Retranslation is a paradoxical activity in that it is simultaneously both fundamentally contemporaneous, modern and forward-looking, and at the same time also fundamentally conservative and restorative. This tension between the desire to bring forth a new and fresh view and to pay homage to a prominent text that has endured time creates a double bind that plays out in the translation as well as in its reception. A third binding element in the equation of newness and longevity is provided by the pre-existing trail of translations, as retranslation by definition has to follow in the footsteps of at least one predecessor (Koskinen and Paloposki 2015a). This triple bind of newness, nostalgia and network of texts radically affects how retranslation is practiced and perceived. It provides a cognitive patterning that creates expectations and directs actions and appraisals in ways that are not always attributable to the texts themselves. Indeed, readers engaging with retranslations, be they professional critics or regular readers, will have preferences and appraisals that do not necessarily arise from careful reading of the different versions but from our preconceived cultural understandings and collective “remembrance environments” (Zerubavel 2003, p. 81). Retranslators wishing to make their mark, in turn, position themselves with regard to their predecessors, either providing a belligerent rereading of the previous translation or emphatically refusing to read the earlier translation at all for the risk of undue influence (Koskinen & Paloposki 2015a).

For the researcher, a critical analysis of the interplay of newness and nostalgia in retranslation requires close reading. This, in turn, directs research designs towards case studies. Retranslation research has indeed been characterized by a tendency toward single case studies, and these often concern world-renowned classic texts and/or exceptional retranslations that stand out in either positive or negative light. Another typical direction is general overviews and non-empirical philosophical essays (Berman 1990; Gambier 1994;
These often contain a wealth of interesting insights and arguments but scant verifications of them through empirical data.

This paper builds on my long collaboration project together with Dr. Outi Paloposki. We have been mapping retranslation both as a particular kind of translatorial activity and as an integral part of the functioning of the field of literature in Finnish/Finland (Koskinen & Paloposki 2015b; 2019). In our approach we have tried to walk a middle way between singular case studies of world literature classics and universal philosophical claims. We have engaged in a comparative close reading of various translation versions of a number of more or less renowned novels from different languages, as well as their newspaper reviews that shed light on how these novels have been read by contemporaries. At the same time, we have also needed to follow Franco Moretti’s (2000) advice of not reading to be able to see the bigger picture through a more bibliographical, quantitative approach (translation archaeology according to Anthony Pym 1998). In the project with Dr. Paloposki we traced the full translation history of 52 books in their Finnish translation (amounting to the total of 173 first translations, retranslations and revised versions). This data set is still quite small, but compared to individual cases it allows us to return to more general arguments with the backup of more extensive evidence (see Koskinen & Paloposki 2019). In keeping with the theme of the event, in this paper I focus on the interplay of newness and nostalgia from the perspective of reception and remembering, on reading and not reading in the context of retranslation.

On newness in retranslation

A retranslation is a new interpretation of an already familiar work. This set-up gives it a positive aura. For the translator an invitation to produce a retranslation is often a welcome, status-raising career opportunity. Antoine Berman (1990, p. 2) associates retranslation with great translations, claiming that first translations can never be great translations and that only retranslations can achieve this status. This requires an opportune kairos moment, but also a great translator with an exceptional translational drive (pulsion) (Berman 2009, p. 58). In our data, some prominent translators come up repeatedly, allowing us to tentatively identify some great translators whose work has had lasting value (either going unchallenged by new versions or remaining in circulation parallel to them) and who have produced several retranslations. At the same time it needs to be recognized that in terms of greatness,
retranslation functions in a self-fulfilling way: to be asked to retranslate a classic is a signal of appreciation, and having been in that role will give translators a flair of greatness that will add to the likelihood of being asked again. It operates in the same manner in terms of classichood: classics get retranslated, and retranslation raises works into the category of classics. In the temporal scheme of literature (see Casanova 2007, p. 89), retranslation allows the work to be simultaneously old and modern/contemporary, and this acquired newness propels it upward in the classics ladder.

While the argument of greatness of retranslations in itself is both difficult to ascertain (how do we measure greatness?) and also unlikely to hold in a sustained analysis of first and subsequent translations, retranslation undoubtedly tends to be cast in a positive light in reception. A new translation is often a welcome cultural event, and retranslations typically get praised for their fresh, contemporary outlook. They are also acclaimed for more accurate, closer re-rendering of the original and seen as outperforming the previous translation. In her treatise on global literary flows, Pascale Casanova (2007, p. 326) talks about second generation authors who become rebels and revolutionaries of the literary scene. In retranslation, a similar generational dynamic emerges within the context of a particular book’s translation history, casting the retranslator in the role of rebelling against the predecessor or as the carrier of a “more present present” or the “newest certified present” (ibid., p. 91). Retranslation also pushes the first translation into a status of assumed outmodedness, as the necessity of retranslating gets interpreted as a lack of fit with contemporary times in the previous version (see also Koskinen & Paloposki 2015a). The new translation, Antoine Berman says (2009, p. 28), functions like a photographic developer that exposes the old one, making its deficiencies and obsoleteness visible to us.

While casting a harsh light on the old translation, the brand-new retranslation dazzles our perception. A new translation is news, and retranslations get a lot of publicity. In our research we systematically analyzed all newspaper reviews of our retranslation subdata of year 2000 (Koskinen & Paloposki 2003; 2015b), and we also expanded this data-set with a number of reviews of earlier retranslations. Going through this set of data we have come to conclude that their standardized discourse constitutes an easily available cultural and mental model the critic can apply without actually reading the new translation and its predecessors too carefully for comparisons. A retranslation seems to activate a familiar scheme the review is
easily molded to: The new translations are seen as “modern” or “fresh”, and they are described as “more complete”, “more accurate”, “closer to the original” than their predecessors. In research, closeness and accuracy have been found elusive concepts (Koskinen & Paloposki 2015b), and in some cases reviews go against factual evidence (Koskinen & Paloposki 2003). Newness and freshness as well as the idea of improvement can be seen as a “conventionalized social typification” (Zerubavel 2003, p. 89), readily available for reviewers struggling in the busy world of journalism. The scheme pushes forward a particular narrative structure that is also often supported by displaying a quotation from a previous translation in parallel with the new one to underline the success of the latter (it is quite rare for reviewers to track down the full translation history of the work, and the selection of the point of comparison often appears arbitrary). The retranslator gets a positive mention. And, the publisher is praised for “finally” treating the Finnish readers with a new and improved version. This positive publicity is surely one significant factor in publishers’ decisions to opt for (more costly) retranslation as opposed to reprinting an earlier version (Koskinen & Paloposki 2003).

This temporal logic that favors the new over the old is also linked to materiality. The physical aging of books – their smell, the changing typeface and cover design trends, yellowed pages – also have a role to play in the appraisals. The elated status of a new translation is also based on presentist cultural expectations of progress: we are programmed to think that if a new translation was made it has to be better than the previous one. Why else bother? And since we are also culturally programmed to expect translations to be faithful, “better” is understood as being more faithful – however we wish to define fidelity. The newness factor tilts the table in favor of the latest version, but a comparative close reading of various case studies reveals a much more complex scene: retranslations are needed not only to rectify ideologically skewed translations of the past (see Pokorn 2012) but also to match texts to new expectations of correctness; aged translations may well be stylistically as compelling and “fresh” than more recent versions, and less “faithful” translations may be more interesting or more “readable” than accurate but dry re-renderings.

Retranslations and nostalgia
The paradox of retranslation dictates that while newness is what defines retranslation and sets it apart from the previous ones, nostalgia and affective attachment also have a role to play. Since a retranslation reintroduces a text that has already been translated, the same elements that allow it to demonstrate its newness in opposition to the earlier interpretation run the risk of shaking up the reception. This is particularly likely to happen for texts which have become formulaic and perform ritual roles in social situations. For example, a “new” Bible translation into Finnish from 1992 still feels alien to many, and the “new”, updated hymns from the 1980s, many of them retranslations, still make many people struggle. Particular wordings for culturally central texts were learned by heart, and they resonate in our minds:

There is, in fact, a kind of bodily reassurance in a translation like the KJV [King James Version]: “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want” may sound to Eugene Nida like a lack of desire for God --- but of course for the Christian who memorized those words in childhood the “normal” somatic response, the response to the words if heard on the street, is massively overridden by the somatics of security. When I say these words, my world feels stable and safe. (Robinson 1991, p. 225)

In listening to or reciting a ritual text, we respond to affect memory, that is, an emotionally expressed feeling that recurs when recalling a significant experience. The wording connects us to the affective valence of the contexts where we have previously heard it. A new translation will encounter resistance, as the ritualistic affective experience gets broken. Children's classics are another prime example of how affect memory affects the intergenerational reader experience: a new translation may well be objectively seen as “better” or more accurate or closer to the original than the previous one, but many adult readers prefer a version that repeats their childhood experiences (Koskinen 2012, p. 24). Interestingly, our memory may also fail us, and the fond memories we have harbored may become shattered at an actual encounter with the old translation.

Retranslation is one form of “mnemonic transitivity” (Zerubavel 2003, p. 93), that is, a method for linking generations and for preserving memories from one generation to the next. Children's classics get retranslated when the parental and grandparental wish to ritually pass on the cultural capital vested in them meets with some resistance because of the changed expectations and preferences of and for the new child readers, or because of the new visual
and/or textual aesthetics and ideologies of the literary field, including the parents themselves. These retranslations often balance between sameness and difference. To function in the cultural memory role, the retranslation needs to carry on the identity with the previous version although it at the same time parts way with it through transforming, downplaying, omitting or censoring the unwanted elements. Identity is carried out for example by means of keeping key characters’ names in their already familiar form, while some other textual elements, cultural references or ideological underpinnings may (need to) be radically altered to meet contemporary preferences.

Retranslation, remembering and affective alienation

The interplay of newness and nostalgia in retranslation can be considered as a “mnemonic battle” fought over what should be remembered and what is the correct way to interpret the past (Zerubavel 2003, p. 98). This battle is a prominent cause behind many retranslations: to maintain its status, a classic needs to be cleared of elements we do not wish to remember. When a new retranslation of an old classic that evokes nostalgic memories brings to light unwanted aspects, affective dissonance ensues. While the reception of retranslations tends to foreground a discourse of completeness, fidelity and accuracy, these are only considered virtues insofar as they concern characteristics we are willing to carry forward. Sara Ahmed (2010, p. 30) calls those elements that are non-conforming to the evolving “drama of contingency” and fail to orientate in the way we desire as “affect aliens”. Proximity to an object that in spite of being imbued with nostalgia fails to result in an experience of pleasure causes alienation:

We become alienated – out of line with an affective community – when we do not experience pleasure from proximity to objects that are attributed as being good. The gap between the affective value of an object and how we experience an object can involve a range of affects, which are directed by the modes of explanation we offer to fill this gap. If we are disappointed by something, we generate explanations of why that thing is disappointing. Such explanations can involve an anxious narrative of self-doubt (why I am not made happy by this, what is wrong with me?) or a narrative of rage, where the object that is ‘supposed’ to make us happy is attributed as the cause of disappointment, which can lead to a rage directed towards those that promised us happiness through the elevation of such objects as good. We might even become strangers, or affect aliens, at such moments. (Ahmed 2008, p. 11)
Affective alienation may result in strong emotional response. In the case of children’s literature, affective alienation is further fueled by sentiments of pedagogical necessity and the need to shelter and protect the young, leading to moral outrage and bans. A good contemporary example of a strong alienation trigger is racialized vocabulary, found in many classics and increasingly felt to be an affect alien to many readers, causing public uproars and rage. In Finland, as in many other societies, many contemporary debates focus around one particular taboo word, the unspeakable – and unreadable – “n-word”. Astrid Lindgren’s beloved *Pippi Långstrump* (1945) is one example of a children’s classic that has been subject to rewriting both in the original language and in translations. References to Pippi’s father, who is *negerkung* have been reworked on repetitively. Its (I focus here on the first book) Finnish translation history attests to the intensification of the mnemonic battles over the n-word during the 21st century (Koskinen & Paloposki 2015b, pp. 220–231). It was first translated into Finnish in 1946, and the now problematic word was translated according to the standard usage of the time as *neekeri*. This translation was extensively revised in 1970, but the n-word remained unchanged. At that time you could still find “n is for neekeri” constructions in the first-graders’ abc books.

Towards the turn of the millennium the word *neekeri* had become increasingly pejorative in its connotations, and concerned parents had begun skipping the word and inventing new translation solutions when reading the book aloud to their children. The publisher issued a newly revised edition in 2005. Although it is known that the reviser was reluctant to make the required changes, the n-words were retranslated as *alkuasukas* (“native”, with slightly pejorative connotations). This was soon (2007) followed by a full retranslation that was combined with Lauren Child’s new illustrations. The retranslator publicly discussed her unwillingness to succumb to what she called hypercorrectness around the n-word, but eventually a new solution was introduced: the father was now called *hottentottien kuningas*, the king of hottentots. It is no wonder this decision raised heated debates, as it is no less racist than the earlier choice. The third reworking of the book in less than 15 years has now been published, as the publisher brought out a new Finnish translation of the entire series between 2017 and 2018 to celebrate the 110th birthday of Astrid Lindgren in 2017. The information on the cover page of the first volume indicates that this is a reprint of the 2007 version, but it is
in fact a revised version. The word *hottentotti* was now removed, and the father now was *Etelämeren kuningas* (king of the Southern sea), where he is ruling over *alkuasukkaat* (natives). In 2007 the new translation received a lot of attention; this latest turn of events has gone largely unnoticed. Instead, the latest outcry (beginning of 2019) concerns the Finnish dubbing of the Pippi films from the 1970s, currently available from the streaming service of the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE. A concerned mother publicly demanded a remastering of the dubbing to remove the n-words. The company currently declines. In Sweden, some changes to the original tape have already been made, and it may be a matter of time until accurate documenting of past programs will give way to new demands of acceptability.

*Pippi Långstrump* depicts an empowering story of an exceptionally strong and independent girl, and deals with issues such as ethics, tolerance, difference, otherness and marginalization. Racism is not a central theme (although affinities to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* have been identified), and, with the exception of the volume that takes place in the Southern seas, the references to occasional n-words are contained in the fictional world with loose ties to any ethnological reality any translation solution would need to accurately convey. Managing the problematic word has therefore been relatively flexible, as the varied Finnish translation history shows. Things become more complex with realist fiction. A recent Finnish retranslation of Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* (2018) provides an interesting parallel to *Pippi*: it, too, is kind of children’s literature, but for a more mature age group, and currently rather characterized as an adult classic. It is set in a context where, at the time of writing, *nigger* was a word commonly used, and it originates from the cultural context whose growing racial anxieties and the concomitant discursive challenges are reflected and repeated in the European n-word battles such as the case of *Pippi Långstrump*. In contrast to more passing usage in *Pippi*, the problematic word is central to the plot and characterization of *Huckleberry Finn* and frequently repeated throughout the text.

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1 This is not uncommon. One of the findings of our project was that revisions, abridged versions and retranslations are not uniformly labeled, and the readers are not necessarily informed of the changes between editions. For the publishing industry, this may be good business practice or inconsequential in formation; for a scholar interested in retranslation and revision practices this poses a significant challenge in compiling and categorizing data. (See also Koskinen 2018).
The recent fifth Finnish translation follows a previous one from 1972, i.e. from a time when the debate had not entered the Finnish society (cf. the revision of Pippi in 1970). In 2018 the cultural context is radically different. The question of the n-word and its translation has therefore been a touchstone for the current translator, and his solution an obligatory point of commentary in reviews. The decision was to keep to the traditional equivalent, *neekeri*, thereby following a principle of giving Finnish readers a similar experience to contemporary American readers who also need to encounter a usage cognitively recognized as ordinary at the time the book depicts, but at the same time affectively felt as alien and unacceptable in the reader’s contemporary context (NB. in a recent revised edition of the original in 2011 the word was changed to *slave*).

Reception of the new retranslation has been somewhat unexpected, considering the on-going debates around Pippi and some other recent social media debates over translating *nigger* in subtitling. Reviewers of the 2018 translation in newspapers and in the blogosphere have, for the main part, viewed the translator’s decision favorably, although they often seem to have a need to indicate that they recognize the difficulties and exceptionality of the choice:

I need to state upfront that the original (1884) speaks about neekeri and so do the Finnish translations. (Uusi-Rintakoski 2019).

Indeed, Lindholm sticks with the word “neekeri”. In my mind that is quite right, as inappropriate as it sounds in modern Finnish. It just happened to be the most commonly used term for black people in the atmosphere of the 19th century United States. (Jokinen 2019)

So far, I have encountered only one newspaper review that criticizes the choice, stating the use of the “offensive n-word” causes “202 screams the reader’s brain” (Jäntti 2018). The reviewer has taken the trouble to count all occurrences of the word, but cannot bring himself to writing the word in full anywhere in the review. Even this review is not against this translation solution, however. In spite of the creaks, “non-censorship is the only reasonable choice”, the reviewer agrees. One blogger also seems to play with the expectations of moral outrage: The blog text is titled as “Shame on you, Otava!”, but the content is not about the n-word decision but the shamefully bad availability of the new retranslation in bookstores (Otava is a publishing house and a bookstore owner; the retranslation was published by Siltala).
A discussion piece in *Helsingin Sanomat*, the leading daily newspaper in Finland, also takes up the issue censorship, stating (approvingly) that the word *nigger* has not been censored as it has been replaced by the word *neekeri* (Koivuranta 2019). In contrast, the other reviews talk about n-words in the two languages without making any distinction between the English original and the Finnish translation, assuming a straight-forward equivalence between them. It is, however, important to remember that although closely interconnected, these two words are not the same, and they do not have the same historical trajectory nor the same cultural and social connotations. While it is no doubt accurate to say that *neekeri* has taken up much of the same racism and offensiveness that the word *nigger* has acquired in the US context, the predominantly positive reception of the retranslation in itself indicates that the two n-words are still not exactly the same.

It is, still, newsworthy also in Finland that a new translation is sprinkled with n-words. Only one of the reviews (Grönholm 2019) entirely omits discussing the n-word. Beyond this issue, most reviews, not unexpectedly, follow the schema of retranslation reviews discussed above. They place *Huckleberry Finn* firmly within the category of world classics (hence worthy of a new translation), bring up a couple of previous translations for comparison, offering a few selected citations of them, and then place the latest version on the top of the hierarchy (again, with the exception of Grönholm who appraises all three best known translations as equally “fresh”):

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (trans. Juhani Lindholm, *Siltala*) has been translated many times but only with the bar trembling like so many other classics that are over 100 years old – except now that a new brilliant translation of the book has been published. (Aitio 2018)

The version most often taken as the point of comparison is the most recent predecessor from 1972 by Jarkko Laine, a poet and translator whose decision to translate Jim's speech with a local dialect of his home town Turku, Finland had brought him publicity and acclaim at the time. In a move familiar from retranslation schemas discussed above, his version is now placed in a secondary position as the newcomer is placed on top. One review directly touches the issue of how we remember the old versions (versus how they actually are):
I do like Laine’s translation – and many may have “fond memories” of it, but Lindholm does feel more fluent now that I read it, more focused on the content. With it, you can enjoy yourself, and you trust it. (Huhta 2018)

Conclusions

In comparison, the two cases of dealing with the same taboo word in subsequent translations are more different than one might anticipate. While the word poses difficulties to all contemporary translators, publishers and reviewers, involved in them, the translation history of Pippi is more “neurotic” in the sense of repeated corrective measures, and the different solutions are also more eagerly criticized. Prospective young child readers may be one explanation. In the case of Huckleberry Finn, in contrast, we seem to be dealing with most reviewers (all male, which may also have some significance) and the (male) translator all being in the same 50+ age group, likely to project readers similar to themselves and assumedly less vulnerable in dealing with offensive content and of generations who were never taught to avoid this word until well into their adulthood.

The changing translations also indicate to another relevant factor behind retranslations: business prospects (Gambier 1994). New translations are good for business as they attract positive attention, but in packaging newness and nostalgia publishers need to carefully navigate the affective waters of remembering. Affective alienation can kill sales and do serious harm to the publisher’s brand. Looking at the translation of taboo words and their reception can highlight the question of reading and not reading in retranslation: we want to read fresh and new translations and we are willing to assume the latest translation to be the most optimal and also the most accurate one, but only so far as we can affectively align with the text. If accuracy requires words we are not willing to read, and can barely write in full in the reviews, we begin to hesitate and start feeling affective alienation. Children’s literature, in particular, is expected to be purified from harmful influences, and varying degrees of political correctness and censorship are introduced to manage an acceptable match to reader expectations.
References

Primary sources:

a) *Pippi Långstrump*


b) *Huckleberry Finn*


Secondary sources:


