

Prismatic Translation and the Hum or Buzz of Tongues

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i. Textuality/é

A multilingual volume, like this one that you are reading, oscillates between languages in both obvious and hidden ways. The obvious oscillation happens when you turn a page and switch from French to English or vice versa. But any word may also be afflicted by secret wobbles, be nudged out of its habitual pathways of meaning by pressure from the other language or languages nearby. Take ‘textuality’ and ‘textualité’ in the English and French versions of this book’s title. Their juxtaposition prompts a question: how securely are they each lodged in the vocabulary and syntax of their respective standard national languages? How far do their meanings and usage blend and overlap? Should we really think of them as different words? – or rather as variant (ever so slightly variant) spellings of the same word? Is ‘textuality’ wholly English? Is ‘textualité’ wholly French?

The ideology according to which languages are standardised and kept separate, each with its own vocabulary and rules, is sustained by governments and privileged social groups, via institutions which include universities, publishing houses and schools, with their corresponding books and practices: their lessons and conventions, their manuals of grammar, spelling and style.¹ Resources for studying the histories of languages are typically arranged along national lines. There is the *Oxford English Dictionary* on one side of the channel, and the *Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française* on the other; it is the same story for books of grammar. When the two languages are brought together in bilingual dictionaries, or comparative studies such as Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet’s *Stylistique comparée du français et de l’anglais*, the emphasis falls on the differences between the languages rather than the similarities between them. Obvious etymological, phonetic, orthographic and semantic continuities like those between ‘liberalism’ and ‘libéralisme’ or ‘money’ and

¹ See James Milroy and Lesley Milroy, *Authority in Language: Investigating Standard English*, 3rd ed., London, Taylor & Francis, 1999; Richard J. Watts, ‘The Social Construction of Standard English: Grammar Writers as a “Discourse Community”’ and Ronald Carter, ‘Standard Grammars, Spoken Grammars: Some Educational Implications’, both in Tony Bex and Richard J. Watts (eds), *Standard English: The Widening Debate*, London, Taylor & Francis, 1999, pp. 40-68 and 149-168; R. Anthony Lodge, *French: From Dialect to Standard*, London, Taylor and Francis, 1993; translated by Cyril Veken as *Le français: histoire d’un dialecte devenu langue*, Paris, Fayard, 1997.

‘monnaie’ are typically configured, not as interesting variants in the usage of a single lexical bundle, but as treacherous ‘false friends’.

Yet these pressures pushing the languages apart come up against the everyday sharing and intermingling of words and phrases. For of course, beyond ‘liberalism/e’ and ‘money/naie’, vast stretches of English and French vocabulary have common roots – usually in Latin – and braided histories. ‘Text/e’, ‘textua/el’ and ‘textuality/é’ are among them. If, from one ‘English’ array of databases, I open the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Middle English Dictionary*, and from another, ‘French’, array I open *Frantext* and *Le Trésor de la Langue Française*, I can follow the traces of their mergings and separations. In the medieval period, ‘text/e’ commonly had the same spelling – with final ‘e’ – in both languages. Its meanings included the possessing of original authority, by contrast with explanatory material (called ‘glose’ – again the same word in English and French). You could speak of a ‘texte’ by contrast with a translation, or of a translation as being a ‘texte’ by contrast with a commentary. The derivative ‘textuel’ (again the same spelling in both languages), meant ‘close to a text’ or ‘knowledgeable about it’. In later centuries, English shifted the spelling to ‘textual’, while the French ‘textuel’ branched into new patterns of usage, appearing where English would typically use ‘literally’ – for instance in Flaubert’s correspondence: ‘Hier, je n’ai pu travailler de toute la journée ... à chaque mouvement que je faisais (ceci est textuel), la cervelle me sautait dans le crâne.’² Meanwhile, back in English, the form ‘textuality’ is recorded in the early nineteenth century (still meaning ‘closeness to a text’), apparently long before the French ‘textualité’. Nowadays, the English and French versions of ‘text(e)’, ‘textua/el’ and ‘textuality/é’ seem thoroughly overlapped and intermingled, all similarly charged with the meanings generated in Paris by Kristeva, Barthes, Derrida, Riffaterre and Genette, and propelled across the Channel and the Atlantic as part of the eruption of French-language theory into the English-speaking world.³ A squad of related terms can be written and pronounced all-but indiscriminately in line with French or English norms: ‘ge/énotext(é)’, ‘phe/énotext(e)’, ‘intertext(e)’, ‘architext(e)’, ‘paratext(e)’.

² Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance (juillet-décembre 1852)*, Paris. L. Conard, 1927, p. 62; *Frantext*, Z134. Base textuelle FRANTEXT, ATILF - CNRS & Université de Lorraine. Site internet : <http://www.frantext.fr>; accessed 9th January, 2017.

³ For the history of this eruption, see François Cusset, *French Theory: Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze & Cie et les mutations de la vie intellectuelle aux États-Unis / in America*, Paris, La Découverte, 2003 ; Sylvère Lotringer and Sande Cohen (eds), *French Theory in America*, New York and London, Routledge, 2001.

Kristeva described textuality/é as a ‘travail translinguistique’, a sideways movement across previously established norms and grammatical structures.⁴ She does not explicitly mention the crossing of boundaries between standard languages; but, as Mary Orr has pointed out, her own immigrant and trans-lingual position in relation to France and French is pervasively implicit in her work.⁵ Kristeva argues, for instance, that to foreground textuality by working in the ‘*matérialité*’ of language is to make oneself ‘étranger à la langue’ because one steps outside the channels of communication which standard languages, with their norms and structures, establish and keep clear.⁶ A consequence of Kristeva’s argument is that the distinction between ‘foreign’ and ‘not-foreign’ breaks down, as words draw in meanings by lateral connections such as rhyme and echo, rather than the *fiat* of dictionaries, and slip out of their habitual contexts into new ones, across the boundaries of standard languages no less than within them. The history of the word ‘textualiy/é’ is itself a testament to the workings of textuality/é; and the same is true of many other words.

In the case of the language of theory in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, the voyagings of ‘textuality/é’ and related terms created a hybrid word-realm which was also a linguistic border-country, remote from the core vocabulary of either of its participating standard languages. It is easy to imagine a speaker of either French or English looking at a word like ‘phe/énotext(e)’ and asking: does that really belong to my language? – and in fact the word(s) as yet appear(s) in neither the OED nor the *Trésor de la langue française*. In this contact zone of linguistic usage, which is at once transnational (French / English / American) and merely regional (the professional dialect of literary theory), complications in the definition of translation become easy to see. Derrida, himself writing in a French-inflected academic English, pointed to ‘the line that I seek to recognize within translatability, between two translations’ – i.e., two kinds of translation – ‘one governed by the classical model of transportable univocality or of formalizable polysemia, and the other, which goes over into dissemination.’⁷ In the first model, a word like ‘textualité’ is ascribed a meaning in its (French) language and context; ‘textuality’ is judged to have the same meaning in its (English) language and context; and the one is translated into the other. In the second model, ‘textuality’ and ‘textualité’ belong in a continuum of possible substitute words, each

⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Shmeiwtikh*: *recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Paris, Seuil, 1969, pp. 52, 147.

⁵ Mary Orr, *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*, London, Polity, 2003, pp. 24-27.

⁶ Kristeva, *Shmeiwtikh*, p. 9

⁷ Jacques Derrida, ‘Living On / Border Lines’, in Harold Bloom et al. *Deconstruction and Criticism*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 93.

conjuring a slightly different interpretive context and introducing a new shade of meaning. In the first model, translation is aligned with Kristeva's view of 'la science littéraire' which 'assimile la *production* sémiotique à un *énoncé*, refuse de la connaître dans le processus de sa productivité, et lui inflige la conformité avec un objet véridique.'⁸ In the second model, translation is itself one of the means of '*production sémiotique*'. In the first model, translation is the enemy of textuality; in the second model, translation and textuality are as one.

The contrast between Derrida's 'two translations' roughly corresponds to the distinction between texts defined by a culture as 'non-literary' and those defined as 'literary'. It is a truism that translations of poetry are necessarily varied and interpretive, and so go 'over into dissemination': this is why poetry is often said to be 'lost in translation'. On the other hand, functional texts are widely thought to possess 'transportable univocality'. To take one example, the Lisbon Treaty (which reformed the European Union in 2007) exists in one authorised version in the standard language of each of the participant States, with each version being taken to have the same meaning. However messy the translinguistic process of negotiation by which the Treaty was drafted, in its final version(s) what matters in the text(s), the obligations which bind its/their signatories, are taken to be identical across languages, so that dissemination, linguistic productivity – the play of textuality, in short – are arrested.⁹ Yet there are many ways in which this apparently stark distinction between the 'literary' and the 'functional' is perforated and blurred. Many texts occupy an ambiguous realm between the poles of 'poetry' on the one hand and 'pure functionality' on the other: not only texts in the hybrid language of literary theory but also novels, essays, journalism, political rhetoric, everyday conversation, stand-up comedy, and so on, and on: in fact, the large majority of language-use falls into this category of the in-between. As Roman Jakobson, among others, famously showed, 'literariness' is not confined to poetry, nor literature, but can be found in all sorts of text – perhaps any text – if you look in the right way.

This means that Derrida's 'line between' his two models of translation is not only a line which separates (a border) but also a line which joins (a border crossing). Even legal translation can be afflicted by dissemination: this is why the Lisbon Treaty has to be anchored in the interpretive machinery of the European Union so as to limit the possible play

⁸ Kristeva, *Shmeiwtikh*, pp. 148-9.

⁹ On the gesture which authorises such texts, see Theo Hermans, *The Conference of the Tongues*, Manchester, St Jerome, 2011, p. 11 & *passim*.

of meaning between its versions, anaesthetizing disputes. At the other extreme, even translators of poetry may sometimes feel that they are ‘really getting’ the meaning of their source text, ie succeeding in establishing ‘transportable univocality’. In the world of academic Translation Studies, *Skopostheorie* offers a way of extending the discipline of ‘translation as transport’ into realms where ‘translation as dissemination’ might otherwise flourish. It urges translators to determine the primary ‘function’ of the source text, to use this definition of function as a means of limiting what counts as meaning, and to endeavour above all to reproduce the same function in their translations:¹⁰ a joke should be funny, an insult should be insulting and so on. However, the very need for the ‘function’ to be determined shows that it is not self-evident: there is often more going on in a joke than the provocation of laughter; and more to an insult than the wish to offend. *Skopostheorie*’s strategies for limiting dissemination paradoxically reveal its presence, for if dissemination did not always threaten, if it were not always incipiently in play, why would it have to be limited?

There is, then, a complex and interactive relationship between the ideas of translation as transport and as dissemination, with each at once combating and stimulating the other. It is only because there is a plurality of possible translations that any given translator can imagine herself to be striving for the best equivalent: a translation can only be ‘right’ if it could have been ‘wrong’. Equally, it is only because each translator strives for the best rendering that a plurality of translations is, over time, created: the desire to be right becomes a need to improve on previous translations; and you can only improve on previous translations by adding another one to their number.

ii. The prism of translation

This complicated relationship between translation as transport and as dissemination produces tensions in the way translators talk about their work, as they often both recognise and resist the actual and potential plurality of translations. Here, for instance, is the distinguished American translator and writer of short fiction, Lydia Davis, discussing her 2010 translation of *Madame Bovary*:

¹⁰ A useful summary and critique of the theory is in Joseph N. Eke, ‘Skopos translation theory, text-types, and the African postcolonial text in intercultural postcolonial communication. A theoretical reflection’. *Babel* 62.3 (2016), 349-69, p. 354

Not long ago, I was chatting with an older friend When he heard that I had just finished a translation of *Madame Bovary*, he said something like, ‘But *Madame Bovary* has already been translated. Why does there need to be another translation?’ or ‘But *Madame Bovary* has been available in English for a long time, hasn’t it? Why would you want to translate it again?’ Often, the idea that there can be a wide range of translations of one text doesn’t occur to people—or that a translation could be bad, very bad, and unfaithful to the original. ...¹¹

What interests me here is the switch from an apparently welcoming stance towards translation difference (‘there can be a wide range of translations of one text’) to a disciplinary attitude, implicitly grounded in ‘the classical model of transportable univocality or of formalizable polysemia’, according to which translation difference can only be caused by errors that need correcting: ‘a translation could be bad, very bad, and unfaithful to the original’.

Elsewhere in Davis’s discussion, the shift from our first to our second idea of translation is played out in more detail. Here is the positive phase:

But in the case of a book that appeared more than one hundred and fifty years ago, like *Madame Bovary*, and that is an important landmark in the history of the novel, there is room for plenty of different English versions

‘Room’ and ‘plenty’ sound warm and appreciative. And yet here at once is the switch to the negative:

.... For one thing, the first editions of the original text may have been faulty, and over the years one or more corrected editions have been published, so that the earliest English translations no longer match the most accurate original. (2) The earliest translators (as was the case with the Muirs rendering Kafka) may have felt they needed to inflict subtle or not so subtle alterations on the style and even the content of the original so as to make it more acceptable to the Anglophone audience; with the passing of time, we come to deem this something of a betrayal and ask for a more

¹¹ Lydia Davis, ‘Some Notes on Translation and on *Madame Bovary*’, *Paris Review* 198 (Fall 2011), 65-99, p. 65.

faithful version. (3) Earlier versions may simply not be as good in other respects as they could be—let another translator have a try.¹²

It is striking how the discourse of fault extends from printing errors which can indeed be corrected ('the original text may have been faulty') into areas of translation variance which could well be viewed with more tolerance. Davis's second point might better be described as a historical shift in conventions than a 'betrayal': after all, every translator needs to 'inflict ... alterations' on the source text in order to suit it to a new audience (indeed, that is quite a good definition of what translation is). And one might expect her third point to include some recognition that versions will inevitably differ simply because they are done by different translators, each of whom will have their own distinct feel for language. This, more than any failure to be 'as good ... as they could be', is the overriding reason why 'there is room for plenty of different English versions'.

It is easy to see the pressures that lead Davis to skew the field in this way. There are commercial pressures: publishers would rather market a version that claims to be 'better' than one that is merely 'different'. There are personal pressures too: the work of translation is arduous, and the hope of improving on previous versions is likely to be a stronger motivator than that of simply adding to them. Here is Davis encountering this anxiety:

It happened several times while I was doing the translation that I would open a newly discovered previous translation of *Madame Bovary* and my heart would sink. I would say to myself: Well, this is quite good! The work I'm doing may be pointless, after all! Then I would look more closely, and compare it to the original, and it would begin to seem less good. I would get to know it really well, and then it would seem completely inadequate.¹³

Alas, what a melancholy mode of friendship, in which deepening acquaintance provokes an ever more vivid perception of inadequacy! The reason for it lies, not so much in the discovery of fault, as in the process by which a translator arrives at her own version which is inevitably different from earlier translations (as from the source) simply by virtue of being hers, of being done through her interpretive imagination into her own particular way with words.

¹² Davis, 'Some Notes', p. 66.

¹³ Lydia Davis, 'Survival of the Fittest', <http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2010/09/20/survival-of-the-fittest/>, accessed 31st January, 2017.

Close attention to another translation can fuel this process by prompting and giving salience to different choices. Here is Davis at work:

For example, the following seems good enough, until I look at the original: ‘Ahead of them, a swarm of flies drifted along, humming in the warm air.’ But they were flitting (*voltigeait*), not drifting—a very different motion—and they were buzzing (*bourdonnant*), as flies do, not humming. (The ‘warm air’ (*air chaud*) is fine.)¹⁴

And here is the French she is translating, from Part II, Chapter 3:

Tous les deux, côte à côte, ils marchaient doucement, elle s'appuyant sur lui et lui retenant son pas qu'il mesurait sur les siens; devant eux, un essaim de mouches voltigeait, en bourdonnant dans l'air chaud.¹⁵

Neither of her choices simply corrects an error or straightforwardly ‘does better’. ‘Bourdonner’ can be rendered by ‘buzz’; but it might also be ‘hum’, or ‘murmur’, or ‘drone’ (machines and people can both ‘bourdonner’; a ‘bourdon’ can be the low rumbling of an organ or bagpipe). ‘Buzzing’ may be the most usual of these possible collocations for a swarm of flies, but that does not necessarily make it the best in this context (it is not simply what ‘flies do’): there are other factors to take into account such as the sound of the sentence and the mood of the scene. ‘Flit’ is the most common dictionary equivalent for ‘voltiger’, but again this is not the whole story. The complication here comes from the picture the French prose seems to be trying to evoke. Though strict grammar suggests otherwise (‘voltigeait’, singular, agrees with ‘essaim’, ‘swarm’), it is hard to see a whole swarm as ‘flitting’. Rather, each individual fly is probably ‘flitting’, while the swarm as a whole does something more like ‘drifting’, shimmeringly keeping ahead of the couple as they walk. To choose ‘flitting’ is to state one aspect of the picture and imply the other; to choose ‘drifting’ is to do the reverse. It is a matter of feel and style, not right and wrong.

Like any translator, Davis strives to make the best choices. But these can only be the choices that seem best to her, given the context in which she is writing, her feel for the two languages, her literary taste. When she looks at a previous translation, all these aspects of her

¹⁴ Davis, ‘Survival of the Fittest’.

¹⁵ Gustave Flaubert, *Madame Bovary: moeurs de province*, ed. Béatrice Didier, Paris, Le Livre de Poche, 1983, pp. 125-6

own practice are thrown into relief by contrast with the choices made by the earlier translator who was of course a different person, in a different cultural context, answering to different expectations, with different taste and feelings. In the heat of imaginative discovery, the differences might look like errors; and perhaps sometimes they are. But much more often they will be testament to the fuzziness of language and therefore the scope for variance in translation. Every word or sequence of words in the source text has a complex of meanings which will be apprehended by readers in diverse ways: the source text is itself a swarm of significance, at once hovering and flitting. When its readers are also translators, different translation choices will result. And these translations will, in turn, be taken in a range of ways by their own readers, for each translation is a swarm of significance too. Each buzzing or humming text stands somewhat to the side or in front of the source, interacting with it and departing from it, harmonising and clashing, obscuring and illuminating. More than any other mode of textuality, translation makes visible the shifts of dissemination. Any act of translation relies on, and conjures up, an awareness of the translation possibilities which, by virtue of its own existence, it has necessarily rejected. In this respect, all translation is what I call ‘prismatic translation’: a process which, in its endeavour to match the source text, cannot but release from it a plurality of meanings.

iii. Spectral media

The spectral rays generated by the prism of translation have tended to be obscured in modern European and North American cultures by the traditional ways of printing novels on paper, and by the reading practices which they nourish. Readers tend to commit to a novel and read forward through it. The possibility of looking at different translations feels inimical to that impetus of reading, especially when it involves turning to a different book (or indeed opening a different text on an e-reader). The comparison of translations seems to be a quite different practice from fiction-reading – something that might happen in the classroom, or as part of scholarly research.

With poetry, the situation is somewhat different. Poems, of course, are often shorter than novels, and ask for slower and more elaborative interpretation. There is a kinship between the enjoyment of metaphor and ambiguity in a poem and the exploration of multiple translations. So publications like Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz’s *Nineteen Ways of*

Looking at Wang Wei: How a Chinese Poem is Translated (1987), which exhibits and discusses multiple versions, seem less strange than would a notional *Nineteen Ways of Looking at Madame Bovary*. In print culture, poetry has generated textual proliferation in many different historical moments and in many different ways. In London, in 1854, a volume of Latin *Erotica* produced by the publisher Henry Bohn included English prose translations of Propertius's *Elegies* alongside versions into verse. In Paris, in 1675, Ruaeus's edition of Virgil included a paraphrase of the Roman poetry into more recent prose Latin, together with explanatory notes: similar procedures were often, and still are, adopted by editors of classical texts, and there are many other examples that might be given. The *Aeneid* is as big as some novels, and so raises the possibility that prismatic modes of presentation may be, to some extent, transferable to long prose texts despite the forward impetus that is characteristic of novel-reading. Further encouragement comes from the Bible, a text which bridges poetry and prose, and which has been massively paraphrased and annotated. Since the early sixteenth century, polyglot Bibles have made visible something of the rich translational textuality of that book, printing Hebrew source texts alongside the Greek Septuagint and Latin Vulgate translations, other relevant texts in languages including Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic, Chaldee, Ethiopian, Persian and Samaritan, and further translations into English or other modern tongues.¹⁶

The Bible is of course a very particular case. But it does provide a model for the presentation of multiple translations which might conceivably be applied to novels, so as to enable a reader's eye to flicker easily across from (for instance) this:

Tous les deux, côte à côte, ils marchaient doucement, elle s'appuyant sur lui et lui retenant son pas qu'il mesurait sur les siens; devant eux, un essaim de mouches voltigeait, en bourdonnant dans l'air chaud.

To this:

The two of them walked slowly, side by side, she leaning on him and he slowing his step to match hers; in front of them flitted a swarm of flies, buzzing in the warm air.¹⁷

¹⁶ Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edn, 2012, p. 76.

¹⁷ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, tr. Lydia Davis, London, Penguin, 2010, p. 84.

To this:

Both of them, side by side, walked slowly, she leaning on him and he curbing his step, measuring his pace to hers; in front of them, a swarm of flies hovered, buzzing in the warm air.¹⁸

To this (the version which Davis thought to be ‘completely inadequate’):

Together, side by side, they strolled along, she leaning on his arm and he slowing his stride to the measure of hers; ahead of them, a swarm of flies drifted along, humming in the warm air.¹⁹

If it were possible for our eyes to flit, or perhaps hover, or drift, back and forth between these parallel texts we could observe the shifts between a slightly more ‘dynamic’ rendering (in Nida’s classic terms) such as ‘strolled along’ and a slightly more ‘static’ one, such as ‘walked slowly’; between ‘leaning on his arm’ (dynamic) and ‘on him’ (static); and then between variants that are too subtle to be defined by that binary: ‘curbing’ and ‘slowing’; ‘match’, ‘measuring’ and ‘to the measure’; and the words that occupied Davis: ‘flitted’, ‘hovered’ and ‘drifting along’; ‘buzzing’ and ‘humming’. In doing so, we would not be looking for the ‘best’ reading but rather gaining a complex apprehension of the source by opening ourselves to its textuality as it plays out through the various textualities of its translations.

This might happen within the technology of the book. But there is greater scope for it in digital media, where texts can be layered and interwoven more fluidly than on the printed page, and where (as is well known) reading practices are correspondingly shifting. Websites increasingly gather multiple translations: for instance, romanianvoice.com offers Romanian poetry translated into six languages (though it does not make it easy to compare them), while biblegateway.com offers parallel presentation, and so easy comparison, of up to five texts from an enormous array of variant versions in English and sixty-two other languages. Computers can map the relation between different translations in the same language – as with the *Version Variation Visualisation* project at <https://sites.google.com/site/delightedbeautyws/>; and they can present them in ways that it is

¹⁸ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, tr. Adam Thorpe, London, Vintage Books, 2011, pp. 87-88.

¹⁹ Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*, tr. Geoffrey Wall, London, Penguin, p. 91.

possible to enjoy reading – as with the text comparison software developed by Stefan Jänicke at Leipzig (see figure 1.)

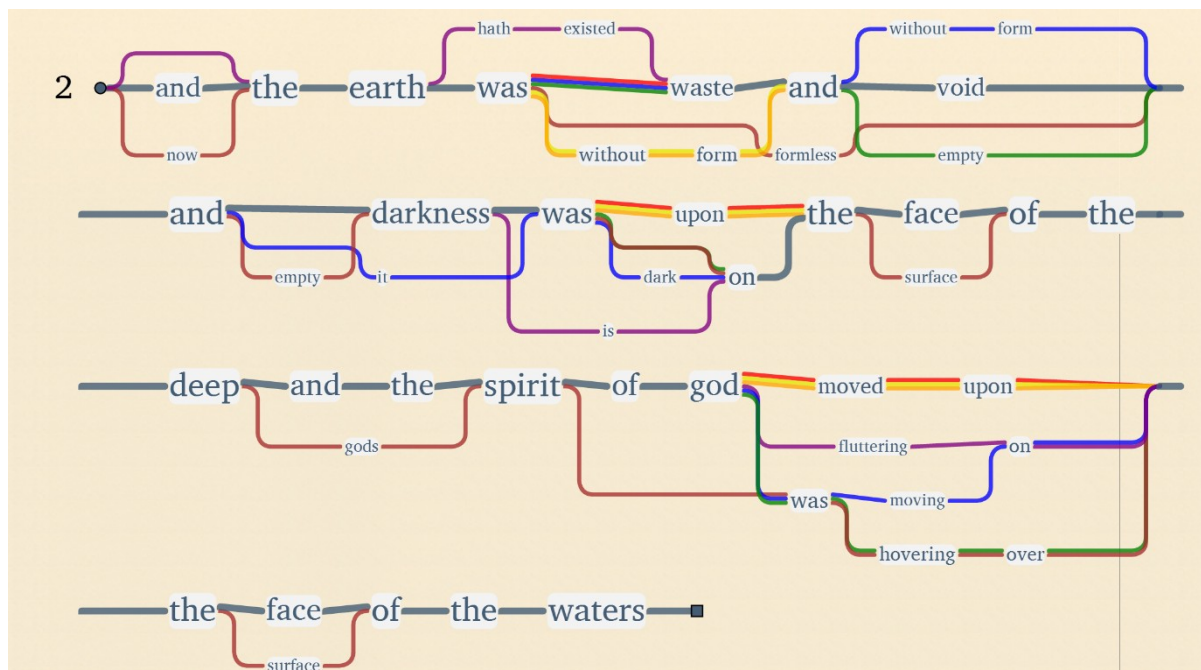


Figure 1. Stefan Jänicke, TraViz representation of varying Bible translations:
<http://www.informatik.uni-leipzig.de:8080/HolyBible> (accessed 18th January 2017).

Our variant versions of *Madam Bovary* could be laid out in a somewhat similar way, for instance like this:

Both of them, side by side, walked slowly, she leaning on him

The two of

Together

they strolled along

his arm

and he curbing his step, measuring his pace to hers; in front of them,

slowing

to match

stride to the measure of

; ahead

a swarm of flies hovered, buzzing in the warm air.

flitted

drifted along, humming

It would be interesting to see how readers might negotiate this sort of text (if they had the patience to do so at all); perhaps slowing their own mental stride at interesting moments to register the hum or buzz of tongues, and pressing ahead with a single version when the impetus of the narrative becomes more compelling. In digital media the variants might generally be hidden and only appear at the click of a mouse or touch of a finger. It is possible to imagine a whole landscape of variant translations, through which readers are enabled to make their way with different detours and at different speeds.

Partial precedents for this sort of plural textuality, and corresponding modes of reading, can be found in the work of some contemporary English-language print-poets who have brought prismatic translation into their creative practice. Anne Carson's 'A Fragment of Ibykos Translated Six Ways' (2012) remakes the words of the ancient Greek into different sets of English lexis: first into a comparatively neutral style which has traits in common with scholarly translation and with Carson's own verse; then into vocabulary drawn substantially from John Donne's poem 'Woman's Constancy', from 'Bertolt Brecht's FBI file #100-67077', from 'p. 47 of *Endgame* by Samuel Beckett', from 'pp. 136-37 of *Conversations with Kafka* by Gustav Janouch', from 'stops and signs from the London Underground', and from 'pp. 17-18 of *The Owner's Manual* of my new Emerson 1000W microwave oven'. The only words that remain constant between the versions provide a structure for the varying vocabularies and scenes: 'on the one hand, / ... On the other hand .../ Nay rather...'. The material organised by these phrases reveals the differing textures that the conglomeration of usages called 'English', or perhaps 'American-Canadian-English', can have, and explores how far an emotional shape can re-assert itself in quite different situations, as the scene-setter 'In spring' is transformed successively into 'In woman', 'At a cocktail party attended by known Communists', 'In your kitchen', 'In the end', 'At the excess fare window', and 'In hot snacks and appetisers'. As you read on from one version to the next, something of what has gone before lingers in your mind, creating a nebulously metaphorical relationship between the parallel phrases, and opening up a swarm of connotation. It is a more nuanced and vaster analogue to 'hum/buzz' or 'Both of / the two of / together'.

Another recent creative instance of prismatic translation is by the English scholar and print-poet Angela Leighton, and is made from Leonardo Sciascia's sequence 'La Sicilia, il suo cuore' ('Sicily, its heart'). For each poem of Sciascia's, Leighton offers 'two translations' which have some kinship to the 'two translations' theorised by Derrida: 'the first' – she says – is 'a fairly strict rendering which conveys the sense and syntax, line by line, but loses, in the process, the rhythm of poetry; the second a free version which takes the original and gives a part interpretation, part variation on a theme'. Leighton sees translation as occurring neither in the strict rendering nor the free version but – if anywhere – between them: 'between strict and free renderings, adherence to sense and adherence to the makings of a poem in English, I have tried to catch something of the original, even if only "between".'²⁰ As she sees it, there needs to be more than one version for the work of translation – the catching of something – to be able to happen.

The first two-voiced poem is 'Sicily, its Heart' (as with all the translations, the 'strict' and 'free' texts share the same title). It presents a still, silent landscape with (I quote from the 'strict' version) 'curdled clouds, / crows flying slowly down; ... burned stubble ... sparse trees ... naked heat'; it is 'a myopic mirror of pain'. At what feels like the heart of this poem about Sicily's heart, the silence is summed up, and then cracked:

Silence gobbles everything up.
It cracks, if the pan-pipes
sound a strain, spreading profound panic.

Or, in the 'free' version:

Here, silence feasts on its own heart.

But listen. Catch
the faintest stirrings of an antique flute,
panicky, profound. Tears well up,
blurring the wellsprings.²¹

²⁰ Angela Leighton, *Spills*, Manchester, Carcanet, 2016, p. 145.

²¹ Leighton, *Spills*, pp. 146-7.

Sciascia's Italian is not included in the published volume, so reading involves a strange combination of plenitude and lack: two versions of something, but not the something they are versions of. Leighton's 'strict' translation is on the left-hand page, where the source-text would be in a standard parallel text, so there is a hint that we should take the right-hand version as a translation of, or deviation from, the left-hand one: 'feasts on' grows out of 'gobbles', 'antique flute' departs from 'pan-pipes'.

The Italian text which started the successive substitutions is not widely published, and not available online. But when I track it down in a university library, it turns out that the distinction between 'strict' and 'free' is not as straightforward as we might have assumed. In terms of form, the right-page text does indeed depart from the source more than the left-page one: it has the liberty to leave out lines and introduce new ideas. On the other hand, at the level of word choice, it is sometimes impossible to decide which version is more 'strict'. As in the lines we have begun to explore:

Il silenzio è vorace sulle cose.
 S'incrina, se il flauto di canna
 tenta vena di suono: e una fonda paura dirama.²²

'Everything' (from the 'strict' translation) is indeed closer to 'cose' than is 'heart' (from the 'free' one), just as we would expect. But 'feasts on' ('free') is perhaps nearer to 'è vorace su' than is 'gobbles' ('strict'), just as 'antique flute' ('free') is perhaps more like 'flauto di canna' than is 'Pan-pipes' ('strict'). The variants reveal the wrongness – when one is working at this level of nuance – of thinking that there is some meaning simply 'in' the source text against which the translations can be measured for closeness or distance. Physically, a 'flauto di canna' looks very like the instruments that in English are called a 'recorders' or 'bamboo flutes' – but the connotations of both those terms are culturally at odds with the scene Sciascia is picturing. In opting for 'antique flute', Leighton sketches one swarm of meanings; in opting for Pan-pipes she sketches another; and both of them both blend and clash with the swarm of meanings in the source. Perhaps it is the recognition that there is no vein of sound – no 'vena di suono' – in the source that can simply be heard and reproduced, simply diverted into English, that prompts Leighton's renderings to be so hummily or buzzily intermingled at just this point. Reading the Italian, we cannot tell if the flauto di canna does actually sound,

²² Leonardo Sciascia, *Opere 1984-1989*, a. c. di Claude Ambroise, Milano, Bompiani, 1991, p. 973.

or if what is being imagined is just the possibility of its sounding; and the same is true in both Leighton's versions. There is more of the implication that it is just a possibility in the 'strict' version ('if the pan-pipes / sound'), and more of an actual sounding in the 'free' one ('listen. Catch'); but both remain ambiguous.

'Catch' is the word Leighton used for what she hoped these versions would do to their source texts ('I have tried to catch something of the original, even if only "between"'). When the word reappears in the verse-version, it becomes evident that in reading, and therefore in translation, there is no sure line between catching and thinking that you have caught, between hearing and imagining that you have heard. In the Sciascia poem, the uncertainty as to whether the flute does or does not sound contributes to a probing of the relationship between culture and nature: how far do myths associated with a landscape really belong there? In what sense can they be 'heard'? This question persists into Leighton's prismatic versions, where it combines with thoughts about translation that are similar to those we have been pursuing in relation to 'textualité/y' and *Madame Bovary*. Since translation does not simply replay a 'vein of sound', since there is not simply a sense in the source text that can be reproduced in translation, the desire to 'catch' is perpetually undercut by the impossibility of catching, which in turn re-awakens the desire to catch. Translation can therefore never be finished; and its drive towards a purely notional completion inevitably generates multiples. Prismatic modes of translating, and of presenting translations, invite readers to participate in this play or agon of interpretation by allowing them to experience the hum or buzz of tongues.