

## The Sieve of Translation

### Reflections on the French Version of *The Butcher Boy* by Patrick McCabe

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**Abstract** This case study aims to analyse the difficulties a translator faces when dealing with a text that is built around the representation of oral language. In *The Butcher Boy*, the Irish author Patrick McCabe uses linguistic characterisation to confer social plausibility to his characters and builds the entire novel as a monologue the first-person narrator delivers in his own voice. The challenge such a variety of factors poses makes the translation of the book into any language an interesting subject of investigation. This contribution will draw a parallel between the original text and its French translation by focusing on the hermeneutic choices the translator has to make during the entire translating process.

**Keywords** Patrick McCabe. Translation as negotiation. Translation as hermeneutic process. Linguistic characterisation.

Born in 1955, Patrick McCabe is a renowned Irish novelist and playwright whose writings are mainly associated with the black comedy genre.<sup>1</sup> *The Butcher Boy* (1992), the first of his novels to be acclaimed by both critique and public,<sup>2</sup> is structured as a long first-person narration in which the protagonist and narrator, Francie Brady, tells the story of his life to an indefinite 'you' to whom he confides his darkest secrets. The oral quality of the *récit* legitimates the interpretation of Francie's monologue as an enunciation that he directly delivers to this unknown interlocutor with whom the reader may or may not choose to identify.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Francie

1 His main novels, all acclaimed by the critique, are *The Butcher Boy* (1992), *Breakfast on Pluto* (1998) – both shortlisted for the Booker Prize for Fiction – and *Emerald Germs of Ireland* (2001). McCabe also published a children's book, *The Adventures of Shay Mouse* (1985), and a collection of short stories, *Mondo Desperado* (1999). Moreover, he wrote radio plays for RTE, the national Irish channel, and for BBC Radio 4.

2 To the success of the novel contributes the appearance, in 1997, of the homonymous film directed by Neil Jordan.

3 The identity of Francie's interlocutor remains opaque. From the type of interaction created with the listener by the intimate quality of the narration one can infer that the 'you' Francie addresses is a sort of confessor, like a policeman, a priest, a worker from a charity institution

seems to 'speak' to a public, as an actor wishing to break the fourth wall would by talking to the audience. The intimate atmosphere of complicity that is created in the novel by the confessional aspect of the narration (the same that arises from face-to-face conversation) allows the reader to experience a whole series of opposite feelings towards the narrated events - the revelation of the obscenities in which Francie indulges and the discovery of Mrs Nugent's brutal murder are viewed under a totally unexpected and original light deriving from the empathy that is gradually built up between the reader and the not-so-endearing narrator as a result of the confidential tone in which the story is told.

On the oral, mimetic nature of the novel depends the difficulty of translating Francie's narrative style into a different language - in the text re-sounds the unrefined voice of a deranged boy who belongs to that particular class of the Irish proletariat that in the aftermath of World War 2 could not afford to pay for their children's higher education. The narrator's socioeconomic situation requires a precise linguistic characterisation, whose social accuracy relies on the character's plausibility, all the more so since, as already mentioned, the entire narration is entrusted to Francie in the form of a long monologue. The translational challenges that stem from this variety of factors make interesting a comparison between the original novel and its translation into any language. Having read for personal interest the French translation of the book, *Le garçon boucher*, translated in 1996 by Énith Soonckindt-Bielok for the publishing house Plon, for this brief discussion I decided to draw a parallel between the English and the French version by recurring to close textual analysis.

At an aesthetic level, the peculiar characteristics of *The Butcher Boy* imply a remarkable interpretative effort on the translator's part during the process of translation, and this often entails, as Gadamer puts it, an 'emphasizing clarification' (1960, 345; Author's transl.) of the inferences deriving from the hermeneutic activity:

L'imperativo della fedeltà, che vale per ogni traduzione, non può sopprimere le fondamentali differenze che sussistono tra le diverse lingue. Anche quando ci proponiamo di essere scrupolosamente fedeli ci troviamo a dover operare difficili scelte. Se nella traduzione vogliamo far risaltare un aspetto dell'originale che a noi appare importante, ciò può accadere solo, talvolta, a patto di lasciare in secondo piano o addirittura eliminare altri aspetti pure presenti. Ma questo è proprio ciò che noi chiamiamo interpretare. La traduzione, come ogni interpretazione, è una chiarificazione enfatizzante. (Gadamer 1960, 345)

(a sort of social worker), or even an imagined divine figure. This stratified indeterminacy undoubtedly facilitates the reader's identification with the recipient of the story.

The imperative of fidelity that is valid for any translation cannot suppress the fundamental differences existing between the various languages. Even when one intends to be scrupulously faithful, one has to face the difficult situation of making tough choices. If one wants to stress in the target language a specific aspect of the original text that seems relevant to him, this can only occur if one pushes aside or even erases other aspects that are present in the text. However, this is precisely what I call interpreting. Translation, as any interpretation, is an emphasizing clarification. (Author's transl.)

By textual confrontation, this article endeavours to prove that the linguistic representation of the target version manages to highlight only some of the effects, intentions and contents which in McCabe's novel issue from the reproduction of the various idiolects. The nature of the linguistic peculiarities that are accentuated is determined by the interpretative choices the reader-translator made during the transposition of the text, choices that ineluctably presuppose a leveled/constricted rendition of the initial linguistic representation. Indeed, one of the translator's main tasks is, for each demanding passage, to sift through the set of possibilities and decide which translating technique between the widening and the narrowing of the lexical range he disposes of is the best option. This case study, then, aspires to examine the consequences of specific translational choices and, therefore, does not intend to be a reflection on translation in general. In the awareness of being only a partial overview of all the observable phenomena, its purpose is to identify the strategies adopted by Soonckindt-Bielok as far as the French translation of *The Butcher Boy* is concerned.

As already mentioned, the type of narration selected by McCabe for his novel needs a minute characterisation of the narrator's enunciative style in order to be effective. To grant Francie's idiolect plausibility, the language of the *récit* has to mimic the immediacy of talk and, consequently, must be both ungrammatical and apparently spontaneous.<sup>4</sup> Actually, Francie's stream of words is not simply a mere imitation of orality, but is also functional to the construction of the empathic relationship with the reader/spectator and to the characterisation of both Francie and the setting.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, it seems interesting to determine, by drawing a close parallel between the two texts, what translational choices Soonckindt-Bielok made

4 This spontaneity is of course fictitious and the result of a meticulous planning on the author's part.

5 In fact, through Francie's words, McCabe renders both the historical and the geographical setting (the story takes place in Ireland during the '50s), establishes the social background not only of the narrator but also of the other characters whose utterances are reported - with different levels of manipulation - by Francie, and creates a subtle critique of the conversational norms that bourgeois conventions impose.

in order to render in French the dialogical nature that characterises the protagonist's original narration.

In *The Butcher Boy*, McCabe reproduces what are the typical traits of verbal language within the boundaries of written narrative discourse. Despite the fact that the representation of speech is structured into multiple levels,<sup>6</sup> this discussion is limited to the specific analysis of those aspects that constitute a translational obstacle for the French language. As far as the oral style of the narration is concerned, from the opening lines of the novel some differences can already be spotted between the source text and its translation. In particular, it is possible to discern a frequent recourse to pragmatic equivalence,<sup>7</sup> which usually results in a rendering of the original grammatical incorrectness through an effect of colloquialism deriving from specific lexical choices:

When I was a young lad twenty or thirty or forty years ago I lived in a small town where they were all after me on account of what *I done* on Mrs Nugent. I was hiding out by the river in a hole under a tangle of briars. It was a hide *me and Joe made*. Death to all dogs who enter here, we said. Except us of course. (*BB*, 1;<sup>8</sup> emphasis added)

Quand j'étais jeune il y a vingt trente ou quarante ans de ça j'habitais une petite ville où ils me couraient tous après à cause de ce que j'*avais foutu* sur Mme Nugent. Je m'étais caché dans un trou près de la rivière sous un enchevêtrement de bruyères. C'était une cachette que *Joe et moi on avait faite*. Mort à tous les chiens qui y entrent qu'on avait dit. Sauf nous bien sûr. (*GB*, 9;<sup>9</sup> emphasis added)

These two passages show how Francie's ungrammaticality cannot be simply translated word by word,<sup>10</sup> and the translator is forced to choose a lexical equivalence in her mother tongue in order to express the same perception of orality the English audience senses when reading McCabe's work. In the case of «I [had] done», where the omission of the auxiliary

6 For a taxonomy of orality, see Bazzanella 1994.

7 In this article I adopt the definition elaborated by Koller, who defines as «pragmatic» an equivalence that aims at maintaining in the target text the same effect produced in the source text. See Koller 1995.

8 Any bibliographical reference to McCabe's novel will be indicated by the initials *BB* followed by the page number.

9 Any bibliographical reference to the French translation will be indicated by the initials *GB* followed by the page number.

10 In his *De optimo genere oratorum*, Cicero already discouraged from translating *verbum pro verbo*.

reminds one of demotic language, Soonckindt-Bielok employs the unorthodox verb *foutre* to recreate the same effect of colloquiality in the French version. The same kind of omission is present in the expression “me and Joe [had] made”, where the use of the objective pronoun in frontal position is another ‘mistake’ made by the narrator (both because the first person pronoun should be a subjective one and because it should follow, not precede, the other subject of the sentence). In this case, the translator cannot but opt for the pleonastic employment of the subjects (“Joe et moi on”), which is typical of spoken French, but is obliged to conjugate the verb correctly so as to avoid a verbal construction that would sound excessively awkward and unnatural in French.

If one proceeds linearly and diachronically with the textual analysis, it soon becomes apparent that the translator’s hermeneutic moves impose themselves on the original content and meaning of McCabe’s novel, thus producing a ‘new’ – in the sense of “other” (see Paci 2008) – linguistic representation that differs at various degrees from the English version:

Then I stuck my nose out to see what was going on. Plink – rain if you don’t mind!

But I wasn’t complaining. I liked rain. The hiss of the water and the earth so *soft bright green* plants would *nearly sprout beside* you. This is *the* life I said. I sat there staring at a waterdrop on the end of a leaf. It couldn’t make up its mind whether it wanted to fall or not. *It didn’t matter* – I was in no hurry. *Take your time drop, I said – we’ve got all the time we want.* (BB, 1; emphasis added)

Puis j’ai glissé le nez dehors pour voir ce qui se passait. Ploc, et de la pluie en prime!

Mais je m’en suis *pas* plaint. J’aimais bien la pluie. Le sifflement de l’eau et la terre tellement *molle* que des plantes *d’un vert éclatant* auraient pu pousser d’un coup à deux pas de vous. Ça c’est la *vraie* vie j’ai dit. Je me suis assis là en contemplation devant une goutte d’eau au bout d’une feuille. Elle arrivait *pas* à décider si elle voulait tomber ou non. Ça avait *pas* d’importance. J’étais *pas* pressé. *Prends ton temps goutte je lui ai dit on a tout le temps qu’il faut maintenant.* (GB, 9; emphasis added)

The quotations above are indicative of the translating devices that the French translator adopts in an almost systematic way throughout the novel in order to render Francie’s idiolect. Since it is not always possible to achieve a ‘faithful’ rendering of the original text, oral traits typical of colloquial French pervade the entire narration even when the English Francie

speaks remains normative.<sup>11</sup> Paradigmatic in this sense are all the verbs in the negative form, expressed in French by omitting the *ne* the grammatical rule would require (*ne... pas*). Another example of the mechanisms regulating the transposition of orality is the use of *ça*, which is also distinctive of spoken, informal language.

Those translational choices – undeniably justifiable – originate from a series of Soonckindt-Bielok's interpretative moves that sometimes entail a sort of hypertranslation. This is due to the fact that the translator, who is first and foremost a reader of the text, presents the Francophone target public with a product that not only has to meet its demands, but that also carries and conveys a textual interpretation (the translator's). Emblematic in this regard is the last sentence of the passages above – McCabe recurs to a definite, precise use of punctuation (which, in his case, appears quite unusual); on the opposite, the same sentence in French is to be read in one breath. If the use of the dash, which in English symbolises the oral pause that denotes a change of topic, is not very common in French and, consequently, its omission is legitimate, the lack of a comma marking the prosody of the utterance is quite unjustified. The reason behind this deletion is probably the fact that, further on in the novel, Francie's narration gradually becomes an uninterrupted stream of words in which the use of punctuation is almost completely absent. However, at this stage of the story (this is the first page) deciding not to guide the reader in his or her textual inferences is more of an interpretative act than a mere translational choice.<sup>12</sup> This reading is further validated by the fact that in French, except for the last sentence that closes a dyadic dialogue, it is a comma, like in the source text, that marks the end of direct speech.

The hypertranslation just described is accompanied in *Le garçon boucher* by an opposite tendency, referred to as hypotranslation, which stems from the impossibility of finding solutions that maintain the polysemy and the metaphorical value of a term in the passage from a language to another. In the extracts above, for instance, one can notice that the sentences relating the narrator's perception of the natural world present subtle but meaningful differences. In fact, the English text is susceptible to possibilities of interpretation as far as Francie's *weltanschauung* is concerned, whereas in the target version the translator obliterates the nuances related to this

11 The concept of faithfulness has always been an object of debate in translation theory. However, it may be useful to cite here its definition by Umberto Eco: «il concetto di fedeltà ha a che fare con la persuasione che la traduzione sia una delle forme dell'interpretazione e che debba sempre mirare, sia pure partendo dalla sensibilità e dalla cultura del lettore, a ritrovare non dico l'intenzione dell'autore, ma l'intenzione del testo, quello che il testo dice o suggerisce in rapporto alla lingua in cui è espresso e al contesto culturale in cui è nato» (2003, 16; emphasis in the original).

12 Indeed, translation may well be seen as an interpretative process (see Gadamer 1960).

potential construal by making narrowing translational choices – if the original lexicon conveys Francie’s naïveté, gentleness and wonder in front of the rain, in French those connotations are completely absent. In this case, choosing equals not only selecting, but also sieving and excluding.

Another characteristic of Francie’s *récit* is the use of lexical repetition. Since the immediacy of talk often implies the use of limited, generic lexicon that is redundantly re-employed within the same discourse, McCabe exploits this stylistic device to enhance the reader’s sense of being in front of an oral enunciation rather than a written text. Although this locutionary strategy is valid for both languages, in French the systematic and extreme reiteration of the same word excessively disturbs the reading process. As the following passages illustrate, the translator is consequently forced to recur to a variation – even though not particularly effective in order to avoid excesses – of *verba dicendi*, which in English are usually limited to the generic *to say*:

One time we *were* standing in the lane behind the houses shading our eyes from the sun and Joe *says*: Did you see that plane Francie? I *said* I did. It was a tiny silver bird in the distance. What I want to know is, he *said*, how do they manage to get a man small enough to fit in it? I *said* I didn’t know. I didn’t know much about planes in *them* days. (*BB*, 1-2; emphasis added)

Une fois, on était debout sur le chemin derrière les maisons à protéger nos yeux du soleil et Joe *a demandé*: T’as vu cet avion, Francie? *J’ai répondu* que oui. C’était un minuscule oiseau argenté au loin. Ce que je veux savoir, il *a dit*, c’est comment ils arrivent à trouver un homme assez petit pour rentrer dedans? *J’ai répondu* que je savais *pas*. Je savais *pas* grand-chose sur les avions à cette époque. (*GB*, 10; emphasis added)

From these excerpts, it is apparent that, in the target version, the effects created by McCabe through the regular repetition of *to say* are somewhat dimmed. In *Le garçon boucher*, the only verb that is repeated is *répondre*, a generic lexical choice that only partially conveys the almost maniacal redundancy with which Francie uses words, and that it is hard to avoid interpreting as a sign, not even too veiled, of his obsessions. Furthermore, if one closely compares the two quotations above, it is evident that Francie’s violation of the *consecutio temporum* is not reproduced in French – the translator limits herself to an alternation between the *imparfait* and the *passé composé* depending on whether the action is dynamic or punctual (in the sense that it does not extend in time). On the one hand, these expedients serve to meet the target readership’s demands, which constitutes the ultimate goal of any translator; on the other hand, the changes that cannot be ascribed to the teleologic nature of translation and that consid-

erably differ from the source text are to be attributed to the translator's interpretation of the language of the novel. That "T'as vu" uttered by Joe seems to support this hypothesis – the apocope that is introduced here probably derives from the need to underline and stress, in this instance even too much, the colloquial tone in which Francie's friend speaks as opposed to the oral, uncontrolled nature that already characterises the first level of narration. This necessity, which is completely absent from the dynamism of McCabe's novel, becomes inevitable when Soonckindt-Bielok opts for a systematization of talk that stems from her own interpretation of the English text.<sup>13</sup>

As already mentioned, this homogenisation is functional and inevitable when reproducing as faithfully as possible an imitation of orality such as the one created in *The Butcher Boy*. However, at a communicative level faithfulness towards the source text is not always the most efficient choice;<sup>14</sup> when the translator detects a potential difficulty as far as the readers' comprehension is concerned, she adapts the language of the target version in order to facilitate to the French public the reception of the opaque meaning, which is intentionally blurred in English:<sup>15</sup>

Then I heard a clatter I thought I'd better get in the window to see what that was I thought maybe Grouse Armstrong or someone was in stealing the sausages again but when I got into the kitchen who's there only ma standing there and a chair sideways on the table. What's that doing up there ma *I says* it was fuse wire belonging to *da* just dangling but she didn't say what it was doing there she was just stood there picking at her nail *and going to say something and* then not saying it. I *told* her Mary's was shut could I still keep the sixpence she said I could Yee ha! I said and bombed off out to the border shop. (*BB*, 8; emphasis added)

Puis j'ai entendu un cliquetis *et j'ai pensé* que je ferais mieux de passer par la fenêtre pour voir ce que c'était j'ai pensé que peut-être Grouse Armstrong ou quelqu'un était dedans en train de voler encore les saucisses mais quand je suis entré dans la cuisine *voilà que je trouve* m'man debout et une chaise en travers de la table. Qu'est-ce que ça fiche là m'man *je lui demande* c'était un fil électrique de *ton* père qui pendait

13 The translator's choice of putting at the centre of the translating process the reproduction of orality as the dominant effect of the text does not seem to take into consideration the implications that such a systematization of talk within the *récit* may have at a hermeneutic level. From my researches, it appears that Soonckindt-Bielok has not written critical contributions on *The Butcher Boy*, so my observations are derived from my personal reading and interpretation.

14 On the notion of faithfulness, see previous paragraphs.

15 More than translating, the translator seems to be explaining the text (see Paci 2017).



mais elle me dit pas ce que ça fichait là elle restait plantée à se ronger un ongle *sur le point de dire* quelque chose *pour* finalement pas parler. *Je lui ai expliqué* que c'était fermé chez Mary mais est-ce que je pouvais garder quand même les six sous *et* elle m'a répondu que oui *alors* j'ai crié Youpi! et j'ai filé comme une flèche en direction de la boutique voisine. (GB, 15; emphasis added)

The juxtaposition of the two passages underlines the way in which in French, in order to make the reading process easier, inter-phrasal links are made explicit even though they correspond neither to the original text nor to its intention, that being that of showing the mental confusion bursting into Francie's language and modifying its internal cohesion and coherence. The episode described in the quotations above is emblematic of the frequent phenomena of denial and displacement characterizing Francie's psychological status. In fact, the narrator acritically describes the scene he witnessed as a child without being able to understand, or pretending not to understand, his mother's attempted suicide. In English, the mental derangement is reflected in the way Francie expresses himself - his style, in the way thoughts follow one another by association, hints at the different forms of the stream of consciousness; his use of sentence structuring mirrors his emotional state (Francie is so confused that he is unable to establish logical connections other than the coordinative conjunction *and* or the asyndeton). In French, by contrast, connective links are inserted in order to expedite the reader's understanding of what is happening. These links are basically an explanation of the narrated events that results from Soonckindt-Bielok's hermeneutic conclusions, which sometimes deviate, even though slightly, from the meaning of some enunciations. For instance, by opting for the possessive adjective "ton" she establishes that it is Mrs Brady the person that utters the sentence, whereas in English it seems that the source of the enunciation is Francie ("da" is the appellative he would normally use to refer to his father). Umberto Eco stresses the unavoidableness of the changes that occur during the translating process and underlines the lack of fair distribution within the exchanges generated in the passage of meaning from a language to another:

traducendo, *non si dice mai la stessa cosa*. L'interpretazione che precede ogni traduzione deve stabilire quante e quali delle possibili conseguenze illative che il termine suggerisce possano essere limate via. Senza mai essere del tutto certi di non aver perduto un riverbero ultravioletto, un'allusione infrarossa.

Ma la negoziazione non è sempre una trattativa che distribuisce equamente perdite e vantaggi tra le parti in gioco. Posso ritenere soddisfacente anche una negoziazione in cui ho concesso alla controparte più di quanto essa abbia concesso a me e tuttavia, considerando il mio

proposito iniziale e sapendo che partivo in condizione di netto svantaggio, ritenermi egualmente soddisfatto. (Eco 2003, 16; emphasis in the original)

As already hinted, this contribution brings forward a practical example of what are the main translational criticalities McCabe's novel presents at both a narrative and hermeneutic level, in the awareness that other interpretative views may be applied to the translations of *The Butcher Boy* in other languages, as well as, obviously, to this very French version. Specifically, what is sketched here is a reflection, through a phenomenological analysis of the textual occurrences, on the fictional oral interaction that is created both in the original and the translated text. In the latter, Soonckindt-Bielok manages, even though within the limits of the 'negotiation' Eco writes of and through the necessary operations of equivalence, to reproduce the idea of an oral account, of a face-to-face conversation between the narrator and the reader. However, the implications of a narration that has as its intrinsic aesthetic that of being in mimetic relationship with talk are plural, and the effects of Francie's specific type of idiolect diversified. As mentioned above, McCabe achieves an accurate characterisation of the characters by exploiting the linguistic varieties they speak, which become at a further level a critique of verbal language and its conventions.<sup>16</sup> Because of its complexity, this composite stratification characterising *The Butcher Boy* implies that in *Le garçon boucher* some aspects are inevitably left aside or just hinted at.

Since, consciously or not, the ultimate goal of translation must be that of meeting the demands of the target public, phenomena of domestication that make the understanding of the text easier to the Francophone readership are frequent in *Le garçon boucher*.<sup>17</sup> From an exegetical point of view, the series of operations to facilitate the readability of the French text entails that some of the social, intellectual meanings that are conveyed through the representation of orality in English are inevitably lost in the target version. In fact, in French the traits that in written discourse conventionally portray speech are mainly denotative of the diaphasic variety of language and tend to overlook the diastratic and diatopic connotations McCabe employs in English. While the Anglophone reader of *The Butcher Boy* is aware of dealing with the typical idiolect of an Irish narrator belonging to the lower class and very poorly educated, the Francophone reader

16 *Irish and Urban English* connote the characters also at a social level and contribute to outline the postcolonial discourse of the novel (see following paragraphs).

17 To cite a few examples: "Newtown Road" (*BB*, 7) becomes in French "Newton Road" (*GB*, 14); the use of a generic but more familiar "Londres" (*GB*, 39) is preferred to the more specific but also more opaque "Camden Town" (*BB*, 35).

only perceives clearly the mimetic oral dimension of the narration because fewer and less evident are the instances in which the social dimension of speech is expressed. Those instances are easily acknowledgeable only when Francie reports entire sentences or fragments of dialogue he heard other people utter – by inserting the voice of the other characters within the boundaries of his own discourse, Francie provides the reader with a close juxtaposition of the linguistic varieties depicted in the novel, even though always filtered through his register and his subjectivity:

H'ho when the priests get their hands on you there won't be so much *guff outa* you *ye h'ho*. I said I'm sorry Sergeant Sausage but he stubbed the *fag* exactly in the ashtray and said *its* too late for that me *buck* you *shoullda thoughta* that when you were in Nugent's up to your tricks! *H'ho aye!* (BB, 72; emphasis added)

Ho ho quand les curés t'auront mis la main dessus tu feras *plus* tellement *le mariole* ho ho. J'ai dit je suis désolé sergent Sausisse mais il a éteint sa cigarette dans le cendrier tout excité et il m'a répliqué c'est trop tard pour ça *mon coco* t'aurais dû y penser quand tu *faisais l'andouille* chez les Nugent! *Hé hé oui.* (GB, 72; emphasis added)

Through the semi-phonetic representation of the characters' voices, McCabe manages to reproduce the Irish accent and the demotic roots of their discourse. As the extracts show, when this diastatic connotation is more evident, a similar effect can be achieved in French by suggesting the characters' social background with terms deriving from the colloquial, argotic lexicon, though the diatopic characterisation portrayed in the source text gets inevitably lost. The neutrality to which translation is forced is a notion on which Françoise Grellet insists:

La plupart des traductions optent d'ailleurs pour une solution intermédiaire: le dialecte est rendu, mais il devient neutre. Il n'a presque aucune caractéristique régionale, ce qui est une façon de résoudre le problème du choix mentionné ci-dessus mais aboutit souvent à une perte certaine: une bonne partie de la saveur, de l'humour, de la richesse de certains dialectes anglais ou américains disparaissent en français. (2014, 199)

This intermediate solution is determined by the interdependence that links the target text and the target readership; if the translator accepts what Grellet states above, the consequence is that the average reader provides the parameters for translation:

Translating as a teleological activity *par excellence* is to a large extent conditioned by the goals it is designed to serve, and these goals are set

in, and by, the prospective receptor system(s). Consequently, translators operate first and foremost in the interest of the culture *into* which they are translating, and not in the interest of the source text, let alone the source culture. (Toury 1985, 19; emphasis in the original)

In French, the diastatic element is identifiable only as opposed to a more normative use of the language, mainly when characters engage in dialogical interactions. What follows is an excerpt in which it is possible to detect the stylistic difference between Francie's colloquial, trivial talking and Mrs Nugent's formal and grammatically correct speech:

J'ai croisé Joe sur le Diamond et il m'a dit fais attention Francie on est en guerre avec la Nugent. Elle est passée chez nous et elle va passer chez toi. Ça a pas loupé j'étais étendu en haut sur le lit et voilà qu'on frappe à la porte d'entrée. J'ai entendu m'man fredonner et ses pantoufles traîner sur le lino. Ah bonjour madame Nugent entrez donc mais la Nugent était pas d'humeur pour un ah bonjour entrez donc ou autre. Elle a attaqué m'man à propos des bandes dessinées et tout le bazar puis j'ai entendu m'man qui disait *oui oui je sais bien sûr que je le ferai!* Je m'attendais à ce qu'elle grimpe l'escalier à toute vitesse, m'attrape par l'oreille puis me jette en bas aux pieds de la Nugent et c'est ce qu'elle aurait fait si la Nugent avait pas commencé à parler des cochons. Elle lui a dit qu'elle connaissait les gens dans notre genre bien avant de partir en Angleterre et qu'elle aurait dû interdire à son fils de s'approcher de quelqu'un comme moi que peut-on espérer d'autre d'un foyer où le père traîne dans les cafés du matin jusqu'au soir, il ne vaut pas mieux qu'un cochon. Et ne croyez pas que nous ne savons pas ce qui se passe dans cette maison oh nous le savons que trop! Pas étonnant que le garçon soit comme il est quel avenir a-t-il à courir la ville à toutes les heures avec ses habits qui lui pendent dessus ça coûte quand même pas cher d'habiller un gamin que Dieu le garde ce n'est pas sa faute mais si on le voit encore avec notre Philip il y aura du raffut. Il y aura du raffut vous pouvez me croire!

Après ça m'man a pris mon parti et les derniers mots que j'ai entendus c'est la Nugent descendant la rue en nous lançant *Des cochons pour sûr que toute la ville est au courant!* (GB, 11-2; emphasis in the original)

Though long, the quotation is necessary for it shows that the options to which Soonckindt-Bielok can recur without preferring a specific regionalism to another – and, consequently, incurring in banal stereotypes and preconceived representations – are very limited. This limitation results in the fact that the most subtle linguistic peculiarities, identifiable at a first reading level in the original, need in French a closer juxtaposition

between two or more varieties of language (in this case, Francie's and Mrs Nugent's) in order to be acknowledged.

The overall neutrality of the target text comes to be problematic when in McCabe's novel the language deliberately becomes metalanguage and reflects on Francie's social status. The previous extract, which reports the episode that triggers Francie's obsession with Mrs Nugent and internalization of his 'pigginess', is a good example of the way McCabe exploits linguistic representation to tackle socioeconomic issues. The transcription of other characters' sentences without quotation marks within Francie's stream of words is paradigmatic of his metamorphosis into what other people think he is – since he is called a "pig", he becomes one.<sup>18</sup> The French version is unable to convey the specific critique, actualized in the original by the way speech is portrayed, of the complex and stratified Irish bourgeoisie (both Anglican and Catholic). The poor conditions and the sense of inferiority experienced by the 1950's proletariat, outclassed by the bourgeoisie of mainly English and Anglican origins, are symbolized by Francie's moral, mental and linguistic decadence; in the novel, it seems that Francie, condemned by historical and social determinism, cannot but become a clinic case.<sup>19</sup> In French, this anthropological aspect, which is partly conveyed through linguistic representation in English, is necessarily transmitted by contents – bound to make choices that inevitably favour only some of the original features, the translator prefers enhancing the aesthetical and mimetic aspects of the text to portraying its social meaning, which is consequently put aside. The outcome of such an excluding selection is, perhaps unavoidably, an imperfect equivalence:

une bonne traduction ne peut viser qu'à une équivalence présumée, non fondée dans une *identité* de sens démontrable. Une équivalence sans identité. Cette équivalence ne peut être que cherchée, travaillée, présumée. (Ricoeur 2004, 40; emphasis in the original)

What can be perceived as a partial loss of linguistic identity in the French translation may be considered as an inescapable factor of rendering such

<sup>18</sup> By making Francie the emblem of the social inferiority of the colonised as opposed to the dominant status of the Anglican bourgeois ascendancy, McCabe tackles the complex question of Irish Postcolonialism. The possibility of considering Ireland as Great Britain's first, 'anomalous' colony has been an object of controversy for a long time, but only in the last decades scholars have started to centre their research around the issue. A renowned case is that of Edward Said, who sees in the subordinate position to the metropolitan culture in which the Palestinians live the same social inequality the Irish suffer under English hegemony (see Said 2003).

<sup>19</sup> The question is much more complex. For this brief analysis, suffice it to say that the changes in human geography brought about by the different phases of evictions have contributed to forge Irish social stratification.

a complex stratification as the one that characterises McCabe's novel. It is the result of Soonckindt-Bielok's hermeneutic, albeit legitimate, process (see Gadamer 1960) and of the inexorable linguistic 'insipidity' deriving from having to recur to *aut-aut* translating operations that opt, for lack of better options, for the 'lesser evil'. Moreover, in the case of works stemming from Postcolonial Literatures, the linguistic discourse poses a further challenge on account of the fact that the use of different registers implies, more than in other literary traditions, a reflection on identity values strongly linked to the socio-cultural context. The masterly elaborateness of *The Butcher Boy*, which derives from the intersection of anthropological themes and linguistic representation, forces the translator to put the original text through a sieve and to choose which aspects to privilege and which to leave aside.

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