



## Translating culture: Matthee's *Kringe in 'n bos* as a case in point

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### Abstract

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*The translation of "cultural identity" in a novel such as "Kringe in 'n bos" contributes towards the definition of a uniquely South African representation of time and space in the global context. When translation is studied as a product of its socio-historical context, the translator is faced with problems of translating ideology and cultural identity in literature. Realia constitute a particular challenge to the translator because, according to the definition, precise equivalents of these words do not exist in other languages, which could cause shifts in the target language text. This article considers the concept of translatability and concludes that, despite the problems encountered, an adequate and satisfactory German translation from the Afrikaans original should be possible.*

*The question of translatability assumes an interesting dimension as the Afrikaans novel was translated into English by the author herself. The privileged position of author-translator granted Matthee a near-perfect understanding of the different layers of meaning and intention of the source text and eliminated the gap between the author and translator. However, one gains the impression that the German translator (Stege) resorted to transference as a strategy to avoid translation and it emerges that most instances of definite mistranslations are, indeed, attributable to Stege's unfamiliarity with the South African context.*

## Opsomming

### Kulturele vertaling, met verwysing na Matthee se *Kringe in 'n bos*

*Die vertaling van "kulturele identiteit" in 'n roman soos "Kringe in 'n bos" dra by tot die definisie van 'n uniek Suid-Afrikaanse voorstelling van tyd en ruimte in die globale konteks. Wanneer vertaling bestudeer word as produk van die sosiohistoriese konteks, kry die vertaler te doen met probleme wat ten nouste verband hou met ideologie en kulturele identiteit in die letterkunde. Realia stel besondere uitdagings aan die vertaler, want dit word gedefinieer as woorde waarvoor presiese ekwivalente nie in ander tale bestaan nie. Dit kan klemverskuiwings in die doeltaaltekste tot gevolg hê. In hierdie artikel word die begrip "vertaalbaarheid" onder die loep geneem en die gevolgtrekking word gemaak dat 'n toereikende en bevredigende Duitse vertaling uitvoerbaar behoort te wees.*

*Die vertaalbaarheidskwessie verkry 'n interessante dimensie aangesien die Afrikaanse roman deur die outeur self in Engels vertaal is. Synde in die bevoorregte posisie van skrywer-vertaler het Matthee 'n onverbeterlike begrip van die verskillende betekenisvlakke en die oogmerke van die brontekste gehad. Die normale afstand tussen outeur en vertaler het ook nie bestaan nie. Dit lyk asof die Duitse vertaler (Stege) in probleemgevalle haar toevlug geneem het tot ontlening ten einde vertaling te vermy en dit blyk dat die meeste gevalle van definitiewe vertaalfoute inderdaad toegeskryf kan word aan Stege se gebrekkige kennis van die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks.*

## 1. Introduction

This article is mainly concerned with literary translation. It addresses the problems posed by ideology and cultural identity in a source text that have to be accommodated in a target text. Aspects such as cultural layering or acculturation and ideological bias with regard to Dalene Matthee's novel *Kringe in 'n bos* (*Circles in a forest*) will constitute the main focus. In this respect, important extra-textual elements, or *realia*,<sup>1</sup> have been identified and the difficulties in their

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1 These cultural markers would act as guidelines in the evaluation of the German translation. For the purposes of this article, Vlahov and Florion's definition of "realia" (as quoted in Leighton, 1991:218) will be used:

Those words (and word conjunctions) of a native language which represent the names of objects, concepts, phenomena characteristic of a geographical environment, culture, material existence, or distinctive

translation will be discussed. Various categorisation models (derived from several acknowledged sources)<sup>2</sup> have been combined and adapted to form a useful model for the identification of prominent markers representing the forest ethos in *Kringe in 'n bos*. As a framework for the initial model, Dagut's division of the "referential void" into "environmental void" and "cultural void" was implemented.

As a cultural product, literature captures and verbalises the interaction between people and their individual and historical contexts. Lerner (1990:335) emphasises this contextual relationship in literary expression when he identifies at least three different but interrelated contexts that apply to any text: its social reality, ideology, and strategies of writing. To exclude any of these would be an oversimplification. Ashcroft (2001:124-125) interprets this relationship in a more personal way by insisting that all constructions of place hinge on the question of belonging. However, he makes it clear that this "place" to which a person "belongs" may also be situated in symbolic features, which constitute a shared culture.

In her novel, *Kringe in 'n bos (Circles in a forest)*, the Afrikaans writer, Dalene Matthee, creates an interesting example of how "cultural identity" evolves through the interaction of a person or a community with their respective contexts. In this case, the context is defined by a specific location, an authentic forest location in Knysna, South Africa. As a nature sanctuary (wildlife heritage) where an indigenous elephant population used to roam freely and interference from the outside world kept to a minimum, the ecosystem of fauna and flora was pristine and particularly significant, but this landscape, its animal population and inhabitants have since been sadly depleted. Matthee depicts the long-time traditional inhabitants, woodcutters and foresters, as an isolated community with a unique lifestyle and a peculiar forest ethos or rhythm of life; a life spent in symbiosis with their environment.

As a native from this region, Matthee recreates or "transposes" the natural forest context into a language infused with cultural, regional

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socio-historical features of a people, nation, country, tribe, and function thereby as bearers of national, local, or historical colour; precise equivalents of these words do not exist in any other language.

2 Those of Newmark (1988:103), Klingberg (1986; as quoted in Postma, 1995:122-123), Krüger (1990:227), Pretorius (1997:45), Nida (1954) and Straight (1977; as quoted in Leighton, 1991:220), Nord (1991; as quoted in Schäfer, 2000:58) and Dagut (as quoted in Smit, 1990).

and colloquial nuances. She thereby manages to capture the cultural idiosyncrasies and ideological beliefs of the foresters and woodcutters and their environment. It is perhaps due to the inhabitants' particular way of speaking – their unique designation of geographical locations, topographical landmarks, and their special names for trees, animals and rivers – that induced Matthee to translate her own work into English so that she could capture the cultural inheritance of the forest ethos reflected in the source text.

Although the novel has since been translated into several languages (15 to date) the main concern in this article will rest with the German (1985) and English (1984) translations. The German version of *Kringe in 'n bos* (*Unter dem Kalandertbaum*) does not always adequately translate the cultural features (*realia*) that inform the original Afrikaans version. However, if the main idea is to transfer meaning and aesthetic value, and if the relevant socio-historical contexts and inherent ideological bias of both texts are suitably observed and accommodated, the cultural features of this literary text should be translatable.

## 2. Literature and translatability<sup>3</sup>

In literary translation, cultural issues and the difficulties of cross-cultural communication have inevitably induced translators to regard context, conventions and the history of translation as important considerations (Bassnett & Lefevere, 1990:123). As a translator, Lefevere (1987:33) firmly believes that literature should be viewed within the larger context of history:

If we analyse its genesis instead of looking for timeless lessons, we are on the way to a mindset in which we can analyse literatures produced in different cultures without being tied to the yardstick of 'timeless excellence'.

Bassnett (1993:76) also points to the relevance of context when she indicates how themes in postcolonial literature have affected the fundamental concerns of translation:

Once we take on board the term, geographical entities shift and other considerations come to the fore. [...] The theme of exile,

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3 The issue of translatability is a relative concept (and depends largely on the definition of translation). "Translatability equals the possibility of finding approximate equivalents in the target language – not the possibility to explain all the peculiarities of the source text." (Van den Broeck & Lefevere, 1979:70.)

of belonging and non-belonging and the problematics of language and national unity are common links between writers from post-colonial cultures. Equally, the problematics of language and national identity offers another fundamental point of unity.

Despite the difficulties encountered in cultural translation, the consensus among theoreticians (Wilss, 1982:35; Nida, 1964:2) now seems to be that absolute untranslatability, whether linguistic or cultural, does not exist. There are various strategies, acknowledged as sound translation mechanisms, that translators can use when confronted with a gap between two languages or two cultures. Yet it is assumed that a perfect translation without any losses from the source text is unattainable because there will always be a certain loss of meaning when a text is translated (De Pedro, 1999). A practical approach to translation must accept that, since not everything that appears in the source text can be reproduced in the target text, an evaluation of potential losses has to be accommodated and priorities should be set (Snell-Hornby & Pöhl, 1989:79).

However, it certainly seems logical and undeniable that some texts are more easily translatable than others. Van den Broeck and Lefevere (1979:70) clearly state that

Vertalen is een activiteit met relatieve kansen op success, en dat success varieert onder meer met het communicatieniveau. Daarom is vertaalbaarheid veeleer een kwestie van gradatie dan een klaar afgelijnde dichotomie. Teksten zijn niet zozeer in de absolute zin vertaalbaar of onvertaalbaar als wel min of meer vertaalbaar.

*Translation is an activity with relative chances for success, and that success varies (inter alia) according to the level of communication. Therefore translatability should be considered a matter of degree rather than a clearly defined dichotomy. Texts are not so much in the absolute sense translatable or untranslatable as “approximately” translatable. (Translation and emphasis – WHC.)*

Translating between cultures usually requires choosing between two basic translation strategies: domestication or foreignisation. Domestication means changing the text to be more recognisable and familiar and thus bringing the foreign culture closer to the reader in the target culture. Foreignisation, however, implies the opposite as it means retaining the foreign feeling of the original text and forcing the reader to acknowledge the cultural and linguistic differences.

This choice between domestication and foreignisation is linked to questions of ethics as well, because it remains a question whether the translator should be accountable to the source culture or to the target culture, and to what extent.

To address this question, Van den Broeck and Lefevere (1979:70) propose six laws of translatability that should be observed:

1. The larger the unit of translation, the greater the translatability would be, and vice versa. (That is, a novel will generally be more translatable than an essay.)
2. The smaller the amount of information, the less complex the structure would be and the greater the translatability, and vice versa. (That is, a couple of "straightforward" sentences will be more translatable than a poem of about the same length.)
3. Translatability is greater when there is a degree of contact between the source language and target language. (That is, greater translatability exists between English and French than between English and Rumanian.)
4. Translatability is greater when the source language and target language are on an equal cultural level of development. (That is, greater translatability exists between Latin and Greek than between Latin and Zulu.)
5. Translatability is greater between two closely related languages, especially if the conditions in 3 and 4 are applicable and special consideration is given to "faux amis". (That is, greater translatability exists between Dutch and Afrikaans than between Dutch and Russian.)
6. Translatability can be influenced by the expressive possibilities of the target language. No two languages are similar. During the translation process, some cultural colouring and nuances will be lost, but could also be gained due to the vocabulary and lexical diversity of the target text.

In consideration of the guidelines provided above, it could be argued that the first two laws are not useful for purposes of a comparison as they apply to the same source text, while the 4th and 6th laws could be equally applicable to the English and the German translations –

as English, German and Afrikaans are on roughly the same cultural level of development.<sup>4</sup>

Once the first two laws have been discarded and the 4th and 6th laws have been disqualified due to their similar results when applied to both target languages, the assertion can be made that the relative level of translatability of *Kringe in 'n bos* into English and German respectively could be determined by applying the remaining two laws which concern the *degree of contact* between language communities (law 3) and the *relatedness* between source language and target language (law 5).

The question of “translatability” assumes an interesting dimension in this case as the original Afrikaans novel was translated into English by the author herself. However, the subsequent translations into German (1985) and Dutch (1999) respectively were accomplished by translators outside South Africa. As both Dutch and German are languages of Germanic origin, one is inclined to assume that the problematics related to translatability would not be such a high priority on the agenda of both translators. Yet, it would seem that the German translator (Gisela Stege) whose translation features in this study, had very little knowledge of Afrikaans. She used the “re-written” English version as basis and – relying upon her “little reading knowledge of Dutch” – referred to the Afrikaans version for further validation (communiqué with the translator – Dierks, 1993).

### 3. Language affinities

The “degree of contact” (law 3) can exist in two ways, namely (i) contact between the two language communities as a whole – increasing the chances that suitable words will exist to express aspects of unique (but shared) human experience, and (ii) the translator’s familiarity with the language and culture of the source language community.

- (i) **English:** There is a degree of contact between Afrikaans and English communities, but the translator had to consider the fact that the book was written in a specific language variety (geolect, sociolect and temporal dialect in one). For the South African English speaking public the translation strategy of transference

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4 English and German have similar expression possibilities; both languages have highly developed vocabularies, lexical diversity and a translation tradition going back hundreds of years (i.e. law 6; Krüger, 1990:133).

might well be an acceptable solution in many cases. However, English is an international language. Most of the English version's readers are from Britain, North America and Australia – people who normally have very limited knowledge of South Africa and, of course, even less of the (unique) Knysna region. The fact that English speaking people have been living in the Knysna region since 1804 ensures that there are acknowledged English equivalents for many of the region's unique features.

**German:** Even less contact exists between the Afrikaans and German language communities, except for the relatively small number of German immigrants living in South Africa and Namibia. But this translation was primarily intended for German, Austrian and Swiss people and not for the isolated German communities in Southern Africa.

- (ii) **English:** The fact that the author (Matthee) is also the author-translator of the English text contributed to bridging the gap between the two languages as she had a near-perfect understanding of the different layers of meaning and intention of the original text in its entirety.

**German:** The German translator (Steger) depended on the English translation as source text because she does not have much knowledge of Afrikaans. She does possess a little reading knowledge of Dutch (Dierks, 1993), which must have helped her to understand the Afrikaans text to a certain degree. It is clear, however, that Steger lacks in-depth knowledge of both Afrikaner culture and the South African landscape. "Relatedness" (law 5) between German and Afrikaans is closer than the relatedness between English and Afrikaans. Though Afrikaans, English and German share a Germanic heritage, the independent development and separated geographic regions still lead to many translation problems (Krüger, 1990: 133). It can thus be assumed that translating *Kringe in 'n bos* into either English or German should be possible, as long as translators are aware of the potential referential gaps between the languages.

#### 4. Cultural markers

Extra-linguistic features are especially important in the specific source text due to the text's unique *Landeskunde* and the fact that the language of the source text is "a geolect, a sociolect and a temporal dialect" in one (Krüger, 1990:106). Unfortunately, most of the



idiosyncratic language use is lost during the translation into German. Krüger (1990:144) identifies and discusses the merits of three different ways of dealing with idiosyncratic language – none of which is very satisfactory.<sup>5</sup> Matthee translated the idiosyncratic Afrikaans into unmarked Standard English. Consequently, all translators who used the English version as source text also translated the English text into unmarked standard language. This strategy completely neutralises the idiosyncratic language. The fact that so much of the language's unique character is inevitably lost in translation makes it all the more important to retain as much as possible of the extra-textual elements, notably *Landeskunde*.

According to Dagut (as quoted in Smit, 1990:14), extra-textual factors are the cause of referential voids, which he (Dagut, 1981:64) describes as “blank spaces in the field of reference, corresponding to referents outside the ken of the language”. This means that certain “physical-cultural” elements are absent in the extra-linguistic “reality” of the target language culture, which does not possess a term to designate such elements. A translator would experience problems in finding appropriate terms or expressions to fill these voids. In fact, Dagut (as quoted in Smit, 1990:14) states that referential voids are untranslatable, “unless and until the referent is added to the conceptualised experience of the target language speakers”.

## 5. *Kringe in 'n bos*. context

The forest as predominant space influences the disposition of its inhabitants to a great extent. It determines their lifestyle and ultimately their identity by forcing them into isolation, preventing social development and keeping contact with the outside world to the minimum. The forest determines their income, their diet, their clothing, their type of housing, their level of education, their social standing, their “choice” of occupation (woodcutter), their experience of religion, et cetera. In short, approximately every aspect of their material, social and religious lives is shaped (and generally limited) by their isolated state of being.

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5 (i) A comparable geographic, temporal or social dialect occurring in the target language could be imitated;  
(ii) marked language in the source text could be translated into unmarked language; or  
(iii) a “translator's dialect” could be created in the target language.

The title of the novel refers to Saul Barnard's pursuit of Oupoot, the leader of the forest elephants. It suggests that Oupoot might be leading Saul, the protagonist, in circles through the forest – either planning to trample him finally, or because he wants to remind his “human brother” of the destruction caused by the woodcutters and the gold diggers. The “circles” also symbolise the futility of Saul's struggles and his gradual realisation of his own identity and place in society. In the final instance, it becomes a (seemingly inevitable) vicious circle: the forest is being destroyed by the woodcutters who are, in turn, being exploited by the wood buyers – and the elephants' existence is threatened by both.

Saul's quest becomes parallel to his search for human dignity, the meaning of life (both in and outside of the forest) and, ultimately, the “truth”. He wages a twofold struggle: against the prejudices of a “superior” class as well as against the traditions, suspicion and narrow-mindedness of his own people. Saul is trapped between these two worlds, but he is also the only one capable of building bridges between them. Saul is simultaneously outsider and defender of the forest. He possesses an accurate perception and intimate knowledge of the trees and nature which, for instance, is encapsulated in his loving description of the stinkwood tree (Matthee, 1984a:112). His own people reject him, brand him as a traitor and make him a scapegoat, while the English townsfolk regard him as a “bush baboon” who does not know his proper place. Saul acts as a conscience to both bush folk and townsfolk, bringing to light the blindness and prejudice of the respective societies, and pointing out injustices and exploitation.

## **6. Realia**

Apart from the unique cultural setting of *Kringe in 'n bos*, the translation into English by the original Afrikaans author also served as incentive to construct a model that would identify cultural markers influencing the translation. The following two main markers, *environment* and *culture*, were identified in the text after combining various relevant categorisation models. The first marker, *environment*, was subdivided into flora (comprising trees and other plants), fauna (comprising animals, birds and insects), weather conditions and physical/topographical features. The second marker, *culture*, was subdivided into material culture (comprising food and tools; clothing and housing and payment methods), social culture (forest life and woodcutting, social classes, names and kinship, geographical designations), and religion (comprising Christianity, taboos and supersti-

tions, illness and death). Due to the limited scope of this article, a few examples will have to suffice in illustration of the argument. A table indicating the Afrikaans, English and German translations as well as an accompanying commentary on the choices made for the target text has been included as Addendum B.

Under the rubric of *environment*, the following references will serve to highlight some of the difficulties encountered:

- **Flora (trees)**

- *Kwar* (A<sup>6</sup>:175); *Kwar* (G<sup>7</sup>:187): A tree with edible fruits. The German translator, Stege, might have considered the Afrikaans term to be more German looking than “quar”. She seems to have relied on her intuition in the decision-making process.

**Translation strategy:** Transference from the Afrikaans text.

- **Flora (other plants)**

- *Bloubokkietou* (A:24); *Blauböckchenseil* (G:31): “Where blue buck rope grows, you can be sure of success.” (It is an indication that there is a blue buck trail nearby – in other words a good place to set a trap.)

**Translation strategy:** This is a very direct, but satisfactory, translation of the key elements: blue + buck + rope;

- *Seweweeksvarings* (A:17); *Farnen* (G:24): The English translation is “seven-week ferns” so it was definitely Stege’s own idea to omit the “seven-week” element. She probably did not consider it to be of much importance.

**Translation strategy:** Combination of translation proper and omission.

- **Fauna (animals)**

- *Olifante* = Grootvoete, dikbene, onse voorouers (A:10); *Elefanten* = Großfüße, Dickbeine, Alte (G:17): The word *elephant* is not used by the forest people for fear that the elephants “will

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6 Afrikaans.

7 German.

hear you and think you're calling them". Elephants are called bigfeet or thicklegs or old people, but never by their real name.<sup>8</sup>

- *Bosvarke* (A:23); *Wildschweine* (G:31): *Wildschweine* is a more general term than *bosvarke*. (The English text, used as source language, also uses the more generic term "wild pigs".) A *bosvark* is a type of wild pig that lives in a forest – as opposed to a warthog that lives in the open. This translation is satisfactory due to the fact that all wild pigs in the European context are also bush pigs.

**Translation strategy:** Translation proper of somewhat adapted/explained English text.

- *Klipspringertjie* (A:159); *Klippspringer* (G:171): A small, nimble antelope that inhabits rocky terrain. They are mostly solitary and never in groups of more than two. This type of antelope is indigenous to South Africa – no other translation possibility exists. The extra *p* in the German *Klippspringer* might have an explanatory function, because *klip* can indeed be translated with *Klippe*. This slight adaptation enables the (German) target language readers to grasp the meaning of the word.

**Translation strategy:** Transference from the English text.

- **Fauna (birds)**

- *Groot loerie* (A:9); *Großer Lori* (G:15): The great lourie is a beautiful, colourful bird that is indigenous to the Knysna region. "Groot loerie" is a direct, but adequate translation of the elements: great + lourie.

**Translation strategy:** A direct translation of the elements: great + lourie.

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8 Woodcutters have much respect and awe for elephants, but also hate them because they are the terror of the forest. "Underestimate a bigfoot and you're dead." The woodcutters' only defence against elephants is to be cautious: they are always aware of the wind direction, they're constantly on the lookout for climbable trees, as a rule they do not walk in the forest at night, and they are extra careful in wet weather – when elephants are known to be more active than usual.

- **Fauna (insects)**

- *Vuurvliegies* (A:80); *Glühwürmchen* (G:89): When fireflies gather it is a sign of rain. “Signs of rain” are especially important in societies, such as this, that are very much affected by rain.

- **Weather conditions**

- As hy só by Noetzie stamp lat jy hom tot hier kan hoor, kan jy jou klaarmaak vir reën. (A:36); Wenn du das Meer von hier aus gegen die Felsen von Noetzie schlagen hörst, kannst du sicher sein, daß es Regen gibt. (G:43): Rain has special significance for a woodcutter. It is not possible to fell a tree or chop wood in wet weather. It is, however, easier to drag out wood when the forest floor is wet. Another important safety implication is that elephants are more active in such weather.
- *Die wind is teen sy rug ...* (A:17); “Der Wind kam von hinten und blies den Elefanten ins Gesicht!” (G:24): As elephants have a keen sense of smell, awareness of wind direction is a crucial survival skill. The addition in the German sentence (because of the addition in the English version) shows that Matthee thought it necessary to explain the matter further to the non-Afrikaans audience.

**Translation strategy:** Translation proper of adapted/explained English text.

- **Physical/topographical features**

- *Kortruigte* (A:18); *Hohe Farn* (G:25): Matthee translated “skuinste” with “under the hill” and “kortruigte” with “ferns”. This has an explanatory function and makes the text more accessible to English readers.

- **Culture (food and tools)**

- *Katotjie* (A:23); *Kaffeetopf* (G:30): Matthee changed some of the phrases to make the text more accessible to readers who are unfamiliar with the South African context and Afrikaner culture. Stege chose to retain these changes.

**Translation strategy:** Translation proper of somewhat explained English text.

- *Kaiawinkel* (A:300); *Wellblechladen* (G:313): The cultural element "kaia" is omitted and replaced with a standardised concept, because there is no clear target language equivalent for this term in either English or German.
- *Skerm* (A:4); "Skerm, eine behelfsmäßige Unterkunft" (G:10): Stege chose to transfer "skerm" to German even though Matthee translated it with the descriptive equivalent "shelter". Stege did realise, however, that German readers will have trouble to grasp the meaning of this Afrikaans word if proper context is not supplied. Therefore she added the explanatory phrase "eine behelfsmäßige Unterkunft". This explanation should suffice.

**Translation strategy:** Combination of transference from the Afrikaans text and explanation.

- **Payment methods**

- *Tiekie* (A:288); *Tickie* (G:301): Previously in the text (A:42, G:49) the Afrikaans "tiekie" was merely transferred to German. This is not consistent.

**Translation strategy:** "Tickie" looks like a mix between "tiekie" and "tickey". It might be that Stege transferred the Afrikaans term, but decided to change its form (spelling) in order to make it look more German.

- **Social culture**

- *Oom Anneries sê jy is nou in jou jongbullyd, maar dit klink eerder of jy in jou beneuktyd is!* (A:62); "Oom Anneries sagt, daß du in deiner Jungbullenzeit bist, aber mir scheint, du bist eher in deiner Stachelkaktuszeit." (G:71).

**Translation strategy:** Translation proper of the somewhat adapted English text. In many of these instances, idiosyncratic language is inevitably lost.

- *Toe hulle wakker word, het oom Anneries langs die halfdooie vuur gelê, sy kop natgedou, en hy het gesnork soos een wat kraansaag trek* (A:32); "Als sie erwachten, war Oom Anneries wieder da; halbtot vor Erschöpfung, den Kopf noch naß vom Tau, lag er am Feuer und schnarchte wie eine Brettsäge" (G:39): "When they woke up, old Anro was back, lying by the half-dead fire, his head wet with dew, and snoring like some-

one pulling a pit-saw” (E:47). The German translator did not grasp the meaning of the English sentence and probably did not have enough knowledge of Afrikaans to realise her mistake by comparing the English text with the original. It is the fire, not uncle Anro, that should be “halbtot”.

- *Hier is delwers wat ons nie eers met ’n lepel vertrou nie.* (A:241); “In der Gegend gibt es Goldgräber denen wir nicht mal unsere Löffel anvertrauen würden) (G:255): “There are diggers round here we don’t even trust with a spoon” (E:293). The German translator did not fully comprehend the subtle meaning of this sentence. The Afrikaans Morris is reluctant to trust some of these diggers with spoons (let alone with knives), whereas the German Morris is merely concerned that they might make off with his hotel’s spoons.

**Translation strategy:** Mistranslation.

- **Religion (superstition)**

- *Jy had altyd ’n ding oor Oupoot* (A:305); “Du hattest es immer mit diesem *Elefanten*” (G:319): “You always had a thing about that *elephant*” (E:367). Jozef would not have been comfortable with the word “elephant”. Now that he has liberated his mind a bit it seems possible that he will also eventually shake off his superstitious beliefs (like Saul) – but not yet.

**Translation strategy:** Mistranslation.

## 7. Translation strategies

The purpose of this article was to determine whether the ostensible instances of *realia* identified above did in fact complicate the German translation of *Kringe in ’n bos*. As *Kringe in ’n bos* was translated by the author herself into English, she was able to render cultural expressions as close to the source language as possible. In terms of subjectivity, the usual gap between the author and translator did not exist to “colour” the translation (Tanquero, 1998:55.)

Though Matthee, like any other translator, was constrained by the existence of a pre-established fictional universe, she probably did not feel “bound” to the source text in the same way as when the author and translator are two separate people. Matthee anticipated, of course, that the English text would serve as source text for most

translators of her work.<sup>9</sup> It is evident that the English text (and consequently all translations for which it served as source text) tends to be more descriptive than the Afrikaans text. Matthee also opted for adding some explanatory footnotes – making the text more accessible not only to the English target audience but (via the translations thereof) also to the international audience.

The translator responsible for *Unter dem Kalanderbaum*, Gisela Stege, is a professional German translator who subsequently also translated some of Matthee's other novels such as *Fiela se kind* (1985) and *Moerbeibos* (1987). The fact that Stege has even been commissioned to produce German translations of several novels by the celebrated author Salman Rushdie, is sufficient proof that she has an exceptional reputation as translator. It is evident, though, that Stege lacks in-depth knowledge of both Afrikaner culture and the South African landscape; a fact that she admits when she claims to having had very little knowledge of Afrikaans and a "little reading knowledge of Dutch" which enabled her to refer to the Afrikaans text for further validation (communiqué with the translator – Dierks, 1993). However, all instances of non-correspondence between the Afrikaans and German texts cannot be attributed to inaccuracy on the part of the German translator – the reason for this being that Stege used the English translation as source text.

As far as the flora is concerned, Matthee generally attempted to make the English text more accessible for the benefit of the international audience. This explains why all descriptive plant names (trees and otherwise) are either "official" (dictionary) translations or direct translations of the meaningful units. Stege followed suit and translated the descriptive names directly from the English text. "Assegai", "kamassie", "kalander" and "upright" are the only tree names that Matthee (and consequently also Stege) merely transferred from the Afrikaans text. This is because these four names are not descriptive, that is, unlike the other tree names they are not combinations of meaningful units that can easily be translated. Dictionary translations also do not exist, as these trees are indigenous to South Africa.

Much the same strategies were adhered to with regard to the fauna. Wherever possible (available) the names of animals, birds and in-

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9 The English text probably served as "derived" source text for all translations – with the exception of Dutch.



sects were rendered with their official translations. Some bird species are, however, so unique to the particular region that official translations or close “equivalents” simply do not exist, in which case Matthee (and consequently also Stege) made use of the strategy of omission. This is one of the rare cases in which omission is probably a satisfactory solution. Addendum B provides a listing of detected mistranslations and unexplained omissions.

All phrases relating to weather conditions were directly translated. Only once did Matthee consider it necessary to add an explanatory phrase to make the text more accessible. Stege retained the adapted text. The same applies to physical/topographical features that were rendered with direct translations. In most cases the English text was somewhat adapted for the sake of explanation. Stege again retained the changes.

The second main marker, *culture*, provided some problems as a result of the dialect or colloquial speech used in the forest and environs. All phrases categorised under “food and tools for preparation thereof” were translated directly but in almost all cases Matthee added additional phrases to the English text in order to make it more understandable to readers who are unfamiliar with the context. Stege chose to retain these changes. Most phrases relating to clothing and housing were also translated directly – with the interesting exception of *skerm*. Stege chose to transfer the Afrikaans *skerm* to German even though Matthee translated it with the descriptive equivalent *shelter*.

Stege clearly did not have a specific policy with regard to the translation of phrases relating to payment methods. (This is, of course, not a problem in itself, but it can easily lead to inconsistency if the translator is not very meticulous.) In most cases, transference from the English text was Stege’s strategy of choice and in two instances she transferred directly from the Afrikaans text. Stege made use of translation proper only twice. A few footnotes are provided where deemed necessary to explain the meaning of words like *goodfor* (which might sound English, but occurs only in certain regions of South Africa). Most footnotes were also translated into German.

Translation proper was mostly used for phrases relating to “forest life and woodcutting” but in most cases Matthee adapted the text somewhat to make it more accessible. These changes were retained by Stege. In some cases Stege even found it necessary to add explanations of her own, i.e. she did not merely translate explanations occurring in the English text. Pronouns proved confusing

in distinguishing between social classes. This can be attributed mostly to the fact that English doesn't distinguish between a more and less courteous form of the word "you" – as is the case in Afrikaans (*jy/u*) and German (*du/Sie*). The impression is thus created that Saul is more humble and McDonald is more polite than they really mean to be. Stege translated pronouns directly from Matthee's English text.

Most modes of address as well as proper names were simply transferred from the Afrikaans text in spite of the fact that this was not the strategy Matthee followed. (The only exception being "Fred Terblans" which was transferred from the English text.) The reason might be to avoid pronunciation difficulties. This is a case of inconsistency on the part of Stege. A multitude of other modes of address (like *Meneer*, *Baas* and *Juffrou*) and proper names ("Gert Oog" and "Oom Wiljam" for instance) would, after all, also cause severe pronunciation difficulties. The same is true for nearly all geographic names. *Goudveld* (*Goldfeld*) is the only geographic name that was translated instead of being transferred by Stege. The probable reason is that *Goudveld* consists of two clearly recognisable elements: *goud* + *veld*. Inconsistency is at the root of most of Stege's errors. (See also Addendum B for comments on mistranslations that were identified in this category.)

The category related to religion includes all language used in relating to Christianity, taboos and superstition, and illness and death. These phrases were mostly translated directly from the English text. In several instances Stege apparently forgot about the superstitious beliefs of the forest people. Unfortunately, this led to quite a few inappropriate translations.

## **8. Conclusion**

As a result of new communication technologies, the link between author and translator is becoming increasingly close. Some authors spend long hours in conversation with the translators of their works, providing them with help and support. Günter Grass even holds seminars and lectures (lasting several days) for his translators (Vinocur, 1980). This exchange of ideas between two language professionals reflects a clear change in the relationship between author and translator – a change that acknowledges the co-authorship of the translator. It is a fact that reputable writers can be discredited by inferior or mediocre translations of their works. It is for instance widely believed that the English translations of Thomas Mann's work are responsible for a distorted image of Mann in Britain and Ame-

rica. Closer to home, an obviously third-rate German translation of Rachelle Greeff's *Al die windrigtings van my wêreld* (1996) recently caused quite a stir in Afrikaans literary circles. It probably had an adverse effect on Greeff's reputation in German speaking countries. This is fortunately not the case in *Unter dem Kalandertbaum*. However, the German translation does not always adequately translate cultural features (realia).

The most notable difference between the two English and German texts is that the German text makes more frequent use of transference than the English text – in spite of the fact that the German reader is less likely to understand unexplained cultural features (realia), because of the more limited contact between German and Afrikaans language communities (see 2.1.4). Much can be said for transference, which Dagut (1978:51) considers to be the best translation strategy in the case of environmental and cultural voids. But he adds that transference should always be accompanied by “an adequate explanatory footnote or glossary entry”. In the English translation short footnotes are provided wherever Afrikaans words are transferred, but the German translator only added footnotes where the English translation also provided them. Dasenbrock also argues in favour of transference:

A full or even adequate understanding of another culture is never to be gained by translating it entirely into one's own terms. It is different and that difference must be respected. In multicultural literature in English today, that difference is primarily established by barriers to intelligibility being strategically and selectively raised for the less informed reader, forcing the reader to do work that then becomes part of the book's meaning. Making things easy would have denied the reader the experience needed to come to an understanding of the culture.

But one of the main objects of translation is, after all, to make literature accessible, and a refusal to translate could also indicate a difficulty to translate. Wills (1982:49) states:

Should a translation nevertheless fail to measure up to the original in terms of quality, the reason will normally be not an insufficiency of syntactic and lexical inventories in that particular target language, but rather the limited ability of the translator with regard to text analysis.

One gains the impression that Stege used transference more as a way to avoid translation than as a translation strategy. From the analysis in Addendum B, it is clear that most instances of definite

mistranslations can be attributed to Stege's imperfect understanding of her two source texts. More specifically, she was handicapped by a lack of knowledge of the South African landscape and Afrikaner culture (as indicated above). To my mind the quality of the German translation could have been better if it was possible for Stege to consult with Matthee.

It is clear that the "line" needs to be drawn somewhere between the translator's task to explain and the reader's opportunity to learn (see Nelson, 1991:51 and Landsberg, 1999). It would be a meaningful avenue for further research to attempt to establish the "position" of this elusive line or, alternatively, to determine where this line should ideally be located.

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### Key concepts:

cultural translation  
cultural void  
environmental void  
literary translation  
Matthee, Dalene: *Kringe in 'n bos*  
realia  
referential void  
translatability

**Kernbegrippe:**

kulturele lakune

kulturele vertaling

literêre vertaling

Matthee, Dalene: *Kringe in 'n bos*

omgewingslakune

realia

referensiële lakune

vertaalbaarheid

# Addenda

## A. Combination of various relevant categorisation models

Newmark (1988:103); Pretorius (1997:45); Klingberg (1986; quoted in Postma, 1995:122-123); Krüger (1990:227); Nida (1954) and Straight (1977; quoted in Leighton, 1991:220); Dagut (quoted in Smit, 1990)

### Dagut's division of the referential void (serving as basis):

#### Referential void

Environmental void

Cultural void

→ Religious void

→ Secular void

## 1. Environment

### 1.1 Flora

1.1.1 Trees

1.1.2 Other plants

### 1.2 Fauna

1.2.1 Animals

1.2.2 Birds

1.2.3 Insects

### 1.3 Weather conditions

### 1.4 Physical features

## 2. Culture

### 2.1 Material culture

2.1.1 Food and tools for preparation thereof

2.1.2 Clothing and housing

2.1.3 Payment methods

## 2.2 Social culture

- |  |
|--|
| 2.2.1 Forest life and woodcutting (including measures and units) |
| 2.2.2 Social classes   |
| 2.2.3 Naming and kinship relations                               |
| 2.2.4 Geographic names   |

## 2.3 Religion

- |                               |
|-------------------------------|
| 2.3.1 Christianity            |
| 2.3.2 Taboos and superstition |
| 2.3.3 Illness and death       |

## B. Mistranslations and unexplained omissions

	Afrikaans (Matthee)	English (Matthee)	German (Stege)
(1)	Sanna is sommer van die los mense in die bos en sy gaan graag waar sterfte is. (p. 19.)	Sanna was one of the odd people of the forest and she liked going where there was death in a house. (p. 31.)	Sanna gehörte zu den Alten des Waldes und ging gern dorthin, wo der Tod im Haus war. (p. 26.)
→	Stege probably thought the "odd" was a printing error and that "old" was meant.		
(2)	Kwartdag (p. 24)	Quarterday (p. 37)	Dreivierteltag (p. 31)
→	Probably an oversight that slipped through.		
(3)	Toe hulle wakker word, het oom Anneries langs die half-dooie vuur gelê, sy kop natgedou, en hy het gesnork soos een wat kraansaag trek. (p. 32.)	When they woke up, old Anro was back, lying by the half-dead fire, his head wet with dew, and snoring like someone pulling a pit-saw. (p. 47.)	Als sie erwachten, war Oom Anneries wieder da; halbtot vor Erschöpfung, den Kopf noch naß vom Tau, lag er am Feuer und schnarchte wie eine Brettsäge. (p. 39.)
→	The German translator did not grasp the meaning of the English sentence and probably did not have enough knowledge of Afrikaans to realise her mistake by comparing the English text with the original. It is the fire, not uncle Anneries, that should be "half dead".		



(4)	En hy en Jozef kies dieselfde witpeer, maar Jozef sukkel om op te kom en Saul moes verbyhardloop. (p. 34.)	Saul and Jozef chose the same white pear, but Jozef struggled to get in and forced Saul to run past. (p. 49.)	Saul und Jozef wählten dieselbe Weißbirne, doch Jozef kletterte schneller hinauf und zwang Saul, weiterzulaufen. (p. 41.)
→	Stege did not grasp the meaning of the English sentence. In the Afrikaans version, the tree is big enough for both boys, but Saul has to run farther because Jozef takes too much time to get in. In the German version, Saul has to run to another tree because Jozef already picked this one – which is too small for both boys.		
(5)	Halfuur se draf tot agter. (p. 36.)	Half an hour's stiff walk. (p. 51.)	Einen strammen Halbtagesmarsch. (p. 43.)
→	This is probably just an oversight, but if the reader is observant, it is enough to hurt the credibility of the narrative.		
(6)	Witkop-se-Hoogte (p. 68.)	White Head's Height. (p. 90.)	Witkop-se-Hogte. (p. 77.)
→	Spelling error resulting from a lack of understanding of Afrikaans. Few Germans will know how to pronounce this proper name.		
(7)	Sy regterbeen kramp van die inmeakaarsit [...] die skets wat Kate van Oupoot gemaak het. (p. 95.)	--	--
→	The author-translator's reason for omitting the last three paragraphs of Chapter 6 in the English (and consequently also the German text) is not clear. Matthee might simply have decided that they were redundant.		

(8)	"Ek het darem 'n ou flenter by die skuur," het hy Patterson probeer vermaak. "En jy hoef my nie te probeer koudlei om hier uit te kom nie." (p. 132.)	--	--
→	Omitted in English and consequently also in German. Author-translator's personal decision. She might have thought it superfluous.		
(9)	Hulle het hom nie herken nie, want hulle het stywenek gegroet toe hulle uitstap. (p. 184.)	They did not recognise him and greeted him stiffly as they walked out. (p. 225.)	Sie erkannten ihn offenbar nicht, denn als er den Laden verließ, grüßten sie steif und förmlich. (p. 197.)
→	The German translator confused the pronouns. According to this, Saul leaves the shop just before he enters it. This might hurt the credibility of the narrative.		
(10)	Hier is delwers wat ons nie eers met 'n lepel vertrou nie. (p. 241.)	There are diggers round here we don't even trust with a spoon. (p. 293.)	Hier in der Gegend gibt es Goldgräber denen wir nicht mal unsere Löffel anvertrauen würden. (p. 255.)
→	It seems that the German translator did not fully comprehend the subtle meaning of this sentence. The Afrikaans Morris is reluctant to trust some of these diggers with spoons (let alone with knives), whereas the German Morris is merely concerned that they might make off with his hotel's spoons.		