ARCHAISATION, MODERNISATION AND REFERENCE IN THE TRANSLATION OF OLDER TEXTS

Francis R. Jones & Allan Turner
School of Modern Languages, University of Newcastle
Newcastle NE1 7RU, U.K.
e-mail: f.r.jones@ncl.ac.uk, allangturner@aol.com

Abstract: This article, based on a survey of scholarship and world-wide-web ‘metatexts’ (reviews, translators’ guidelines, etc.) discusses the options open to translators when translating older literary and religious texts. It is argued that different decisions along a scale ranging from ‘hyperarchaisation’ to ‘violent modernisation’ give different deictic signals, which point the reader to different aspects of the temporal and cultural relationship between source and target text. Translators’ decisions and readers’ interpretations are mediated by cognitive factors: translators may be more or less skilled in producing certain target-text styles or conveying certain signals, and readers more or less able or willing to process certain styles. They are also mediated by translational and literary norms, though these may vary across time, between cultures and between interest-groups. In the recent English-reading world, the interaction of pre-modern, modernist and post-modern norms can give different attitudes towards the use of modernising and archaising techniques: archaisation in poetry translation, for example, tends to be seen as hackneyed ‘Victorian’ translationese rather than as signalling the source text’s specific historicity, whereas archaisation in religious translation can be seen as integrating the text into a liturgical tradition.

1. INTRODUCTION

When the time gap between the production of a source text and its translation becomes so wide that the source text appears markedly past to readers in terms of language, content or both, translators have to decide how to deal with this gap in their translations. Their decisions are popularly seen as falling into two main categories:

- **Archaising (archaisation)** – highlighting the historicity of the text by using non-modern language (i.e. language perceived as markedly past relative to the time of translating) and retaining all non-modern text-world content.

- **Modernising (modernisation)** – highlighting the modern-day relevance of the text by using modern language (i.e. language perceived as contemporary to the time of translating), and even on occasion by introducing modern text-world content.

Such decisions we see, after Richardson (1998), as deictic in nature. In other words, we see the translator as choosing between a variety of linguistic and contextual signals which encourage the reader to interpret the time relationship between source and target text in different ways. Our main aim in this article is to model the main time-deixis options open to translators of older texts, the interpretations which translators might intend readers to derive from them, and the key factors which might condition this process. The article also provides a case-study of how modern English-language readers are likely to interpret such signals in translations of older literary texts.

Literary translators often see themselves as balancing two ethics: faithfulness to their reading of the source writer’s intent (or, with a religious text, of the text’s divine inspiration), and the desire to produce a text that succeeds as a target-culture artefact (Jones 2001). The sheer linguistic, structural and referential complexity of the literary text proper means that its translators are conventionally allowed a high degree of autonomy in their decisions. Even in secular literature, however, this autonomy is constrained by cognitive and social factors. Cognitively, what translators can produce is constrained by their text-production skills, and what reader/listeners can understand is constrained by their background knowledge and text-processing abilities (Gutt 2000). Socially, literary and translational norms, i.e. implicit or
explicit ‘game-rules’ specific to a certain culture and era, constrain both the decisions which translators feel permitted to take, and how readers interpret the resulting target texts (Hermans 1999; Toury 2000).

We begin our discussion by examining how a text’s language and content might deictically signal the time and culture context of its production. Then we propose a typology of archaising and modernising target-text decisions and discuss the signals which they might potentially generate. An analysis follows of how cognitive factors might restrict the signals which translators are able to generate and the implicatures which readers are able or willing to derive from them. Finally, focusing on the case of recent translations of older texts into English, we examine the potential effect of literary and translational norms on the references which target readers might derive from archaised and modernised translation styles.

All our discussions refer to source texts where language and text-world will have appeared contemporary to their original readers but appear markedly past to present-day source readers; an example here might be Dante’s *Divina commedia*. Thus we exclude source texts, like Eco’s *Il nome della rosa*, where text world and/or language are deliberately constructed by source authors to appear past to their intended readers. Moreover, as will be shown below, the choice between archaizing and modernising appears to apply largely to the translation of secular and religious literature; hence our discussions focus on literary translation in its widest sense. For reasons of clarity, we consulted only sources which discuss translations into English (except for the invaluable theoretical input from Lefere 1994). Thus, though the model itself is not language- or culture-specific, some of the findings it generates are – in particular, the normative judgements about recent translations into English.

2. DATA SOURCES

In this article we draw on two types of source. Our first consists of published academic discussions relevant to the translating and reception of older texts. To the best of our knowledge, however, only a handful of case studies and theory-based explorations focus on this issue (e.g. Jindra 1990; Leighton 1991; Lefere 1994; Venuti 1996, 1998; Bałuk-Ulewiczwowa 2000; Wilczek 2002), and only Lefere (1994) systematically models the choices open to translators when dealing with older texts.

But the view from the academy is not necessarily that of translators and translation users at large. Here, for our second source, we felt that the wide-ranging and largely unvetted nature of the world-wide-web would supply useful primary data (Ó Dochartaigh 2002:199-201) about how date signals in translated texts are perceived by those involved in the translation process: critics and other readers, publishers, translation commissioners and translators themselves¹. Thus we used the Google Advanced search-engine, with translation/translating AND archaism/archaisation/archaising/modernisation/modernising as keywords, to search for documents which discussed archaizing or modernising decisions in the interlingual translation of older source texts. *Archaism* and its derivates were very productive; and though *modernisation* and its derivates gave no relevant documents within the first 50 potential hits listed, ¾ of the *archais-* documents also referred in some way to modernising decisions. After 20 relevant documents had been found, fresh documents supplied relatively few new insights, and the search was stopped.

The documents are referred to as Doc1, Doc2, etc.: for full bibliographic details, see Appendix Table 3. Only two were first written before 1990 (Doc7 in 1885, and Doc11 in 1958); but since both were posted as contributions to recent debates, it was decided to retain them as data relevant to present-day evaluations.
Table 1  Web documents: document types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of translated text</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translator’s or editor’s statement</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guidelines for translators</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essay/feature</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2  Web documents: source texts referred to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source Text</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classical (Greek/Latin) European literature</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medieval European literature</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renaissance/Baroque European literature</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European literature post 1700</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medieval Arabic literature</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible/Qur’an, hymns, liturgy</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows most documents to be translation reviews (10/20) or statements by translators and editors (7/20); two sets of translators’ guidelines (both for religious texts) form a third group. These echo three of the four translation norm-setting agents (‘criticism’, translators, and training ‘institutes’) cited by Toury (1978, reprinted 2000). All the documents discuss translations into English, and the range of source texts referred to (Table 2) appears representative of translations of older works now being made and/or evaluated in the English-reading world: European literature predominates (13/20), but there is a significant presence of religious texts (6/20). The implication is that archaising and modernising decisions are largely perceived to be a feature of literary and religious translation, though this does not rule out their application to other genres, such as translated citations in biographies or histories.

3. TIME REFERENCE AND DIACHRONIC CONTEXTS

‘Time deixis’ describes the use of signals which link a text to a time context. Unlike most discussions of time deixis, however, we are not concerned with how a text uses adverbials or tense-forms (such as now, by the end of the century, will have) to refer to an immediate micro-context. Instead, we focus on how a text might deictically signal the time of its own production (Richardson 1998). Such signals may be seen as falling into two main types:

- Historically datable linguistic forms. English examples might be Whither goest thou? or fab, which would signal that the text was written or spoken in the late 16th or the late 20th century respectively.
- Reference to artefacts, situations, etc. peculiar to a certain historical period. Examples might be pardoner or slide rule, which would site the text in the European Middle Ages or the 19th-20th century respectively.

It is important to note that any utterance shows a choice of register, so that no form of language is stylistically unmarked per se: modernity is no less a deictic property than outdatedness, as Richardson (1998) points out. Thus a modern British speaker who says Fancy a pub lunch? is unavoidably signalling the fact s/he is speaking in the late-20th or early-21st century (pub lunches are a fairly recent phenomenon, as is the use of Fancy to mean ‘Would you like’). Moreover, the time being signalled might be the actual time of text production, or might be a time in which the producer wishes to situate the text. Hence the same speaker may choose to situate his/her discourse in a pre-modern age by saying Let’s repair to yonder hostelry. The translator of an older text has a similar choice of time-styles, and therefore of time-signals. Thus Brisset (2000) asks whether Dante and Chaucer should be translated into a form of the target language more or less contemporary with their composition so as to re-
create a similar effect of historical distance for the target reader, or conversely if it would be appropriate to render Cicero in the style of a well-known contemporary politician, presumably to demonstrate the universality of political ideas.

The receivers of a text interpret deictic signals in the light of communicative context. For the reader of an older original text, this context is ‘diachronic’. In other words, it potentially incorporates the time of writing, the time of reading and all points between: thus a 21st-century English reader can interpret the language and gender relations of Jane Eyre in 19th-century, 20th-century and 21st-century terms. When an older work is translated, the translator interprets the source text in the diachronic context of his or her reading – seeing Jane Eyre as having modern-day relevance, for example. This interpretation then informs his or her writing – prompting the translator to use markedly modern idioms in dialogue, say. Readers of translated literature almost always know that they are reading a text which is both new and old – a modern representation, ‘overt’ in House’s sense (1995), of an underlying, older original. They interpret the translated text, therefore, in the light of a double contextual knowledge: thus they may see the translator’s use of modern idioms in Jane Eyre as refreshing (highlighting the work’s modern-day relevance) or disturbing (clashing with their knowledge that the source text dates from the 1840s).

Before we continue, it is worth noting that time deixis may not only be a matter of grammar, vocabulary or subject-matter: discourse, style and register may also act deictically. For example, in a critique of Lattimore’s 1958 Iliad, Venuti (2000) identifies ‘Victorian poeticisms’ such as his beloved son and as when rivers in winter spate. Here, the lexical and grammatical forms are still extant per se, but their combination appears in Venuti’s eyes to signal a register now marked as non-modern. Even the choice of one literary genre above another is a potential time-deixis signal, as when Nida (1964, reprinted as Nida 2000) urges that Homer should be translated into prose because nowadays ‘we are not accustomed to having stories told to us in poetic form’. Moreover, reference to artefacts and situations can potentially encompass the whole Gedankengut or ideational world of a text. Thus Venuti (ibid.) also cites as ‘Victorian’ the phrase he strides into battle; here, though both striding and battle exist in the modern-day world, for many English readers the concept of the noble, lone warrior belongs an age before Passchendaele and the Somme. All these examples also indicate that time-deixis signals of the type examined here need not be purely temporal, but may also refer to cultural phenomena perceived to be embedded in a certain time and medium, such as ‘Victorian literature’ or even belonging to a general non-contemporary category such as ‘traditional poetic diction’.

4. TRANSLATORS’ CHOICES AND INTENTS

To turn now to translation practice, what are the time-reference options open to translators as writers, and what effects may translators intend with them? We claimed earlier that this is often seen as a bipolar choice between archaisation and modernisation – in other words, between highlighting earlier versus later aspects of the diachronic context. Six of the 20 web documents surveyed, however, mention ‘middle way’ options between archaisation and modernisation; and our claim that the translator’s communicative context is not bipolar but diachronic implies a spectrum of translation decisions.

One possible spectrum of decisions, with input from Lefere’s 1994 typology, is shown in Figure 1. Though the categories are inevitably arbitrary, the choices they represent can be seen as signalling different aspects of the target text’s diachronic context. As for the scope of these decisions, web documents and scholarly sources usually regard them as what might be termed ‘approaches’, i.e. policies towards the text as a whole (Baker 1998:passim). However, they almost certainly also operate as ‘techniques’, i.e. as solutions to individual translation
problems (Fawcett 1997), which implies that different categories of solution may be used in one text.

**Figure 1** ST-TT time-reference decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hyperarchaisation</th>
<th>Time-matched archaisation</th>
<th>Updated archaisation</th>
<th>Superficial archaisation</th>
<th>Minimal modernisation</th>
<th>Violent modernisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TT idiom</td>
<td>TT idiom</td>
<td>TT idiom non-modern but more recent than ST idiom</td>
<td>Modern TT idiom with non-modern elements.</td>
<td>Unmarked modern TT idiom</td>
<td>Markedly modern TT reference</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At one extreme, that of **hyperarchaisation** (Lefere’s *hyperarchaïsme*), the translator uses forms older than those which the source writer’s target-language contemporaries would have used. An example is Ferguson’s 2000 translation of a sonnet by Mikołaj Sęp Szarzyński (c. 1550–1581), cited by Wilczek (2002):

... Ten nasz dom – Ciało, dla zbiegłych lubości Niebacznie zajrzyć duchovi zwierzchności, Upaść na wieki żądać nie przestanie. ...

This our house – the flesh, for fleeting joy Rashly jealous of sprite its majesty, From craving fall eternal will not withhold.

Wilczek points out that, in the metaphysical context of this poem, an English contemporary of Szarzyński would have used the still-extant form *spirit*, instead of *sprite*, which is now obsolete in this sense. Hyperarchaisation, therefore, could be said to stress the antiquity of source-text composition not only by positioning the text at an even earlier date in the target culture than in the source culture, but also by deliberately avoiding modern-day reference.

**With time-matched archaisation**, the target text is calqued on the language and style of the source-writer’s target-culture contemporaries. An example is the following, which uses forms attested from 17th-century English poetry:

Prijst vry den Nachtgael,  
Als hy uw’ menigmael  
Verlust, en schatert uyt;  
Een zingend vedertje en een ghewieckt gheluydt,  
[...]

Maria Tesselschade (1594–1649)

Come, praise the Nightingale,  
Whose song doth oft assaille  
Thy sense with mocking glee;  
This warbling featherlett, this winged Melodie,  
[...]

(Tesselschade 1996: Francis Jones’ translation)
Here, linguistic deixis not only stresses the date of source-text composition, but also positions Tesselschade as analogous to the English metaphysical poets who were her contemporaries (Christopher Reid, personal communication).

An example of updated archaisation is Ezra Pound’s use of what he characterises as ‘pre-Elizabethan English’ in translating the 13th-century sonnets of Guido Cavalcanti (Pound, 1929, reprinted 2000, source text added by present authors):

Chi è questa che vèn, ch’ogn’om la mira,  
che fa tremar di chiaritate l’âre  
e mena seco Amor, si che parlare  
null’omo pote, ma ciascun sospira?
[…]

Who is she that comes, makyng turn every man’s eye  
And makyng the air to tremble with a bright clearenesse  
That leadeth with her Love, in such nearness  
No man may proffer of speech more than a sigh?
[…]

Updated archaisation is often used where the non-congruence of sub-codes between source language and target language (Brisset 2000), i.e. differences in rhetorical tradition or literary and linguistic resources between source and target communities at a certain point in time, make time-matched archaisation problematic. In the example above, Pound (ibid.) aims to give the modern English target-text reader a ‘proportionate feel of antiquity’ to that experienced by the modern Italian source-text reader. As the Italian of the 13th century is closer in form and expression to that of the present day than is the case in English, a time-matched approach would not only be culturally and linguistically out of step, but would also set up a potential comprehensibility barrier – an issue we return to below. As Pound puts it, with typical rhetorical exaggeration: ‘the ultimate Britons were at that date unbreeched, painted in woad, and grunting in an idiom far more difficult for us to master than the […] Lingua di Si’. A more extreme example would be that of translation from Ancient Greek into English: because there is no such thing as 4th-century-BC English, time-matched archaisation is impossible, and any archaisation must inevitably be of the updated or superficial type.

Superficial archaisation (Lefere’s traduction superficiellement archaïsante) involves adding lexical or syntactic archaic markers into a target text that is otherwise relatively modern, as in the following:

The nightingale we’ll praise  
That oft on high doth raise  
The heart rejoicing;  
A feathery singer and winged voice  
[…]

(Tesselschade 1996: Yann Lovelock's translation)

These markers, such as the lexical item oft, the morpheme doth and word-order inversion, often belong to a standardised archaic register of easily recognisable features which are unlinked to a specific time period. Thus Lovelock marks Tesselschade’s poem as ‘past’, without bringing in the time- and culture-specific analogies generated by time-matched and updated archaisation. Alternatively, such devices may indicate a more general ‘traditional poetic’ diction – an issue we examine later.
**Minimal modernisation** (*traduction minimallement modernisante*) Lefere defines as ‘modernisation exclusivement linguistique’; to which one might add that the target idiom is conventionally seen as not debarring pre-modern reference, as in the following example:

Oh, praise the bird of night  
Which often brings delight  
When it begins to sing;  
A plume of song, of music on the wing,  
[…]

(Tesselschade 1996: Paul Vincent's translation)

Bałuk-Ulewiczowa (2000) sees this approach as stressing the ‘secular characteristics’ of the time of translating: hence Vincent’s version of Tesselschade's poem relates it to a generalised ‘nowadays’. Richardson (1998:128-129), citing Vladova (1993), adds the claim that linguistic modernisation best enables a work to be situated temporally for the reader, arguing that the contrast between modern-day language on the one hand and ‘references in the text to archaic forms and artefacts’ on the other hand ‘emphasise[e] the outdatedness of these references’.

With **violent modernisation** (Lefere’s *traduction violemment modernisante*), however, references tie the target text to a specific modern-day time-period, thus stressing its relevance to the time of translating at the expense of its historicity. An example is Holmes’ illustrative version of a rondel by Charles d’Orléans (1988, cited in Doc5):

Jeunes amoureux nouveaux,  
En la nouvelle saison,  
Par les rues, sans raison,  
Chevauchent faisans les saulx.  
[…]

Young rockers with a bird in tow,  
Now the long evenings are here,  
Revving their engines, changing gear,  
Up and down the street they go.  
[…]

The fact that the time reference in violent modernisation is more specific and thus narrower than in minimal modernisation, however, means that it also more quickly comes to highlight another aspect of the text’s diachronic context: the time-gap between the writing of the translation and its reading. Hence, to the early 21st-century reader, once-current words like *rockers* in Holmes’ version are already outmoded, situating the text as having been translated sometime in the 1960s or 1970s.

The examples above show how the different tactics can be used consciously or unconsciously by translators to express different aspects of a text’s diachronic context. Doc5 relates how translators’ intents and therefore choices changed over time, following changes in their readings of the source text and in their vision of the target text’s purpose (cf. Vermeer 2000). Initially, the translators saw their goal as introducing the 15th-century Catalan poet Ausias March to a broad English readership, which meant avoiding techniques that signalled either a historical source time or authorial idiosyncrasies. This normalising drive (Jones 1999) prompted an approach of minimal modernisation:

It would be ingenuous in the extreme [...] to imagine that the contemporary English readership would accept with alacrity the archaic idiom and abstruseness of the brooding introspective March.  
[…]. As a result, our effort endeavoured initially to become more reader-friendly, perhaps
excessively so. The act of reading was facilitated, orthography modernised, ellipsis fleshed out, expression updated and linguistic complexities partially resolved.

An example given by Doc5 is:

It is through Love that I am come to this:  
I lose the world as love I cannot feel,  
This I might do if He would but allow  
That I could come to love without Love’s help.

Gradually, however, the translators’ priorities changed towards ‘an acceptance of the validity of the presence of the original’. Here, superficial-archaising techniques were part of a wider drive to stress the poet’s difference from what would be familiar to target readers (cf. Venuti 1998:14-16):

[The] initial impulse to move March towards the anglophone reader has been qualitatively reversed. Firstly, the tendency to update lexis semantically is less evident[,] […] as an opposing drift towards a certain archaism is detected in words like ‘goods movable (furniture); regard (look); dolour; wench’. The verbal element corresponds to this new direction both in recourse to obsolete forms, ‘trow, guerdoned’ and also inflection and word order, ‘believeth; me compensate’. More impressive, however, is the fidelity shown to the original syntax where there are only very minor changes made. […] What also becomes apparent in this case […] is that it also renders better the tortuous, uncompromising austerity which is such a vital facet of March’s unmistakable idiom.

On the evidence so far, it would appear that no position on the spectrum sketched above is intrinsically superior to others, but that translators’ preferences will vary, depending on what they want to achieve. Bałuk-Ulewiczova (2000) argues that, though archaisation requires the translator to perform an artificial ‘bear-dance’, the same applies to any act of translation. In other words, no translation is transparent: any translation refers not only to the source text, but also to the diachronic context of its recreation in a receptor language. Whether the translator uses modernisation to highlight modern-day aspects of this context or archaisation to highlight its historical aspects is less important, in her view, than the fact that communication should be effective – that 'the translator’s artificiality should be trustworthy”:

Just as the director of a play is free to dress his actors up in period costumes, or to have them appear in the clothes of today, so too a translator is allowed to play as much as he wants with archaic language. The point is to satisfy the audience, to make them feel that they have been to a good play.

Bałuk-Ulewiczova (ibid.)

5. SKILL, KNOWLEDGE AND COGNITION

Effective communication, however, depends in part on cognitive factors – that is, on factors concerning the knowledge and skills of translators and readers, and how translators and readers process information in real time. However value-neutral the translation techniques described above may be in the abstract, such factors may lead to certain techniques being more or less favoured by individual translators, and their intended signals being more or less accessible to individual readers.

The first factor in communicating a set of time-deixis references is the ability of an individual translator to produce a convincing target text. And the older the target-language model being used, the greater the problems become of trying to achieve homogeneity in a dead language (Lefere 1994). Few translators, for example, have the linguistic and versifying skill
of James Holmes, who produces an illustrative arcaised version of the Charles d’Orléans rondel to parallel the modernised version cited above (1988, in Doc5):

Lusty yonge bacheleres,
In the Spring sesoun,
Ryden the streets sans resoun,
Maken to-lepen hir coursers.
[...]
readers to be justified by a ‘special pay-off’ in terms of ‘special contextual effects’ (Gutt 2000:107-111). Here, one may question whether the translator’s aim, be it to signal the *Egidiuslied*’s relationship to Middle English verse or to indicate how the original is experienced by the modern Dutch reader, is worth the difficulty which many English readers would have in deciphering the target idiom.

But it is over-simplistic to assume that there is a clear divide between archaic and modern language-use. Most adults’ linguistic repertoires are diachronic as well as synchronic, with archaic and modern language forms coexisting, even though the former may well perform a marked, register-specific role; and most adults have at least some knowledge of pre-modern life and events. Few if any adult UK listeners, for example, would find the Blackadder TV comedies or traditional folk ballads hard to understand, and many will be able to produce at least a pastiche of the latter’s diction. Hence, on cognitive grounds alone, one must not assume that archaised text is always harder to process and produce than modernised text.

What may be hard to process, however, may be texts that run counter to readers’ accepted schemata. Schema theory claims that language users’ knowledge of the world is organised in terms of mental models of phenomena that typically occur together; and phenomena that contravene these schemata tend to be perceived as cognitively jarring and thus harder to process (Anderson 1995:154 ff). To use a familiar example, UK restaurants involve ordering, eating and paying for food; hence a restaurant where the waiters refused to accept payment would disconcert most customers. Literary schemata familiar to an educated reader might include those of contemporary prose (where modern events are related in modern language), 17th-century poetry (where 17th-century or universal events are related in a 17th-century idiom), the historical novel (where past events are related in modern language), etc. A translation that fits with one of these schemata would probably be accepted by those readers who have that schema in their repertoire, but would be less likely to be accepted by those readers who do not have that schema in their repertoire. And texts that do not accord with any existing schema of integrating the pastness of the original with the linguistic and/or conceptual presentness of the translation would risk confusing or irritating most readers with the ‘discordance ontologique’ (Lefere 1994) given by their unexpected mix of deictic signals. In English, one such unexpected mix appears to be that of ‘high’ archaic and colloquial modern style. Doc1 expresses the resulting ontological discordance as follows:

Haile is trying to write in an inflated, archaic style. [...] Unfortunately, archaism is a difficult device to control. If an author has a good command of the archaic dialect in question, if his writing is idiomatic, or at least consistent enough to seem idiomatic, it can be very effective; but if an author has a poor command of the archaic dialect he is affecting, the result can’t rise above unintended burlesque. Another problem is consistency of dialect and tone: the pacing of Aristophanic comedy, for instance, is ill accommodated by stately Victorian verse; while florid Elizabethan English can only accommodate certain registers, certain modes. [...] Haile’s archaisms are poorly controlled in both senses: he slides between archaic and near-colloquial dialect without thought or reason and his tone almost never comes into alignment with his dialect.

Typically, the reviewer in Doc1 blames the first factor mentioned above, the translator’s own lack of genre proficiency (‘a poor command of the archaic dialect he is affecting’), for the discordance he senses. Equally typically, however, he makes absolutising judgments about the match between decisions along the archaising-modernising spectrum and genre (‘the pacing of Aristophanic comedy, for instance, is ill accommodated by stately Victorian verse; while florid Elizabethan English can only accommodate certain registers, certain modes’), indicating discordance at the level of literary schema. This absolutisation also indicates that the reviewer is claiming this breach of a cognitive schema to be the breach of a group norm – an issue we will turn to shortly.
Wilczek (2002) describes more explicitly, and in a less absolutising manner, how discordant signals at stylistic level can block the communication of a coherent set of time and culture references. The main problem with Ferguson’s translations of Szarzyński’s sonnets (see above), in Wilczek’s view, is their inconsistency, coupling free-verse forms and modern punctuation with (hyper)archaic vocabulary so that the combination positions itself neither as modern nor as 16th-century poetry. As Wilczek puts it, the reader of Ferguson’s versions ‘can have an impression that the text is exotic (and bizarre!) not because it represents foreign culture, a different way of thinking and a different value system, but because it sounds like a pretentious, unnatural code, resembling English Renaissance poetry while failing to share the artistic values of that poetry’.

Conversely, if a translated text fits in with a literary schema already in a reader's repertoire despite containing a mixture of archaic and modern signals, the reader may not find it hard to construct a coherent interpretation of those signals. Thus Christopher Logue’s reference to Cape Kennedy in his translations from the *Iliad*, which Steiner perceives as ‘numbingly powerful’ (1998:370) fits in with the common practice of updating the content of literary works, as in the adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* into *West Side Story*. Indeed, in such cases a radically anachronistic approach may be seen as giving a freshness of insight lacking in translations with more consistent structures of time-reference.

Nevertheless, the critiques of Haile’s Aristophanes and Ferguson’s Szarzyński have shown that skill is needed on the part of the translator if a deliberate technique of anachronism is not perceived by audiences as simply poor control of register. But whatever this skill consists of, skill may not be enough. It may also be pure chance that the writers of these critiques have a different set of schemata than Steiner: what works for one person need not work for another.

Moreover, seeing archaising and modernising decisions as deictic in nature implies that they need not accurately calque a particular idiom, as long as they result in effective communication between sender and receiver. Thus Doc19 admires Richard Burton’s translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* ‘for his unique use of language and the quaint archaic quality of the vocabulary (a vocabulary that never really existed in English of any period)’, and Doc 12 writes with regard to modernisation:

> the reader will find that though my freedmen speak a colloquial American idiom, it is colloquial by convention, and not the real speech of particular region or city.

(Doc11)

And even with time-matched archaisation, philological accuracy (e.g. whether Jones’ version of Tesselschade is a convincing copy or a crude pastiche of 17th-century metaphysical poetry) is almost certainly less important than whether the desired communication is achieved (in this case, whether the modern reader perceives Tesselschade as a cultural contemporary of Donne). After all, the recipient of the deictic signals is a real modern reader, not a 17th-century reader hypothesised four centuries later.

6. THE MEDIATING ROLE OF NORMS

Communication does not take place in a social void, and cognitive schemata are learned and enacted as much through interpersonal communication as through personal experience. Hence socially-generated norms play a crucial mediating role in the generation and interpretation of time-reference signals in translated texts. In one sense, translation norms are what might be called ‘interpretative conventions’: shared schemata which determine the implicatures that a certain group of social players typically derives from a certain text-transformation approach. In another sense, they act as ‘regulative conventions’ (Nord, 1991, in Hermans 1999:79):
internalised rules which determine how far an approach is viewed as acceptable by that group. These in turn have real-world effects, determining, for example, which approaches translators are more likely to choose, or whether a translation gets published; with religious translation, regulative conventions are often particularly prescriptive, and the penalties for transgression have sometimes been severe (Prickett 1993). Of course, interpretative and regulative uses of norms are closely linked: for example, if an approach generates implicatures which a group considers undesirable, the group will tend to stigmatisate the approach itself.

Hermans (1999:85) sees ‘metatexts’, such as the reviews, translator statements and guidelines surveyed in this study, as useful sources of data on working norms. Hence, in the sub-sections which follow, we analyse the normative judgments that appear to underlie the evaluations of techniques/approaches for dealing with older texts as indicated in our scholarly and web sources. Of course, since norms are by definition culture-specific, they can only indicate present attitudes towards archaisation and modernisation in the English-reading world, and cannot be generalised to other times or spaces. The main indicator of a shared group norm in our metatexts is an ‘observable regularity’ (Chesterman, 1993, in Hatim 2001:148; cf. Chesterman 2002), i.e. a set of shared opinions; a back-up indicator is whether a similar judgment is justified in similar terms, such as the frequent use of ‘Victorian’ or ‘Victorianisms’ in negative judgments of archaisation. Hermans adds a necessary ‘note of caution’ here: that there may be a difference between the normative ‘codes’ shown in such metatexts (i.e. judgments of what translators ought to do) and what translators actually do (1999:89-90). Hence our sources show the overt climate of values in which present-day translators of literary and religious texts into English operate, rather than the approaches and techniques which they use in practice.

In statistical terms, i.e. using our first indicator, target-text archaisation appears to be a moderately stigmatised tactic in the modern English-reading world. Of the 20 web documents surveyed, for example, only four give archaisation solely positive evaluations, as opposed to six neutral/mixed and ten negative evaluations. A similar picture, however, applies to target-text modernisation: of its 15 mentions in the web documents, only four are positive, four are neutral/mixed, and seven are negative. As for what might be a favoured norm, the strongest hint is the ‘middle-way’ solution, avoiding extremes of archaisation and modernisation, advocated in six of the 20 documents surveyed and argued against in none. The following sub-sections analyse this apparent dispreferential of both archaisation and (violent) modernisation in more detail.

6.1 Linguistic archaisation as stigmatised norm

To begin with archaisation, a commonly-held rationale for seeing it as problematic in recent translations into English is what might be called the ‘outmoded genre’ stance. Here, archaisation is seen as a typical feature of a style which is often labelled ‘Victorian’ – a style which went out of fashion with the shift to modernist aesthetics in the early 20th century. Venuti (2000), for example, criticizes the ‘mixture of current standard English with poetical archaisms’ in Mandelbaum’s 1958 translations of Ungaretti. In deictic terms, what Venuti sees as the need to position Ungaretti as a modernist poet in the reader’s eyes risks being blocked by the fact that Mandelbaum’s superficially-archaising style not only positions the text in a pre-modernist era, but is also stigmatised and thus likely to deter the reader from engaging with the text.

Though it would indeed be hard to find a justification for translating a modernist source text into a hyperarchaic pre-modernist target idiom, the archaisation-as-outmoded-genre argument is often applied to modern translations of pre-20th-century poetry. Thus Venuti (ibid.) criticizes not only the ‘Victorian poeticisms’ he identifies in Lattimore’s 1951 translation of the Iliad, as mentioned above, but also the ‘poetical words and phrases’ in
Ciardi’s 1951 translation of Dante’s *Inferno* – all of which appear to be archaisms, such as *dreer*, *piteous* and *thy*. One might view this tactic of superficial archaisation as an attempt by the translators to signal the antiquity of the source texts; to Venuti, however, this is again negated by the stigmatised association of superficial archaisation with pre-modernist poetics. And Venuti is far from alone in this judgement, as our web documents bear out. As one translator states:

> we [...] wanted to avoid archaism, a gambit of most 19th-c. translators. Dante’s Italian is NOT ‘old-fashioned’: it is fresh and vital, angular and alive. Archaism can kill that quickly.

(Doc2; punctuation corrected)

The emotive force of this statement is by no means untypical: the older norm is often characterised by metaphors of death (‘kills’), and the present-day norm by metaphors of life (‘vital’, ‘alive’). Though, as argued below, the norm-based rejection of linguistic archaisation rarely implies the deletion of reference to historical artefacts and phenomena, the updating may sometimes involve more than merely grammar and syntax. Doc6 phrases this view more sharply than most, but it is by no means unique in arguing that classical Roman and Greek poetics should be adapted to fit modernist norms:

> There is even a hint that Fagles has rescued Homer from himself, paring away verbal excesses and tedious formal conventions that hamper the drive and momentum of the poem, archaic mannerisms for which a modern reader cannot be expected to sit still.

(Doc6)

This echoes, for example, Nida’s claim cited earlier that Homer’s verse should be rendered as English prose (1964, reprinted as Nida 2000). Doc6, like Nida, also implies that archaisation may not be inappropriate for all audiences, but is inappropriate for modern-day English-speaking audiences.

The circular nature of such arguments, which assume that an undifferentiated target-culture readership knows what it likes and likes what it knows, shows the modernist stigmatisation of archaising techniques to be based on a normative judgement that has no more or less validity than the nineteenth-century favouring of archaisation which preceded it. Here, however, it is worth pointing out that what modernist theoreticians such as Pound (1929, reprinted as Pound 2000) objected to was not archaisation per se, but the fact that it had fossilised into an automatic, generalised poetic style, just as neo-Gothic architecture, originally chosen for its expression of spirituality, had become a vernacular for town halls and post offices. In other words, there were valid cultural reasons for rejecting a superficially-archaising discourse that, particularly in poetry, was signalling merely ‘this is verse’. But these need not exclude the use of more radical archaising techniques which might still have the power to signal the translated text’s specific historicity – as Pound himself demonstrated in his Cavalcanti translations cited above.

### 6.2. Modernisation and middle-way solutions

From the raw web document counts cited above, modernisation appears to be no more highly favoured than archaisation for recent translations of older texts into English. Looking more closely, however, what most sources reject is *violent* modernisation – in other words, signals that point overtly towards modern-world relevance:
I too dislike translationese and archaism and avoid them (for they trouble the illusion of reality), but equally a ruthless realism, the precise realism of a particular place and an unmistakable time, seem to me no less jarring and destructive.

(Doc11)

The most commonly proposed solution is minimal modernisation. The assumption here is that a generalised modern discourse lacks specific time-dating deixis markers, and is thus ‘timeless’ and maximally transparent:

David Luke’s recent translation […] has all the virtues of previous classic translations of Faust, and none of their shortcomings. […] It preserves the essence of Goethe’s meaning without sacrifice to archaism or over-modern idiom. It is as near an ‘equivalent’ rendering of the German as has been achieved.

(Doc8)

As with arguments against archaisation, covert and overt advocations of middle-way solutions are often, like Doc8, implicitly prescriptive in tone, indicating that here too we are dealing with regulative rather than merely interpretative conventions. The normative force of such justifications is again underpinned by reference to absolutised notions of equivalence, as in Doc8, or to appropriacy for a universal, undifferentiated reader:

More importantly for the lay reader, [the translations] are lively and readable, avoiding inappropriate archaism or colloquialism.

(Doc10)

We argued earlier that even a minimally-modernised target text carries the ‘secular characteristics’ of the time of translating (Bałuk-Ulewiczowa 2000). On the evidence of our sources, however, this appears to be overridden by the real-world fact that minimal modernisation is seen by many if not most translators and translation-users as timeless. Its actual, norm-mediated deictic effect, therefore, is more likely to be the stressing of the translated work’s universal rather than merely modern-day relevance.

6.3. Archaisation and sub-group norms

Admittedly, there are dissenting voices to the widespread condemnation of archaisation-based techniques in English, voices which stress the value of historicising the text by means of archaisation. Steiner (1998:359 ff.), for example, sees archaisation as giving a form of linguistic distancing by avoiding the current idiom, which would tie it down to a particular modern-day time and place. Since, in Steiner’s view, the time axis is perhaps more internalised than the geographical axis (that is to say, people find it easier to accept something from the history of their own culture than from a foreign culture), he sees archaisation as creating a ‘natural habitat’ in the target culture, thus enabling the foreign text to be accepted as if it were an element from the audience’s own native past. Such opinions are few and far between, however, and there is no evidence in the sources available to us that they constitute an alternative literary norm in the sense of a convention shared by producers or users of English literary works in general.

When we look at producers and users of religious translations in English, however, there does seem to be a sub-group norm which echoes Steiner’s views in advocating that archaisation should be used to ground texts in a historical tradition. The six web documents evaluating religious texts show a slight advocacy of archaisation (two positive, three neutral/mixed/nuanced, and one negative evaluation) and a more striking rejection of
modernisation (no positive, one neutral/mixed/nuanced, and three negative evaluations). Thus Doc12 states:

Hymns, prayers, biblical texts and ritual language that have become sanctioned by familiarity, personal associations and the history of God’s people should not be changed merely for the sake of modernisation.

[...]

Archaisms in language, as long as they do not pose barriers to meaning or understanding, link us with the ‘chronological communion of saints’, reminding us that the ‘faith of our fathers’ is indeed passed from generation to generation.

Doc12 also points out that audiences may expect archaic language in liturgical or hymnal translations: ‘Ordinary churchgoers [...] tend to express a strong attachment to such language’. Two factors appear to be at play here. On the one hand, archaic terminology or diction can signal a strong affective link with the target language’s liturgical tradition. Tellingly, the only negative evaluation of archaisation in a religious text (Doc20) relates to an English translation of the Qur’an: as Arabic is the only liturgical language of Islam, the target language has no liturgical status. On the other hand, earlier translations of the texts in question may well have set powerful precedents for certain textual solutions; and breaching these precedents may, by breaching textual schemata shared by the group in question, be seen as cognitively jarring by that group’s members. The latter argument is borne out by Doc12. Here, with new translations rather than re-translations, i.e. where previous translations have not set archaic precedents, the more general target-culture norm of minimal modernisation is invoked as the default approach:

Translations from other languages will normally use contemporary English, unless a specific archaic effect is intended.

In a more general sense, one might claim that a user group’s attitudes towards archaisation as a translating technique are determined by its attitude towards cultural tradition. In modernist English-language poetics, by this argument, the rejection of 19th-century poetics is linked to the rejection of archaisation in modern-day poetry translation, just as religious groups which see themselves as heirs to an unbroken liturgical tradition will tend to favour archaisation in translating liturgical texts.

6.4. Time and space variables

The fact that norms are social agreements implies not only that they may vary between sub-groups within a culture, but also that they may change over time and across geographic space. Thus the dominant English-language poetic norm for a large part of the 20th century, that of using contemporary, ‘plain’ language where possible and avoiding archaisations, was as much a phenomenon of its cultural time and place as the ‘Victorian’ tolerance of archaized diction that preceded it. Indeed, the rejection of archaisation in the English-writing world can be seen as a reaction against the existence of a particularly vigorous archaising tradition in English literature, which is linked in turn to the fact that English has a long, unbroken literary tradition over a period during which the language has undergone considerable changes. Malory, for example, produced a highly readable version of Le Morte Darthur in 1469, just before Caxton was called upon to put it into print (Vinaver 1971:vi, ix), thus keeping the diction of the late medieval romance in the public eye in Britain while elsewhere in Europe it was superseded by the more ironical Renaissance romance of Ariosto; and the Authorised Version of the Bible and Shakespeare have exerted a profound influence on the English literary language since their publication. Therefore there has been a tendency for some writers deliberately to place
themselves in this historical tradition, Spenser with his imitation of Chaucer no less than the Victorians.

Not all languages, however, have undergone similar changes in the early modern period whilst retaining such authoritative and pervasive models from that period, nor in the Romantic period were all literatures tempted to regard a patina of age as a sign of literary value. In the 19th century, for example, South Slav writers deliberately rejected the medieval tradition and used contemporary folk literature as the basis for what are now the Bosnian, Croatian and Serbian literary languages. Conversely, this means that not all modern literatures have felt the need to reject this historical rootedness in reaction to its having become a near-default mode for the previous literary generation – as seen, for example, in the interweaving of modern and medieval diction in Mak Dizdar’s *Kameni spavač* (‘Stone Sleeper’), the iconic masterwork of 20th-century Bosnian poetry (1973; cf. Buturović 2002). And even in literary cultures where historical rootedness is highly valued, as in the modern Chinese world, literary norms may advocate maintaining rather than breaking links with tradition. In both cases, translations that are archaised both in linguistic and in discourse/genre terms are much less likely to be stigmatised.

Cross-cultural differences between literary norms, however, also mean that attempts to reproduce non-contemporary language may not generate time-based connotations in all target languages: they may introduce different literary or even political connotations instead. In translating an older English text, for example, an Italian author may attempt to utilise the historical roots of his or her language by transforming Latin words according to the rules of Italian morphology. However, the resulting style may well not be seen as historicised, but simply as ‘literary’ in view of the high status of Latin as a language of culture.

### 6.5. Modern, pre-modern and post-modern approaches

For clarity’s sake, we have characterised modernising/plain-text and historicising/’poetic’ approaches to literary translation as mutually exclusive. However, the force of the polemic drive against historicising/poetic translations in the English-speaking world even now, almost a century after the supposed triumph of the modernist aesthetic, indicates that things may not be so clear-cut in practice. Whereas each of the translators quoted by Venuti (2000: see above) claims to be using ‘modern’, non-poetic language, they do not go far enough for him. It looks, in fact, as if they are consciously following one norm, that of modernism, but subconsciously feel the pull of a pre-modern norm.

With more recent translators, the adoption of archaising techniques may perhaps also be linked to a post-modern norm that stresses the multiplicity of possible readings open to a translator. This, for example, is an ethic that underpins the translation praxis of one of the present authors (see Jones’ versions of Tesselschade and the Egidiuslied above, and Jones 2002). It also fits in with a recent drive in translation theory advocating radical approaches to conveying the double non-normality of translated literary text: the unfamiliarity of the foreign, plus the ‘specialness’ of literature. Indeed, though he condemns unthinking archaisation as part of an unmarked poetic diction (2000), Venuti is one of the few translation scholars to see the potential value of deliberate archaisation in helping to convey this double non-normality (1996; 1998:14-16).

### 7. CONCLUSION

In this article we have endeavoured to model the target text choices open to translators translating older literary and religious texts, the deictic effects of these choices, and the key factors which might affect translators’ decisions and readers’ interpretations. The spectrum of translator techniques and approaches presented in Section 4 is in principle non-judgemental.
Though each highlights different aspects of the diachronic context which stretches from the time and culture of the source text’s composition to the time and culture of the target text’s reading, no technique is superior to any other, at least in the abstract. Archaising decisions, for example, can situate the target text in its source culture, but they can risk creating a past that is at best ‘phony’ (Czerniawski, cited by Wilczek 2002) and at worst incomprehensible to the target reader. Modernising decisions, by contrast, can stress the relevance of the text to the modern reader, but risk deracinating the text from its source-culture context.

Texts, however, do not exist in the abstract: they are interpersonal communicative acts performed in the real world. This means that there are clear limits on the translator’s verbal and compositional skill in communicating a certain interpretation of the source text’s diachronic context to the reader or listener. Similarly, there are limits to how far individual readers are able or willing to decipher a text written in an unfamiliar idiom of the target language. Moreover, texts cannot be separated from their social environment of production and use. This means that different user-groups may have different expectations as to which aspects of a text’s diachronic context should be stressed, expectations which determine which approaches and techniques translators are likely to use. Nevertheless, what one reader finds cognitively challenging another may find stimulating; and norms can change through time and vary across geographical space. In the end, what counts is the effectiveness of the communicative chain from the source text writer via the translator to a particular reader. The fact that one translator conveys a Renaissance source text by imitating a 16th-century target-culture text and another by giving it 21st-century features probably matters less than whether they do so in a way which enthuses at least some of their readers.

There is, of course, need for further research in this still under-examined field of translation theory and practice. In this article we have examined some key principles which might condition translator choice when translating older texts. But there are other potential principles: we have not, for example, examined the role of ideological and economic factors in determining translating style and publishers’ and readers’ preferences. Nor have we examined in any generalisable manner to what extent translators and publishers conform to the normative statements surveyed here (cf. Hermans 1999:86-91) – even for the translations into English surveyed in this article. This gives a double research priority: to examine which techniques and approaches are actually used in published translations of older texts, but also to gather comparative data on norms and praxis in other target languages.

REFERENCES


## APPENDIX

### Table 3  Web texts in the sample: bibliographic data

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NOTES

1 Some of these perceptions may be opinionated or self-serving; this, however, reflects the nature of perceptions in the real world.

2 One text contains features of two categories and is therefore double-logged.

3 These may include a graphemic level, as in the notorious ‘Ye Olde Tea Shoppe’.

4 Original emphasis.

5 The first two series of which were set in medieval and in 16th-century England.