TRANSLATING GERMAN AT THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



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What is translation?

What are we doing when we 'translate'?

'I think it's the cast of mind that reads something in another language, then says to itself: how would I have put this if I'd thought it in my own language? And it does a **little jump from original to target language**, passing briefly through a no-man's-land where neither really exists, only the meaning and the tone of voice. **It's difficult to explain** because of the absence of language in this interim phase. But if you have the trick of it, you land somewhere near where you want to be. Of course you then **revise and re-revise**.'

Anthea Bell, https://www.londonreviewbookshop.co.uk/blog/2019/8/a-q-a-with-anthea-bell

E.g. Kafka, Asterix comics, Cornelia Funke's Inkworld Trilogy and more…

Function

What's the purpose of my translation?
How does my purpose change the decisions I make when I'm translating?
What's the function of translating instructions for a coffee maker?
Or a letter written by a resistance fighter in the 1940s?





Domestication/Foreignization



***Mr and Mrs** Dursley, of number four, **Privet Drive**, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, **thank you very much**.*

Mr und Mrs Dursley im **Ligusterweg** Nummer 4 waren stolz darauf, ganz und gar normal zu sein, **sehr stolz sogar**.

*In the very middle of the court was a table, with a large dish of **jam tarts** upon it…*

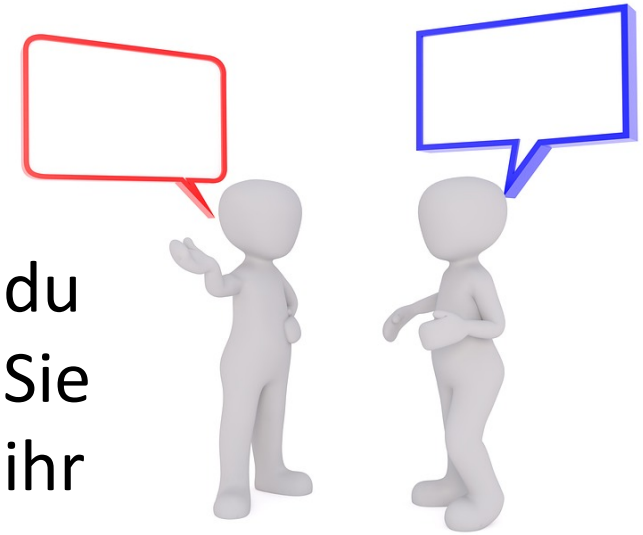
Marmeladenküchelchen.



Untranslatability (cultural; linguistic)

Der Trabant / der Trabi





du
Sie
ihr

Wie viele Arbeiter braucht man, um einen Trabi zu bauen?
Zwei: Einer faltet, einer klebt.

Is anything untranslatable?

Can you translate these German words?
Why do people call them ‘untranslatable’?

Waldeinsamkeit	Erbsenzähler
Schadenfreude	Unwetter

verschlimmbessern	Torschlusspanik
Fernweh	Treppenwitz

Translation



What translation challenges does this German sentence pose?
Which of these translations is the most literal? The freest? The best? The worst?

Das Sofa lässt sich mit wenigen Handgriffen in ein Bett verwandeln.

A The sofa can, with few manipulations, be transformed into a bed.

B Converting the sofa into a bed takes a matter of moments.

C Take one sofa, press here, pull there — and hey presto, it's a bed!

D The sofa lets itself with few manipulations into a bed transform.

E With a few simple movements, the sofa can be converted into a bed.

F It's quick and easy to convert the sofa into a bed.

Examples cited in Margaret Rogers, Michael James White, Michael Loughridge, Ian Higgins, Sándor G. J. Hervey,
Thinking German Translation: A Course in Translation Method: German to English
(Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2020)

Die Weiße Rose

Hans Scholl (1918-1943)
Sophie Scholl (1921-1943)
Christoph Probst (1919-1943)
Alexander Schmorell (1917-1943)
Kurt Huber (1893-1943)
Willi Graf (1918-1943)

Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, München
Juni/Juli 1942 und Januar/Februar 1943
Flugblätter



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What translation challenges does this German passage pose?
How have the translators approached the text?

Flugblätter der Weißen Rose I

Leistet passiven Widerstand —
W i d e r s t a n d -, wo immer Ihr auch seid, verhindert das Weiterlaufen dieser Kriegsmaschine, ehe es zu spät ist, ehe die letzten Städte ein Trümmerhaufen sind...

Wherever you may be, mount passive resistance —
RESISTANCE — obstruct the progress of this war machine before it's too late, before the last cities are left in ruins...

Translated by student members of the White Rose Project
https://whiteroseproject.org/resources/pamphlets-in-english/

Flugblätter der Weißen Rose II

Bis zum Ausbruch des Krieges war der größte Teil des deutschen Volkes geblendet, die Nationalsozialisten zeigten sich nicht in ihrer wahren Gestalt.

Until the outbreak of the war, the vast majority of the German people were blinded, the National Socialists did not show their true face.

Translated by student members of the White Rose Project
https://whiteroseproject.org/resources/pamphlets-in-english/

What should we consider when translating historical – and private – documents?
What are the challenges for a translator here? Can you translate this?



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Sophie Scholl – Letter

Lieber Fritz,
Dein letzter Brief liegt schon wieder so weit zurück. Ich hoffe, daß daran nichts besonderes schuld ist. Wie geht es Dir? […] Nächste Woche mache ich meine Prüfung, dann geht die Schule nicht mehr so lang. Wahrscheinlich muß ich im April zum Arbeitsdienst. Etwas daran wird mir gewiß gefallen…
Herzlichen Gruß
Sofie.

Letter from Sophie Scholl to Fritz Hartnagel, 27 January 1941; adapted;
cited in Sophie Scholl and Fritz Hartnagel, *Damit wir uns nicht verlieren: Briefwechsel 1937-1943*,
ed. by Thomas Hartnagel (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2006), p. 259.

Why not enter the White Rose Project Writing Competition?

Oxford German Olympiad

https://www.ogn.ox.ac.uk/content/oxford-german-olympiad-2021-round2

Competition open to pupils in years 12 and 13 (age 16-18).

Prize: £100. The winning entry will also be featured on the White Rose Project website.

Task: Write a letter in German telling the story of Sophie Scholl's life and/or legacy (max. 300 words). The letter can be addressed to anyone you choose.

www.whiteroseproject.org