

THE TRANSLATION OF NON-STANDARD LANGUAGE IN LITERARY WORKS

ALET KRUGER

Department of Linguistics (Translation Studies)
University of South Africa

The aim of this article is not to discuss translation theory, or to lay down aesthetic norms for the assessment of the quality of translated literary works. Neither is it the author's intention to discuss here the reasons why, or the manner in which, writers present non-standard language in literary works. Rather, the aim is to investigate some of the typical problems that face the translator who attempts to translate non-standard Afrikaans in literary works into an equivalent non-standard variety of English.

If we accept an extreme form of the Whorfian hypothesis in terms of which the world view imposed by one's native language is dominant and longlasting in its effects, translation would, in principle, be impossible. On the other hand, if we acknowledge the existence of language and culture universals, we can accept the Exact Translation Hypothesis according to which "anything that can be said in one natural language can be translated exactly into any other language" (Keenan, 1978: 157).

However, why is it that despite the existence of formal and substantive linguistic and cultural universals which form a *tertium comparationis* between two languages, the non-standard varieties of such languages cause the translator such problems? And in this particular case the view is held that it seems to be much easier to translate a non-standard variety of English into an equivalent non-standard variety of Afrikaans than vice versa.

The key term here is equivalence, if we accept Juliane House's (1981: 29 - 30) definition of translation as "the replacement

of a text in the source language by a semantically and pragmatically equivalent text in the target language". And, as the first requirement for semantic-pragmatic equivalence House posits that "the translation text must have a function equivalent to that of the source text" (House, 1981: 30).

In the following discussion some of the typical difficulties facing the translator who is confronted with non-standard language in a text will be elucidated *viz*:

- . finding an equivalent non-standard variety in the target language (TL);
- . overcoming cultural differences between source language (SL) and TL;
- . indicating sociolinguistic differences by means of register, style and code-switching;
- . indicating idiolectal features;
- . translating an unsystematic and inconsistent presentation of non-standard language in the Source Text (ST); and
- . deciding on additions and omissions in the Target Text (TT).

Quite a number of literary works in which a non-standard variety of English appear, have been translated into Afrikaans. In *Twaalfde Nag (Twelfth Night)* Uys Krige managed successfully to turn the Shakespearean *Stat de langue* between Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Sir Toby Belch into convincing unsophisticated non-standard contemporary "Boere-Afrikaans" between Sir Tobie Wynvat and Sir Andries Bibberbakkies, e.g. "Tut, man" was turned into "Nonsies, man" and "absence" into "opsent" (Van Heerden, 1964). A definite gain for Afrikaans is found in a comic cultural addition such as:

"Shall we rouse the nightowl in a catch that will draw three souls out of one weaver? shall we do that?"

* * *

"Sal ons die naguil opjaag met 'n deuntjie wat selfs 'n Dopper aan die dans sal laat spring ... sal ons insit, vrinde?"

From the opening lines of André P. Brink's translation of *Playboy of the Western World (Bobaas van die Boendoe)* the following:

PEGEEN: Six yards of stuff for to make a yellow gown. A pair of lace boots with lengthy heels on them and brassy eyes. A hat is suited for a wedding-day. A fine-tooth comb. To be sent with three barrels of porter in Jimmy Farrell's creel cart on the evening of the coming Fair to Mister Michael James Flaherty. With the best compliments of this season. Margaret Flaherty.

SHAWN KEOGH: Where's himself?

PEGEEN: He's coming. To Mister Sheamus Mulroy, Wine and Spirit Dealer, Castlebar.
(she directs letter)

SHAWN: I didn't see him on the road.

PEGEEN: How would you see him and it dark night this half-hour gone by?

* * *

MAGRIET: Ses jaarts teffeta vir 'n brylofstawwerd.
(skrywend) Een paar haaipolfaai-steweltjies met blink gespers. En 'n stuk net vir 'n weil. En 'n kammetjie met fyn tanne. Saam met drie vaatjies vaaljapie op Peet Tanne se bus die Vrydag net voor Nieuwejaar, C.O.D. aan Migiel Vlooi. Met die compliments of the season. Magriet Vlooi.

SEEF: En-en waa's hy dan so likely?

MAGRIET: Hy kom. Mister P.J. Koekemoer, Algemene Handelaar en Produktekooper, Bredasdorp.
(adresseer die brief)

SEEF: Het hom nie gesien oppie pad laans nie.

MAGRIET: En hoe wil jy hom siet hier innie pikgitstikdonkerte? Met die onweer, de lot. Kyk hoe lyk dit. Is van allie Amerikaners oppie maan lat mens nou al Desembermaand moet sta' vuur maak. Of bose geeste.

Brink managed to overcome most of the 'typical difficulties' listed above. He found an equivalent "idiom" and "texture" in Afrikaans that gave new meaning to the Irish peasantry by

changing his *Boendoe* characters into Coloured fishermen speaking "Kaapse Afrikaans" (the non-standard variety of Afrikaans spoken by the Coloured in the Cape Province). He therefore had no difficulty substituting "vaaljapie" for "porter" and "Nieujaar" for "the coming Fair".

Unsubstantiated additions will harm a translation and the inclusion of new information can never be allowed as that would be considered a violation of a major principle of translation, *viz* that of faithfulness to the original. However, Brink cleverly added information by explicitly expanding Magriet's argument.

"Is van allie Amerikaners oppie maan lat mens nou al Desember maand moet sta' vuur maak. Of bose geeste".

Another translation worth mentioning is Chris Barnard's translation of Steinbeck's *Of mice and men* (*Man en muis*), if only to agree with Summerton's criticism (Summerton, 1978: 1 - 36) that because the translator failed to find an appropriate equivalent non-standard variety in Afrikaans the character presentation has been sociolinguistically marred. In most cases profane language in the original was either completely ignored or translated with euphemisms. In the following extract "flop" was omitted, "sheriff" mistranslated as "landdros" and the fact that a drink costs two "bits" - a footnote would have explained a "bit" as 1/8 dollar - was ignored.

'Jus' the usual thing. We go in to old Susy's place. Hell of a nice place. Old Susy's a laugh - always crackin' jokes. Like she says when we come up on the front porch las' Sat'day night. Susy opens the door and then she yells over her shoulder: "Get yor coats on, girls, here comes the sheriff." She never talks dirty, neither. Got five girls there.'

'What's it set you back?' George asked.

'Two an' a half. You can get a shot for two bits. Susy got nice chairs to set in, too. If a guy don't want a flop, why he can jest set in the chairs and have a couple or three shots and pass the time of day and Susy don't give a damn. She ain't rushing guys through and kickin' 'em out if they don't want a flop.'

* * *

"A, jy weet ... Ou Suzie se losieshuis. Helse soort losieshuis darie. Ou Suzie is 'n doring - maak aljimmers grappe en dinge. Soos laaste Sat'ragaand toe ons daar aankom, sien,

maak sy die deur oop en sy skree oor haar skouer, "Sit op julle hoedjies, dames, hier kommie landdros!" Nooit 'n vuil woord oor haar lippe nie. Sy't vyf meisiemense daar."

"Jy't vergeet om jou punte by te skryf," se George. "Ek sil nou. Ek's klaar anie verloor. Ou Suzie het 'n lekker ou sitkamertjie. As 'n man die aand nie lus voel virrie vroumense nie, loop sit jy net daar en maak 'n snapsie en Suzie gee nie 'n hel ommie. Sy jaag g'n niemand an nie - die anner smyt 'n mens uit as jy nie die aand 'n meisiemens wil he nie."

Barnard has however succeeded in rendering an acceptable pragmatic translation of Steinbeck's novel by making use of phonological deviations in the standard vernacular and including deviant forms which do not appear in the standard.

In a study of some English translations of literary works containing a non-standard variety of Afrikaans it becomes evident that it seems to be much easier to translate a sociolect into Afrikaans than into English. The reason is that South African English (SAE), as a geographical dialect of English, has a limited number of sociolects, while Afrikaans seems to be much more "shaded" sociolinguistically. Although Branford (1980) claims that SAE is a "mixed bag", Afrikaans, because of its development from a number of standard and non-standard language varieties, has a whole range of sociolinguistically active non-standard varieties and vernaculars e.g. "Kaapse Afrikaans" (Coloured Afrikaans), and Black Afrikaans. Although SAE is a "mixed bag" it lacks sociolects equivalent to those in Afrikaans mentioned above. Even though there should not be any problems in translating anything said in non-standard Afrikaans into non-standard English, most translators to date have opted for a pragmatic translation strategy and chose to render the sections consisting of non-standard Afrikaans into a simple form of standard SAE, interspersed with Afrikaans words, deviant spelling and phonetic idiosyncracies to suggest an equivalent sociolect.

In her article on the problems experienced with the translation of *Die swerfjare van Poppie Nongena* (*The long journey of Poppie Nongena*), Elsa Joubert (1983: 47 - 61) explains why she insisted on simple standard English, retaining some Afrikaans and Xhosa words and with some direct translations in order "to assume the tone of voice of the original".

She admits that something certainly got lost in the translation, that a sentence such as "Ek like nie om gepush te worde nie" proved to be untranslatable. Another non-standard expression

that caused problems was "canfruitbottles" and although she considered "fruit jars" or "glass jars", in the end "canned fruit bottles" was regarded as a bona fide RSA expression!

In many cases cultural differences caused problems as well: the authoress insisted on having "rooi baba" translated as "red baby" which elicited the following comment from her editor: "I can understand a tiny white baby being called a red baby, but ... are tiny black babies reddish too?" Any reader who is not familiar with the fact that "rooi baba" is derived from the Xhosa word *usana olubomvu* which refers to the placenta, will never be able to enjoy the "strong emotional appeal" of this term! Why then insist on the inclusion of such a term in the translation?

Another more recent best seller than *Poppie*, was also translated into a number of languages and again the issue to be considered is the fact that much of the colourfulness of the non-standard variety of Afrikaans that is used in the original gets lost in the English translation.

As in the case of *Poppie*, no equivalent non-standard variety of English could be found for the "Bos-Afrikaans" used by the Knysna woodcutters in *Kringe in 'n bos (Circles in a forest)* by Dalene Matthee. Again an attempt was made to achieve a successful translation of the non-standard Afrikaans by making use of simple standard English. As a result many of the non-standard Afrikaans expressions were translated into colloquial English, not into a non-standard variety. In some cases anglicized Afrikaans expressions had to be translated back into standard English expressions, e.g.

spaaï spy
goewerment government, etc.

and therefore these words lost their non-standard "colour". Sometimes the simple English aimed at resulted in unidiomatic and unintelligible English, e.g.

engeles (engele) angelings (angels)
Die gal sit in sy kop the gall sits in its head.

Problems in respect of register also mar character presentation, e.g. Joram Barnard's "bewaar vir die nageslagte" is translated as "conserve for posterity". Both *conserve* and *posterity* are derived from Latin (*conservare*; *posteritas*) and are words that would never have been used by the "Kitchen Dutch" speaking woodcutters. Joram would never have spoken in this register to a fellow woodcutter either. The general impression is that, al-

though a pragmatic translation strategy was followed, the translation fails to give the reader an idea of the sociolect used by the woodcutters.

In *Kennis van die aand* André P. Brink again makes use of "Kaapse Afrikaans", the medium he chose as translation equivalents in *Bobaas van die Boendoe* and in *Kinkels innie kabel*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors*.

Even though an "appropriate" non-standard equivalent might exist in English, the unsystematic and inconsistent presentation of the non-standard variety in the SL could cause the translator endless problems.

Apart from allowing the protagonist in *Kennis* to show traits of sociolinguistically unconvincing style shifting from non-standard Coloured Afrikaans to perfect Standard Afrikaans, within (almost) the same paragraph, Brink also made use of phonological deviations in such an inconsistent way that they cannot be defended by the fact that inconsistencies do form part of an individual's idiolect.

In his translation of *Kennis (Looking on darkness)*, Brink translated the non-standard variety of Afrikaans *viz* Coloured Afrikaans, into a simulated equivalent "Coloured English". However, no such equivalent exists because, according to an HSRC report (Scheffer, 1983) although Afrikaans speaking Coloureds include English words both consciously and subconsciously in a sociolect (Coloured Afrikaans), English speaking Coloureds (mostly in metropolitan areas) show a preference for the use of Standard English. This fact seems to bear out the statement made earlier that SA English is not as "shaded" as Afrikaans.

Brink's translation, although attempting a transposition of a sociolect in the SL to the TL, fails to make credible the English speech of a Cape Coloured person as anything more than an idiolect:

Wil ek ma' sê. Om hom soe te gelat staan het. Ek moet mal gewies het, ma' is mos soe. As die liefde jou vat, wat maak jy anners? Is nie lat ek my pa nie gelief het nie, ma' mens is mos ma' net ienmal swiet sixteen en de lot, en Jirre die lewe was ok nie moonlight en roses nie. En toe die man nou kom, en wit da' by, wat het ek gewiet van nee sê? Dis diekant toe en daaikant toe, ma' ek staat vol innie blom en is blom wat hy soek. Iers was hy gewies, 'n mooie soe met sy rooi bakkebaard saam. Ma' my pa, sê ek vi' hom. Moenie worry nie, sê hy, ons sil jou pa regsien. Kom saam met my

Baai toe, dan vat ons die skippietjie, en as ons eers oorkant die water in Ierland sit, dan stier ons vi' jou pa geld lat hy nie wiet watter kant toe nie.

* * *

As what I'm saying mos. To leave him jus' like that. Must've been med I was, but what do you do when love take you? It's not, no, as what I didn' love my fa'rer, but jiss, one's only swiet sixteen once in a lifetime hey, and it's not as if it was all roses and moonshine. So this men come en' he's white en' oll, so what could I say! Thisaway en' thataway, but there I was, full in the flower en' it's mos flower what he's looking for. Irishman they sed he were, en' suts a nice men too with that red beard. But what about my fa'rer, I said to him. Don' worry men, he said, I'll fix yo' fa'rer. Jus' come with me to Port Lizbit en' we take the shippietjie beck to Ireland, then we send yo' fa'rer money like he never sawed befo'.

In the extract above there are forms included that are not necessarily peculiar to SAE, even at a sub-standard level e.g.

fa'rer
thisaway
thataway
yo'.

A lexical item such as *mos* is used, according to Branford (1980) "redundantly in South African English". And *hey* as in "once in a lifetime hey" is also prevalent in SAE, but not exclusively to it (Branford 1980). The translation of the already artificial *skippietjie* by the improbable *shippietjie* and *Port Lizbit* for *Baai* mar the speaker's idiolect.

The reader's participation is indirectly invited in the elicitation of sympathy for the speaker by strong reference to the hardships she has been suffering:

"en Jirre, die lewe was ok nie moonlight en roses nie".

In the translation, for an unaccountable reason, this is changed to

"it's not as if it was all roses and moonshine".

The speech in the translation seems contrived, a conglomeration of stereotyped forms of sub-standard English, a caricature composed of elements of American Black English and expressions from

American westerns (*thisaway, thataway*) interspersed with some elements of Coloured Afrikaans. The sympathy that the ST arouses in the reader gets lost in the translation.

It is neither possible nor appropriate to tender eventual conclusions about such a large and complicated field in what must necessarily be a brief and tentative paper. For the purposes of this publication, however, it is pertinent to restate what occurs earlier merely as a sub-conclusion. It would appear that, for reasons that are difficult to determine, but interesting to pursue, SAE lacks the variety and flexibility of sociolects that are manifest in Afrikaans. This can be determined most clearly in discrepancies between the non-standard linguistic phenomena of the two languages. Would it be too daring to suggest that these shortcomings in SAE are attributable to colonial presumptions and blind adherence to them, to political isolation and alienation or possibly to lack of cultural identity?

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