Domestication and Translocation: The Strange Case of the Disappearing City

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Venuti equates domesticating, fluent translation with the apparent elision of the translation process itself, rendering it invisible. I would like to suggest, however, that extreme forms of domestication, paradoxically, can achieve the opposite effect, foregrounding the translation. This article outlines various domesticating strategies, touching on the trend of translocation in audiovisual products but concentrating on Frédéric Beigbeder's novel 99 francs and its English translation where the setting of the novel is transposed from Paris to London.

As well established by the literature of the discipline, translation is not a neutral activity, with different strategies producing a variety of target texts (TT). The translator (of literary texts in particular, although not exclusively) must, therefore, evaluate which methodology will be most suited in a certain set of circumstances for each individual translation: one of the most important decisions will be that between a domesticating or a foreignising strategy. In the first instance, the translator will bring the author of the foreign text closer to the readers of the translation, to paraphrase Schleiermacher (1992, 42), the TT reader will not notice too many «foreign elements» in the new text, the translation will appear more «seamless», almost «transparent», the reader will at times forget they are in fact reading a translation at all. This approach is often encouraged by publishers who feel that readers may be put off if the act of translation is foregrounded: translated fiction in the UK, for example, tends to

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be seen as rather earnest and challenging.\(^1\) Prevailing norms in current translation practice tend to operate in such a way that «foreign elements», be they lexical, syntactic, stylistic, or cultural, are replaced with elements more familiar to the readers of the TT – the degree to which this happens is, of course, variable and can depend on factors such as the language pair and directionality.

The notion of difference, on the other hand, which underpins a more foreignizing strategy, is frequently equated with a poor, clumsy translating technique. As with plastic surgery, we can change things but it must not show, a new appearance with invisible scars is the acceptable face of translation, the less apparent the operation, the better. Translators who leave the stitches in, as it were, know they are running a risk and it is not infrequent in such cases to find a translator’s preface or notes, explaining that this was done on purpose and is not the result of inexperience or lack of skill.

A note on the translation, accompanying Andrew Broomfield’s recent version of War and Peace is such a preface. For the most part, it does not deal with the actual translation but concentrates rather on the genesis of the original version of Tolstoy’s Russian text of which this is the first English translation. But there is one rather telling extract detailing the decision to foreignize certain elements but not others:

[… ] impressionistic are the long, winding sentences with their many clauses that hasten along in the recreation of swiftly passing time. Sometimes the slipping syntax that results from this haste has been corrected in English, but sometimes it has been left, true to the original. Such slippage could well be part of Tolstoy’s deliberate deformations. His generally hurtling manner has a brusqueness and vigour that purposely fly in the face of literary forebears […]. His use of the same unvarying adjective throughout a single passage, in grand disregard for fine style, creates an unrepentant hammering effect in Russian but raises problems in English, which abhors repetition of this kind. Whilst the present translation introduces small variations in the name of stylistic euphony, it occasionally mimics the repetition to enable the readers to feel the force and strangeness of the original.\(^2\) Time and again Tolstoy insisted that

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1. For statistics regarding translation, see Unesco’s Index Translationum. Based on information from a number of sources, however, current estimates indicate that the UK has around 3% of translated fiction, while c. 30% of fiction read in mainland Europe is made up of translations.
2. Emphasis added.
this work was neither a novel or a poem nor a history, and he would have
loathed the idea of its being recast in translation as the very thing, a neat
and tidy story, that he so strenuously sought to avoid. (Broomfield and
Coates: 2007, xvii)

So much for stylistic domestication, altering the language and stylistic
features of the text to bring it closer in line with domestic norms. But there
are, of course, other forms of domestication: do characters maintain their
names or does Guillaume become William and Mrs Smith become la Signora Smith or even la Signora Rossi? Should a regional dialect be ignored,
substituted or maintained in the TT? - and what would maintain mean in
this context? Should a culture-specific reference be domesticated? If a
ccharacter in an Italian novel, for example, is eating panettone, what would
she be eating in the English translation? Is it still panettone, or is it cake,
Christmas cake, traditional/typical Italian Christmas cake, panettone cake
etc.? And what of the setting of a novel? Is a translator authorised in mov-
ing the scene of the action from one locale to another? The answer to this
last question is almost invariably ‘no’ and most readers would no doubt
be rather shocked if this degree of intervention, or manipulation as some
would see it, were revealed. For many, the shift of locale would represent
the difference between translation tout court and adaptation: such changes
in setting are far more common when moving from one genre to another
rather than in the relatively straightforward translation of novels. Derrick
Cameron picks up Lepage’s term of tradaptation, a contraction of trans-
lation and adaptation, «to convey the sense of annexing old texts to new
cultural contexts» (Cameron: 2000, 17). He talks of examples in theatre
translation of translocation to new cultural and aesthetic contexts, such as
the reworkings of Molière by Jatinder Verma whereby Tartuffe and Le
Bourgeois gentilhomme are set in «equivalent periods in India to when
Molière originally wrote the texts».

Venuti, for example, argues that the decontextualizing element present
in any act of translation is highlighted in novel-to-film adaptation, where
it becomes «much more extensive and complex because of the shift to a
different, multidimensional medium with different traditions, practices and
conditions of production» (Venuti: 2007, 29). The very terminology used
in Adaptation Studies is symptomatic of the breadth of approaches and
overlapping of strategies when moving from one medium and/or language
to another: «recontextualization, tradaptation, spinoff, reduction, simpli-
fication, condensation, abridgement, special version, reworking, offshoot,
transformation, remediation, and re-vision» (Milton: 2009, 51). However,
concepts such as cultural proximity – the desire of audiences to see or hear media products from their own or similar cultures (Staubhaar and LaRose: 2000, 488) – or cultural discount – the reduction in value of a film or TV programme when it is being sold to an external market – frequently used in communication and adaptation studies, can help bring into focus the parallel with translation studies and the domestication/foreignization debate. While Acland identifies a «loss of cultural specificity» as one of the side-effects of the global «geographic mobility of cultural commodities» (Acland: 2003, 33), the pressures of cultural proximity have occasioned culturally-specific adaptations of a number of TV programmes, for example, which Translation Studies would identify as being heavily domesticating: programmes such as the Québécois Canadian Un gars, une fille which went on to sell its format to more than a dozen countries and the French Caméra café which sold abroad with similar success: the episodes are not simply dubbed or subtitled but rewritten with new actors, sets, story lines, deemed to be more in keeping with local cultural values, references and notions of humour.

Culturally specific remakes are produced even when language is not an obstacle. There have recently been American versions of the UK science fiction crime series Life on Mars and the popular British mockumentary The Office, with an American cast, in an American setting. The following from an American review of the adaptation:

The British sitcom The Office has the most devoted following this side of Monty Python, so an American remake seemed doomed. Amazingly, the remake actually finds its own enjoyable version of the original’s uncanny comedy of embarrassment. [...] The pilot episode suffers from closely replicating the British pilot, but after that The Office finds its own footing, turning diversity training, an office birthday party, and a

3. Cf. the recent interesting case of a Luanda advertising agency publicising the debut of the Simpsons on Angolan TV with a ‘make-over’ – even though the ad campaign featured an African version of the Springfield family, the actual broadcast was that seen by the rest of the world (accessed 13/10/2009): http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/6057360/The-Simpsons-get-African-makeover.html

4. Smith, D., «US version of Life on Mars gets lost in translation», The Observer, 15/6/2008: http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2008/jun/15/bbc.usa Other UK drama series remade for the US market include Queer as Folk, Cracker, Ballykissangel (the latter is renamed Hope Island). There is also the added twist that, on occasion, these US versions are subsequently exported to the UK market.
basketball game into excruciating yet hypnotically funny rituals of humiliation.  

An excerpt from a British newspaper review of the American adaptation however is clearly conscious of what has been «lost in translation»:

A few things have been left out, a few things added. Some British references have been swapped for American ones, and it's been cleaned up a bit for the country that went into a national crisis at the momentary glimpse of Janet Jackson's boob. Remember our David Brent introducing Dawn to the camera? «I'd say that, at one time or another, every bloke in this office has woken up at the crack of Dawn,» he said. It said something about the appallingly amusing quality of the appallingly amusing office banter, and it was dead funny.

Well, for one, Dawn is called Pam in this US version so a crack-of-Pam joke doesn't work so well. But that would have been far too naughty for them anyway. Here's how Michael Scott does it: «If you think Pam is cute now you should have seen here a couple of years ago.» [Tiger growl for extra comic effect.] Lamer, in other words. [...] It's like seeing a performance of a play you know and love - *Hamlet*, say - but with all the names changed. «Something is rotten in the state of Pennsylvania ...».

While following the logic of cultural proximity, therefore, from a translational point of view we can interpret all these remakes and translocations as conforming to Nida's strategy of equivalent effect and they can also be seen as examples of overwhelming domestication. But, as illustrated by the case of *The Office*, rather than entering their new locale surreptitiously as commonly happens with domesticated TTs, the 'translated' nature of these cultural products is laid bare and discussed at far greater length than any dubbed or subtitled equivalent. But does the same hold true for literary products where the traditionally higher cultural status of novels, for example, commonly dissuades such an approach?

5. http://www.amazon.com/Office-Season-One-Steve-Carell/dp/B0009VBTP0 /ref=pd_sim_d_3 accessed 13/10/2009. While the British original only ran for 2 seasons (14 episodes in all) the US version has already produced over 100 episodes.

Frédéric Beigbeder’s novel *99 francs* was published in Paris by Grasset in 2000. The protagonist and main narrator is Octave a successful advertising executive for a large company in Paris. He is an aggressive, unscrupulous, coke-snorting cynic, writing this exposé of his work in the hope he will be sacked, thereby pocketing his unemployment insurance. But, the more obnoxious he becomes, the more highly valued he is at the office. Beigbeder unleashes a head-on attack against the world of advertising (trumping his fictitious creation by managing to lose his own job with Young and Rubicam on the novel’s publication), with lengthy tirades against stifling consumerism where everything is reduced to its selling potential and commercial value: an obvious example of this is the very title of the novel, where 99 Francs coincides with the actual price of the book. The game is pushed even further, in 2002, when the Euro is introduced in France and the book’s title is updated accordingly to *14,99 euro*. As part of this heavy emphasis on materialism and reification, Beigbeder’s writing is laden with references to popular culture, consumer products, advertising slogans which are integral to the text and as such present an imposing challenge for the translator.

Here is an example of one of Octave’s many scathing assessments of his livelihood:

> Tu veux être allongé sur une pelouse et pleurer en regardant le ciel. La publicité a fait écrire Hitler. La publicité est chargée de faire croire aux citoyens que la situation est normale quand elle ne l’est pas. Comme ces aboyeurs nocturnes du Moyen Age, elle semble crier continuellement: «Dormez, braves gens, il est minuit, tout va bien, du pain du vin du Bour- sin, du beau, du bon, Dubonnet, vas-y, Wasa, Mini-Mir, Mini- Prix, mais il fait le maximum.» Dormez, braves gens. «Tout le monde est malheureux dans le monde moderne», a prévenu Charles Péguy. C’est exact: les chômeurs sont malheureux de ne pas avoir de travail, et les travailleurs d’aller à un dormez tranquilles, prenez votre Prozac. Et surtout ne posez pas de questions. Hier ist kein warum. (Beigbeder: 2000, 85)

There are clear echoes of George Orwell’s disillusioned advertising copywriter Gordon Comstock in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*. This, for example, is the description, through Gordon’s eyes, of the pervasive presence of advertising on the streets of 1930s London:

> Opposite, next to the Prince of Wales, were tall hoardings covered with ads for patent foods and patent medicines. A gallery of doll-faces – pink vacuous faces, full of goofy optimism. Q.T. Sauce Truweet Breakfast Crisps (‘Kiddies clamour for their Breakfast Crisps’), Kangaroo Bur-
gundy, Vitamalt Chocolate, Bovex. Of them all, the Bovex one oppressed Gordon the most, a spectacled rat-faced clerk, with patent-leather hair, sitting at a café table grinning over a white mug of Bovex. «Corner Table enjoys his meal with Bovex,» the legend ran. (Orwell: 1954, 10)

But where Orwell’s words are loosely based on slogans of the period and the names of the products advertised are only similar but not identical to real ones (e.g. Bovex instead of Bovril, Truweet instead of Weetabix), Beigbeder reproduces contemporary slogans for real products. His readers will recognise the words, perhaps be able to sing along to the jingle and all this is part of Octave’s ploy: to show his readers how gullible they are, how they have been influenced and conditioned by the world of corporate advertising. One of the few cases where names have been altered is that of the product he is working on himself, a new kind of yoghurt, for the large dairy conglomerate, Madone, a direct allusion to Danone, even down to the little hummed tune at the end of television adverts. But the shift from Danone to Madone is a clever one: madone in French is another name for the virgin Mary, the Italian madonna. Yoghurt as a false idol.

But where does all this leave the translator? There is, for example, the Italian translation, published by Feltrinelli in 2001 with the ‘new’ title of Lire 26.900, which was of course the price of the book when it first appeared in Italy. Annamaria Ferrero’s translation was then reprinted three years later (again, after the introduction of the euro) and, although the title officially remains the same, the cover design shows a price sticker for 13.89 euros, although the book itself now cost only 7.00 euros (13.89 euros is, in fact, the exact equivalent of 26,000 lire based on the official exchange rate).

As far as the translation of the actual text is concerned, Ferrero chooses to render Beigbeder’s text according to what might be termed the prevailing norms for works of this kind: product names have been left in their original form, slogans have been translated into Italian, and when for example the slogan is for an internationally-marketed product such as l’Oréal, the equivalent Italian slogan has been substituted for the French original. None of this surprises the reader: the book is set in Paris and so it is normal to come across references to French products and French culture in general.

The differences begin, however, when we move to the English translation. It first appeared in the UK in 2002, published by Picador with the title £9.99 which, as with the French and Italian versions was the real price of the book, there being, of course, no euro in Britain even in 2002. But
the title did change the following year when the novel was reprinted in a cheaper format: it became *Was £9.99 Now £6.99* and the new cover bears the image of a reduced-price sticker with the original price crossed out. Following the title page both the French original and its English translation have two pages, one with a dedication and the other with three quotations. In Adriana Hunter’s translation, the Aldous Huxley quote reverts to English with its original English title of *Brave New World*, the Alain Souchon lyric has been translated into English but maintains its French title while the Charles Bukowski quote is in English but, strangely, the title appears in French as in Beigbeder’s text: *Le capitaine est parti déjeuner et les marins se sont emparés du bateau* rather than its original English *The Captain Is Out to Lunch and the Sailors Have Taken Over the Ship*. The most startling departure, however, is to be found on a new page that does not appear in the original French with a note that simply reads:

£6.99 is a translation from Frédéric Beigbeder’s 99 francs. The setting of the novel has also been transposed – from Paris to London – and so the English edition differs in some respects from the original.

Arguably, there is a degree of ambiguity in the positioning of this note within the text, after the dedication and the quotations, both elements presumably written/chosen by Beigbeder rather than the publishing company. Then, in the French ST, there is a *faux* legal warning, written in English:

The names have been changed to protect the guilty.

which remains *tel quel* in the English translation. Once the main narration begins, however, the differences between the two versions are numerous and significant, dictated by the unorthodox decision to shift the locale of the entire novel from Paris to London. The changes operated on the text

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7. It might, at this point, be interesting to read Adriana Hunter’s reasons for opting for such a strongly domesticating strategy. I wrote to Ms Hunter asking primarily whether the decision had been hers and her reasons for such a choice. Here is part of her reply: «I made the decision to move the setting of £9.99, and it happened as a very natural, logical process when I started working on the book. The first time Octave is bombarded by advertising slogans […] I wondered how I was going to give English readers the same experience of this as French readers would have had, ie very familiar, catchy tunes and slogans they would all recognize. I thought - briefly - of keeping them in French or - dreadful idea - of translating French slogans into English... but the obvious answer was to use English slogans that my readers would instantly recognise. Fine... or was it? Why on earth would Octave’s French radio station be talking about “Tesco, every little
fall into a number of different categories: one of the first, most obvious changes is that while some proper nouns maintain their original form, others are anglicised to appear more natural in the new setting:

The protagonist Octave Parango becomes Octave Parengo, his boss Alfred Duler is now Alfred Dewler, Marc Marronier, Mark Browning, Jean-François is Jeffrey, Philippe, Philip, Veronika, Veronica, and so on. Names intended as descriptions of their owners are also «converted»: Enrique Baducul (99) becomes Enrique Immizass (83). But not only individual names need changing now that the action takes place in London: stock characters such as Madame Michu de Valenciennes (105) the archetypal housewife and ideal target for many of the products Octave’s agency advertises becomes Mrs Cartwright from Orpington (89). This kind of change can be contrasted with the choice made by the Italian translator (La signora Pinco Pallino 87 – Mrs Whoevers) which both avoids using the French stereotype which would not be understood by the average reader of the translation but also avoids choosing a specifically Italian equivalent (e.g. la casalinga di Voghera, a housewife from Voghera) as this would appear incongruous in the French setting. At one point in the novel, Octave has to go and visit Madame’s director of marketing. There is a great sense of importance laid on this meeting «comme si j’allais rendre visite au Président de la République» (23) which becomes «as if I had a meeting with the queen» (10).

A further example of name-changing are the frequent passages where the narrator makes extensive mention of public figures from both the French context and a more international stage. These names are functional helps” or “Ronseal, it does exactly what it says on the tin”? Clearly it wouldn’t, so Octave was going to have to be in London. I asked my editor [...] who went along with the suggestion and I emailed Beigbeder himself about it. I was gratified by his reply: “I can’t really see how the book works in translation if you don’t do that” [...]. The editor and author agreed with me that it was important for the English reader to recognise the slogans so that he or she felt implicated in the book in the same way as French readers would have with the original. Once the move was made all cultural references were tweaked as well: I wanted to bring in things that were very much “of the moment” so mentioned Big Brother and The Weakest Link instead of French television programmes which wouldn’t have meant anything to English readers.» (personal communication, August 2007).

8. All page references are to the French, English and Italian editions listed in the bibliography.
to the overall effect of the novel and cannot be omitted contributing as they do to the image of a high-octane, consumeristic, celebrity-driven lifestyle. As long as the names are internationally recognised, they present no problem for the translator, but when they refer to celebrities known principally to a French audience, the English translator opts to substitute them with British or international «equivalents» as can be seen from the following dreamlike sequence describing an island populated by people all thought to be dead but who are in fact still very much alive. The current age of these celebrities is also given (i.e. the age they would have been when Beigbeder wrote the book, had they not died):

Chaque soir, ils croisent les autres faux morts de l’île: les chanteurs Claude François (62 ans) et Elvis Presley (66 ans) écoutent le petit Kurt Cobain (34 ans) composer des chansons country avec Jimi Hendrix (59 ans); l’ancien Premier ministre Pierre Bérégovoy (76 ans) devise avec François de Grossouvre (81 ans); l’écrivain Romain Gary (87 ans) déambule main dans la main avec son épouse Jean Seberg (63 ans); le publicitaire Philippe Michel (61 ans) joue au tennis avec Michel Berger (54 ans); Arnaud de Rosnay (55 ans) donne des cours de windsurf à Alain Colas (58 ans); John-John Kennedy (41 ans) se promène bras dessus bras dessous avec son père John Fitzgerald Kennedy (84 ans) et l’actrice Marilyn Monroe (75 ans). (264)

In Adriana Hunter’s translation, many of the names have been substituted and the ages ‘updated’ to the time of publication of the English language version, again adding to the impression of immediacy and total relevance of the text to the reader of the translation:

Every evening they meet the other fake-dead of the island: Kirsty McColl (forty-one) and Elvis Presley (sixty-eight) listen as little Kurt Cobain (thirty-six) composes country music songs with Jimi Hendrix (fifty-nine); one former leader of the labour party, John Smith (sixty-four), chats to another, Harold Wilson (eighty-six); Mike Hutchens (forty-two) strolls hand in hand with Paula Yates (forty-two); Eric Morecambe (seventy-six) and Peter Sellers (seventy-seven) are setting up a practical joke for everyone on the beach; John-John Kennedy (forty-three) walks arm in arm with his father John Fitzgerald Kennedy (eighty-six) and the actress Marilyn Monroe (seventy-five). (241-242)

As well as personal names, real or fictitious, there are many other features that undergo Hunter’s domesticating process. French place names and, more specifically Parisian locations, are substituted with British and London equivalents: while Octave works in Boulogne-Billancourt (50)
in the ST, his offices have moved to Soho (36) by the time we read the translation. The pun that is the Bar Biturique (71) is a rather more prosaic Lola’s Bar (55). The ‘in’ places to go shopping are, obviously, no longer the same:

La plupart des autres objets que tu possèdes viennent de chez Colette. Quand ils ne viennent pas de chez Colette, cela veut dire qu’ils viennent de chez Catherine Memmi. Quand ils ne viennent ni de chez Colette, ni de chez Catherine Memmi, cela veut dire que tu n’es pas chez toi.(111)

Most of the other things you own come from Selfridges. If they don’t come from Selfridges then they must come from the Conran Shop. When they’re from neither Selfridges nor the Conran Shop, that means you’re not at home. (96)

Towards the beginning of the novel, Octave explains how his work is rewarded with sophisticated holidays in the most sought-after resorts around the world. However, the idea of what might be considered the most desirable locations changes from one culture to another and so some of the destinations on Octave’s list are altered accordingly:

J’interromps vos films à la télé pour imposer mes logos et on me paye des vacances à Saint Barth’ ou à Lamu ou à Phuket ou à Lascabanes (Quercy). Je rabâche mes slogans dans vos magazines favoris et on m’offre un mas provençal ou un château périgourdin ou une villa corse ou une ferme ardéchoise ou un palais marocain ou un catamaran antilais ou un yacht tropézien. (18)

I interrupt your films on TV to bombard you with my logos, and they give me a holiday in St Barths or Phuket or St Moritz. I bang on and on at you with my slogans in your favourite magazines, and they offer me a château in the Périgord or a manor house in Gloucestershire or a villa in Tuscany or a condo in Aspen or a palace in Morocco or a catamaran in the Caribbean or a yacht in St Tropez. (6)

With such importance attached to choosing the right brand, there are constant «adjustments» in the TT: «Je me prénomme Octave et m’habille chez APC» (17) becomes «My name is Octave and I’m dressed head to foot in Tom Ford.» (5) He lunches at Apicius (99) in Paris and at The Ivy (83) in London. While French Octave reads Le Figaro (45), his British counterpart reads The Guardian (31).

Literary references are also domesticated for the British reader: C’était à Mégara, faubourg de Carthage, dans les jardins d’Hamilcar are the almost proverbial first words of Flaubert’s historical novel Salammbô that Beigbeder here parodies with C’était à Méga-Rail, faubourg de par-
tage...(87). Adriana Hunter plays cleverly, if somewhat more at length, on Dickens’ famous incipit It was the best of times, it was the worst of times; it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness turning it into It was the best of lines, it was the worst of lines, it was the age of crystalline wisdom, it was the age of powdery foolishness (71). The reader should perhaps not be surprised that Hunter chooses these opening lines, coming as they do from A Tale of Two Cities, a novel set most appropriately in Paris and London.

Conversions are operated to move from the metric system to the imperial. Here the narrator comments on his car: [...] puissance grâce à son 6 cylindres en ligne qui développe 321 chevaux, lui permettant de passer de 0 à 100 kilomètres/heure en 5,4 secondes. (18) which becomes [...] the grace and power of its straight six-cylinder engine producing 400 b.h.p. and giving a 0 to 60 time of 5.4 seconds. (6)

Monetary values – of which this novel is replete – also come in for the same treatment. There are conversions from francs and euros to pounds sterling. The French switch to single currency is commented on cynically by Octave: Je passe ma vie à vous mentir et on me récompense grassement. Je gagne 13000 euros (sans compter les notes de frais, la bagnole de fonction, les stock-options et le golden parachute). L’euro a été inventé pour rendre les salaires des riches six fois moins indécents. (18)⁹

The sentence is changed quite radically for it to have any meaning in a British context: I spend my life lying to you, and I’m paid a shed-load for it. I earn around £12k a month (excluding the expenses, the company car, the stock options and the golden parachute). I should say 19,440 euros really, because I would look richer.(6) Hunter has had to add that the figure refers to a month’s salary for the benefit of British readers who are used to expressing earnings as gross annual pay. It is also interesting to notice the higher salary in the English version, presumably a further example of the updating of the translated text in line with the later date of publication. Other examples of updating include adapting the text to include more recent technology: during a meeting, one of Octave’s colleagues makes a presentation tout en projetant des transparents sur le mur avec un rétroprojecteur (26), which in English becomes using powerpoint to illustrate what he’s saying (12). Rather oddly, three sentences on, Hunter continues with He looks up from his papers and changes the transparency. These words appear on the wall in bold type (13).

⁹. This last comment, refers to the fact that the official exchange rate was set at c. 6.5 francs to the euro.
As already mentioned, the novel makes constant reference to advertising slogans and jingles. The narration is, in fact, interrupted a number of times for ‘commercial breaks’ with a short screenplay for a TV advert. Again, the products mentioned and their accompanying slogans, that would be so familiar to French readers, are domesticated for the British audience. The only exceptions are international products, known in both cultures:

Il [...] possède une grosse Mercedes qui fait vroom-vroom dans les embouteillages et un cellulaire Motorola qui fait pilim-pilim dans son étui accroché au-dessus de l’autoradio Pioneer qui diffuse des messages pour Casto-Casto-Castorama, Mamouth écrase les prix, Choisissez bien Choisissez But. (24)

He has a great fat Mercedes which goes vroom-vroom when he’s stuck in the traffic and a Motorola which goes pilim-pilim in its little case just above the Pioneer car radio that broadcasts messages for Peugeot – the drive of your life, Tesco – every little helps, Sanatogen – for life’s little ups and downs. (11)

Now that the locale has been transferred to the UK, there is the added problem of dealing with the extensive use of English within the French text: this use of English by Beigbeder’s characters is a clear indicator of the ‘trendy’ value attached to this language within advertising circles in France (and the same is also true of many other countries) and is employed by the author to highlight the empty, phony nature of their activities. In most cases, where the characters simply use English terminology, the translator leaves those terms as they were, thereby losing the ‘code-switching’ effect:

un concurrent lance un me-too avec une grosse campagne (25) > One of our competitors is launching a me-too product with a big campaign. (12)

le Directeur de clientèle [...] prend la parole pour résumer le brief (26) > our [...] commercial director addresses the meeting and gives them an outline of the brief (12)

le script que j’ai pondu (27) > the script I hatched last night (27)

tout en collant à la copy-strat (27) > while adhering to the original strategy (14)

As can be seen from the page references, all these examples come from three consecutive pages, chosen almost at random, and contribute to creating a cumulative formulaic jargon effect that is no longer present in the English, or certainly not to the same extent. But, it might be argued, this would be a problem for any translator into English, regardless of the
translation strategy adopted. The problem, however, becomes more noticeable in the parts of the text where the narrator draws attention to this all-pervasive use of English within the French context: how does the translator deal with these comments, now that the English version of the text is no longer set in France?


Copywriters work in a team with an art director. They have found a little phrase to set them apart: they call themselves ‘ADs’ (and all over the world they use this English-language abbreviation, even if it bears no relation to their own language). (34)

Tu contemps The Grind sur MTV. [...] The Grind, c’est un autre monde, la plage de la perfection, la danse de la pureté. Or Grind, en anglais, signifie BROYAGE. (67)

You gaze vacantly at The Grind on MTV. [...] The Grind is another world, perfection on a beach, dance in all its purity. Just think about the word GRIND ([graɪnd] vb i. to reduce or be reduced to small particles by pounding or abrading). (51)

Both these solutions appear somewhat convoluted and a little laboured. Perhaps it would have been more appropriate to simply elide these points. And this raises one of the most probing questions regarding domestication: how far can or should a translator go in seeking to bring the author to the reader? Is there an ethical dilemma in presenting such a strongly domesticated text as this to the reading public as a translation, albeit with the four-line note at the beginning of the novel?

It is only after careful analysis, obviously with access to both languages, that we can assess the extent of the domestication. The «warning» note, in fact, tells us that «£6.99 is a translation from Frédéric Beigbeder’s 99 francs.» The preposition, we now realise, is telling. The more natural choice would have been «a translation of»: ‘from’ suggests a looser relation between the two texts, but how obvious is this to a non-expert reader?

In his review for The Guardian Nicholas Lezard comments on the text in general but reserves two paragraphs for the translation:

Certainly, Beigbeder is not precious about his art. The translator has moved the action from Paris to London, Octave’s flat from St-Germain to Hoxton, and so on; can one imagine Houellebecq accepting such
changes with equanimity? I doubt it. These geographical and cultural translations are by no means consistent or necessarily successful, by the way.
The range of literary reference is far greater in France than it would be in the UK. The idea of a London ad exec quoting Gramsci, let alone Cioran, is flatly unfeasible; and we do not, here, wear pink Ralph Lauren polo shirts with sweaters knotted over the shoulders. (Eurgh, that’s so horrible. The worst thing is that Octave rails against the sweaters.) But even these distractions don’t harm the book’s thrust; its disgust can be quite perceptive. «The poor sell us drugs so they can buy Nikes; the rich sell them Nikes so they can buy drugs».

Interestingly he also adds: Brand names and slogans are unaltered, left open to our contempt. So despite some very British references to Tesco supermarkets and Mr Kipling’s ‘exceedingly good cakes’ that could not possibly have featured in the French original, the domestication process has obviously spun its web.

And so to return to our initial point: while one accusation routinely levelled at domestication is that of rendering the translation process invisible, thereby eliding the role of the translator and any transformation the text may undergo, a marked domesticating strategy, such as the one described above, paradoxically, appears to have had the opposite effect and encouraged debate: as well as comments in reviews (a paratextual element that notoriously fails to mention translation), the translation was shortlisted for the 2003 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize for works of contemporary fiction translated into English (with half the £10,000 prize money going to the author and half to the translator), and as the translator herself comments: I have been asked more questions about this book than any other I have worked on. That such attention is dedicated to the translation process is all the more telling if we take into account the fact that

Beigbeder is not a canonical author: along with the many commercial products that feature in his novel, Beigbeder’s text is likely to be viewed by many as yet another disposable object. Arguably, it is the translation strategy, rather than any underlying literary merit of the original, that has shone the spotlight on the English version. So, while within the translation itself there is undoubtedly a loss of many of the features of the original novel and certainly a domestication of the ST for readers in the United Kingdom (for indeed, speakers of English from other parts of the world will need their own version if we are to follow Hunter’s line of thought), if we widen our analysis to include paratextual elements such as the foreword, reviews, literary prizes and papers such as this, then the only conclusion we can come to is that the translation process has in fact been foregrounded.

References


