

“I Read it in the Original”: Translation as a Help or Hindrance in Understanding Terry Pratchett’s Discworld Novels

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Abstract

It is often considered that reading a novel in the original is better than in translation; however, there are limiting factors regarding reading in a foreign language. Detecting cultural references and identifying their referents is problematic for readers whose proficiency in the second language is not near-native-like and who do not have a good knowledge of the culture(s) in question. This paper examines the translation into Finnish of cultural references in Terry Pratchett’s book *Jingo*. Pratchett’s books not only tell a story, they also illustrate a truth of some kind: they are satirical as well as amusing. Any loss of cultural references in translation may affect these purposes.

I present the results of a questionnaire completed by Finnish university students divided into two groups, one reading the original source text and the other a translation. Categorisation of the cultural references is done according to a modified version of the systems used by Leppihalme (1997) and Ruokonen (2010). The results show that although the respondents better understood references in the original, they also misidentified some. The incidence of ‘culture bumps’ was, however, low in both texts, and the translations of the references were mostly felt to be coherent with their cotexts.

Keywords: cultural reference, Pratchett, culture bump, translation, satire

1 Introduction

It is frequently proposed in casual conversation that if one has the linguistic ability, reading a work in its original language of composition is better than turning to a translation. Such a claim, however, invokes many problematic issues, including: 1) how good should readers’ command of the language of the original be? and 2) how much cultural knowledge do they need?

In this article, I will present the results of a survey of two groups of respondents, one reading text extracts in the original and the other in translation. The respondents were Finnish university students reading short extracts from one of Terry Pratchett’s novels, *Jingo*, a work filled with cultural references of varying types, many of which contribute to his satirical style. The aim was to examine how well the readers understood the

references in the extracts and to determine whether the language in which they were reading played a role.

I first lay out the working definitions I use for terms such as 'cultural reference' and 'allusion' and explain the terms proposed for the translation strategies discussed in the paper. I next introduce the material and methods used in the data-gathering process and the respondents involved, before moving on to the main points of interest emerging from the data. Finally, I conclude with remarks on what the results may suggest and further potential avenues of research.

2 Translating cultural references

The concept of a cultural reference has had many labels, examples ranging chronologically from Peter Newmark's 'cultural word' (1988: 94–103) through Mona Baker's 'culture-specific item' (1992: 21), Christiane Nord's 'cultureme' (1997: 34) and Yves Gambier's 'cultural terms' [*termes culturels*] (2001: 224) to Maria Yarosh's 'culturally-specific elements' (2013: 55), amongst others. For the term 'allusion', the situation is reversed, since the term is well-known but the definition more fluid. It is sometimes used only of literary allusions, being then a form of intertextuality, and at other times more broadly – as Minna Ruokonen puts it, "[an] allusion is an implicit reference resembling an external referent that belongs to assumed shared knowledge" (2010: 33). Here, the 'assumed shared knowledge' refers to that between the writer and the source-culture reader. However, there are two caveats here: firstly this assumption of shared knowledge breaks down when the text is translated or is otherwise transported into a new culture, and, secondly, in some cases the external referent itself may be shared across cultures, but the manner in which it is invoked in the text may be culturally specific.

Although I feel that in general allusions are a kind of cultural reference, Ruokonen's definition of allusion is broadly equivalent to my usage of 'cultural reference' in all its essentials. Accordingly, in the data-gathering and analysis of the material from the survey, I use the term 'cultural reference' to cover both concepts since the difficulties in translation as well as in decoding by readers are identical.

In terms of difficulty for the translator, cultural references have much in common with allusions in that both refer (or allude) to something external to the text and both require that the translator first identify it and then understand its purpose. This similarity is less apparent in the original as whilst allusions in their traditional sense are certainly intended by the author to explicitly or implicitly call to mind some other text, some cultural references in the original may simply form part of the normal narrative for author and source-culture reader alike, becoming potentially problematic only in translation.

2.1 Translation strategies

There have been many attempts to categorise the various strategies available for the translation of source culture (SC) references in the source text (ST) into the target culture (TC) of the target text (TT). Nord (1990: 13), Leppihalme (1997: 79, 84), Gambier (2001: 232–233) and Ruokonen (2010: 142) all provide lists of strategies, with Ruokonen providing an interesting comparative overview of the other three mentioned. Here, I present the four strategies encountered in the translation of the eight extracts used in the questionnaire.

1) Transposition

The ST element is used untranslated in the TT in the manner of Ruokonen's strategy 'replication' or Gambier's '*emprunt direct*'. The result will either be the loss of the SC reference or its retention, depending upon how well-known the reference is for the reader. This is the strategy used in Extract 6.

2) Direct Translation

A (near) literal translation which conforms to the requirements of the target language, most similar to Gambier's '*traduction dite littérale*' and Ruokonen's 'minimum change'. This strategy can also lead to the retention or loss of the SC reference, depending upon whether the reference is understandable and recognisable in translation and in the TC. The strategy is used in Extracts 5, 7 and 8.

3) Replacement

The use of a new element, as in Ritva Leppihalme's and Ruokonen's 'replacement'. If the new element is non-referential, then the SC reference is simply lost, whereas if the element is a TC reference, then the SC reference is lost and a new TC reference created. Extract 3 is an example of replacement in which a new TC reference is created, and Extract 4 contains a non-referential element.

4) Established Translation

An existing translation of the reference in the same way as Leppihalme's 'standard translation' and Ruokonen's 'existing translation'. Such a translation is a word, phrase or other element frequently used in the TC for that specific text. Extract 1 uses a version of a common translation for a phrase used in relation to a specific Cold War weapon, while Extract 2 uses the standard translation for a well-known section of the American Constitution.

The strategy or strategies that are used lead to very different consequences for the cultural reference. How the reader experiences the text in translation will depend upon the frequency of such references, the strategies employed to translate them and the significance of the references for the work in question.

2.2 Textual Coherence

When translating cultural references, it is important that the text remain coherent even if the reference is not understood. This is also true for the original text as too many unknown references will cause the reader unnecessary 'friction' in the reading process. However, the issue of textual coherence becomes vital when translating cultural references as the choices made by the translator may create difficulties and require effort to overcome them – whether the effort is in maintaining concentration, cognitive effort in trying to decipher them or physical effort in turning to external sources to understand them. Where the cultural reference would be unclear, these 'culture bumps', as Leppihalme (1997: 4) terms them, need to be minimised, unless a work is being translated in such a way as to deliberately challenge readers.

If a cultural reference cannot be expected to be understood by the new readership, one possible response is to abandon it as a genuine reference and replace it with text that sounds plausible in the context. Ruokonen comments on textual coherence with regard to allusions in a way which is equally applicable to cultural references:

[A]n allusion already has a meaning in its cotext. In some cases, this cotextual meaning can even be *coherent* without the referent, making sense in its new cotext. However, the cotextual meaning can also be *incoherent*, in which case the allusion is hardly intelligible without its referent. (Ruokonen 2010: 57)

In the data that I provide later in section 5, an example of a translated cultural reference that should be considered incoherent with the cotext can be found in Extract 8, though many readers did not actually note this. Similarly, in Extract 5, the translation was seen as textually coherent by the readers even in cases where they failed to identify a referent. In both cases, the readers involved appear to have been content with the text as they understood it.

For translators, then, as Ruokonen later remarks, "the possibility for a non-allusive interpretation can be a good alternative [...] to keep in mind: although it may change the interpretation of the passage, it is still likely to result in a coherent target text" (2010: 110). This possibility may be problematic with regard to Pratchett's Discworld works, however, as the cultural references are part of both their humour and satire.

3 Pratchett, Discworld and *Jingo*

Terry Pratchett wrote his Discworld series over more than three decades, from the first, *The Colour of Magic* in 1983, to his last, *The Shepherd's Crown*, published posthumously in the summer of 2015, 5 months after his death. The books have been very popular in Finland, where between 1993 and 2018 all 41 of the Discworld novels have been translated. He is an important author in his genre globally, and this popularity makes studying the translation of his works relevant and useful.

The material in this paper is from *Jingo*, Pratchett's 21st Discworld book, containing his usual hallmarks of humour, cultural references and satirical observations on the human condition. The translation used is by Mika Kivimäki, an experienced translator of Pratchett books who has translated 29 of Pratchett's Discworld series for the Finnish publishing house Karisto.

In *Jingo*, Pratchett uses his customary humour to address prejudice, racism, nationalism and war. The synopsis of the book provided at terrypratchettbooks.com reads as follows:

Throughout history, there's always been a perfectly good reason to start a war. Never more so if it is over a 'strategic' piece of old rock in the middle of nowhere. It is after all every citizen's right to bear arms to defend what they consider to be their own. Even if it isn't. And in such pressing circumstances, you really shouldn't let small details like the absence of an army or indeed the money to finance one get in the way of a righteous fight with all the attendant benefits of out-and-out nationalism..." (terrypratchettbooks.com)

Pratchett's work features extensive use of wordplay and cultural references. The latter are not always strongly signalled and many are perhaps so difficult to identify that it is fair to call them obscure. However, they serve an important purpose. James Knowlson, writing about Samuel Beckett, explains how authors will work hard to place allusions and references in their work both for their own pleasure and that of their readers, and that this mutual pleasure in placing and identifying them binds the writer and reader together:

...the young, immensely well-read Beckett was fully aware of the complexity of the author-reader partnership and that in conveying the relish that he himself experienced at the literary echoes he was invoking, he was also aiming to involve the reader's own subjective responses and judgements in what can be regarded as an intellectually invigorating and mutually satisfying complicity... (Knowlson 2016: 263)

If one is to read Pratchett's books and enjoy them to the full, one needs to have a fair chance of understanding the references he has included. In this paper, I consider the extent to which such understanding is achieved by Finnish readers reading in the original or in translation. In order to assess this, I designed a questionnaire with eight extracts that each contained a cultural reference and administered it to two similar groups, one reading in English and the other in Finnish, in order to see how they fared in interpreting them.

4 Materials and methods

The purpose of the questionnaire was not to test the readers' ability to recognise that a reference was being made to something but instead to test the reader's ability to identify the referent in question and understand it. This was done in both the original and in translation in order to examine how cultural references are received and understood.

Juliane House has reservations concerning such research methods:

An equally problematic test is the one where respondents are asked to answer questions about a passage when they had only seen either original or translation, the idea being that if the answers are equivalent across respondents, the original and its translation are equivalent. This again is only a very rough test of a translation's intelligibility and of the correspondence of the content of the original and its translation. (House 2009: 46)

In the case of this research, however, I am less concerned with the intelligibility and equivalence of the text as a whole and am more interested in how specific cultural references are responded to by readers, both in the original and in translation. I believe that this method has the capacity to provide insights into how the translation of cultural references affects Finnish readers and to shed light upon whether reading the original or the translation would be better in terms of their understanding of this central element of Pratchett's style.

4.1 The questionnaire

The eight cultural references in the material consisted of two involving phrases, one involving a disparaging term, two involving lyrics, one involving personal proper names, and two involving the names of objects or products. The eight translations into Finnish use at least one of each of the four translation strategies set out in section 2.2 above: three Direct Translations, two Established Translations, two Replacements and one Transposition.

The cultural references were provided in their context. Seven of the English references had 40–75 words to help situate them, with the eighth having 171 words. Similarly, seven of the Finnish references had 37–70 words in their extracts, the eighth having 116. In each case, the actual reference was underlined in order to ensure that the respondents were able to concentrate upon understanding the reference and not expend effort on finding it. It also avoided misunderstandings about what was to be considered the reference.

The questions that the respondents were asked focussed on the following information (abbreviated here due to the limited space):

1. If the referent was known:
 - a. What was it? (testing understanding)
 - b. Did the reference make sense in context? (testing textual coherence)
2. If the referent was not known:
 - a. Was the element natural in its context? (testing textual coherence)

There were also misidentified references. This occurred when a respondent specified a referent that was not the one intended. I recorded these separately (as it affects understanding) and also whether or not the respondent had felt that the reference made

sense in context (textual coherence). I used ‘make sense’ when talking about identifying and discussing the referents themselves and ‘sound natural’ when talking about the text containing the reference. The questionnaire itself is not included here for reasons of space but is available upon request.

4.2 The respondents

The respondents were 36 university students aged between 19 and 31, with the majority (31) aged 25 and under. At the time of the research they were all in their first year of study at an English Department, though some may have studied in other departments prior to taking English as a ‘minor subject’. Their level of skill in English was relatively high as the selection process for the degree is rigorous and requires a considerable amount of reading in English.

The respondents were students of a translation class, who were asked to fill in the questionnaire as part of the course, though they were allowed to request that their data were not used in my research. A total of 36 students answered the questionnaire, of whom 18 read the English original and 18 read the Finnish translation. None refused to be part of the research.

As part of the background information, the students were asked how many novels they read per year, and whether they had read any of Terry Pratchett’s Discworld series. The information is presented in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

Table 1: Respondents’ Reading Background

Group	Novels Read per Year:				
	0	1-5	6-12	13-24	25+
English Extracts	0	7	7	2	2
Finnish Extracts	0	9	7	2	0

Table 2: Respondents’ Familiarity with the Discworld Series

Group	Has Read Discworld Novels?			
	No	Yes	English #	Finnish #
English Extracts	17	1	3	2
Finnish Extracts	17	1	1	0

Of the 18 respondents reading the extracts in English, only one had read any Terry Pratchett Discworld books – 3 in English and 2 in Finnish. Another respondent had read approximately five non-Discworld books by Pratchett, and a further one had read one non-Discworld book co-authored by Pratchett. The results were similar concerning the

18 respondents reading the questionnaire extracts in Finnish – only one had read any Terry Pratchett Discworld books, in this case just one book and in English. As a consequence, since only four of the 36 students involved had read anything by Pratchett, the data were not unduly prejudiced by prior knowledge either of the books in question or of the author's style in general. For this reason, I retained all the respondents. In a larger survey, it would be interesting to group together those familiar with Pratchett's writing style to see if their responses differ from the others.

5 Results

In this section, I present information about each extract in turn. I include the actual cultural reference itself in quotation marks, identify the intended referent, provide the corresponding translated text (also in quotation marks), and name the translation strategy employed.

For each extract, I then present the results in three tabulated parts. The first part sets out how many of the respondents identified the referent and whether they felt that it made sense – that is, how many felt they understood the role of the cultural reference. The second part presents how many of the respondents misidentified the referent and whether they felt that it made sense. Finally, the third part shows how many of the respondents failed to identify any referent, whether the intended one or not, and whether they felt that the text was coherent with the cotext. In other words, did they feel that the element containing the cultural reference nonetheless appeared natural and did not stand out unduly?

Each extract is then followed by a brief discussion that expands upon the data specific to it, examining the issues involved with each reference and the translation strategy employed. I also consider the degree of success the respondents reported, both in terms of identification of the referent and of textual coherence.

Having examined the extracts individually, I then look at the data from the overall perspective of the two groups of readers. I first discuss how well the references were understood, and then move on to look at how well the references were felt to mesh with the text surrounding them, their degree of cotextuality. This allows an assessment of the success of the references, whether understood or not.

Extract 1

Original:	" <u>which kills people but leaves buildings standing</u> "
Referent:	The neutron bomb
Translation:	" <u>joka tappaa ihmiset, mutta jättää rakennukset ehjiksi</u> "
Strategy:	Established Translation

Table 3: Responses to Extract 1

Group	Reference Recognised	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	4	4	0
Finnish Extracts	1	1	0

Group	Reference Misidentified	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	1	1	0
Finnish Extracts	1	1	0

Group	Reference not Recognised	Natural	Not Natural
English Extracts	13	10	3
Finnish Extracts	16	10	6

The reference is to the neutron bomb – a shared cultural reference, but one frequently referred to in English by the specific phrase used here. Four of those reading the original identified the weapon more or less precisely, whereas only one reader of the Finnish translation identified it correctly; a second felt it was a nuclear bomb, which it is a type of, but the others going under that more general name absolutely do *not* leave buildings standing. Of all the references, this was the one that generated the most confusion since as many as one in four of all the readers felt it seemed unnatural in context. That said, the Finnish translation generated two-thirds of these responses. The exact translation used here can be found on-line in Finnish. It is only one of a number of near-identical variants to be found but to a degree is established as the standard translation of the English phrase. It appears understandable in the context, but it may be that the young age of the respondents makes Cold War era referents hard to identify.

Extract 2

Original: “any citizen has the right to bear arms”
 Referent: The US constitution
 Translation: “jokaisella kansalaisella on oikeus kantaa aseita”
 Strategy: Established Translation

Table 4: Responses to Extract 2

Group	Reference Recognised	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	13	13	0
Finnish Extracts	8	7	1

Group	Reference Misidentified	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	0	0	0
Finnish Extracts	1	1	0

Group	Reference not Recognised	Natural	Not Natural
English Extracts	5	5	0
Finnish Extracts	9	7	2

The reference to the United States Constitution was the one that was most readily identified by the respondents. Those reading the extract in English had the highest success rate as more than two-thirds (13 of 18) identified it. Those reading the translation were less successful, but nearly half (8) managed to identify the referent. In this sense, the use of an established translation seems to have served well and this may be because the referent is still a prominent part of American life.

Extract 3

Original: “Johnny Klatchian”
 Referent: The English term ‘Johnny Foreigner’
 Translation: “Iivana Klatchilaiselle”
 Strategy: Replacement

Table 5: Responses to Extract 3

Group	Reference Recognised	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	2	2	0
Finnish Extracts	0	0	0

Group	Reference Misidentified	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	0	0	0
Finnish Extracts	2	2	0

Group	Reference not Recognised	Natural	Not Natural
English Extracts	16	12	4
Finnish Extracts	16	14	2

The referent here is the English term ‘Johnny Foreigner’, a derogatory designation for

foreigners of all types. Two respondents reading the original recognised the phrase, but four others found it unnatural, and the result of the translation is also mixed – two misidentified the referent, but only two felt the term to be unnatural, which is fewer than for the original.

The translator has created a new referent by using the somewhat derogatory Finnish term ‘iivana’ normally used of the Russians – the British (non-derogatory) use of ‘Ivan’ during the Second World War is similar. The Finnish term therefore corresponds well to the original’s ‘Johnny Klatchian’ and works well as fewer of those reading it felt it was unnatural.

Extract 4

Original: “the Artful Nudger”
 Referent: ‘The Artful Dodger’ from the Dickens novel *Oliver Twist*
 Translation: “Viekas Venkula”
 Strategy: Replacement

Table 6: Responses to Extract 4

Group	Reference Recognised	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	1	1	0
Finnish Extracts	0	0	0

Group	Reference Misidentified	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	0	0	0
Finnish Extracts	0	0	0

Group	Reference not Recognised	Natural	Not Natural
English Extracts	17	11	6
Finnish Extracts	18	16	2

In English, the name ‘the Artful Nudger’ is so heavily marked by the definite article and the verb +er ending that it has a clear parallel with its referent. That the referent is well-known in the English-speaking world is attested by the fact that typing ‘the Artful’ into the Google search engine generates the suggestion that the next word should be ‘Dodger’.

Ruokonen (2010: 57) writes about translating that ‘the coherence of cotextual meaning affects the reader’s possibilities for constructing an interpretation for the allusion, particularly if the referent is unfamiliar; incoherent allusions are also more likely to be noticed.’ Ironically, what we see here is that a full third of those reading in **English** not only failed to see the reference and were unable to create an interpretation for the name,

but they also felt that the name was problematic somehow. In contrast, almost all those reading in Finnish felt that the name was reasonable. The translator's solution to use the replacement strategy to create an entirely new, non-allusive, name seems to have worked well.

Extract 5

Original: "We don't want to fight, but—"
"By jingo, if we do [...]"
"We have no ships. We have no men. We have no money, too"
 Referent: Music hall song from 1878 by G. H. MacDermott and G. W. Hunt
 Translation: "Emme halua käydä sotaan, mutta –"
"Kautta jingon, jos me käymme [...]"
"Meillä ei ole laivoja. Meillä ei ole miehiä. Meillä ei ole rahaakaan"
 Strategy: Direct Translation

Table 7: Responses to Extract 5

Group	Reference Recognised	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	1	0	1
Finnish Extracts	0	0	0

Group	Reference Misidentified	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	0	0	0
Finnish Extracts	1	0	1

Group	Reference not Recognised	Natural	Not Natural
English Extracts	17	14	3
Finnish Extracts	17	16	1

This is perhaps the most central of the references in the book. Here, Pratchett is referring to a music hall song from the mid-19th century known as MacDermott's War Song. It is a profoundly pro-war and patriotic work that calls upon the British to fight Russia if necessary and recall their place in the world. In the extract, the students were given the elements underlined – in fact, the reference begins a line earlier with 'We don't want to fight but', but I wished to reduce the amount of underlined text. I do not feel that omitting that small element has impacted upon the respondents' ability to detect the referent.

The reference is taken from the original song almost word for word, the only

alteration being the negative form substituted in each case – that is, instead of “We have the ships, we have the men, we have the money, too,” the text reads “We have no ships, we have no men, we have no money, too.” The positive word ‘too’ is retained in Pratchett’s version to maintain the parallel structure with the referent even though this is ungrammatical given the negative structures. The Finnish translation feels no need to do the same and corrects the grammatical forms to the Finnish negative ‘-kaan’ ending.

It seems extremely unlikely that a Finnish reader would detect this reference. Of the respondents reading in English, just one reader mentioned that ‘jingo’ was a phrase used in politics but saw no further meaning in it, and another commented that it raised the question of ‘Who the hell is Jingo?’ This is despite the fact that the grammatical oddity could perhaps have served as a marker for the English-language reader that something is happening here. One respondent reading in Finnish mentioned a connection with the threat of war, and two others said that it seemed familiar but they weren’t sure why. Although the translator has used the direct translation strategy, he has modified the grammar, as noted above, and it could be that he felt that there was very little chance of the reference working, or of the grammatical issue serving as a marker, and decided that reproducing the grammatical issue would be interpreted simply as an error.

Extract 6

- Original: “His ship is the *Milka*”
- Referent: An old English advert for milk, “Drink a pinta milka day,” combined with the name of one of Columbus’s ships, the *Pinta*
- Translation: “Hänen laivansa nimi on muistaakseni *Milka*”
- Strategy: Transposition

Table 8: Responses to Extract 6

Group	Reference Recognised	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	0	0	0
Finnish Extracts	0	0	0

Group	Reference Misidentified	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	4	4	0
Finnish Extracts	1	1	0

Group	Reference not Recognised	Natural	Not Natural
English Extracts	14	13	1
Finnish Extracts	17	16	1

The transposition of the ship name from English to Finnish allows us to compare directly how well the respondents coped with the name when they were reading in each language. In neither language did any of the 36 respondents identify the reference correctly. This is hardly to be wondered at, however, given that the connection relies heavily on the reader knowing a milk advert from Britain that ran for many years from 1958 onwards. What is interesting here is that five of the respondents created their own, alternative referent, the internationally known 'Milka' chocolate brand. Ruokonen discusses this phenomenon regarding Leppihalme's reader-response tests, where a form of culture bump is created by the derivation of incorrect connotations from the wrong referent (2010: 111). Here, as with Leppihalme's example of the White Rabbit (1997: 146), the *Milka* reference is misidentified, but without any negative consequences as the respondents found an alternative amusing referent that fitted the style of the author.

Extract 7

Original: "pints of Winkle's Old Peculiar"
 Referent: The English ale 'Old Peculier' (official spelling!) brewed by Theakston
 Translation: "tuopillista Torvisimpukan Vanhaa Omituista"
 Strategy: Direct Translation

Table 9: Responses to Extract 7

Group	Reference Recognised	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	0	0	0
Finnish Extracts	0	0	0

Group	Reference Misidentified	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	0	0	0
Finnish Extracts	0	0	0

Group	Reference not Recognised	Natural	Not Natural
English Extracts	18	15	3
Finnish Extracts	18	14	4

Here, the translator has taken the idea of a beer type based upon a direct translation of the original. The source text does not incorporate the unusual spelling of the real-world referent and neither does the translation. It was only barely more confusing for those reading in Finnish than the original was for the other group and therefore appears largely cotextual.

Extract 8

Original: “The Pheasant Pluckers”
 Referent: An English tongue twister with a double meaning
 Translation: ‘Fasaaninkynijöissä’
 Strategy: Direct Translation

Table 10: Responses to Extract 8

Group	Reference Recognised	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	2	2	0
Finnish Extracts	1	1	0

Group	Reference Misidentified	Made Sense	Did Not Make Sense
English Extracts	0	0	0
Finnish Extracts	0	0	0

Group	Reference not Recognised	Natural	Not Natural
English Extracts	16	16	0
Finnish Extracts	17	15	2

This reference has been translated using the direct translation strategy. The principle oddity with this reference is that despite almost none of the respondents understanding it, all but two accepted (apparently without question) the strange name for the regiment and the reference to its marching song. Military regiments in the UK do tend to have, or have had, strange names, but there is a clue that all is not as it seems here in that one of the characters explodes into laughter upon hearing that they had a marching song that was ‘quite hard to sing right’. The first character responds to this with “Er ... sorry, miss?”, which serves as another hint that there is more is going on than simple names. In fact, the name is a tongue twister which when sung as part of a drinking song tends to give ‘accidentally’ humorous results. In theory, the character’s inexplicable reaction leads to textual incoherence for the reference, yet the respondents do not seem to have experienced it in that way.

5.1 Identification of referents by reader group

The questionnaire created a significant amount of data. Although only eight extracts were provided in the questionnaire, given that there were 36 respondents the total number of responses to the individual items was 288 (18 x 8): 144 responses from the English texts and 144 from the Finnish. When considered in this way, this is a large number of data points and makes it possible to identify some clear patterns.

One such pattern does in fact stand out. In Table 11 below, I present the percentages of the cases in which the referent was recognised, misidentified and not recognised. A glance at the table reveals just how small was the number of referents that was identified by either group. Though the number of referents successfully identified is quite different in that more than twice as many referents were identified in English as in Finnish, the actual percentage remains low (16% compared to 6.9%).

A second point is that there was actually a slightly lower rate of misidentification when reading in English. This is unexpected, since a natural assumption would be that one would make more such errors in one's second language than in one's mother tongue. Although this is a negligible difference, it is nonetheless surprising that the figures are so similar and that reading these extracts in a foreign language did not cause more problems for the respondents.

Table 11: Aggregate of Respondents' Identification of Referents

Group	Referent Recognised	Referent Misidentified	Referent Not Recognised
English Extracts (144)	23 (16.0%)	5 (3.5%)	116 (80.5%)
Finnish Extracts (144)	10 (6.9%)	6 (4.2%)	128 (88.9%)

Despite the low rate of success, it seems that here is some evidence suggesting that readers whose English language skills and cultural knowledge are of a comparable standard to these respondents perhaps should read in the original if they wish to experience as many as possible of the cultural references that Pratchett employs so freely. Further research should examine whether those who understood more references had a greater familiarity with Pratchett's work, read more in general, or were simply older and had a greater store of general knowledge.

5.2 Consideration of cotextuality by reader group

The second large-scale observation that we can make involves the textual coherence, or incoherence, of the references. How were the respondents affected when they read the extracts and encountered the references? In Table 12 below, I provide information from the data that allows an assessment of how successful the translations were overall in

terms of avoiding ‘culture bumps’. For this purpose, I have totalled the number of occasions in which the translation of the reference either made sense as a reference or was nonetheless coherent with the surrounding text. Similarly, I have totalled the number of occasions in which the reference either made no sense as a reference, or was not seen as a reference at all but seemed otherwise incoherent with the surrounding text.

Table 12: Aggregate of Respondents’ Reactions to the References

Group	Reference Made Sense or Natural-Sounding	Reference Did Not Make Sense or Unnatural-Sounding
English Extracts (144)	123 (85.2%)	21 (14.8%)
Finnish Extracts (144)	122 (84.7%)	22 (15.3%)

One can immediately see that unlike identification of the referents discussed above, the ‘overall success’ rates (cultural reference made sense + reference element was natural-sounding) are high: 85.2% and 84.7%, respectively. The figures are almost identical – just 0.5% between them. In terms of culture bump avoidance, therefore, the Finnish translation seems to be every bit as good as the English original, especially since fewer of the referents were identified in the translation, thus meaning that the unidentified references were nonetheless coherent with the surrounding text.

6 Conclusion

The questionnaire employed was intended to provide information on how cultural references were understood when two similar groups read texts in English or Finnish. There are, however, some limitations that this methodology imposes upon the research. Firstly, it is not possible to carry out a comprehensive survey of all the references in the work examined. A selection of references had to be chosen that had different types of referents and that had been translated using a variety of strategies, and it is possible that different references could have generated different results. Secondly, the respondents were not necessarily readers of Pratchett’s books. I felt, however, that if I had sought respondents who had already read Pratchett, they may well have read the book in question and may also have looked on-line at the readily available sites that discuss his references, whereas I wanted to discover how the reader experiences the text whilst reading. Thirdly, even though there were 36 respondents, increasing the number of respondents is always desirable. With further data gathering, the pattern of reader understanding will become clearer. A fourth point revolves around how well native speakers of English from the source culture identify and understand the referents – what sort of success rate do they have, and is the difference between them and Finnish readers in this regard one of degree rather than of kind? It is intended to examine this in future research. Nonetheless, despite the above caveats, the questionnaire revealed interesting patterns in the respondents’ understanding of the texts they read, and the

research brings out two main points of interest for both translators and readers.

The most striking of these points is how few of the referents were identified in either language, which is perhaps evidence of a lack of cultural knowledge in the respondents, who were mostly young. The high level of English-language skills may partially account for the fact that more referents were understood in English, as may the ubiquity of Anglo-American culture, but the very low success rate for those reading in Finnish suggests that a greater emphasis on the reader should be considered, even if this means more modification of the text through different translation strategies. As an example, the replacement strategy for the Artful Nudger/Viekas Venkula reference in Extract 4 was especially good at reducing confusion.

The other point is that a translation nonetheless remains more accessible for readers with a lower level of language skill and cultural knowledge: the Finnish translation produced the same overall level of understanding in co-textual terms. The translated extracts read well and flowed smoothly for their readers, a characteristic which doubtless improves the reader's experience. This is of course also true for a native speaker of the source culture who lacks the requisite cultural knowledge – the books are a pleasant read – but in both cases it must be accepted that much of the cultural dimension is lost.

Together, these two points reveal the difficulties in translating Pratchett. If the observations he makes regarding the human condition and references to real-world affairs are not available to readers of the translations, his works will become more one-dimensional, more simple, and solely entertainment. As a result, the satirical element will likely be reduced to the point where the books no longer possess this function. The importance of this revolves around whether readers in translation are reading his works merely for the pleasure of the fantasy plots, or whether they need the more detailed translations necessary to preserve the satire.

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