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## Retranslation as Re-accentuation On the Epistemology and Poetics of Retranslation

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### Abstract

*In this paper, we try to answer the often repeated call for more theory-building on retranslation, by discussing the shortcomings of the still dominant 'retranslation hypothesis', and some of the problematic received ideas associated with it, regarding retranslations' novelty, their difference as compared to first or earlier translations, and the ageing of translations as opposed to originals (Section 1). Bringing together the topical issues of difference and historical time, we then discuss an epistemology of change in retranslation, based on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of reaccentuation, in which text and context come together (Section 2). The final part of this paper (Section 3) proposes three possible avenues toward a poetics of retranslation, which address each of the three misleading ideas examined in Section 1, revisiting these in the light of the epistemology of change discussed in Section 2. From the examples given, of Dutch and French translations of Laclos, Joyce and O'Brien, emerges a poetics of retranslation that we shall describe as a re-dialogising, re-complexifying, palimpsestic re-accentuation, that brings change regarding how works of literature are known in the target context.*

*Keywords: epistemology, poetics, retranslation theory, dialogism*

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## Retranslation as Re-accentuation

### On the Epistemology and Poetics of Retranslation

“L’histoire a besoin de méthode.” (BRISSET 2004: 62)

#### Abstract

*In this paper, we try to answer the often repeated call for more theory-building on retranslation, by discussing the shortcomings of the still dominant ‘retranslation hypothesis’, and some of the problematic received ideas associated with it, regarding retranslations’ novelty, their difference as compared to first or earlier translations, and the ageing of translations as opposed to originals (Section 1). Bringing together the topical issues of difference and historical time, we then discuss an epistemology of change in retranslation, based on Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of re-accentuation, in which text and context come together (Section 2). The final part of this paper (Section 3) proposes three possible avenues toward a poetics of retranslation, which address each of the three misleading received ideas examined in Section 1, revisiting these in the light of the epistemology of change discussed in Section 2. From the examples given, of Dutch and French translations of Laclos, Joyce and O’Brien, emerges a poetics of retranslation that we shall describe as a re-dialogising, re-complexifying, palimpsestic re-accentuation, that brings change regarding how works of literature are known in the target context.*

#### 0. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Since the nineties, retranslation studies (hereafter RTS) have privileged a perspective on retranslation (RT) that rests on the way in which the phenomenon was presented in the first thematic issue on the topic, the 1990 *Palimpsestes* volume on “*Retraduire*”. Even today, Berman (1990), although available only in French, remains one of the most quoted references in the field, too often, however, by second-hand and through the lens of Chesterman’s (2000) ‘retranslation hypothesis’ (RTH). Chesterman indeed refers to Berman, yet considerably transforms the latter’s thought, taking stock mostly of Bensimon’s (1990) introduction to the “*Retraduire*” volume (PEETERS & VAN POUCKE 2023: 4-8). Ever since, the RTH has dominated a substantial part of the field, determining how text analyses were conducted in numerous case studies, although it has been met with sharp criticism (KOSKINEN & PALOPOSKI 2003, 2004; MASSARDIER-KENNEY 2015; CADERA 2017a; PEETERS & VAN POUCKE 2023: 8-12). Even if today many scholars agree that the RTH has run out of breath, much of the current debate still

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has greatly benefited from the comments provided by the editors and the anonymous reviewers; I wholeheartedly thank them for their much appreciated time and effort.

ruminates over that same hypothesis, for which, to our knowledge, no alternative text-analytical epistemology has been put forward. In this theoretical paper, we will first discuss the shortcomings of that dominant paradigm, especially considering three problematic received ideas associated with it (Section 1). Second, we will present an alternative way of conceptualising change in RT, namely Bakhtin's (1981c) theory of dialogical re-accentuation (Section 2). On the basis of that epistemological framework, we will then put forward three possible avenues toward a poetics of RT that are related to the previously mentioned *trivium* of received ideas (Section 3). As such, this paper draws on, and brings together our previous and ongoing research into the poetics of RT.

### **1. The problematic *trivium* of RT: novelty, closeness, ageing**

In the following paragraphs, three received ideas concerning RT shall first be discussed. These ideas are: that RTs are *new* translations of a *same* text in the *same* target language and context (Section 1.1); that RTs are *closer* to the source text (ST) than first translations (Section 1.2); and that RTs are made when existing translations' language has *aged* (Section 1.3). Although this problematic "trivium" (LADMIRAL 2011: 45) does hold some truth, it has been accompanied by misunderstandings that have had a structuring impact on much of the debate over the past decades.

#### **1.1 Novelty, homogenisation and dichotomy**

Since the beginning, RT as a topic of scientific investigation has suffered from ill-considered conceptualisations. These are first of all related to the common definition of RTs as *new* translations of a same ST previously translated in the same target language and context (GAMBIER 1994; TAHIR GÜRÇAĞLAR 2009; KOSKINEN & PALOPOSKI 2010). By that definition, the focus lies with the idea that RTs are "new translations". However, what that means is not unambiguous. On the one hand, "new" can refer to a *translation product* that is new compared to an existing one, and therefore different – this has given rise to the dominant paradigm of differentiability, by which scholars study what is different in RTs as compared to first or earlier translations (rather than what is not different). On the other hand, however, "new" can also refer to a new stage in the *historical process* of subsequent translations, that is, a new publication and therefore a new event in the foreign reception process of a work of literature – this has led to another emphasis, namely on target context / culture (TC) change, rather than textual difference, or change.

Arguably, in RTS, this ambivalent concept of novelty has developed into two perspectives on the relationship between text and context. On the one hand, researchers have privileged text-comparative approaches, looking into *how* specific RTs are different as compared to first or earlier translations (either confirming or denying the RTH, or considering it insufficient). In such analyses, one generally turns to context only in second instance, as an external, explanatory factor, so that textual analysis and contextualisation tend to remain a dual approach, all the more so because the latter

mostly involves looking into the *who?*, rather than the *how?* question. On the other hand, researchers have embraced “primarily [...] contextual” (Cadera 2017a: 14) methods, such as the systemic approach (CADERA 2017a; BERK ALBACHTEN & TAHIR GÜRÇAĞLAR 2019) focusing on the complex interrelations, in a given TC, between historical, socio-cultural, institutional, commercial and agential aspects, addressing the questions *when* texts get retranslated, *who* retranslates them and *what* gets retranslated and *why* (see also the important archival work done by KOSKINEN & PALOPOSKI 2019; GULYÁS 2023; SVAHN 2023), thus refusing to explain the phenomenon’s “mercurial inconstancy” (DEANE-COX 2014: 1) merely by textual factors.

Both these perspectives, albeit different (putting either text or context first), rest on a same and largely accepted premise, namely that contextual changes have an ‘inward’, explanatory effect on textual changes. Less attention has been devoted to RTs’ ‘outward’ effect in the TC, that is, the idea that a RT “must somehow represent a change” (CADERA & WALSH 2022: 4). A RT is *another* translation, at *another* stage in the TC historical process, by which *another*, often competing, interpretation (VENUTI 2004: 36-37) changes how a work of literature is known in the receiving culture. Historical change thus works both ways, from context to text (inward) but also from text to context (outward). To conceptualise how change occurs in that reciprocal relationship between texts and contexts, implies an epistemology of change (a theory of how knowledge of a work of literature changes when it is retranslated) that transcends the dominant hermeneutical (explanatory) approach to context, as well as the current emphasis on either textual difference by which contextual change comes second, or contextual change by which texts come second.

The development of such a historical approach to how the knowledge of works of literature changes in the TC when they are retranslated – not only because RTs are new translations, but because the *mutual relationship* (outside-in and inside-out) between both source and target texts and contexts, evolves – may have been hindered by a second conceptual issue. That issue is the ahistorical and homogenising perspective on languages and contexts enclosed in the definition of RTs as new translations of the *same* text, in the *same* target language and context. Since the cultural turn, TS and RTS scholars are very much aware that cultures and languages change, and that texts do not have a stable and immanent meaning. But the definition we use says otherwise. Yet, when Jacques Aubert and his team of French translators, for instance, retranslated *Ulysses* in the early 2000s, were they really translating the *same* text (with the *same* meaning) in the *same* language and in the *same* TC as Auguste Morel in the late 1920s? RTs should be defined, not as a new version of the same text in the same language, but as an event in the foreign reception process of a work by which a changed translation offers a changed text of that work, in a changed language, in a changed TC. Historical change works both ways: as much as RTs are influenced by cultural and linguistic change in the TC, they also create cultural and linguistic change in that TC.

Third, by the same definition, RT is forced into a dichotomic straitjacket that contrasts source and target, ST and TC. Although commonplace in TS, that dichotomy is

dysfunctional when it comes to RT, as the ST is already present in the TC, to readers and retranslators alike, in an existing translation. That translation can be read, criticised, even re-used by a retranslator, thus becoming a second (and second-degree) source material to the retranslator. When *Ulysses*, for instance, was retranslated in French, Joyce's novel already was a canonical text, in the TC as well, in Morel's 1929 translation (which was included, in 1995, in Gallimard's "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade", the unquestioned centre of French canonicity). Morel was indeed re-used by the retranslators. Some retranslators even use existing translations in other languages than the target language. The Dutch retranslators of *Ulysses* (BINDERVOET & HENKES 2012), for instance, have used the existing Dutch, yet also French and German translations<sup>2</sup>, while the Dutch retranslator of Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* looked at the existing Dutch, but also English and German translations.<sup>3</sup> A case can definitely be made for a more multilingual concept of RT, as advocated by Alevato (2019). At any rate, RT blurs the dichotomy of source and target: the ST already is (a) target text(s), out there to be read by the same potential readership, and target texts can even become second-degree source materials.

Another dichotomy is the one that contrasts RTs with translations, although RTs are, in the very first place, translations. But RTs are seen as 'special' translations, as the exception to an unwritten, yet actually uncertain, general rule, that texts would 'normally' be translated only once. At least for canonical texts, if there is a general rule, surely that rule must be that sooner or later canonised texts are either retranslated, or forgotten (KOSKINEN & PALOPOSKI 2019: 31). That may well be the only 'universal of RT' to stand the test of the phenomenon's complexity. Maybe it is not RT, but single translation of canonical texts that is the exception – albeit often accompanied by reprints and overt or covert revisions (BOLLAERT 2019; SVAHN 2023). More archival work is definitely needed.

Arguably, these homogenisations and dichotomies essentially touch upon the two central topics when it comes to understanding how retranslators translate and how RTs bring creative change, in changed TCs. These central topics are textual difference on the one hand, and contextual evolution on the other hand, as two sides of the same coin of historical change. Both of these topics as well, have been subject to problematic received ideas, as we shall explain in the following paragraphs.

### **1.2 Textual difference and 'closeness'**

When it comes to RT's textual difference in comparison with first or earlier translations, too much credit has been given to the idea that RTs tend to be 'closer' to the ST than existing translations (Chesterman, 2000). If anything, the vast archive of case studies that

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<sup>2</sup> As the translators have stated in interviews in the press and online, e.g. <https://thedreamlifeofbalsosnell.org/2012/08/10/klamaai-nog-aan-toe-ulixes-de-nieuwe/>.

<sup>3</sup> Personal conversation with the retranslator, Martin de Haan.

have endeavoured either to confirm or to refute the RTH,<sup>4</sup> has led to a largely shared agreement on two points: (1) that ‘closeness’ to the ST is not a precise concept, but a *topos* borrowed from publishers’ and translators’ paratexts that can mean just about anything; and (2) that the idea of target-oriented first translations *versus* source-oriented RTs is yet another problematic dichotomy. It should at least, according to Ladmiral, be considered alongside two other components of a complex and “problematic trivium” (2011: 45)<sup>5</sup> in need of much more analysis, namely the parts played by commercial motivations and the multifaceted phenomenon of canonicity.

In addition, Chesterman’s formula is akin to the previously mentioned ahistorical perspective on RT. Its focus on textual ‘closeness’ parentheses contextual evolution, which is dismissed by a fairly laconic “same ST, same TL” (CHESTERMAN 2000: 23). On the other hand, the historical contingency of texts is dichotomised into a differential “earlier” *versus* “later translations” (ibid.), that does not do justice to the phenomenon’s “real complexity” (CADERA 2017a: 6). RTs are not always “later translations”, nor are they always the result of an earlier translation being outdated. Joyce’s *Dubliners*, for instance, was translated fourteen times in Italian, and is available in the market today in at least six different Italian translations. These are all RTs, all co-exist, and were all made between 1988 and 2008, thus surely not because the previous ones had aged. And this is no exception: other examples of such overabundance are Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* in English or Korean (DEANE-COX 2014; LADMIRAL 2011: 30), Kafka’s *Die Verwandlung* in Spanish (CADERA 2017b) or Saint-Exupéry’s *Petit prince* in Turkish (TAHIR GÜRÇAĞLAR 2022). Approaching RT in dichotomic terms of first (or earlier) translations *versus* RTs, or in their diachronic succession without considering their synchronic presence in the TC and the historical specificity of that TC (BRISSET 2004: 63), does not stand to reason.

As we have argued before (PEETERS & VAN POUCKE 2023), there is a third reason why the RTH is ill-suited to describe historical change. That reason is that the very notion of ‘closeness’ is an epistemological construct which is itself historically contingent (thus culturally diverse). What TCs, and therefore translators and scholars in those societies, believe ‘closeness’ in translation to be, changes over time. Therefore, when ‘closeness’ (whatever it means) is applied to historical change (i.e. to study later translations as compared to earlier ones), one should duly consider the historical evolution of the notion of ‘closeness’ itself. If not, a contemporary envisionment of that notion is projected unto translations of the past (SIMÉONI 2000: 8; BRISSET 2004: 40), in which case it is no wonder that more recent RTs are found to be ‘closer’ to the ST. In fact, they are closer to our own cultural construct of what ‘closeness’ to the ST is, or should be. ‘Closeness’ is hardly an objective measure; it is more of a *petitio principii*.

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<sup>4</sup> Overviews can be found in MILTON & TORRES 2003, DESMIDT 2009, PALOPOSKI & KOSKINEN 2010, MONTI & SCHNYDER 2011, DEANE-COX 2014, ALVSTAD & ASSIS ROSA 2015, and PEETERS & VAN POUCKE 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Unless indicated otherwise, translations from French are ours.

None of these criticisms, however, should be taken as an attack on Andrew Chesterman as such. What Chesterman wrote on RT was never intended to be anything else than a set of examples of four types of hypotheses, put forward as the prolegomena to an “*empirical* research programme for translation studies” (2000: 25, our emphasis). Rather, the issue is that the RTH has been used by RT scholars, not for the empirical research it was meant to illustrate, but (a) as an *epistemological* paradigm that has to a large extent determined how we have studied RTs; (b) as a *hermeneutic* paradigm used to interpret difference in terms of ‘closeness’; and (c) as descriptive, or even predictive *statements* (rather than probabilistic hypotheses) on what RTs are, or ought to be. The RTH, or rather what we have collectively made of it, should be dismissed, instead of being continually discussed.

### **1.3 Contextual difference and ageing**

A third problematic received idea, which is related to the previously mentioned ones, is the purported ageing of translations (as opposed to originals), as a motive for RT. That idea is often attributed to Berman (1990), which is hardly fair. Berman clearly distances himself from those who “search for the reasons behind the need for RTs in a phenomenon that is itself rather mysterious” (1990: 1), namely the conviction that translations ‘age’ (Berman’s inverted comma’s) while originals do not, to then pursue “a very different line of thought” (1). That line of thought is a dense “reflection” on the relationship between translation and historical time, in which Berman distinguishes between two types of temporality. The first is translation’s own temporality (i.e. time inscribed in a translation, so the *textual* dimension of translations’ historicity): in Berman’s view, all translations are marked by incompleteness (“*inachèvement*”; no translation is a perfect rendering) and decay (“*caducité*”; all translations are doomed to die, that is, to be replaced or to be forgotten), so that “the possibility and necessity of retranslation are inscribed in the very structure of the act of translating” (1). Put otherwise, all translations (including RTs) are by nature open to RT. On the other hand, there is historical time (i.e. the *contextual* dimension of translation’s historicity), which chronological linearity unfolds itself, according to Berman who takes inspiration from Goethe, in triadic cycles, of initial “failing” or “shortcoming” (“*défaillance*”), followed by improvement that reduces that “*défaillance*”, and finally “fulfilment” (“*accomplissement*”). When it comes to the history of consecutive translations, translation’s own temporality (*caducité* and *inachèvement*) is integrated into historical time (from *défaillance*, over reduced *défaillance*, to *accomplissement*). This results in repeated triadic cycles of first translations which are “*défaillantes*” (yet Berman admits exceptions, explicitly stating that first translations can exceptionally be “major translations”, “*grandes traductions*”); then RTs that reduce “shortcomings”; and finally “major translations”, i.e. RTs that are “fulfilled” because they bring, not ‘closeness’ or source-orientedness, but a *synthesis*, at a given moment in a TC’s history, of source-orientedness (which in Berman’s view is the *first* stage!) and target-orientedness (*second* stage) that achieves canonical status in the TC, and therefore “*temporarily* suspends the succession of translations” (1990: 5; our emphasis). That

moment in history when major translations occur, is not a full stop (i.e. even major translations ‘age’ after some time, albeit more slowly), nor is it a given: major translations only occur when “the appropriate moment” is there, the ungraspable “Kairos” (the god of opportunity), which in Greek mythology counters the ineluctable destruction (*caducité*) brought by Chronos. Berman’s philosophical “*réflexion*” (his word) is much more, and far less dichotomic, than what it has been taken for (e.g. first translations are always deficient; RTs are source-oriented; major translations do not age; history is a linear process of improvement; all of that has been written, and repeated; none of it conforms to Berman’s *réflexion*).

The ageing of works of literature, whether translations or originals, is “mysterious” (BERMAN 1990: 1) because it is not just an empirical given. It is related to the very complex issue of canonicity. When a translation ‘ages’, “[i]t is not so much the translation itself that is ageing”, Ladmiral (2011: 31) writes, “as our relationship with it”. That relationship (which itself is context- and time-specific) is determined by two factors, one obvious, the other perhaps less so. The obvious element of ageing is that the language used in a translation ages, as compared to contemporary target language which continuously evolves. Morel’s French today is outdated, and some day Aubert’s will be as well. The other factor at play, albeit less obvious, is equally important. That is the “cultural representation” (MASSARDIER-KENNEY 2015: 76) of literary ageing, which is akin to what we (in a given TC) believe originals and translations to be, or ought to be. Besides language itself, that construct also changes over time, and therefore ages (TOPIA 1990: 45-47; BRISSET 2004: 52-56). The difference between translations and originals lies not so much in the (empirical) ageing of their language (Joyce’s English, or Flaubert’s French are outdated as well), but in the social construct of how we believe translations (or their target language) age(s) (bluntly put: badly), and how canonical originals (their source language) and, if we follow Berman, major translations which are “like originals”, age (that is: well, or at least more slowly – which is why claiming Joyce’s or Flaubert’s language is outdated, may come across as provocative, yet not so for Rabelais’ or Chaucer’s which are much older). Canonical texts (and maybe canonical translations as well) are perhaps less influenced by historical contingency because canonical status turns them into national monuments of the past, endowed with atemporal aesthetic value or cultural capital (BOURDIEU 1993: 60 and 187; BRISSET 2004: 53-55). Put otherwise, maybe their relevance to later generations does not ‘age’ as much, or as rapidly as their language does, thus slowing down the *perceived* ageing process. Translations (unless canonised in the TC) stem by definition from foreign literatures, thus are perhaps less easily inscribed in such a national logic of canonisation (with the historical exception of young nations creating their own literary tradition by translations of imported world literature). Therefore, hypothetically, when their language ages, our relationship with them ages without the stabilising forces of canonisation slowing down the destructive forces of Chronos.

Nonetheless, the outdatedness of a translation can indeed be the result of empirical ageing, in which case it is no longer read or deemed readable because of important linguistic, translational or socio-ideological changes in the TC. Yet, an outdated translation is not necessarily an old one (nor does an old translation have to be outdated).

Our relationship with a translation can also change for other reasons, including *authors* being forgotten or censored in the TC. One of those reasons can also be that an existing translation *is presented* as no longer readable, because there is a new translation. One of the changes that RTs bring to evolving TCs, is that they *make* (a) previous translation(s) (seem) outdated, because the “new translation” must surely have been made for good reason. The most obvious reason, given the cultural representation that translations age badly, then is that the existing translations must be outdated, although empirical ageing may not be involved. Translations are not necessarily replaced because they have aged; it can also be the other way around: they are replaced (for other reasons) and therefore presented as having aged. The change that RTs bring in the TC, is first and foremost a changed relationship with the existing translation(s), because change and therefore the latter’s (purported) outdatedness are now thematised in the TC.

In the paragraphs above, we have discussed a number of methodological pitfalls (homogenisation, dichotomy, ahistoricity) and a misleading *trivium* of received ideas (concerning novelty, closeness, and ageing), that may have hampered the development of an epistemology of change in RT. That need for a new epistemology that can replace the now shunned RTH by considering historical change, not as a predominantly text-related, nor as a predominantly context-related matter, but in the mutual interrelatedness of texts and contexts, both outside-in and inside-out, brings us to Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of re-accentuation.

## **2. Re-accentuation: the never-ending process of reinterpreting the classics**

Arguably, Bakhtin’s (1981c) theory of dialogical re-accentuation can indeed offer such an epistemology, avoiding the pitfalls of the RTH and underpinning a more critical view on the concepts discussed above. Bakhtin approaches historical change in terms of context-determined yet textually present dialogical relationships between texts and their contexts. Whereas the systemic approach has shifted attention toward contextual complexity, away from the text by its rightful avoidance of the RTH, the dialogical approach presented here advocates a return to textual analysis (yet not in the way the RTH does), while considering texts in their historical relationship with both source and target contexts (as does the systemic approach, though emphasizing inward change). That relationship is dialogical; it is expressed through language, as the two-way conduit (both inward and outward) between contexts and texts. It is by their use of language that texts, whether originals or translations, absorb their historical contexts in all their complexity; it is also by their use of language that texts, including RTs, react to existing texts, including STs and existing translations, and engage a dialogue between their own historical context and other historical contexts voiced by those existing texts. When RTs occur, that dialogue changes, thus brings change in the TC with regard to how a work of literature is known.

### **2.1 Heteroglossia and historical change**

Re-accentuation is a way of conceptualising the historical process of continuous re-interpretation of the classics (PEETERS 2021; PEETERS & SANZ GALLEGO & PAULIS 2022), by bringing together an epistemology of language (dialogism) – which is not a theory of translation as such, yet relevant to translation since language is the raw material translations are made of – and a concept of changing, mutual (outside-in and inside-out) interaction between texts and historical contexts.

Bakhtin's theory is contained in a long essay titled 'Discourse in the novel' (1981c: 259-422). As evidenced by that title, his main concern is the novel's relationship to the languages and discourses (i.e. languages used in individual and social voices) present in a given socio-ideological, historical context. Novelistic discourse, Bakhtin argues, incorporates materials borrowed from those voices present in the context in which it is written (including socio-ideological perspectives and viewpoints included in them, and their chronotopes, i.e. collective representations of time-space; BAKHTIN 1981b and BRISSET 2004: 41, 47-48). The novel thus reacts to the diversity of languages (i.e. heteroglossia – diversity in a language by influence from other languages) and discourses (i.e. heterology – social diversity within a language) that comes with its contextual situatedness. Its linguistic material is "borrowed from others" (ROBINSON 2011), as it reacts to individual, social, ideological, regional, historical voices, including the socio-ideological perspectives on reality that they bring, present in a given socio-ideological, historical context. Discourse in the novel is therefore dialogical: it is shaped by the 'responsiveness' by which an individual stylistic expression enters in dialogue with the plethora of interconnected voices that cohabit within social space, and from which meaning emerges. This is why the novel is rooted in heteroglossia (1981c: 293-295)<sup>6</sup>.

Although novelistic discourse is embedded in the highly complex diversity of social discourses present in its context (which are its linguistic material), the language used in a novel (the form it uses) does not necessarily manifest heteroglossia. The discursive field of the novel is permeated by the dynamic between what Bakhtin refers to as two "stylistic lines". The First Stylistic Line in the history of the novel tends toward uniformity. In that tradition, akin to epic (1981a), materials used are detached from their own, various discourses and voices, as heteroglossia is organised according to a hierarchical principle. That principle subdues the "centrifugal forces" of discourse diversity to the "centripetal forces" of authoritative linguistic correctness (1981c: 272). This results in monological, "single-voiced" discourse, in which characters and narrators share the same, conventional, highbrow language-of-literature, closed on itself as other types of social discourses reputed unworthy of literature, are excluded from the novel. That language of "general literariness" (383), detached from its socio-linguistic context, exists only in literature, and in discourses aligned with the authority of highbrow literary style and correctness (in politics, journalism, philosophy,

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<sup>6</sup> From this point forward, for practical reasons, we use "heteroglossia" as an umbrella term that includes heterology.

education). The Second Stylistic Line in the novel, on the other hand, relativises such abstract language by importing real-life language use, thus the concreteness of heteroglossia. While centripetal forces seek stability, the centrifugal forces at work in the Second Stylistic Line challenge pre-conceived, conventional discourses – Bakhtin thus associates it with modernity (HIRSCHKOP 2021) – by embracing the social and ideological diversity of heteroglossia. Narrators and characters then develop their own voices by embodying socio-ideologically specific ways of expression (e.g. the language of a working man, a would-be writer, a young girl abandoned by her lover, an elderly priest, or bourgeois, catholic, communist, or roaring twenties ways of expression, and so on, that all interconnect). Novelistic discourse is thus turned into a multifarious means of characterisation, by multiple voices that show “the present in all its open-endedness” (1981a: 19). Such discourse is “multi-voiced”, as it brings all discourses and genres present in the context, into novelistic discourse. This is the reason why Bakhtin’s concept of “novelness” is more a force than a genre. It applies to all forms and types of style that challenge highbrow tradition by celebrating heteroglossia, including in other genres (poetry, theatre, film and tv-series dialogue) that can be “novelised” as well. Novelness and multivoicedness are the stylistic and narrative counterparts of contextual heteroglossia, when the sociolinguistic diversity associated with literary material (e.g., the previously mentioned working man, would-be writer, and so on), also affects literary form (making use of their respective, diverse and multiple voices).

Heteroglossia and therefore historical context, are at the heart of Bakhtin’s concept of dialogical re-accentuation. As explained above, novels are rooted in the heteroglossia of their time, thus bring their historical context into the text by the socio-ideological voices they incorporate. On the other hand, that text also becomes part of another historical context, i.e. the one in which it is read. This is why readers too respond to heteroglossia, present both in the text they read, and in their own historical and social-ideological context, including the place they see for heteroglossia in literature. Those contexts, including societal heteroglossia in them, are subject to historical change. Therefore, Bakhtin is also concerned with the changing contextual background against which novelistic discourses are understood. Re-accentuation involves that changing dialogical background, hence the continuous reinterpretation and re-use of classic works of literature, in changing contexts. Simply put: the material text of a work of literature does not change (*Ulysses* will always be *Ulysses*, abstraction made of slight varieties in different editions), but reception contexts do (*Ulysses* is no longer received, read nor interpreted as it was in 1922). Therefore, responsiveness, i.e. the interpretation of, and engagement with that text, including its relationship with contextual heteroglossia, changes, so that “the historical life of classic works is in fact the uninterrupted process of their social and ideological re-accentuation” (1981c: 421), through re-interpretations and re-uses (in comments, parodies, adaptations, imitations, screen adaptations, and so on), in changed contexts. Re-accentuation, as a way of conceptualising the process by which the classics meet an uninterrupted chain of dialogical responses, is first and foremost an epistemological dialogue of historical

contexts “in which (...) one historical specificity speaks to another” (DENTITH 1995: 96), to make meaning out of texts.

## **2.2 Translation as re-accentuation**

Although Bakhtin’s theory of re-accentuation is not a theory of translation, translation is indeed a re-accentuation, and one that plays an important part in the afterlife of classics of world literature. Translators as well are readers that engage, from their own historical context, in a responsive dialogue with a text’s historical specificity, thus develop their own socio-ideologically and historically specific, individual attitudes toward the heteroglossia present in the ST material on the one hand, and in their own TC on the other hand. In that sense, Aubert and his team were not reading, nor retranslating the ‘same’ text in the ‘same’ language as Morel. One of the major disputes between Joyce translators was precisely about heteroglossia: Paul Claes contended that *Ulysses* contains “mainly idiomatic English”, thus should be translated in mainly idiomatic Dutch, while Erik Bindervoet and Robbert-Jan Henkes claimed the opposite, emphasising Joyce’s playful deconstruction of the language, hence the need for a bold, heteroglossic translation in “Joycean Dutch” (PEETERS 2013).

As this example shows, translators, of course, are not only readers that interpret the ST material in a given way. They are also writers, creators of a target text, in the target language and context of their own contemporaneity, therefore developing an attitude toward contemporary context and target language heteroglossia in that context, including the place they see for it in translated literature, as a dialogical response to the heteroglossia present in the ST material. Paul Claes’ and Mon Nys’ (1994) translation is closer to Bakhtin’s First Stylistic Line of the novel, while Bindervoet & Henkes (2012) re-accented the novel’s interpretation in the Dutch TC toward increased heteroglossia, thus moving it closer to the Second Stylistic Line in the TC. That way, they did not only develop a changed attitude toward both source and target heteroglossia (outside-in), they also brought change in the TC (inside-out). This is not a matter of ‘closeness’ to the ST – which was claimed by all the translators involved, albeit with a different concept of what ‘closeness’ to Joyce’s text means. Rather, it is a matter of how a given concept of ‘closeness’ to the ST as expressed in an existing translation, is re-accented when another concept of ‘closeness’ is created in a RT – in this case, one that brings the translated material closer to the Second Stylistic Line of heteroglossia and multivoicedness. Such a re-accentuation can, but need not, happen after a given amount of time. And it can, but need not, happen when retranslators consciously use and improve (in their view) on an existing translation. Even when retranslators choose not to look at existing translations, their RT still creates historical change, by re-accenting the way in which a work of literature is known, and can be read, in the TC.

## **2.3 RT as second-degree re-accentuation**

As was made clear by the open polemic between Dutch Joyce translators, re-accentuation does not always occur as the result of much ageing (18 years, in this case); it can also be induced by concomitant conflicting visions. However, even when the

time lag between two translations is small, RTs still are translations made “after *and against*” (STEINER 1975: 412; our emphasis). As RTs are presented to the public as “new translations”, they have to be somehow ‘better’, that is, more faithful, reliable, readable, modern, closer to the original, or any other *topos* in paratexts and press reviews. Retranslators have to deliver on that assumption and to somehow create change in comparison with the existing translation(s), because otherwise their RT would have no legitimacy. Retranslators thus “assume *some* stance towards the first translator” (KOSKINEN & PALOPOSKI 2015: 28). That stance is typically a polemical one, either overt (i.e. when discussed in paratexts, and when existing translations are consciously used, to improve on them) or hidden (when not talked about, or when existing translations are not looked at).<sup>7</sup> The existence of (an) earlier translation(s) in the TC is a given of RT; therefore, the materials that retranslators dialogically react to, either by using them or by the refusal to use them, include previous translations, as well as the ST material. To come back to re-accentuation and historical change, it would appear that retranslators formulate, from their own historical TC and with their own responsiveness toward heteroglossia in that TC, a dialogical response to the ST material, including its attitude toward heteroglossia stemming from its own historical context. At the same time, retranslators formulate *another* dialogical response, either to the way in which existing translations had responded to that ST material and the attitude toward heteroglossia contained in it (when retranslators use existing translations), or to the fact that a previous translation already exists (but is not used). The re-accentuation that occurs in RT therefore is a re-accentuation to the second degree, and one that is influenced by, yet also brings historical change. The re-accentuation of the ST material that occurs in RT, implies a re-accentuation of existing translations that had already re-accented that source material in the TC. As the latter are existing TC materials, RTs are not simply more source-oriented or closer to the ST; rather, RTs trace a path of increased dialogical interaction between source and target texts and contexts, both outside-in and inside-out. Change in RT is a two-way epistemology, from both source and TCs to texts, and from both source and target texts to TCs.

### 3. Towards a poetics of RT

The theory of re-accentuation and its two-way epistemology of changing-texts-in-changing-contexts, when applied to RT as in Section 2.3 above, can feed into possible approaches to the poetics of RT. Poetics is defined here, following Aristotle, as the analysis of how a work of verbal art uses language (form) to represent objects, characters and events (content), and what effects this has on its interpretation in a given context. Following the theory of re-accentuation, the poetics of RT can be defined as the study of how a work of verbal art (a RT) uses changed target language (form) to re-accent the way

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<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin (1984: 196) defines “hidden polemic” or “hidden dialogue” as a type of dialogical response to someone else’s discourse, by which the other’s voice is not addressed openly, yet in which “One word acutely senses alongside it someone else’s word speaking about the same object”.

in which (an) existing work(s) of verbal art (the existing translation(s)) used target language (form) to re-accent the way in which an existing work of verbal art (an original) used source language (form) to represent objects, characters and events (content), and what effects this has on the interpretation of that work, including how it changes the way in which that work had been translated before, in a given historical TC. Our approach to form in poetics focuses on heteroglossia as the two-way conduit between texts and contextual situatedness, as explained above.

In the following paragraphs, we shall present three possible strands for the analysis of that poetics of RT. Each of these strands builds on the previous one, and addresses one of the elements that compose the misleading *trivium* of RT discussed above (Section 1), revisiting these in the light of the framework of re-accentuation (Section 2). Each of these strands should be seen as hypothetical – in the sense that the model for the study of RT poetics proposed in these pages, could hypothetically be used to describe what happens in other RTs, in other languages, other genres or types of discourse open to heteroglossia and akin to ‘novelness’ (in journalism, film or theatre), and other contexts, than the ones we have studied. None of these ideas, however, should be taken as the prolegomena to yet another probabilistic universal such as the RTH. In re-accentuation, changing context is key; therefore, in a Bakhtinian epistemology, there is no such thing as a universal.

First, we will focus our attention on the alleged ageing of translations (Section 1.3), arguing that ageing is not a translation-inherent phenomenon, but is related to changing target text heteroglossia, as a result of which RTs can be studied as re-dialogising re-accentuations of existing translation(s) (Section 3.1). Next, we will discuss how RTs challenge some of the hypothetical ‘universals’ of translation, such as explicitation, standardisation, conventionalisation, or simplification, and how that idea can lead to a poetics which approaches ‘closeness’, not as a probabilistic universal, nor as a descriptive statement (Section 1.2), but as a context-determined and historically contingent, thus changing combination of variables (Section 3.2). Finally, we will look into the question of RTs novelty (Section 1.1) and discuss a possible way of analysing RT poetics in terms of a re-accentuation that combines revisions and palimpsestic re-uses of, or overlaps with, existing translations (Section 3.3).

### **3.1 Ageing, heteroglossia and re-dialogisation in RT**

Part of the misleading received idea that translations age while originals do not, is true. Translations do age. But so do originals. After a given amount of time, all texts age. Rabelais, Montaigne, Chaucer, Shakespeare can all be read today in modern language adaptations / modernisations / transpositions – curiously, there is a certain reluctance to call them (intralingual) translations. Even Berman’s “major translations” age, as they only “temporarily suspen[d] the succession of translations” (1990: 5), laying claim to the title of *the* canonical translation only until the “taboo represented by the retranslation of canonical translations” (LADMIRAL 2011: 45) is transgressed. Morel’s 1929 longtime canonical translation of *Ulysses* (overviewed by Valery Larbaud, sanctioned by Joyce himself) *has* been replaced by a RT, albeit only after 75 years, and

so have the more iconic examples of major translations given by Berman (Baudelaire's Poe, or Chateaubriand's *Paradise lost*) (PEETERS & VAN POUCKE 2023: 9-10). Canonical texts (whether originals, or major translations) age too, and can even be forgotten (who today remembers Carl Spitteler or Sinclair Lewis, both Nobel Prize winners?). That happens when there is no, or no longer, re-accentuation, that constantly updates canonical texts' relevance to contemporary contexts, by including them in new texts and artefacts (novels, comic books, newspaper articles, critical comments, films, songs, works of art, adaptations, and also translations), thus establishing a changing dialogue with today's concerns.

Although translations age, their ageing does not necessarily play a role in the appearance of a RT. New translations (RTs) turn up when that dialogue, as it occurs in the re-accentuation performed in (an) existing translation(s), is perceived as dysfunctional in the TC, for any number of reasons. This can, but need not, be due to its language being experienced as outdated. It is also possible that its language *use* (its heteroglossia, or lack thereof) or its content are considered problematic, for ideological (see the case of Agatha Christie's *And then there were none*, CADERA & WALSH 2022: 4), or aesthetic reasons. Often, however, behind all of these possible *motives* for RT, there is a more fundamental *motivation*: commercial and/or symbolic capital. Generally, if there is no money or prestige to be gained, by the publisher and/or the translator, there is no RT. It is commercial motivation that brings publishers to set off the previous translation's outdatedness against the new translation's alleged freshness, closeness, faithfulness, and so on (PEETERS & VAN POUCKE 2023: 7-8). More than a reason for RT, the ageing of existing translations is a motive used as a commercial argument, while the real motivation is profitability and symbolic value (GULYÁS 2022: 216 and 220-221). The publishing rate of, for instance, Italian Joyce translations (10 translations of *Dubliners* between 1974 and 1995, 5 of *Ulysses* since 2012) can only be explained by commercial rivalry between publishers, competing for a national market with multiple centres of production (Milan, Florence, Rome) and the symbolic and commercial capital that comes with having their own Joyce translations. In multi-centred literary systems such as the Italian or the Spanish ones, ageing may well play a less important role when it comes to what is retranslated and when, than in strongly centralised literary systems such as the French or the Dutch ones. It would be interesting to put that hypothesis to the test, in a large, transversal, cross-cultural project on RT.

Whatever the motive may be for RT to occur, whether ageing or not, the re-accentuation performed in RT concerns language-in-contexts, i.e. the way in which target language is used, in a given (historical, socio-ideological) TC, to create a particular idea of 'closeness', or nexus of Toury's (2012) adequacy (how a translation achieves a given 'faithfulness' to the ST material) and acceptability (its appropriateness, including the language it uses, in the TC). RTs redefine that very nexus of 'closeness' by a polemical response (either overt or hidden) to how the ST was translated by making use of TC language. In that second-degree re-accentuation, language use and heteroglossia are key: the poetics of RT rests on how changing target (con)text

language is used to portray source (con)text language, what effects that yields on the interpretation of content and meaning, and how those effects bring change (or not) in the TC, in comparison with existing translations (whether re-used or not).

Language use (including heteroglossia or the lack thereof) may even be one of the keys as to why some translations (including RTs) age badly (rapidly), and others age well (slowly). The idea that translations age thus are replaced by RTs because their language ages might not be entirely true; it could also be the case that it is language *use* that makes *some* translations age faster, while others age slower. Language, Meschonnic (1990) argued, is the palimpsest of translation: that “sub-text” determines a translation’s “post-text” (Meschonnic’s terms), or longevity in the TC. According to Meschonnic, when a translator uses a language they believe to be “possible” (arguably, one could say conventional in the TC), the “historicism” (historical contingency) of that language is what makes our relationship with a translation age. When, however, translators use language in such a way that they create “a poetics of their own”, their translations are “like originals”, and age well, in their own “historicity” (as opposed to “historicism”). Meschonnic’s theory lays a bridge between Berman’s idea of major translations, and Bakhtin’s distinction of two Stylistic Lines in novelistic discourse. Translations that use conventional target language, draw their language from the First Stylistic Line of “general literariness” in the TC, thus could age more rapidly, as those literary conventions are subject to historical change. Translations closer to the Second Stylistic Line, however, embrace target language heteroglossia and, through “novelness”, create a specific combination of absorbed languages and discourses ‘fitting’ their content materials, and therefore a poetics, a voice of their own which is not conventional (since it is a voice of their own) – they can (but not always do) become major translations. Of course, the question what the effects of heteroglossia on canonisation are, and whether heteroglossia may slow down translations’ ageing process needs much more analysis, but it does seem to be the case that many of the works that make up the canon of Western literature, and certainly of modernity, and are at the heart of retranslation studies (Rabelais, Cervantes, Dostoevsky, Flaubert, Shakespeare, Kafka, Joyce, ...), are indeed heteroglossic.

In previous research, we found that early translators (of the forties to the sixties, in some cases up to the nineties) of Joyce’s *Dubliners* and *Ulysses*, across a number of target languages (Dutch, French, German, Italian, and Spanish), tended to explicate the meaning of the ST material, and conventionalise language use by means of standardisations. Early translators thus resorted to the conventional, idiomatic language of the First Stylistic Line, reducing heteroglossia and monologising the ST material, in the target language form. Standardisation of form (language) and explication of meaning (content) also tended to co-occur – when language was standardised, the meaning conveyed in that language was also explicated. Twenty-first-century retranslators, on the contrary, replaced segments of the previous translations that involved explicitations and standardisations, with retentions of implicitness and ambiguity, and TC heteroglossia. Interestingly, they re-used many segments of the previous translations, yet almost exclusively segments that did not explicate or standardise. This

indicates that heteroglossia is indeed key to RT's re-accentuation of existing translations. The re-introduction of TC heteroglossia in the RTs, resulted in multivoicedness being re-introduced. Similar phenomena occur in the Dutch RT of Laclos' *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (PEETERS 2021), English RTs of Camus' *L'Étranger* (KAPLANSKY 2004) and Zola's *Nana* (BROWNLIE 2006), or in André Markowicz' French RT of Dostoevsky's *Brat'ja Karamazovy* (GACOIN LABLANCHY & BASTIEN-THIRY 2014). In 1993, that RT was met with sharp criticism, for its non-respect of "la norme du bien écrire" – i.e. for the target language heterology it introduced when rendering Dostoevsky's heterologic Russian. Markowicz' RT was averse to the conventional "general literariness" of the First Stylistic Line, that critics associated with the *Frères Karamazov* they had read, because, in the early fifties, Dostoevsky had been translated along those lines, as a "great author", and TC conventions of the time dictated that great authors use correct, standard language. The controversy brought by Markowicz' RT changed that idea, and re-accented how Dostoevsky was known in the TC, by re-introducing heteroglossia and multivoicedness. It re-dialogised Dostoevsky in the French TC.

This is why we put forward what we called the re-dialogisation hypothesis (PEETERS & SANZ GALLEG0 2022). That hypothesis, presented here as a possible strand for the analysis of RT poetics, of other texts, in other translations and other languages, can be formulated as follows. When existing translations of heteroglossic, multivoiced novels explicitate meaning and standardise language according to the First Stylistic Line, thus becoming monological (single-voiced) texts, the re-accentuation that occurs in recent RTs de-explicitates and de-standardises how that work was known in the existing translation(s). As a result, the RT re-dialogises the translated work in the TC, by a poetics that moves the translated text closer to the Second Stylistic Line of dialogical (multivoiced) novelistic discourse. The change that RT thus brings in the TC, is double: not only does RT bring a changed interpretation of the translated work in the TC, it also changes the way in which the existing translations are perceived, namely as outdated, less adequate, or no longer acceptable.

The re-dialogising re-accentuation that occurs in RT, is a result of increased dialogism of intertwined source and target voices. Whereas translation typically concerns the way in which the source author's voice (including narrator's and character's voices) is re-accented by the translator's target voice, in RT, there is the previous translator's voice, which can be ignored, or used in the translation process. In the latter case, that previous translator's voice is at the same time a target voice to the author's voice, and a source voice to the retranslator's voice. In addition, other target voices (i.e. other re-accentuations of the ST material) may come into play.

A lovely example of this can be found in the French translations of a formula used by Stephen Dedalus in *Ulysses*, which occurs (a biblical) three times, in slightly different formulations: "Agenbite of inwit. Conscience" (U1.481-82 in the Gabler edition), "Agenbite of inwit." (U9.197) and "Agenbite of inwit: remorse of conscience." (U9.809-10). That third occurrence contains the key as to how to interpret Stephen's heteroglossic formula (that Joyce borrowed from a 14<sup>th</sup>-century moral treatise, so as to give a pedantic voice to his character, who is an aestheticist aspiring writer): "Agenbite"

(agen-bite, again-bite), is a direct translation of the Latin *remorsus*, the repeated (*re*) 'bite' (*morsus*) of a feeling of moral guilt ("inwit", in-wit, inner understanding). Heteroglossic (Latin-English), heterologic (mediaeval English in Joyce's English) and multivoiced (Stephen's inner voice in the narrator's voice) in the ST, that formula becomes even more multivoiced in the French context, as existing TC voices are added to that dialogical multivoicedness. Morel (1929) translated Stephen's formula with "*Morsure de l'ensoi*" [bite of the interior self], thus re-creating the idea of a bite, yet not its repetition, while standardising language, therefore losing (etymological) heterology. He further translated "inwit" with a philosophical term conventional in the then existing French translations of Kant's *an-sich*, that is, pure empirical existence (so, outside of conscience, let alone moral conscience, although that is the topic of Stephen's inner voice).

That translation was criticised in the seventies by Jacques Lacan, who indeed found "*de l'ensoi*" unacceptable, while in the meantime yet another, additional strand of philosophical meaning had been added to it, namely Sartre's existentialism, in which *l'être en-soi* refers to existence that remains unconscious to itself, as of objects. Lacan (2005: 164) proposes an alternative translation that re-accentuates Joyce's formula according to the psychoanalyst's own preoccupations: inwit, he writes, "rather means [...] the bite of a witty word, the bite of the unconscious". Lacan thus re-interprets Joyce's "inwit" as the *unconscious*, that reveals itself in the *mot d'esprit*.

Even more interestingly, in 2004, Michel Cusin, who happened to be a specialist of Lacan, came up with the following RT: "*Re-mords de l'inextimé. Remords de conscience*" [Re-morse of the inextimate. Remorse of conscience], which re-introduces the idea of repetition, even emphasised by a hyphen that pastiches Lacan's style, and mirrors the latter's concept of the *extime*, that is, the outer aspect of intimacy (the *intime*) by which Lacan stresses that intimacy cannot exist without the idea of the Other. That RT thus re-accentuates Joyce by bringing in Lacan's voice, while re-accentuating Morel's translation of Joyce, and re-accentuating Lacan's translation of Joyce by coming back to "conscience", as in Morel, instead of the unconscious. The dialogical interplay of source and target voices in RT can get complicated.

In RT, source and target voices and the contexts they voice, are dialogically intertwined. Those voices re-used in RT come with histories of their own. As a result, through re-dialogizing re-accentuation, RT creates a heterologic 'time spread' of sorts, which is larger than in the early translations examined. In that respect, it is perhaps not so much the translations that age, than the way in which translations deal with age. In any case, we have argued in the paragraphs above, that the analysis of the poetics of RT could focus on how RTs perform a re-dialogising re-accentuation, which re-uses yet de-explicitates and de-standardises existing translations, thus creating target text heteroglossia and heterology, that can even be increased by including the dialogical interplay with other TC voices. The poetics of RT is concerned with the analysis of how linguistic materials from both source and target texts and contexts are dialogised in RT by their mutual interplay in the target text form, and how that form re-accentuates the

existing translation, thus bringing a changed interpretation of a work of literature, in a changed TC.

### 3.2 Closeness, S- and T-variables and complexification in RT

As our analyses indicated that RTs tend to bring change in the TC by doing away with standardisations and explicitations present in the “*espace de la traduction*”, a further possible avenue for research into the poetics of RT is the idea that RT may challenge the notion of so-called “universals” of translation. In the literature, explicitation, standardisation and simplification are described as potential T-universals (T for target) (e.g. CHESTERMAN 2011; MALMKJAER 2012, and many others since, see PEETERS 2024, *forthc.*), that is, features typical of translated language as opposed to original target language. Our analyses of re-dialogisation in RTs (Section 3.1) suggest otherwise, namely that standardisations and explicitations occur far more in early translations, yet far less in RTs. This is why we decided, when invited to a conference on simplification in translation and writing,<sup>8</sup> to look into how simplification (standardisation, explicitation) and complexification (their counterparts) could be conceptualised in RT poetics. We decided to consider simplification, not as a probabilistic T-universal, but as the hypernym of a set of *variables*, by which a literary translator, when confronted with complexities in a given segment of the ST material (S-variables; S for source, i.e. *what* is simplified, or not), strikes a specific balance (T-variables; for target, i.e. *how* is it simplified, or not, in the target text) between adequacy and acceptability (TOURY 2012). This way, we wanted to explore whether the changing idea of ‘closeness’ in RT can be conceptualised in a functional and dynamic manner, by approaching ‘closeness’ not as a given, nor as a probabilistic universal, but as a changing balance in poetics, by comparing how different translations relate to S- (what) and T- (how) variables, on a continuum between simplification and complexification, as given S-variables are simplified or not, by resorting or not resorting to given T-variables, thus revealing a given idea of ‘closeness’ (PEETERS 2025, *forthc.*). The question, then, is not an essentialist inquiry into whether RTs are ‘closer’ to the ST or not, but an analysis of how the epistemological construct of what ‘closeness’ is, evolves across translations, thus changes in the TC as RTs modify the balance between what we termed S- and T-variables. The S-variables we looked at are complex *content* (including cultural content such as realia, intertextual references, allusions, ambiguities, implicit meanings); complex *language* (e.g. intricate syntax, rhythms and rhymes, vocabulary, heteroglossia); and complex *narrative features* (e.g. multi-centred narration, focalisation, multivoicedness, free indirect speech), which can also co-occur. Simplification of these features can happen through a number of translation strategies or techniques, which we subsumed, for practical reasons, into three main categories of T-variables: *explicitation* when S-variables are rendered more explicit, precise, detailed, or clearer, e.g. by a hyponym or an example, a clarification

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<sup>8</sup> *T&R7 – Translate, write, simplify*, organised by Fabio Regattin and Sara Vecchiato, university of Udine, 24-25 November 2022.

either intratextual or in a note, an explicative paraphrase, or an explicit name replacing an ambivalent pronoun; *adaptation* when a complex ST segment is replaced with a segment reputed easier to understand for the implied TC reader, or more conventional, e.g. by cultural substitution or domestication, modernisation, or transformation of free indirect speech into direct speech; and *condensation*, that is, simplification by means of summary, reduction, or omission. Conversely, a translator can also resort to counterpart T-variables in the continuum, namely *implicitation* (and not *explicitation*), *retention* (instead of *adaptation*), and/or what Berman (1984, 1985) called “*traduction littérale*” or “*traduction de la lettre*” [literal translation], i.e. a translation that highlights form (including heteroglossia and heterology), rather than follow the ideology of transparency and “*déformation*” (1984: 18) which prioritises content over form.

In our analyses, we found, as already stated above, that early Joyce translations tend to simplify complex ST materials by explicitations (making meaning more precise), standardising adaptations (notably of heteroglossia and heterology), or occasionally condensations. 21st-century RTs tend to shift the balance of S- and T-variables away from explicitation and toward implicitness, away from standardising adaptation replaced with retention of foreignising content, heterology and ambiguity of voices, and literal translation with more attention for rhythm, rhyme, and other formal peculiarities. Joyce RTs thus re-accent the construct of ‘closeness’ in the TC by re-complexifying what had been simplified before. Re-complexification can thus be analysed as a mechanism by which the very construct of ‘closeness’ is re-accented in RTs, as combinations of S- and T-variables move across time, from translation to translation, in the ‘*espace de la traduction*’ of a given translation culture.

In the Dutch translations of Laclos’ *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (PEETERS 2021, 2025) for instance, the latest RT, by Martin de Haan, resorts to both modernising and archaising (thus heterologic) target language when addressing the key complexities of Laclos’ novel, namely its linguistic and cultural embeddedness in French 18th-century salon culture, and its polyphony and the stylistic variety that results from it. The standardisations and conventionalisations present in earlier translations of the fifties, sixties and seventies are de-standardised and de-conventionalised through a RT strategy that combines foreignising retention (including heteroglossia) with historicising as well as modernising heterology, thus creating a heterologic ‘time spread’ instrumental to how content and style were rendered.

### **3.3 Novelty, re-use and revision, and the palimpsest of RT**

A final topic that we want to address, is RTs’ inevitable, knowing or unknowing, re-use of existing translations. Unlike what publishers and journalists in their wake lead the public to believe, RTs are not entirely “new translations”. Languages are limited in options when it comes to translating content, language and narration from a given ST into a given target language. As a result, even retranslators who do not look at existing translations sometimes inevitably use the same phrasings. Some retranslators, though, consciously re-use existing translations. As we saw, Joyce retranslators tended to recycle

segments from earlier translations in which there were no explicitations or standardisations. RT, put otherwise, always comes with a part of non-retranslation. That part, whether conscious re-use or unknowing overlap, should be included in the poetics of RT, as it provides valuable insights into what actually changes, and what not, and thus how RTs' re-accentuation creates change in the TC. The question at hand, however, is not so much related to *how* translations change (since we are looking at what does not change), but to *what* and *how much* in them does not change, i.e. is re-used, whether knowingly or not. A second question is how much of that is inevitable overlap.

These questions of degree are related to the "fine line" between revision and RT (PALOPOSKI & KOSKINEN 2010): to what extent is a RT new or different as compared to an existing translation, or should so be to qualify as a RT, rather than a revision. As was shown by Van Poucke (2020), lexical overlap between translations – and even parallel translations made independently of each other – can mount up to about 50 to 60% of a RT (in this case, Dutch RTs of four Russian classics). Yet lexical overlap, however indicative of re-uses, does not necessarily say much about how those lexical items are integrated in language *use*, i.e. heteroglossia and re-dialogisation. This is why we decided to further look into re-uses and overlaps in RT, starting from Meschonnic's (1990) argument that translation is palimpsestic by the language it uses (see Section 3.1). In RT, that palimpsest, i.e. TC language material, can be double: when an existing translation is used, the palimpsest of RT is not only language use by the retranslator, but also the way in which this language use is a (overt or hidden) dialogical (polemical) response to, and re-accentuation of, the target language used by the previous translator(s).

The French translations of Flann O'Brien's *At Swim-Two-Birds* provide a very interesting case for such an analysis of the palimpsestic poetics of RT, in terms of re-uses and overlaps *versus* revisions of the existing translation (PEETERS *forthc.*). O'Brien's novel was translated by Henri Morisset in 1964, and retranslated by Patrick Hersant in 2012. In 2015, Ludivine Bouton-Kelly made an additional, partial RT, of the first half of the novel, as part of an unpublished PhD. Interestingly, Hersant's RT was accused of plagiarising Morisset's translation, with only some minor, insignificant revisions here and there (i.e. seriously comprising its status of being a "new translation", as stated in the blurb and on the publisher's website), while Bouton-Kelly's RT was made without looking at the existing translations (thus providing us with the opportunity to look into unconscious overlaps with existing translations).

As our topic of investigation included the question of how much overlaps or re-uses and how much revisions there are in the RTs, we decided to make use of MSWord's Compare function (included under the Review tab), which tracks and counts overlaps and revisions, and apply it to both RTs, compared to Morisset's first translation.<sup>9</sup> The numbers we found varied enormously, especially with regard to Hersant's RT: in the *incipit*, about 60% of the words were revised, while 40% occurred in Morisset. In other

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<sup>9</sup> MS Word's Compare function was designed to compare different versions of the same document, not to compare different translations, hence comes with some drawbacks, discussed in detail in Peeters, *forthc.*

passages, we found percentages between 30% and 50 % of revisions. In the second half of the novel, however, percentages dropped dramatically to a mere 5% of revisions (thus, 95% overlap). These numbers indicate that Hersant's RT is a hybrid translation product: sometimes a RT proper, sometimes a revision, and sometimes, indeed, a near-copy. As for Bouton-Kelly's RT of the first half of the novel, the number of revisions (differences in comparison with Morisset) were consistently higher than in Hersant, yet there was also overlap with the existing translations (both Morisset's and Hersant's), varying between 10% and close to 40% of the words, although she did not use those translations. It would therefore seem that a fair amount of overlap in RT is undeliberate, perhaps even unavoidable (confirming what Sanz Gallego *et al.* 2023 termed "unretranslatability"). The numbers we found prompted us to put forward an admittedly rough, quantitative 20-40-60 rule of thumb to distinguish between types of RTs: when revision percentages exceed 60% of the words in a RT compared to an existing translation, a RT brings much change and can therefore be considered polemical; a revision percentage of between 40 and 60% could indicate that a RT is more conservative; below that percentage, a translation product should probably be described as a hybrid of RT and revision (between 20 and 40%), if not as a revision (below 20%), and at worst, as a near-copy and, ultimately, plagiarism.

As for the question *what* of the existing translations was re-used, MSWord's Compare function used, produces a new file that contains both translation and RT in a single text, showing revisions in the RT as underlined insertions and strikethrough deletions, and overlaps with the existing translation in roman. The novel's *incipit*, for instance, was translated as follows. We shall first give the original passage, and then both RTs compared to the first translation:

O'Brien's *incipit* (1939: 9):

*Having placed in my mouth sufficient bread for three minutes' chewing, I withdrew my powers of sensual perception and retired to the privacy of my mind, my eyes and face assuming a vacant and pre-occupied expression. I reflected on the subject on my spare-time literary activities. One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings.*

Bouton-Kelly's (2015: II, 13) *incipit* – in underline and roman – compared to Morisset's (1969: 11) – in strikethrough and roman:

*Ayant place suffisamment de pain dans ma bouche pour trois minutes de mâchement, je modérais mes prédispositions aux perceptions sensorielles et me retirais dans l'intimité de mon esprit, mes yeux et mon visage avaient adopté un air vide et tourmenté. Je réfléchissais au sujet de mes activités littéraires mon passe-temps. Dans un livre, un seul début et une seule fin, ne me satisfaisaient pas. Un bon livre peut avoir trois débuts*

*fondièrement différents, uniquement liés dans l'imagination de l'auteur, ou des centaines de fins d'ailleurs.*

We found this method of 'palimpsestic reading' to greatly ease analysis, as translation and RT can be read in synopsis, while overlaps and changes in the RT's re-accentuation of the existing translation lay out open, on one and the same page. Our analyses conform to what we found earlier: revisions are mostly due to (a) the re-accentuation of standardisations and explications in Morisset, especially in Bouton-Kelly's RT although it was made without consulting Morisset's translation; and (b) the introduction of heteroglossia when rendering O'Brien's heteroglossic Irish-English (e.g. in compound words, such as "pre-occupied", "inter-related", "bevil-beaked", "fish-tailed", or syntactical deviations from idiomatic English) and direct translations from the Irish (e.g. the novel's title, *At Swim-Two-Birds*, which is a word-for-word translation of an Irish toponym, *Snámh-Dá-Éan* ([sna:wd{áé}nʲ], 'Swim-Two-Birds', i.e. 'the swimmable ford of the two birds'), that refers to a passage across the river Shannon in county Ros Comáin, mentioned in the 13<sup>th</sup>-century Irish legend of *Buille Shuibhne* ([bʷilʲə 'hɪvʲnʲə], 'the madness of [King] Sweeny'), that O'Brien had studied and partly translated in English in his youth, and incorporated much from in his novel. In Bouton-Kelly's RT, overlaps with Morisset (in roman, above) are mostly idiomatic or direct translations for which there were no real alternatives.

#### **4. Concluding remarks**

With this paper, we tried to answer the often repeated call for more theory-building in RTS, by arguing for an epistemology of change that may underpin RT poetics, conceptualising what changes, how, and with what effects, when a work of literature is retranslated. This required engaging critically with a number of received ideas that have stood in the way of developing new understandings and new methods for the analysis of RTs, in their textual as well as contextual historicity. In discussing that epistemology of change, which is entirely open to debate, we have concentrated on the relationship between two topical issues, namely (a) textual change (or difference), which can only be understood when (b) contextual change (or historical evolution) is duly considered. Bakhtin's theory of re-accentuation may bring such an epistemology, without text nor context coming first, by putting language use first, by which texts and contexts are dialogically intertwined. Texts are influenced (outside-in) by their historical and socio-ideological contexts, and voice these when absorbing heteroglossia, yet new texts (originals, translations, or RTs) also bring new voices, thus historical and socio-ideological change (inside-out), to their contexts.

A first point we made, thus is that contextual change is more than an external, explanatory factor for textual change. Change works both ways: RTs are different as contexts have changed, yet contexts also change as RTs are different. RTs *create* difference, as their use of language (i.e. how they render the ST material, including heteroglossia) reacts to another one, engaging it in a polemic by which it is presented as outdated.

RTs thus produce polemical change in the TC concerning how a work of literature is known, and also how an existing translation of that work is known.

The second important theoretical point put forward in these pages, concerns the much discussed ‘closeness’. The polemical change that RTs bring, is realised by bringing a changed idea of what ‘closeness to the ST’ means in the TC. RTs change the balance, in the TC, between what we termed S- and T-variables in the field of tension between simplification and complexification. Closeness in RT, put otherwise, should be approached, not as a supposedly objective measure of purported source-orientedness, but as a historically and culturally determined epistemological construct that strikes a balance between Toury’s adequacy and acceptability, and that evolves across texts-in-contexts. In that respect, ‘closeness’ is the very episteme of change in RT.

Third, the epistemology discussed, and the poetics that rests on it, includes a more critical view on some of the misleading received ideas concerning RT, that were borrowed, to a large extent, from publishers’ and translators’ paratexts. We should not simply accept the idea that RTs are closer to the ST, more faithful, more reliable, more readable, but study the content of closeness across translations, as the very epitome of change. Similarly, we should not accept the idea that RTs are made when existing translations are outdated, without considering that the latter are presented as such (because their language has aged, or for other reasons) when a new translation is marketed in the TC. And finally, we should not be misguided by publishers’ emphasis on the novelty of “new translations”. RTs are new events in the foreign reception process of a work of literature, but they are not entirely new translations; consequently, the part of non-retranslation (re-use or overlap) inherent in RT should be included in RT poetics.

In the cases we have analysed, the poetics of RT performs a re-dialogising (3.1), re-complexifying (3.2), palimpsestic (3.3) re-accentuation of how a given idea of ‘closeness’ was produced in existing translations. In these RTs, the balance in the construct of closeness in translation, shifts toward increased heteroglossia, thus toward the Second Stylistic Line of novelness and multivoicedness. That changing balance, away from explicitations and standardisations, challenges the notion of translation universals such as simplification.

We do, however, realise that the epistemology and methods of analysis we presented, are inspired by RTs of novels that are, already in the original, heteroglossic and multivoiced. Yet, many novels, especially the canonical classics of modern world literature that are studied the most in RT studies, *are* heteroglossic. Nonetheless, other types of re-accentuation may surely be found, and the ideas we put forward should be taken, not as yet another probabilistic universal, but as an epistemology that may bring new methods of study, independently of the RTH, and duly considering contextual as well as textual change. Much more analysis is needed, into the role played by heteroglossia and re-dialogisation, in RTs, in the dialogical interaction between source and target texts and contexts, and in canonisation; into how the idea of closeness evolves in subsequent translations; into how that may be different when concomitant RTs are involved; into how RTs’ novelty is presented and the polemic it creates; into the role played by competition between publishers in different, more or less centralised,

cultural systems; into how RTs challenge universals of translation; into the palimpsestic presence of existing translations in RTs; into the effects of retranslators consciously using or not using existing translations. That research into the poetics of RT should include other texts than the ones we have studied, other genres such as song, film or theatre translations, other languages, and other contexts. We can only hope that some of the ideas and avenues for research discussed in this paper may inspire such analyses and may have brought other understandings, that will also be re-accented, bringing change and further paving the way toward new paradigms for RT studies.

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