

WorldCanvass: What's in a Word? The Translator's Challenge (Part 3)

[Joan Kjaer](#): Hello. I'm Joan Kjaer. Welcome to WorldCanvass from International Programs at the University of Iowa. This is part three of our program on translation, where we're asking, What's in a Word? In this segment, our guests will take us beyond words, and to an interpretive space where translations are made in multiple art forms. I'm pleased to introduce Madeleine Campbell from the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Edinburgh. Thank you for being here.

[M. Campbell](#): Thank you.

[Joan Kjaer](#): Next to Madeleine is Oleg Timofeyev, an adjunct assistant professor in the UI Department of Asian and Slavic Languages and Literatures. Thanks for being here, Oleg.

[Oleg Timofeyev](#): Thank you for inviting me.

[Joan Kjaer](#): At the far end, we have Thomas Rose, an assistant professor of Classics at Randolph-Macon College. Thanks for making the trip out here. Appreciate it.

[Thomas Rose](#): Thanks so much for having me.

[Joan Kjaer](#): So, Madeleine, may I start with you? As you know, throughout this program, we've been talking about reading, translation, re-translation, with language as the tool of expression. With you and your fellow panelists, we're going in another direction with this segment, and looking at translation beyond words. I see that you've recently published a book about translating across sensory and linguistic borders, so what does that mean?

[M. Campbell](#): Yes. Well, this book is by artists, by dancers, by performers, theater arts performers, visual artists, sculptors. And in the book, they talk about their translation practice, and they also try to provide an explanatory framework for their translation practice. We also have poets. For example, we have the poet Vahni Capildeo, who is translating de Ronsard, his Ode à Cassandre. We have Clive Scott, who is translating Baudelaire's [inaudible 00:56:23], and he has six successive versions, which are increasingly mixing modes of expression. We have a sign art poem, which is performed in British sign language. That's translated by [inaudible 00:56:41] into a concrete poem. So, we have all sorts of mixing of media.

[Joan Kjaer](#): And so, tell us about sort of the translation element. Are we, in some of these cases, moving from something that began as a text, and now is being interpreted, say, as dance?

[M. Campbell:](#) Yes. It can begin as text, or it can begin as a painting. It can begin from anything, really. What makes it different from literary translation in one sense, and different from intermedial artworks in the other, is that, first of all, it's not confined by verbal means. And secondly, it doesn't ... it originates with a source, a source text or a source image, which would be in a different language, or it could be a piece of artwork from a different time, and it's typically carried across, which is the ancient sense of the word translate, is carried across from that source into a different medium, or one or more media, and typically also across cultures.

[Joan Kjaer:](#) So, how does it differ from adaptation or illustration?

[M. Campbell:](#) Yes, that's a really good question. The structuralist Roman Jakobson in 1959 defined intersemiotic translation as an interpretation of verbal signs into nonverbal signs, and that is quite a narrow translation of the term, intersemiotic translation. But it tends to be applied to adaptation. And so, for example, today, when we speak of intersemiotic translation, people tend to think of translation to the theater, or into television or film. But that immediately puts the focus on the actual product of the translation, rather than the process, and it also creates a sort of border, an artificial border, between our different means of relating to a text, the different senses.

[M. Campbell:](#) And so, adaptation tends to be focused on the medium and dictated by the medium, whereas what we are now, in a post-structural sense, defining intersemiotic translation as, is not dictated by the medium. The intersemiotic translator looks at an original artwork or source text and decides what medium to use.

[M. Campbell:](#) Similarly, illustration is dictated by the medium, being the illustration. Response is different, again, because response departs from the source text or original, takes more artistic license, perhaps, and less acknowledgement of the original than intersemiotic translation does.

[Joan Kjaer:](#) Are there any examples you could give us of maybe just translation through performance?

[M. Campbell:](#) Yes. For example, we have in the book, we have [inaudible 01:00:10], who translates Hélène Cixous's book, *Inside*, but she starts ... and this is already a re-translation. She starts by using the English translation by Carol Barko, the 1986 translation. And her intention is not to dramatize the text, which would be adaptation. Her intention is to allow the original, what she calls the vibrative properties of the text, which is a [inaudible 01:00:43] term, to traverse her performers. So, it's a completely different way of looking at drama or theater.

[M. Campbell:](#) Another example of performance is Laura Gonzalez, who's also in the book, and she took the case studies by Freud of so-called hysteric women, and she read their original letters, paintings, looked at their photographs, read accounts by

doctors, and then she allowed those women ... she allowed her body to become the theater for these women, and set up a series of one-to-one performances where she sits with a quote-unquote "spectator" and goes through this original ... re-experiences the hysteric's experience. And the spectator or sitter helps her through it. That's another form of translation.

[Joan Kjaer](#): Yeah.

[M. Campbell](#): We also have examples of translation through sculpture. For example, we have in our book Bryan Eccleshall, who takes the precepts that were originally formulated for literary translation by Antoine Berman, who wrote about the 12 deforming tendencies. And it was really written in order to encourage loyalty in the translator towards the source text, and warned them against these deforming tendencies. But Bryan Eccleshall chooses the example of sculpture, and he is a sculptor, and takes the deforming tendency of ennoblement, which is the tendency of the translator to perhaps take something that they consider clumsy and make it slightly more stylish, more palatable for a modern audience, or something.

[M. Campbell](#): And he chooses the example of Jeff Koons, who everybody's familiar with these immense statues that he made of balloon animals, and he made them in mirror-like steel, polished steel, and huge. And Brian talks about how that act in sculpture was akin to the act of ennoblement, taking the vernacular or the common aspect of balloon animals and aggrandizing them. But also preserving an essential element of the source, which is the frivolous nature of it. So, that's an example.

[M. Campbell](#): There are also examples of sound sculpture.

[Joan Kjaer](#): Yeah. Well, speaking of sound, we might go to Oleg here, as Oleg Timofeyev, you're well-known here in our part of the world as not only being a teacher, a fine teacher, but also a really quite brilliant musician. And so, thank you for being on our show tonight.

[Oleg Timofeyev](#): It's a great honor.

[Joan Kjaer](#): And talk to us a little bit about how you conceive of this notion of translating beyond words.

[Oleg Timofeyev](#): Well, like that character in [inaudible 01:04:04], who discovers he's been speaking prose all his life, I discovered that I was doing intersemiotic translation. That literary reference that comes to mind is that of hedgehog and fox. I am being the hedgehog, meaning that, since our knowledge becomes more digital, I can see how in the future, people will Google me, or whatever the search engine will be at the time, and they will find out Oleg Timofeyev, see also Russian guitar, because I single-handedly, blah, blah, blah. I don't want to sing

this ode to myself, but basically, my claim to fame is the rediscovery of a different instrument.

[Oleg Timofeyev:](#)

And it's a parallel ... If you're in the guitar world, it's a parallel universe, a guitar that was only used in Russia and then in the Soviet Union. It had seven strings. It was originally foreign importation. And that's where things become interesting, because Russia is always a little, has a strange relationship with the West. Sometimes it's very close; sometimes it's very distant. In the 19th century, or late 18th century, when this importation happened, it was actually very close to the West, so the Western elite in Russia was considering itself Western. And so, the people who actually started playing those guitars, they were Czechs and Poles, and the founder of this tradition was a former harpist, Andre Sychra, certified Czech.

[Oleg Timofeyev:](#)

And what's interesting is that if you look at the Russian guitar versus the well-known six-string guitar, they look very similar, just a different number of strings. But, so it happens, the instruments are more complex than just wooden pieces with strings attached. Every instrument in my view is a combination of software and hardware, and software is a set of habits and artistic ideas, what you do with it.

[Oleg Timofeyev:](#)

And so, what interests me right now, very locally and very kind of, hedgehog kind of way, is one trick per life, is how the music for the six-string guitar was translated for the Russian guitar. So, you have basically an international cosmopolitan musical language, pieces that are very transparent, very obvious for a Western listener, and the Russian guitar models it all in a very kind of pleasing way. Everything becomes very sonorous. All the rhythms become kind of obscured by some strange ornaments across strings, because it was also developed in this appreciation of harp.

[Oleg Timofeyev:](#)

So, it's probably intersemiotic. It definitely doesn't start from words. But it doesn't go very far. It's from one guitar to another. But tomorrow, I'm destined to try to demonstrate how it works, or doesn't work. I mean, what usually doesn't work, and I tried it in front of roomfuls of guitarists. Usually it's very difficult to demonstrate what's different.

[Joan Kjaer:](#)

But so, it's hard it demonstrate what's different, and yet you hear what's different?

[Oleg Timofeyev:](#)

Well, that's what we are about to find out.

[Joan Kjaer:](#)

Yeah. One of the questions I'd like to have all of you answer, or think about answering, and certainly I'll go to you, Thomas, as a professor of the classics and ancient history and whatnot, how much does someone who's engaged in either the original translation of something, or a re-translation, or even all of us just being active readers, how much do we need to know or learn about the setting of the time, the history of the time, the sort of background to any kind of text,

or for that matter, Russian guitar? How much do we understand without really looking more deeply than what we see when we first engage with a piece?

[Thomas Rose:](#) The context is really important.

[Joan Kjaer:](#) Yeah.

[Thomas Rose:](#) If I can continue with Oleg's Archilochus analogy, I'm kind of a hedgehog too, and I spend a lot of my time in the early Hellenistic period. And so, if we're talking about translation without words, in that time, money talks, and so do monuments. I can give some examples of how that works, but first maybe I should talk a little bit about context.

[Thomas Rose:](#) So, the Hellenistic period is the time period after the campaigns of Alexander through western and central Asia, all the way to the Punjab. And those campaigns and that expedition, for Greeks living on both sides of the Aegean, their horizons opened up in a way that's really difficult to overstate. To give a couple of examples, there's a guy called Clearchus of Soli. It's a city on the island of Cyprus. He was a philosopher who did his education in Athens, and traveled to Delphi, and then later on we find him inscribing Delphic precepts, "know thyself," and other things like that, in the temple of Apollo, in a city called Ai-Khanoum on the Oxus River, on the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, which is unbelievable, in the third century BC.

[Thomas Rose:](#) At the same time, roughly, there's a city called Demetrius in central Greece, founded by one of the successors of Alexander, a guy called Demetrius Poliorcetes, the Besieger of Cities. And there, we found this cache of painted grave markers, and they preserved names and ethnics of people who moved to Demetrius and worked there and lived there and died there. And they're from Syria and Phoenicia and from Libya and from Crete. They're coming from all over, and this exchange of ideas is happening in both directions. We often have this idea of the Greeks bringing these gifts of culture to these benighted folks, but in fact, they're encountering cultures which in many cases were more sophisticated and much older than their own.

[Thomas Rose:](#) So, I'm not sure where I was going with all of this. I got lost in the context. I guess I was going to give some examples of translation without words. But I just wanted to give an idea of how translation in both of those registers is so important at a time when Greek culture goes global, and global culture comes to Greece.

[Thomas Rose:](#) We see it in coinage, for instance. And to return to the successors of Alexander, all of the successors of Alexander have one fundamental flaw that they all share, and that's that none of them are Alexander. So, we can see them wrestling with that as they try to imitate Alexander or separate themselves from Alexander, or in rare cases excel Alexander, which is difficult to do. But in their coinage, early on after the death of Alexander, they adopt very similar iconography in their

portraits of heroes and gods. Alexander generally had a portrait of Heracles on the head side and a seated Zeus on the tails side, and they kept that, but they started to bring in little subtle changes, little translations, by which they asserted their individuality and their own power, and eventually we start to see them putting their own portraits on these coins. So, Heracles is replaced by Demetrius or Ptolemy from these mints that are operating in Alexandria and on the Tigris River and in Greece.

[Thomas Rose:](#)

We also see it in monuments. In it a world that's so polyglot and multiethnic and diverse, a good way to get your message across is to set up something really cool in a place where a lot of people are going to see it. And we see this happening in big pan-Hellenic sanctuaries, sanctuaries for the god Apollo, Adelfia, Telos, Hedona, in places people go, like Athens. Those are sites of memory, and they can subtly alter the commemorative charge of places like that.

[Thomas Rose:](#)

When you walk into a sanctuary where people have been competing and setting up monuments and offering dedications to the gods for centuries, and trying to set themselves apart from their peers, that's where that double-bind of newness and remembering is operated on everyone that's involved there. On the person that might commission a monument, on the artists who execute that commission, on all the observers who are aware of that commemorative charge and see how it's being altered by this new monument, and what people are trying to say about their own accomplishment, how they might be trying to erase those of others. It is a kind of translation.

[Joan Kjaer:](#)

Wow, how interesting. And it makes me think of some of the controversies today, just in our own life, and in America, one administration trying to erase the accomplishments of another. It happens in such quick succession. But so, in addition to the sculpture that we talked about, some of these sort of monumental things, and the music that you work with, Oleg, how conscious are audiences of what's actually happening when they hear a version ... I have heard your guitar colleagues from Russia when they've come here, and it is an amazing sound. It is very different from what groups of guitars sound like playing the traditional six-string guitar here. But are audiences generally aware of the process artists have gone through in re-translating this material, or translating the material, do you think?

[M. Campbell:](#)

Well, I think the example of guitar, I'll let Oleg speak to. But one of the aspects of intersemiotic translation that I think is important is that it moves away from the concept of the audience as a consumer, and of the translator as producing a product ... a finished product for them to consume. And in an age where consumerism is everywhere and passivity is encouraged, I think it's really important to create events and situations where the audience member is actually a participant in the translating process, and is empowered to do so, so that the translator becomes a mediator that provides a number of entry points to an original source text or artifact, and lets the viewer or the listener or the

participant actively construct meaning out of the starting point that the mediator has provided.

[Oleg Timofeyev:](#)

I'm just listening to a middle line in all of those possibilities. I am wondering if every musician is an inter ... what, because you start it. And I think even if we're accepted, this is what happens, intersemiotic translation, every musician, I think we can actually see the degrees of translation. To what extent an act of performing a piece of music in public or in front of a microphone, to what extent it's actually a powerful reading of the original score. And here, my background is so-called historically--informed performance of original. It was called something like authentic performance, or performance on authentic instruments. People very quickly realized that this language is dangerous, and nobody knows what's authentic.

[Oleg Timofeyev:](#)

But in my humble sort of musical practice, I discovered at least two kinds of musicians. The prodigies, wunderkinds, et cetera, who start playing at the age of three, who never had the chance to think, who are always pushed to be better and faster and louder, and therefore they exist in the present-day interpretation. They actually don't necessarily go back to the context in which the piece was written, to the [inaudible 01:16:23] that kind of coincide with this time, to the particularities of notation, to various other sources. I mean, all of that are specific traits of someone who was taught, or taught himself, herself, historically-informed performance. That is the historically-informed component.

[Oleg Timofeyev:](#)

And that type of performer tends to come to music later in life, after having done something else, not necessarily music as their first choice, and not necessarily the most brilliant musical abilities from the beginning. But they intellectually can connect the sound and the culture, and I think that's a very ... when I think about the performer like that, it's very easy for me to use the word intersemiotic.

[Joan Kjaer:](#)

Well, I remember a few years ago, you may recall that Sting did a recording of some John Dowland music, which I thought was absolutely beautiful. I worked in classical music at the time, and oh my gosh, the comments from classical music lovers were all over the map, and I recall, very negative when that was first released. It was somehow a new interpretation of some of the Dowland works, and I guess we all know what we like and what we don't like, or what we're used to, and so on. But just taking a moment to go back to you, Thomas, I know your talk is about the translating of glory. Tell us what you mean by that, the translation of glory?

[Thomas Rose:](#)

Sure. This is a little bit, if I can build, pick up that thread of commemoration and erasure that we can read in a monument. We particularly begin to see that again in the Hellenistic period, in these pan-Hellenic sanctuaries, but the people that are competing are Hellenistic dynasts. So, you can see, I'm going to be talking about Macedonians and Romans, and how that conflict and rivalry, and the ultimate, spoiler alert, triumph of Rome played out in a commemorative

program by a guy called Lucius Aemilius Paullus. But I suppose, what might be salient here is, what we can see there is a series of monuments in which the Roman victory over the Macedonians exploits Macedonian iconography that's been established, and exploits sites where Macedonian victories had been celebrated in these charged environments. So, again, it's a kind of iconographic act of translation, of commemoration, of erasure.

[Joan Kjaer](#): Gosh, well, this is such interesting stuff. I hope that everyone who has a chance to go and enjoy some of the colloquium in the next couple of days will do so. I know you'll all be speaking and taking part in that, so I'd like to say thank you to you, Madeleine Campbell, and Oleg Timofeyev, and Thomas Rose, so much for being here, and to all of our guests this evening.

[Joan Kjaer](#): Just a reminder that the Reading and Re-Translation colloquium begins tomorrow and runs through Saturday, and the public is invited to attend any or all of the sessions. You can find the schedule at the International Programs website, which is international.uiowa.edu. These WorldCanvass programs are all available on iTunes, the Public Radio Exchange, and the International Programs website. And just a reminder, our next program will be on April 11th in this room. We'll be launching the Provost Global Forum that evening, with a discussion called Why School? Education and Social Transformation. So, I hope you can join us for that program.

[Joan Kjaer](#): I'm Joan Kjaer. For all of us, thank you for being with us tonight, and good night.

[M. Campbell](#): Thank you, thank you.