

# Translation's Aftermath: la friche, la francisation et la faux faussée

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## 1. Défrichement

Picture this. Imagine someone cultivating French. What calls itself *le français*. Someone that *le français* is cultivating. And who, as a French citizen to boot, would be a subject of French *culture*. Suppose, for example, that one day this subject of French *culture* were to come up to you and say:

Il est deux langues que j'adore  
Et que je parlais autrefois ;  
Il me vient des pleurs dans la voix  
Si parfois je les parle encore ;

Et je sens un trouble soudain  
Dont toute mon âme est saisie,  
Au moindre mot de poésie  
Ou de patois périgourdin...

Il me semble que je m'abuse  
Quand j'entends ces sons inouïs,  
Le doux parler de mon pays  
Et le doux parler de la Muse ;

Et je savoure tour à tour  
Cette double réminiscence,  
L'idiome de mon enfance  
Et le langage de l'amour...

[Gabriel Tarde « Les deux langues mourantes », in *Contes et poèmes*, Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1879, p. 242-246]

It would be almost paradoxical. It's an evocation in French of a lost dialect; and it's a generic contradiction (an elegy for poetic language), *rhétorique qui fait l'impossible avec le sens*. There's also something *dépaysant*, something 'outlandish', about it. It's written using the *In Memoriam* stanza of Lord Tennyson. A form, not of the troubadours, but of English Victorian pastoral elegy. And it contains the Wordsworthian image of an old, illiterate and *patoisant* peasant as the locus of poetic memory:

je n'oublirai pas  
Vos poétiques idiomes,

Tant qu'il restera dans nos champs  
Quelque laboureur centenaire  
Qui de l'*adisias* ordinaire  
Salûra de loin les passants,

[Gabriel Tarde « Les deux langues mourantes », in *Contes et poèmes*, Paris, Calmann Lévy, 1879, p. 242-246]

These are 'our fields', in French (*nos champs*): fields of *la patrie*. And the 'poetic idiom' of the Muses is also French. The poet was initiated into it by the rebarbative toil of learning French: "Plus tard, quand je sus le français, / (Et j'eus de la peine à l'apprendre) / J'étais grand ; survint l'âge tendre, / Je fis des vers, j'en pâlassais !" He blanches at the memory. Yet he implies the idiom of the Muses survives only in the memory (*in memoriam* itself) and only in so far as an old peasant, who implicitly can't speak French, lives on in the French fields to say not *au revoir*, not *adieu*, but the Occitan *adisias*, both *adieu* and *au revoir* to those who pass by on their verges: a clear antinomy in French, but in both Occitan and the Tennysonian memory, it is the only way for the present, focused on the past, to address the future.

How might such a problematic subject of French *culture* mark out a new 'field' of enquiry?:

cherchons avec toute la précision désirable, mais sans prétendre pour la science qui nous est chère à une autonomie absolue, les limites du champ qu'elle est appelée à défricher.

[Gabriel Tarde *Les deux éléments de la sociologie* 1897]

We might well remark on the similarities between such a carefully pruned statement of intent and the problematic demarcations of translation studies. The same pastoral metaphors apply. Michel Ballard, for example, introducing Guy Bocquet's essay revisiting this recent history, in the collection *Qu'est ce que la traductologie*, says: 'il esquisse, entre autres, les débats autour de la dénomination et de la délimitation du champ' [Michel Ballard (ed. & intro.) *Qu'est ce que la traductologie ?* (Arras : Presses de l'Université d'Artois, 2003) p. 8]. For the hired-hand English translator, however, the immediate problem in Tarde's mission statement is a single word – *défricher* – which seems to demand a bit of extra spade work.

It's a word that would've come as no surprise to contemporary readers. In particular, those who'd been schooled (as Tarde had) in French *grammaire* in the provinces during the nineteenth century, would naturally accept that clearing and cultivating a neglected field, however thorny a task, was a worthy vocation, even a patriotic duty. Generations of them, for example, would have practised weeding errors out of their formations and pronunciations of plural nouns, in what was often their second language, by multiplying the grammatical fruits of the following vignette:

## LE CHAMP

Mettez au pluriel les noms entre parenthèses.

La cabane du pauvre Nicolas était batié sur un terrain couvert de (*bruyère*), de (*genêt*), d'(*ajonc*), de (*coudrier*), de (*ronce*), d'(*épine*) et de (*buisson*) de toute (*sorte*). Il semblait que ce terrain ne dût jamais produire ni (*légume*), ni (*fruit*).

[One day a superior farmer comes along with a cart bursting with an impressive harvest. He advises Nicolas to clear all the brush and to plough the earth then...].

“ensemence-la en (*céréale*), en (*graine*) fourragères, en (*légume*) ; plante des (*pomme*) de terre, des (*carotte*), des (*navet*), des (*haricot*), des (*fève*), des (*artichaut*) ; puis attends le résultat de ton travail ; [...]

Larive et Fleury, *La Première Année de Grammaire*, Paris, A. Colin, 1871. p. 11 (229 reprints between 1871 and 1953), [Périgourdin Occitan translations from: Emil Colas, *Voyage en linguistique [...] dictionnaire des mots patois périgourdins [...]* (Paris : Vic et Amat 1905)]

The benefits to be reaped from this toil were abundant. The *élèves paysans* would glean not only the rules of the regular plural –s, a simple difference between written and spoken language, a clear Lockean sense of property and territory, a moral lesson about the value of an honest day's work, a reminder of the economic importance of agricultural industry, and so on, but crucially they would also learn to uproot whatever hardy remnants of their local *baragouin* were still entrenched in the semantic field of (indigenous) flora and replace them with a rich crop of French vocabulary: a real lexical cornucopia harvested from the more cultivated and productive language of the urban bourgeoisie. And there's something incorrigibly prolific about its metaphors : ‘Le cultivateur ... *entama sur-le-champ* une conversation’, ‘Nicolas *goûta* ces conseils’. This is, to take a clipping from Deleuze, a vivacious rhizome.

It goes almost without saying, then, that Nicolas's work is analogous to the pupil's, and the *cultivateur*'s words to the teacher's. (Notice that Nicolas is not allowed to speak and the *cultivateur* addresses him as *tu*). Just as the pupils of the *écoles rurales* were brought up to value literal *défrichement*, they also had implanted in them a recognition of the value of a metaphorical intellectual *défrichement*. It was a cliché, and one they were repeatedly called upon to copy down:

l'oisiveté est tellement contre nature, que partout où elle règne, elle nuit. Les champs, pas plus que l'homme, ne sont faits pour elle. Dans l'homme, elle produit les pensées stériles, dans la terre, les plantes sauvages ou malsaines. Rien n'est plus agité qu'un

homme oisif, et la terre livrée à elle-même se couvre d'une végétation désordonnée, plus fatigante à enfanter que des moissons bienfaisantes.

[Le Comte de Falloux (Académie française), "Le paysan d'autrefois et d'aujourd'hui" in Gustave Heuzé, *Lectures et dictées d'agriculture, pour l'enseignement primaire dans les écoles rurales*. (Paris, Lib. Agricole de la Maison Rustique, 1867) p. 93 – 94]

The linguistic analogy is blatant and perennial. The idea of the *dictée* is to sow the seeds of standard French in the arable land of a newly marked out *esprit national* which struggling pupils would probably have been baffled to learn was more fatigued by indolently generating the vivacious wildflowers of its local dialects than industriously cultivating the national staples and delicacies of an alien French grammar. And we should note the verb that's used: *enfanter*. The earth (*la terre*) is the mother of the plants, and she's tired of giving birth to weeds; she can be reenergised only by being cultivated at the behest of the cultivated French landowner, aware, from his reading in French, of modern crop-rotation techniques. How in the *école maternelle* would the painful labour of reproducing this kind of thing have related to a pupil's idea of what he would have learned to call his *langue maternelle*? More to the point, how would such a conception have affected his socio-linguistic relationship with his own mother? For the budding psycho-sociologist from the provinces, these would have been salient questions. And they were questions linked to key sociological changes in late nineteenth century France.

Time permitting, one might embark here upon an exploration of the reification of 'Culture' and Matthew Arnold's importation of this French idea into Britain following his tour of French schools in 1859. However, that will have to be for another time.

## 2. Déchiffrement

What does all this have to do with translation?

Well the first thing to say is that the French language taught in the *école nationale* was implicitly the result of a standardization project that had Latin *version* as its foundation stone... think, for example, of the role of the *belles infideles* in the creation of the Academy. In a broad theoretical sense, standard literary French was considered to be the universal language of translation. It had replaced Latin precisely because it had assimilated into itself, by translation, everything that Latin could say. It was this process that had made French what it was... a language that rendered clear and broadly accessible to a modern rationalist society what had previously been obscure and

inpenetrable to all but an elite. Julie Candler Hayes provides us with Claude-Pierre Goujet as an example of a proponent of this metanarrative:

Goujet takes for granted that “content” can be extracted and transferred from one language to another without significant loss [...] The reflection on the advantages of reading in translation leads Goujet to announce the second motivation for offering his project: “To honor our nation by displaying its literary riches; by demonstrating that there is no aspect of literature, science, history or the arts that has not only been carefully cultivated in France, but treated in our language”. Looking back to French literary glories of the previous century, Goujet proclaims that French has taken the place of Latin as “the universal language of Europe”. French has incorporated the riches of other languages into itself, both through translation and through creative emulation [...] Goujet’s historical consciousness is intimately linked to his desire to set forth rules and systems, [...] The gradual articulation of such rules indicates the arrival of French as an international language, as a machine through which everything may be translated

[Julie Candler Hayes *Translation, Subjectivity and Culture in France and England, 1600-1800* (Stanford University Press, 2009) p. 238 – 239]

But it was not just a matter of theory. The grammar exercises in the provincial primary schools were the practical offshoots of the *version* exercises in the *lycée*. Renée Balibar tells us :

Lorsque les textes des lectures, exercices, exemples de grammaire et de rhétorique, étaient enseignés dans les petites classes des lycées, c’était comme préparation à des études franco-latines. Leur caractère artificiel était ouvertement rapporté à l’apprentissage de la traduction. [...] Les mêmes textes une fois transférés dans l’enseignement monolingue ont changé d’aspect. [...] Leur apparition semblait inconditionnelle, leur pouvoir d’expression absolu, leur logique indiscutable. L’immense majorité des Français qui ne pouvait penser ni au latin ni aux langages maternels pour faire ses devoirs, recevait le français des manuels comme une seconde nature, ou plutôt comme le seul langage naturel, le premier naturel, de la communauté française.

[Renée Balibar « le français enseigné » in *Histoire de la langue française 1880—1914* sous la direction de Gérald Antoine et Robert Martin, (CNRS Editions 1999) (vol. 24) p. 284]

Even more than this, as strange as it might sound, the *version* exercise – the translation of a text into prescriptive standard French prose – had actually been maintained in the monolingual primary school and had retained some of the pre-eminence it enjoyed in the Latin-centred *lycée* as a mechanism and a trope of cognitive transformation. Balibar continues:

Parmi les devoirs rassemblés à l'Exposition [universelle de Paris] de 1878, beaucoup s'intitulent bizarrement pour un Français d'aujourd'hui, « traduction », « traduction en prose » : ce sont des transformations d'énoncés pris dans Boileau, La Fontaine, Rabelais, et récrit dans « l'ordre direct », c'est à dire dans l'ordre requis par la théorie grammaticale : sujet – verbe – complément d'objet – complément circonstanciel.

Balibar (1999 : 280)

With the advent of the Third Republic, however, this thinking was overturned by a new generation of comparative linguists. Chief amongst them was Michel Bréal, translator of Franz Bopp and the pioneer of French semantics. Bréal presented an explicit vision of '*l'école qui tienne au sol*', and debunked the widespread notion that local dialects were debased versions of French. As Sonia Branca explains:

Bréal, comparatiste, professeur au Collège de France et membre du Grand Conseil de l'Instruction Publique, publie en 1872 *Quelques mots sur l'Instruction publique en France* : dans cet ouvrage [...] il revient sur les patois. [...] Bréal y voit « des dialectes non moins anciens, non moins réguliers que le français proprement dit, lequel, pour avoir été le dialecte de l'Ile-de-France, est devenu la langue littéraire de notre pays. »

[Sonia Branca « Patois, jargons, dialectes et institution scolaire dans la France du XIXe siècle » in *Recherches sur le français parlé* (G. A. R. S. no. 2, 1979) p. 22]

Such a vision led to the introduction of a teaching practice in provincial primary schools which replaced the latent influence of Latin and the strange monolingual translation exercises with actual bilingual translations from local dialects into French, which were explicitly modeled on Latin *version*. Branca tells us:

[Les provençalistes] vont alors tenter d'orienter dans un sens nouveau cet enseignement comparé. [...] Il faut [...] trouver un exercice qui fournisse un modèle, un appui aux élèves et une norme de correction au maître. Un exercice surtout où les élèves soient obligés de mener une recherche active. Aurouze songe à *la version*, qui permet de comparer deux langues et de regrouper tous les exercices

autour d'un texte. [...] Le plus célèbre de ces provençalistes fut Joseph Lhermite, [...] Il avait publié en 1876 une anthologie des poètes provençaux qui devait servir de recueil de versions pour l'enseignement du français en Provence. En 1911 parut *La Lionide*, poème en langue provençale, préfacé par Mistral et Barrès et destiné à servir d'épopée à usage scolaire.

Branca (1979 : 61)

Lhermite, going by his nom de plume, Savinian, became identified as the leading light in the movement.

la méthode dite « savinienne » : il s'agissait de remplacer l'enseignement en français, inaccessible aux petits élèves dont le français n'était pas la langue maternelle, par un enseignement qui utilise celle-ci comme intermédiaire.

*Histoire de la langue française 1880—1914* (1985 : 342)

It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the project of nationalist *défrichement* had been abandoned by this switch to pedagogic *déchiffrement*. On the contrary, the idea was to render the process more effective. Even in the most sentimentally pro-dialect statements, the goal of making the French territory more productive is implicit. Maurice Barrès, in his prefatory letter to Savinian in the bilingual edition of *La Lionide*, says:

Sous le prétexte de faire des citoyens français, chaque jour on détruit ce qu'il y a sans doute de meilleur chez nous, nos petits paysans. On entend partout se plaindre que nos campagnes sont délaissées. Peut-il en être autrement ? On s'attache comme à plaisir, à relâcher, à briser tous les liens qui rattachent aujourd'hui l'enfant – et, demain, l'homme à sa terre.

[Maurice Barrès in Savinian [J. Lhermite] *La Lionide, poème d'éducation*, Préface de Frédéric Mistral, Lettre de Maurice Barrès, de l'Académie française. (Avignon, Aubanel Frères ; Paris, Honoré Champion, 1911) p. xi]

What's more, the reason for the increased efficacy of this method for disseminating a pure form of standard French was conceived in terms that were specifically linked to a new interest in translation theory. Specifically, the desire was to reduce linguistic 'interference'.

les deux systèmes doivent coexister parallèlement et intégralement sans interférer. D'un côté on corrige les gasconismes pour faire plus français, de l'autre on vitupère contre les francismes pour conserver plus purs gascon ou provençal. L'hostilité à l'égard du français régional est explicite chez Charles Brun qui écrit qu'en dehors



de la méthode savinienne, l'enfant « n'arrivera à posséder qu'un « français régional », c'est à dire, en somme un patois »

*Histoire de la langue française 1880—1914* (1985 : 342)

In fact, even Bréal hints that the whole point of the *version* exercise is to extract the pupil from his local culture. A kind of cultural translation of the individual which seems benign when referring to the study of Latin... but when transferred to the study of French by *patoisant* students, it carries serious colonial implications

Le profit inestimable qui réside dans l'étude d'une langue [...], c'est qu'elle dépayse l'esprit et l'oblige à entrer dans une autre manière de penser et de parler. Chaque construction, chaque règle grammaticale qui s'éloigne de l'usage de notre langue doit être pour l'élève une occasion de réfléchir

Michel Bréal *Quelque mots sur l'instruction publique en France* (Paris : Hachette 1872) p. 164 [my emphasis]

The *dépaysement* that Bréal refers to, however, is implicitly supposed to pre-empt a *repaysement*, if you like, a synthetic reconstruction of a new mental *pays* – on the same lexical terrain as the old one – in the act of recreating a text. These kinds of statements hint at the influence of an embryonic translation theory with both cultural and epistemological elements. One might even be tempted to suggest that there is an analogical link being made here between an implicit deverbalisation (for the sake of reverbalisation) and an implicit *défrichement* (clearing terrain for the sake of cultivation).

Finally, the late nineteenth century saw the innovation of at least five new academic subjects in France, all of which were reliant on a marked increase in translation activity between European modern languages, namely Comparative linguistics, semantics, stylistics, anthropology and sociology. I would argue that these are the direct antecedents of contemporary translation studies. There is an almost circular line of causality involved: increased intertranslation of European scientific discourses leads to an increased interest in metacultural and metalinguistic fields of study which in turn leads to European translation studies.

### 3. Aftermath

Some questions need to be asked. Why has European translation studies had so little to say about the internal delimitations of linguistic territorial boundaries? By which I mean to say, why does it pay relatively so little attention to 'translations' between so-called 'variations'? How, in turn, does this relate to the subject's own conceptions of the internal and external limits of its own research

field? Why, for example, did Antoine Berman never explore the question of the internal *étranger* in any detail, despite the fact that at the same time as writing *l'épreuve de l'étranger* he was translating Eugen Weber's *Peasants into Frenchmen : the modernization of rural France* – a text which focuses very heavily on the project of territorial transformation pre-empted by aggressive linguistic standardization policies in rural schools, and even employs arguments related to cultural translation theory. Here is one telling extract from that text:

A word calls up an image, or a whole covey of images, and there can be serious problems of adjustment when a word familiar in one's own speech carries quite different connotations in another—as was the case, among others, with the word *rentier*, which in the south denoted not a man who drew a rent and lived on it, but a man who paid it. Even on the level of sheer practicality, difficulties of mental adjustment may arise when an object endowed with a particular gender or personality in one frame of mind has to be given another in translation. Gaston Bonheur cites a striking illustration of this problem involving the river Aude. In the local patois the river was treated, not as an object, but as a person. The article was accordingly never employed in referring to it: one went to Aude, or said that Aude was high, that Aude growls, and so forth. A whole mentality had to be bent for a small article to be added. Small wonder children and adults both had difficulty in coping with a language that was not only alien in itself but also represented an alien vision.

Eugene Weber *Peasants into Frenchmen : the modernization of rural France 1870 – 1914* (Stanford University Press 1976) p. 93

Seen in the context of an implicit desire to encourage a new unifying, transformative, technological and capitalist vision of expansionist land-use, this deliberate *dépaysant* 'bending' of a mentality can, I think, be called *territorial translation*. To understand the psycho-social mechanisms via which such a 'translation' might be propagated, we would be well advised to look back at the work of Gabriel Tarde: a man who, after all, had first-hand experience of its mind-bending effects.