**Erlend Loe’s style in translation**

The differing voices of first‑ and second-language translators

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**Abstract**

Translation into the translator’s second language, although quite a regular occurrence nowadays, is generally viewed as an unaccepted practice. This might be why non-evaluative studies of texts translated by second-language translators are few and far between. Taking a descriptive approach, we compare, in this article, the translation of the stylistic features of one Norwegian author, Erlend Loe, into English by two first-language translators and one second-language translator. What we found was that the overall strategy of the first-language translators was more domesticating than that of the second-language translator, whose own, culturally-tinged voice was much more strongly manifest. The article discusses possible reasons for this difference, such as differences in the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the translators, differing degrees of editorial intervention, and/or differing degrees of experience of the translators. We conclude that even though the results *could* point towards a principled difference between first- and second-language translation, more research of a similar kind is needed to ascertain that there is indeed such difference.

Keywords: Second-language translation, Erlend Loe, style, voice

## 1. Introduction

Translation into one’s second language is generally seen as an unaccepted practice, because of second-language translators’ alleged insufficient competence in the target language (see Adab 2005: 227). This seems to have had three interrelated consequences within the field of translation studies: first, the great majority of research in the field seems to tacitly assume that the translator is always a first-language translator (Campbell [1998] 2013: 1), second, there is not much research on second-language translation (ibid.), and third, most of the research carried out on second-language translation within the field of translation studies has been focused on putative differences in quality between first- and second-language translations (e.g., Campbell [1998] 2013, Adab 2005, Rogers 2005, Thelen 2005). Apart from a few cognitively oriented process studies (e.g., Liu 1997, Pavlovic 2010), hardly any research has, to our knowledge, been carried out that looks more descriptively at differences in how first- and second-language translators translate. This is what the current study purports to do, in looking at two novels by the Norwegian author Erlend Loe, their style, and the rendering of this style in English by first- and second-language translators. The large, general questions we ask are whether there are any systematic differences in the translational choices made and if so, whether these can be ascribed to the linguistic or cultural backgrounds of the translators, or to other factors.

Before embarking on the study a couple of things need, however, to be said regarding the thorny issue of second-language translation and (in)sufficiency of competence. First, as most are aware, although this kind of translation practice may not currently be accepted, it is not at all uncommon. In any post-colonial country, for example, second-language speakers regularly write and translate into the colonizer’s language (Campbell [1998] 2013: 12), and translators who are native speakers of lesser used (and hence more rarely learned) languages often find themselves having to translate into their second language because of a lack of native-speaker translators (Pavlovic 2010), a situation that might to a certain extent be true of the Nordic countries (see Rogers 2005: 258). Second, however, and most importantly, an interesting study carried out by Pokorn (2005: xii) showed that the first- or second-language status of the translator may not always be that which distinguishes a good from a bad translation, but rather the skills (e.g. abilities, knowledge of the source and target cultures) of the individual translator. Similarly, Rogers (2005) compared groups of novice first- and second-language translators, finding that the translations of both groups displayed strengths as well as weaknesses in different areas (translation purpose, level of accuracy, and naturalness). Both studies seem to suggest that a lack of linguistic competence can be compensated for, or even superseded by, translation competence, understood by Rogers to include factors such as contrastive competence, genre competence, cultural competence, and so on, which can be held by both novices and professional translators (Rogers 2005: 262)[[1]](#footnote-1). Both studies are limited, however, and the findings would need to be substantiated by further research. Nevertheless, we shall here rely on the basic assumption that it is at least possible for second-language translators to produce linguistically adequate translations (as shown in Campbell [1998] 2013: 104, see also Pokorn 2005: 1). In particular, we claim, this would be the case for second-language translators from countries such as the Scandinavian countries translating from their mother tongues into English, since the level of non-native proficiency in English in these countries is among the highest in the world.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In this study we have chosen to compare a translation by a native speaker of a Scandinavian language – Norwegian – translating from Norwegian into his second language, English, with a case of “multiple translatorship” (Jansen & Wegener 2013) where two native speakers of English translate from their non-mother-tongue Norwegian into their first language. The point of departure for the comparison is the hypothesis that while the translators’ differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds may of course influence quality (however defined), it is equally likely to influence the choice of translation solutions and strategies. By “differing linguistic and cultural backgrounds” we especially understand, in the context of this study, second-language translators’ deeply embedded insiders’ relationship with the source culture, a relationship that may, we hypothesize, lead to a more marked projection of source language and cultural traits (as expressed, in this case, by various aspects of the source author’s style), which may render the textual voices of the author and translator more clearly discernible, that is, make them more “manifest” (Greenall 2015: 47–48, Alvstad et al. 2017: 11). Conversely, first-language translators, arguably more invested in the target language and culture, might be less likely to transfer the peculiarities of the source language and culture and source-author stylistic traits, potentially making the source author’s voice and their own *less* clearly perceivable, or “non-manifest” (ibid.). Whether it is the author’s or the translator’s voice that becomes highlighted in any given reading of a translation will depend on the context, in a way that will be explained further in section 3.

**2. Loe’s novels and their translators**

The two novels whose translations will be studied here are Erlend Loe’s *Naiv. Super.* and *Doppler*. *Naiv. Super.* was published in 1996 and is Loe’s second novel. It centers on an unnamed main character and narrator (popularly believed to be Loe himself) whose existence suddenly seems meaningless and to whom big, universal questions seem too complex to handle. As a consequence, he retreats from all his daily activities, including his university studies and newspaper job, and isolates himself in his brother’s apartment. While there he simplifies his own mindset by making lists and playing with toys meant for children. His eventual journey back to normalcy takes him to New York, where he discovers that he cannot (and need not) know or understand all the complexities of life and the universe: he can simply choose to believe in the cathartic effect of having fun and enjoying life. His life in limbo is realistically and humorously described with temperate language, immediate narration, and the inclusion of real-world documents, like e-mails and fax papers, that bridge the gap between fiction and reality. As part of a style that has been branded as “naivistic” (Rottem 1996, Andersen 2012: 650), Loe uses an abundance of simple and incomplete sentences, repetitions, lists, and so on, features that strongly evoke Norwegian stereotypes such as introversion, self-restraint, coldness, and a curious fusion of cleverness and adherence to the so-called Law of Jante (*Janteloven*), a set of unwritten norms allegedly at play in Norwegian society (possibly also other Nordic societies) that hold people back from taking credit for personal success.[[3]](#footnote-3)

*Doppler* is Loe’s fifth novel. It was published in 2004 and again revolves around a main character who is also the narrator. This time we meet Andreas Doppler, a reluctant family man who detests and rebels against conformity and the Norwegian society’s demands for “cleverness” (*flinkhet*)[[4]](#footnote-4). Paradoxically, he “cleverly” proves his masculinity and self-reliance by leaving his children and his pregnant wife and moving into a tent in Nordmarka, the vast woodland north of Oslo where wealthy Norwegians ski and jog, showcasing their healthy, “clever” lifestyle, in stark contrast to Doppler’s newfound primitive lifestyle. Despite there being a supermarket within walking distance, Doppler’s survival, in his mind, seems to depend on him killing a cow elk for food; the cow elk is survived by its cub, now in dire need of parenting, and Doppler, however reluctant, picks up the gauntlet. Doppler names the cub Bongo, and together the unlikely friends roam the forest and occasionally suburban Oslo, stealing and bartering for food, playing board games (animal lotto), and raising a totem pole in honor of Doppler’s late father. The writing style and layout in *Doppler* is more conventional than in *Naiv. Super.*. The language is more complex, but still includes naivistic stylistic traits like repetition and random allusions to high culture (i.e. Norwegian cultural icons).

The two books were translated by Tor Ketil Solberg, and Don Bartlett and Don Shaw, respectively. In order to gain knowledge about the translators’ backgrounds (which could later be held up against their translational output), we conducted semi-structured e-mail interviews with them during March 2015. Bartlett and Shaw (the translators of *Doppler*) chose to respond to the questions as a unit. Follow-up questions were asked when the need arose, also via e-mail. The e-mail interviews were conducted partly in English, partly in Norwegian.

The interviews revealed that Solberg considers English to be his second language, while Bartlett and Shaw both consider English to be their first language. Solberg has Norwegian parents but spent time that, all in all, amounted to two and a half years in English-speaking countries while growing up. It was while he was a student in Cape Town that he got the idea of translating *Naiv. Super.*. He had just read Loe’s book in Norwegian and was quite taken by it, so much so that he decided that he would very much like for his English-speaking friends to be able to read it. Thus, with the aid of an ancient PowerBook 140, an English dictionary, and the Internet he set about the task, which was finished within a period of three weeks. He made eight copies of the manuscript, each one a Christmas present for one of his friends, who were under strict instructions not to distribute the text further. As it happened, one of the recipients turned out to be a friend of a friend of Erlend Loe’s, who thus got wind of the existence of the translation. He asked for a meeting with Solberg and received a copy of the translation, which he read and appeared to like very much. Loe’s publisher then sent it as a sample translation to international publishers, whereupon Edinburgh-based Canongate Books ended up buying the rights, more or less using the translation as it was (the few errors that there had been had already been smoothed out, according to Solberg, by one of his English-speaking friends who had received the manuscript as a present). In other words, Solberg did not from the start intend for the translation to be published; it all happened, as he himself describes it in the interview, more or less by accident.

Don Bartlett lives in England and is a full-time translator of children’s books, crime fiction, and literary fiction by authors such as Stian Hole, Jo Nesbø, and Karl Ove Knausgaard. He has a master’s degree in literary translation. According to an online interview conducted by Sarah Smith (2014), he has also studied German at university level, and has worked as a teacher in Austria, Germany, and Denmark. He learned Danish from scratch while in Denmark, through what he himself describes as “real-life learning” (Smith 2014). While there, he studied linguistics at Aalborg University and began to read Norwegian and Swedish. Every year, he travels to Norway and Denmark. “Knowing what life is like in these countries is essential for translation” (ibid.), he states. “You have to understand the second language culture from the inside to know what you are describing, and you have to see your own culture from the outside to be able to describe it” (ibid.). Don Shaw, Bartlett’s long-standing collaboration partner, holds a language degree from a British university and has taught Danish in Denmark for over twenty-five years. In the interview with us, Bartlett explains that “we originally collaborated on translations of Danish literature into English, after which we were asked by Norwegian publishers to work on authors such as Roy Jacobsen and Erlend Loe”.

**3. Some background on style, voice, and translation**

Like many a novelist’s style, Loe’s is likely to cause more than a few head-scratching moments for translators. Examples of structures that contribute to Loe’s style include, as mentioned, widespread use of repetition and lists (Holst 2006: 41–42), and short sentences (Vassenden 2004: 80; Holst 2006: 65), in addition to laconic humor (Rottem 1996), incongruity-creating cultural allusions, idiosyncratic twists on fixed expressions, and swearing. Before moving on to look at how the translators have chosen to deal with such items, however, it is necessary to take a closer look at the complicated relationship between the notions of style and voice.

*3.1 Style vs. voice*

Style can be described simply as the expression of a given author’s natural writer personality (Schleiermacher [1813] 2004: 47). A more complex description would mention the author’s tools of the trade, as in Simpson’s (2014: 3) definition of style as “the various forms, patterns and levels that constitute linguistic structure”. According to Boase-Beier (2006: 1–2), the study of style in translation, although still an under-researched area, is currently expanding to include issues such as “voice, otherness, foreignization”. As a testimony to the truth of this statement, Alvstad (2013: 207) identifies style and voice as nowadays partially overlapping concepts, one of her references in this regard being to Munday (2008). In Munday (2008: 19), voice is seen as “the abstract concept of authorial, narratorial, or translatorial presence”, while style is seen as “the linguistic manifestation of that presence in the text”. So far things seem simple enough, but of course they are not, for the reason that style-as-linguistic manifestation, in the scholarly literature, can be about two different things. In the literature, we find the two following definitions of style: first, style is seen to be constituted by “the linguistic habits of a particular writer” (Leech & Short 1981: 11), and second, style is “what is unique to a text” (Boase-Beier 2011: 73). The first definition seems to potentially encompass everything that a writer (or translator) does in a text, while the second definition homes in on a given set of features of a writer’s text. Rather than being mutually exclusive, these two definitions actually highlight two different aspects of style (and voice) that are rarely acknowledged *as* two different aspects: the fact that even quite conventional, mundane, stereotypical aspects of a text are the result of choices made by an individual uniquely situated in time and space, and thus form part of their – in this case, subdued – style vs. the fact that *some* of the individual’s choices are more likely to stand out vis-à-vis a given reader. These two different but integrated aspects of style correspond to the two types of voice mentioned briefly in the introduction, namely *non-manifest* and *manifest voice*. The notion of non-manifest voice takes as its point of departure that no author, narrator, or translator can avoid deploying their individuality in authoring, narrating, and translating (cf. Munday 2008: 20). Even when their voices are “unheard”, however, they are still there in the text. The notion of non-manifest voice recognizes the fact that we are deploying our individualities *all the time*, even when we are doing things that do not stand out and that are therefore not particularly noticeable. The notion of manifest voice, by contrast, addresses the features of a text that do stand out and that are particularly noticeable (cf. “unique to a text”, Boase-Beier 2011: 73). This is where the voices of writers become more audible, or more manifest, to readers.

But what does it mean to say that certain elements of texts stand out/are more noticeable to the reader? Simply put, elements (linguistic items) can either stand out in the text by virtue of their relationship with other elements in the text or in other texts, or they can stand out “in and of themselves”. For example, some elements in a text may stand out in relation to (the) other elements in the same text (cf. the second definition above), others in relation to elements in the text of another author, or, in the case of a translation, in relation to the source text, or to another translator’s translation (either of the same text or of another text). These elements, through establishing a marked contrast with something else, become foregrounded, or *made prominent* (Khalil 2005), and hence grab the attention of readers, including scholars and critics, to a greater degree than other elements in the text. Linguistic items can also be attention-getting “in and of themselves” by constituting breaches of taboos (e.g., swearing) or other norms. Such breaches create “a break in automatic expectations” and therefore demand an increased degree of attention (Schutz & Luckmann 1973: 189). And this heightened attention, which is due to something that we find particularly interesting or which needs resolution, in turn tends to evoke an interest in the originator of the text, about who is responsible for the “knots” that readers find challenging: the author, or the translator.

*3.2 Whose voice – the author’s or the translator’s?*

Both authors and translators deploy a style or project a voice (cf. Mossop 2007: 18, Munday 2008: 20), either non-manifest or manifest. When a translation contains attention-getting (manifest) elements, the reason for this may either be that there were attention-getting elements in the source that have been re-created as attention-getting in the target text, or that the translator, without any support for this in the source text, has added the manifestness somehow. In either of these cases, the manifest voice may be ascribed, by readers, to either the author *or* the translator, depending on the context. Within the contexts surrounding a given reading of a translation there exists, according to Alvstad (2014), a “translation pact” whereby translations are read as if they were originals (i.e., the voice in the texts is ascribed to the authors). As long as the language of the translation runs smoothly (i.e. as long as textual voice is non-manifest), the pact will tend to be upheld. A very strongly manifest textual voice, however – which could be due to errors, translationese, or intended markedness (e.g., the recreation of particularly marked stylistic features) – may evoke in the reader the idea of the translator’s intervention in the process and hence break the pact, drawing attention to the *translator*’s voice instead (cf. Parks 1998: 9–1, Mossop 2007: 35, Munday 2008: 14, Alvstad 2014, Solum 2017)[[5]](#footnote-5). In addition, there exist specific groups of readers, who are on the explicit lookout for the translator’s mark on a given translation, such as translation scholars, and reviewers. Such readers go manifestness mining, and might find it even where it is not immediately obvious. According to Pekkanen (2013: 69), the “agency of the translator is seen in the shifts the translator has opted for”. We would certainly not disagree that this is one way in which translators’ agencies come to the fore. Shifts are precisely contrasts, created in this case by differences between source and target texts, and so shifts *are* likely to make the translator’s voice manifest. The question, however, is, manifest to *whom*? Possibly not to “ordinary readers” who will perhaps most often not bother with the source text.[[6]](#footnote-6) To scholars studying precisely the relationship between the source and target texts, and being well-versed with both languages, it is, of course, another matter. Furthermore, both Pekkanen (2013: 71) and Munday (2008: 20) suggest that translators’ voices manifest themselves in differences between the choices that two or more translators would make when translating the same text. Again, we cannot but agree, because again, a contrast is set up in the juxtaposition of two (or more) texts, where each translation puts the other in relief. Again, however, this kind of manifestness is probably obvious only to a special kind of readership. Very few ordinary readers will read several different translations of the same text, and hence perceive a given translator’s style or voice in this way.

*3.3 A model of the interaction of the voices of authors and translators in texts*

Several scholars have tried to characterize the way the author’s and translator’s voices interact in translated texts, very rarely getting beyond the level of vague metaphor. Munday (2008: 19), for example, contends that “the translator’s voice generally mixes more subtly with that of the author, ‘insinuating itself’ into the discourse, as Hermans puts it, and generally passing unnoticed unless the target is compared to its source”. And according to Pekkanen,

the translator's voice consists of idiolectal linguistic features which mingle with those of the author of the source text, thus producing a translational interpretation, which is ultimately a product of two individual voices, a duet between the translator and the author comparable to a musical performance of a composition. (Pekkanen 2013: 70)

The notions of non-manifest and manifest voice, the notion that both authors and translators deploy them (consciously or subconsciously) in texts, plus the idea that readers are the ones that ultimately ascribe non-manifest and manifest voice to authors and/or translators give us some more concrete tools to work with when characterizing the (perceived) intermixing of authors’ and translators’ voices in translations. Basically, we have the following four theoretical scenarios:

1. The author’s non-manifest voice remains non-manifest in translation
2. The author’s non-manifest voice becomes manifest in translation
3. The author’s manifest voice becomes non-manifest in translation
4. The author’s manifest voice remains manifest in translations

Each of these statements is of course meant to be supplemented by the phrase “in a given context of reading”. Likewise, whether the resulting manifest voice (in scenarios 2 and 4) is interpreted by readers as the author’s or the translator’s will also depend on the given context.

In this article, we investigate Erlend Loe’s manifest voice, which means that scenarios 3 and 4 will apply: his voice, the elements of his texts that have been noted by scholars as typical and unique to him as an author, may according to this scheme either be neutralized into non-manifestness in translation, or the stylistic features may be preserved and hence remain manifest or be made manifest in other ways not involving preservation. Our original hypothesis can thus be rephrased in the following way: second-language translators, who are presumably more invested in the source, will tend to preserve original manifestness, resulting in potential manifestness of voice, while first-language translators, more invested in the target, will be less concerned with preserving original manifestness. We are now moving on to see if this is the case, with regard to the case in hand.

**4. The voice of the second-language translator: a tendency toward manifestness**

Of the naivistic, stylistic features being studied here, personification, animation, and the use of lists are characteristic of only *Naiv. Super.*, while Loe-esque expressions (i.e., unique twists on fixed expressions, see below), repetition, swearing, and cultural allusions feature in both books. The results of an analysis of both books show that the translation carried out by the second-language translator clearly tends toward manifestness of voice. (Whether the reader will perceive this as the author’s or the translator’s voice will, as previously mentioned, depend on the context of reading.)

*4.1 Translational choices creating manifest voice*

A feature that has been noted[[7]](#footnote-7) but nevertheless remains under-discussed is Loe’s frequent creation of his own versions of familiar Norwegian expressions. What looks like intentional malapropisms (see example in table 1) could represent the main character’s attempt to recall a sense of grappling with language as a child. These *Loe-esque expressions* create a stylistic feature that, like much of that which can be characterized as Loe’s style, tends to have a defamiliarizing effect (see Holst 2006: 65). Defamiliarization draws attention to the author’s voice and makes it manifest.

**Table 1** Loe-esque expressions

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Naiv. Super.***  | **Second-language translation**  |
| **1** | Noen burde *skyte dem i foten*. [‘Someone ought to *shoot them in the foot*.’]  | Someone ought to *shoot them in the foot*. |

The example in table 1 illustrates the narrator’s annoyance toward advertisers, a group of people whom he particularly dislikes. The example represents the Loe-esque version of the Norwegian phrase *å skyte seg selv i foten* (‘to shoot oneself in the foot’). Originally, the expression means to unintentionally make a situation worse for oneself, but including *burde* (‘ought’) and exchanging “oneself” with “them”, as Loe does here, suggests that the narrator encourages the shooting of advertisers (an example of Loe’s laconic humor). An English-language equivalent of the original expression – to “shoot oneself in the foot” – exists, which allows for literal translation. Furthermore, we see that the twist on the expression is preserved in the target text by using “ought to” and “them”. Hence, in this instance, a marked stylistic feature has been preserved, creating manifest textual voice, drawing attention to either the author or the translator depending on the context of reading.

Our analysis shows that most of the selected naivistic features are repeated within the given work. This marks them off from the rest of the text and draws further attention to textual voice. Sometimes, however, *repetition* is an independent stylistic feature, such as when there is repetition of content words, displaying a given character’s limited, child-like vocabulary. The second-language translator seems to have largely followed the author’s pattern of repetition. Some repetitions of content words, like in the example in table 2, are of a special kind in that they create intrasentential redundancy, which is a very marked structure. Here, there would normally be ellipsis, that is, a word would be “left out because it can be filled in from the surrounding text” (Hasselgård et al. 2007: 404).

**Table 2** Repetition of content words creating intrasentential redundancies

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Naiv. Super.*** | **Second-language translation** |
| **2** | Jeg sa at jeg ikke syntes at vi skulle sitte og nikke til hverandre og si at ... den og den *filmen* er en viktig *film*. [‘I said that I didn’t think we should sit and nod to each other and say that … such and such *film* is an important *film*.’] | I said I didn’t think we ought to sit and nod at each other and say that … such and such a *film* is an important *film*. |

In example 2, rather than using ellipsis (*den og den filmen er viktig,* ‘such and such a film is important’), *film* is repeated twice in the same sentence, creating a childlike, insistent tone. Preserving the stylistic feature of intrasentential repetition strengthens the degree of potential manifestness of the translator’s voice.

Another feature creating a strongly manifest author voice, and hence potentially manifest translator voice, is the presence of *swearing* in *Naiv. Super.*. Both novels contain swearing, but the swear words in *Naiv. Super.* are less strong than those in *Doppler*. Comparing the severity of swearing across cultures and languages and across source texts and their target texts is challenging, but it is nevertheless possible to make some suggestions on the basis of available research, like Lie’s (2013) and Millwood-Hargrave’s (2000) surveys assessing public opinions on swear words in Norway and Britain, respectively. Also helpful is Harris et al.’s (2003) study, which concluded that hearing and reading expletives in one’s second language is less uncomfortable than in one’s first language (Harris et al. 2003: 566, 574). If this is true of translators as well, and we ought to presume that it is, they are likely to be less uncomfortable choosing severe swear words when translating into their second than into their first language.

Swearing is stylistically important in both *Naiv. Super.* and *Doppler* because it co-defines the two main characters’ registers, where one is childlike and the other more like that of a teenager (see Holst 2006: 54). Severe swear words in Norwegian include *faen* (‘the devil’), while mild ones include *skit* (‘shit’). *Naiv. Super.* contains thirty-one swear words used by characters in conventional ways (nineteen severe, twelve mild), compared to the translation’s thirty swear words (fifteen severe, fifteen mild). The total amount of swearing in the original *Naiv. Super.* rises significantly, however, if we include all the expletives from the chapter “Biblioteket” (“The Library”), where swearing assumes a somewhat unusual role. This chapter describes a situation where anatomical Norwegian expletives, in an act of immaturity, are typed into a library search engine at the New York Public Library with the purpose of finding matching Anglophone author names. Thus, their function is not to have a character express anger there-and-then, but to show his rebellion against appropriate, grown-up behavior. The examples in table 3 represent typical swear words used in *Naiv. Super.*, the first is used in the narrator’s pondering over thoughtless American megalomania while watching the skyscrapers in New York, and the second is taken from “Biblioteket”. The swear words and their translations are italicized for the sake of clarity.

**Table 3** Swearing

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Naiv. Super.*** | **Second-language translation**  |
| **3** | Det er det samme hva som er inni, men vi bygger dem høye. Vi bygger dem *jævlig* høye. [‘It doesn’t matter what’s inside, but we’ll build them tall. We’ll build them *devilishly* tall.’] | Never mind what’s in them, let’s build them tall. Let’s build them *fucking* tall. |
| **4** | *pikk* [‘dick’] | *pikk =dick*  |

Some of the swearing in the target text seems to be slightly more severe than in the source text, illustrated here by example 3, where *jævlig* (‘devilishly’), considered neutral in Lie’s survey (2013: 10), is translated into “fucking”, ranked the third most severe swear word in Milwood-Hargrave’s survey (2000: 9). Hence, textual voice in this example is somewhat less manifest in the source than in the target text. As regards example 4, however, the translator has chosen an unusual strategy both translationally and typographically, which increases the degree of voice manifestness exponentially. Both the source text and the target text sport identical facsimiles of Internet search pages. In the target text, however, handwritten explanations have been added next to the Norwegian words (*pikk = dick*, see table 3). This unusual combination of borrowing plus handwritten translation provides a very clear manifestation of voice. Furthermore, the typographic choice makes it very likely that the reader perceives the *translator’s* – rather than the author’s – voice.

Repeated *cultural allusions* contribute to the naivistic feel of *Naiv. Super.* and make the author’s voice manifest in the source text. Some of the allusions are to popular culture and some to high culture (e.g. classical poetry and fiction). The examples in table 4 are allusions to the popular Norwegian children’s song “Kveldssang for Blakken” (Evening song for Blakken), about the old and tired horse Blakken, which undoubtedly evokes childhood nostalgia for Norwegian readers, and to the Norwegian poet Olav H. Hauge.

**Table 4** Allusions

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Naiv. Super.***  | **Second-language translation**  |
| **5** | Jeg kan synge Fola Fola Blakken. ... Når gutten kommer smilende inn i stallen og hilser fra far at Blakken skal få hvile, da henger det sammen. [‘I can sing Fola Fola Blakken. … When the boy smilingly enters the stable and says that father says that Blakken will get to rest, that’s when it fits together.’]  | I can sing “Fola Fola Blakken”\*. ... When the boy comes smiling into the barn with word from father that Blakken is going to rest, that’s when it all fits together.\*A melancholy song about an ageing horse who is ready for “retirement.”  |
| **6** | Olav H. Hauge | Olav H. Hauge\*\* (1908–94) Poet |

In example 5 the second-language translator borrows the title of the children’s song, then explains it to the target audience in a footnote. Like in example 4, the textual choices set up a context that heightens the possibility that the translation pact is broken, that is, that the translator’s voice is the one that will be noticed. In example 6, it is the low-status main character who refers to the high-cultural figure Hauge. This creates an incongruity of which the character himself is innocently oblivious, which furthers the naivistic style of the text. In the translation, the allusion is preserved: the poet’s name is borrowed and explained by way of a footnote, thus highlighting the translator’s voice.

Olav H. Hauge is on the main character’s list of “people he admires”. The narrator’s considerable use of *lists* in *Naiv. Super.* to categorize events and objects is his way of coping in a world that he finds too complex (Holst 2006: 37). Rødset suggests that generally, categorization in *Naiv. Super.* is similar to how children categorize the world (Rødset 2007: 15). The lists are a hallmark of Loe’s style, and can also be found in his 2005 novel *Volvo Lastvagnar* but are absent in *Doppler*.

Table 5 exemplifies one of the twenty-four lists in *Naiv. Super.*, sent to the narrator per fax from his one, good friend, Kim.

**Table 5** Lists

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Naiv. Super.*** | **Second-language translation**  |
| **7** | Kim har sett på svensk ZTV. Han siterer: 1. Säg upp dej
2. Res bort
3. Skaffa nya vänner

[‘Kim has been watching Swedish ZTV. He quotes: 1. quit your job 2. travel. 3. get new friends’] | Kim has been watching some programme or other on TV. He quotes: 1. Quit your job. 2. Go travelling. 3. Make new friends |

There is an identical number of lists in *Naiv. Super.* and its translation, which means that this stylistic trait has been preserved in the translation, demonstrating manifest textual voice both in the source and in the target texts. In one of the cases, however, the target text version of the list has numbered elements but the elements are not placed underneath each other (see example 7), but overall, the list feature is preserved, and textual voice – perceivable as either the author’s or the translator’s – is manifest.

A final feature that draws strong attention to the author’s voice in the source text is his use of *short and simple sentences* (example 8) and *sentence fragments* (example 9).

**Table** **6** Short and simple sentences, sentence fragments

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Naiv. Super.***  | **Translation**  |
| **8** | Sangen er kjempefin. [‘The song is really nice.’] | The song is great. |
| **9** | Bære noe riktig tungt. [‘Carry something really heavy.’] | Carry something really heavy. |
| **10** | Jeg ... sa at jeg ikke kom til å skrive på en stund, og kanskje aldri. [‘I ... said that I wouldn’t be writing for a while and maybe never.’] | I ... told them I wouldn’t be writing any more for a while. Maybe never. |

A simple sentence consists of “a single clause which occurs on its own” (Hasselgård et al. 2007: 28). In the chapter entitled “Fire” (“Four”), half of the sentences are simple, while in the corresponding target text chapter, 59 percent of the sentences are simple. This suggests an intensification of the naive style and an accompanying increase in the degree of manifestness of voice.

All three examples in table 6 are part of the narrator’s internal monologue and constitute a retelling of ongoing or previous events. Example 8 is a typical simple sentence, containing the narrator’s temperate description of Alanis Morissette’s song “Ironic”. Example 9, a sentence fragment, is one of the activities the narrator wished someone would employ him to do, in order to alleviate his inactive existence. Example 10 is the retelling of the narrator quitting his writing job at a newspaper following a mental breakdown. Of the 200 sentences in the first chapter of *Naiv. Super.*, “Veggen” (“The Wall”), there are nineteen sentence fragments. In the corresponding target text chapter (*Naïve. Super.* 1–7), twenty-two sentences out of 195 are fragments, a slight increase in manifestness.

Examples 8 and 9 are translated literally, preserving the stylistic feature. Example 10 represents the set of examples where a sentence fragment is added in translation, which slightly intensifies manifest voice.

*4.2 Translational choices creating non-manifest voice*

While most of the second-language translator’s choices reproduce (or add) manifestness of textual voice, some do not. The latter occurs mainly with two features (repetition of content words and cultural allusions), which are sometimes rendered *preserving* markedness of textual voice, as shown above, and sometimes not.

The content word most frequently repeated in *Naiv. Super.* is various versions of *sympatisk* (‘sympathetic’), which are used thirteen times, while its counterpart, *usympatisk* (‘unsympathetic’), is used twice. The narrator’s fixation on this word indicates his concern with people’s degree of likeability and demonstrates his limited vocabulary.

**Table 7** Repetition of content words

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Naiv. Super.***  | **Second-language translation** |
| **12** | sympatisk [‘sympathetic’] | friendly, good |
| **13** | usympatisk [‘unsympathetic’] | not so friendly, unpleasant |

*Sympatisk*, a relatively infrequent word in Norwegian, is generally translated here into the relatively equivalent but more frequently used word “friendly”. In addition, “friendly” is not used as a translation for *sympatisk* throughout. The line of repetition is broken with the intrusion of the modulation of an adverbial use of *sympatisk* into the adjective “good,” which also weakens the manifestness of the textual voice, perhaps as far as making it non-manifest. The two instances of *usympatisk* are rendered differently in the two cases; this word is rendered as “not so friendly” and “unpleasant,” respectively. This breaks the convention of sticking to the repetitive word choice of the original and thus reducing originally manifest to non-manifest voice.

The difference between the examples of repetition in 4.1 – where style is preserved – and examples 12 and 13 may reside in the fact that while none of the preservations of style in 4.1 resulted in unidiomatic translationese, the preservation of an unbroken repetitive line using “friendly” in a consistent fashion throughout in the English translation *would* have done that: “friendly” could work as an adverb, but would have been less idiomatic in the given context. Other examples, however, are difficult to explain in this fashion. The allusion in table 8 refers to a familiar Norwegian nursery rhyme about a kitten who visits his or her mother.

**Table 8** Allusions to popular culture

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Naiv. Super.***  | **Second-language translation**  |
| **14** | Jeg vil be Børre om å synge inn Lille Kattepus på bånd. ... *Lille kattepus, hvor har du vært? Jeg har vært hos mammaen min*. [‘I want to ask Børre to record Little Pussycat on tape. ... *Little pussycat, where have you been? I have been with my mummy*.’] | I’m going to ask Børre to sing The Owl and the Pussycat on tape. …*The owl and the Pussy-cat went to sea,* *In a beautiful pea-green boat.* … |

Example 14 gives us a completely different type of translational choice than we saw for allusions in 4.1, where cultural references were retained and explained in footnotes, in keeping with the translator’s expressed aim “to teach the reader something about Norwegian/Scandinavian popular-culture references” (Solberg, interview). Here, we get instead a form of cultural transposition, where the well-known Norwegian children’s song “Lille Kattepus” (Little pussycat) is exchanged by an equally well-known equivalent in the target culture, “The Owl and the Pussycat”. In the absence of any more specific explanation for the choice made in example 14, we are perhaps forced to resort to the more or less accepted truth that translators do not always stick to one strategy throughout a given translation (Toury 1995: 67). This is echoed in Solberg’s own take on his inconsistency when asked about it in the interview: he describes himself as a “budding translator” and contends that for reasons often no stronger than a gut feeling, he sometimes “chose to explain these references in footnotes, while elsewhere I decided it was more appropriate to leave the reader to look things up if desired, or simply leave hanging what the reference could mean” (Solberg, interview).

**5. The voices of the first-language translators: a slight tendency toward non-manifestness**

While the main impression of Solberg’s translation of *Naiv. Super.* is that Loe’s manifest voice has generally been rendered as manifest voice, Bartlett and Shaw’s translation of *Doppler* leans slightly more toward rendering manifest voice as non-manifest voice.

*5.1 Translational choices creating non-manifest voice*

Like *Naiv. Super.*, *Doppler* contains twists on familiar fixed expressions. According to the translators themselves, their strategy in these cases was to try to “find a similar expression and change it in the same way” (Bartlett and Shaw, interview). Nevertheless, many examples illustrate another type of strategy, as shown in table 9.

**Table 9** Loe-esque expressions

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Doppler***  | **First-language translation**  |
| **15** | Du er ikke akkurat *den skarpeste i klassen*. (‘You are not exactly *the sharpest in the class*.’) | You may not be *the sharpest knife in the drawer*. |
| **16** | Ræva mi ler. (My ass is laughing.) | I laugh my arse off. |

Example 15 constitutes the main character Doppler’s description of the elk cub Bongo’s limited intelligence by means of a variant of the familiar expression *den skarpeste kniven i skuffen* (‘the sharpest knife in the drawer’). In the source text, Loe exchanges *skuffen* (‘drawer’) – a metaphor for the general population – by a more specific reference to *klassen* (‘the school class’), thus causing defamiliarization and evoking associations to childhood or youth. The first-language translators here choose a non-defamiliarizing option, which shifts textual voice toward non-manifestness: this particular instance in all likelihood neither draws attention to the author’s, nor the translators’ voices. The same can be said of example 16, where Loe’s twist on the expression “laughing one’s ass off” (“My ass is laughing”) is not reproduced in the translation.

In *Doppler*, repetition of content words is a strong feature, and especially the repetition of *flink* (‘clever’). Doppler is a walking paradox: he is the embodiment of the aforementioned “Law of Jante” in the sense that he deeply resents self-praise and all things clever, and by extension all things Norwegian, yet he praises himself for his unorthodox life choices. The repetition of *flink* peaks when Doppler suffers a mental breakdown on pages 39–41. Here, the word is repeated no less than thirty-six times.

**Table 10** Repetition of content words

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Doppler***  | **First-language translation**  |
| **17** | Senere har vi fått barn som vi har vært *flinke* med og vi har skaffet oss hus og pusset det *flinkt* opp. [‘Later we have had children whom we have been *clever* with and we have obtained a house and refurbished it *cleverly*.’]  | Later we had children to whom we were *nice* and we acquired a house which we decorated to look *nice*.  |

The repetitive instances of *flink* have been rendered in English by a number of different equivalent words. Example 17, however, illustrates a different facet of the translation’s tendency toward non-manifestness in regard to this word. The example contains the source text’s most unusual use of *flink*, an adverbial version (*flinkt*) that is very uncommon in Norwegian, which means that the word is set especially apart in the text. We see that while the translators have recreated the intrasentential repetition by substituting both instances of *flink* by two instances of “nice”, the unconventional, or marked, use of *flinkt* is, however, rendered into an unmarked use of an adjective (“nice”) that renders the authorial-translatorial voice less manifest than the original author voice.

*Doppler* contains forty-nine swear words in total (thirty-four severe, fifteen mild), compared to the translation’s forty-five (eighteen severe, twenty-seven mild). This means that about half of the severe swear words are carried over to the target text with a similar degree of strength, a greater change in stylistic effect and voice than in the second-language translation, where roughly 80 percent of the severe swear words were carried over with a similar degree of strength. Table 12 presents an example of swearing in *Doppler* and its translation.

**Table 11** Swearing

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Doppler***  | **First-language translation**  |
| **18** | Det er omtrent null grader ute og det begynner å snø *som faen* ... (‘It is about zero degrees outside and it is beginning to snow *like the devil*’...) | It’s about zero degrees outside, it has started to snow *like crazy* ... |

Example 18 illustrates one form of reduction of the severity of swearing in the translation of *Doppler*; it exemplifies one of four cases where swearing is translated into non-swearing. *Faen* (‘the devil’) is one of the most frequent swear words in the text, and the repetitive effect is not replicated in the translation in that a variety of different translations are chosen. Hence, the originally manifest voice has been changed to less manifest voice. In the interview, the first-language translators themselves state that they endeavored to “use a variety of swear words. Our experience has been that editors can occasionally tend to reduce the variety of swearing and focus particularly on the ‘f’ word”.

Like *Naiv. Super.*, *Doppler* contains allusions. Example 19 in table 12 borrows and adapts a couple of lines from “Eg ser” (I see), a song by Norwegian artist Bjørn Eidsvåg: *Eg kan ikkje gå alle skrittå for deg* ... *men eg vil gå de med deg* (‘I can’t walk all the steps for you ... but I will walk them with you’). The allusion is used by Doppler to describe Bongo’s life situation, an amalgamation of the serious and the trivial that creates attention-getting humor. Example 20 in the same table is a loving and supportive comment Doppler makes to Bongo, and it alludes to the catchphrase “You and me, Emil” in Swedish author Astrid Lindgren’s children’s book series *Emil i Lönneberga (Emil of Lönneberga)*, evoking childhood nostalgia.

**Table 12** Allusions to popular culture

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Doppler***  | **First-language translation**  |
| **19** | Du har en lang vei å gå, du, Bongo ... men jeg skal gå den med deg. [‘You have a long way to go, you, Bongo ... but I will walk it with you.’] | You’ve got a long way to go, you have, Bongo ... but I’ll be with you every step.  |
| **20** | Du och jag, Bongo, sier jeg. [‘You and me, Bongo, I say.’] | You and me, kiddo, I say.  |

Despite a relatively close translation example 19 erases the allusion, since the target audience is unlikely to be able to connect the words to the requisite song. Unlike the second-language translator, the first-language translators opt not to explain such allusions in footnotes, possibly because of norms that discourage them in modern-day translations. The translation in example 20 also erases the original allusion. This is, however, compensated for by the insertion of the phrase “kiddo”, which has become a more or less fixed expression in American English and is used in a multitude of films and TV series (Dalzell and Victor 2008). Since this allusion is less specific, however, and less traceable to a specific fictional universe, it arguably renders the textual voice less manifest than the original.

*Doppler*, too, contains allusions to Norwegian poetry that contrast with the surrounding text, exemplified in table 13.

**Table 13** Allusions to high culture

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Doppler***  | **First-language translation**  |
| **21** | Vi må være kommet til feil skog, sier jeg til Bongo. Her er så underlig. [‘We must have come to the wrong forest, I say to Bongo. Here is so strange.’] | We must have come to the wrong forest, I say to Bongo. It’s so strange here.  |

Example 21 contains an allusion to two verses of the Norwegian poet Sigbjørn Obstfelder’s modernist poem “Jeg ser” (I see), which read *Jeg er visst kommet på en feil klode! / Her er så underligt* (‘I must have come to the wrong planet! / Here is so strange,’ Obstfelder [1893] 2002: 17–18). The translation erases the allusion, and non-manifest voice is the result.

The fact that several of the allusions in *Doppler* are more covert than those in *Naiv. Super.* – that is, they come in the form of lines from songs or poems rather than titles of songs and names of poets – may be one of the reasons why they are translated in a non-manifest way: the possibility for close translation without creating strangeness (a very pleasant choice for translators to be able to make given typical expectancy norms (Chesterman 1993, see also Greenall 2014)) is readily at hand, unlike in cases where the allusions are more overt. Still, the choices made by the first-language translators in regard to allusions do fall into a relatively discernible pattern although this is a pattern that they also often depart from, as we shall see in the following.

*5.2 Translational choices creating manifest voice*

Our first example in this category concerns content-word repetition that creates intrasentential redundancy. The repetition in example 22 occurs while Doppler ponders why people should inhabit all available open spaces, leaving no room for people who want to be alone.

**Table 14** Repetition of content words creating intrasentential redundancy

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Doppler***  | **First-language translation**  |
| **22** | Store, øde landskaper slutter å være store, øde landskaper hvis de har ett eller flere mennesker i dem. [‘Vast, desolate landscapes stop being vast, desolate landscapes if they have one or more human beings in them.’] | Large, desolate landscapes stop being large, desolate landscapes once they have people in them.  |

The conventional version of the sentence in example 22 would be *store, øde landskaper slutter å eksistere hvis* … (‘vast, desolate landscapes cease to exist if ...’), a formulation that would not have had the same defamiliarizing effect. The example is translated literally, and the style and voice have been preserved. This breach of the (weak) trend of manifest being translated as non-manifest voice could be due to the previously mentioned observation that translators just do not translate consistently (Toury 1995: 67). A closer examination and a comparison between previous examples and this one suggest, however, that the first-language translators might simply be less likely to re-create stylistic features if this cannot be done without creating unidiomatic translationese (or what could be *perceived* as such), and more likely to do so if dysfluent target language can be easily avoided. In example 17 we saw that *flink* was translated into idiomatic English “nice” rather than using the equivalent, but in the given context unidiomatic, “clever”. In example 22, by contrast, a direct translation does not cause unidiomaticity. Both cases could, however, easily be explained as erring on the side of caution on the part of the translators, as too strong a degree of manifestness of textual voice can attract negative attention to translators (cf. Solum 2017).

Other times, however, such caution seems to be thrown to the wind. Example 23 is an example of swearing, and it also contains an allusion to a well-known biblical passage (1 Cor. 13: 13), which makes the swearing particularly marked. The sentence is an example of one of Doppler’s many musings about the inherent sanctity of the forest.

**Table 15** Swearing

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Doppler***  | **First-language translation**  |
| **23** | Et nytt år med flinkhet og *faenskap* og tro og håp og kjærlighet i verden. Men størst av alt er skogen. [‘A new year with cleverness and *devilry* and faith and hope and love in the world. But greatest of all is the forest.’] | A new year with niceness and *devilry* and belief and hope and love in the world. But greatest of all is the forest.  |

Despite the strong tendency toward neutralizing swearing in the translation of Doppler, there are examples such as this, where the Norwegian swearword *faenskap* (‘devilry’) is directly translated into “devilry” in English, which simply is not a swear word in that language (while Norwegian swear words traditionally come from the religious domain, English swear words most often come from the bodily domain; see Fjeld 2004). It is, however, marked, but this is not because it is a taboo word, because it is not, but because it is an archaic word against a backdrop of non-archaic language. In sum, this is an example where the manifestness in the source text is created by one kind of means (a taboo word), and the corresponding manifestness in the translation is created by a different means (an archaic word).

Our final example concerns a stylistic category that is not found in *Naiv. Super.*. This is *personification* and *animation*, which contribute considerably to the naivistic tone in *Doppler*. By endowing parts of his surroundings with living characteristics, the main character seems to suggest that he has a closer relationship to non-human things than to humans.

**Table 16** Personification and animation

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | ***Doppler***  | **First-language translation**  |
| **24** | Den største forskjellen mellom Afrika og meg er nok at jeg ikke liker folk, mens Afrika liker dem godt. [‘The biggest difference between Africa and me is probably that I don’t like people, while Africa likes them well.’] | The biggest difference between Africa and me, I suppose, is that I don’t like people, whereas Africa likes them a lot. |

The personification of “Africa” in example 24 creates a strongly manifest voice in the source, as it does in the translation.

## 6. Concluding remarks – and some final words from the translators

## According to several influential theorists, stylistic traits are generally suppressed in translations (Toury 1995: 269, Parks 1998: 37). What our exploratory study has shown is that this is not always the case.

 The hypotheses we started out with, that second-language translators are more likely to translate manifest voice manifestly, while first-language translators are more likely to translate manifest voice non-manifestly, have been slightly strengthened as a result of our study, although much more empirical research is of course needed in order to be able to state that a) second-language translators and first-language translator differ in this respect as a rule, and b) that their linguacultural background is the main reason for this difference. So many different factors influence the way translations are carried out. In the current study, for example, it should be taken into account that a novice translator – such as our second-language translator – is less likely to be familiar with and/or concerned with still-dominating Western translation norms that dictate fluency in the target text. The bold move of presenting sixteen pages worth of borrowed Norwegian swear words with handwritten annotations (see table 3) plus footnotes might testify to the non-influence of such a norm in our case. Providing as they do the target readers with a quick lesson in Norwegian swearing, they rather reflect Solberg’s previously mentioned didactic objective: to teach the target reader about his language and culture. It is furthermore interesting to consider the fact that a publisher should accept such a translation wholesale. Solberg himself comments that the “forward-leaning” publisher Canongate was indeed open to “unorthodox features, such as the hand-annotated photo-copies of the searches the boys did on the N.Y. library computer”. In this, Canongate obviously represents an exception to the suggested “rule” that Anglophone publishers always seek domesticating translations (Venuti 2008: 1).

While Solberg, consciously or inadvertently, drew attention to himself as a translator, this is not the case as regards the first-language translators, Bartlett and Shaw. One of the most noticeable differences between Solberg on the one hand and Bartlett and Shaw on the other, was seen in the different treatments of the Loe-esque expressions, arguably an especially marked element of Loe’s style. While the twists on the expressions are in most cases re-created by the second-language translator, they are often translated, by the first-language translators, without the twists (see Parks 1998: 41). Again, Solberg’s didactic agenda may explain the differences, as well as his inexperience as a translator. Bartlett and Shaw, perhaps all-too familiar with the game, might understandably rather err on the side of caution, avoiding choices that would draw too much attention to the text and its creators.

Judging from the results presented here, we may cautiously conclude that it would be wrong to reduce the issue of the difference between first-language and second-language translators to one of differences in quality. Could it simply be, in many cases, that each brings different perspectives to the job of interpreting the source text and presenting their version of it to a target audience? If this is the case, then this might constitute an argument in favor of working toward challenging the inherent bias against second-language translators.

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1. Such skills can be either intuitive or trained, which explains the fact that some untrained translators can produce good translations. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In a survey published by Education First in 2013, Norway is in fifth place out of fifty-four countries, excluding countries where English is spoken as a first language (Moe 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Law of Jante was put into words by Aksel Sandemose in his novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* (*A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks*) from 1933. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I.e. doing one’s best within the confines of some set of written or unwritten rules, achieving a non-ostentatious form of success (as opposed to, e.g. taking risks, succeeding and excelling). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Explanations and footnotes are of course also textual features that draw attention to the translator’s voice rather than the author’s. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. There are, of course, exceptions here; the first thing that comes to mind is subtitling, where audiences have access to both source and target languages simultaneously, which means that they will be able to, especially in the case of a well-known language such as English as a source language, make comparisons during viewing/reading. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Rødset’s (2007:46) observations on Loe’s use of clichés and expressions. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)