

## The Semantics of Invention: Translation into Esperanto

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*One day, when Christopher Robin and Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet were all talking together, Christopher Robin finished the mouthful he was eating and said carelessly: "I saw a Heffalump to-day, Piglet."*

*"What was it doing?" asked Piglet.*

*"Just lumping along," said Christopher Robin. "I don't think it saw me."*

*"I saw one once," said Piglet, "At least, I think I did," he said. "Only perhaps it wasn't."*

A. A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, p. 56

Piglet's commentary on the ephemeral nature of the imagination might stand as a suitable epigraph to a talk on translation into the international language Esperanto, a planned language, not least because Christopher Robin takes command of the discourse from the outset by framing it, quite literally, in his own terms – the made-up term *Heffalump*. Piglet and Pooh are left to make sense of something that manifestly makes no sense, or at least just enough sense to confuse. Such, one might imagine, would be the fate of the speaker of Esperanto attempting to translate a literary work into that language. A blind man and a Heffalump, as it were. How do words *mean* in Esperanto? How can the complexity of meaning that we find in, say, English, be conveyed in a made-up language? And in what sense can Esperanto be described as made-up?

Years ago, my friend Mark Starr, an old-time leftist who was for many years the educational secretary of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union and was involved in a nasty dustup with the right when Mayor Fiorella LaGuardia tried to name him director of adult education for the City of New York in 1943, called me in Philadelphia to say that his friend Elliot Macrae, the president of E. P. Dutton and Company, the publisher, had received a rather strange manuscript and wanted advice on what to do with it. Written in spidery handwriting on a sheaf of paper of assorted sizes, it was a translation into Esperanto of the children's book *Winnie-the-Pooh*. Macrae was planning to write to the translator, an elderly lady from California, informing her that Dutton was disinclined to publish an Esperanto translation of *Winnie-the-Pooh*, for which he suspected there would be only a very limited market (and whose handwritten manuscript in any case struck him as daunting even for the best of stenographers); but he decided to check with Mark Starr, a longtime enthusiast for Esperanto, before doing so. So Mark, with whom I worked in representing the Universal Esperanto Association at the United Nations, got in touch with me.

I asked to see the manuscript. As an active user of Esperanto for a number of years, I felt I could judge whether the manuscript was worth our attention. What I found was something of a

surprise. The translator was Ivy Kellerman Reed, who, almost sixty years earlier, had done a quite sprightly translation of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, which was performed by professional actors in a Washington, DC, park on the occasion of the Sixth World Congress of Esperanto in 1910 – presumably in the presence of Dr. Zamenhof, the founder of Esperanto, himself.

The present translation was plodding by comparison. Ralph Lewin, who taught at the Scripps Oceanographic Institute in San Diego, had helped Mrs. Reed with it, but, even with his assistance, it lacked the requisite energy. What was I to do? The chance of having a publisher as illustrious as Dutton produce a book in Esperanto struck me, as a practicing Esperantist, as too good to pass up, but I could hardly recommend this somewhat dismal effort. So, with the aplomb of the book's illustrious hero, Winnie-the-Pooh himself, I Hit on a Plan.

Under the guise of typing the manuscript so that we would have a clean text to examine, I set about what was essentially a re-translation. I renamed the characters, rewrote all the songs, and made countless adjustments to the balance of the text.<sup>1</sup> And I did all this at lightning speed, for fear that Mr. Macrae and his publishing house might forget all about it if I took too long. While I showed it to the putative translators and they gave it their blessing, it was essentially a new text. Elliot Macrae died soon after. One of his last acts as a publisher was to accept the book for publication.

The book appeared in 1972, with prefatory material in which I introduced the English reader to Esperanto, and a glossary. Although no longer published by Dutton, it has enjoyed steady sales ever since. Between that first typed version and the final, published text, it went through numerous further revisions and all manner of improvements proposed by such figures as William Auld, who was later to become the first Esperanto writer nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature, the biographer of Zamenhof Marjorie Boulton, the poet Reto Rossetti, the psycholinguist Victor Sadler, and the now retired Professor of Phonetics at University College London John C. Wells. Thus as an Esperanto translation it acquired a certain iconicity. As I polished the text, I pored over numerous other translations of the book, made available to me by the publisher, including the witty Latin translation and the rather less inspiring versions in French and Italian. Most admirable about the Latin translation was its author's skill in finding equivalent devices for the numerous puns and wordplays with which the original abounds – devices that are based above all on the ironic distance between the actual reader and the

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<sup>1</sup> The names were a particular problem. In translating out of English, how important is it to make the names fit Esperanto orthography and grammar? What characteristics of the original names should one seek to preserve in Esperanto? The problem starts with Pooh himself. The origins of the “Winnie” part of his name are obscure, but appear to be derived from Winnie, the name of a black bear in the London Zoo (donated by a Canadian soldier from Winnipeg), while the connection of the Pooh part with excretion seems inescapable (despite the different explanation provided on page 20 of the original text). Fortunately the interjection “pu” in Esperanto, uttered in response to a bad smell, has much the same connotation as “pooh” in English. I settled for Winnie-la-Pu in order to convey a sense of the Englishness of the book while also making a concession to Esperanto. Piglet, strictly speaking, means the young of a pig rather than a little pig, but I decided that Porketo (little pig) gave a better sense of the original than Porkido (the young of a pig). Small children, after all, are likely to be more interested in appearance than in provenance. Eeyore, which Reed had rendered, awkwardly, as Ijoro (j's are pronounced as y's in Esperanto), struck me as unacceptable, since Esperanto-speaking donkeys do not say “eeyore!” Kalocsay's term for a bray (first used, I believe, in the 1920s in his poem *Ezopa Fablo*) was “ia!” and so Ia seemed a suitable name for Eeyore (“ia” in Esperanto also means “any kind of,” which also struck me as a name sufficiently disrespectful to evoke protest from Eeyore, a creature permanently suffering from a weak self-image).

characters in the book (Lenard 1960). But the characters in the book also operate in their own ironic space: Christopher Robin's grounded awareness of the fictive nature of his animals' adventures, and his own vaguely imperialist interventions on their behalf (this is a very British book), is matched by our own sense that the entire structure that Christopher Robin has created for himself is one that we have experienced but moved beyond. We enter into a conspiracy with Christopher Robin to keep his stuffed animals alive, but with the tacit understanding that they are, indeed, just stuffed animals. And the ridiculous behavior of the animals is, in its way, merely a distorted image of the ridiculous behavior of adults themselves. In short, the book, situated in liminal territory between childhood and adulthood, is a translator's minefield (or perhaps goldmine) of contrasting linguistic registers, lexical jokes, contrived solemnities, and restricted witticisms.

The book in its Esperanto form fits with a long tradition of translation into Esperanto. When, in Warsaw in 1887, Zamenhof published his first little book on Esperanto – an introduction to the language sufficient to allow people to begin learning it – it appeared in four editions: Russian, Polish, French, and German – with Hebrew following in 1888 and English, Swedish and Yiddish in 1889. Thus the very introduction to the language was itself a translation. Each edition had the same content: (1) a foreword explaining the principles and genesis of the language, (2) six “specimens of the international language,” (3) a section containing a pledge, to be filled out and mailed to Zamenhof, that the reader will learn Esperanto provided a certain number of others pledge to do the same, (4) a “Complete Grammar of the International Language” on six pages, and (5) a brief vocabulary, in the International Language and the target language, of rather less than a thousand roots, which, if used in conjunction with the grammar, will allow the reader to understand a simple International Language text (Boulton 1960).

The design could not be simpler. Interestingly, the vocabulary offers nothing by way of explanation as to why Zamenhof chooses the roots he chooses, nor does Zamenhof explore the semantic complexities of those choices: this is simply a glossary, not an explanatory dictionary. In essence, the roots carry with them the semantics of their source languages, or at least the semantics of a kind of pan-European reservoir of meaning. They were selected in part in order to maximize this sense of a common heritage and a common semantics.

The six “specimens of the international language” consist of (1) the Lord's Prayer, (2) a brief passage from the beginning of the Book of Genesis, (3) a letter in the new language, (4) an original poem *Mia penso* (My thought), (5) a translation of a brief poem by Heine (*Mir träumte von einem Königskind: En sonĝo princinon mi vidis*), and (6) a second original poem *Ho, mia kor'* (Oh my heart).

In 1888 Zamenhof followed his first book on Esperanto with a second. In it, he comments further on his project, replying to criticisms that he has received, and commenting on his plan to collect pledges. He supplements this introductory section with sixteen paragraph-long readings so that learners of the language “may repeat in practice the rules of the international grammar and clearly understand the meaning and use of the suffixes and prefixes.” This is followed by a complete translation of *The Shadow* (*La ombro*), a fairy tale by Hans Andersen retranslated from the German, and by a brief collection of fifteen proverbs (*Kia patrino, tia filino*: Like mother, like daughter; *En sia urbeto neniu estas profeto*: No one is a prophet in his/her village – and so

on). Completing the brochure are two poems – a translation of the student song *Gaudeamus Igitur* by “Hemza” (probably Zamenhof himself) and another, somewhat awkward, translation of a Heine poem (*Lieb Liebchen, leg’s Händchen aufs Herze mein*), this time bearing the initials K.D. but apparently the work of Leo Belmont (Leopold Blumenthal), who had bought Zamenhof’s brochure in August 1887 and begun to learn the language.

Thus translation, and also original literary composition, was a part of the language from the beginning (Tonkin 1993, 2002a). Zamenhof, I believe, had two principal reasons for such inclusion. First, the existence of literary works in a language is a guarantee that it has a life of its own, and that it is connected to the cultural past: it declares that Esperanto is not a code, but rather a work of art grounded in earlier works of art. Second, it obliges the language to expand into domains in which it may not yet have been used in practice. Thus the language of literature opens the way to the language of experience. “We should not avoid difficult translations,” he wrote. “On the contrary, we should seek them out and conquer them, because only in that way will the language be fully developed” (Waringhien 1983:149-150). As if to prove his point, and amid his many other activities, both professionally and as the begetter not just of a language but very soon of a movement of users of that language, Zamenhof launched a program of translation that would have daunted many others.<sup>2</sup>

His first major undertaking was Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1894), and this was followed (considerably later in his career, when he had the time to translate and a publisher willing to publish the results) by the publication of Gogol’s *Government Inspector* (1907), Schiller’s *Die Räuber* (1908), Goethe’s *Iphigenia auf Tauris* (1908), Molière’s *Georges Dandin* (1908), and the Polish novelist and activist Eliza Orzeszko’s *Marta* (1910). During these years Zamenhof also published extensive translations of parts of the Old Testament, and at his death he left translations of the complete fables of Hans Andersen (by way of a German translation), Heine’s *Rabbi of Bacharach* (published 1924), Sholem Alechem’s *The High School* (published 1924), and the complete Old Testament (published, with many corrections – theological rather than linguistic – as part of the Esperanto Bible, which appeared in 1926). The initial emphasis on drama (Shakespeare, Gogol, Schiller, Goethe) can be readily explained: Zamenhof was interested in providing models not just for written Esperanto but also for the spoken language of his newly-founded language community, and theatre provided a means to do so. Unlike most other languages, it was written Esperanto that informed spoken Esperanto, rather than the other way round.

I will not dwell on the history of Esperanto itself, except in so far as it is necessary background to our topic. Although the language progressed more slowly than Zamenhof wished, it rapidly developed a following, and within two years the earliest Esperanto societies were in operation and the first periodical began to appear. Zamenhof was an idealist, in fact the kind of practical idealist, like Ben Yehuda, the founder of modern Hebrew, that the cultural ferment of northeastern European Ashkenazi Jews was apt to produce. His ideals, particularly his views on religious ecumenism, were at odds with many of the more practical and down-to-earth bourgeois commercial types who adopted his language. They wanted a language that would serve the ordinary purposes of practical communication; Zamenhof saw himself as founding a far more

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<sup>2</sup> Gaston Waringhien examines this “program of translation” in his essay “La tradukplano de Zamenhof” (Waringhien 1983:149-156).

spiritually rich community of like-minded citizens of the world. “Our language,” he wrote, “must serve not only for documents and contracts, but also for *life*” (Waringhien 1983:150). Indeed, for a brief moment before the nations of Europe were swallowed up in the reassertion of nationalism in World War I, it seemed possible that, moving on the wings of an expanding technology, a new society of universal values might be born (Harper 160-163). Zamenhof’s purpose was utterly serious, his linguistic goals courageously expansive.

Umberto Eco, in his book *The Search for a Perfect Language*, has suggested that languages like Esperanto are part of a strong and well established tradition in western culture – the search for a perfect means of communication (Eco 2005). The search intersects with the work of the translator at least in so far as translation is itself a search for meaning – for meaning in the source language (capturing the essence of the text to be translated) and its accurate transferral to the target language. This meaning, Walter Benjamin suggests, resides in “pure language,” *reine Sprache*, a phenomenon that underlies the individualized text: “A translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification, thus making both the original and the translation recognizable as fragments of a greater language” (Benjamin 1968:78). This language, says Benjamin, is “imprisoned” in the original text and must be released, and thus “the great motif of integrating many tongues into one true language is at work” (1968:77).

The notion that between source and target there exists either an autonomous language (in Benjamin’s case the *only* autonomous language, round which there revolve the heteronomies of individual languages<sup>3</sup>) or an interlanguage functioning as an intermediary, resembles practical ways in which Esperanto has been used, for example as a black-box language in machine translation: in the DLT project run by the Dutch software firm BSO in the late 1980s, Esperanto played such a role, primarily as a disambiguating agent between languages (Sadler 1991). Esperanto has also been recommended, by both Auld (1976) and Waringhien (1987), as a language well suited for comparatist pursuits, occupying as it does a kind of space between languages. It requires little extension of Benjamin’s essentially mystical idea to point out that the process of creating a language resembles the pursuit of meaning that engages the translator. Zamenhof’s linguistic creation (often called in Esperanto a *verko*, a *creative work*) can be readily construed as the pursuit of the pure language to which Benjamin refers. Zamenhof’s handful of original poems, particularly *La Espero*, confirm that such an idea was not far from his mind (Tonkin 2002b). Regardless of whether our position is essentially mystical or merely practical, what this implies is that translation into Esperanto is in some sense translation into a translation – because Esperanto is both an original language and also a relexification of European semantics.<sup>4</sup>

The obstacles confronting Zamenhof as he sat down to translate *Hamlet* were of course immense. He had chosen for his translation the work that most of those around him would probably have described as the greatest single work of western literature: Shakespeare was popular in both Germany and Russia, the two cultures from which Zamenhof drew his greatest inspiration, and,

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<sup>3</sup> In the sense in which Romaine (2000:14) uses these terms.

<sup>4</sup> Ortega, attempting, in a 1937 essay, to explain the relative ease with which it is possible to translate a scientific text, takes a less kindly view of such intermediate languages, describing the language of scientific terminology, for example, as a “pseudolanguage” – a “Volapuk, an Esperanto established by a deliberate convention” among those who cultivate a given discipline, regardless of their original language (Ortega 2000).

of all Shakespeare's works, it was *Hamlet* that stood out. That was why Zamenhof chose it. The late nineteenth-century Hamlet of Central and Eastern Europe was no indecisive weakling, but the very epitome of the seeker after truth. In a celebrated essay, Turgenev refers to Hamlet as a dark and enigmatic figure, who yet "wages relentless war" against evil and "is irreconcilably at war with falsehood" and "through this very quality he becomes one of the foremost champions of a truth in which he himself cannot fully believe" (Střibrný 2000:46). Examine the independence movements of Central Europe and *Hamlet* is never very far away. Thus Zamenhof begins his linguistic movement – the attempt to establish a second language for international communication beside the ethnic languages – with a revolutionary statement, a statement that at one blow might silence those who suggest that his language has no life. Internally, within the Esperanto movement, it was a brilliant move: it gave the early Esperantists a sense of cultural dignity, and above all it linked them with the elite cultures of Europe. In this sense the *Hamlet* translation can be seen as a political act – as indeed literary translation generally is (Spivak 1993), particularly if we see languages not as linguistic systems but as social institutions.

On a recent trip to Poland, following a talk I had given on language policy in Europe, a questioner rose to take me to task for suggesting that translators mediate between languages. No, she maintained, we mediate between cultures. In a larger sense, she was of course correct. But, translating *Hamlet* in 1891, into a language barely four years old, between what and what, exactly, was Zamenhof mediating? The likelihood is that he used a German, or possibly a Polish, translation (or both), rather than the original English text (his knowledge of English was limited), but of course by this time Shakespeare had drifted loose from his moorings on the south bank of the Thames: Turgenev claimed him for Russia; Schlegel claimed him for Germany.

So the Shakespeare that Zamenhof translated was not the Shakespeare of the First Folio (which had long been assigned to the category of untranslatables in Jakobson's sense [Jakobson 1959]) but the already translated Shakespeare of European culture. We should not look in Zamenhof's translation for the exactitude of a scholarly translation based on the original, but rather for a living and performable text. Furthermore, it is a text that has circulated *through* many languages: fidelity to the original is less important than bringing the international Shakespeare, the disembodied and circulating text, to earth in the particularity of Esperanto: Zamenhof was engaged in *capturing* the text – and he was doing so in a linguistic net of his own creation. Thus his translation is much more than a mere rendering of an English original in another language: it is an attempt to prove the universality of the original by rendering it in the language of universality. Benjamin, famously, quotes Mallarmé – in a passage particularly fitting in this context: "The imperfection of languages consists in their plurality, the supreme one is lacking: thinking is writing without accessories, or even whispering, the immortal word still remains silent; the diversity of idioms on earth prevents everybody from uttering the words which otherwise, at one single stroke, would materialize as truth" (Benjamin 1968:77). Zamenhof's *Hamlet* was the seeker after truth; and Esperanto, if Umberto Eco, is right, was part of the search for the perfect language, the language of truth. As Benjamin himself suggests, "A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language ... to shine upon the original all the more fully."

Zamenhof had taken a huge risk in providing so little guidance on the meaning of the roots that he included in his first book of 1887. The possibilities of misunderstanding, given the range of

mother tongues of the earliest Esperantists, were vast. But his options were unpromising. To render his language inert, by pulling elements from existing languages while suppressing their semantic load would make no sense – indeed would bring Esperanto dangerously close to what Jakobson calls intersemiotic translation – between verbal and non-verbal (or deverbalized) signs. Zamenhof counted on the kind of linguistic convergence that arises when people are eager to communicate and to be understood, and he also relied on what the early speakers could themselves bring to the language, rather than dictating such matters *a priori*. In fact, the lexicon rapidly acquired a semantic valency that proved to be remarkably consistent. Of course, in its infancy Esperanto was mostly a written language, which helped, since the newly established norms circulated widely through the printed word, which helped stabilize the language.

Zamenhof's translation was therefore based on a common European semantics. In effect, it was an attempt to take the translated *Hamlet* one step further by expressing its common Europeanness in a new, international medium (and also, incidentally, to claim what Even-Zohar (1990/2000) would call the literary polysystem of Europe for his language, at least in potential). So the mediation was above all between two attitudes of mind – that rooted in nationalism and particularity, and that rooted in a sense of common heritage. The latter was, of course, dangerously speculative, but it had been given meaning by Zamenhof's highly conscious efforts to construct a past for his newly constructed language – much as nationalist movements construct an interpretation of history that justifies their political action in the present. Because of his wholesale transfer of the common semantic base to which I have referred, Zamenhof relexified a pre-existing collection of shared understandings: Esperanto was not so much a new language as a restatement of the old in a new context.

Translating the literary works of the past was one way of reaffirming this context, as indeed was the translation of the Bible. We might also note that Zamenhof included proverbs in his first book. His father had a particular interest in collecting proverbs from many languages and looking for connections among them; the son's interest in proverbs was as a kind of instant folklore for his new language. One cannot construct a linguistic present without constructing a linguistic past.

If Zamenhof had to deal with the sheer literary eminence of the work he chose to translate first, and if he was also faced with the issue of dealing with a kind of nascent semantics, in addition he had a third potential problem to contend with: how to handle the blank verse of his original. But precedent was already laid down. His choice of a poem by Heine for the poetic translation in his 1887 book, and the two original poems that he wrote, established from the beginning that his literary Esperanto was to be an accentual language: despite the Latinate appearance of the language, he followed German prosodic models rather than, say, French or Italian.<sup>5</sup> In Esperanto

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that the language cannot be adapted to suit other prosodic approaches – as Grabowski proved in his translation of Juliusz Slowacki's Polish-language tragedy *Mazeppa*, written in the 13-syllable lines (7 + 6) characteristic of epic poetry in that language. Grabowski further developed the style in his translation of Mickiewicz (1918). Vallienne rendered his early translation of the first two books of the *Aeneid* in tolerable representations of the Latin hexameter. Leppäkoski reproduced the movement of the original, and its 16-syllable lines, in his translation of the Finnish *Kalevala*. But the poetic mainstream (picked up also by the poets of China and Japan later on) remained accentual. Kalocsay, representative of that mainstream, in his translation of Dante's *Inferno* is remarkably successful in reproducing the rhythmic hendecasyllables of the original. For a brief English-

the accent falls on the second to last syllable of each word, and this fact, coupled with rules for the elision of the <o> at the ends of nouns (such elision can offset what might otherwise be a trochaic emphasis to the poetic line), gives the language a naturally iambic cadence, which in turn allows it to be rendered in the iambic pentameter of a Shakespeare relatively easily. On the other hand, the lexical category of most roots is expressed by suffixes, thus reducing the number of monosyllables and expanding the number of syllables required to render, let us say, a passage in English. This syllabic prolixity is offset by rules for the compounding of roots that allow for extreme concision, and the system of affixation also produces enormous flexibility among parts of speech. Thus, the root *pal-*, meaning “pale,” yields *pala* in its adjectival form, *palo* in its substantival form (“paleness”), *pale* as an adverb, *palas* (“is pale”) in the present tense, and so on. There are other ways of expressing these same concepts (*paleco*, *estas pala*, and so on), each carrying its own particular contextualized meaning, so that the structures of the language also yield a wide range of synonyms. Thus, while the language functions differently from English (indeed in certain important respects differently from all of its source languages), it offers an openness of form and structure that is a boon to the translator.

Like any other language, Esperanto is subject to language change. Much of that process has come about not so much from changes in the basic structure as from discoveries of latent possibilities in the structure as it was originally conceived.<sup>6</sup> At the surface level, the language appears to be a fairly conventional Indo-European language with heavy Romance elements, but while Zamenhof based his language on the vocabulary and semantics of European languages, he used grammatical principles akin to those of what used to be called isolating languages, in which invariant lexical elements are used to construct utterances. In his brochure he is rather careful to emphasize that he has presented the grammar of his new language in terms readily understandable by those familiar with the grammatical terms and categories used for the languages that they might know, particularly Latin, but that it actually functions according to rather different principles, involving “words” (today we would presumably call them lexical items) that can be combined in a more or less infinite series of combinations (see Janton 1993: 44-45). Thus, it is erroneous to think of grammatical affixes and mere appendages: potentially they can stand on their own. Zamenhof writes as follows:

I introduced a complete dismemberment of ideas into independent words, so that the whole language consists, not of words in different states of grammatical inflexion, but of unchangeable words.... The various grammatical inflexions, the reciprocal relations of the members of a sentence, are expressed by the junction of immutable syllables. But the structure of such a synthetic language being altogether foreign to the chief European nations, and consequently difficult for them to become accustomed to, I have adapted this principle of dismemberment to the spirit of the European languages, in such a manner that anyone learning my tongue from grammar alone ... will never perceive that the language differs in any respect from that of his mother-tongue. (Ludovikito 1991:306)<sup>7</sup>

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language introduction to Esperanto poetry, see Tonkin 1993. On prosody in Esperanto, see Kalocsay, Waringhien & Bernard 1968.

<sup>6</sup> A majority of the lexical elements in the language have entered Esperanto independently of Zamenhof: in providing the bare bones of a lexis, he wished to encourage the active linguistic participation of all members of his speech community.

<sup>7</sup> My translation - HT.

Accordingly, it is possible for scholars, in describing the structure and conceptual base of Esperanto, to see it as everything from revolutionary and non-European to a mere simplification of Latin. We know very little about Zamenhof's connection with the scholarly currents in linguistics in his day, but in fact the noted Polish linguist Jan Baudouin de Courtenay, a precursor of the structuralism of Ferdinand de Saussure, was developing his linguistic theories at the Universities of Kazan and Tartu at the time when Esperanto was coming into being (he later became the founding president of the Polish Esperanto Association), and René de Saussure, one of Ferdinand's younger brothers, was a prominent Esperantist. Baudouin de Courtenay was among the first linguists to articulate the difference between language (an abstract structure) and speech (the rule-bound but individualized behavior of the individual). Zamenhof's keen awareness of this distinction, and his emphasis on building a speech community as well as constructing a language, was one of the principal reasons why his language, almost unique among planned languages, developed a significant following, leading in turn to the establishment of a functionally autonomous language community. At the same time, his structuralist approach to the language allowed non-Europeans to find familiar elements in it, so that, quite early on, Esperanto broke out of the semantic and lexical cocoon of its European origins to embrace other parts of the world.

One of the first Esperanto poets, Antoni Grabowski, was among those who experimented most extensively with the language. Others followed. Indeed, Esperanto literature, both original and translated, was a key element in the ordered development of the language, providing models for language use, the incorporation of new realms of experience into the lexical and semantic repertoire, opportunities for linguistic experiment, and a sense of cultural solidarity. The major literary movements of the twentieth century have had their imitators and practitioners among writers in Esperanto. The great works of literature have been translated into the language: Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz* by Grabowski, around half of the plays of Shakespeare, Dante, Boccaccio, Camoens, Cervantes, Goldoni, Petöfi, Ibsen, Baudelaire – but also *Outlaws of the Marsh*, Ba Jin, the Koran, Ihara, Tanizaki. Pleadin's recent lexicon of Esperanto writers (2006) contains biographies of over 900 published authors.

Perhaps this brief enumeration, more than any more theoretical argument, offers confirmation of the fact that translation into Esperanto is neither as paradoxical an exercise nor as unusual as it might otherwise appear. Esperanto is a second (or third or fourth) language for most of its speakers. Until recently, at least, linguists have been content to examine the behavior of native speakers of a language, regarding their use of the language as somehow more authentic and typical. They have tended to ignore communities of second-language speakers. Likewise, their emphasis has tended to fall on speech rather than on writing. Literary scholars like to think that a literature is owned by the native speakers of a language, with second-language contributors mere add-ons, but increasingly this is an inadequate description even of the literatures of English, and certainly of the literatures of many developing countries.

Esperanto is uncommon in that its native speakers number no more than a few hundred and do not set its linguistic norms, and its development has taken place as much through writing as through speech. These characteristics make it both developmentally conservative and also unusually open to potential influences (and often enrichment) from a range of languages. Translators into Esperanto tend to translate out of their native languages into the target language,

rather than out of the source language and into their native language. The latter is surely the norm among translators. Working out of one's native language has obvious advantages (Auld 1997:60-62). When in recent years I came to translate two of Shakespeare's plays, I found that my close acquaintance with his linguistic complexity was a huge advantage. It was also an advantage to have cut my teeth on the even more formidable problems of *Winnie-the-Pooh*.

Perhaps the first question that I had to tackle was the purpose of the translation. When Zamenhof translated *Hamlet* he was less concerned with rendering its linguistic details than with presenting a smooth and readily recited text: he wanted Shakespeare's text to resound in Esperanto with all the vitality that it reveals in the English original (and also in its German and Russian translations). Reto Rossetti describes the process as having Shakespeare read as though Shakespeare was writing in Esperanto. Zamenhof's translation proved eminently playable when it was finally presented on the stage in Antwerp in 1928. When Leonard Newell retranslated the play thirty years after that, in the late 1950s, he was concerned to produce a translation as faithful to the original as possible – a task that he fulfilled with considerable skill but that resulted in a text that seems weighed-down and cumbersome when we read it today and that would be extremely difficult actually to perform. One wonders exactly what Newell's purpose can ultimately be. To provide the non-English-speaker with the complete contents of Shakespeare's text? His approach to the play is essentially textual; Zamenhof's is much more concerned with fidelity to character and action.

Newell's disadvantages were two: he did not move widely in the Esperanto community outside English-speaking countries, and as a result did not develop a sensitivity to the cadences of spoken Esperanto, and, secondly, his desire to fit every last element of Shakespeare's text into his translation causes the text to expand out of control. Thus, Hamlet's speech "Now all occasions do inform against me" (4.4) expands from 34 lines in the original to 42 in Newell, the "To be or not to be" speech (3.1) picks up an extra four lines, and so on. Newell neglects the incontrovertible fact that compression is an essential element of Shakespeare's verse: the verse of the original explodes with meaning, and much of its energy derives from the organization of the individual line. He also fails to observe a principle well enunciated by Auld (1986:93): avoid translating a word or expression out of context. Context is all.

Early on, as I began my translation of *Henry V*, I set myself what may seem an artificial limitation that in practice proved extremely valuable: my translation would have the same number of lines as the original and would, as far as possible, reproduce the lines as they appear. Shakespeare paragraphs his blank verse, and so my translation often broke with this principle, but I sought to shape and balance the lines rhetorically and linguistically as I imagine Shakespeare might have done had he, as Rossetti suggested, signed Zamenhof's pledge and learned the language. If this required jettisoning complexities, then, reluctantly, I dropped them. I sought also to maintain the approximate balance of run-on and end-stopped lines – a defining characteristic of the chronology of Shakespeare's plays – and also sought to avoid, as Shakespeare avoided at this stage of his career, the addition of extra syllables. When, later, I translated *The Winter's Tale*, I allowed for more run-on lines and more extra syllables, in line with Shakespeare's later style. My goal was to render the explosive quality of the verse to which I have just alluded, and to do so in language that would make my translations playable on the stage. I continue to hope that one day someone will choose to perform them.

Of course, I was making these translations in the first decade of the twenty-first century and my audience consisted of the speakers of a language 120 years old, with its established literary norms and with a vocabulary greatly expanded since Zamenhof's time. My translations reflect that. One day they will wear out and, we can only hope, new translations will come along. While the Shakespearean style is an elevated style, and the rhetoric of an Esperanto translation should reflect that, it is not clear that it should make use of archaisms: we own the Shakespeare of today and the voice should be as timeless as we can make it. This consideration caused me to avoid both outdated locutions (such stylistic relics exist in Esperanto as they do in any other language) and anything that could be regarded as linguistic experiment. I believe that my Shakespeare translations include no neologisms – words invented by me – or near-neologisms – recent coinages of limited circulation.

*Henry V* presents particular linguistic problems because among its characters are the non-native English speaker Fluellen, whose use of the English language seems often to lag behind the complexity of the ideas he attempts to express in it, and a collection of non-elite characters with a range of non-elite modes of expression. Rendering dialect and non-standard speech in Esperanto (in fact accurately rendering register in general) is a particular problem, best overcome by seeking analogous locutions in Esperanto, but not necessarily the same ones as in the original (Fluellen's Welsh speech in Shakespeare's original seems idiosyncratic in the extreme, and a stereotyped representation of a stage Welshman now lost in the mists of time).

In addition, of course, there are the French. Shakespeare has the leaders of the French speak English, employing a common convention that irons out linguistic difference in the interests of audience comprehension. This is so except in the memorable scene in which the Princess Katherine attempts to learn English, ending the experience in shock at the sheer vulgarity of the English language. The scene depends on translingual puns, in which innocent English words, mangled by their French speakers, turn into homonyms of French obscenities. Shakespeare needs a second language in this scene, since he can hardly depict an English lesson in which the pupil speaks fluent English, and thus he writes the scene in French. I was able to render the scene in Esperanto, having no need for a third language, and, since Esperanto has a quite rich vocabulary of obscene language (created mostly in the 1930s by the Hungarian poet Kalocsay, but rapidly absorbed, especially by young people, into everyday Esperanto), it was not difficult to turn innocent English into punning Esperanto vulgarities. Although the rank chauvinism (if that is what it is) of much of this play might seem to make it unsuitable for translation into Esperanto, of all Shakespeare's plays it is one of the most sensitive to the nuances of language difference. Indeed the scene with Katherine that I have just described comes immediately after Henry's speech at the siege of Harfleur, whose principal subject is the horrors of rape by uncontrollable soldiers. The nonetheless hilarious scene that follows is therefore also, and more troublingly, a depiction of a kind of linguistic rape of the Princess Katherine, who is later to become one of the spoils of war.

These particular problems, and opportunities, presented by *Henry V* were accompanied, in both of my Shakespeare translations, by other more mundane issues: the problem of proper names, for example (the question of the extent to which they should conform to Esperanto orthography and grammar, already noted in connection with *Pooh*), the rendering of nuance related to status, the

occasional wordplay – and ultimately, therefore, the degree of *interpenetration* of source and target. This last is a point of some importance in a language associated with an anti-nationalistic ideology. One does not have to accept the full implications of the Whorfian hypothesis in order to be aware that all languages carry with them, to a greater or lesser extent, ideological freight that frames their utterances. Finally, a translation must (as the linguists might put it) demonstrate communicative as well as linguistic competence: it is not enough to get one’s grammar right; one must also be able to move within a language as the speakers of that language move.

I should perhaps add that I did most of my translation on trains: trains are useful reminders of the fact that translations are a journey, with a destination. I tried not to be held back by obstacles, but to improvise in difficult passages and return to these difficulties to rework or polish them at a later date: much of the art of translation lies in retrospection, and solutions to problems late in a text can provide solutions to problems earlier in that text.

When Newell translated *Hamlet*, he had the example of Zamenhof’s translation before him. Mine was the first translation of *Henry V*. William Auld had translated the Crispin’s Day speech from Act 4 in a collection of translations mostly from 20<sup>th</sup>-century English poetry called *Omaĝe*, which appeared in 1987. I decided to ignore it, and in fact did not go back to it until after my translation had come out. My reasoning was that, if Auld had found solutions to problems that I was struggling with, those solutions would distort my own perception of their context: in translation, other people’s solutions may actually become limitations. Today, our two texts make an interesting comparison (see Appendix 1), and I am glad that at least my translation holds its own against the witty and skillful version of one of Esperanto’s finest translators.<sup>8</sup>

I will not dwell here on prose translation into Esperanto. Over the years, I have translated numerous non-literary documents, but little else in prose. Prose, particularly creative prose, raises different problems from Shakespeare, particularly problems of register, and often problems of historical distance, as in this passage from Daniel Defoe’s novel *Moll Flanders* (1722) and my attempt at a translation:

*I knew a woman that was so dexterous with a fellow, who indeed deserved no better usage, that while he was busy with her another way, conveyed his purse with twenty guineas in it out of his fobpocket, where he had put it for fear of her, and put another purse with gilded counters in it into the room of it. After he had done he says to her, ‘Now han’t you picked my pocket?’ She jested with him, and told him she supposed he had not much to lose; he put his hand to his fob, and with his fingers felt that his purse was there, which fully satisfied him, and so she brought off his money. And this was a trade with her; she kept a sham gold watch and a purse of counters in her pocket to be ready on all such occasions, and I doubt not practised it with success.*

Mi konis virinon, kiu tiel lertis ĉe iu bonulo (kiu ja ne meritis pli bonan trakton), ke dum li okupiĝis pri ŝi laŭ alia difinita maniero, ŝi transportis lian monujon, kun dudek gineoj ene, el lia

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<sup>8</sup> Auld’s essays on translation are particularly valuable. On translation from English to Esperanto, see particularly his essay “La plej malfacila arto” (The most difficult art) in Auld 1986:91-108. On “translatability” of poetry (and, incidentally, its importance in Esperanto) see “Pri la tradukado de poezio” in Auld 1978:21-32, and on “The international language as a device for translating creative writing” (“La internacia lingvo kiel belarta tradukilo”) see the extensive essay in this same volume: Auld 1978:95-157. The latter provides abundant specific examples. See also “La arto de la verstraduko en Esperanto” in Kalocsay 1985:39-54

horloĝa poŝeto, kien li jam metis ĝin ĝuste pro timo pri ŝi, kaj metis alian monujon plenan je orumitaj disketoj en ties anstataŭon. Fininte sian prilaboron li diras al ŝi, “Nu, vi ne priŝtelis mian poŝon, ĉu?” Ŝi ŝercis kun li, dirante, ke ŝi supozas, ke li ne havas multon por perdi; li pripalpis sian poŝeton, kaj liaj fingroj konfirmis, ke lia monujo ĉeestas, kio plene kontentigis lin, kaj tiel ŝi liberigis lian monon. Kaj temis pri komerco ŝiaflanke: ŝi kutimis teni en la poŝo falsan oran horloĝon kaj saketon de disketoj por esti preta por ĉiuj okazoj, kaj mi neniel dubas, ke ŝi praktikis sian komercon sukcese.

The almost two and a half centuries separating us from this text have produced changes in phraseology (*fellow, deserved no better usage, conveyed, into the room of it, han't, brought off* and so on). To what extent should the translator seek to convey that sense of distance? Obviously much will depend on the strategic purpose of the translation. And how obvious will a simple translation of “while he was busy with her another way” convey to, say, a Japanese reader of Esperanto, both the circumlocution employed and the meaning of that circumlocution (*in another way* is a charmingly indirect way to explain what was actually going on, and it seems essential to preserve the balance between indirection and plain sense here)? The same is true of “after he had done.” I decided to add the word *difinita*, roughly equivalent to *in another specific way*, in the first instance, and I translated *while he was busy with her* with the somewhat mundane *dum li okupiĝis pri ŝi*, which translates as *while he was occupied with her*. Having sacrificed in some measure that sense of busy-ness, I was able to work it in later by translating *after he had done* by *fininte sian prilaboron*, which translates as *having finished his working-on* (in Esperanto, if one works on something, *oni laboras pri io*; hence *prilaboro* is working on [something or someone]). As for archaisms in phraseology, I did my best to find locutions that would sound sufficiently different from customary turns of phrase to convey this sense of distance. The term *brought off* presented particular difficulties: in the eighteenth century, one *brought off* passengers from a ship by taking them by boat to the shore, or one *brought off* shipwrecked mariners in a rescue operation. The term therefore came to mean *rescue*. I decided to use the verb *liberigi*, to set free, rather than the literal term *transportis*, which I had in any case used earlier in the text to translate the term *conveyed*.

Outside my topic on this occasion are the problems of translation out of Esperanto and into English. In many ways they are greater than going in the reverse direction. I have, for example, never seen translations of Esperanto poetry into English that even begin to reproduce the complexity of their originals. Poets choose to write in Esperanto not because they are born into it but because they detect particular qualities in Esperanto that cause them to use it. These qualities are different, almost by definition, from those of their native language. By exploiting them they may well render the result near-untranslatable. In a measure the same is true of prose. My biggest translation project in prose was the translation, at the behest of the Soros family, of two autobiographical works by George Soros’s father, Tivadar, one on his adventures in World War I and the other about his survival, and that of his family, in Nazi-occupied Budapest. The latter was published in Britain with its Esperanto title *Maskerado* and in the United States as *Masquerade*. Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the translation was Tivadar’s relative lack of skill in writing in Esperanto. I often found that I knew what he wanted to say, but that his rendering of his thoughts was accompanied by stylistic awkwardness. Was it my task faithfully to reproduce that awkwardness in my translation, or to produce a fluid text that carried its message with reasonable elegance? I elected, *traditore*, to do the latter, reasoning that Tivadar’s

message was more important than his linguistic skills or lack of them. Need I say that my decision raises ethical issues of some complexity?

But, *retournons à nos moutons*, or, more precisely, our stuffed animals... I want to end where I began – with my quotation from *Winnie-the-Pooh*. It encapsulates some of the problems and the pleasures of translation into Esperanto.

*One day, when Christopher Robin and Winnie-the-Pooh and Piglet were all talking together, Christopher Robin finished the mouthful he was eating and said carelessly: "I saw a Heffalump to-day, Piglet."*

*"What was it doing?" asked Piglet.*

*"Just lumping along," said Christopher Robin. "I don't think it saw me."*

*"I saw one once," said Piglet, "At least, I think I did," he said. "Only perhaps it wasn't."*

A. A. Milne, *Winnie-the-Pooh*, p. 56

Unu tagon, kiam Kristoforo Robin kaj Winnie-la-Pu kaj Porketo kune konversaciis, Kristoforo Robin finmanĝis buŝplenon kaj diris kvazaŭ indifere: "Mi vidis Hefelanton hodiaŭ, Porketo." "Kion ĝi faris?" demandis Porketo.

"Ĝi nur hefelis laŭ la vojo," diris Kristoforo Robin, "Mi kredas ke ĝi ne vidis *min*."

"Mi iam vidis Hefelanton," diris Porketo. "Almenaŭ mi kredas ke jes," li diris. "Aŭ eble ĝi ne estis tio."

A. A. Milne, *Winnie-la-Pu*, p. 48

The heart of the matter is the Heffalump, whose reversed consonants and aspirated beginning are combined with the lumpish characteristics of what Pooh might have called, on some other occasion, a Very Large Animal. Mrs. Reed had chosen to translate it as *Hefalumpo*, but that would really not do. To begin with, I had no reason to suppose that an Esperanto-speaking child would choose to aspirate the opening <e> of *elephant* as a British child might well do. Secondly, the word for *lump* in Esperanto is *bulo*, and *lumpo* carries no particular significance. I decided to stay with the aspiration, reasoning that, since it would convey rather successfully Piglet's terror later in the book at encountering Pooh with a honeypot on his head and mistaking him for the dreaded Heffalump, it would have its uses. Then I focused on Christopher Robin's metacoinage "lumping along." How could I create a noun that would easily generate an appropriate verb?

The solution lay before me in the structure of Esperanto. The term *Esperanto*, as everyone acquainted with the history knows well, is derived from the pseudonym that Zamenhof used when he first published the language, *Doktoro Esperanto*, Dr. One-who-hopes. The word *esperant-o* derives from the root for "hope" (*esper*) plus the present participial form –ant, plus the substantival affix –o. As a noun, the participial form denotes a person who engages in the action represented by the participle: thus "hoping" (*esperanta*) becomes "one-who-hopes" (*esperanto*). Originally, Esperanto was known as "the language of Dr. Esperanto," which in due course was reduced to "the language of Esperanto" and then simply to "Esperanto." Now the word for "elephant" is *elefanto*, which, quite coincidentally, looks like the word for "one-who-elephs," whatever that may mean. Any child, applying the rule that he or she has learned about the ending –anto (and, in any language, young children tend, as experts on language acquisition will

tell us, and as we have perhaps observed in our own children, to over-apply such rules), would naturally come to that conclusion. If we then reverse the consonants, as children (or so I judged) might do, we get *efelanto*. Add an <h> and we have “one who hephels” and “Just lumping along” becomes *nur hefelis* (in the translation we avoid the participial form of the imperfect tense, since that would bury the joke). Our Heffalump is no longer a lump, to be sure, but he perambulates in a fashion even more resonant than the original. What we lose on the roundabouts we gain on the swings.

After my recent Polish questioner had asked me about mediating between cultures and the session had come to an end, a fellow-Esperantist came out of the crowd to commiserate with me for what seemed a somewhat unfair question about language and culture. I suggested that that was a mere occupational hazard, of no great moment. He replied with a quotation from *Winnie-the-Pooh* which, I noted to my considerable pleasure, had passed into the language by way of the Pooh translation: I had heard it not infrequently before, in equally unexpected contexts. “*Oni neniam scias kiam temas pri abeloj,*” “You never can tell with bees.” Indeed you can’t.

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