'You pays your money and you takes your choice': translating Nathalie Sarraute's *Les Fruits d'Or* into English.

An inescapable dilemma faces all translators at all times: how close to the original should the translation be? The dilemma can be in part resolved by considering the purpose of the translation and its target readership. Of course. But the dilemma is never banished entirely. For the purposes of this article, may I assume that I have been commissioned to translate Nathalie Sarraute's novel, *Les Fruits d'Or* for an English-speaking readership? That being the case, let us look first at a short extract from the novel and then at two different theoretical approaches to translation, to see in what ways they can help resolve the dilemma.

The extract

Nous sommes tous ici, n'est-ce pas, de même espèce, de même couleur, de même race, de même confession et de même rang. Soudés en un seul bloc. Il n'y a et il ne peut y avoir ici, entre nous, aucun paria. Aussi, avec une certitude qui tous nous honore, avec la ferme assurance de ne faire rougir personne, avec une fraternelle confiance je peux vous regarder droit dans les yeux et répéter avec force ce que chacun sait déjà : ceux qui, encore aujourd'hui, admirent Les Fruits d'Or sont des sots…

Mais moi, ça me brûle, ça m'incommode… Cette fraternelle et innocente confiance qui répand sur nous ses rayons dans lesquels, très détendus, paresseusement tous ici se chauffent et se dorent, moi, elle me fait mal au cœur, la tête me tourne, elle va me donner une insolation, je dois me protéger, voilà, je vais me dresser et interposer entre elle et moi cet écran : Mais moi, vous savez, moi je dois vous avouer que pour ma part, Les Fruits d'Or, j'aime beaucoup ça.

N. Sarraute: *Les Fruits d'Or* , 189-190

The novel was published in 1963, Nathalie Sarraute's fifth, coming after *Le Planétarium* (1959) and before *Vous les entendez?* (1972) and *Enfance* (1983). The latter two novels are highly significant for an understanding of Sarraute's writing, as shown by John Phillips, 1994, who, with incisive clarity and perspicacity examines how metaphor and fairy-tale permeate Sarraute's writing. As a *Nouveau roman*, *Les Fruits d'Or* pays little attention to specific fictional characters or to plot, and instead brings the art-form itself into

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sharp focus. Language, the wielding of language as a code or tool, take centre-stage. It is language as a deeply symbolic system conveying meaning at a deep, sub-conscious level as well as at a surface, playful level. Les *Fruits d'Or* is imbued with this principle.

The source text is attractive from several different points of view. Formally, it is almost perfectly balanced, with two paragraphs, roughly equivalent in word-length. The first paragraph is composed of four sentences, the last of which is long. The second paragraph has but two sentences, the second being very long indeed.

The paragraphs are of course antithetical. They are ostensibly about a novel called *Les Fruits d'Or* (a nice example of *mise en abyme*, given that the title of Sarraute's novel is also *Les Fruits d'Or*), but they are also about everyone of us and our need for self-definition. Reference to the *je* of the narrator occurs only once in paragraph one, where, on the contrary, the focus is on the group as expressed in *nous* (three occurrences) and *même* (five occurrences in the same sentence). The first paragraph contains many 'solidarity' words, mostly nouns (*espèce, couleur, race, confession, rang, soudés, bloc, certitude, honore, ferme assurance, fraternelle confiance, avec force*) and a few 'rejection' words (*paria, faire rougir, sots*). Thus the first 'conceit' is constructed: it is a position of connivance, complicity, belonging, trust, confidence, engendered by a common set of beliefs and values tested by the appearance of a despicable novel, and found to be satisfactory in its role as social glue. This is tribalism as practised by aesthetes and intellectuals.

But what happens if an individual ceases to subscribe to the accepted set of values? The second paragraph is light in tone, but extremely serious in implication. Whereas paragraph one started with the all-inclusive, maternal-sounding *Nous sommes* (nasal consonants, rounded vowels), the second paragraph, also ironically using nasal consonants, this time in alliteration, cuts the flow, opposes in no uncertain terms the singular *moi* to the inclusive *nous*. There are no fewer than thirteen occurrences of either *moi* or *me* in the paragraph, reflecting perhaps the agitation of the narrator, who has now changed camps. Whereas the solidarity of the first paragraph was premised on negativity and rejection of a new artistic

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phenomenon, the rebellion of the second paragraph is triggered by positive, welcoming feelings towards the newcomer, even if these lead inevitably to rejection of the group. The lightness and the polarity of the second paragraph seem to be made possible by the French language – the repeated *moi* and *me* are in no sense overwhelming, perhaps because of the softness of that 'm' sound, and French is fortunate to possess a first person emphatic pronoun which is so economical, and dare I say, poetic.

The second paragraph presents many physical, combative words – this time mostly verbs – *brûle, incommode, fait mal au coeur, la tête me tourne, une insolation, protéger, dresser, interposer, écran*, while evoking as a backdrop the warmth and confidence enjoyed by the conformists.

The extract, as a cameo, is brought alive by the device of the narrator apparently speaking directly to us, *Je peux vous regarder droit dans les yeux, Je dois vous avouer que pour ma part*. One can see the poetic parallelism at word level, the assertiveness of the narrator-as-groupie and the apologetic tentativeness of the narrator-as-rebel, but who exactly is *vous*? *Vous* inevitably draws readers in, but we, as readers, seem to be assigned changing roles. In paragraph one we are part of the group and are being convinced of the need to reject, but in paragraph two we are confessors, being asked to listen to an affirmation of independence. It probably does not matter what role we are asked to play, since what we are really doing, as readers, is supporting the interplay of *je-nous* by encapsulating it in a make-believe live act of oral communication. The *vous* affirms what Roman Jakobson, 1960: 350-357, would term the phatic function of the text, its ability to communicate and ensure that it is heard.

The above is what the source text means to me. I have tried to describe the effect of the text, which I, as a translator, would like to convey to a new target readership. This, of course, begs the question of whether my reading is shared by other readers, in particular native speaker readers. I have no answer to that question.

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As a translator, what strategy should I employ? Should I remain as close as possible to the source text on the grounds that readers want it 'pure and unadulterated', or should I attempt to anglicise the wording a little, with the aim of creating a text which is both enjoyable to read, <u>and</u> able to convey the spirit of the original, as I see it? In order to resolve the dilemma, let us explore two very different theoretical approaches to translation. Further on, we will examine implications of a 'foreignising' approach, but for now, let us consult some of the tenets of relevance theory.

The theory was first propounded by Sperber and Wilson (1986), as a theory of communication, not necessarily applied to translation. The theory holds that every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance

> In its simplest form, an act of ostensive communication might comprise a speaker making a statement which is received and interpreted by a listener. In such a case, it is clear that for the listener to understand the statement, he/she must at least believe that it contains some relevance to him/her. As a listener, I project on to what I hear, an interpretation which is coloured by the statement's perceived relevance to me. (Sperber and Wilson, 1986: 158)

In 1991, Ernst August Gutt, who has major experience of Bible translation, evolved a theory of translation based on relevance theory. According to Gutt, the translator must be aware of the statement's relevance to the listener if it is to be translated adequately. This is a truly awe-inspiring idea. In the case of the Sarraute text, the act of communication is deferred and indirect. There is no oral statement immediately heard and interpreted, there is an artefact which conveys a multiplicity of meanings, and which will be received in times and places far removed from those of the original text. It is surely the case that neither author nor translator can know in what ways the text will have relevance for future readers, or even, for that matter, for 'contemporary' readers. I conclude from this that ultimately, relevance theory as applied to translating, seems bound to fail: it cannot enable us to know what a 'good' translation is because it has no foolproof way of defining the full relevance of a text for all receivers of that text. Therefore the criteria it purports to use are impossible to apply. End of story? Well no, not quite, because relevance theory is a laudable and exciting attempt to apply a theory of communication to a particular type of

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communication which is far more complex than the original model of speaker-statement-listener. Even if we accept that we will never know exactly what relevance a text has had, has, or will have on its receivers, we are at least alerted to the fact that it might contain several different relevances. Within this framework, a translator should strive to be aware of all possible relevances a text might have, including those available to the text's author. Phrased thus, and this is a personal view, relevance theory does not make us seek out something impossible, but rather encourages us to seek the multiple possible relevances or meanings present in the text to be translated.

Relevance theory offers a tool for identifying relevances: it is called the communicative clue and is contained in stylistic features which 'provide clues that guide the audience to the interpretation intended by the communicator' (Gutt, 2000: 134). As Gutt said in a lecture given at University College, London, in May 2002, the clues can be elusive in that they are not inherent properties of verbal stimuli. If I understand that correctly, they convey features such as humour, irony or artistry which may be supra-verbal. He went on to say that when one compared a source text with a target text, it is not the texts one is comparing, but the relation between the intended interpretations (see also Gutt, 2000: 233). Relevance theory, he maintained, 'helps constrain the range of possible interpretations. One must look for the contextual effects the original author was most likely to have intended.'

One can see that this last statement still begs many questions, such as Who knows what the original author most likely intended?. Nonetheless, it is recognised that work on the source text is essential if a translator is to get anywhere near apprehending it in its entirety. Entirety? This can only mean becoming aware of possible ambiguities and interpretations, of at least some of its contextual features, both as they reflect its original context, and as they might impact on a new context, and above all of the communicative clues that the author has buried in the text, rather as if we, as professionals, were tracking an animal in the bush.

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I offer now a translation of the source text which purports to be the result of analysing the communicative clues and attempting to incorporate them as 'relevantly' as possible in a target text which invites comparison of 'the intended interpretations'. This target text was arrived at after many drafts and much discussion in a student group. Readers may like to check out the commentary on it, attached as an Appendix.

Target Text A

> We're all of a kind here, aren't we, same colour, same race, same religion, same rank. United in a single solid block. Amongst us, there never has been and never could be any pariah. So, with an assurance which does credit to us all, firm in the knowledge that none of us will have cause to blush, and with the confidence born of belonging, I can look you straight in the eye and emphatically confirm what we all already know, namely, 'Anyone who still has time for *The Golden Fruit* is a fool...'

> But wait, I am burning, I feel uncomfortable… Everyone here is lazily, languidly sunning himself, basking in the warm rays of the sweet confidence born of belonging. Well, I feel sick, I feel dizzy, I'm going to get sunstroke, I must do something about it, right, I'll sit up and use this statement as a sunshield: 'You know, I have to admit that actually, I think *The Golden Fruit* is great'.

Following Sarraute's antithetical literary construction, let me now argue for a completely different approach.

Arguments about how faithful a translation should be are never far away from any discussion about translation. Whereas relevance theory sidesteps the issue in a way, by focusing on intentions and interpretations, another approach, which I shall call the foreignising approach, faces the issue head on, and comes up with a rather disturbing answer. The first person to articulate forcefully and coherently a theory of foreignising translation was Friedrich Schleiermacher, a protestant German theologian who lived from 1768 to 1834. According to Lawrence Venuti, whose recent writings have done much to

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provoke thought and discussion on this issue, Schleiermacher lived at a time when the German elite was somewhat complacent, and when French dominated the cultural scene. What seems to have led Schleiermacher to promote foreignising translation was (a) he wanted to shake up the complacent elite, and (b) he wanted to react against French domination and culture by attacking the tradition of domesticating translation prevalent in France at the time. French would admit no foreign incursion: it was narrow-minded and blinkered. Underlying this were passionate feelings of nationalism, a need to prove that the German language was all the stronger for opening itself to other ways of seeing and other ways of saying.

> Schleiermacher's nationalist theory of foreignizing translation aims to challenge French hegemony not only by enriching German culture, but by contributing to the formation of a liberal public sphere, an area of social life in which private individuals exchange rational discourse and exercise political influence. (Venuti, 1995: 109)

It was a short step from this laudable aim of tolerance and openness to a belief that all this foreignness was best mediated to the world at large through the German language. We can see how that line of reasoning is entirely compatible with subsequent disastrous drives for political and cultural hegemony. It is helpful to understand the impetus behind Schleiermacher's promotion of foreignising translation. However, the combination of factors which drove him, and in particular, the nationalistic aspects of his thought, should not prevent us from thinking hard about his argument and transposing it to a different set of circumstances.

In the twentieth century, it was not French domination which troubled the world. The new villain was, of course, English. The spread of English seems unstoppable. As we know, English is highly tolerant of non-standard varieties; the English have few hang-ups about the ways the language is evolving, but this does not mean that the English-speaking world does not suffer from complacency, nor that it accepts readily the influence of foreign literatures. There has grown up, in Anglo-Saxon culture, a tradition of encouraging translations into English that are highly anglicised. It is true that English is more of an 'exporter' language than an 'importer' one, i.e. comparatively speaking, little is translated into English, and when something is translated, the English-speaking reader expects it to

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read like English, with most foreign traits obscured. In other words, we like any foreign text to be domesticated, made fluent, so that we are not disturbed by the unfamiliar and the awkward. Strangely, this attitude can be linked to the work of twentieth-century Bible translators, translating out of English, and endeavouring to make their translations as accessible as possible to peoples they were seeking to convert to Christianity. All done with the best of intentions, of course, but feeding in to a tradition which excludes and marginalises the foreign (Venuti, 1995: 117-118).

The thought of trying to reverse this trend is not comfortable. To 'take in' the foreign, as it were, we must retain as much of the source text expression as we can, even making ourselves write un-English English, or 'translationese' as it has come to be known. In this frame, to calque our translations on the source text becomes a desirable objective, since it undermines the hegemony of English and restores to the source text a strength and a dignity that are otherwise lost. Why should English continue to suppress non-English cultures as it did in the heyday of the Empire? Domesticating translation is nothing but a perpetuation of the colonising instinct, surely to be deplored.

Let us return to our Nathalie Sarraute text and see what happens if we adopt a foreignising translation strategy. I was about to reproduce here my own attempt at a foreignising translation when I came across a translation of *Les Fruits d'Or* published in 1964, a year after the original French. The translation by Maria Jolas seems to fit the bill very well. (See Appendix for a commentary on the translation.)

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Target Text B

> Here, isn't it true, we all belong to the same species, the same colour, the same race, the same faith and the same rank. Welded into a single block. Here there are not and there cannot be among us any pariahs. Therefore, with a certainty that does honour to us all, with the firm assurance of causing none to blush, with fraternal confidence, I can look you straight in the eye and repeat forcefully what everybody knows already: those who today still admire The Golden Fruits, are fools…
>
> But as for me, that burns me, that upsets me… This fraternal, innocent confidence that illumines us with its rays in which, lazily and very relaxed, all here are warming and browning themselves, as for me, it nauseates me, my head is swimming, it's going to give me a sunstroke, I must protect myself, so there, I'm going to stand up and set between it and me this screen: Well, you know, as for me, I must admit that I myself like The Golden Fruits very much.
>
> <div align="right">Jolas translation, page 120</div>

This text does depart in minor ways from the original (e.g. a more faithful rendering of the first and third sentences would have been, 'We are all here, are we not, of the same species…' 'There is not and there cannot be here, amongst us, any pariah'). I think, however, that one might argue that Jolas's translations sound even more 'foreign' than word-for-word renderings! In general, Jolas's work keeps extremely close to the original. This type of translation is quick and easy, requiring minimum thought, as the translator is concerned to write English, yes, but leave intact all unfamiliar expressions and values.

If you had £10 and could buy either Translation A or Translation B of the novel, which one would you choose? Should the tradition represented by relevance theory inform our cultural life from now on, or should it be the anti-colonising, foreignising strategy that should dominate? Admittedly, the choice is not easy because this is a literary text with a strong emphasis on the surface expression. That might lead you to prefer a more literal approach so that you can more fully apprehend the stylistic effects sought by the writer, as well as her deliberate, and often self-revealing, choice of words. However, I would like to lobby in favour of a more communicative approach, very much in the spirit of relevance theory

('communicative translation attempts to produce on its readers an effect as close as possible to that obtained on the readers of the original' – Newmark 1981: 39). This does not entail a licence to adapt the source text (ST) at will, but rather the seeking-out of target language collocations and expressions which purport to match those of the ST but are nonetheless authentically and recognisably English. In other words, I do not subscribe to the foreignising camp, but rather to the fluency camp, albeit conscious and controlled. The search for fluency is not inevitably and blindly domesticating, and I would urge you to spend your £10 not on a disturbing and disjointed text but on something you would really enjoy. Nathalie Sarraute might even, just possibly, support me in this.

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Appendix

Readers may be interested in the following comments on the genesis of Target Text A (TTA) and on Target Text B (TTB).

Target text A

We're all of a kind here, aren't we

The French has *espèce*, but *all of a kind* seems a more familiar English collocation. It also removes any vestigial requirement to insert *the* which would

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have obtained if we had used *of the same species*. *Religion* chosen above *faith* or *creed*, but perhaps the resulting alliteration out-Sarrautes Sarraute?

United in a single solid block

My first version had *We are united into a single solid block*, on the grounds that English is less tolerant of verbless sentences than French. However, the group decided to echo the French construction here. *United we stand* was rejected as being too much of a cliché.

Amongst us… pariah

Originally, *There is not, nor can there ever be, any outcast amongst us*. Having read Phillips's book, I realised how significant Sarraute's words and constructions are, so I decided to use *pariah*, even though it jars slightly. I also decided to put this word at sentence-end as in the source text (ST).

with the confidence born of belonging

This seems to me to be a legitimate rendering of *avec une fraternelle confiance*, and its rhythm and alliteration emphasise the poetic tone of the the ST. Because it is a pleasing phrase, its repetition in paragraph 2 is welcome.

emphatically confirm

Originally *forcefully repeat*. As English-speakers my students and I related better to *emphatically confirm*.

anyone who still has time for…

Originally *people who, still today, admire…* which is much closer to the ST. The change is in the interest of readability and familiarity.

But wait

No hesitation over this short sharp command.

I am burning

Originally *I don't like it*, because burning seemed so extreme and strange. However, Phillips's discussion of sustained metaphor led me back to *I am burning*, to a construction reflecting the *I feel uncomfortable* which immediately follows it. (TTB's *that upsets me* is, to me, an inaccurate rendering.)

Well, I feel sick

Full stop inserted. Originally, the rest of this paragraph was peppered with fullstops. Again, Phillips's book made me realise how important punctuation was for Sarraute, so I compromised with just one break. For the same reason, I

inserted the 2 x 3 dots which my original had omitted as I had not seized the significance for Sarraute.

I feel sick

This series of statements all start with *I*, contrary to Sarraute's phrasing. One might say that the *I* compensates for our lack of *moi* and reinforces the *I – them* dichotomy, though I'm sad we do not have a *moi*.

you know

Originally *I for one must admit to you, my friends, that, actually, I very much like the* Golden Fruit. *My friends* removed as taking too much of a liberty with the ST. The final version reinstates the rhythm established by *... is a fool* (the singular is deliberate): here we end on *... is great*.

All-in-all, the aim has been to bring the TT near to the reader, while retaining the specificity of certain TT elements (*pariah,* the punctuation, the parallelism of the two paragraphs).

Target text B

Here, isn't it true

Slight re-ordering of the ST phrasing, but the result sounds un-English to me.

… the same species

The repeated definite article is stylistically heavy-handed.

Welded

The word in English sounds more specialised and technical than *soudés* which lends itself more than *welded* to metaphorical use. TTA added *solid* to support the blander word *united*.

Here there are not…

Compare TTA's *Amongst us, there never has been…* Surely TTA is kinder on the English ear (but this may not be an appropriate criterion…). Putting *pariahs* in the plural makes it seem that pariahs are quite a common phenomenon.

Therefore…

To my ear there are manmy gallicisms here (*certainty , honour, with the firm assurance of causing none to blush, fraternal confidence, repeat forcefully).*

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The Golden Fruits

The plural brings in echoes of 'the fruits of one's labour' i.e. effort, reward, product. I did not read this into the Sarraute novel at all.

But as for me…

Having read Phillips, I accept the TTB punctuation of this paragraph.

illumines us with its rays

Is this what these rays are doing? The ST has *répand*. TTA managed to work the word *basking* in.

lazily and very relaxed,

This intercalated adjectival phrase is not acceptable to me in English; and I would avoid *browning (themselves)* as being more appropriate for cooking than for sunbathing.

as for me, it nauseates me

I associate *as for me* with foreigners searching for an English equivalent of a similar expression in their own language, it is not an expression I would use very much myself, except perhaps pejoratively 'as for him, he's nothing but a…'. Ditto for *it nauseates me* - is this a phrase that readily comes to your lips? But are these legitimate questions for a foreignising translation???

my head is swimming

Disconcerting image in relation to *a sunstroke*. English usage would not normally use the indefinite article for *sunstroke* (I understand *a sunstroke* is standard American English).

so there

Is this an accurate rendering of *voilà*? I don't think so, so there!

set between it and me this screen

The antecedent of *it* is a very long way off. The word-order in English is highly unlikely.

I myself

Attempts to render the *moi*. TTA used *actually* which attempts to downplay the more strident, uncompromising sound of *I*.

very much

Not strong as an ending. Does not render the finality of *ça*.

All in all, I realise my comments relate as much to the foreignising as to translator's choices. The translation submits almost totally to the ST and where it departs from the ST, the choices are at times unfortunate to my ear. Doubtless the referential content of the ST is conveyed, but I submit that TTB does not make for enjoyable reading.

Penny Sewell,
Birkbeck, University of London

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