is peculiar to those characters, their emotions, their social class, their position in the society, their opinions and so on. As a result, Atzenian language is multi-layered, a mixture of different cultural worlds. This linguistic experimentation is ever-present in the author's works, but it is not consistent. There is considerable variation between different writings: from one work to another we can notice different languages or substrates chosen as the main focus.

The language used in *Bellas Mariposas* (1996), for example, which includes elements of Sard and a colloquial register, differs from the one used in *L'apologo del Giudice Bandito* (1986), enriched also with words in Spanish. On the contrary, the two novels *Il Quinto Passo è l'addio* (1995) and *Il figlio di Bakunín* (1991), are written in a language which is closer to the one that might be commonly named *standard*, even though such definition could be limiting, as it collocates the language of both works in a precise domain. Indeed, even though these two novels have in common that they are not characterized by the constant presence of elements in Sard or other languages, the language and the register used differ. In *Il figlio di Bakunín* (1991) for example, the direct speech is the chosen register, while in *Il Quinto passo è l'addio* (1995), the narrating voice will correspond to the one of the main characters.

In order to address the question of how the translation of Atzenian language should be approached, it was first necessary to provide a detailed examination of what that language is and how it can be described.

Sergio Atzeni's literature has drawn significant critical interest. Giuseppe Marci (1999, 2005), Gigliola Sulis (2000, 2012) and Ramona Onnis (2016) have dedicated entire books to the author. Other scholars, such as Beppe Cavatorta (2013) and Michele Broccia (2014), have consecrated parts of their work to Atzeni. Although interest in the author's work has been growing, his language has only been observed in the most general terms. Broccia (2014, 9), for example, when discussing Sergio Atzeni and other writers of the Sardinian Nouvelle Vague such as Niffoi, Fois or Murgia, simply observes that 'they sometimes use a special type of Italian, the Sardinian variant, with Sardinian words or expressions'. Thus far, as will be shown below, scholars have observed Sergio Atzeni's language from a global point of view and no detailed deconstruction of Atzeni's linguistic experimentation has been carried out.

In the following paragraphs, the views of these scholars will be presented in chronological order. This part is relevant as it provides an overview of how the different scholars have described the author's language and have also introduced some terminology.

4.1 Giuseppe Marci (1999, 2005)

Giuseppe Marci, Professor of Italian Philology and Sardinian literature at the University of Cagliari, was one of the first scholars to demonstrate an interest in Atzeni's work. According to the Sardinian scholar, Sergio Atzeni's modulation of the Italian writing is strictly connected to his multiple conception of a Sardinian, Italian and European identity, which expresses both an opening and an attachment to his main land traditions (Marci, 2005, 288). Discussing the novel *Bellas Mariposas* (1996), for example, Marci (1999, 112) describes Sergio Atzeni's language as a means of translating an interior world, strongly tied to the people and place from which it emanates. We can notice how the scholar highlights in the most general terms the function of the language as he perceives it but does not provide any precise details about how this function is achieved. It would not be correct, though, to say that Marci makes no attempt to describe the author's stylistic choices. Indeed, the following quotation will present to the reader the particularity of Atzeni's style, characterized by the *shredding* of the texts in shorter and shorter segments and the use of words and expressions typical of Sard.

«Quanti si sono, a vario titolo, occupati dell'opera di Sergio Atzeni, non hanno potuto fare a meno di osservare le particolarità di uno stile che, fin dalle prove giovanili e poi, con crescenti consapevolezza, negli anni della maturità, è andato orientandosi verso la frantumazione del testo in segmenti sempre più brevi, da una parte, e, dall'altra, nella ricerca di valori espressivi, sonorità nuove, chiarezze e opacità, attraverso l'impiego di vocaboli, espressioni tipiche, costrutti sintattici tratti dalla lingua sarda, dall'italiano regionale parlato nell'isola, dal gergo in uso fra i giovani cagliaritari. »⁷

We can notice here how the scholar moves his focus more to the inside of the language, by highlighting the particularity of its structure and vocabulary, thus also signalling the author's experimentation with sounds, with regional varieties and with slang. However, no examples are provided in terms of the use of the language.

Despite the lack of a concrete examination of the linguistic surgical operations performed by Atzeni, it is important to mention the glossary that Giuseppe Marci included within his work *Sergio Atzeni, a lonely man* (1999). Indeed, the scholar made a list which provides some practical examples of the vocabulary typical of Sard used by the author, along with their translation into Italian. This glossary

⁷ "Those who have, in various capacities, dealt with the work of Sergio Atzeni, have not been able to help but observe the particularities of a style which, since his youthful trials and then, with growing awareness, in the years of maturity, has been orienting towards the breaking up of the text into increasingly shorter segments, on the one hand, and, on the other, in the search for expressive values, new sounds, clarity and opacity, through the use of words, typical expressions, syntactic constructs taken from the Sardinian language, from the regional Italian spoken on the island, from the jargon in use among young Cagliaritans", Marci (1999, 115).

demonstrates the need of transposing some words and cultural elements typical of the Sardinian local culture to the Italian linguistic and cultural context.

4.2 Gigliola Sulis (2000, 2012)

Another scholar who showed early interest in Atzeni's work was Gigliola Sulis, Director of research in Italian at the University of Leeds, who devoted her thesis to his work. In her article *Lingua, cultura, identità: riflessioni sulla letteratura di Sergio Atzeni* (2000, 555), she speaks of: 'L'insistenza sulle questioni linguistiche e la chiara preferenza per soluzioni avverse a ogni tentazione puristica delineano già un preciso cammino, che si compirà pienamente nelle opere di narrativa, ambientate quasi tutte in Sardegna.'⁸ In that quotation, Gigliola Sulis talks about Atzeni's preference for the most adverse solutions in terms of linguistic choices, which – according to the scholar – demonstrates the precise linguistic pathway the author took, without, however, analysing practical examples. In fact, by reading Atzeni's work, it is clear that the author chooses a language as coherent as possible. The place where the story occurs not only influences the characters' way of speaking and then the author's linguistic choices, but it also affects their personality and actions, which reflects some cultural aspects typical of Sardinia. She points out that Atzeni's narrative takes place in the main city of Sardinia, Cagliari, appearing in the foreground, in an island which is perceived as a continent-island because of the interethnic exchanges. «La narrativa di Atzeni ha il suo centro proprio nel capoluogo, che viene in primo piano, all'interno di una Sardegna percepita come isola-continente, proprio perché sito deputato per gli scambi interetnici.»⁹

Sulis talks about Atzeni's plurilingualism as a search for balance between linguistic innovation and comprehensibility, supposing that Sergio Atzeni's fear of alienating the reader discourages him from introducing an excessive presence of Sard in his writings. Again, we encounter what feels like an accurate description of the language in global terms, but one without detailed reference to the author's specific linguistic and stylistic choices. An important consideration made by Sulis (2012, 3) is also that the ten years of Atzeni's literary maturity, 1986-1995, corresponded in Italy to the postmodern phase of Eco, Tabucchi, Del Giudice, Baricco, and constituted the right context for some of the experimental aspects of Atzeni's writing, such as the preference for ellipsis and the internal and multiple focus, the uneven narrative structures, the intertextual net that he takes from the Bible, the classics, comics, pop songs, the presence of the typical Sardinian instruments *trimpanus* and *launeddas*, and the samba, jazz and rap music. It is important to be aware of these aspects so as to understand how Sergio Atzeni's literature and language developed.

4.3 Giuseppi Lo Castro (2011)

Another scholar who showed interest in the Atzenian literature is Lo Castro¹⁰. The scholar wrote in *Lo Specchio di Carta* (2011), arguing that Sergio Atzeni is included in the postcolonial background and is also associated to the concept of *négritude* and *creolité*. The same article is also helpful to understand the multiplicity of the *Sardinias* and the author's identity. According to the article's author, we cannot talk about only one Sardinia. In fact, this land presents a multiplicity of identities so that it is possible to talk about more *Sardinias*.

Nella incerta identità dell'universo antillano, centro di una letteratura postcoloniale, che si fonda sul superamento dell'antica dicotomia tra **occidentalizzazione e nostalgico recupero della négritude**, si

⁸ "The insistence on the linguistic questions and the clear preference for solutions avverse to every purist attempt, define a precise path, which will be fully accomplished in the narrative works, almost all set in Sardinia", Gigliola Sulis, 'Lingua, cultura, identità: riflessioni sulla narrativa di Sergio Atzeni', in *Eteroglossia e plurilinguismo letterario, Atti del XXVIII Convegno interuniversitario di Bressanone*, ed. by Brugnolo F. and Orioles V. (6th-9th July 2000, p.555).

⁹ 'Atzeni's narrative has its centre in the main city, which is in the foreground, in a Sardinia perceived as a continent-island, just because it is a place designated to the interethnic exchanges 'Gigliola Sulis., *Lingua, cultura, identità: riflessioni sulla letteratura di Sergio Atzeni*, in *Eteroglossia e plurilinguismo letterario, Atti del XXVIII Convegno interuniversitario di Bressanone*, 6-9 luglio 2000, a cura di Furio Brugnolo e Vincenzo Orioles, Il Calamo, Roma 2000, p.555-556.

¹⁰ <https://lospecchiodicarta.it/2011/07/27/sardegna-postcoloniale-una-lettura-di-sergio-atzeni/>; and <https://lospecchiodicarta.it/2011/07/14/sergio-atzeni-bellas-mariposas/>

riconosce anche la **sardità di Atzeni**. Dicono Chamoiseau e Glissant nell'Eloge de la creolité che ormai lo scrittore postcoloniale scrive da **un territorio dalle molteplici identità**, che non è possibile ricercare un'identità autentica, originaria e primitiva, perché l'uomo e lo scrittore delle Antille di oggi sono ormai intimamente scissi, **figli di un'anima ormai plurale, di una origine mista e in fieri**.¹¹

It is not difficult to accept the idea of a Sardinia with multiple identities, considering the long-lasting domination that its population had to face and the inevitable influence that all the populations who lived in the island brought. The same dominations are also linked to the concept of *négritude*, meaning Sardinians were dominated and put under the dominators' rules. This vision of multiple identities that Lo Castro puts forward is extremely important when observing Atzeni's work, as it provides a wider vision of his language, making the reader give up on the idea of a *mixture of languages* to the extent to which the theorist conveys a sense of coexistence of more languages intended as multiple identities.

4.4 Beppe Cavatorta (2013)

The scholar Cavatorta made some considerations useful to better understand the difficulty of classifying Sergio Atzeni's language; he suggested the term *hybridization*, which recalls the concept of a language created with the inclusion of items coming from different linguistic universes. According to Cavatorta (2013, 148), Atzeni's first published piece seems to represent the beginning of the mechanism of Sergio Atzeni's linguistic hybridization. This was the play *Quel Maggio 1906. Ballata per una rivolta cagliaritana* (1977)¹². In this first work, Sergio Atzeni places Cagliari at the centre of his literature, even idealizing its population, which Cavatorta describes as a "model hero" (141). He includes some details about the singularity of the language: 'From a stylistic point of view, we find a tendency to break up phrases, to employ an ironic style and to strip sentences down to the bare bone, sacrificing all that can be sacrificed, as well as inserting words taken from Sardinian (*mandrone* / lazy ass)' Cavatorta (2013, 149). In the same article, he argues that in *Apologo del giudice bandito* (1986), Sard and Italian intersect "without creating any friction"; it is a "seamless" integration, which applies equally to his use of Spanish within the novel (146). Even though Sergio Atzeni's language is enriched by different elements typical of other linguistic universes, this novel and his subsequent works are still understandable to the Italian reader. This is an author who reaches out to an external public, promoting on the one hand a sense of attachment to his land through the language he uses – bringing in words and constructions typical of Sard – while on the other hand desiring to overcome the limits imposed by the sea to join up with the national literary context.

Cavatorta is keen to underline that Atzeni's linguistic project is not a mere experimentation but satisfies instead the need of the author to express his political and personal views. Indeed, for example, the inclusion of Spanish in *Apologo del Giudice bandito* (1986) is a political statement. Atzeni, in fact, continues to use Spanish words throughout the rest of his work, words such as "Rey", "soldados", "cursores", "Alguazil" etc. to convey a sense of oppression, never translating these words into standard Italian, much less into Atzeni's Sardinian, as having done so would have legitimized them and implied that they were accepted and therefore, to a certain extent, this would have caused the text and its author to appear to cower in the face of these oppressors.

4.5 Ramona Onnis (2016)

Ramona Onnis (2016) dedicates an entire book to Sergio Atzeni, called *Sergio Atzeni, écrivain postcolonial*. She consecrates the second part of her work to the author's postcolonialism. Towards the end of this section, she dedicates four pages (281-284) to the analysis of the translation of Sergio

¹¹ "In the uncertain identity of the Antillean universe, the center of a postcolonial literature, based on overcoming the ancient dichotomy between Westernization and nostalgic recovery of *Négritude*, Atzeni's Sardinianness is also recognised. Chamoiseau and Glissant say in the *Eloge de la creolité* that the postcolonial writer now writes from a territory with multiple identities, and that it is not possible to search for an authentic, original and primitive identity, because the man and the writer of today's Antilles are now intimately split, children of a now plural soul, of a mixed and in progress origin." (TN), www.lospecchiodicarta.it (Sardegna postcoloniale? Una lettura di Sergio Atzeni | Lo Specchio di Carta, 27/07/2011); source: <https://rim.univ-cotedazur.fr/items/show/2183#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=0&xywh=-60%2C-393%2C877%2C952>

¹² That May 1906. Ballad for a Cagliari revolt (our translation)

Atzeni's works abroad. Although this is only a brief review of her work, it represents a useful starting point. Crucially, though, Onnis provides no in-depth analysis of the source language.

5. The need for defining Sergio Atzeni's language. Different kinds of languages - definition

Before starting the analysis, the need for defining Sergio Atzeni's language was impellent. Going across different definitions of languages, *idiolect* seems to be the one which best defines it, even though saying that it encloses all the author's language features and enriching elements would be too reductive. However, here, we will refer to it as an idiolect, as this helps one to better understand what this article focuses on and what specific feature of Atzeni's language it wants to highlight: the subjectivity and the ability to define a character.

5.1 Standard language

In 2003, Crystal defines *standard* as a term used in sociolinguistics to refer to a prestige variety of language used within a speech community. 'Standard languages/dialects/varieties' cut across regional differences, providing a unified means of communication, and thus an institutionalized norm which can be used in the mass-media, in teaching the language to foreigners and so on'.¹³

A *standard language*, then, differs from a *non-standard language* in the possibility of being used as the main means of communication and as an institutionalized linguistic norm. According to this consideration, Sard can be considered a *standard language* as it was included in the TV and Radio programs in the national channel Rai, after the signature of the convention with the Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri-Dipartimento per l'informazione (The Ministry of Information Presidency) and the company dealer of the radio-television public service¹⁴.

Federici (2011, 6) emphasizes some controversial definitions in the literature. The influence of a single and universal national language, for example, is still felt in most of the definitions of *lects*, which seem to imply notions of hierarchical order in relation to the *standard language*. However, the concept of *standard language* is very complex itself, as linguists agree. Bassnett and Lefevere (1990, 3) state that: 'The trouble with standards, it would seem, is that they turn out not to be eternal and unchanging after all'. Indeed, if we focus on Sard – the language with which Atzenian's literature is enriched – it is important to remember that this was considered a dialect until 1999, when it gained the *language* status. This may suggest that Sard had a position of dependence with the Italian language until then, which it lost with the introduction of the 1999 law.

5.2 Dialect

In Federici's view (2011, 8), defining dialects is harder and there is a huge variety of definitions. Crystal defines dialect as:

A regionally or socially distinctive variety of language, identified by a particular set of words and grammatical structures. Spoken dialects are usually also associated with a distinctive pronunciation, or accent. Any Language with a reasonably large number of speakers will develop dialects [...]. One dialect may predominate as the official or standard form of the language, and this is the variety which may come to be written down.¹⁵

¹³ The entries from Crystal's *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* have been retrieved from <http://www.credoreference.com/entry/bkdictling/> which offers access to the digital version of the *Dictionary*. For this reason, page numbers are not provided.

¹⁴ ansa.it, "Rai: programmi in lingua sarda diventano realtà" "Rai: programs in Sard become real" (TN), 7 August 2020

¹⁵ The entries from Crystal's *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* have been retrieved from <http://www.credoreference.com/entry/bkdictling/> which offers access to the digital version of the *Dictionary*. For this reason, page numbers are not provided.

With regards to this definition, Federici (2011, 9) emphasizes the problematic distinction in Italian (but also in German and French) dialectology between a ‘written down’ and a ‘not written down’ language and that ‘defining a dialect becomes a political and sociological issue as much as a linguistic activity’. This last consideration is essential to better understand the debate on Sard, which lasted for decades until this gained the status of language in 1999. Also, Atzeni’s linguistic style in *Bellas Mariposas* (1996) is prevalently oral, it is therefore situated in-between ‘written down’ and ‘not written down’, a feature that must be taken into consideration when conducting the analysis.

5.3 Sociolect and Idiolect

According to Crystal sociolect is a ‘term used by some sociolinguists to refer to a linguistic variety (or lect) defined on social (as opposed to regional) grounds, e.g. correlating with a particular social class or occupational group’.¹⁶

Federici (2011, 7) points out that the reference of this definition to social components, classes and status allows to recognize the speaker of the community. This term may be included in the definition of Atzeni’s language, as it seems that the author tends to describe the belonging to a community of his book’s characters. It will be important, during the analysis, to recognize which parts of the speech can be identified as sociolects.

Crystal defines an idiolect as:

One’s personal dialect. A dialect can be seen as an abstraction deriving from the analysis of a large number of idiolects. Idiolectal features are particularly noticeable in literary writing, as stylistic markers of authorship. Some linguists give the term a more restricted definition, referring to the speech habits of a person as displayed in a particular variety at a given time.¹⁷

Federici (2011, 8) integrates this definition with his view:

Idiolect can be considered as the ensemble of linguistic features, belonging to a person, which are affected by geographical, educational, and even physical factors including class, gender, race, historical influences that contribute to shaping one’s ideological persona.

The second definition has been given by Wales (2001, 197), who defines idiolects as:

The usage of an individual may well be constrained by his or her place of origin, but idiolect covers those features which vary from register to register, medium to medium, in daily language use; as well as the more permanent features that arise from personal idiosyncrasies, such as lisping, monotone delivery, favourite exclamations, etc. idiolect thus becomes the equivalent of a finger-print: each of us is unique in our language habits. Such ‘voice-prints’ are of great value to dramatists or novelists as a ready means of characterization, along with physical attributes.

According to Crystal, idiolects may be interpreted as belonging to larger sets that share similar linguistic features, where characters may embody the ‘voice-print’ of speakers located in another *lect*. In both definitions, it seems that, while *sociolects* are the expression of the belonging to a particular community, *idiolects* are more personal, as they define the person, who by selecting linguistic expressions or items creates their own, unique language.

Idiolect may be the linguistic term that best defines Sergio Atzeni’s work, but using it to refer to such a complex language may be too vague, especially because we cannot ignore the presence of *sociolect*

¹⁶ The entries from Crystal’s *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* have been retrieved from <http://www.credoreference.com/entry/bkdictling/> which offers access to the digital version of the *Dictionary*. For this reason page numbers are not provided.

¹⁷ The entries from Crystal’s *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* have been retrieved from <http://www.credoreference.com/entry/bkdictling/> which offers access to the digital version of the *Dictionary*. For this reason page numbers are not provided.

and *dialect* elements in Atzeni's literature. Also, reading Atzeni's work, we can equally encounter foreign words, slang words from Cagliari, and syntactical structures typical of Sardinian adapted to Italian. Moreover, talking about *idiolects* may be limiting, as it may suggest the analysis is about direct speech and not about the narrative voice as well, while the latter also presents some relevant particularities.

However, as previously mentioned, as this article focuses on the translation of idiolects and on the subjectivity of a language with regards to how it can be translated and perceived by the reader, we will refer to it as an idiolect.

6. "Can we translate idiolects?" Examples and reflections

In this section of the article, some examples of Sergio Atzeni's language will be provided. These examples have been extracted from the two books, *Bellas Mariposas* (1996) and *Apologo del Giudice Bandito* (1986), and are part of the bank of expressions identified for my research.

6.1 Bagassa

The first example is the term **Bagassa**, included in the novel *Bellas Mariposas* (1996, 53). To a local reader, familiar with the language of Cagliari, this term would soon recall the meaning of *slut*, *prostitute*¹⁸. For a non-Sardinian reader instead, this would recall its meaning in Italian, the "residue from the grinding and squeezing of sugar cane"¹⁹. The presence of the word in the two linguistic universes, the Sard and the Italian ones, spawns the first comprehension problem. Indeed, the reader may have never heard the term *bagassa* before, as its Italian meaning refers to a very technical context, and they may look for it in the Italian dictionary, without, however, getting the sense of what the author wants to convey.

This first consideration leads to a problem of comprehension linked to the encounter of two different linguistic universes in Atzeni's literature, the Sard – more specifically Sard from Cagliari – and the Italian ones. Moving the focus to a reader audience only composed by people from Cagliari, the perception of that particular word could differ from one person to another, according to the position of that particular word in their personal *idiolect*.

For example, to a person accustomed to a context where to vulgar language is attributed a fun and comic feature, where this is used to make jokes or to mock others, the presence of this term could represent a fun element. In this case, the word *bagassa* would confer comedy and funniness to the text, making also the reading light.

To another person, accustomed to a context where to vulgar language is attributed a very negative feature, where the use of vulgar language was forbidden and in which people using that particular kind of language were strongly criticized, the presence of the word *bagassa* may not be perceived very positively. Indeed, in this second case, the text could make the reader grimace upon the vulgarity of that particular word.

If we then imagine a third person, who was subjected to abuses where the abuser used to call them *bagassa*, reading that word could have an emotional impact on them. Indeed, in this case, the word could recall some extremely bad feelings and sad moments to the reader.

6.2 Terencio Lopez

Another example to mention is the presence of many Spanish names in the *Apologo del Giudice Bandito* (1986, 14), such as *Terencio Lopez*. Here, again, the collocations that Spanish words and the Spanish linguistic universe have in the reader's idiolect could completely change the way in which

¹⁸ Artizzu L. (1996). Il Dizionario di Cagliari, (Cagliari, Edizioni della Torre), p.66

¹⁹ Dizionario Treccani online [treccani.it/vocabolario/ricerca/bagassa/](https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/ricerca/bagassa/)

they are perceived. For example, the presence of Spanish words in Sard makes a local reader closer to Spanish than others as there is a high presence of words in Sard which are similar, or even identical, to Spanish. Also, the translation into a different language, for example English, totally changes the relationship between the two cultural contexts included in the same text (Sard/Italian/Spanish; English/Spanish). Talking more specifically about idiolects, someone having a relative or a sibling whose surname is Lopez may feel more involved in the story than another.

7. Conclusions

The hypotheses mentioned in the previous section are those where the persons' profiles have been made up for this article. They are useful to demonstrate that a particular word has a precise and different position in any person's idiolect. We could provide as many different examples as there are readers, with some similarities but many different nuances. Those nuances are not reproducible in the translation and they are also impossible to grasp when the reading happens in the same linguistic universe.

To make it clearer, two Sard speakers from Cagliari can perceive the same word in two different ways and attribute two different weights, deep meanings, and emotions to it. If we then consider that a text is made of many words and expressions, by going through it, any reader will create their own *map* to orientate themselves in the text perception, affected by elements such as their comprehension level, their emotional state with regards to the language/words, and so on. For this reason, the translation of idiolects is never fully possible.

This does not mean that a source text cannot be transposed to a target language, but this would occur in an approximate way, where most of the message is conveyed but the deep nuances which make a text unique are lost.

References and bibliography

- Article 2, clause 1 of the Legge Regionale 15 ottobre 1997, n. 26. Available on the official website of the Autonomous Region of Sardinia, retrieved from: <http://www.regione.sardegna.it/j/v/86?v=9&c=72&file=1997026>
- Artizzu L. (1996). *Il Dizionario di Cagliari*, (Cagliari, Edizioni della Torre).
- Atzeni S. (1977). *Quel maggio 1906-Ballata per una rivolta cagliaritano* (EDES, Cagliari).
- Atzeni S. (1986). *Apologo del giudice bandito* (Palermo: Sellerio).
- Atzeni S. (1991). *Il figlio di Bakunin* (Sellerio, Palermo).
- Atzeni S. (1995). *Il Quinto Passo è l'addio* (Segrate: Mondadori).
- Atzeni S. (1996). *Bellas Mariposas* (Palermo: Sellerio).
- Broccia M. (2014). 'The Sardinian Literary Spring: An Overview. A New Perspective on Italian Literature' in *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*, Vol.9
- Cavatorta B. (2013). Sergio Atzeni's one-man gang, in *The Politics of Poetics: Poetry and Social activism in early-modern through Contemporary Italy*, ed. by Federica Santini and Giovanna Summerfield (Cambridge Scholars Publisher).
- Crystal D. (2008). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*, (6th ed).
- Federici F. (2011). 'Translating dialects and Languages of Minorities', in *New trends in Translation Studies*, vol.6, ed. by Jorge Díaz Cintas (London: Peter Lang).
- Ferrer E.B., & Koch P., & Marzo D. (Eds). (2017) *Manuale di linguistica Sarda*, Berlin.
- Harris M, & Vincent N (Eds). (1998). *The Romance languages*, Croom Helm, London & Sidney.
- Marci G. (1999). *Sergio Atzeni, a lonely man* (Cagliari: CUEC)
- Marci G. (2005). *In presenza di tutte le lingue del mondo*.
- Mensching G., & Remberger E. M. (Eds). (2016). *Sardinian*, in *The Oxford Guide to the Romance Languages* by Adam Ledgeway and Martin Maiden, Oxford Scholarship Online, Oxford.
- Onnis R. (2016). *Sergio Atzeni, écrivain postcolonial* (Paris: L'Harmattan).

- Posner R. (1966). *The Roman languages*, Cambridge University press.
- Robert A., & Hall Jr. (Eds). (1950) *The reconstruction of proto-romance**, Cornell University
- Sara Corpino, PhD theses on Sergio Atzeni's translation analysis (tbp).
- Sulis G. (2000). 'Lingua, cultura, identità: riflessioni sulla narrativa di Sergio Atzeni', in *Eteroglossia e plurilinguismo letterario*, Atti del XXVIII Convegno interuniversitario di Bressanone, ed. by Brugnolo F. and Orioles V. (6th-9th July 2000)
- Sulis G. (2012). *Chi era Sergio Atzeni*
- Sulis G. (6-9 luglio 2000), *Lingua, cultura, identità: riflessioni sulla letteratura di Sergio Atzeni*, in *Eteroglossia e plurilinguismo letterario*, Atti del XXVIII Convegno interuniversitario di Bressanone, , a cura di Furio Brugnolo e Vincenzo Orioles, Il Calamo, Roma

Websites

- Ansa: www.ansa.it, "Rai: programmi in lingua sarda diventano realtà" "Rai: programs in Sard become real" (TN), 7 August 2020
- Dizionario Treccani online <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/>
- Lo Specchio di carta: www.lospecchiodicarta.it
- <https://lospecchiodicarta.it/2011/07/27/sardegna-postcoloniale-una-lettura-di-sergio-atzeni/>
- <https://lospecchiodicarta.it/2011/07/14/sergio-atzeni-bellas-mariposas/>
- SIL, 'ISO 639 Code Tables', Retrieved from: https://iso639-3.sil.org/code_tables/639/read?title=&field iso639 cd st mbrshp 639 1 tid=All&name 3=Sardinian&field iso639 element scope tid=All&field iso639 language type tid=All&items_per_page=200

The author

Sara Corpino was born in Sardinia (Italy) and obtained a BA in 2009 in Linguistic Mediation (English and French) at the School for Linguistic Mediators. In 2012, and a MA in Translation at the University of Cagliari, in Italy. In 2017 she obtained a PGCE in Modern Foreign languages at the University of East London and my QTS in 2018. Sara has worked several years as a freelance translator and as a teacher, in London, in Italy, and as an Italian language assistant in Belgium and is a PhD student at the University of Birmingham.