

## Defining Difference. Inscribing Linguistic Variation in British and American English Translations

**Abstract:** While English as a Lingua Franca has been increasingly researched in relation to language pedagogy and typically in commerce, diplomacy, tourism and academia, there is little investigation into how different varieties of English are chosen, promoted, excluded or otherwise dealt with within the publishing industry and, more specifically, within the field of translations into ‘English’. This paper provides an overview of the current situation, presenting a wide variety of case studies drawn from contemporary English translations of foreign-language texts, highlighting the many different strategies adopted by the industry on both sides of the Atlantic. One of the recurring characteristics across the corpus is the lack of transparency surrounding the various behaviours: this paper aims to foreground the phenomenon and lay the groundwork for further research.

Keywords: *ELF, American English, British English, nationlects, translation, publishing industry*

Over the last two decades, there has been a stimulating expansion in research revolving around a number of issues connected to English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). As Barbara Seidlhofer observes, it “is a fascinating object of study in that due to its extremely widespread and frequent use by speakers from a vast number of first languages it affords us the opportunity of observing language contact, variation and change happening in an intensified, accelerated fashion right before our eyes”.<sup>1</sup> As discussed by Henry Widdowson, there is a two-way pull, with the cooperative principle on the one hand and the territorial imperative on the other.<sup>2</sup> This dichotomy also underlies Seidlhofer’s remarks that in any linguistic interaction “we need to continually modify and fine-tune our language in order to communicate with other people” while “we adjust our language in compliance with the territorial imperative to secure and protect our own space and sustain and reinforce our separate social identity, either as an individual or as a group”.<sup>3</sup>

As the use of English expands among non-native speakers, scholars are questioning the long-held aspiration to speak ‘authentic’ British or American English (BrE, AmE), just as second-language acquisition pedagogists are formulating calls to challenge the authoritative role of inner-circle, native-speaking instructors as gate-keepers to the ‘correct’ usage of the language. For the majority of users of ELF today, English represents a means of international communication: in general, little attention is paid to norm-driven grammatical prescription and even less to identification with any of the native-speaking communities. The issue of International English is addressed therefore with reference to both the English Language Teaching (ELT) industry and also the wider spheres where ELF is generally used, typically in commerce, diplomacy, tourism and academia. This paper, however, seeks to investigate the question in relation to the publishing industry within the English-speaking context—the United States and the United Kingdom in particular—and more precisely how native speakers of English relate to the different varieties of the language. It will seek to understand how texts respond to the tension identified above between the cooperative principle and the territorial imperative. Examples

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Seidlhofer, “Accommodation and the Idiom Principle in English as a Lingua Franca”, *Intercultural Pragmatics*, 6.2 (2009), 195.

<sup>2</sup> Henry G. Widdowson, “Learning Purpose and Language Use” (Oxford: Oxford U.P., 1983), 78.

<sup>3</sup> Seidlhofer, *Accommodation*, 196.

analysed will be drawn from works written originally in English before moving to the more specific question of the variety of English adopted for the translation of (literary) texts ‘into English’.

The interdependence of co-operation and territoriality can be seen in terms of communication accommodation theory, where convergence, in line with co-operation, is described as “a strategy whereby individuals adapt to each other’s communicative behaviors in terms of a wide range of linguistic/prosodic/non-vocal features”,<sup>4</sup> with the aim of modifying their own strategies to resemble the patterns of their interlocutor. Although referred to speech acts, a similar tendency can be observed in written discourse, and, more specifically in the domain of translations, where domesticating strategies prevail. Territoriality, on the other hand, implies divergence, “the way in which speakers accentuate speech and non-verbal differences between themselves and others”,<sup>5</sup> to differentiate themselves and can be equated in certain circumstances with the translation strategy of foreignization.

Producing different versions for different markets has long been one of the standard practices of the Anglophone publishing market but has received little academic attention. In translation studies, Lawrence Venuti talks of the “regime of fluency” when it comes to the reception of translations, especially in the context of the Anglo-American publishing market, taken as one entity. He quotes a long list of excerpts from reviews of books translated into English, highlighting the dominance of fluency as the most-prized quality. Much evidence does indeed point to the fact that “the effect of transparency conceals the numerous conditions under which the translation is made, starting with the translator’s crucial intervention. The more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text”.<sup>6</sup>

In order to achieve the highest degree of fluency, it therefore makes sense for different translations, or, at least, different versions of the same translation to be produced for the various English-speaking territories. Limiting the investigation to the United Kingdom and the United States,<sup>7</sup> it is true to state that, while the linguistic differences are not unsurmountable, they can be obtrusive. In her discussion of various cognitive biases affecting native speakers of BrE and AmE when it comes to their use of language, perhaps the most significant for the present discussion is that which Lynne Murphy terms the “novelty bias”, whereby we notice new and unusual linguistic elements, while ignoring the familiar.<sup>8</sup> Any element not belonging to our own particular nationlect, whether purely linguistic or cultural, will be foregrounded. This desire for fluency emerges as a key factor not only in the production of translations but also in English-language source texts in the two principal Anglophone markets and, although, there is no single predominant behaviour to achieve this end, a number of strategies can be observed among the mainstream publishing companies of the United States and the United Kingdom. This article surveys the most common strategies adopted, although they remain a well-kept secret, with very little indication from the imprints themselves or discussion among writers, critics or academics.

The first two categories of Roman Jakobson’s famous tripartite division of translation (intralinguistic and interlinguistic—the third being intersemiotic) can be useful here even though he makes no specific reference to shifts from one idiolect/dialect/nationlect to another when he talks of intralingual translation—his emphasis is on such practices as paraphrase and *précis* writing. We can, however, agree with Linda Pillière’s assessment that “the term’s somewhat loose definition enables us to interpret it as covering a wide range of possibilities from transforming one sociolect into another to

<sup>4</sup> Howard Giles et al., *Accommodation Theory. Communication, Context, and Consequence* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 1991), 63.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator’s Invisibility. A History of Translation* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002), 1.

<sup>7</sup> The article concentrates on these two territories as they represent the overwhelming proportion of English-language publishers worldwide. According to recent statistics, the US and UK have 30% and 4% of the global book market respectively, while representing only 4.25% and 0.87% of the global population, [www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/](http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/), accessed 10 June 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Lynne Murphy, *The Prodigal Tongue* (London: Oneworld, 2018), 36.

rewriting one dialect in the terms of a different one”.<sup>9</sup> The initial part of the paper, therefore, will be dedicated to texts originating in either BrE or AmE and how they can vary (or not) when published on the opposite side of the Atlantic. The first set of publications can be seen almost as the *degré zero* of editorial intervention: the text itself appears in an identical format on both sides of the Atlantic, although most commonly some of the peritextual elements are adapted for the local market. Even when the cover illustration remains the same, the blurb and especially the endorsements and excerpts of favourable criticism feature sources the reader is more likely to be familiar with. There is minimal editorial intervention, limited to spelling, more common in the transfer from BrE to AmE than vice versa. Most changes at this level can be ascribed to the implementation of rules set out in (in-house) style guides adopted by the ‘new’ imprint. A recent example is that of the dual versions of Sally Rooney’s *Conversation with Friends*.<sup>10</sup> The UK edition features two quotes from British newspapers (*The Sunday Times* and *The Sunday Telegraph*) on the front cover, while the US edition quotes *The New Yorker*, as well as adopting American spelling: *humor, favorite, practice* (v.). To some degree, this intralingual convergence can be seen in the writing process itself: in line with the phenomenon described by Rebecca Walkowitz as the ‘Born Translated’ novel,<sup>11</sup> the American author Lionel Shriver, who has long resided in the UK, explains how, under pressure from her publishers to achieve a form of linguistic “ethnic cleansing”, so that her novels can be published as they stand in all territories, “my characters are required to speak with a colloquial purity at odds with the messy interaction between the two argots that I observe in real life”.<sup>12</sup>

Whether it be a series of light-hearted children’s books or a text from the literary canon, there are multiple examples of books whose titles have been changed in their journey from the United Kingdom to the United States. On the one hand, therefore, Martin Handford’s *Where’s Wally?*, for example, begins life in the UK before becoming *Where’s Waldo?* in America,<sup>13</sup> whereas Joseph Conrad’s 1897 novella *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’* is published in the same year in America as *The Children of the Sea*, not through any sensibilities over the racist slur in the title but rather because the New York publishers, Dodd, Mead and Company, feared that a book with a black protagonist would not stimulate much interest among the book-buying public—indeed, one American critic commented that the US title “offered evidence of superior refinement”.<sup>14</sup> Most Agatha Christie novels have different titles on opposite sides of the Atlantic: *Lord Edgware Dies* becomes *Thirteen at Dinner*<sup>15</sup>; and the complicated case of one of Christie’s most famous novels, *Murder on the Orient Express* that was published the same year in America as *Murder in the Calais Coach*<sup>16</sup> to avoid confusion with Graham Greene’s novel *Stamboul Train* (1932) which, in turn, had been published in the States as *Orient Express*.<sup>17</sup> A film version of Greene’s book, again titled *Orient Express*, came out in America in exactly the same year as Christie’s novel and it was felt, therefore, that the similarity could lead to confusion and the

<sup>9</sup> Linda Pillière, “Conflicting Voices. An Analysis of Intralingual Translation from British English to American English”, *E-Rea*, 8.1 (December 2011), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Sally Rooney, *Conversations with Friends* (London: Faber and Faber, 2017); Sally Rooney, *Conversation with Friends, a Novel* (New York: Hogarth, 2018).

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *Born Translated* (New York: Columbia U.P., 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Lionel Shriver, “Cripes, a Bumbershoot! The Love–Hate Relationship between American and British English”, *Times Literary Supplement* (20 April 2018).

<sup>13</sup> Martin Handford, *Where’s Wally?* (London: Walker Books, 1987); Martin Handford, *Where’s Waldo?* (New York: Candlewick, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Donald W. Rude and Kenneth W. Davis, “The Critical Reception of the First American Edition of *The Nigger of the ‘Narcissus’*”, *The Conradian*, 16. 2 (June 1992), 48.

<sup>15</sup> Agatha Christie, *Lord Edgware Dies* (London: Collins, 1933); Agatha Christie, *Thirteen at Dinner* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1933).

<sup>16</sup> Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express* (London: Collins, 1934); Agatha Christie, *Murder on the Calais Coach* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1934).

<sup>17</sup> Graham Greene, *Stamboul Train* (London: Heinemann, 1932); Graham Greene, *Orient Express* (New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1933).

decision was taken to rename the mystery tale. Examples of the phenomenon in the ‘other direction’, of original American titles adapted for the UK market, are far less frequent with Louisa May Alcott’s second volume, *Little Women II*, published in London as *Good Wives*,<sup>18</sup> a notable exception.

There are many cases also where the text itself undergoes varying degrees of editorial intervention to avoid features that might prove jarring for the non-local reader. The novel *Bridget Jones’ Diary* is very clearly set in England and the author/publishers are keen to maintain the Britishness that is at the centre of Bridget’s character—*flat* and *coriander* have been maintained—rather than *apartment* and *cilantro*—and even references to celebrities that an American is unlikely to know (“Una threw herself across the room like Will Carling”—a famous rugby player) have been maintained.<sup>19</sup> The behaviour is somewhat idiosyncratic however with *shopping trolley* swapped for *shopping cart*, the British actress Joanna Lumley being substituted with Goldie Hawn and, when Bridget charts her weight, her *9st3* has become *129lbs*. A more high-profile example and systematic treatment is that reserved for J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels, where the first volume of the saga, published by Bloomsbury, appeared in its original UK format as *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* while the title was adjusted to *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* by the US publisher Scholastic for the North American market.<sup>20</sup> Most BrE spellings and lexical items have been replaced with AmE equivalents: ‘packet of crisps’ becomes ‘bag of chips’, ‘dustbin’ is now ‘trashcan’, ‘gummy’ is rendered with ‘toothless’ and ‘shan’t’ is converted to ‘won’t’.

Texts can also appear in different formats in conformity with different moral or ethical sensibilities. While the two editions presently available of Rosamond Lehmann’s controversial 1936 novel *The Weather in the Streets* differ only in punctuation—the *cherry-coloured curtains* have not become *cherry-colored drapes*—the 1936 editions tell another story. The excerpt below narrates the scene of Olivia’s miscarriage. All the parts in italics were omitted by the London publishers but remained in the New York edition:

She heard herself say clearly:

“I’m having a miscarriage.”

“Shall I get a doctor?”

“Yes... Quick.”

He went hurtling down the stairs.

She cried out, on a tag-end of breath:

“Don’t be long!”

He wouldn’t have heard.

*Alone. Must get down to the bathroom. I can get there... because I will.... She accomplished it, in one rigid flight. Don’t lock the door... in case I die in here....*

*Mother, Kate, - oh, Kate!...Rollo!... “Don’t tell them,” I should have said to Ivor.... “Just say love, sorry....” I won’t die. “Say to Rollo....”*

*She died and presently came back to life lying on the pale blue linoleum. How cold, and the smell of oilcloth....She crawled out, up the stairs, on her hands and knees, reached the bed; crouched down beside it, her head buried against it, as if in an ecstasy of bedtime prayer.... Can’t be found like this.... An ultimate effort heaved her on to the mattress, rolled her down flat, motionless, extinct, between the sheets.<sup>21</sup>*

<sup>18</sup> Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women II* (New York: Roberts Brothers, 1869); Louisa May Alcott, *Good Wives* (London: J. Nisbet, 1890).

<sup>19</sup> Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (London: Picador, 1997), 38; Helen Fielding, *Bridget Jones’ Diary* (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997); J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (New York: Scholastic, 1998).

<sup>21</sup> Rosamond Lehmann, *The Weather in the Streets* (London: Collins, 1936), 286; Rosamond Lehmann, *The Weather in the Streets* (New York: Reynal and Hitchcock, 1936), 322. For a more detailed discussion of this text and its translations into

Moving away temporarily from literary texts, we can observe that the same phenomenon is present in other forms of discourse. Tim Harford’s bestselling non-fiction book *The Undercover Economist*, illustrating economic principles for the general reader, is a case in point. In a private communication, the British author explains how he first wrote part of the text while living in London— “and some of the scenes speak very clearly about that experience.” Having moved to Washington DC, he signed contracts with both UK and US publishers and proceeded to rewrite parts of the text, adapting the UK book for the US reader. While there is nothing in the paratext of either edition (including listings on Amazon or other websites) to suggest that the two books are different in any way, the following example highlights the reworking. Here Harford is explaining how train-station coffee stalls make their profit. In the edition written for the UK, he establishes London’s Waterloo Station as his site of enquiry, not so in the US version:

UK version	US version
In this oasis, rare delights are served with smiles by attractive and exotic men and women—today, a charming barista whose name badge reads ‘Jacinta’.	In this oasis, rare delights are served with smiles by attractive and exotic men and women—today, a charming barista whose name badge reads ‘ <i>Maria</i> ’.
I am thinking, of course, of the AMT coffee kiosk.	I am thinking, of course, of <i>Starbucks</i> .
Even if you’ve never heard of AMT coffee, you’ll know exactly what I’m talking about.	
	<i>The café is placed, inescapably, at the exit to International Square. This is no quirk of Farragut West: the first storefront you will pass on your way out of nearby Farragut North Metro is—another Starbucks.</i>
You find the same kind of thing all over the planet—and catering to the same desperate commuters.	You find <i>such conveniently located coffee shops</i> all over the planet and catering to the same desperate commuters.

Table 1: Excerpt from *The Undercover Economist* (2006), Tim Harford. <sup>22</sup>

Waterloo Station has been substituted with Farragut West, a metro station in Washington, along with the barista’s name and the coffee chain she works for. Although the point being made by Harford is the same, the standing of AMT and Starbucks within their respective cultures is not and we can observe how the discourse has been modified to accommodate the fact that one operates out of kiosks while the other is typically present as shops and that they enjoy differing levels of notoriety. The requirement that readers should recognize the cultural references as familiar to their own constituency has dictated the intralingual adaptation of the text, or what might be called a localization of the book for the US market. The cultural references, the prices, the place names have all been adapted to resonate with an American audience. Harford, who also writes a regular column in the *Financial Times*, explained: “Because I have lived in both the UK and US—and my newspaper column is

French and Italian see Mary Wardle, “Same Difference? Translating ‘Sensitive’ Texts”, *Vertimo Studijos*, 10 (January 2017), 120-34.

<sup>22</sup> Tim Harford, *The Undercover Economist* (London: Abacus, 2006), 6; Tim Harford, *The Undercover Economist* (New York: Random House, 2007), 3-4. The differences are highlighted in italics in the US version.

published in both countries—I try to bear both audiences in mind in my writing”.<sup>23</sup> It is also worth noting that when two such different versions of the ‘same’ text co-exist, there can also be significant implications for any subsequent translations depending on which ‘original’ version is taken as the source text for the translator to work from? The French, German and Italian translations of Harford’s book are all based on the US source text, while the Spanish translation has been carried out on the UK original. But more of interlingual translation shortly.

The marked cultural adaptation of Harford’s book is, in many ways, reminiscent of certain audiovisual remakes, again usually of UK products remade for the US market. Concepts such as *cultural discount* – the reduction in value of a film or TV programme when it is being sold to an external market—or *cultural proximity*—the desire of audiences to see or hear media products from their own or similar cultures<sup>24</sup>—frequently used in communication studies, can help bring into focus the parallel with the cooperation/territoriality and the domestication/foreignization debates addressed earlier. While Acland identifies a “loss of cultural specificity” as one of the side-effects of the global “geographic mobility of cultural commodities”,<sup>25</sup> the pressures of cultural proximity have occasioned culturally-specific adaptations of a number of TV programmes, for example, which Translation Studies would identify as being heavily domesticating: alongside reality TV and game shows, where different countries produce local versions based on one original format (e.g. *Big Brother*, *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*, *MasterChef*, etc.), there is an increasingly long list of original UK TV series that are remade for US audiences (*The Office*, *Broadchurch*, *Shameless*, *Skins*, etc.). As with the literary examples, there are many fewer cases of transfers in the opposite direction, with British audiences far more tolerant of American products—the phenomenon, originating in the commercial imbalance between the two territories, with America producing on a much larger scale, both books and audiovisual products, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy: the more the UK audience is exposed to US material, the more familiar they become with American vernacular and cultural references and, therefore, accepting of the influx.

If we now turn our attention to interlingual translation, we can again observe an array of different strategies adopted by Anglophone imprints producing translations ‘into English’. The extremely successful *Neapolitan Novels* by Italian author Elena Ferrante, for example, are translated into English by Ann Goldstein for the New York company, Europa Editions, who, according to their website, aim “to bring fresh international voices to the American and British markets”. The publishers, therefore, deliberately mention both audiences, presumably to broaden their appeal as much as possible, and yet only produce one single edition.<sup>26</sup> On the first page of the first novel, *My Brilliant Friend*, the phrase *she’s gotten worse* clearly puts an AmE stamp on the language, reinforced by a quick succession of *cell phone*, *closet* and *apartment* where a British reader would expect *mobile (phone)*, *wardrobe* and *flat*; spelling is American (*odor*, *gray*, *neighborhood*); cultural references rely on knowledge of American society (*Lila appeared in my life in first grade*). The front cover of both editions carries an endorsement from *The New York Times Book Review*.

A different strategy is that used for the English translations of Haruki Murakami, many of which are carried out for Vintage by either Philip Gabriel or Jay Rubin, both American. The editions for the two territories have different artwork on the covers and the endorsements are from national press in each case. Despite it being the same publishing company and the same author, the strategies themselves are not homogenous. While Gabriel’s translation of *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* is identical in the US and UK,<sup>27</sup> with standard AmE throughout, Rubin’s translation of

<sup>23</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Straubhaar and Robert LaRose, *Media Now. Communications Media in the Information Age* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2000), 488.

<sup>25</sup> Charles Acland, *Screen Traffic. Movies, Multiplexes, and Global Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 33.

<sup>26</sup> Elena Ferrante, *My Brilliant Friend* [2011], trans. by Ann Goldstein (New York: Europa Books, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> Haruki Murakami, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* [2007], trans. by Philip Gabriel (London: Vintage, 2009);

*Norwegian Wood*, on the other hand, has been edited for the British readership: “People began unlatching their seatbelts and pulling baggage from the storage bins ...” becomes “People began unfastening their seatbelts and pulling luggage from the overhead lockers ...”.<sup>28</sup>

Another translation that appears unaltered in both Anglophone editions is William Weaver’s version of Carlo Emilio Gadda’s *That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana*. In the Foreword to his translation in the 1965 edition, Weaver points out how the novel is “a teeming canvas of Roman life, many of whose characters speak the city’s expressive, but not always elegant dialect” and explains that this could not be rendered in translation, “[s]o the English-speaking reader is therefore asked to imagine the speech of Gadda’s characters, translated here into *straightforward spoken English*, as taking place in dialect, or in a mixture of dialects”.<sup>29</sup> The book itself, including the dialogue, is written however in straightforward American English (*the homicide squad, braids, traveled, center, flavor*, etc.), although admittedly not heavily marked. But this is the point: when writing in English, the translator is obliged to use either one nationlect or the other. There is no such thing as a neutral form of English. One of Weaver’s many other prestigious translations from Italian provides an example of yet another strategy: he translated Italo Calvino’s collection of short stories, *Cosmicomiche*, for publication in New York and this same translation, with AmE spelling and lexis, continued to be published on both sides of the Atlantic for over forty years, until 2010, when Penguin in London produced a new edition of *The Complete Cosmicomics*, containing a one-page ‘Note on the Translations’, stating somewhat enigmatically, “The two volumes translated by William Weaver were originally published in America; for this edition, minor changes have been made to anglicize the text and standardize presentation, together with minor emendations to a sentence in certain stories to reflect the original Italian”.<sup>30</sup> On closer inspection, it transpires that ‘anglicize’, here, means ‘to adjust spelling and lexis for British readers’: from present research, this is one of the few examples of AmE being adapted to BrE.

If we then look at a further classic Calvino text, the plot thickens even more with seemingly hybrid editorial behaviours. *Palomar* was translated, again by Weaver, into AmE as *Mr. Palomar* and also appears in the UK in a BrE edition (*Mr Palomar*, without the punctuation mark): on close inspection, the situation soon reveals itself as more complex, with what appears to be idiosyncratic editing of basic nationlect features (*color, meter* and *gray* all remain as they are, while *toward* does gain a final *s* in the BrE edition and Palomar’s honorific is adapted throughout as in the title) and evidence of changes that go beyond these features, as illustrated by the following paragraph (again changes are highlighted in the BrE version with italics):

But isolating one wave is not easy, separating it from the wave immediately following, which seems to push it and at times overtakes it and sweeps it away; and it is no easier to separate that one wave from the preceding wave, which seems to drag it toward the shore, unless it turns against the following wave, as if to arrest it.

*But it is very difficult to isolate one wave, separating it from the wave immediately following it, which seems to push it and at times overtakes it and sweeps it away; just as it is difficult to*

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Haruki Murakami, *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running* [2007], trans. by Philip Gabriel (New York: Vintage, 2009).

<sup>28</sup> Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood* [1987] trans. by Jay Rubin (New York: Vintage, 2000), 1; Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood* [1987], trans. by Jay Rubin (London: Vintage, 2001), 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> Carlo Emilio Gadda, *That Awful Mess on the Via Merulana* [1957] trans. by William Weaver (New York: George Braziller, 1965), xv. Emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup> Italo Calvino, *The Complete Cosmicomics* [1965], trans. by William Weaver, Martin McLaughlin and Tim Parks (London: Penguin Books, 2010), xxv. For further discussion of this example, see Mary Wardle, “One Size Fits All? Varieties of English and ELF in Translation”, in Michal Organ, ed., *Translation Today. National Identity in Focus* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020), 79-89.

separate that one wave from the *wave that precedes it and seems to drag it towards the shore*, unless it turns against *its follower* as if to arrest it.<sup>31</sup>

As in many other similar circumstances, the paratextual elements shed no light on how these incongruities appear in what is to all intents and purposes, at least as far as the reader is concerned, ‘the same translation’. Depending on the size of the publishing company responsible for the translation, the number of steps that lead to the actual publication can vary enormously. In a large company, a typical procedure, once the final draft of the translation has been submitted by the translator, might include the intervention of a production editor, responsible for scheduling and managing the production process in its entirety, from preparing the manuscript for typesetting through to finding a printer and a copy editor. The latter would then work on the manuscript, at a micro level, checking the details of spelling, punctuation and grammar, vouching for the accuracy of references and quotations as well as ensuring that any house-style is followed. The text would then move on to a line editor who reads the manuscript, concentrating more on the overall style, adjusting any odd or awkward phrases and generally addressing the readability of the text. Once all these phases have been completed, the text can be sent to a proof-reader and then on to a typesetter. In smaller publishing companies, a number of these tasks might be carried out by the same person and sometimes, especially proofreading, by the author/translator themselves. No matter how these steps are distributed, however, it is still a complex procedure during which, for a whole variety of reasons, adjustments are constantly being made to the initial manuscript.<sup>32</sup> With no indication given in the book itself, therefore, it is impossible to know with any degree of certainty who is responsible for deciding to edit the translation and who, subsequently, carries out the task. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of different figures can be involved but, most frequently, the changes are ascribable to editorial roles rather than translators themselves.

The following example is similar to that of Weaver’s translation of *Palomar*, but even more startling, and concerns the English translation of Michel Houellebecq’s *Les Particules élémentaires*, carried out by the Irish translator Frank Wynne. It appeared first in the UK as *Atomised* and later the same year in the US as *The Elementary Particles*. At the time of its publication in the UK, the novel was yet to attain its near cult status among a certain sector of the French (and subsequently, international) reading public but was very well received despite—or perhaps because of—its controversial themes. In view of this increasing success, as Vintage were about to publish the BrE translation in the US, they opted to edit the text further, resulting in a version that, in some parts, reads very differently from the translation published in London. The following excerpt is taken from the opening chapter:

French source text	British target text	American target text (p. 17)
Il avait travaillé dans un environnement privilégié, songea-t-il en démarrant à son tour.	He felt privileged to have worked here, he thought as he pulled out into the street.	He felt privileged to have worked here, he thought as he pulled out into the street.
À la question: « Estimez-vous, vivant à Palaiseau, bénéficier d’un environnement privilégié? », 63% des	When asked ‘Do you feel privileged to live in an area like Palaiseau?’, 63 per cent of respondents answered ‘Yes’.	When asked “Do you feel privileged to live in an area like Palaiseau?” <i>sixty-three percent</i> of respondents answered “Yes.”

<sup>31</sup> Italo Calvino, *Mr. Palomar* [1983], trans. by William Weaver (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985), 3; Italo Calvino, *Mr Palomar* [1983], trans. by William Weaver (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1985), 3.

<sup>32</sup> Linda Pilière, “Re-Working Translations for the American Reader or the Domestication of British English Translations”, *Palimpsestes*, 26 (October 2013), 46.



habitants répondaient: « Oui. »		
Cela pouvait se comprendre; les bâtiments étaient bas, entrecoupés de pelouses.	It was hardly surprising: the buildings were on a human scale, surrounded by lush green lawns.	<i>This was hardly surprising: the buildings were low, interspersed with lawns.</i>
Plusieurs hypermarchés permettaient un approvisionnement facile;	There were several supermarkets conveniently nearby <u>for shopping</u> .	Several supermarkets <i>were</i> conveniently nearby.
la notion de qualité de vie semblait à peine excessive, concernant Palaiseau.	The phrase 'quality of life' seemed to have been coined for such a place.	The phrase "quality of life" <i>hardly seemed excessive</i> for such a place.
En direction de Paris, l'autoroute du Sud était déserte. Il avait l'impression d'être dans un film de science-fiction néo-zélandais, vu pendant ses années d'étudiant :	The motorway back into Paris was deserted and Djerzinski felt like a character in a science-fiction film he had seen at university:	The <i>expressway</i> back into Paris was deserted, and Djerzinski felt like a character in a science fiction film <i>he'd seen at the university</i> :
le dernier homme sur Terre, après la disparition de toute vie.	the last man on earth after every other living thing had been wiped out.	the last man on earth after every other living thing had been wiped out.
Quelque chose dans l'atmosphère évoquait une apocalypse sèche.	A post-apocalyptic wasteland.	<i>Something in the air evoked a dry apocalypse.</i>

Table 2: Excerpt from *Atomised/The Elementary Particles* (2000), Michel Houellebecq, trans. by Frank Wynne.<sup>33</sup>

While some of these changes derive from relatively straightforward editorial choices (writing numbers out in letters, substituting *motorway* with *expressway*), it is a more complex task to hypothesize what has motivated the other choices. It is clear that the 'new' US version is closer to a source-oriented translation of the French, but it is not clear why this was judged to be a more suitable choice for the US market in particular, especially in light of the favourable reception of Wynne's translation in the UK press.<sup>34</sup> Adding to the confusion surrounding the status of these translations, the title page of the US edition clearly credits Frank Wynne as the translator and the copyright page reads "This translation was first published in the United Kingdom under the title *Atomised*". A little further down on the same page, however, we learn: "[t]he publisher wishes to thank Asya Muchnick for her comprehensive assistance in translating and editing this text." No further explanation is provided, and I have found no discussion of these 'incongruities' in the press or in academic papers.

The question of what passes as 'the English translation' is indeed a murky one: publishing companies appear to conspire to fudge the edges over these, at times, invasive editing practices. There are occasional examples of translators discussing their adaptations of BrE translations for the US

<sup>33</sup> Michel Houellebecq, *Atomised* [1999] trans. by Frank Wynne (London: Vintage, 2000), 12; Michel Houellebecq, *The Elementary Particles* [1999] trans. by Frank Wynne (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 2000), 17.

<sup>34</sup> I am grateful to Frank Wynne for taking the time to go through the events surrounding publication with me. There had been one negative assessment of the translation in a letter published in the *Times Literary Supplement* but this does not seem to justify such drastic modification to a translation that had otherwise been much praised.

market,<sup>35</sup> but, on the whole, the changes appear to be the work of editors and the publishing companies do very little to draw attention to such practices. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, these different versions for the US and UK markets can be seen as a form of intralingual translation but there is also a case for stating that, in their hybridity, they display some of the features of retranslations. The fact that more than one translation exists for the same source text is, of course, not surprising in itself, with retranslation now the focal point of much research within the field of translation studies. As a text gains literary recognition, and as long as there are no copyright issues, it is not uncommon to find that the number of translations increases, with publishing companies keen to include the title in their respective catalogues. There is indeed a reciprocal process whereby, on the one hand, a text entering the literary canon will produce retranslations and, on the other, the production of retranslations will confirm the text's canonical status. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed analysis of the many reasons occasioning retranslations, one specific point would appear particularly pertinent in the present context, as far as AmE and BrE editions of the same translation are concerned and this is Koskinen and Paloposki's concept of supplementarity,<sup>36</sup> whereby each retranslation attempts to carve out its own individual niche within the market, appealing to different constituencies (general readership, scholarly press, young adult market, low cost publication, etc.).

Although Venuti's concept of invisibility is something that has now been internalized by the translation studies community, in the case of retranslations we find perhaps one of the rare occasions where attention is drawn to the fact that the text as it is being presented was not in fact written in this language. Publishing companies are surprisingly eager to point out that these are new translations, where new implies better. Paratextual elements draw comparisons to earlier versions, captions are added to book covers, as are prefaces and notes within the epitext, often written by the translator themselves; there are comments in publicity materials and remarks in reviews. When we move to translations newly-edited for the diverse nationlects of English, however, this no longer seems to be the case. The shroud of invisibility is once again thrown over the translation process and the manipulation that the text has undergone. In the cases discussed here, as we have seen, the divergence between the versions is very rarely brought to the attention of the readership but is presumably carried out following guidelines that adhere to some of the same criteria that determine the supplementarity paradigm in retranslation, attempting to fit the text somehow to its target audience.

Returning to Murphy's concept of novelty bias, it is clear that, as readers, we are more inclined to notice those features that do not belong to our own linguistic variety. It is that which is 'different' that stands out to us. In the note to her English retranslation of Louis Guilloux's 1935 novel *Le Sang noir*, the American translator and poet Laura Marris comments: "the language of the translation can't lose too much of its sense of place by sounding like it belongs in any particular English-speaking culture", pointing out that the earlier translation by Samuel Putnam, published back in 1936, "uses quite a few British English expressions—"old boy" and "old chap" or "By Jove!"—that now seem odd in a French setting".<sup>37</sup> It is worth noting that perhaps the 'oddness' of these three examples, for anyone, is attributable to their being dated and old-fashioned just as much as to their sounding too British to an American ear. Marris, therefore, advocates a more neutral, unmarked form of English. It might come as a surprise, therefore—certainly to a British reader—to find the following in the first two pages of her retranslation: 'what did she come in here for?' (*what had she come in here for?*), 'a pile of grading' (*a pile of marking*), 'it had only made them snicker' (*snigger*), 'she'd gotten married' (*she'd got*

<sup>35</sup> For example, Richard Dixon, "Playing on Words. Challenges in Translating Umberto Eco's *Numero zero*" *Signata*, 7 (2016), 377-390.

<sup>36</sup> Kaisa Koskinen and Outi Paloposki, "Retranslations in the Age of Digital Reproduction", *Cadernos de Tradução*, 11.1 (2003), 19-38.

<sup>37</sup> Laura Marris, "A Note on the Translation", in Louis Guilloux *Blood Dark* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2017), xiii-xiv.

married), ‘he finally quieted’ (*he finally went quiet*), ‘the neighborhood’ (*the neighbourhood*).<sup>38</sup> Alice Kaplan is perhaps closer to the mark, in her introduction to Marris’ translation, when she observes how “she has brought *Blood Dark* to life for the American reader” while dismissing Putman’s first translation as being written in “the ‘mid-Atlantic style’ then in vogue, neither American nor English, supposedly pleasing to readers in both countries but actually quite lost at sea”.<sup>39</sup>

For the point here is that, in the context of a French novel, set in France, a British reader will be more or less inclined to accept foreignizing elements deriving from the French original, whereas the elements of AmE become confusing and jarring. This example from Guilloux, while based on two separate translations, is however symptomatic of the practice described throughout this article. For a British reader of the Ferrante novels, there is an unintentional sense of dislocation that is added to the text: the first distance is created by the Italian setting—presumably expected by the reader and even part of the pleasure of reading a work originating in a different culture—but the second sense of distance is represented by the language itself, that constantly creates episodes of interference for non-American readers of English. The changes to the texts—in the case of intralingual shifts – and to the translations – for the interlingual versions—are presumably carried out to remove the interference, to allow the language to be as neutral as possible to the reader of each particular nationlect and allow any foreignizing strategies specific to the source text and its translation to come to the surface. This desire to create a ‘fluent’ reading experience can also be observed, typically, in the production of edited works of one single author that have, however, been translated by multiple translators, both British and American. As discussed in Wardle,<sup>40</sup> *The Complete Works of Primo Levi*, edited by Ann Goldstein (2015) adapts BrE translations to AmE norms, to ‘homogenize’ the collection. Another similar example is that of the English-language translation of Giacomo Leopardi’s *Zibaldone* (2013) that consists of over 2,500 pages, translated by a team of seven translators, both British and American. As all the translators were working on one single work, linguistic uniformity was of paramount concern and, accordingly, the editors issued the translators with a set of guidelines regarding lessical choices but also the indication that American English should be adopted throughout.<sup>41</sup>

From the evidence examined so far, it emerges that publishing companies adopt a range of strategies when it comes to making a choice between the two main varieties of English. There is little systematic academic analysis of the phenomenon and the few comments to be found, mostly in paratexts, can appear somewhat haphazard and even at odds with the texts they refer to: those who claim to be using ‘standard English’ or ‘neutral language’ appear insensitive to linguistic features external to their own nationlect and, at times, betray a non-awareness of the impact that the ‘wrong’ variety of English can have. Given the emotive nature of the question—if we believe that our (national) identity is, at least in part, reflected in our (regional) voice— and in the absence of a truly ‘international’ form of English, the choice of nationlect in English writing and in English-language translations in particular, can produce an effect whereby a native speaker ends up as an ‘outsider’ to their own language. Depending on the reader, therefore, the same translation can be at once transparent and domesticating on the one hand and draw attention to itself and the translation process in general on the other. As this initial survey illustrates, there is no standardized behaviour, with a variety of factors no doubt influencing the strategy of the publishing companies, almost case by case. Among the variables encountered are the text type, the likelihood of the text being a commercial success, which variety of English the ST is translated into initially. As the next stage of this project, it would be useful to compile a database to record these strategies, to bestow some statistical significance on the findings. It would also be interesting to investigate, for example, the impact of the era of the translations, the source language, the fame or otherwise of the authors and translators

<sup>38</sup> In brackets, a BrE equivalent that a British reader might expect.

<sup>39</sup> Alice Kaplan, “Introduction”, in Louis Guilloux *Blood Dark* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2017), x.

<sup>40</sup> Wardle, *One Size*.

<sup>41</sup> I am grateful to Franco D’Intino – editor of the English translation, together with Michael Caesar – for this information.

involved, the commercial and/or critical success of the books in question. It is certainly time to bring the question out of the shadows.