A Metalinguistic View of Rushdie's 'Stammering Puns' in *The Satanic Verses*

Philippe De Brabanter

Université Libre de Bruxelles

pdebraba@ulb.ac.be

This paper sets out: first to briefly examine why wordplay (and incidentally poetry) often poses apparently insurmountable difficulties in translation. To that end, I will successively consider the entanglement of form and content, the metalinguistic dimension of punning, reflected meaning (Leech, 1981), and metalinguistic connotation (Rey-Debove, 1997). Subsequently, in the light of these reflections, I will turn my attention to the way in which a special brand of wordplay was dealt with in the French translation of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. This unusual kind of pun might be labelled the 'meaningful stammer':[1] Sisodia, an Indian film producer, has a bad stutter that 'accidentally' endows his utterances with an additional layer of meaning:

> (1) 'For the moomoo movies also TV and economics have Delhi Delhi deleterious effects.' (519)

Finally, drawing on this discussion, I will argue that a more acute awareness of the mechanisms that underlie puns — which mechanisms I suggest are metalinguistic — make better results possible in the translation of puns.

1. Introduction

There is a widespread notion that wordplay[2] is untranslatable. The idea crops up both in scholarly discussions of translation and in translations themselves, where translators are at times forced to confess to their helplessness in humiliating footnotes. Historically, translation critics and theorists have discussed the so-called 'impossibility of translation' in reference to poetry rather than wordplay. That may be because, as Cary suggested, "for a long time the translation of poetry was the dominant kind of translation" (1957: 11). Relying on several quotations of scholars who believe poetic translation to be (virtually) unfeasible, Cary insists on the harmony between content and form, on how the words or the rhythm (i.e. the language) fit the meaning or the thoughts. Cary offers a faithful illustration of a standard conception of the untranslatability of poetry, one which is found notably in such classics as Mounin's *Les belles infidèles* or Savory's *The Art of Translation* (1968: 77).

Such a conception is expressed in this peremptory assertion about Jakobson's

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[1]   A remark on typographical conventions: simple inverted commas will be used for terms of art or to express tentativeness (and when necessary for embedded quotes); double inverted commas will be used for quotations from other authors; French quotation marks will be used for signifieds and for quotations in French. Italics will be used to indicate smaller units (words or phrases) in autonymic (i.e. self-referential) use. Naturally, they will also be used ordinarily for emphasis. Finally, original typographical choices will be kept in quotations provided they do not create ambiguity.

[2]   I shall be using *wordplay* and *pun(ning)* indifferently.

poetics: "I would say that Jakobson was the first scholar, the first specialist of poetry to take quite seriously what genuine poets and genuine artists have always known to be true: in art, form and content are intimately linked — 'what non-artists call form, [the artist] experiences as the content, as the thing itself'" (Ruwet, 1989: 18, translation mine).[3] It is clear that these views are endorsed by many a contemporary translation scholar: talking about 'connotations,' which he regards as a central problem of translation, Ladmiral writes that "the experience of translating shows [...] that there is a coincidence of meaning and style, of 'form' and 'content,' and that the two will have to be translated together, in their indissociable unity" (1994: 128). And Langeveld states that "the major translation problem is not the content but the form, or rather: the content in combination with the form" (1986: 124).

2. Wordplay

2.1. Form and content entangled

Delabastita (1993: 171-190) provides a remarkable summary of traditional views on the translation of wordplay. Most scholars and translators quoted — and there are a lot — agree that wordplay is impossible, or at least extremely difficult, to translate. The central theoretical argument that emerges is that "the purely formal features of a punning phrase make an essential contribution to its semantics and total communicative impact" (179). This clearly runs parallel with standard views on the translation of poetry. Indeed, some scholars go so far as to claim that punning is an essentially poetic device, or even that punning 'reigns over' poetry (Jakobson).

In the sections that follow, I shall look into the notion that, whether in poetry or in wordplay, form and content are inextricably intertwined. Relying on theoretical concepts developed notably by Leech and Rey-Debove, I will try to give a more precise account of what exactly is meant by this entanglement of form and content.

2.2. The metalinguistic dimension

To my knowledge, Peter Newmark is the first translation writer who has explicitly thrown a bridge between wordplay and the "metalingual function of language," which he defines as "the capacity of a language to describe or to illustrate one or more of its own peculiarities" (1981: 105).[4] Curiously, Newmark is content with *including* wordplay in the chapter he devotes to "Translation and the metalingual function of language": he does not bother to clarify in what respect(s) wordplay is metalinguistic. His perfunctory manner is unexpected because the examples he considers are very varied in kind, ranging from the obviously metalinguistic (an article on phrasal verbs in

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[3]   Unless otherwise stated, all translations are mine.

[4]   The notion is borrowed from Jakobson's "Linguistics and Poetics," where the metalingual function is outlined rather than defined. Jakobson talks of "sentences [that] convey information merely about the lexical code of English" (1981: 25). Newmark significantly extends the scope of the notion. Note that I shall use *metalingual* when I refer to theories which favour that term. However, in this article the two words, *metalingual* and *metalinguistic*, apply to exactly the same phenomena.

English) to instances that, *pace* Newmark, are actually not metalinguistic (but may call for a metalinguistic gloss in translation). It becomes very difficult to grasp exactly what Newmark means by 'metalingual' when one considers that under the same heading he also examines such poetic devices as assonance, alliteration, and metaphor. It is unlikely that all of these phenomena rest on identical metalinguistic mechanisms. However, this is not the place to assess the theoretical consistency of a writer whose goals are chiefly practical. Newmark's merit lies elsewhere: his views are often challenging and thought-provoking, and so is the idea of connecting puns and metalinguistic use.

Delabastita, who elsewhere is reprimanded by Newmark (1993: 129) for indulging in needlessly abstract theorising, makes a similar point to Newmark's, and in a more articulate way. In Delabastita's view, wordplay provides a comment on the 'code' (Saussure's *langue*, as distinct from *parole*) from which it draws its material, a comment that, say, a metaphor or a metonymy do not provide, unless these are so standard as to be codified in the lexicon. As Delabastita puts it, "in the terms of Jakobson's communication model, wordplay typically fulfils the referential function (wordplay as object-oriented language) and the metalingual function (wordplay as comment on the medium) *simultaneously*" (1993: 68).[5] This brilliant insight is at the basis of the next two sections.

2.3. Reflected meaning

A link can be established between Delabastita's citation and what Leech has named the 'reflected meaning' of a lexical item. The link is not self-evident, because Leech does not talk about puns. I shall nevertheless try to show that it exists. Leech sums up reflected meaning as "[w]hat is communicated through association with another sense of the same expression" (1981: 23), and remarks that "it has become increasingly difficult to use terms like *intercourse*, *ejaculation*, and *erection* in 'innocent' senses without conjuring up their sexual associations" (1981: 17). In the context of translation theory, Hervey & Higgins adopt Leech's notion but redefine it as "the meaning given to an expression over and above its literal meaning by the fact that its *form* is reminiscent of the completely different meaning of a *homonymic or near-homonymic expression*" (1992: 105; original emphasis). In other words, Leech locates reflected meaning in polysemy, while Hervey & Higgins do so in homonymy. At first sight, this discrepancy does not matter much: the boundaries of polysemy and homonymy are notoriously fuzzy, and, depending on the viewpoint adopted, it is not unusual for two homonyms to be regarded as a polyseme and vice-versa (See e.g. Delabastita, 1993: 104-05, 108; Palmer, 1981: 100-08; Leech, 1981: 227-29). There is nevertheless another difference, one that can easily be missed: I will return to it in **2.4.**

The point that deserves our attention now is the fact that the perception of

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5   W. Terrence Gordon makes a similar observation, albeit in less theoretical terms: "Such is the paradox [...] of all word-play, which refuses to allow language to abut in a simple and conventional way on the real world of somethings. *Linguistic humor turns language back on itself* and creates a new world of meaning, by *forging* unexpected links among words" (1986: 146, emphasis mine).

reflected meaning requires some sort of metalinguistic operation: if I fall about laughing when I hear someone say

(2) Ce salaud m'a regardé d'un air concupiscent,

it is because I have realised (or remembered) that *concupiscent* (« lustful ») can be broken down into three words, *con*, *cul*, and *pissant*, whose concatenation is homophonic with the initial word, and all of which have relevant sexual and excretory associations. What is worth pointing up is that other *signs* have been conjured up, not just signifieds. The relevance of this distinction will come out clearly in my discussion of metalinguistic connotation below.

Of course example (2) is not originally a pun, and one might object that I have yet to demonstrate the relevance of reflected meaning to punning. It is true that neither Leech nor Hervey & Higgins state that puns can be based on reflected meaning. But the latter suggest something to that effect when they focus their attention on avoiding unwanted reflected meanings, as, they claim, might happen "if one wrote 'Holy Spirit' just after reference to Communion wine" (1992: 105), because the context might help *Spirit* to conjure up the idea of alcoholic drinks. A better example maybe: "whatever the ST [source-text] expression may be, the phrase 'a well-hung door' in a D.I.Y. manual just will not do, and the editor will suggest that the translator think again" (1992: 191). What Hervey and Higgins are warning translators against is the occurrence of involuntary puns: they do not want a translation to conjure up unwittingly images of a holy bottle of wine, or of a door endowed with a large penis (and who knows what goes on in the mind of a D.I.Y. enthusiast?).

Other translation scholars had made a similar point, thereby showing that reflected meaning had been recognised long before the notion was theorised. For instance, Nida & Taber warned Bible translators of the pitfalls that attend the reading aloud of the Scriptures:

In some languages, *e.g.*, Portuguese, it is quite common for people to listen for combinations of sounds (usually the endings of words combined with the initial portions of following words) which have vulgar or obscene meanings. This means that one must carefully read all translations of the Bible so as to avoid any combination of sounds which can be reinterpreted as a different and unacceptable word. (1969: 30)

More relevant than the question whether some nations have a dirtier mind than others is the fact that this passage comes under the heading *Unintentional oral puns should be carefully avoided*. The idea that (as yet unnamed) reflected meaning was liable to spark off unsuitable hilarity had even been conceived earlier by Forster:

I was consulted a short time ago about a projected translation of a novel which had just appeared in Germany. One of the principal characters is called Egbert, and referred to by his friends throughout the book as 'Eg.' This is obviously impossible in English; he is not a comic character and it is a *very* serious novel. (1958: 26)

By now, one should be able to see how reflected meaning can be (and has been) put to good use in genuine puns. As a matter of fact, one is struck by the similarity between the definitions of *reflected meaning* given above and that of *pun* in, for instance, the *Longman Dictionary of the English Language*: "a witticism involving the use of a word with more than one meaning, or of words having the same, or nearly the same, sound but different meanings" (1991: 1300). The main difference is that the pun is presented as a particular speech act — a witticism — but it is a speech act that depends on something that is very much like reflected meaning. In other words, one could claim that puns are deliberate uses of reflected meaning for humorous purposes.

2.4. Metalinguistic connotation

In addition to its kinship with reflected meaning, Delabastita's citation is also congruent with what the French linguist Rey-Debove has termed 'autonymic connotation' but which I shall call 'metalinguistic connotation' for reasons that I have developed elsewhere (De Brabanter, 1999). Metalinguistic connotation applies to signs that, in addition to an ordinary denoted content, also have a connoted content which is itself a sign. Rey-Debove relies on Hjelmslev's definition of different sorts of semiotic systems: in a nutshell, an ordinary sign is made up of an expression (E = signifier) and a content (C = signified), and can be represented by the formula E (C). Connotation occurs when an ordinary sign is itself the signifier of a higher-order sign, as represented by [E (C)] (C). Metalanguage is characterised by a signified that is itself a sign: E (E (C)). In the case of metalinguistic connotation, both the signifier and the signified are signs, as shown by the formula: [E (C)] (E (C)). The denoted content (the first C) is what the sign says about 'the world,' while the connoted content (the (E (C)) to the right) is what it says about language.

A useful illustration is provided by a sentence like "That company has found a niche, as marketing directors say": *niche* first signifies « a small group identified as customers for a particular range of products or services », and then, because of the gloss that follows, it is reexamined as signifying « <u>the word n-i-c-h-e</u>, which means "a small group identified as customers for a particular range of products or services". » To establish a parallel with reflected meaning, let us take up example (2) again: it may be argued that the ordinary sign $E_1 (C_1)$, with C_1 = « lustful », connotes three signs Ei (Ci), where E_2 = c-o-n and C_2 = « a bloody fool » or « a woman's genitals », E_3 = c-u-l, etc. The whole formula would be $[E_1 (C_1)] ((E_2 (C_2)) + E_3 (C_3) + E_4 (C_4))$.

Autonymic connotation appears to cover a wider range of phenomena than does reflected meaning. For instance, the *niche* example does not come under the latter category. But the question remains whether all instances of reflected meaning can be accounted for in terms of metalinguistic connotation. First, it needs to be said that Leech regards reflected meaning as one of five types of 'associative meaning,' a term which subsumes those aspects of meaning that "have the same open-ended, variable character" (1981: 18), and which can be explained in terms of "an elementary 'associationist' theory of mental connections based upon contiguities of experience" (*ibid*.). Thus, what

Leech calls 'associative meaning' is very similar to a standard concept of (linguistic) connotation. Leech himself insists that the five types of associative meaning "have more in common with connotative meaning [which is one of the five] than with conceptual meaning" (*ibid.*). As a matter of fact, connotative meaning is defined as "the 'real world' experience one associates with an expression when one uses or hears it" (1981: 12). The reference to *experience* confirms the affinity between connotation and the other four kinds of associative meaning. It is no wonder then that (at least some instances of) reflected meaning should also fall under the heading of metalinguistic *connotation*.

But this parallel may not be enough. In Leech's definition, the focus is on polysemy, and what is 'reflected' is not a sign but 'another sense' of an expression. In other words, if Leech is right, reflected meaning corresponds in Hjelmslevian terms to a plain case of connotation, not of metalanguage, and we have the formula [E (C)] (C). As I enigmatically implied in **2.3.**, Hervey & Higgins's definition, by pointing at homonymy, leaves the door open to genuine metalinguistic connotation: a (near-)homonym is a different sign (with a close or identical signifier), so that when reflected meaning involves homonyms, it cannot simply be an additional signified that is connoted but a whole new sign. The difficulties raised by polysemy and homonymy are quite inextricable,[6] and it is not possible to sort them out within the scope of the present paper. It is therefore advisable to tackle actual examples and see how these can be read:

> (3) The City's administrative centre was like a giant-scaled village green, with three municipal erections boxing it in.

Here, « something built » and « enlarged and hardened penis » are two senses of a single polysemous lexical item. No dirty-minded reader (Portuguese or other...) will fail to see the second sense under or behind or 'shining through' the first one. The question, though, is whether he or she will need the second, connoted, sense to be supported by its signifier. I assume that most people would argue that in this occurrence only a signified is connoted: nothing warrants going to the extra cognitive cost of mobilising a complete sign. This does not detract from the fact that homonymy/homophony-based puns, whether intentional or not, can be accounted for quite satisfactorily in terms of metalinguistic connotation. And, on a principle of analogy, one might equally be tempted to maintain that puns grounded in polysemy function in an identical manner. Here, theoretical economy would compensate increased cognitive cost.[7]

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6 Rey-Debove's own hesitations bear witness to that: in the *bâtards* example mentioned below, she regards the senses « a natural child » and « a sort of Vienna roll baked in France » as pertaining to two homonyms. Elsewhere, these two senses are treated under one and the same polysemous entry: *Le Petit Robert*, 1994 ed., of whose editorial board she is the chief secretary.

7 Similar difficulties crop up in the analysis of the following sentences from the British National Corpus:
   (4) Tail fully erect with the tip stiffly vertical. An intense greeting display with no reservations. (Desmond Morris)
   (5) 'Ha!' the Major ejaculated again, pulling his mount to a standstill.

I will close this section with a final remark about Rey-Debove's framework:[8] the author herself points out the connection between puns (*calembours*) and autonymic connotation: "Autonymic connotation enables one to make all sorts of plays on words since it relies on a sign (hence a signifier), [...] and leads directly to puns, which are deliberate cases of homonymy" (1997: 280-81). That claim is illustrated with the example "Les boulangers font des bâtards." Elsewhere, Rey-Debove had written that "connoting a homo*phone* is the very basis of punning" (1997: 253, emphasis mine). In spite of the inconsistency — what is connoted is a sign with the same signifier (homonymy) or with a close but distinct signifier (homophony) — the main point remains valid: puns resort to some variety of metalinguistic connotation, i.e. an initial sign evokes another sign that has a different signified.

2.5. A provisional conclusion

I have insisted that puns (usually) rely on a metalinguistic mechanism, which can often be accounted for in terms of reflected meaning and/or metalinguistic connotation. Still, that does not mean that puns can be reduced to a mere metalinguistic mechanism: Delabastita (see **2.2**) rightly underlined that puns signify both the world (denotatively) and language (connotatively) — these two levels are inherent in metalinguistic connotation —, and it also needs to be borne in mind that puns fulfill an intention to make people laugh or smile. Thus, in translation, they will be treated differently not only from sentences that signify nothing but the world, but also from other kinds of metalinguistic discourse, in particular those sentences that signify or designate *nothing but* (aspects of) language. A case in point is autonyms and autonymic sentences (cf. Rey-Debove, 1997: 57-162; 163-250), but it is impossible to discuss the complex problems they raise within the limits of this paper.

I must also warn readers that this paper does not address the difficult issue of the boundaries of the 'metalingual' and the 'poetic' in Jakobson's sense. As was hinted earlier, Jakobson regards puns as essentially poetic. I hope I have been able to show that they usually involve a metalinguistic mechanism. This, rather than pointing up an inconsistency, may simply mean that the borderline between the metalingual and the poetic functions is fuzzy indeed: there may be some overlap. As a matter of fact, the groupe μ (1982: 23-24) reproaches Jakobson with not having noticed that the message — i.e. the focus (the 'set', the *Einstellung*) of the poetic function — subsumes the other five factors required in an act of verbal communication — addresser, addressee, code, context, contact. On this reading then, a poetic utterance may include a metalingual

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Both examples are taken out of their contexts, and this is a potential weakness in my argument. But that is actually not the point here: all I want to point at is the possibility of unintentionally causing hilarity. Actualisation of that potential will depend on numerous contextual factors. Note, however, how fraught with possible double entendres (4) is.

[8]   The interested reader can consult Rey-Debove's *Le Métalangage* (pp. 251-291), or De Brabanter (1998, 1999) for an introductory presentation and some criticism.

comment on the code as well as on the message.[9] The 'metalingual/poetic' pair of terms could also usefully be compared to the 'metalinguistic/metadiscursive' tandem, but this would be the subject of a whole new paper.

3. A meaningful stammer?

It is time to turn to the 'meaningful stammer' announced in the introduction. Can it be said to differ in any essential way from other varieties of wordplay? Not inasmuch as it relies heavily on (near-)homophony and polysemy. However, it further compounds translation difficulties by being linked to a speech disorder that conforms to a specific pattern.

The reason why the latter constraint makes translation even more perplexing is that it limits the means available to the translator to somehow get round the difficulty. The most notable of these means is *compensation* (Vinay & Darbelnet: 1977, 188-92; Hervey & Higgins: 1992, 34-40). In a nutshell, a play on certain words in a text may not be translated at that particular spot (because the target-language word or phrase that is denotatively equivalent does not allow of the same manipulation) but rather compensated for at another spot where another target-text item offers a better opportunity for punning (compensation *in place*). Alternatively, wordplay based on, say, homophony, may be translated by a pun based on polysemy (compensation *in kind*). In the case of Sisodia's involuntary punning, a radical exploitation of the latter option is hardly practicable since it would involve making Sisodia into an altogether different character, one that was not affected with a bad stammer. As a consequence, the translator is allowed less leeway, and the difficulties s/he is faced with are increased.

But before throwing in the sponge, it is useful to describe the main linguistic features of Sisodia's stammer. From the morphophonological point of view, the stammer consists mainly in the duplication of syllables[10] or parts of syllables. Here is an instance which will be further developed in the next section:

(6) 'Baback where you bibi belong: on the iska iska iscreen.' (337)

First there is a repetition of a syllable without its coda [bQ], then a double repetition of

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9   For a thorough critical assessment of Jakobson's model, see Dominicy (1991) and Ruwet (1989). In particular, Dominicy writes that "the metalinguistic use of language in itself brings into play no other function than the referential one" (160, n. 7), and that "the 'metalingual function' [is] nothing but a — no doubt very special — variant of the 'referential function'" (164, n. 15). These comments are presumably grounded in the reasonable idea that language is part of 'the world.' Both Dominicy and Ruwet also point out that Jakobson's characterisation of the poetic function as the "focus on the message for its own sake" (1981: 25) has given rise to all sorts of interpretations of poetry as self-referential, and has accordingly blurred the distinction with metalingusistic use. Savory (1968: 77) illustrates, as does Jakobson's discussion of "I like Ike" (1981: 26), the difficulties inherent in keeping those two functions apart.

10   I do not wish to enter into a discussion of the syllable: for all practical purposes, I consider that, say, "mimi miracle" includes two repetitions of the syllable [mI], even though some phonologists would argue that consonants belong to the adjacent stressed syllable and accordingly that the syllable is [mIR], as would J.C. Wells in his *English Pronunciation Dictionary*. Likewise, and less controversially, I consider "bibi belong" to include a double repetition of the syllable [bI].

the whole syllable [bI], and finally a repetition of part of the onset [sk] of a syllable preceded by [I] and followed by [´]! The sheer complexity of this example indicates that Rushdie is ready to bend Sisodia's stammer as much as required by his desire to create some new meaning. Psycholinguistics might usefully tell us whether Rushdie's playfulness nevertheless has a sound scientific basis — whether, say, "But it feels googood to let this ist ist istuff out" (343) is likely ever to be produced by a stutterer — but this is only of secondary importance to the translator: it is not functionally relevant. What matters is the stammer's verisimilitude rather than its reality: in the above example, for instance, the [I] sound convincingly reinforces both the jerkiness of Sisodia's delivery and the hissing quality of the [s], and is therefore at least plausible.

Another formal characteristic of Sisodia's speech disorder is that it chiefly involves *stressed* syllables. This appears once more to be plausible, but it also immediately raises the question as to how a French translator should deal with this feature since French makes sparser use of word-stress in speech. Here again, the answer would seem to be something to the effect that he or she should only aim at producing a French version of the stammer which has sufficient prosodic verisimilitude, never mind the precise formal properties.

From a lexical point of view, the repetitions of syllables definitely prove to have been carefully engineered, as many result in other words being created. An extra difficulty here is that these words are not exclusively English. In the first example given above, *baba* and *bibi* are Hindi words meaning respectively « father, senior person » and « lady, wife. » As regards *iska*, it may be built on the root for the Hindi word meaning « love, passion, desire, » something to which I return later.[11]

The meaningfulness of the stammer exerts a further constraint on the already daunted translator. There is no need to give in to pessimism, though: if it can be shown that translation *is* achieved effectively in plenty of instances, we may then have a case for the overall translatability of wordplay. It is nevertheless well-established that the degree of *direct* translatability will hinge to no small extent on the similarity of the codes involved. Accordingly, if it is shown that puns are often translated adequately, the good news will only apply with a degree of certainty to English-French translation, and, provided there is due empirical testing, to all translation from and into other Germanic and Romance languages.

4. Examples

The following selection should allow a look into the major difficulties with which Sisodia's stammer presents the translator. I shall not seek to conceal those nuts that are too hard to crack and then pretend that all the translational obstacles encountered were easily cleared, thus conveying the impression that perfect

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[11] Of course, one might imagine that Rushdie's playfulness extended to creating words in other languages he is familiar with, but then any repetition of sounds is likely to produce a word in one of the five thousand or so languages in the world, and the translator's competence has got to end somewhere.

translatability can be achieved. Rather, I wish to show that, with a proper analysis of the problems facing them, translators can often reach a decent end result. As was hinted previously, the passages selected call for a variety of translational solutions. Some will prove rather easy to deal with as they involve morphemes, words or phrases that are formally similar to their counterparts in French. Others will require a more indirect (compensatory) treatment. A few others still await an adequate translation.

If we now turn to the published French version, it soon appears that the translator, A. Nasier, had plenty of trouble preserving the extra layer of meaning added by Sisodia's stammer.[12] In general, Nasier tended to opt for rather scatological repetitions of syllables such as *caca*, *pipi*, *popo*, *cucu*. This is an obvious translation loss: Rushdie's puns, though sometimes merely suitable for thigh-slapping (and why not?), are often very subtly and carefully crafted.

Let us examine several examples in detail:

(7) When they knew each other better, Sisodia would send Allie into convulsions of laughter by rolling up his right trouser-leg, exposing the knee, and pronouncing, while he held his enormous wraparound movie-man glasses to his shin: 'Self pawpaw portrait.' (337)

This example can be formulated in terms of Rey-Debove's framework: since *pawpaw* originally results from a speech defect, it is not a genuine sign: it is a signifier without signified: E_1 (?). The reader, however, is likely to discern the presence of a pun — though of course it remains unprovable — because of the spelling change in the first syllable of *portrait*. Therefore, the reader will superimpose a sign (or several signs) on the initial non-sign. Hence the formula $[E_1 (?)] ((E_2 (C_2)) + (E_2 (C_2)))$, with:
E_1 = p-a-w-p-a-w
(?) = the empty signified
E_2 = p-a-w
C_2 = « an animal's foot »
The French translation has « Autoto poportrait »(367-68). This *sounds* likely to be uttered by a stammerer and is potentially funny as low comedy goes, but the trouble is that the facetious intrusion of the word *paw* — and maybe also *pawpaw* though the contextual motivation is less obvious — is entirely lost. Thus, the connoted content is virtually absent from the translation: the initially meaningless stammer does not conjure up a proper sign with its own contextually relevant meaning. That way, Sisodia's

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[12] The Dutch translation, which is otherwise quite successful, does not prove very satisfactory on that count either: "*Baback where you bibi belong: on the iska iska iscreen*" (337), which is Sisodia's repressed answer to Gibreel's question "where am I?" after the latter has been hit by Sisodia's limo and landed on the bonnet of the car, becomes "*Waar je tuh-thuishoort: in b-b-beeld*" (308), which definitely carries across into Dutch the basic meaning but fails to account for the significant addition of 'bibi' 'baba' and perhaps 'iska,' all of which are Hindi words that make sense in this context. Most of the Dutch translator's other solutions are of a similar kind.

stammer is reduced to mere slapstick. Yet, arguably, compensation was possible. One suggestion[13] is:

(7') Quand ils se connurent mieux, Sisodia faisait mourir Allie de rire en remontant la jambe droite de son pantalon jusqu'à découvrir le genou et en déclarant, tandis qu'il s'entourait le tibia de ses énormes lunettes panoramiques d'homme de cinéma: « portrait de lard lard l'artiste en ge genou jeune homme ».

The phrase is an allusion to Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, but whether the allusion is picked up by readers or not is immaterial. *Lard* (« fat ») may be regarded as a mere option whose purpose is to underline Sisodia's self-deprecating witticism, while *ge genou* (« knee ») is a mildly contrived means of creating an allusion to a relevant body part in a way that is similar to the English stammer-induced addition.

(6) 'Baback where you bibi belong: on the iska iska iscreen.' (337)

This repressed answer to Gibreel's question "'Where am I?'" has already been mentioned above. Yet, some complementary background information about the characters is needed if one is to grasp the relevance of Sisodia's words. Sisodia is a powerful Indian film producer and Gibreel Farishta is a famous Indian actor whose mental balance is temporarily upset. In this incident, *Baba* might be read as connoting a term of address used by Sisodia to greet Gibreel's unexpected landing on the bonnet of the former's limousine. The collision actually marks the end of one of Gibreel's worst schizophrenic episodes and will result in Sisodia's driving him back home to his English fiancée, his *bibi*, with whom he belongs. Furthermore, it is not impossible that *iska* is linked to the Hindi root *isq*, which quite aptly means « love, passion or desire. »[14] Nasier has "« Tutu tu es revenu à tata place: sur lélé l'écran »" (368). A *tutu* is a ballet skirt and *tata* is a mildly derogatory term for an effeminate, possibly homosexual, man. But of course these additions, if deliberately meaningful, are hardly relevant since the signifieds of the connoted contents ('C_2') are unrelated to the context. On the other hand, *lélé* (i.e. *l' ailé*: « the winged one ») is a brilliant idea if intentional (cf. *Gibreel* is the name of the archangel). Finding an alternative translation of the whole passage is difficult because some of the more obvious possibilities have to be dismissed for not performing the appropriate speech act. For instance, "« Type typique retour à ta vraie nana nature. Sur lélé l'écran »," where *type* means « man, bloke » and *nana* is a colloquial word for a girlfriend, is not a suitable reply to Gibreel's question. A more contrived, but more complete, suggestion is:

(6') « homhomme oh mais! de retour à ta vraie nana nature, sur lélé l'écran ».

The careful reader will have noticed that I have failed to account for another pun based

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[13] All my suggestions are only tentative. They are not meant as definitive translations but simply as alternatives showing how *one* of the difficulties raised by Rushdie's text can be dealt with more adequately.

[14] The difficulty is that 'isq' contains a voiceless *palatal* fricative [S] instead of an alveolar [s].

on the double meaning of *screen* i.e. the « windscreen » and the « cinema screen ».

The passage continues with "'No bobobones broken,' Sisodia told Allie. 'A mimi miracle. He ista ista istepped right in fafa front of the weewee vehicle'." Not all of these duplicated syllables appear to generate new words, which shows that at times Rushdie's manipulation of Sisodia's stammer is gratuitous. But here is how Nasier translated the last one: "« Il a mama marché juste dede devant la woiwoi woiture »" (368). The translator should at least have noticed that this is the only instance in which Sisodia turns out to be incapable of pronouncing a [v] otherwise than as a [w], so that this inability cannot be put down to the persistence in his speech of the influence of the phonological system of Hindi, in which the letter that is transliterated as <v> is usually realised as a bilabial approximant [w].[15] This observation prompts us to ponder why we are presented with such an inconsistency. The answer probably lies in the pleasure we derive from the absurd application of an adjective meaning « very small » to the film-producer's huge limousine (plus perhaps an echo of the verb *to wee-wee*, which in children's language means « to urinate »). Here again, the translator should have tried to account for the connoted content. I propose: "« Un mimi miracle. Il s'est élé élancé juste dede devant mon nain nainpétueuse auto »," where *nain* means « dwarfish » and also allows a distortion of the spelling of *impétueuse* (« impetuous »)[16]? Of course, one may object that this suggestion introduces an artificial element into the target-text so that it is no longer a translation proper. I shall return to this issue when discussing translatability in the final section.

> (8) 'No pop problem,' Sisodia would send [Allie] off with a cheery wave. 'I will iss iss issit here-only until you return. To be with Gibreel is for me a pip pip privilege.' (343)

This Sisodia says to assure Allie that he is going to take care of the ailing Gibreel while she is away. It may be assumed that, since Sisodia wants to restore Gibreel's popularity as an actor, the intrusion of *pop*, for popularity, is not accidental. *Iss*, as far as I can see, simply underlines Sisodia's 'fits and starts' and reinforces the sibilance of the [s] sound — it may also be there because in Sisodia's stammer the onset of a syllable is never repeated separately from a nucleus. As for *pip*, in spite of the many possible senses of the word, it may defeat once more my original argument that the stammer-induced syllables are deliberately meaningful. Nasier has "« Papa pas de problème », lui lançait Sisodia avec un geste gai. « Je vais rere rester ici jusqu'à votre retour. Etre avec Gigi Gibreel est pour moi un pipi privilège »" (374). Once again Sisodia falters convincingly in French. Furthermore, one may wonder if Nasier did not replace what I have read as an allusion to popularity by one to Sisodia's role as a protector (*papa*). A more straightforward solution is:

> (8') « Pas de pop problème » lui lançait Sisodia en agitant joyeusement la main pour qu'elle s'en aille.

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15   Unless, because of the intense emotion caused by Gibreel's landing on the bonnet of the car, Sisodia has a 'relapse.'

« Je vais rere rester ici jusqu'à votre retour. Etre avec Gigi Gibreel est pour moi un pipi privilège ».

But it is not equally effective since *pop* is natural and widespread in English, whereas it is a less frequent loan-word in French with a narrower scope.

(9) 'Today the top gogo goddess is absolutely Lakshmi,' Sisodia confided [...] (512)

Nasier has "« De nos jours, la dédéesse numéro un est sans conteste Lakshmi », confia Sisodia..." (548). Lakshmi, the consort of Vishnu, is the Hindu goddess of wealth and good fortune. Rushdie is playing on the polysemy of *gogo* (« up-to-date, eager, fast-growing » vs. « a sexy, alluring, gogo-dancer »). This clever convergence — achieved once again by means of metalinguistic connotation — of the worlds of money and sex in the goddess is unfortunately totally absent from Nasier's version. I suggest:

(9') « Pour ne rien vous cash cacher, la déesse la plus réputut réputée, c'est la sousou souveraine Lakshmi », confia Sisodia [...],

where *cash* and *sousou* (*sousous* is a colloquial word for money) account for the first meaning of *gogo*, and *puput* (*une pute* is a whore) account for the second. One might object that this version overdoes it a bit, which is a typical if justified criticism levelled at compensation.

On the same page, Sisodia is on a plane to India in which he meets Saladin Chamcha, the book's other main protagonist, and strikes up a conversation with him:

(10) 'Call me Whisky,' he insisted. 'What lie lie line are you in? How mum much do you earn? How long you bibi been away? You know women in town, or you want heh heh help?' (512)

This is an excellent illustration of the pointedness and versatility of Sisodia's stammer: the reader knows that Chamcha has been a liar for years and years: his line is lying. The second question *might* read as "you'd rather not tell (keep mum about) how much you earned through lying." The next as "How long has your woman (bibi) been away?" The woman in question would then be Zeeny Vakil, the Indian girlfriend from whom he was long separated. The fourth question may be understood as a mocking offer of services. Nasier writes: "« Appelez-moi Whisky, insista-t-il. Que-que faites-vous? Combien ga-gagnez-vous? Combien de tem-tem-temps êtes-vous parti? Connaissez-vous dé-dé des femmes là-là-bas, ou voulez-vous dé-dé des tuyaux? »," where most of the expressive effects are lost because there is no real metalinguistic connotation to speak of. An alternative worth considering is:

(10') « Vous faites du dupe du p'tit commerce? C'est coi quoi vos revenus? Vous avez encore de la fam fam famille ici? (or: Vous nana n'habitez plus ici depuis long longtemps?) Vous co-connaissez des femmes ici, ou vous voulez de l'hé hé aide? »

Here *dupe* means « person fooled, » *coi* is basically the same as *mum*, *fam* is

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16   Several other adjectives could do the trick here: 'inconfortable,' 'imprudent,' 'indélicat,' etc.

phonetically *femme* (« woman »), and the last question maintains the underlying sarcasm.

5. Conclusion

It appears that Nasier regularly, but not systematically, failed to account for the additional layer(s) of meaning in the source-text. More specifically, he did not consistently make allowances for metalinguistic connotation. 'Extenuating circumstances' can barely be invoked: one could argue that the English lexicon numbers more monosyllabic morphemes (or repetitive disyllabic ones) that graphically or phonically match the first (part of) syllables or morphemes of longer words. If that proportion is significantly lower in French, then the translator needs to be even more inventive than Rushdie. However, this extra difficulty is offset by the fact that the French language is fundamentally more syllabic than English. If one considers poetry or the lyrics of songs, where the prosodic and rhythmic features of languages are most sharply brought out, it appears that the syllable plays a more prominent role in French than it does in English, where the leading part is shared with word-stress. This makes English unstressed syllables unavailable for punning, while the French translator can potentially apply the stammer to just any syllable.

It is therefore reasonable to assume that Sisodia's stammer could have been handled more meaningfully. Nasier's erratic performance nevertheless denotes his partial recognition of the nature of the stammer. I tentatively suggest that Nasier underused compensation: most of his stammer affects words that are more or less literal translations of the ones on which Sisodia falters in English. I have made much more abundant use of compensation in place, an option that has several implications: 1) I have not refrained from adding here and there a word that afforded a punning opportunity and did not sound unlikely in the context; 2) I have been led in several cases to alter more or less significantly — but arguably within acceptable limits — the literal meaning of the source-text in order to make punning possible; 3) I have also settled for mere paronyms in cases where Rushdie achieved perfect homophony (compensation in kind).[17]

These 'liberties' inevitably raise an important question. Was I still *translating*? My answer is a tentative *yes*. Most linguists in their right mind have long since rejected the idea that systematic one-to-one correspondences are possible between two codes, two *langues* (e.g. Jean-René Ladmiral, 1994: 125, 222-23). This observation, rather than inducing pessimism, should prompt scholars to adjust their conception of translatability. Since systematic direct translation is not in order, then it would be inconsistent to continue relying on it as the only standard of translatability.

Delabastita proposes reading *untranslatability* as summing up the fact "that

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[17] I have also chosen to naturalize those Hindi words created by the stammer (when identified), because I have assumed that the Hindi community is much more scarce in French-speaking countries than in the UK and obviously India, which are the target-audiences of the book.

wordplay (*certain types of it more than others*) tends to resist (*to a greater or lesser extent, depending on many circumstances*) certain kinds of translation" (1997: 10). The same point is made by de Vries & Verheij (1997: 68) or, more recklessly, by Newmark, who maintains that "[i]n fact, *all* jokes are translatable, but they do not always have the same impact" (1981: 107).

In a similar vein, Gottlieb (1997) concludes, after completing a systematic empirical study of the subtitling of the satirical English programme *Carrott's Commercial Breakdown*: "[...] even in a genre as semantically and semiotically complex as the mix of stand-up comedy and punning commercials, *nearly all items of wordplay are translatable*, although some TV translators may for whatever reason not manage very well in this genre" (226; original emphasis)

When translating wordplay, Terrence Gordon advocates "subordinating the search for words of closely equivalent meaning and concentrating instead on the imitation of the word-play as process" (1986: 146). In his eyes (and ears), "Hunters shoot hares and academics split them," or even "If there's rum in the recipe, there's proof in the pudding," are perfectly adequate translations of "Les musiciens produisent des sons et les grainetiers les vendent." Never mind referential accuracy: it is the process (i.e. evoking an unexpected meaning) that is crucial to the humour. With a bit more caution, Terrence Gordon nevertheless acknowledges that in some puns, the meanings of items are important as well. The following pun occurs in a parody of Roland Barthes: "Je suis le marchand de sens; on s'arrête chez moi pour faire le plein de sens." Terrence Gordon argues that this extra difficulty does not entail relinquishing the 'humor-is-process approach,' and he suggests, turning partial homophony into complete homophony: "I am the sense merchant; people come to me to get their two sense worth" (147). I assume that the attention that Terrence Gordon says should be paid to the 'process' is comparable to awareness of metalinguistic mechanisms, and I shall agree with him that, when translating wordplay, focusing on the process is the safest way of achieving equivalence. Moreover, I shall also agree that refusing the predominance of the 'process' dimension — hence the need for creativity — is no evidence of a thirst for accuracy and faithfulness, but is rather typical of "an inexperienced or overly cautious translator" (1986: 146).

The latter judgement applies, but only to a certain extent, to Nasier. I said earlier that the French translator had partially grasped the workings of Sisodia's stammer. In other words, Nasier recognised part of Rushdie's *intention* to pun. This recognition no doubt derives from a certain degree of familiarity with Rushdie's works — the intentions are attributed to him, not to Sisodia — and with his love of humour and linguistic inventiveness. Moreover, as was hinted earlier, there are clear linguistic signals that there is more to the stammer than meets the inattentive eye. In quite a few examples the repetition of a syllable is (near-)homophonic without being homographic. Thus, "caw corpses in bubloodbaths" (343), a "fufufuck function" (421), and "Delhi Delhi deleterious effects" (519) are unmistakably meant to trigger comical associations. These distortions of spelling allow readers to assume that other less transparent

instances conceal some double meaning as well.

I will not go into the question whether punning also manifests a metalinguistic intention. It will suffice to suggest that learning or rediscovering some (very local or general) property of the language(s) involved in a pun is part and parcel of understanding it. One might venture to say that if a play on words does not 'tell' us something 'new' about language, it is likely to sound trite and fall flat. I therefore assume that for an audience to be won over and to laugh, a pun (also) needs to convey some relevant — unusual, unexpected — metalinguistic information.

By way of conclusion I should like to insist on the precariousness of the translation critic's position: surely critics can, in their best moments, provide suitable methodological advice and throw light on tricky questions, but they may also misread the communicative intentions of the translator just as the translator may presumably have in part misread the author's intentions. Ultimately, translation critics cannot help but acknowledge the role of subjectivity. Their main task is to help translators realise that their 'art' is not constrained but rather enhanced by a better understanding of the linguistic mechanisms at play in a text.

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