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Mylène Lacroix*

“Gallia and Gaul, French and Welsh” (*MWW*, 3.1.89): Transposing Shakespeare’s ‘Favourite’ Foreign Accents into French

Abstract: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* has long been compared to a great babel of languages. The play contains a smattering of Spanish, Italian and Dutch and even a whole scene dedicated to the mistranslation of Latin. A large part of the play’s humour also heavily relies on the foreign accents of two characters: the French Doctor Caius and the Welsh parson Sir Hugh Evans. If Christopher Luscombe’s 2008/2010 production of *The Merry Wives* at Shakespeare’s Globe theatre in London bears testimony to the success of cross-language and accent-based comedy as a source of laughter on today’s English stage, it seems rather implausible, at first sight, that French translations, adaptations and stagings of these accents and linguistic idiosyncrasies should be greeted with the same degree of hilarity. Indeed, how should the Welsh and French accents, both representing real stumbling blocks for French-speaking translators of the play, be transposed into French? What translation strategies can the latter devise? And to what extent can some of those strategies be said to be politically correct? Focusing on Shakespeare’s ‘favorite’ (predominant) accents and the significance and impact of such linguistic comedy, I shall examine the question of their problematic translation through the analysis and comparison of a number of translations and stagings of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* into French.

Keywords: multilingualism; cross-language comedy; (un)translatability; national stereotypes; stage dialects; foreignness.

Introduction

This article aims to explore the linguistic tension at play in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* through the examination of what I propose to call here Shakespeare’s “favourite” foreign accents, namely the French and Welsh accents with which the irascible French doctor Caius and the Welsh parson Sir Hugh Evans respectively speak in “Shakespeare’s English comedy” (Roberts). Caius and

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Evans both communicate—or sometimes attempt to communicate—in their own variety of “broken English”, specifically the literary “Wenglish” and “Frenglish” of the time. A portmanteau word for “Welsh English”, “Wenglish” refers today to the dialect(s) of English spoken by Welsh people, especially in the South Wales Valleys, whereas I here use the term “Frenglish” to refer to a humorous mixture of English and French produced by a poor command of the former language—Caius has indeed a tendency to fill in gaps in his knowledge of English with French words or short sentences. The doctor and the parson’s foreign-accented speech immediately identifies them as non-native and designates them as the main linguistic scapegoats of the play, providing the ideal foil for the foregrounding of the “King’s English” that these characters are both accused of “abusing” (*MWW*, 1:4:5).

More specifically, I would like to examine the various challenges that these accents pose for translation and particularly for translation into French. These challenges are not only of a linguistic nature, as the representation of linguistic “otherness” also raises issues on artistic, cultural, ethical and political levels. Given these parameters, how could stage accents—in our case Welsh and French accents—be transposed into French? What various translation strategies have been devised by French-speaking translators and directors so far? In order to try and answer those questions, I shall make a diachronic comparison of several renderings of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, namely the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century translations of Pierre-Antoine de La Place (1707-1793), Shakespeare’s first French translator; Pierre Le Tourneur (1737-1788); François Guizot (1787-1874); and François-Victor Hugo; the early twentieth-century translation of René-Louis Piachaud; the late twentieth- and early twenty-first translations of Daniel and Geneviève Bournet; Léone Teyssandier; and Jean-Marie Villégier; and finally Jean-Michel Déprats and Jean-Pierre Richard, who have recently retranslated the play for the prestigious “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade” edition.

“Welsch Men”

Shakespeare’s “only English comedy” (Parker 138)—that is to say the sole Shakespearian comedy set in England—extensively plays on jocularly exotic national names such as “Base Hungarian wight” (1:3:19), “Base Phrygian Turk” (1:3:83), “Cathayan” (2:1:136), “Castalian King Urinal, Hector of Greece” (2:3:31), “Bohemian Tartar” (4:5:18). With the exception of the noun “Cathayan”¹ (literally, “Chinese”), used as a term of disparagement by Master George Page, the husband of one of the “merry wives”, all these outlandish

¹ From “Cathay”, a former name for China.

insults are coined by the two most xenophobic characters of the play, namely Pistol and the Host of the Garter Inn. In spite of these various references to foreigners from far-away countries, “Sir Hugh [Evans], the Welsh priest, and Caius, the French doctor” (2:1:189-190²) are the only two actual foreigners within the community of Windsor as it is portrayed in Shakespeare’s *Merry Wives*. Historically, they are both “welsch men”.³ Indeed, the term “Welsh” derives from the Old English *Wealh* meaning “foreigner”—it is the name that the Anglo-Saxon settlers of England once gave to the native population of Wales. However, “In Old English *Wealh* and its compounds or derivatives are occasionally used of foreigners more generally, particularly in names referring to France or Gaul and their inhabitants” (*OED Online*, s.v. “Welsh”, *adj.* and *n.*). It is therefore tempting to examine the characters of Caius and Evans in tandem, especially since “in Elizabethan England”, as Alan Powers argues, “the French and the Welsh held the dubious affinity of mutual marginality. They were considered the natural recipients of insult, congenital butts of humor” (114). They frequently were (and often still are⁴) depicted as quarrelsome, simple-minded and—more importantly as far as this article is concerned—linguistically inept.

“Wenglish” and “Frenghish”

Caius and Evans can be described as both insiders and outsiders. Each of them holds a respectable position within the community of Windsor. With regard to the courtship of Anne Page, the French physician is favoured by her mother, who argues that “The Doctor is well moneyed, and his friends / Potent at court.” (4:4:86-87). Caius’s court connections and financial standing should indeed make him a suitor of choice for Anne in bourgeois Windsor. As for Sir Hugh Evans, he combines the offices of priest and schoolmaster, two obvious positions of authority. In the denouement, moreover, the parson plays a central role in the deception and comeuppance of Falstaff, upon whom he inflicts “a Welsh correction” of his own, to quote a phrase from *Henry V* (5:1:74). However, Caius and Evans’s “broken English”—a phrase also quoted from what has been

² All quotations from Shakespeare are from *The Oxford Shakespeare* edition.

³ Cf. John Cheke in 1550: “The germans and our old Saxons called [al men beside themselves] welsch men. We now call them strangers and outborns, and outlandisch.” (*The Gospel according to Saint Matthew and Part of the First Chapter of the Gospel according to Saint Mark*).

⁴ In an episode of *QI*, a British comedy quiz show hosted by Stephen Fry, Welsh actor and comedian Rob Brydon went as far as to speak of “institutionalized racism, which is accepted when it’s directed towards the Welsh” (*QI*, Series C, Episode 1 “Campanology”, original airdate: 30th September 2005).

described as “Shakespeare’s most English play of all” even though “its most memorable characters are French, Irish, and Welsh” (Levin and Watkins 8)—unarguably sets them apart from the rest of Windsor’s leading citizens. “These mis-speakers”, Wendy Wall argues, represent “marginalized figures of amusement rather than sharp critics of dominant power formations” (136).

The parson’s mangled English is instantly recognizable as the literary “Wenglish” (Edwards) of the time and encompasses a wide range of phonetic, syntactic and lexical idiosyncrasies. The most noticeable phonological feature consists in the devoicing of voiced consonants. This is exemplified at the opening of the play when Sir Hugh attempts to make peace between Justice Shallow and Falstaff, who publicly pokes fun at the parson’s Welsh accent and its tendency to turn *d*’s into *t*’s:

Evans. *Pauca verba*, Sir John, good worts.

Sir John. Good worts? Good cabbage! (1:1:113-114)

Evans will be taunted about his accent until the very end of the play: in the closing scene, Ford promises that he “will never mistrust [his] wife again till [he is] able to woo her in good English” (5:5:132-133) and Falstaff accuses the Welshman of “mak[ing] fritters of English” (5:5:142) when he mispronounces “cheese” and “butter” as “seese” and “putter”. Besides his funny accent, Evans has a predilection for the plural form (e.g. “How melancholies I am!” (3:1:13)), for words in pairs (such as “pribbles and prabbles”⁵ (1: 1: 50)), or for the Welsh tag “look you”. Evans’s “stage Welsh” is also characterized by a propensity to malaprop and use inappropriate parts of speech (for example, “I will description the matter to you, if you be capacity of it” (1:1:198-199)).

As for Doctor Caius, Barbara Traister regards him as the “most linguistically handicapped character” of the play (126). He too has a strong foreign accent—“an odd mixture of French and German”, according to Traister (125)—as well as difficulties with both grammar and vocabulary. In Act 1, scene 4, Mistress Quickly, Caius’s housekeeper, hides Peter Simple (Slender’s servant) in a closet as the message he has come to deliver is likely to enrage her master: “If he [...] find anybody in the house, here will be an old abusing of God’s patience and the King’s English” (1:4:3-5), Quickly announces, building up the comic figure of the foreign doctor. Caius’s very first line does not disappoint: “Vat is you sing? I do not like dese toys. Pray you go and vetch me in my closet *un boîtier vert*—a box, a green-a box. Do intend vat I speak? A green-a box.” (1:4:41-43). In this short excerpt alone, examples of mother tongue interference range from cases of phonic interference (reflecting for example the well-known difficulty for French people to pronounce [ð], which is generally replaced by

⁵ This is a Welsh variant and corruption of the term “brabble”, which means “dispute”.

either [d] or [z]), to cases of grammatical interference (“Vat is you sing?” is a syntactic calque) and lexical interference (“intend” is probably a mistranslation of the French *entendre*, “to hear”). Dr Caius regularly resorts to code-switching, that is to say he alternates between French and English in the same sentence or speech, which betrays his relatively poor command of English. If Caius finds it hard to make himself understood (“Do intend vat I speak?”), he also regularly struggles to understand what others say to him, which makes him an easy target for a joker such as the Host of the Garter Inn. In the following passage, the Frenchman is waiting to fight a duel with Evans, who has not arrived at the appointed place. As for the Host, he mockingly excites Caius’s pugnacity and takes advantage of his linguistic disadvantage by manipulating the relationship between words and their meanings (Vomero Santos 66):

Host. A word, Monsieur Mockwater.
 Caius. Mockwater? Vat is dat?
 Host. Mockwater, in our English tongue, is valour, bully.
 Caius. By Gar, then I have as much mockwater as de Englishman. Scurvy jack-dog priest! By Gar, me vill cut his ears.
 Host. He will clapper-claw thee tightly, bully.
 Caius. Clapper-de-claw? Vat is dat?
 Host. That is, he will make thee amends.
 Caius. By Gar, me do look he shall clapper-de-claw me, for, by Gar, me vill have it.
 Host. And I will provoke him to’t, or let him wag.
 Caius. Me tank you for dat. (2:3:51-65)

Whereas “Monsieur Mockwater” is an insulting title alluding to the medical practice of casting water (i.e. the inspection of urine to diagnose disease), the verb “clapperclaw” (“to beat, thrash, drub”, *OED*, s.v. “clapperclaw”, v.) actually means quite the opposite to the deliberate mistranslation provided by the Host (“he will make thee amends”). In the *Pink Panther* series, a number of modern “hosts” (hotel clerks) will later play similar tricks on the eccentric and heavily accented French Inspector Clouseau, one of Caius’s many descendants.⁶

Christopher Luscombe’s production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* at the Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in 2008 and 2010 greatly capitalized on the play’s instances of cross-language comedy. According to both Gareth Armstrong (who played Evans) and Philip Bird (Caius), who both kindly accepted to answer a few questions concerning their respective roles, the linguistic jokes based on

⁶ In the written exchange I had the privilege to have with actor Philip Bird about his experience of playing Caius at the Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre in 2008 and 2010, Bird pointed out Clouseau as one of his main reference points with regard to stage French accent (19th April 2015, quoted with permission).

their characters' accents were generally greeted with loud laughter, as is clearly attested by the recorded performance of the play. In Caius's case in particular, these jokes were supported by the character's body language and physicality, which were readable by an international audience such as that attending Shakespeare's Globe. If the popularity of both these accents on an English stage is hardly surprising, the object of this article, however, is to assess how well they can survive the process of translation, especially into French. Indeed, it seems rather implausible—at least at first glance—that French translations and stagings of these accents and linguistic idiosyncrasies should be greeted with the same degree of hilarity. To begin with, there is obviously no such thing as a stock Welsh accent in French. And as far as the French accent itself is concerned, it is rather difficult to conceive how it could possibly be rendered into French. As for the various passages in French in the source text, they are bound to “blend with the target language” in French translation, “thus disappearing as audible markers of national difference” (Hoenselaars xiv).

Translating Caius and Evans's Broken English into French: Challenges and Strategies

When it comes to rendering dialects and foreign accents into a different language, one can adopt either a conservative or an experimental approach:

When translators do not attempt to force the norms, they are conservative in respecting the target language expectations and avoid challenging it with non-standard variants [...]. When translators try to reveal the differences in the source language, [...] they are experimental. (Federici 10)

In the case of the French translations of *The Merry Wives*, the three predominant strategies to render dialects and foreign accents are: 1) the “standardization” or “neutralization” of these accents, rendered in standard French; 2) “dialectal transposition”, i.e. the search for an “equivalent” dialect or accent in the target culture; and 3) the substitution of a foreign accent or a dialect with a recognizable idiolect, i.e. “one's personal dialect” (Crystal 225). Whereas the first strategy (standardization) partakes of the conservative approach described by Federici, the other two are experimental and follow a more creative path.

Standardization is indeed either a mere *pis aller* or a way to “rationalize” the source text and make it conform to the French norms of linguistic correctness and “good taste” (*le bon goût français*). In the list of roles from La Place's version of the play (1746), Sir Hugh Evans, whose Christian name has been Frenchified into Hugues, has become a Fleming. This may be because, according to a contemporary dictionary (*Dictionnaire de Trévoux*, 1740),

“Flemish is not a beautiful language”,⁷ in the same way that Welsh was generally considered a “barbarous” tongue. The choice of a Fleming as an equivalent for a Welshman might also carry sociocultural implications. Indeed, some of the stereotypes about Flemish and Welsh people seem to match: the same *Dictionnaire de Trévoux* describes Flemings as corpulent and slow-witted, which mirrors the early modern depiction of the Welsh, who supposedly had a predilection for cheese (“I will rather trust a Fleming with my butter, Parson Hugh the Welshman with my cheese, [...] than my wife with herself”, claims Master Frank Ford in 2:2:291-294) and whose intellect is far from being favourably portrayed in *The Merry Wives*. Oddly enough, however, La Place’s Flemish Evans speaks in impeccable French throughout the play—as does Caius, who remains a French doctor in this version. In Le Tourneur’s translation (1781), Caius’s language is not accented in any way and his grammar observes *le bon usage* most of the time. Therefore, his sporadic pidgin French (e.g. “moi vouloir tuer le Prêtre”,⁸ literally “me want kill the priest”) awkwardly jars with the rest of his speeches. According to Le Tourneur, dialect comedy is not translatable and “its success almost entirely rests upon the actor”.⁹

The case of François Guizot, a famous French historian and politician who rewrote Le Tourneur’s translations, is interesting in this regard. As John Pemble points out, “Segregated material was reinstated, paraphrases were unscrambled, passages that had strayed from the original were retranslated. The result was an idiom noticeably more demotic than Le Tourneur’s.” (88) In 1820, Guizot thus attempted to imitate Evans’s “jargon” by giving him a vague Swiss accent (“Le fromache n’est pas pon avec le peurre”¹⁰ [523]) and willingly acknowledged in a note that Caius’s “piquancy” wholly lay in his jargon. “To have him speak good French”, Guizot explained, “would completely neutralize it.”¹¹ (533) To ensure that the character remains “colourful”, we therefore have to suppose that Caius is an Englishman who mangles the French language, the translator added. Although Caius’s pronunciation remains unaffected, his grammar is often incorrect—for instance, he regularly gets the noun genders wrong (as when he realizes he has married “*une garcon*” in Act 5). Forty years later (1861), however, Guizot radically reconsiders his translation strategy in his newly and entirely revised edition of the play. Evans’s *fromache* is replaced by *fromage* and Caius’s *garçon* becomes masculine again. Somewhat admitting

⁷ “Le Flamand n’est pas une belle langue” (my translation).

⁸ This translates “me vill kill de priest” (2:3:74).

⁹ “Son succès dépend presque en entier de l’Acteur” (my translation).

¹⁰ This translates “Seese is not good to give putter” (5:5:139). The correct French would be: “Le fromage n’est pas bon avec le beurre”.

¹¹ “Tout le piquant du rôle de Caius consiste dans son jargon ; faire parler ce personnage en bon français l’annulerait entièrement” (my translation).

failure, Guizot justifies his recourse to standardization by explaining how difficult the rendering of both characters' dialects truly is. On reflection, Guizot might have also decided that the play's linguistic humour was somewhat tiresome and that reproducing Evans's phonetic, syntactic and lexical idiosyncrasies was ultimately a lower priority than conforming to the sacrosanct French norms of linguistic correctness.

Like La Place and Guizot, Jean-Michel Déprats (Shakespeare's leading current translator into French) and Jean-Pierre Richard resorted to standardization in their first translation of the play, initially commissioned by the Comédie-Française for Andrés Lima's production (2009) and first published by Gallimard in 2010. In this version, the Doctor spoke in French throughout. The French words and phrases from the source text, whose spelling was modernized, were made noticeable through typography only (words in italics followed by an asterisk). If Caius's constant code-switching was thus visually suggested to readers, it was inevitably lost on the play's spectators, even though Déprats and Richard's text was originally intended for performance.

The second technique to be examined in this article is "dialectal transposition", that is to say the search for an equivalent for source-text dialects or accents in the target culture. As Dirk Delabastita suggests (183), the translatability of cross-language and dialect humour should be understood as a continuum. With regard to translation attitudes towards the foreign, if standardization is at one end of the spectrum, dialectal transposition would be at the other end. With the exception of Guizot's attempt, in 1820, to give Evans a Swiss accent and to turn Caius into an Englishman, instances of transposition of one dialect into another became more frequent in the 20th century. In his performance-oriented "free translation"¹² of the play (1928), for example, the French-speaking Swiss writer René-Louis Piachaud gives Evans a German accent and metamorphoses Caius into "some kind of English Purgon"¹³ (214). Interestingly, Piachaud reinstates code-switching in the doctor's speeches, making him sound like the "walking bilingual dictionary" (Williams 236) he really is: "Je prié vô: allez et cherche pour moi au cabinet... *the green box*. *Green box*: boîte, vert boîte. Vô compris quoi je dis? Le vert boîte." (235). The fact that Piachaud came from a multilingual country might have contributed to his boldness as a translator, at least in comparison to his French counterparts. Besides, the choice of a German accent as an equivalent for Evans's "Wenglish" was unlikely to be politically neutral in interwar Geneva, where the play was performed four times in 1928.

¹² The play is "freely translated to be adapted for the contemporary theatre" ("librement traduite pour être adaptée au tréteau contemporain").

¹³ "Une manière de Purgon anglais" (my translation). Piachaud is of course referring to Argan's infamous physician in Molière's *Le Malade imaginaire* (1673).

In France, similar attempts were later made to find equivalents and preserve the foreignness of the characters. Caius became Spanish in two TV productions of the play respectively directed by Roger Iglésis (1964) and Guy Lauzin / Jacques Fabbri (1970). He also turned Italian in the 1992 French translation of the play by Daniel and Geneviève Bournet, two translators from Marseilles: “Zé vous prie, allez mé cercer dans mon cabinet una scatola in verde... Ouné boîte, ouné boîte verte”; “Z’ai marié oun ragazzo, oun garçon, oun contadino” (264 and 328). In the translators’ opinion, “The requirements of theatrical performance in French seem to be more important than the accuracy of the particular target of the satire”¹⁴ (Bournet 249). Léone Teyssandier (2000), who also gives priority to “verbal humour” over faithfulness to Caius’s nationality, turns him into a Fleming, as La Place had done half-heartedly—in the list of roles only—some 250 years before her. Teyssandier’s choice might have been at least partly motivated by the fact that Belgians are the usual laughing stock of the French and the butt of their ethnic stupidity jokes, in the same way the English used to mock the Welsh in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and tend to make fun, nowadays, of the supposed imbecility of the Irish. Such substitution of one target of ethnic humour for another, however, is always bound to be politically incorrect and is therefore risky territory for any translator to venture into.

Another risk of such transposition is for caricature to be carried to the extreme at the expense of the characters’ credibility. In his production of *Les Joyeuses Commères de Windsor* for the Comédie-Française (2009-2010), for example, Andrés Lima chose genuinely “foreign” actors for the roles of the two Windsor foreigners. Evans (played by Belgian actor Thierry Hancisse) and Caius (interpreted by Polish actor Andrzej Seweryn) respectively spoke with exaggerated Belgian and Russian accents. Some critics complained about their “gibberish” and particularly about Seweryn’s ham acting, comparing him to a “grotesque clown” (Sadowska Guillon). Others argued that Caius’s and Evans’s accents were so strong that they too often interfered with the intelligibility of the text. This negative reception might also be indicative of a relatively low tolerance for accents in France, where regional and foreign accents are readily caricatured but are often perceived as a handicap in many professions. This is particularly the case in the acting profession, where actors are generally encouraged to lose their natural accent.

The last translation strategy that I would like to examine here and that I would probably situate halfway between standardization and dialectal transposition is the substitution of a foreign accent with a distinctive idiolect. According to Katie Wales (211),

¹⁴ “Les impératifs de la représentation théâtrale en français nous semblent l’emporter sur la direction précise de la satire” (my translation).

The term covers those features which vary from register to register, medium to medium, in daily language use; as well as the more permanent features that arise from personal idiosyncrasies, such as lispings, monotone delivery, favourite exclamations, etc. Idiolect thus becomes the equivalent of a fingerprint: each of us is unique in our language habits.

Trying to find an appropriate idiolect for Caius and Evans, a number of translators have thus resorted to substituting their accents with speech defects. François-Victor Hugo (1864) gives his Caius a strong lisp, which turns out to be far more fanciful than Caius's original dialect. As for Daniel and Geneviève Bournet (1992), they lay on speech faults with a trowel. *V*'s and *s*'s are for instance systematically replaced with *f*'s in Evans's utterly unpronounceable speeches, such as the tongue-twister "Dieu fous béniffe en fa merfi, fous touf!"¹⁵ which translates or rather disfigures the much less dialectally marked "God pless you from his mercy sake, all of you." (3:1:40). Not only are these idiosyncrasies extremely wearisome, but they are also totally unperformable, in spite of the fact that Daniel and Geneviève Bournet's translation claims to be performance-oriented, as suggested in a translator's note (249). When it comes to matters of pronunciation, "undertranslation" (Fr. *sous-traduction*) is almost always preferable to "overtranslation" (*surtraduction*). Le Tourneur's early intuition, in 1781, that it is the actor's task to "fill the gaps" of the translation, was probably correct.

In what he calls his "free imitation" of the 1602 Quarto (Villégier 12), director Jean-Marie Villégier adopts a radically different stance and abandons the idea of transposing accents phonetically. Unlike François-Victor Hugo's reader-oriented translation or Daniel and Geneviève Bournet's performance-oriented translation, Villégier's "imitation" is production-oriented: the director wrote it with his own production in mind (co-directed with Jonathan Duverger in 2004), which accounts for the considerable liberties he has taken with the source text. In his preface, significantly entitled "Infidèle fidélité" ("unfaithful fidelity"), Villégier notes that "the humour of *The Merry Wives* [...] mainly resides in language registers and their incongruous juxtaposition. Fidelity, in that case, seems to be dependent on verbal inventiveness rather than on word-for-word translation"¹⁶ (11). The broken Englishes of Caius and Evans (respectively renamed Docteur Lemonsieur and Monsieur Ledocteur and described as two "pedants") are thus conveyed by a variety of "language oddities".¹⁷ Lemonsieur's speeches, for example, are sprinkled with English idioms (such as

¹⁵ I.e. "Dieu vous bénisse en sa merci, vous tous", in standard French.

¹⁶ "Le comique des *Joyeuses Commères* [...] tient essentiellement aux niveaux de langage et à leur juxtaposition incongrue. La fidélité, en ce cas, plus que par le mot à mot, semble devoir passer par l'invention verbale" (my translation).

¹⁷ "Étrangetés de langage" (my translation).

“wait and see”, “let’s go” or “by God”, which translates Caius’s catchphrase “by gar”), Anglicisms (“j’étais au *meeting*,¹⁸ oui ou non?”¹⁹) and mangled idiomatic expressions (e.g. “Ledocteur est une poule humide. Il m’a déniché un lapin. Pas vu le bout de ses naseaux !”²⁰). As for Ledocteur’s speeches, they abound with archaisms borrowed from Pierre de Larivey, a French playwright contemporary with Shakespeare. Evans’s “good worts” (Q1 “good vrdes”), for example, is rendered by *paroles melliflues*, which sounds much more dated in French than “mellifluous words” in English. The fact that these two pedants speak differently from the English characters of the play is made conspicuous, not by means of geographical transfer (e.g. from a British dialect to a dialect of the French language, in Evans’s case), but thanks to a kind of linguistic time-travel, from Ledocteur’s archaistic language to Lemonsieur’s present-day *Français*.²¹

Finally, I would like to mention the latest French version of the play by Jean-Michel Déprats and Jean-Pierre Richard, who place great emphasis on preserving the energy and the performability of the dramatic text by “listening to the spoken voice” (Déprats 137). The translators have recently reworked their 2010 translation for the “Bibliothèque de la Pléiade” edition. Their text, which was published in May 2016 and features in the sixth volume of Shakespeare’s bilingual French/English *Complete Works*, has undergone noteworthy changes since 2010, especially regarding Caius’s language. Whereas the doctor’s French was effectively expunged from their first version, Déprats and Richard’s recent way to reinstate Caius’s code-switching consists in inserting English words or phrases into his speeches. Let us compare, for example,

(1) “Oui, mettez-le* dans ma poche. Vite.” (Déprats and Richard, *Les Joyeuses Commères de Windsor* 53, 2010 version) ;

(2) “Oui, mettez-le dans ma « pocket »: on se dépêche, « quick quick ».” (Déprats and Richard, *Les Joyeuses Epouses de Windsor* 47, 2016 version)

as well as:

(1) “Pourquoi êtes-vous tous venus, un, deux, trois, quatre ?” (2010)

(2) “Pourquoi vous tous, « one, two, tree, four », êtes-vous venus ?” (2016)²²

¹⁸ Emphasis added.

¹⁹ Q1: “Haue I not met him at de place he make apoint, / Haue I not?”.

²⁰ I.e. “Ledocteur is a chicken-hearted man. He has stood me up. He hasn’t shown up!” (my translation). The correct idiomatic expressions in French are *poule mouillée* (“wimp”), *poser un lapin* (“stand somebody up”) and *pointer le bout de son nez* (“show up”). For this passage, Q1 reads: “Begar de preest be a coward lack knaue, / He dare not shew his face”.

²¹ In French, the substantive *Français* refers to the superfluous use of English words (for which there are French equivalents) in French. The term was popularized in France by the writer and scholar René Etiemble in the 1950s.

²² “Vat be all you, one, two, tree, four, come for?” (2:3:21).

As for Caius's signature expletive "by Gar", it is replaced in this version with "my God", an interjection occasionally borrowed by French speakers, in much the same way as their characteristic *oh là là* has been "pilfered" by English speakers. One could of course argue against the paradox whereby the only character to speak English in the play—albeit broken English—is the French doctor. But if we are ready to suspend disbelief and trade realism for comedy, then this apparent incongruity should no longer be an issue.

Lastly, Caius's *Français* (in Villégier as well as Déprats and Richard's translations) brings about an interesting reversal. Whereas in Shakespeare's England, the French language was seen as an underlying menace to the integrity of English, the latter has now become the most influential language on the planet. Likewise, if English represented no particular threat in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France, its spread is today gradually perceived as a serious menace to the language and culture of France and other French-speaking countries. In that respect, today's French translations and stagings of *The Merry Wives* could have an unusual advantage over English contemporary productions in that they have the potential to meaningfully re-enact the linguistic tension at play in England some 400 years ago—a tension that would have lost most of its gravity for modern Britons. As Salman Rushdie once wrote in *Imaginary Homelands*, although "it is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation", let us "cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can always be gained" (Rushdie 17).

Conclusion

Whereas eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French translators of Shakespeare generally displayed a tendency to obliterate Caius and Evans's foreignness and linguistic idiosyncrasies, predominantly for the sake of "good taste" or linguistic correctness, modern translators of the play seem to have gradually become more sensitive to the Renaissance linguistic tension between English and British dialects or foreign languages, especially French. Several of the French renditions of such tension successfully manage to parallel or convey some of it. The transposition of Caius's idiolect from "Frenghish" (English language invaded by French words and syntax) to "Français" (French language invaded by Anglicisms), for example, constitutes a meaningful reversal of that linguistic tension at play in the source text—if French was perceived as a menace in the ethnocentric community of Windsor, the excessive use of English is nowadays considered as a threat by many French speakers. The substitution of one accent with another is never neutral and usually has implications beyond the linguistic. Inevitably, the translation of regional or foreign voices often becomes a political issue as much as a linguistic activity.

Translating the “doubly foreign” or the “foreign within the foreign” is therefore a risky undertaking. We are usually ready to accept ethnic humour in a Shakespeare play, but how far can the translator go when it comes to transposing it into a different culture and language? Can that transposition ever be politically correct or is it bound to perpetuate or even exacerbate cultural and racial stereotypes? In many ways, the translation of the doubly foreign allows us to reflect on the various implications of hosting the stranger in one’s language. As hazardous as it is, it nonetheless has the advantage of making us sensitive to issues of identity and otherness as well as making us more aware of the strangeness of our own language.

“Sometimes Shakespearian humour doesn’t travel well down the ages”,²³ as actor and writer Philip Bird puts it. Admittedly, it does not always travel well in translation either. But this should not be a foregone conclusion. Accents and dialects do present a significant challenge for translators, but it is nevertheless an exciting one as the linguistic constraints imposed on the translator not only raise issues worthy of our attention in today’s divided world but also open up possibilities for creative and stimulating solutions.

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²³ Quoted from my exchange with Philip Bird on playing Dr Caius at Shakespeare’s Globe (19th April 2015, quoted with permission).

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