

“...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic.” Why American Readers Need Intralingual Translation but don’t often Get it « ...bloqué au beau milieu de l’Atlantique ». Pourquoi les lecteurs américains ont besoin de traduction intralinguale et ne l’obtiennent que rarement

John Denton

Volume 20, numéro 2, 2e semestre 2007

TTR a 20 ans II
TTR Turns 20 II

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/018826ar>
DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/018826ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Association canadienne de traductologie

ISSN

0835-8443 (imprimé)
1708-2188 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Denton, J. (2007). “...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic.” Why American Readers Need Intralingual Translation but don’t often Get it. *TTR*, 20(2), 243–270. <https://doi.org/10.7202/018826ar>

Résumé de l’article

La citation contenue dans le titre de cet article illustre les difficultés de réception aux États-Unis du best-seller *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 3/4* (1982), de l’auteure britannique Sue Townsend. Certains comptes rendus de l’ouvrage, ainsi qu’un questionnaire que j’ai utilisé auprès des lecteurs américains, démontrent clairement la rupture (partielle) de la communication transatlantique. Est-ce à dire que les lecteurs américains de textes britanniques, au sein desquels le registre informel et les traces d’un enracinement culturel sont omniprésents, ont besoin d’une certaine forme de traduction intralinguale? En tant que « locuteurs d’une même langue » (bien qu’il s’agisse d’une langue pluricentrique), ils n’en bénéficient pas souvent, compte tenu de la croyance répandue en une langue unifiée et une culture commune. Ainsi, lorsque les lecteurs américains ne partagent pas les mêmes schémas pré-établis de connaissances que les producteurs et les récepteurs de textes britanniques, ils peuvent se trouver désavantagés par rapport aux lecteurs de traductions interlinguales.

“...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic.” Why American Readers Need Intralingual Translation but don’t often Get it¹

John Denton

1. Intralingual Translation

Of Jacobson’s (1959, p. 233) well known tripartite division of translation into intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic types, it is the middle one (which he himself called “translation proper,” arguably implying that the other two are not “properly” translation—Hermans, 1996, p. 23, or at least “translation” in inverted commas—Eco, 2001, p. 71) that is still foregrounded by scholarly investigation and professional practice and enjoys institutional approval, despite some acceptance of the extension of the scope of translation within the academic translation studies community (Hermans, 1999, pp. 147-148). Nevertheless, statements such as: “Translation (...) constitutes *one* mode of textual recycling among others” (my emphasis) (Hermans, 1996, p. 14) and Lefevere’s (1992, p. 2) inclusion of “translation” among other instances of

1 My interest in the subject began with a paper presented at the 17th Conference of the Associazione Italiana di Anglistica (University of Bologna, 1995) entitled “Spotted Dick...jeezus!...This some sexual disease? Aspects of Anglo-American Incomprehension,” followed by “How Well do Best-sellers Travel? The Case of the Multilingual *Adrian Mole*” presented at the 3rd European Society for the Study of English Conference (University of Glasgow, 1995). The present article is an expanded version of a paper read at the 4th Congress of the European Society for Translation Studies (University of Lisbon, 2004).

“rewriting” still betray reluctance to go as far as wholehearted acceptance of the consequences of Steiner’s (1998, p. 294) view that exclusive identification of translation with the interlingual type “has the advantage of obvious and common currency; but it is, I believe, damagingly restrictive.”² In opposition to Steiner’s wide ranging expansion of the coverage of the term “translation,” to the point of practically turning all monolingual text receptors into intralingual translators, Eco presents (at considerable length: 2001, pp. 67-132, 2003a, pp. 123-145, 2003b, pp. 225-253) the case against the interchangeability of interpretation and translation, for which he, somewhat reluctantly, argues Jacobson was (at least partially) to blame.

“Transmutation” as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems” (for example, turning a literary text into another nonverbal medium) has been studied and extended beyond verbal signs to intrasemiotic forms (Eco, 2001, p. 67) more outside than inside the discipline of translation studies. “Adaptation” rather than “translation” is actually the term most commonly used in these cases and scholars investigating the phenomenon are more likely to belong to the domain of literary rather than translation studies. Even the fast expanding branch of multimedia (mostly audiovisual) translation studies has more often than not restricted itself to the verbal-verbal aspect, thus not really fitting into Jacobson’s notion of “intersemiotic translation.”

What concerns us here, though, is “rewording” as “an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language,” which has been variously identified with summary, paraphrase, explanation, definition, reporting, rephrasing etc. (Snell-Hornby, 2006, p. 21; Hervey & Higgins, 1992, pp. 16-18). This form of “translation” (the inverted commas are still arguably advisable) is also widely practised, albeit neglected as a research paradigm, both diachronically and synchronically in a way, arguably, closer to “translation proper” than the other forms of rewording listed previously. The classic case is that of

2 Zethsen (2007) argues in favour of increasing research into many intralingual translation phenomena. My view of the question of what constitutes “intralingual translation” is more restrictive.

religious discourse, a subject of heated debate, particularly in the Anglican church, which now offers liturgical texts in modern (as opposed to genuine or fake Tudor) English, frequently the result of intralingual, diachronic updating. In all Christian (particularly Protestant) churches, biblical translation is an intra/interlingual translation mix. Further diachronic examples could be modernising Chaucer’s Middle English, which is common, especially for school use or Dante’s Italian. A common way of checking Italian high school students’ understanding of the *Divina Commedia* is to ask them to rewrite passages in modern Italian. Modernising the classics intralingually, however, is frequently opposed, not only by the expected self-styled custodians of the National Literary Heritage (as the lively debate provoked by a newspaper article by Susan Bassnett arguing in favour of modernising Shakespeare for present day students shows—Anderman, 2007, p. 48). Significantly, considering the case study concluding the present article, Adrian Mole, in his diary entry for 21st January (Townsend, 1982), writes: “I have just had to translate two pages of Macbeth into English”! This article deals with the complex relationship between the two major varieties of world English and the problem of mutual (mis)understanding, which, in interlingual/intercultural circumstances would normally call for translation proper. A recent notable exception to lack of scholarly interest in this important issue is the first chapter of Michael Cronin’s *Across the Lines. Travel, Language and Translation* (2000, pp. 9-38).

2. Interdialectal Variation in a Pluricentric Language

To return for a moment to Jacobson. For my purposes the key words in his definition of intralingual translation are “the same language.” If American and British English were identical in all linguistic and (crucially) cultural respects, forming a kind of “Anglo-Saxon” monolith, then this paper would be dealing with a non-problem and have no *raison d’être*, and transatlantic communication would not be a significant issue. Opposing this view Cronin writes of “the fiction of one language” (2000, p. 10) and elaborates on this in another passage (he is dealing with travel writers crossing the Atlantic in either direction): “Different accents, lexical variations, dissimilar patterns of language usage

and the multiple sublanguages of English reveal the daunting complexity of a language whose homogeneity the travellers can no longer take for granted" (2000, p. 2). Though it would be a gross exaggeration to speak of two different languages, it is at least entirely legitimate to refer to interdialectal variation between two standard *Englishes* (McArthur, 1998, pp. 72-77) or the two major varieties of a pluricentric language (Leitner, 1992). The extent of this undeniable variation (with which standard textbooks, e.g. Trudgill & Hannah, 2002, pp. 56-93, amply deal, to limit ourselves to grammatical and, more importantly for the purpose of this article, lexical items) is a matter of controversy, however.

Pluricentricity can be underplayed for political/ideological reasons, where the common core is emphasised at the expense of variety, as in the following quotation from the work of two eminent scholars: "We read the same books, (...). We watch the same television shows. We sing the same nursery rhymes to our children, crack the same jokes, share the same folklore, and our speech is interlarded with the same Shakespearean allusions" (Quirk & Stein, 1990, pp. 37-38). This view is remarkably similar to that expressed by a steadfast supporter of the Special Relationship, Margaret Thatcher: "... the Magna Carta belongs as much to you as it does to us; the writ of habeas corpus belongs as much to you as it does to us. (...) There is such a common heritage as well as the language. Shakespeare belongs as much to you as he does to us. (...) That is what unites us and has united us—rather more than a philosophy, but history as well, and language and mode of thought" (*Newsweek*, 8 Oct. 1990—quoted in Romaine, 1992, p. 256). Quirk and Stein's idea of a common Anglo-American culture rests on what seems to be very shaky ground. Some of the examples they give in support of their view are only partially valid, and conveniently they leave out as much as they include. If many of the jokes we crack are culture based then, as Chiaro (1992, p. 77) has argued, there can be considerable comprehension problems for speakers of either of the two major geographical varieties of English. We only watch some of the same TV shows, and if very popular British TV programmes like *Eastenders* and *Coronation Street* were the products of a shared culture, comprehension should present few problems for American viewers, which is clearly not the case, considering the

limited showing of the former and the publication of a glossary to accompany the programme (Ilson, 1990, p. 38) and rejection of the latter by the major US TV networks (*Coronation Street* is shown on CBC prime time in Canada, however, as well as in Australia and New Zealand, countries in which cultural differences are evidently seen as less marked). But we do not read the same newspapers. I am not so sure about the nursery rhymes and have doubts about the importance of Shakespearean influences on contemporary British and American conversations, except in somewhat elitist circles. We may read the same books some of the time, but do we always understand them, and if not why not? This last point will be examined in the case study concluding this article.

Intercultural and related linguistic difficulties likely to be encountered by British English speakers (especially academics, one also being reminded of the fictitious Philip Swallow in David Lodge's hilarious novel *Changing Places*) visiting the USA are described in an entertaining book by Trudgill (1988), in which the British scholar abandons the detached, descriptive approach of academic linguistics and indulges in a wealth of devastating value judgements. Any British visitor to the USA will inevitably come up against numerous linguistic and cultural barriers, where, on occasion, no way out can be negotiated, as the following personal experience shows:

British university teacher John Denton in Boston (USA) for a conference in March 1995.

Scene: restaurant Holiday Inn, Brookline, Boston, breakfast time.

The following dialogue (more or less) took place between hotel guest and waiter:

John Denton: I'd like fried eggs, please

Waiter: How would you like them cooked, sir?

John Denton: Well, just fried.

Waiter: Yes, but how would you like them cooked, sir?

At this point communication broke down, as the waiter listed ways of frying eggs with names that were incomprehensible for a speaker of British English, since in the UK eggs are fried and that's it! In the end John Denton heard the word 'scrambled' and

settled for that, though what he actually got would not have been called ‘scrambled eggs’ in the UK! More seriously, in cognitive linguistic terms, the average American has a different ‘breakfast’ frame stored in his/her memory (Minsky, 1975), at least as far as the fried eggs slot is concerned, including several different ways of cooking them, which are absent from the corresponding slot in the corresponding frame stored in the memory of the average speaker of British English. Communication breaks down when the necessary slots in the cognitive frame cannot be activated owing to lack of or difference in relevant culturally embedded knowledge schemata (Brown & Yule, 1983, pp. 236-256).

A more balanced view of the UK-US linguistic interface emerges from the work of arguably the leading researcher in the field, John Algeo (1986, 1989a, 1989b, 1990, 2001, 2006, to mention just a few of his many contributions). He argues convincingly for two streams, two standard Englishes both deriving from a common ancestor before the two nations diverged in the late 18th century (Algeo, 1986). Although he also claims that the two standards are still remarkably alike: “despite a multitude of differences between it [i.e. American English] and British English, the two are remarkably similar in their standard forms” (2001, p. 58), his detailed research foregrounds this “multitude of differences” precisely in the standard forms where he sees remarkable similarity. One of his most illuminating studies (1989b) concerns a public notice seen in London and tested with 90 native speakers of American English for comprehension (rephrasing in respondents’ own words) and language attitudes (words or expressions seemingly strange in American use) in the USA. The notice read as follows:

Avoid queuing—Customers not requiring a receipt should pin their cheque to the payment counterfoil and post here
- British Gas North Thames office (Finchley Road, London, 1986)

“Obtrusive” (i.e. queuing, pin, cheque, counterfoil, post) and “unobtrusive” (stylistic/pragmatic features, such as formality, third person use, lack of imperatives) Briticisms emerged from the tests carried out at the University of Georgia and a kind of ‘intralingual translation’ constructed out of the respondents’ rewording, “Don’t

wait in line—if you don’t need a receipt, attach your check to the bill and put it in the slot here”, which corresponded closely to a real American notice—a parallel text (albeit an intralingual one) of the type much used in interlingual contrastive analysis and translation teaching:

For check payment only
Insert bills and payment here if you do not want receipt
- Georgia Natural Gas Company office (Athens, Georgia,
1988)

Admittedly British and American academic or scientific texts are “remarkably similar,” only basically differing in spelling and punctuation.³ However, standard English is by no means limited to these genres, as the above public notices show. Algeo, in his major study of British-American grammatical contrasts writes, concerning his preference for mystery novels and other light fiction in the literary part of his corpus: “those genres have a rich store of colloquialisms and informal language (in which British-American differences are most pronounced), whereas serious fiction contains fewer such items” (2006, p. 5). My view of “standard” is basically geographical, i.e. language along the widest possible formality/informality cline that does not betray regional features and is thus understood and used anywhere in a national speech community (McArthur, 1998, pp. 102-137).

3. American Reception of *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole*

The quotation in the first half of my title is a comment on presumed American reception difficulties of British humour by Richard Eder in his review, in the *Los Angeles Times* (28 May 1986), of the American edition (1986) of Sue Townsend’s bestseller *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 3/4* (1982). In view of the book’s enormous success in the UK (5,000,000 copies sold of the first book and its successor—Townsend 1984a—together), the diary of a character who fast became a cult figure

3 I had personal experience of this when translating an Italian philosophical text for an American publisher (Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1997) and dealing with the staff at the proof reading stage.

in the author's home country was soon published in the USA, with expectations of repeating this success (Townsend, 1984b). In the USA it was initially marketed as a children's book, which proved to be a mistaken strategy, since it is actually addressed to the widest possible readership. More seriously, the overwhelming "Britishness" may have swamped the universal appeal of this young adolescent's struggles with life. A new attempt was made two years later with a combined edition of the first two *Diaries* (Townsend, 1986), with the addition of a glossary to assist American readers in overcoming evident linguistic and cultural barriers that the author was asked to provide (Townsend, 1989, p. 458; the glossary was reprinted in Townsend, 1991, pp. 383-388).

It has been pointed out (Lawson, 1975, p. 318) that, on occasion, an expression such as "traduit de l'américain" can be found in books by American authors published in France, a similar situation also existing in German speaking countries, although no consistent policy in the matter appears to be applied. American publishers have also acknowledged the linguistic divide by rewording a number of lexical and a few grammatical items considered unfamiliar to a US readership of British produced books, the most famous case being the "adaptation" (as it is called by Algeo, 2006, p. 5) of the Harry Potter books for young American readers (detailed lists of the changes being available on the website of the Department of Translation Studies of the University of Tampere (www.uta.fi/FAST/USI/REF/potter.html) and on a website devoted to Harry Potter (www.hp-lexicon.org/). However, in the States this kind of rewording or (partial) "intralingual translation" is the exception rather than the rule. Adrian Mole was not subjected to the same treatment as Harry Potter, except for the already mentioned glossary, about which more will be said later on. In the face of inevitable "linguistic misunderstanding, cultural difference, non-equivalence," these factors are "not generally described as such because translation problems are not supposed to be an issue" (Cronin, 2000, p. 16).

Reception studies have firmly established the active role of the reader in text interpretation, not only as a model (or ideal) entity but also as an empirical one (Nardocchio, 1992). For the

purposes of this article two types of (American) reader response have been exploited: reviewers of the US edition of the book(s) (collected in Matuz ed., 1990, pp. 406-421) and respondents to a questionnaire I submitted to various groups of (mostly) young adult native speakers of American English in Boston (USA) and Florence (Italy).

As was probably to be expected, in view of the reluctance to acknowledge the true dimensions of the cultural and linguistic divide between the two speech communities, only a few American reviewers made any reference to difficulties in text processing caused by linguistic difficulties. At least two exceptions, however, deserve quotation:

...What is a “pooffer”? What does it mean if an apartment is “dead grotty”? I did guess that a “call box” is a telephone, but what are “the pips”? What does it mean “to go off” someone, and what do you do when you go out “conkering”? (...) However, it’s not just adolescent slang that is the problem. The off-handed references to politics, grocery products, popular literature and music, vacation sports and social agencies make some entries very puzzling. While the author did provide a glossary for Americans, it by no means elucidates all the references to things particularly British. (Cynthia Rieben, *Voice of Youth Advocates*, Dec. 1986, quoted in Matuz ed., 1990, p. 416)

[Adrian Mole] is so liberal with its Britishisms that it may sometimes mystify young American readers. If they hang in long enough they will see that “dead” means “very,” for instance, or that a “removal lorry” is a moving van... (Natalie Babbitt, *Washington Post*, 13 May 1984, quoted in Matuz ed., 1990, p. 410)

The first of the reviewers referred to the items mentioned as “adolescent slang,” when they are actually normal informal standard British English that could be used by any age group in any part of the country.

The pessimism of Walter Clemens, the reviewer in *Newsweek* (5 May 1986, quoted in Matuz ed., 1990, p. 413): “Can *The Adrian Mole Diaries* repeat its British success in the country? I doubt it...” turned out to be fully justified.

4. A Questionnaire on Reader Reception

Townsend's glossary is in no way an exhaustive, carefully researched attempt to bridge the Anglo-American linguistic-cultural divide, but simply a random, humorous tip of the iceberg. It is presented in the form of 49 questions asked by Hamish Mancini (Adrian's fictitious American pen friend) on receipt of a copy of the *Diary*, followed by Adrian's answers. Here is a very brief sample:

23. Spotted Dick...jeezus...This some sexual disease?
 answer Spotted Dick: is a suet pudding containing sultanas.
 I find your sexual innuendos about my favourite pudding offensive in the extreme.
25. You bought your mother 'Black Magic'—what is she, a witch or something?
 answer Black Magic: dark chocolates.
43. Is *The Archers* a radio serial about Robin Hood?
 answer The Archers: a radio serial about English countryfolk.

A full list of the subjects of Hamish's (mostly culturally based) questions can be found in section 1) of the Appendix, followed by their treatment in a series of reference works (a monolingual learners' dictionary concentrating on culture, three dictionaries of British-American English and two standard, middle sized dictionaries, one British, the other American). The British cultural items, which, as already mentioned, are only a somewhat random selection by Sue Townsend (for example, Hamish doesn't ask what a "building society" is, despite the fact that this institution is unknown in the USA) receive poor coverage in the British-American dictionaries, despite statements by their authors such as: "But there are times when something more than approximate understanding is needed, moments when the minor misconceptions add up to complete confusion and at which reader or viewer is likely to miss the point" (Grote, 1992, p. x) or when the aim of the book is "to help Britons and Americans understand one another better and communicate with one another more easily" (Moss, 1994, p. vii). The Collins and Webster's dictionaries are just as helpful in this area (since they also include some encyclopaedic entries). Clearly only the *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture* is anywhere near to being exhaustive, since, unlike the

guides to Anglo-American differences, it provides much wider coverage of cultural items. It also offers good coverage of brand names, listing 24 of the 35 products mentioned in the *Diary*. The respondents to my questionnaire, on average, only managed to identify about 30 % of the brand names (with only one exception in Boston, who identified nearly all of them, but it turned out that he was Canadian!).

Allusions are also part of the cultural knowledge of members of a specific national speech community and understanding and communicating them is the responsibility of interlingual translators, as the thorough investigation (which also includes reader reception) by Leppihalme (1997) amply demonstrates. Cultural “bumps” (i.e. an awkward situation that can occur when members of two cultures fail to interact satisfactorily owing to cultural differences) do not only occur interlingually, but also between two speakers of the “same language” belonging to different national cultures. If allusions are interculturally shared, as is clearly the case of those to the title of a popular film and perhaps the most famous line in the history of the cinema in two entries in Adrian’s *Diary*, then comprehension on either side is no problem:

(May 11th) Bert Baxter offered to lend us a paraffin heater...I thanked him but refused the kind offer. I have read that they are easily knocked over and our dog would no doubt cause a towering inferno...

(March 12th) ...I expect that there will be a row when my mother comes home and finds that I have gone. But frankly, my dear diary, I don’t give a damn.

However, if, for example, a well known person in one culture but unknown in the other is referred to in connection with his/her specific characteristics a cultural bump will occur in the latter case:

(January 11th) Now I *know* I am an intellectual. I saw Malcolm Muggeridge on the television last night, and I understood nearly every word.

Malcolm Muggeridge made very frequent appearances on British television at the time. The point is that he specialised in providing easily understandable explanations of difficult concepts. So understanding Malcolm Muggeridge was in no way an intellectual feat! The humour does not come across if readers have no idea who the man is. Hamish's second question is "Who is Malcolm Muggeridge?" (to which Adrian answers: "an old intellectual who is always on TV. A bit like Gore Vidal, only more wrinkles").

Most of the humour in the book is culturally based. One example can illustrate how lack of a combination of linguistic and cultural knowledge can prevent American readers from "getting the joke":

(February 26th) The papers got mixed up today. Elm Tree Avenue got the *Sun* and the *Mirror* and Corporation Row got the heavy papers. I don't know why everybody went so mad. You'd think they would enjoy reading a different paper for a change.

When asked what kind of street "Elm Tree Avenue" was, none of the respondents to my questionnaire failed to answer "middle class suburban," but "Corporation Row" was always indicated as "a street in a downtown district with banks, offices etc.", while all British readers will associate it with "working-class housing estate" consisting of houses and flats owned by the Corporation (i.e. local authorities). This and lack of knowledge of the British newspapers mentioned and their usual readers made this (mildly funny) passage totally obscure for all my American respondents.

To go beyond cultural realia, I now turn to the under-researched area (at least in the context of Anglo-American contrasts) of the informal end of use related language variety. Of the 108 informal lexical items I identified in the book I chose just under a third of them (letters c-g) and submitted them in context to American respondents at the University of Boston and to American students studying in Florence (total 50, over a six-year period—1995-2001). Details are to be found in sections 3) and 4) of the Appendix.

“...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic”

Section 3) looks at treatment in the above mentioned reference works (except the *Longman* dictionary), where considerable differences in labelling are especially to be noted in the *Collins* and *Webster's* dictionaries (the former preferring “informal” to “colloquial”, for example)—a phenomenon often referred to in studies of Anglo-American lexicography (Norri, 1996; Tottie, 2002, pp. 95-97).

Section 4) gives the informal lexical items in context as submitted to my American respondents. The 12 items from the alphabetical list (total 32) in **bold** (clapped out, cleared off, do me over, duff...up, fags, flogging, git, getting done, got its own back, gone off, goolies, dead grotty) were not understood by the majority (more than 80%) of respondents, while those (7) in *italics* (dead cushy, dead loss, do myself in, flick, frog, get stuffed, going up the wall) were considered “un-American” but their meaning guessed at. The remaining items in **bold** or *italics* contributed to the obscurity of the passage for American readers. If we look at the treatment of the 19 items in *Webster's* dictionary, which in the title specifically states that it is “of American English” we will note that 15 of them are either missing or labelled as “British,” which ties in pretty well with the results of the questionnaire.

Actually it was often not the alphabetically listed informal lexical item that caused comprehension problems but rather other items in the contextual setting as in the following case:

It would be more of a punishment to make the tight-fisted **sod** cough up some of his **building society** savings. (December 2nd)

Here it is not the item selected (i.e. “cough up”), which is common to both varieties, that causes problems, but other lexical and cultural features that are opaque for the majority of Americans, since they do not generally belong either to their dictionary, i.e. “sod,” or encyclopaedia, i.e. “building society” in cognitive linguistic terms.

Another interesting example is:

Barry Kent said he would ‘**do me over**’ (February 17th)

The item “do me over”, which does not appear in *Webster’s*, shows how guessing the meaning of a familiar expression to speakers of British English can produce faulty results. Instead of ‘beat me up’ it was frequently interpreted by my American respondents as ‘do (something) to me again’ (over=again in American but not British English).

5. American vs. French readers of *Adrian Mole*

...watching American soap-operas or seeing British films without subtitles can create delusions of understanding. Whereas an anglophone reading public might willingly acknowledge the necessary existence of intermediaries to translate for them the reality of life in Afghanistan or Greenland, there may be greater resistance to the notion of the travel writer as translator within the English-speaking world. (Cronin, 2000, p. 36)

The consequences of such resistance on the other side of the Atlantic to the need for at least partial intralingual rewording in the case of a British bestseller have been illustrated in the previous section and accompanying appendix. When “rewriting, transforming, appropriating and relocating a given source text, the translator attunes the resulting entity to a new communicative situation” (Hermans, 1996, p. 14). No one would challenge the fact that text transfer to “a new communicative situation” involving a speech community using a different language requires interlingual translation. *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 ¾* was obviously no exception and was translated into 25 languages.

The problem I should like to examine briefly here is whether readers of an interlingual translation of a text like the one under examination are at an advantage linguistically and culturally as compared with speakers of another variety of the “same” language deprived of some form of assistance by an intermediary (one can hardly imagine American readers of what, after all, is marketed as entertaining fiction for all reading the book with reference works close to hand!).

Successful interlingual and intercultural communication will obviously depend on the level of linguistic and cultural competence of the translator and the transfer strategies employed.

I have chosen the French translation (Townsend, 1984c), which has already been subjected to close analysis (Mailhac, 1996 and Desmet, 1999), rather than the Italian one which I have investigated elsewhere (Denton, 1994), though in the inevitably somewhat prescriptive context of translation teaching (practically, instructions on “how not to translate *Adrian Mole*!”).

Let us look at the lexical items in context that presented particular problems to the American respondents to my questionnaire accompanied by their French translations:

a) Instead of being ashamed of our antiques, he is proud of the **clapped out** old *rubbish*.

Au lieu d'être honteux de nos antiquités, il est fier comme Artaban de ces vieilleries qui n'en peuvent plus.

b) I **cleared off** to my grandma's at dinner time.

Je me suis sauvé chez ma grand-mère pour déjeuner.

e) It would be more of a punishment to make the tight-fisted **sod** cough up some of his **building society** savings.

La meilleure façon de punir ce petit radin, c'est de lui retenir le montant de la facture de son compte épargne logement.

i) I'd have thought that being a prison **wardress** was *dead cushy*.

J'aurais cru que gardienne de prison était un boulot pépère.

l) Barry Kent said he would '**do me over**' unless I gave him twenty-five pence every day.

Barry Kent m'a dit qu'il me “casserait la gueule” si je ne lui donnais pas vingt-cinq pence tous les jours.

n) Pandora says she will **duff** Nigel **up**, if he goes round committing **libel**.

Pandora a dit qu'elle ferait passer un mauvais quart d'heure à Nigel s'il continuait à répandre ses calomnies.

o) They went to the hospital to find that Bert had bought his stinking **fags** from the hospital **trolley**.

J'ai vu qu'il s'était acheté ses cigarettes dégueulasses au tabac ambulancier!

r) Lucas was out **flogging** insurance.

Lucas est parti vendre ses assurances.

s) Bert Baxter said, '**Smarmy** four-eyed **git**' and laughed and ripped the bill up.

Bert Baxter l'a déchirée et m'a dit en riant : “Il peut toujours courir, le vieux chameau à lunettes!”

u) The papers are full of stories about old ladies **getting done** for shoplifting.

Les journaux sont remplis d'histoires qui parlent de vieilles dames qui se font arrêter pour vol à l'étalage.

v) The dog **got its own back** on my father. It jumped up and knocked down his model ship...

Le chien était furieux contre mon père, alors il a sauté sur sa maquette de bateau...

y) Pandora has **gone off** Tony Benn since she found out that he is a lapsed aristocrat.

Pandora s'est détachée de Tony Benn quand qu'elle a découvert qu'il était un aristocrate déchu.

cc) ...but Barry Kent hit me in the **goolies** and walked off saying "There's more where that came from".

Barry Kent m'a donné un coup de genou dans les roustons et s'est éloigné en disant : "C'est juste pour que t'aies une idée de ce qui t'attend."

dd) The *flat* is **dead grotty**, it is modern but small.

L'appartement est drôlement moche : moderne mais tout petit.

Undoubtedly all strictly linguistic items have been provided with accurate translations, in these cases at least giving French readers an advantage over their American counterparts. However, the translator has shown little stylistic sensitivity, extensively normalising Adrian's discourse. In other words, the translator has often failed to draw upon the wide ranging stylistic resources of the French language (here only very selectively used), not matching English informality with French equivalents, where this would have been possible. A glaring example is the translation of "his stinking fags" by "ses cigarettes dégueulasses," where one would have expected the more informal term "clopes."

Culturally speaking, and this is a crucial factor in this kind of text, we have an example of mis-translation, i.e. "compte épargne logement" for "building society savings." Young people at this time often put their savings in a building society rather than a regular bank. This service was offered in addition to the more normal function of a building society dealing with house mortgages. Adrian was not saving up to buy a house! (Mailhac, 1996, p. 178).

“...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic”

6. Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to investigate the problems involved in the transfer of a culturally embedded text from one side of the Atlantic to the other. While translation proper is both interlingual and intercultural and will attempt to face up to and resolve all the problems entailed (depending on the translator's bilingual, bi-cultural and transfer competence), when “translation problems are not supposed to be an issue” the new receptors of such a text, as native speakers of a significantly different variety of a pluricentric language such as English, can be faced with such extensive comprehension problems as to prevent the success of a best selling work of literature in what is undoubtedly a “new communicative situation.” Sue Townsend's cult hero was definitely ‘...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic.’

UNIVERSITY OF FLORENCE

APPENDIX

1. Subjects of Hamish's 49 questions: (items in brackets fictitious)

1) RSPCA, 2) Malcolm Muggeridge, 3) PE shorts, 4) Morning Star, 5) Skegness/Skegness rock, 6) V sign, 7) toad in the hole, 8) Woodbines, 9) family allowance, 10) Kevin Keagan, 11) Barclaycard, 12) Yorkshire pudding, 13) Broadcasting House, 14) 25 pence, 15) Mars Bar, 16) Sainsbury's, 17) PDSA, 18) GCEs, 19) (Big and Bouncy), 20) Bovril, 21) (Evergreens), 22) social services, 23) spotted dick, 24) detention centre, 25) Black Magic, 26) Sheffield, 27) Habitat, 28) Radio Four, 29) '0' Level, 30) copper's nark, 31) Noddy, 32) social security, 33) Sir Edmund Hilary, 34) Alma Cogan, 35) Lucozade, 36) conker, 37) AWOL, 38) Noel Coward, 39) BUPA, 40) wellingtons, 41) Tony Benn, 42) petrol, 43) The Archers, 44) Co-op, 45) VAT, 46) chapati, 47) rouge, 48) Alsatian, 49) Rasta

2. Presence and treatment of above lexical items in selected reference works: (items in brackets omitted from Longman 2nd ed.)

<u>Longman</u>	<u>Grote</u>	<u>Moss</u>	<u>Schur</u>	<u>Collins</u>	<u>Webster's</u>
Alsatian (B)	x	√	√	√	B
The Archers (B)	√	x	x	x	x
AWOL	x	x	x	√	√
Barclaycard (B)	x	x	x	x	x
Tony Benn	x	x	x	√	x
Black Magic (B)	x	x	x	x	x
Bovril (B)	√	x	x	√	x
Broadcasting House	√	x	x	x	x
BUPA (B)	x	√	x	x	x
conker (B)	√	√	√	B	B
Co-op (B)	x	x	x	√	√
copper's nark	x	x	x	B	B

“...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic”

Noel Coward	x	x	x	√	√
detention centre (B)	√	x	x	√	x
family allowance (B)	x	x	x	B	x
GCE (B)	√	√	√	B	x
Habitat (B)	x	x	x	x	x
Kevin Keagan	x	x	x	x	x
Lucozade	x	x	x	x	x
Mars Bar (B)	x	x	x	x	x
Morning Star	√	x	x	x	x
(Malcolm Muggeridge)	x	x	x	x	x
Noddy	x	√	x	x	x
‘O’ Level (B)	√	√	√	B	B
(PDSA (B))	x	x	x	B	x
PE	x	x	x	√	√
petrol (B)	√	√	√	B	B
Radio Four (B)	√	x	x	x	x
Rasta	x	x	x	√	√
rock (B)	√	x	x	B	B
rouge	x	x	x	√	√(old)
RSPCA (B)	√	x	x	B	x
Sainsbury’s (B)	√	x	x	x	x
Sheffield	√	x	x	√	√
Skegness	√	x	x	x	x
social security (B)	√	x	x	√	√(USA)
social services (B)	x	x	x	√	x
spotted dick (B)	√	x	√	B	x
toad in the hole (B)	√	√	√	B	x
VAT (B)	√	√	√	B	x
V sign (B)	√	x	x	B	x
wellingtons (B)	√	√	√	B	√
Yorkshire pudding	√	√	x	B	√

(chapati: only in Collins and Webster’s; Woodbines: only in Grote.
Not mentioned anywhere: Alma Cogan, Sir Edmund Hilary, and,
for obvious reasons, 25 pence)

3. Informal lexical items (letters c-g) in the *Secret Diary*:

	<u>Grote</u>	<u>Moss</u>	<u>Schur</u>	<u>Collins</u>	<u>Webster's</u>
clapped out (adj)	x	x	S	BI	x
clear off (vb)	x	x	x	I	C
come off it!	x	x	x	I	S
commie (n)	x	x	x	I (der)	C (der)
cough up (vb)	x	x	x	I	S
crack up (vb)	x	x	x	I	S
crap (n)	x	x	x	S	√*
creep (n)	x	x	x	S	S*
cushy (adj)	x	x	x	I	BS
dead (adv)	√	√	x	√	√
dead loss (n)	x	x	x	I	x
do in (vb)	x	C	x	S	S
do over (vb)	√	x	x	BS	x
drag (n)	x	x	x	I	S*
duff up (vb)	x	x	x	BS	x
fag (n)	√	C	S	BS	(old)S
fed up (adj)	x	x	x	I	C
flick (n)	x	x	S	S	S
flog (vb)	√	x	S	BS	B
four-eyed (adj)	x	x	x	√	x
frog (adj)	√	x	x	BS	S
get done (vb)	√	x	x	x	x
get own back (vb)	x	x	I	I	+BC
get stuffed (vb)	√	C	S	BS (tab)	x
git (n)	√	C	S	BS	x
(on the) go	x	x	x	I	C
go off (vb)	√	x	I	BI	x
go on (vb)	x	x	x	√	C
go to pot (vb)	x	x	x	√	√
go up the wall	x	x	x	S	C
goolie (n)	√	C	S	S (tab)	x
grotty (adj)	x	C	S	BS	BS

“...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic”

C = colloquial; S = slang; I = informal; B = British; + = chiefly; * = Americanism; der = derogatory; tab = taboo; √ = present without label; x = absent

Longman = *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*. London, Longman 1992 (2nd ed. 1998).

Grote = GROTE, David (1992). *British English for American Readers*. Westport (Connecticut), Greenwood Press.

Moss = MOSS, Norman (1994). *British-American Dictionary*. Oxford, Helicon.

Schur = SCHUR, Norman W. (1987). *British English A to ZED*. New York, Facts on File (revised ed. Eugene Ehrlich, 2001).

Collins = *Collins English Dictionary*, 3rd. (updated) edition. Glasgow, Harper Collins 1994 (6th. ed. 2003).

Webster's = *Webster's New World Dictionary of American English*, 3rd. College edition. New York, Simon & Shuster, 1988 (many updates as *Webster's New World College Dictionary*).

4. Above lexical items in context: (items in **bold** opaque for majority of respondents; items in *italics* considered un-American but meaning guessed at or deduced from context)

a) Instead of being ashamed of our antiques, he is proud of the **clapped out** old *rubbish*.

b) I **cleared off** to my grandma's at dinner time.

c) Christmas dinner and dance in March! - Come off it dad!

d) That filthy commie Bert Baxter...

e) It would be more of a punishment to make the tight-fisted **sod** cough up some of his **building society** savings.

f) Heard my father said good night to the car. He must be cracking up.

g) School dinners are complete crap now.

h) I expect it was that Lucas creep kissing her neck.

i) I'd have thought that being a prison **wardress** was *dead cushy*.

j) Just back from carol singing. The suburban houses were a *dead loss*.

k) I might as well *do myself in*.

l) Barry Kent said he would '**do me over**' unless I gave him twenty-five pence every day.

- m) He wanted to see Blossom again, which was a bit of a drag because he takes so long to walk anywhere.
- n) Pandora says she will **duff** Nigel **up**, if he goes round committing **libel**.
- o) They went to the hospital to find that Bert had bought his stinking **fags** from the hospital **trolley**.
- p) I'm fed up with dogs.
- q) Then he rang Doreen Slater and said he would have to 'take a rain check on Saturday's *flick*'.
- r) Lucas was out **flogging** insurance.
- s) Bert Baxter said, '**Smarmy** four-eyed **git**' and laughed and ripped the bill up.
- t) I am reading *Madame Bovary*, by another *frog* writer.
- u) The papers are full of stories about old ladies **getting done** for shoplifting.
- v) The dog **got its own back** on my father. It jumped up and knocked down his model ship...
- w) Barry Kent told Miss Elf to '*get stuffed*' in Geography today. So she sent him to Mr Scruton to be punished.
- x) It's a wonder I have the strength to hold my pen. I have been on the go all day...
- y) Pandora has **gone off** Tony Benn since she found out that he is a lapsed aristocrat.
- z) ...a book by a woman my mother is always going on about.
- aa) So the worst has happened, my skin has gone to pot, and my parents are splitting up.
- bb) He is in our spare room. My father *is going up the wall*.
- cc) ...but Barry Kent hit me in the **goolies** and walked off saying 'There's more where that came from'.
- dd) The *flat* is **dead grotty**, it is modern but small.

References

ALGEO, John (1986). “The Two Streams: British and American English.” *Journal of English Linguistics*, 19, 2, pp. 269-284.

— (1989a). “British-American Lexical Differences: A Typology of Interdialectal Variation.” In O. Garcia & R. Otheguy (eds). *English across Cultures. Cultures across English*. Berlin & New York, Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 219-241.

— (1989b). “Queuing and Other Idiosyncrasies.” *World Englishes*, 8, 2, pp. 157-163.

— (1990). “British and American English: Odi et Amo.” In S. Adamson et al. (eds). *Papers from the 5th. International Conference on English Historical Linguistics*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia, John Benjamins, pp. 13-29.

— (2001). “External History.” In J. Algeo (ed.). *The Cambridge History of the English Language. Vol. 6, English in North America*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-58.

— (2006). *British or American English? A Handbook of Word and Grammar Patterns*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

ANDERMAN, Gunilla (2007). “Linguistics and Translation.” In P. Kuhiwczak & K. Littau (eds). *A Companion to Translation Studies*. Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, pp. 45-62.

BROWN, Gillian & George YULE (1983). *Discourse Analysis*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

CHIARO, Delia (1992). *The Language of Jokes. Analysing Verbal Play*. London & New York, Routledge.

COLLINS English Dictionary ([1994] 2003). Third (updated) edition. Glasgow, Harper Collins.

CRONIN, Michael (2000). *Across the Lines. Travel, Language and Translation*. Cork, Cork University Press.

DENTON, John (1994). "Translation Criticism, Translation Teaching and Inter-cultural Transfer." *Koiné*, 4, pp. 49-65.

DESMET, Mieke (1999). "The Secret Diary of the Translator." In J. Vandaele (ed.). *Translation and the (Re)Location of Meaning. Selected Papers of the CETRA Research Seminars in Translation Studies 1994-1996*. Leuven, KUL, pp. 215-236.

ECO, Umberto (2001). *Experiences in Translation*. Toronto, Buffalo & London, University of Toronto Press.

— (2003a). *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation*. London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

— (2003b). *Dire quasi la stessa cosa*. Milano, Bompiani.

GROTE, David (1992). *British English for American Readers*. Westport (Connecticut), Greenwood Press.

HERMANS, Theo (1996). *Translation's Other*. Inaugural Lecture. London, University College London.

— (1999). *Translation in Systems*. Manchester, St. Jerome.

HERVEY, Sándor & Ian HIGGINS (1992). *Thinking Translation. A Course in Translation Method: French to English*. London & New York, Routledge.

ILSON, Robert (1990). "British and American English: Ex Uno Plura?" In C. Ricks & L. Michaels (eds). *The State of the Language*. London, Faber & Faber, pp. 33-41.

JAKOBSON, Roman (1959). "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation". In R. A. Brower (ed.). *On Translation*. Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, pp. 232-239.

LAWSON, Sarah (1975). "Traduit de l'américain." *American Speech*, 50, pp. 317-319.

“...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic”

LEFEVERE, André (1992). *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. London & New York, Routledge.

LEITNER, Gerhard (1992). “English as a Pluricentric Language.” In Clyne, M. (ed.). *Pluricentric Languages*. Berlin & New York, Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 179-237.

LONGMAN ([1992] 2nd ed. 1998). *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*. London, Longman.

LEPPIHALME, Ritva (1997). *Culture Bumps. An Empirical Approach to the Translation of Allusions*. Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.

MAILHAC, Jean-Pierre (1996). “Evaluation Criteria for the Translation of Cultural References.” In G. T. Harris (ed.). *On Translating French Literature and Film*. Amsterdam & Atlanta, Rodopi, pp. 173-188.

MATUZ, Roger (ed.) (1990). *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, vol. 61. Detroit, Gale Research Inc.

MCARTHUR, Tom (1998). *The English Languages*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

MINSKY, Marvin (1975). “A Framework for Representing Knowledge.” In P.H. Winston (ed.). *The Psychology of Computer Vision*. New York, McGraw-Hill, pp. 211-277.

MOSS, Norman (1994). *British-American Dictionary*. Oxford, Helicon.

NARDOCCHIO, Elaine (1992). “Introduction.” In E. Nardocchio (ed.). *Reader Response to Literature. The Empirical Dimension*. Berlin & New York, Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 1-11.

NORRI, Juhani (1996). “Regional Labels in some British and American Dictionaries.” *International Journal of Lexicography*, 9, 1, pp. 1-29.

QUIRK, Randolph, & Gabriele STEIN (1990). *English in Use*. London & New York, Longman.

ROMAINE, Suzanne (1992). "English: from Village to Global Village." In T.W. Machan & C.T. Scott (eds). *English in its Social Context. Essays in Historical Sociolinguistics*. Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 253-260.

SCHUR, Norman W. ([1987] 2001). *British English A to ZED*. Revised ed. Eugene Ehrlich, New York, Facts on File.

SNELL-HORNBY, Mary (2006). *The Turns of Translation Studies*. Amsterdam & Philadelphia, John Benjamins.

STEINER, George ([1975] 1998). *After Babel. Aspects of Language and Translation*. Third Edition. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

TOTTIE, Gunnel (2002). *An Introduction to American English*. Oxford, Blackwell.

TOWNSEND, Sue (1982). *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 3/4*. London, Methuen.

— (1984a). *The Growing Pains of Adrian Mole*. London, Methuen.

— (1984b). *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 3/4*. New York, Flare Books (Avon).

— (1984c). *Journal secret d'Adrien, 13 ans ¾*. Trans. Béatrice Gartenberg. Paris, Hachette/Stock.

— (1986). *The Adrian Mole Diaries* (with an *Afterword to the American Edition*). New York, Grove Press.

— (1989). "Interview." In Trosky, S. M. (ed.). *Contemporary Authors*, vol 127. Detroit, Gale Research Inc., pp. 457-460.

— (1991). *Adrian Mole from Major to Minor*. London, Methuen.

“...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic”

TRUDGILL, Peter (1988). *Coping with America*. Second Edition. Oxford, Blackwell.

TRUDGILL, Peter & Jean HANNAH (2002). *International English*. Fourth Edition. London, Edward Arnold.

WEBSTER'S *New World Dictionary of American English* (1988). Third College Edition. New York, Simon & Shuster (many updates as *Webster's New World College Dictionary*).

ZETHSEN, Karen Korning (2007). “Beyond Translation Proper: Extending the Field of Translation Studies.” *TTR*, 2007, XX, 1, pp. 281-308.

ABSTRACT: “...waterlogged somewhere in mid-Atlantic.” Why American Readers Need Intralingual Translation but don't often Get it — The quotation in the title is a comment on presumed American reception difficulties of British author Sue Townsend's bestseller *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 3/4* (1982). A number of American reviews of the book and a questionnaire I used with American readers amply demonstrated a (partial) breakdown in transatlantic communication. Does this mean that American readers of British texts where informal register and cultural embeddedness predominate need some form of intralingual translation? As ‘speakers of the same language’ (albeit a pluricentric one) they do not often get it, in consideration of the widely held belief in a common language and culture. Thus, when shared British text producer-receptor pre-established knowledge schemata can no longer be consistently activated, Americans may well be at a disadvantage as compared with readers of interlingual translations.

RÉSUMÉ : « ...bloqué au beau milieu de l'Atlantique ». Pourquoi les lecteurs américains ont besoin de traduction intralinguale et ne l'obtiennent que rarement — La citation contenue dans le titre de cet article illustre les difficultés de réception aux États-Unis du best-seller *The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole Aged 13 3/4* (1982), de l'auteure britannique Sue Townsend. Certains comptes rendus de l'ouvrage, ainsi qu'un questionnaire

que j'ai utilisé auprès des lecteurs américains, démontrent clairement la rupture (partielle) de la communication transatlantique. Est-ce à dire que les lecteurs américains de textes britanniques, au sein desquels le registre informel et les traces d'un enracinement culturel sont omniprésents, ont besoin d'une certaine forme de traduction intralinguale? En tant que « locuteurs d'une même langue » (bien qu'il s'agisse d'une langue pluricentrique), ils n'en bénéficient pas souvent, compte tenu de la croyance répandue en une langue unifiée et une culture commune. Ainsi, lorsque les lecteurs américains ne partagent pas les mêmes schémas pré-établis de connaissances que les producteurs et les récepteurs de textes britanniques, ils peuvent se trouver désavantagés par rapport aux lecteurs de traductions interlinguales.

Keywords: transatlantic communication, cultural embeddedness, intralingual translation, pluricentric language, knowledge schemata.

Mots-clés : communication transatlantique, enracinement culturel, traduction intralinguale, langue pluricentrique, schémas cognitifs.

John Denton

Dipartimento di Filologia Moderna
University of Florence
via S. Reparata 93-95, 50129 Firenze, Italy
jdenton58@hotmail.com