# 1. *What* is *a* Translation?

Douglas Hofstadter took a great liking to this short poem by the sixteenth-century French wit Clément Marot:

*Ma mignonne.*
*Je vous donne*
*Le bon jour;*
*Le séjour*
*C'est prison.*
*Guérison*
*Recouvrez,*
*Puis ouvrez*
*Votre porte*
*Et qu'on sorte*
*Vitement,*
*Car Clément*
*Le vous mande.*
*Va, friande*
*De ta bouche,*
*Qui se couche*
*En danger*
*Pour manger*
*Confitures;*
*Si tu dures*
*Trop malade,*
*Couleur fade*
*Tu prendras,*
*Et perdras*
*L'embonpoint.*
*Dieu te doint*
*Santé bonne,*
*Ma mignonne*

He sent a copy of it to a great number of his friends and acquaintances and asked them to translate it into English, respecting as well as they could the formal properties that he identified in it:

> (1) 28 lines (2) of 3 syllables each (3) in rhyming couplets (4) with the last line being the same as the first; (5) midway the poem changes from formal (*vous*) to informal (*tu*) and (6) the poet puts his own name directly into the poem.[1]

Hofstadter, a cognitive scientist at Indiana University, got many dozens of responses over the following months and years. Each one of them was different, yet each one of them

was without doubt a translation of Marot's little poem. By this simple device he demonstrated one of the most awkward and wonderful truths about translation. It is this: any utterance of more than trivial length has no one translation. All utterances have innumerably many acceptable translations.

You get the same result with ordinary prose as you do with a poem. Give a hundred competent translators a page to translate, and the chances of any two versions being identical is close to zero. This fact about interlingual communication has persuaded many people that translation is not an interesting topic – because it is always approximate, it is just a second-rate kind of thing. That's why 'translation' isn't the name of a long-established academic discipline, even though its practitioners have often been academics in some other field. How can you have theories and principles about a process that comes up with no determinate results?

Like Hofstadter, I take the opposite view. The variability of translations is incontrovertible evidence of the limitless flexibility of human minds. There can hardly be a more interesting subject than that.

What is it that translators really do? How many different kinds of translating are there? What do the uses of this mysterious ability tell us about human societies, past and present? How do the facts of translation relate to language use in general – and to what we think a language is?

Those are the kinds of questions I explore in this book. Definitions, theories and principles can be left aside until we have a better idea what we are talking about. We shouldn't use them prematurely to decide whether or not the following version of Clément Marot's poem (one of many by Hofstadter himself) is good, bad or indifferent. It's the other way round. Until we can explain why the following version counts as a

translation, we don't really know what we're saying when we utter the word.

Gentle gem,
Diadem,
Ciao! Bonjour!
Heard that you're
In the rough:
Glum, sub-snuff.
Precious, tone
Down your moan,
And fling wide
Your door; glide
From your oy-
ster bed, coy
Little pearl.
See, blue girl,
Beet-red ru-
by's your hue.
For your aches,
Carat cakes
Are the cure.
Eat no few'r
Than fourteen,
Silv'ry queen –
But no more
'n twenty-four,
Golden dream.
How you'll gleam!
Trust old Clem,
Gentle gem.

# 2. *Is* Translation *Avoidable*?

Translation is everywhere – at the United Nations, the European Union, the World Trade Organization and many other international bodies that regulate fundamental aspects of modern life. Translation is part and parcel of modern business, and there's hardly a major industry that doesn't use and produce translations for its own operations. We find translations on the bookshelves of our homes, on the reading lists for every course in every discipline taught at college, we find them on processed-food labels and on flat-pack furniture instructions. How could we do without translation? It seems pointless to wonder what world we would live in if translation didn't happen all the time at every level, from bilingual messages on cash machine screens to confidential discussions between heads of state, from the guarantee slip on a new watch we've just bought to the classics of world literature.

But we could do without it, all the same. Instead of using translation, we could learn the languages of all the different communities we wish to engage with; or we could decide to speak the same language; or else adopt a single common language for communicating with other communities. But if we baulk at adopting a common tongue and decline to learn the other languages we need, we could simply ignore people who don't speak the way we do.

These three options seem fairly radical, and it's likely that none of them figures among the aspirations of the readers of this book. However, they are not imaginary solutions to the

many paradoxes of intercultural communication. All three paths away from translation are historically attested. More than that: the refusal of translation, by one or more of the means described, is probably closer to the historical norm on this planet than the culture of translation which seems natural and unavoidable around the world today. One big truth about translation that is often kept under wraps is that many societies did just fine by doing without.

The Indian subcontinent has long been the home of many different groups speaking a great variety of languages. However, there is no tradition of translation in India. Until very recently, nothing was ever translated directly between Urdu, Hindi, Kannada, Tamil, Marathi and so on. Yet these communities have lived cheek by jowl in a crowded continent for centuries. How did they manage? They learned other languages! Few inhabitants of the subcontinent have ever been monoglot; citizens of India have traditionally spoken three, four or five tongues. [1]

In the late Middle Ages, the situation was quite similar in many parts of Europe. Traders and poets, sailors and adventurers moved overland and around the inland seas picking up and often mixing more or less distantly related languages as they went, and only the most thoughtful of them even wondered whether or not they were speaking different 'languages', or just adapting to local peculiarities. The great explorer Christopher Columbus provides an unusually well-documented case of the intercomprehensibility and interchangeability of European tongues in the late Middle Ages. He wrote notes in the margins of his copy of Pliny in what we now recognize as an early form of Italian, but he used typically Portuguese place names – such as Cuba – to label his discoveries in the New World. He wrote his official correspondence in Castilian

Spanish, but used Latin for the precious journal he kept of his voyages. He made a 'secret' copy of the journal in Greek, however, and he also must have known enough Hebrew to use the *Astronomical Tables* of Abraham Zacuto, which allowed him to predict a lunar eclipse and impress the indigenous people he encountered in the Caribbean. He must have been familiar with lingua franca – a 'contact language' made of simplified Arabic syntax and a vocabulary mostly taken from Italian and Spanish, used by Mediterranean sailors and traders from the Middle Ages to the dawn of the nineteenth century – because he borrowed a few characteristic words from it when writing in Castilian and Italian.[2] How many languages did Columbus know when he sailed the ocean in 1492? As in today's India, where a degree of intercomprehensibility exists between several of its languages, the answer would be somewhat arbitrary. It's unlikely Columbus even conceptualized Italian, Castilian or Portuguese as distinct languages, for they did not yet have any grammar books. He was a learned man in being able to read and write the three ancient tongues. But beyond that, he was just a Mediterranean sailor, speaking whatever variety of language that he needed to do his job.

There are perhaps as many as 7,000 languages spoken in the world today,[3] and no individual could learn them all. Five to ten languages seem to represent the effective limit in all cultures, however multilingual they may be. Some obsessive individuals have clocked up twenty; a few champion linguists, who spend all their time learning languages, have claimed knowledge of fifty, or even more. But even these maniacal brain-boxes master only a tiny fraction of all the tongues that there are.

Most of the world's languages are spoken by very small groups, which is the main reason why a great number of them

are near the point of collapse. However, outside the handful of countries speaking one of the half-dozen 'major' world languages, few people on this planet have only one tongue. Within the Russian Federation, for example, hundreds of languages are spoken – belonging to the Slavic, Turkic, Caucasian, Altaic and other language families. But there is hardly a member of any of the communities speaking these very diverse tongues who does not also speak Russian. Similarly, in India, there aren't many people who don't also have either Hindi, or Urdu, or Bengali, or English, or one of the half-dozen other interlanguages of the subcontinent. To engage with all but a tiny fraction of people in the world, you definitely do not need to learn all their first languages. You need to learn all their vehicular languages – languages learned by non-native speakers for the purpose of communicating with native speakers of a third tongue. There are about eighty languages used in this way in some part of the world. But because vehicular languages are also native to some (usually very large) group as well, and because many people speak more than one vehicular language (of which one may or may not be native to them), you do not need to learn all eighty vehicular languages to communicate with most people on the planet. Knowing just nine of them – Chinese (with 1,300 million users), Hindi (800 million), Arabic (530 million), Spanish (350 million), Russian (278 million), Urdu (180 million), French (175 million), Japanese (130 million) and English (somewhere between 800 and 1,800 million) – would permit effective everyday conversation, though probably not detailed negotiation or serious intellectual debate, with at least 4.5 billion and maybe up to 5.5 billion people, that is to say, around 90 per cent of the world's population. (The startlingly wide range of estimates of the number of people who 'speak English' reflects the difficulty we have in

saying what 'speaking English' means.) Add Indonesian (250 million), German (185 million), Turkish (63 million) and Swahili (50 million) to make a baker's dozen,[4] and you have at your feet the entire American landmass, most of Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals, the great crescent of Islam from Morocco to Pakistan, a good part of India, a swathe of Africa and most of the densely populated parts of East Asia too. What more could you want?[5] *Exeunt* translators! Enter the language trainers! The cast would be more or less identical, so the net loss of jobs worldwide would most likely be nil.

If thirteen languages seems too hard to handle, why not have everyone learn the same one? The plan seemed obvious to the Romans, who made little attempt to learn the languages of the many peoples they conquered, with the sole but major exception of the Greeks. Barely a trace of interest has been found among Ancient Romans in learning Etruscan, Umbrian, the Celtic languages of what is now France and Britain, the Germanic languages of the tribes on the north-eastern borders of the empire, or the Semitic languages of the Carthage they deleted from the map and the colonies in the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea area. If you got taken over by Rome, you learned Latin, and that was that. The long-term result of the linguistic unification of the empire was that the written version of the Romans' language remained the main vehicle of intercultural communication in Europe for more than a thousand years after the end of the empire. Imperial blindness to the difference of others did a huge favour to Europe.[6]

Linguistic unification of the same order of magnitude has taken place in the last fifty years in most branches of science. Many languages have served at different times as vehicles of scientific advance: Chinese, Sanskrit, Greek, Syriac, Latin and Arabic from ancient times to the Middle Ages; then Italian

and French in the European Renaissance and early modern period. Between 1760 and 1840 the writings of the two 'fathers of organic chemistry', Torbern Olaf Bergman and Jöns Jacob Berzelius, made Swedish a language of science, and for about a hundred years it kept a respected place. English and French continued to be used for numerous disciplines, but German burst on to the scene in the nineteenth century with the new chemistry invented by Liebig and others; and Dmitri Mendeleev, the discoverer of the periodic table of the elements, helped to put Russian among the international languages of science before the end of the nineteenth century. Between 1900 and 1940, new scientific research continued to be published, often in intense rivalry, in Russian, French, German and English (Swedish having dropped off the map by then). But the Nazis' abuse of science between 1933 and 1945 discredited the language they used. German began to lose its status as a world science language on the fall of Berlin in 1945 – and many leading German scientists were of course whisked off to America and Britain in short order and functioned thereafter as English-speakers. French entered a slow decline, and Russian, which expanded in use after the Second World War and continued to be cultivated for political reasons during the remaining years of the USSR, dropped out of the science scene in 1989. So we are left with English. English is the language of science, worldwide; learned journals published in Tokyo, Beijing, Moscow, Berlin and Paris are either now entirely in English, or else carry English translations alongside foreign-language texts. Academic advancement everywhere is dependent on publications in English. Indeed, in Israel, it is said that God himself would not get promotion in any science department at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Why not? Because he has

only one publication – and it was not written in English. (I do not really believe this story. The fact that the publication in question has been translated into English and is even available in paperback would surely overrule the promotions committee's misgivings.)

Despite this, efforts are being made to allow some languages to serve once again as local science dialects. A US-government-sponsored web service, for example, WorldWideScience.org, now offers searches of non-English-language databases in China, Russia, France and some South American countries together with automatic retranslation of the results into Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish and Russian. The asymmetry of sources and targets in this new arrangement gives an interesting map of where science is now done.

The reasons why English has made a clean sweep of the sciences are not straightforward. Among them we cannot possibly include the unfortunate but widespread idea that English is simpler than other languages.

However, you can't explain the history and present state of the language of science as the direct result of economic and military might either. In three instances, languages became science vehicles because the work of a single individual made advances that could not be ignored anywhere else in the world (Liebig for German, Berzelius for Swedish, Mendeleev for Russian). One language lost its role because of the political folly of its users (German). What we seem to have experienced is not a process of language-imposition, but of language-elimination, in a context where the scientific community needs a means of global communication among its members. The survivor language, English, is not necessarily the best suited to the job: it's just that nothing has yet happened to knock it out.

One result of the spread of English is that most of the English now spoken and written in the world comes from people who do not possess it natively, making 'English speakers' a minority among the users of the language. Much of the English now written by natural and social scientists whose native language is other is almost impenetrable to non-specialist readers who believe that because they are native English-speakers they should be able to understand whatever is written in English. So clumsy and 'deviant' is international scientific English that even non-native wits can have fun with it:

> Recent observations by Unsofort & Tchetera pointing out that '*the more you throw tomatoes on Sopranoes, the more they yell*' and comparative studies dealing with the gasp-reaction (Otis & Pifre, 1964), hiccup (Carpentier & Fialip, 1964), cat purring (Remmers & Gautier, 1972), HM reflex (Vincent *et al.*, 1976), ventriloquy (McCulloch *et al.*, 1964), shriek, scream, shrill and other hysterical reactions (Sturm & Drang, 1973) provoked by tomato as well as cabbages, apples, cream tarts, shoes, buts and anvil throwing (Harvar & Mercy, 1973) have led to the steady assumption of a positive feedback organization of the YR based upon a semilinear quadristable multi-switching inter-digitation of neuronal sub-networks functioning en desordre (Beulott *et al.*, 1974).[7]

Pastiche and parody notwithstanding, international scientific English serves an important purpose – and it would barely exist if it did not serve well enough the purposes for which it is used. It is, in a sense, an escape from translation (even if in many of its uses it is already translated from the writer's native tongue). Now if the natural and social sciences can achieve a world language, however clumsy it may sound, why should we not wish

all other kinds of human contact and interchange to arrive at the same degree of linguistic unification? In the middle of the last century, the critic and reformer I. A. Richards believed with great passion that China could only become part of the concert of nations if it adopted an international language, BASIC, standing for 'British-American-Scientific-International-Commercial English'. (As its name suggests, it consists of a simplified English grammar and a limited vocabulary suited for technical and commercial use.) Richards devoted much of his energy in the second half of his life to devising, promoting, teaching and propagandizing on behalf of this utopian language of contact between 'East' and 'West'. He was in a way following in the footsteps of Lejzer Zamenhof, a Jewish intellectual from Białystok (now Poland), who had also invented a language of hope, Esperanto, which he believed would rid the world of the muddles and horrors caused by multiple tongues. In the nineteenth century, in fact, international languages were invented in great number, in proportion to the rise of language-based national independence movements in Europe. All have disappeared for practical purposes, except Esperanto, which continues to be used as a language of culture by perhaps a few hundred thousand people scattered across the globe – but what they use it for most of all is not science or commerce, but to translate poetry, drama and fiction from vernacular languages for the benefit of other Esperantists around the world.

Modern Europeans seem to be haunted by a folk memory of the role of Latin in the Middle Ages and beyond. But Latin itself has continued to have a limited use as an international medium for the speakers of 'small' European languages. Antanas Smetona, the last president of Lithuania before it was overrun by Soviet and then Nazi armies in 1941, used Latin to make his last unsuccessful appeal for help from the Allies.[8]

From the other side of the Baltic Sea, a daily news bulletin in Latin is broadcast by web radio from Helsinki even now.

Language unification, if it ever comes, will probably not be achieved by Latin, Esperanto, Volapük or some yet to be invented 'contact vehicle', but by one of the languages that possesses a big head start already. It will probably not be the language with the largest number of native speakers (currently, Mandarin Chinese), but the one with the largest number of non-native users, which is English at the present time. This prospect terrifies and dismays many people, for a whole variety of reasons. But a world in which all intercultural communication was carried out in a single idiom would not diminish the variety of human tongues. It would just make native speakers of the international medium less sophisticated users of language than all others, since they alone would have only one language to think with.

Second or vehicular languages are learnt more quickly and also forgotten more easily than native tongues. Over the past fifty years, English has been acquired to some degree by countless millions across the continent of Europe and is now the only common language among speakers of the different native languages of Belgium, for example, or on the island of Cyprus. Russian, on the other hand, which was understood and used by the educated class across the entire sphere of influence of the USSR, from the Baltic to the Balkans and from Berlin to Outer Mongolia until 1989, has been forgotten very fast and, even when not forgotten entirely, is now usually left to one side for contact with foreigners. If language unification does proceed further in the twenty-first century, its course will be mapped not by the qualities or nature of the unifying language or of the languages it displaces. It will hang on the future course of world history.

Beyond multilingualism and language unification, the third path that leads away from translation is to stop fussing about what other cultures have to say and to stick to one's own. Isolation has been the dream of many societies and some have come close to achieving it. During the Edo period (1603–1868), Japan restricted contact with foreigners to a handful of adventurous Dutch, who were allowed to maintain a trading station on an island in Nagasaki harbour, and the Chinese. In Europe, Britain often seemed to wallow in 'splendid isolation' – *The Times* of 22 October 1957 famously ran a headline saying: 'FOG IN CHANNEL, CONTINENT CUT OFF' – but that was more pose than reality. Not so in the tiny land of Albania. Enver Hoxha, the country's Communist ruler from 1944 to 1985, first broke off relations with his nearest neighbour, Yugoslavia, in 1948, then with the Soviet Union in 1960, and then with Mao's China in 1976. Albania remained committed to total isolation for many years thereafter, and at one point in the early 1980s there were no more than a dozen foreigners (including diplomatic staff) in the whole country.[9] Televisions were tuned so as to disable the reception of broadcasts from outside the state; only those books that confirmed Albania's own view of its position in the world were translated (and there were not many of those); no foreign books were imported; commercial exchanges were as limited as cultural and linguistic contacts, and no foreign debts were contracted. On the very doorstep of Europe, just a short hop from the tourist sites of Corfu and the swankier resorts of the Italian Adriatic, Albania's half-century of voluntary isolation shows that relatively large groups of people are sometimes prepared to forgo all the supposed benefits of intercultural exchange.

The dream of isolation comes in many forms, but its recurrent shadow falls over the many stories that anthropologists

have told us about pre-literate societies living in remote parts of the world. Barely pastiching scientific work of this kind, Georges Perec uses chapter 25 of *Life A User's Manual* to narrate the life of Marcel Appenzzell, a fictional pupil of the real Marcel Mauss, who set off to the jungle of Sumatra to establish contact with the Anadalams. After a debilitating journey through tropical forests Appenzzell finally encounters the tribe. They say nothing. He leaves out what he believes to be traditional gifts and falls asleep. When he awakes, the Anadalams have disappeared. They have left his gifts, up-ended their huts and walked away. He tracks them through the jungle, catches up with them and repeats his procedure, believing it to be the right way to establish communication with these 'pre-contact' people. But the result is the same. They leave. And so it goes on, week after terrible week, until the ethnographer grasps that the Anadalams do not want to engage in communication with him, or with anybody else. That is indeed their privilege. A people may choose autarchy in place of contact. Who are we to say that is wrong?

However, in Perec's telling of this story, the Anadalams exemplify not only pride and self-sufficiency, but also linguistic and cultural entropy. They possess a few metal tools they are no longer capable of fabricating themselves, suggesting they are drop-outs from a more developed civilization. Their language also appears to have had a large part of its vocabulary cut away:

> One consequence of this . . . was that the same word came to refer to an ever-increasing number of objects. Thus the Malay word for hunting, *pekee*, meant indifferently to hunt, to walk, to carry, spear, gazelle, antelope, peccary, *my'am* – a type of very hot spice used in meat dishes – as well as forest, tomorrow,

> dawn, etc. Similarly, *sinuya*, a word which Appenzzell put alongside the Malay *usi*, 'banana', and *nuya*, 'coconut', meant to eat, meal, soup, gourd, spatula, plait, evening, house, pot, fire, silex (the Anadalams made fire by rubbing two flints), fibula, comb, hair, *hoja* (a hair-dye made from coconut milk mixed with various soils and plants), etc. . . . [10]

The reader can of course jump straight from this description of lexical entropy to the almost moral conviction that isolation is bad, for it leads (as the story shows) to the impoverishment and death of a language and the culture it supports, and ultimately to the extinction of a whole people. But Perec catches such sentimentality on the hop:

> Of all the characteristics of the Anadalams, these linguistic habits are the best known, because Appenzzell described them in detail in a long letter to the Swedish philologist Hambo Taskerson . . . He pointed out in an aside that these characteristics could perfectly well apply to a Western carpenter using tools with precise names – gauge, tonguing plane, moulding plane, jointer, mortise, jack plane, rabbet, etc. – but asking his apprentice to pass them to him by just saying 'Gimme the thingummy'.

Perec's tight-lipped carpenter may serve as a warning for people who too loudly lament the loss of language proficiency among (for example) today's teenagers and students. The carpenter's skill as a carpenter is unaffected by the form of words he uses to go about his trade because there is no relationship of cause and effect between linguistic entropy and cultural riches of most other kinds. The loss of a vocabulary, or its replacement by a less refined one, has no generalized impact on what people can do.

It would similarly be unwise to think that isolation causes languages to wither and die. Indeed, isolation may be the most fertile ground for the diversification and enrichment of forms of speech – the innumerable distinctive jargons created by clannish teenagers in every culture provide a good example of that.

Indeed, there are many richly rewarding activities we perform in contact with others, including others who speak different languages, that don't need any words at all.

My father once took a trip to Portugal. On unpacking his suitcase he realized he had forgotten to pack his bedroom slippers. He went out, found a shoe shop, selected the footwear he was lacking, got the assistant to find the right size (39 E), paid for his purchase, checked the change, expressed his thanks and gestured farewell, and went back to his hotel – all without uttering a word, in any language. Every user of a human language must have had or been close to having a language-free intercultural communication of a similar kind. We do use language to communicate, and the language that we use certainly has some bearing on what, with whom and how we communicate. But that's only part of the picture. It would be as artificial to limit our grasp of communication to written or even spoken language as it would be to restrict a study of human nutrition to the menus of restaurants in the Michelin guide.

# 3. *Why* Do *We* Call *It* 'Translation'?

Like speech and communication, words and things don't fill exactly the same space. But there's worse to come. Not all words have a meaningful relationship to things at all.

C. K. Ogden, the famously eccentric co-author of *The Meaning of Meaning*, believed that much of the world's troubles could be ascribed to the illusion that a thing exists just because we have a word for it. He called this phenomenon 'Word Magic'. Candidates for the label include 'levitation', 'real existing socialism' and 'safe investment'. These aren't outright fictions, but illusions licensed and created by the lexicon. In Ogden's view, Word Magic is what makes us lazy. It stops us from questioning the assumptions that are hidden in words and leads us to allow words to manipulate our minds. It is in this sense that we need to ask: does 'translation' exist? That is to say, is 'translation' an actual thing we can identify, define, explore and understand – or is it just a word?

In English and many other languages the word for translation is a two-headed beast. 'A translation' names a product – any work translated from some other language; whereas 'translation', without an article, names a process – the process by which 'a translation' comes to exist. This kind of double meaning is not a problem for speakers of languages that possess regular sets of terms referring both to a process and to the product of that process (as do most Western European languages). Speakers of English, French and so forth are quite accustomed to negotiating such duplicity and can play games

with it, as when they say *walk the walk* and *talk the talk*. More specifically, words derived from Latin that end in English in *-tion* nearly always name a process and a result of that process: 'abstraction' (the process of abstracting something) alongside 'an abstraction', 'construction' (the business of building structures) alongside 'a construction' (something built), and so on. In a related kind of word-use, the teacher of a *cordon bleu* cookery lesson hardly needs to explain that the French use the word *cuisine* to name the place where food is prepared (the kitchen) and the results of such preparation (*haute cuisine*, *cuisine bourgeoise*, etc.). Handling the different meanings of 'translation' and 'a translation' is therefore not a real problem. We should nonetheless keep in mind that they are not the same thing and always be wary of taking one for the other.

The difficulty with 'translation' is different. Many diverse kinds of text are habitually identified as instances of 'a translation': books, real estate contracts, car maintenance manuals, poems, plays, legal treatises, philosophical tomes, CD notes and website texts, to list just a few. What common property do they have to make us believe that they are all instances of the same thing that we label 'a translation'? Many language professionals will tell you that translating a manufacturer's catalogue is utterly different from translating a poem. Why do we not have different words for these different actions? There are other languages that have no shortage of separate words to name the many things that in English all go by the name of 'a translation'. Here, for example, are the main words that you have to talk about them in Japanese:

> If the translation we are discussing is complete, we might call it a 全訳 *zen'yaku* or a 完訳 *kan'yaku*. A first translation is a 初訳 *shoyaku*. A retranslation is a 改訳 *kaiyaku*, and the new translation is a 新訳 *shin'yaku* that replaces the old translation,

or 旧訳 *kyū yaku*. A translation of a translation is a 重訳 *jū yaku*. A standard translation that seems unlikely to be replaced is a 定訳 *teiyaku*; equally unlikely to be replaced is a 名訳 *meiyaku*, or 'celebrated translation'. When a celebrated translator speaks of her own work, she may disparage it as 拙訳 *setsuyaku*, 'clumsy translation', i.e. 'my own translation', which is not to be confused with a genuinely bad translation, disparaged as a 駄訳 *dayaku* or an 悪訳 *akuyaku*. A co-translation is a 共訳 *kyō yaku* or 合訳 *gō yaku*; a draft translation, or 下訳 *shitayaku*, may be polished through a process of 'supervising translation', or 監訳 *kan'yaku*, without it becoming a *kyō yaku* or *gō yaku*. Translations are given different names depending on the approach they take to the original: they can be 直訳 *chokuyaku* (literally 'direct translation'), 逐語訳 *chikugoyaku* ('word for word translation'), 意訳 *iyaku* ('sense translation'), 対訳 *taiyaku* ('translation presented with the original text on facing pages'), or in the case of translations of works by Sidney Sheldon, Danielle Steel, John Grisham and other popular American writers, 超訳 *chōyaku* ('translations that are even better than the originals', an invention and registered trademark of the Academy Press).[1]

English possesses a wide range of names for different kinds of flowers: one way of referring to the relationship between, say, 'tulip' and 'flower' is to call 'flower' a hypernym and 'tulip', along with 'rose', 'hydrangea', 'camellia', etc. the hyponyms of the term 'flower'. 'Hypernym' and 'hyponym' refer to relationships between words in a language, not to (botanical or other) relations between the things they refer to. So we could say that Japanese lacks a hypernym for all its various translation terms, whereas English has the hypernym, but no readily available set of hyponyms. But the very structure of such an argument takes us into dangerous territory. It sets up English as the