

“Do frogs have a palm?”

Behind the scenes of the Norwegian translation of *Les soleils des indépendances*

Abstract

This article discusses challenges found in translator working papers from the process of translating the novel *Les soleils des indépendances* (Ahmadou Kourouma) into Norwegian. It also draws on interview material connected to the same translation process as well as a scholarly article written by the translator herself, Ingse Skattum. Anchored in the theoretical framework of genetic Translation Studies and the archival turn in Modernist Studies, the present article explores the translator’s decision-making by comparing cited passages from the published novel to the same textual issues in the working papers. Furthermore, it displays how the translator is faced with several difficulties that require creativity, a profound knowledge of cultural references, and a pedagogical orientation towards the reader. Thus, this article attempts to shed light upon the translator’s constant hesitation between textual alternatives. Using Skattum’s multifaceted translation project as a case, the article shows that the idea of the translator’s agency should be problematised. The overall aim is to bring attention to the underlying textual process normally invisible to the public and to call for a stronger consciousness and recognition of the translator’s complex work among laymen as well as among professionals.

KEYWORDS: visibility, the translation process, the translator’s agency, the archival turn, genetic translation studies, translator working papers

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A translation process made visible

Translation is by nature an invisible act. Drafts, notes and other documents from the translator’s ongoing textual work are, as a rule, inaccessible not only to the reader of the published version but

also to the researcher. The Norwegian translator Ingse Skattum has kindly allowed me to study four working papers from her translation process of the Ivorian writer Ahmadou Kourouma's novel *Les soleils des indépendances* (1968; *The suns of independence*, 1981).¹ Skattum's written considerations reveal hesitations between alternative solutions and strategies, while my extensive interview with her in 2011 highlights several challenges from the translation process. The material as such offers a rare and fruitful insight into the translation process.²

Skattum called her working papers "Glossary", "Fauna and Flora", "Fundamental Questions" and "Copy Editor" (*SI. Ordforklaringer, SI. Fauna, flora, Les soleils.prins.spm and SI. Språkvasker*).³ The four documents are somewhat overlapping. The first, "Glossary" (WP 1), is the draft of the glossary offered to the Norwegian readership in the published version. The second, "Fauna and Flora" (WP 2), lists the dictionaries used by Skattum and is furthermore a draft with propositions, doubts and reflections about passages describing the animals and vegetation of the Ivory Coast⁴. The third, "Fundamental Questions" (WP 3), is a categorised draft of textual elements and characteristics of Kourouma's literary style that Skattum wanted to contemplate and discuss with the copy editor, Thomas Lundbo. The fourth, "Copy Editor" (WP 4), is a quite organised draft with justifications, explanations and questions more explicitly addressed to Lundbo. The four working papers were all sent to the copy editor with the idea that he could read them before he started reading the first translation drafts. I do not have the responses from the correspondence with Lundbo. However, Skattum underlines in the interview that she didn't collaborate with him until she had made the entire first draft. I have been in contact with Lundbo, who was willing to share his documents as well, but unfortunately, he hadn't saved his manuscripts from 2005.

The novel in question is Kourouma's literary debut which has been translated into at least nine languages. To my knowledge, there are translations in English, Danish, Italian, Hungarian, Swedish, German, Dutch and Spanish in addition to the Norwegian one. Kourouma manipulates the French language – the language of the colonisers of the Ivory Coast – to obey the rules of his own mother

¹ I am aware that "working paper" might refer to different cases and domains. In this article, the term is used as a label for all the work in progress documents used by Skattum during the translation process. All translations of the working paper titles are mine. I will be using the abbreviation WP (working paper) and numerate the four documents.

² The documents were presented to me the first time during the interview in November 2011, and they were later sent to me by email.

³ I have chosen to translate "språkvasker" into "copy editor". I here side with Kristina Solum's use of the term in her thesis from 2018: "The term 'copy-editor' refers to professionals known in the Norwegian publishing context as a *språkvasker* or *manusvasker*, as distinct from a proofreader, or *korrekturleser*" (p. 147).

⁴ In the interview Skattum told me that she consulted experts in different domains during the translation process, there among questions regarding the fauna and flora.

tongue, Malinke, in regard to rhythm, syntax, repetitions and idioms. He also inserts numerous local references and loan words from Malinke into the French text. Any translator of the novel is thus forced to make idiosyncratic choices, offering pedagogical aid to the non-African reader but also aspiring to retain the literary quality of the text.

The Norwegian translation by Ingse Skattum stands out among the translated versions in several ways. First and foremost, Skattum's background is closely connected to the African continent and especially to the Malinke culture. She lived in the Ivory Coast for four years, where she became a friend of Kourouma. She later studied and obtained a Certificate of Mandingo languages. She is now professor emerita in African studies at the University in Oslo and has written several scholarly works about Kourouma's authorship and other West African authors.⁵ The working papers from her translation of *Les soleils des indépendances* reveal Skattum's local competence and portray a highly conscious and confident translator who explains and justifies her choices based on her substantial cultural, literary and linguistic knowledge. Her profound insight into the author's cultural heritage and position is also visible in the final product, particularly when she uses strategies such as in-text translation.⁶ As we have seen, she also provides the reader with a detailed glossary of Malinke words and expressions. In addition to the glossary, she has written a thorough epilogue where she emphasises several characteristics of Kourouma's orally based literary style.

The terminology for the research material in this article varies slightly depending on scholarly perspective. According to translation scholar Jeremy Munday, drawing on the works of Gideon Toury, drafts or working papers are "pre-textual material" and interviews and other commentaries are "extra-textual material" (Munday, 2014, p. 65). Toury warns against the use of extra-textual material as it can be too subjective and therefore misleading. Conversely, Munday argues that interviews are valuable sources that contain information that might otherwise be inaccessible (Munday, 2013, p. 126). Munday furthermore distinguishes between archives, manuscripts and personal papers (2013, p. 127). In my view, Skattum's working papers fall into all three categories. They could equally be understood as documents belonging to a private archive, a kind of manuscript

⁵ Among other publications, see Skattum's master's thesis, *Passion et poésie. Analyse stylistique d'un roman africain "Les soleils des indépendances" par Ahmadou Kourouma* (1981) and her doctoral dissertation, *De Bakoroba Kone à Camara Laye. La répétition comme trait d'oralité dans la littérature mandingue traditionnelle et moderne* (1991).

⁶ In-text translation, or cushioning, is a technique that can be used in the main text to translate a foreign word or expression by introducing an apposition. According to Paul F. Bandia, this technique "is a favoured writing strategy in postcolonial literature which allows the author to develop his narrative without the undue burden of explanatory footnotes" (Bandia, 2008, p. 46). Bandia refers primarily to the author of the original text here, but in-text translation as a technique is often used by the translator as well (see also Batchelor, 2009; Zabus, 1991).

for the final book, and personal papers (private notes and notes meant for correspondence), parts of them made public in this article.

I will also draw on literary theorist Gérard Genette. Even though he focuses primarily on authorship and not translator activity, his framework for paratexts can be usefully applied to a translation context as well. If we were to follow Genette's terms, the working papers form a "private epitext" with further division into "*confidential* epitext" and "*intimate* epitext" (1997, p. 372). The former is an oral or written correspondence to a confidant. In our case this applies mainly to the contact between Skattum and the copy editor Lundbo, materialised in "Copy Editor" (WP 4), but could also include the contact between the translator and other consulted experts. The idea of *avant-texte* or "pre-text" is in Genette's framework a part of the intimate epitext. The pre-text is an "autodestination"; comments from the author to him- or herself. As Genette writes, "many dossiers of pre-texts, [...] contain diary-type notes, information or commentary on the work in progress" (1997, p. 387). This description is just as relevant to translator Skattum, and corresponds to two of her working documents, "Fauna and Flora" (WP 2) and "Fundamental Questions" (WP 3). The working paper entitled "Glossary" (WP 1) could correspond to what Genette calls a "public epitext". The public epitext is directly addressed to the public without "the presence of a first addressee interposed between the author and the possible public" (Genette, 1997, p. 371).⁷ When the glossary was published, it became a part of the "peritext" together with the epilogue. The peritext comprises textual elements that are printed in the book but situated outside the main text. The various types of epitext and peritext form the novel's *paratext*, a phenomenon lurking at the threshold of a literary work (Genette, 1997).

In 2012, Skattum wrote an article in French where she retrospectively discusses and evaluates her own translation in light of theoretical perspectives from Translation Studies and compares it with other translations of the same novel.⁸ Kathryn Batchelor (2009) characterises translations like Skattum's as "academic translations" (p. 211), because they reveal a profound knowledge of the subject and seek to educate their reader. In the interview, Skattum refers precisely to her long teaching experience and mentions that she is used to considering and taking care of the receiver of the information she transmits. In the article she contemplates her own unique position as a proper connoisseur of the author's culture, and concludes by stating that she has, consciously or unconsciously, given priority to the "cultural dimension" of the source text (Skattum, 2012, p. 178).

⁷ The interview could also fall into this category although mediated through the interviewer.

⁸ The article is entitled "Traduire un texte métissé. La traduction en norvégien des *Soleils des indépendances* d'Ahmadou Kourouma" and is directly inspired by my interview with her.

She emphasises the importance of transmitting the stylistic particularities, like the rhythm and the sound effects created by Kourouma's hybrid language. I therefore interpret Skattum's understanding of the "cultural dimension" as a phenomenon covering both the concrete references to Malinke society and the more abstract part of that culture, namely the characteristics of oral storytelling.

Skattum's article is quite interesting in a translator perspective. Very few translators write journal articles about their own practice, evaluating their own choices. Nevertheless, in the following, I will only briefly refer to the above-mentioned publication by Skattum. Instead, the present article is offering a researcher's perspective on the working papers and the oral statements from the interview compared to the final textual result. As Jeremy Munday puts it, "analysis of drafts by a third-party analyst reduces subjectivity compared to those descriptions of the process by the translators themselves" (2013, p. 134). As a researcher with a certain distance to the material, I can hopefully offer a nuanced picture of Skattum's work, both of her drafts and of her final solutions.

The archival turn and translator working papers as research material

The interest in working papers from a writing process stems from the French *critique génétique* in the 1960s. At ITEM, L'Institut des textes et manuscrits modernes in Paris, researchers currently devote themselves to "the study of the genesis of intellectual works based on empirical traces left during the course of the creative process" (ITEM, n.d., my translation).⁹ Quite recently, this research focus has also entered the domain of Translation Studies. In 2013, Munday wrote that literary archives and manuscript material had been "drastically underexploited in translation studies to date" (abstract, p. 1). Over the last decades, there has been a growing interest in the translation process, the translator's workflow and the motivations behind the final textual choices. One of the most recent trends in Modernist Studies is called "the archival turn" (Milthorpe, 2019, p. 3), and this perspective is influencing the field of Translation Studies as well.

The denomination "genetic Translation Studies" embraces the translator's zigzagged route from the preliminary ideas and notes to the final, published translation. Cordingley and Montini describe the genetic perspective as a framework that values and highlights the specificities of the translator's writing process, and where drafted manuscripts and working papers constitute the research focus:

These recent studies do not treat the writing of translation as less prestigious or complex than that of its source text but as writing which develops strategies to respond to different sets of conditions.

⁹ "l'étude de la genèse des œuvres de l'esprit à partir des traces empiriques laissées au cours du processus créateur".

Whereas this field is in its infancy, studies to date suggest that one of the great strengths of a genetic approach to translation is its capacity to problematise the much-debated “agency” of the translator (Cordingley & Montini, 2015, p. 4)

Cordingley and Montini discuss how this research perspective is very useful when it comes to developing an understanding of the translator’s textual strategies. In my opinion, literary translators rely just as much on textual *intuition* as on rational choices (see Schmidt-Melbye, 2014). The more subconscious textual ideas risk superseding the translator’s original *intention* or agency, cf. Cordingley and Montini and defined by Kinnunen and Koskinen (2010) as the translator’s “willingness and ability to act” (p. 6). While *willingness* encompasses “consciousness, reflectivity and intentionality [...] not without some moral or ethical undertones”, *ability* suggests “constraints and issues of power(lessness)” (p. 6). This dual definition of agency could function as a useful reminder of the diplomatic nature of translation, where translators always undertake the role as the mediator, not only between national cultures but also inside their own cultural sphere, where different norms, expectations and interests compete.

However, translator manuscripts are not easy to come by, and it is only recently that such material has begun to appear in libraries and institutions (Cordingley & Montini, 2015, p. 7). This is connected to the low status associated with the translators’ work, and often also their own poor judgment of the value of this material. Few translators are willing to share their drafts, which reveal both their unfinished thoughts and their doubts. Thus, scholars searching for translation archives offered by institutions, would normally have to look in wider search categories, such as “writings”, “literature” and so on, because of a general absence of central catalogues of archives devoted to translators (Munday, 2014, p. 71).

To believe Cordingley and Montini, there are favourable conditions for genetic Translation Studies in the future. Both a change in the translator’s status and the technological evolution of the working environment can contribute to strengthen this type of research (2015, p. 8). But the technology can also work against research in the field, as Munday writes:

Unless translators are made aware of their importance, there is the risk that multiple early drafts may no longer be retained, since the default save facility of word processing packages automatically overwrites the previous version of the document. (2013, p. 135)

This risk resonates in the article “Textual Genetics and Manuscript in Word Processing” from 2009, where Irène Fenoglio also notes the primacy of the final copy “where the intimacy of the work of the writer is overshadowed by a clean, printable, if not printed page” (2009, p. 58). Although Fenoglio focuses on the author, a parallel can be drawn to the translators who use the same technology. The subjectivity of the translator is not necessarily easily traceable in the final version of a translation.

Adjusted to the publisher's requirements or the envisaged taste of the readership, the translator's "textual voice" risks fading away.¹⁰ Translator working papers are therefore a valuable source for studying the traces of the "psychic, cognitive and gestural work of a writer" (Fenoglio, 2009, p. 46), or in our case, a translator. Finally, as Outi Paloposki points out, "[a]rchival sources may not be representative of all translators' condition [...] but they offer a unique vantage point for studying individual translator's experience" (2017, p. 31; cf. Munday, 2014, p. 77).

Skattum's working papers – especially the pair where she refers to assistance from outside specialists, namely "Fauna and Flora" (WP 2) and "Copy Editor" (WP 4) – also highlight the collaborative nature of the Norwegian version of *Les soleils des indépendances*. A translation is seldom the work of only one person but is rather a synergetic project where several participants influence the result. The translator sometimes even needs to handle conflicting interests. A useful term in this context is Jansen and Wegener's "multiple translatorship" (2013), as described by Kristina Solum:

Rather than conceiving of translations as the solitary work of a single agent ("the translator"), this perspective takes into account that translations are the result of negotiations between several parties whose values, interests, and aesthetical preferences do not necessarily coincide, such as publishing editors, copy-editors, and of course the translators themselves. (Solum, 2018, p. 118)

Solum also states that more often than not, we know very little of the process before publication. In this case, I have access not only to the working documents and information about the collaborative nature of the Norwegian translation, but also to the transcription of an extensive interview with the translator. The combination of these two sources will cast light on new sides of the translation process and product.

A glimpse into the translation process: Skattum's ideas and decisions

In the following, I will compare a selection of terms, expressions, phrases and passages from the working papers to the textual result. If Skattum evoked these examples during the interview or in her article, I also bring these retrospective comments to light. Among the many interesting observations in the working papers, I have chosen to focus on passages where Skattum seems to have hesitated between alternate strategies, and/or where I find significant discrepancies between the envisaged solutions and the final ones. I analyse briefly the textual result in these passages.

¹⁰ I lean on Alvstad and Rosa (2015) and their definition of voice: "Textual voices are part of the product (narrative voice, the voices of characters and the translator's textually manifested voice), whereas contextual voices are related to the sociological translation process and hence to the multiple agents that produce, promote and write about translations." (pp. 3-4)

Excerpts from the interview are rendered in English, translated as literally as possible from the transcription, with the original statements in Norwegian in footnotes. Text examples from the original novel, Skattum's translation and the working papers will be presented in French or Norwegian followed by my English translation, where I find it necessary for the reader's comprehension. Here again, I have tried to translate the passages as closely as possible in order to convey the discrepancies in the different documents.

The first example is the denomination "griot", which is essential in Kourouma's authorship and in many other literary works from West Africa. Skattum reflected much upon how to convey this culturally specific reference to a Norwegian readership, which almost functions as a kind of leitmotiv in the novel in question. A griot is traditionally a bard or a wise man who transmits cultural knowledge and conveys literary expressions. The first time the term "griot" appears in the source text, namely in "les griots malinké" (Kourouma, 1970 [1968], p. 11), Skattum translates it as directly as possible, as "malinké-griotene" (Kourouma, 2005, p. 10), without further information inside the main text. In the glossary, however, she dedicates half a page of detailed explanation to the term "griot".¹¹ In WPs 3 and 4, "Fundamental Questions" and "Copy Editor", we observe that Skattum originally had formulated quite a long apposition for this cultural item: "Malinkegriotene – disse ordets mestere og fortidens kjennere, som lever av å lovprise gjestenes aner og deres heltedåder, og som gjør tjeneste som seremonimestre" [the Malinke griots – these masters of words and knowers of the past, who make a living from praising the guests' ancestors and their heroic deeds, and who serve as masters of ceremonies] (WP 3, p. 1; WP 4, p. 2).

Skattum's initial idea of an extended apposition, would have changed the paragraph considerably, as the apposition is not only long, but also loaded with additional information. One could argue that one of the advantages of the glossary in Skattum's version is precisely the possibility of avoiding such long in-text translations. But according to Bandia, in-text translation has generally come to replace peritextual elements such as footnotes and glossaries because these latter solutions easily risk being regarded as "highly intrusive informational digressions with the undesired effect of turning the novel into an anthropological reference" (2008, p. 109). Though Skattum did in fact consider the possibility of introducing an explanatory footnote to "griot" (wp. 3, p. 1), she ultimately decided to avoid such footnotes, because they "constitute the most criticised form of 'clarification' [in translation] as they

¹¹ In the interview, Skattum also mentions an earlier discussion with a translator colleague, working on another literary work, who asked her how to translate the term "griot" in a Norwegian context. At the time, Skattum proposed the Norse *skald* ("bard"). Later on, she didn't agree with the advice she had given, and opted to import the loan word "griot" in her translation of *Les soleils des indépendances* (Skattum, 2011). There are not significant differences between the explanation proposed for "griot" in the "Glossary" draft (WP 1), and the published glossary.

break the novel's illusionary universe" (Skattum, 2012, p. 166).¹² During my interview with her, Skattum recalled the discussion about the specific term "griot" with the publisher, Cappelen, noting that she was the one who proposed a glossary, and that the publisher agreed. For Skattum, what justified both such a glossary and an epilogue was the "great distance" between Norway and African societies.¹³

However, given the fact that the glossary and the epilogue are situated at the end of the book, we cannot know for certain that the reader actually profits from this information during the reading process. Skattum herself discussed this problem during my interview with her:

We [Skattum and her publisher Cappelen] discussed where to put the epilogue, before or after the main text. [...] And we agreed to put it at the end, in order to avoid colouring the text too much. [...] You get an immediate impression of the text and then you are free to consult the epilogue afterwards. But I don't know whether people [...] used the glossary while reading or whether they consulted it afterwards. [...] The table of contents does list a glossary, but it's not referred to anywhere in the main text. And so I don't know what people have chosen. (Skattum, 2011)¹⁴

Skattum here points at one of the possible disadvantages of an epilogue: it is hard to ascertain how readers receive this form of peritext, or indeed if they read it at all. Genette also discusses this possible problem, concluding that "[g]iven the postface's location and type of discourse, it can hope to fulfill only a curative, or corrective, function" (1997, p. 239). Thus, there was a risk that the Norwegian reader missed out on Ivorian customs and beliefs, but the choice of positioning this information at the end opened up for a more concentrated reading, allowing the reader to focus on the story and the poetic dimensions of the text.

I will now move on to a proverb Kourouma used to allude to the female protagonist Salimata, who is in a very difficult position, being the sterile wife of Fama, the last descendant of the Doumboya clan. Salimata pays the marabout Abdoulaye for a fertility treatment by cleaning his house, but he enjoys her company so much that as time goes by, she doesn't need to clean anymore, only flirt with him. This situation is described in a metaphorical way that includes zoological and botanical elements: "Le désir accrochant la barbe du bouc aux épines du jujubier, il n'était plus question à la fin de fin de réclamer la petite noix de cola" [(Because of) the desire that gets the billy goat's beard stuck in the

¹² "[...] constituent la forme de « clarification » la plus critiquée, car en rupture avec l'illusion romanesque".

¹³ "Det er [...] den store distansen vi i Norge har til det afrikanske samfunnet som rettfærdiggjør både en ordliste og et etterord".

¹⁴ "Det var spørsmål også [om] etterordet skulle være før eller etter. [...] Og da ble vi enige om etter, for ikke å farve lesningen for mye. [...] Du får et umiddelbart inntrykk av teksten og så kan du gå til etterordet etterpå. Så vet jeg ikke om folk [...] brukte ordlisten samtidig som de leste eller om de så på den etterpå. [...] For det står jo [i] innholdsfortegnelsen at det er en ordliste, men det blir jo ikke henvist til den noe sted. Og da vet jeg ikke hva slags praksis folk har hatt."

jujube's thorns, in the end there was no longer a question of claiming the little cola nut] (Kourouma, 1970 [1968], p. 66). The first part of the proverb refers to the marabout's desire for Salimata, and the second part, "claiming the little cola nut" alludes to the payment situation. The proverb is translated by Skattum as "Begjæret kan få bukkens skjegg til å hekte seg opp i brystbærtreet's torner, derfor ble det ikke mer snakk *om å betale*, om å innkreve den lille kolanøtten" [Desire can make the billy goat's beard get stuck in the jujube's thorns, therefore there wasn't any more talk *about paying*, about collecting the little cola nut] (Kourouma, 2005, pp. 62, my emphasis).

We observe that Skattum has added a clarification, "om å betale" [about paying]. In WP 3, we can clearly trace the translator's doubts concerning how to convey this expression in Norwegian. After noting that "it's better to keep the figurative expression" she asks herself, "but is it comprehensible? Should I introduce an apposition?" (WP 3, p. 7).¹⁵ In WP 4 she has made her choice, informing the copy editor that she has introduced an apposition in order to explain to the Norwegian reader that the passage narrates a payment situation. The differences between this suggestion and the textual result concern mostly the word order, but the suggestion in the working paper has a more affirmative character: "Siden begjæret setter bukkens skjegg fast i brystbærtreet's torner, ble det ikke mer snakk om å innkreve den lille kolanøtten, *om å betale*" [Because desire gets the billy goat's beard stuck in the jujube's thorns, there was no more talk about collecting the little cola nut, *about paying*] (WP 4, p. 4, translator's emphasis).

Skattum also recalled this passage during the interview, noting how she judged her solution by comparing it with other translations:

I've added something here, let's see. This bit about "collecting the little cola nut", I've added an apposition there, you see, about paying, because that's what you do [...] The English translation omitted the metaphor [...] The Danish one kept the metaphor, but didn't explain [...] It isn't very comprehensible for a Danish readership. (Skattum, 2011)¹⁶

This excerpt also shows how Skattum opts for a pedagogical perspective in her translations: it is important to her that readers *understand* what is being said. However, in the above-mentioned passage, the apposition is short and quite discrete, so it does not necessarily divert the reader's attention from the Malinke literary universe.

¹⁵ "Bedre å beholde det billedlige uttrykket, men er det forståelig? Skal jeg tilføye en apposisjon?"

¹⁶ "Her har jeg satt til noe, skal vi se. Og må du innkreve den lille kolanøtten, der har jeg satt inn apposisjon, ser du, om å betale, for det er jo det du gjør [...] Den engelske oversettelsen har sløffet metaforen [...] Den danske har beholdt metaforen, men ikke forklart [...] Det er ikke veldig godt forståelig for et dansk publikum"

The next example shows how Skattum found a solution to the culture-specific description “couleur petit mil”, which could be translated literally as “pearl millet-coloured”.¹⁷ The original passage reads as follows : “Le matin était couleur petit mil et moite, un matin de sous-bois après une nuit d’orage” [The morning was pearl millet-coloured and damp, a morning like an undergrowth after a stormy night] (Kourouma, 1970 [1968], p. 151). In WP 2, “Fauna and flora”, Skattum continues to compare the English and Danish translations to her own suggestions: “Eng. ‘damp and millet-coloured’, Dan. ‘millet-coloured and damp’. [...] Which colour does it have? I propose: ‘millet-coloured and damp’, but can I specify the colour? e.g. ‘white’, ‘yellow as millet’ or the like?” (WP 2, p. 4).¹⁸ Her final choice is quite different from the English and Danish solutions. Instead of keeping the compound expression “couleur petit mil”, which is not immediately familiar to the Norwegian reader, Skattum adds the colour “brown” to the description: “Morgen var brun som hirse og klam som skogbunnen etter en stormnatt” [The morning was brown as millet and damp as the forest floor after a stormy night] (Kourouma, 2005, p. 139). Kourouma’s description of the morning colour and the humidity could be interpreted metaphorically, as a premonition of the difficulties and the suppressed feelings between Fama, Salimata and Fama’s new wife Mariam. Traditionally, the colour brown is not associated with delicacy, but alludes rather to body fluids or the soil, as something dirty and humid. The difficulty of transposing “couleur petit mil” incited a textual solution which can be read as an emphasis on the problems of the love triangle. Once again, we see that Skattum’s comparison with other translations makes her come up with a new and creative solution.

In the following example, we observe that Skattum originally had thought of a more direct translation, but that she notices, during the process, that her solution doesn’t read well. The original passage describes how Fama is received by poor, starved people in his native village of Togobala: “Des habitants de tous âges accouraient, tous faméliques et séchés comme des silures de deux saisons, la peau rugueuse et poussiéreuse comme le margouillat des murs, les yeux rouges et excrémenteux de conjonctivite” [Inhabitants of all ages came running, all of them starved-looking and dried as catfish of two seasons, their skin rugged and dusty as the lizards on the wall, eyes red and excrementitious from conjunctivitis] (Kourouma, 1970 [1968], p. 103).

In Skattum’s final version, the expression “comme des silures de deux saisons” [as catfish of two seasons] is adapted to the Norwegian reader’s supposed level of comprehension: “Innbyggere i alle

¹⁷ “Pearl millet” is a common plant in Africa. The translation in Norwegian (“hirse”) is the general denomination for this plant.

¹⁸ “eng. damp and millet-coloured, da. hirsefarvet og klam. [...] Hvilken farge har den? jeg: hirsefarget og klam, men kan jeg spesifisere fargen? f.eks. hvit, gul som hirse e.l.?”

aldre kom løpende, alle forkomne og uttørkete som *mallefisk som har ligget for lenge til tørk*, med ru og støvete hud som hos firfiser på en murvegg, med røde, rennende, betente øyne” [Inhabitants of all ages came running, all of them exhausted and dried out *like catfish who have been left to dry for too long*, with a rugged and dusty skin as the lizards on a brick wall, with red, runny, infected eyes] (Kourouma, 2005, pp. 94-95, my emphasis). In WP 2, Skattum proposes rather “alle forkomne og uttørkete som maller som er blitt liggende i to sesonger” [all of them exhausted and dried out like catfish who have been left lying for two seasons] (WP 2, p. 2) before noting that this version is “litt tungt” [a bit unwieldy]. She therefore ends up paraphrasing the implicit, concise expression, “de deux saisons” as “som har ligget for lenge til tørk” [who have been left to dry for too long], at the same time clarifying this local practice for Norwegian readers. The textual result is therefore in line with Skattum’s pedagogical orientation. Another conceivable solution would be to translate “silures de deux saisons” as the common fish product “tørrfisk” [stockfish]. Such a solution would probably evoke the consistence and type of fish more directly to Norwegian readers. However, since such a solution would be a domesticating one, readers could easily have been misled to think that the Ivorian catfish and the Norwegian stockfish looked, smelled and tasted the same.

Near the end of the novel, the male protagonist Fama is being sentenced to twenty years in prison. He knows what it means: he will never be able to return to his village or see his wife again.

Kourouma sums up Fama’s brutal realization by using a comparison: “Tout cela était aussi clair que la paume de la grenouille” [All of this was as clear as a frog’s palm] (Kourouma, 1970 [1968], p. 168), translated by Skattum as “Det sto klinkende klart for ham” [This was crystal clear to him] (Kourouma, 2005, p. 153). I have argued elsewhere (Schmidt-Melbye, 2014) that the change in this rhetorical figure and the introduced idiomatic expression “klinkende klart” is a domesticating solution (see for instance Venuti, 1998, 2008 [1995]), which reorients the text to the Norwegian readership and creates a distance to the Malinke culture.¹⁹ The Norwegian expression is also an unambiguous one, while the comparison in French could be read as a bit more subtle, as it is difficult to know exactly how clear a frog’s palm really is.

Interestingly, in her “Fauna and flora” working paper, Skattum considers the possible direct translation “Det var alt sammen like klart som froskens håndflate” [All of this was as clear as a frog’s palm], a solution that would have kept the richness of the literary image and its underlying complexity. Why didn’t she end up choosing this solution? Skattum’s draft is followed by an elementary question in parenthesis to herself, or possibly to the copy editor: “Har frosker

¹⁹ This is partially because “klinkende klart” could easily be associated with an expression frequently used by a former prime minister of Norway (Schmidt-Melbye, 2014, p. 301).

håndflate?” [Do frogs have a palm?] (WP 2, p. 5). Even though she consulted specialists during the translation process, the uncertainty regarding the anatomy of the frog seemed to endure and made her, finally, lean towards a more pragmatic textual solution.

Conclusion

Although Skattum is a highly adept and confident translator of Kourouma’s work in general, the examples presented here reveal her hesitation about the best translating strategies for *Les soleils des indépendances* in specific cases. They show how she constantly weighs a more direct transmission of Kourouma’s condensed literary language up against the best way to convey the narrative to Norwegian readers. This is in line with Cordingley and Montini (2015, p. 4), who argue that translators alternate between strategies throughout the translation process and do not necessarily stick to one specific agency. When it comes to this specific case, Skattum’s working papers suggest that she several times consciously adapted her style to better suit the readership and that she adjusted some passages after the feedback from copy editor Lundbo.

In WP 3, “Fundamental Questions”, Skattum asks herself to what extent she ought to make an idiomatic version in Norwegian rather than convey the many repetitions in Kourouma’s literary style: “Repeat verbs or complements, respect repetitive figures or make the Norwegian language more idiomatic? Kourouma himself violated the French syntax. But the English edition reads well, it omits many parallelisms”²⁰ (WP 3, p. 8). In WP 4, “Copy Editor”, she explains how she decided to treat the repetitions: “I use fewer pronouns than is usual in Norwegian to keep this trait [repetitions]. (The English translation, which is otherwise excellent, has omitted quite a lot of these repetitions. It makes the English text flow, but erases a characteristic trait)” (WP 4, p. 3).²¹ In many passages throughout the novel, Skattum has ended up neutralizing the repetitiveness of the original text, drawing closer to the publisher’s conventions and the norms underlying the Norwegian literary market (see Schmidt-Melbye, 2014). When we know from the interview and from Skattum’s academic publications that she considers repetitions to be a crucial trait that should be retained, her choice to reduce them in this novel probably indicates how the target culture is influencing her as a translator. As Kathryn Batchelor argues, keeping repetitions or reproducing other foreign literary traits can easily present a negative picture of the translator, the text becoming too “strange” in the eyes of the reader (2009, p. 219).

²⁰ “Gjenta verb eller komplementer, respektere rep.figurer eller gjøre norsken mer idiomatisk? K. selv brøt med fr. syntaks. Men den eng. utg. er god å lese, den sløyfer mange parallellismer.”

²¹ “Jeg pronominaliserer mindre enn man normalt gjør i norsk for å bevare dette trekket [gjentagelser]. (Den engelske oversettelsen, som ellers er svært god, har sløffet en god del slike gjentagelser. Det gir flyt i engelsken, men fjerner et karakteristisk trekk)”.

Literary creation and literary translation have in common the uncountable possibilities of new signs and new ideas. As such, hesitation is a natural and necessary part of the process. Genette reminds us that access to the pre-text and genetic study help “to relativize the notion of completion, to blur the ‘closure’ that has been made too much of, and to remove the aura of sacredness from the very notion of Text” (1997, p. 402). The examples of Skattum’s translation process cited here lay bare the cultural orientation that the translator herself writes about (Skattum, 2012). Yet the difficulty of this choice is highlighted in the comparison of the different translator documents, pointing precisely to the overwhelming number of alternative interpretations. According to Sergio Romanelli, “we see the potential text” in both the author’s manuscript of a literary work and in a translation, because “more than in the edited text, it is in these uncensored spaces that we find the true poetic forces of a creative discourse” (2016, p. 88). Thanks to Skattum, I have been able to investigate such an “uncensored space”. Without access to her working papers, I couldn’t have problematised and discussed the motivation for her choices. It is true that Skattum represents a unique case, the translator possessing a great deal of specific knowledge about the novel in question. Nonetheless, the present article has shown that in despite of this extensive competence, Skattum experiences many doubts of literary, cultural and linguistic nature, during the translation process. It is also interesting to note that the research questions I posed to Skattum during my interview with her in 2011 encouraged Skattum to write academically about her translation process. One could once again argue that this initiative came much easier to Skattum than to other translators, knowing that she is both a professor and a translator. Yet in my opinion, if a researcher expresses curiosity and interest in a translator’s working process, this could generate a more explicit discourse about this specific form of writing among other translators as well, inside or outside an academic setting.

In the future, there is therefore a need for more in-depth research of the translation process. It cannot be based solely on accidental circumstances or the mercy of individual translators. To be able to draw convincing and representative conclusions about the translator’s agency, it is necessary to collect a certain amount of working papers from translators- and indeed, to encourage translators to both keep and share such documents in the first place. Some “extra-textual material” is made public, but this happens rarely to private archives, manuscripts and personal papers. More often than not, these documents remain unknown to the public, forgotten by the translators themselves or even lost. I experienced this problem myself, starting to dive into this material many years after *Uavhengighetens soler* was published in Norway. If I had carried out my research more immediately

after the translation came out, or even better, if I had been observing Skattum's and Lundbo's textual collaboration in 2005, I would have gotten more detailed insight into the process.

If more documents from translators' work in progress were made accessible, genetic Translation Studies could be reinforced. This research perspective is crucial for two main reasons: it could function as an eye-opener to the general public, visualizing that a translated literary text is a subjective product and the result of thorough deliberations during the translation process. It could also counterweigh the common idea of a text as a closed and polished entity. The awareness of translation as a dynamic and human activity will become more and more important as we see the increased use of technology overriding older versions of a document, machine translation, ever-changing texts on web pages and more experimental, digital literature.

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