TRANSLATABILITY AND TAUTOLOGICAL STRUCTURES

TRISTRAM SHANDY AND GYŐZŐ HATÁR'S HUNGARIAN TRANSLATION

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"Translate this into any civilized language in the world – the sense is this"
(Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*)

"Avissi voluto che mio padre o me matri, o tutti e dù,
ci avessero pensato tanticchia prima di farmi nasciri
disse piano, come se parlasse a se stesso, Decu Garzìa.
Fece una pausa, pigli aria, secutò. "Lo dico pi daveru. In coscienza".
(Andrea Camilleri, *Il birraio di Preston*)

This paper is intended to provide an analysis of Győző Határ's Hungarian translation of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman.* While the Hungarian version was produced two centuries after the original, it is nevertheless capable, by virtue of its being the first ever complete Hungarian translation, of offering a unique interpretation of Sterne's famous novel. Through close readings of selected excerpts from the novel, I aim to situate the age-old commonplace: "a translation can never replace the original." My comparative reading is intended to demonstrate that neither are processes of signification in a translated work reducible to those in the original. This way, a logic of mutual dependency and supplementarity comes into play, overshadowing the commonsensical approach to translation which is based on patterns of prioritizing and an urge to distinguish with absolute clearness between correct and incorrect translations. A key concept is that of tautology, which seems inevitable when speaking of translations, as a certain degree of overdetermination and repetitiousness is required to produce effects which may supplement the usually more compact and idiomatic tropes of the original. However, I try to show that, in some rare but fascinating cases, the reverse can be equally true.

Keywords: Sterne, Lawrence, The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman, Határ, Győző, Tristram Shandy úr élete és gondolatai, translation theory (post-Benjaminian), supplementarity, tautological structures, auxiliaries

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Laurence Sterne's magnificent novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, has been a continuous source of interpretative fascination and even bafflement for over two centuries. Gabriella Hartvig has demonstrated[1] that Sterne's influence is detectable in Hungarian literature throughout the late 18th and the entire 19th century as well. However, apart from earlier, aborted attempts and creative imitations, the novel had not been translated into Hungarian until almost two hundred years after its original publication. Győző Határ's Hungarian translation was published in 1956 and became one of the intellectual bestsellers of the era. Despite its republication in 1989, Határ's *Tristram Shandy* is practically unavailable in Hungarian bookstores.

The present paper is intended to provide a comparative analysis of Sterne's novel and Határ's Hungarian translation thereof by way of a close reading of selected excerpts. It is my intention to show that the relation between the original and the translated text can be construed as supplementary (or perhaps complementary, which is clearly not the same thing to say). While it is a truism that a translation can never fully replace the original, my reading of the two texts is meant to demonstrate how a translation can shed light on certain aspects of the original which may otherwise remain hidden. In keeping with certain "post-Benjaminian" theories of translation, I will focus on how the two languages are made to interact through the act of translation, rather than trying to find correspondences and dissimilarities which are accountable for by referring to the translator's linguistic competence. That is, instead of asking whether Határ's decisions are right or wrong, I will concentrate on how his translation reads and interprets Sterne's novel. The logic of supplementarity[2] may help us understand why (according to Walter Benjamin's famous dictum) translation is a necessary condition of the survival of a work; and consequently, why the original cannot be conceived as a self-sufficient system. This way, the above quoted truism becomes reversible: the original can never fully replace its translation either, since the translated text always opens up possibilities which were concealed or repressed in the original.

It is well known that in 1762–63 one of Sterne's most important British contemporaries, Adam Smith, delivered lectures on rhetoric and style at the University of Glasgow. In the second lecture, the renowned moral philosopher (who is also considered to be the founding father of political economy) sets up a contrast between what he calls "perspicuity" on the one hand and stiff, convoluted style on the other. This latter style, he goes on to argue, resembles translation:

> Writers who do not observe this rule [that of perspicuity, that is] often become so obscure that their meaning is not to be discovered without great attention and being altogether awake ... Writings of this sort have a great deal of the air of translations from an other language, where a certain stiffness of expression and repetition of synonymous words is very apt to be gone into.[3]

Smith's characterization is not altogether dissimilar from certain trends in 20th-century translation studies, although the preferences have definitely altered since his time. In Smith's lectures, the fluent and readable text is clearly preferred to one that is repetitive, stuttering and difficult to follow. What seems most striking, however, is Smith's mentioning repetition as a link between style and meaning: his reference to synonyms seems to indicate that the reason translated texts are convoluted is not that something is absent from them. On the contrary, they are stiff because they are overdetermined, repetitive, or even tautological.

One example from Győző Határ's translation of *Tristram Shandy* may render perceptible how the text becomes convoluted not because of the overcomplication of syntax but because of the translator's often praised linguistic ingenuity, and his famous predilection for coining new words or using obscure, archaic language.[4]

– Prejudice of education, he would say, is the devil, – and the multitude of them which we suck in with our mother's milk is – are the devil and all. – We are haunted with them, brother Toby, in all our lucubrations and researches; and was a man fool enough to submit tamely to what they obtruded upon him, – what would his book be? Nothing, – he would add, throwing his pen away with a vengeance, – nothing but a farrago of the clack of nurses, and of the *nonsense of the old women (of both sexes)* throughout the kingdom.[5]

– A belénk nevelt előítélet – úgymond – ez a gonosz; s előítéleteink sokasága, mit az anyatejjel szívunk be: ez maga a pokol, minden ördögével. Ott kísértenek bennünket tanulmányainkban–kutatásainkban, Toby testvér; és ha valaki botorságában kákompilli-módra alávetné magát mindennek, mit ráerőszakolnak, ugyan mi lészen könyvéből? Semmi egyéb – tette hozzá, bosszúsan lecsapva tollát –, semmi egyéb, mint dajkamesék locska galamátya s amaz *abrakadabrák, miket a (mindkét nembéli) gyalogsátánok csácsognak* országszerte.[6]

Whereas Határ's text can be called perspicuous with regard to syntax, its effects are obviously not the same as those of Sterne's English. In the last sentence I have italicized, it is easier for the Hungarian reader (at least for this Hungarian reader) to get the joke in the English. Sterne's version is here – perhaps not quite characteristically – unequivocal, linking "old women" with "both sexes," while for Határ's word "gyalogsátán" it is harder to find a clear referent. Such a contrast is more difficult to establish with respect to other corresponding items in the two texts, thus their effect on the reader may not be made so transparent. Even on the level of lexical items, we are dealing with a complex economy of linguistic connotations. While Határ's "kákompilli-módra" is obviously more idiosyncratic than the English word "tamely," one could hardly establish such a relationship when it comes to "tanulmányok" and "lucubrations," "ráerőszakolnak" and "obtruded," "dajkamesék" and "clack of nurses." A full comparative analysis of even such a short passage, which would aim at the revealing of the connotative fields and the affective structure of both texts, would require a reader ideally competent in both

languages. The inevitable historical difference between the original and a translation further complicates matters, making the identity of their respective intended readers practically impossible to pin down. Needless to say, the system of cultural and historical references used by Sterne is virtually inaccessible by today's Hungarian readers. This fact and Sterne's legendary "eccentricity" render the task of the translator very doubtful: What is it that he has to communicate to his own Hungarian audience?

The most elementary difficulties the translator has to face are well perceivable in the following passage. It is found at a crucial junction in the novel. Walter Shandy, the narrator's extremely systematic and rigorous father, sets out to write a chapter of his *Tristrapaedia*, a treatise on his son's education (the writing of which, as is well-known, serves as a substitute for really educating his son). This chapter concerns the proper use of auxiliary verbs. Mastering helping verbs, Walter argues, makes discussion of any subject possible for the pupil, even if he has no experience whatsoever of the given topic. Practical knowledge of the thing in question is not necessary for the effectiveness of discourse; one does not even have to know whether what is being discussed has an existence verifiable in empirical reality. Auxiliaries are presented as elements of a self-sustained, autoreferential system; and yet, they guarantee not only coherence of discourse but also rhetorical persuasion. Sterne presents Walter's discussion of them as such:

> The verbs auxiliary we are concerned in here, continued my father, are, am; was; have; had; do; did; make; made; suffer; shall; should; will; would; can; could; owe; ought; used; or is wont. – And these varied with tenses, present, past, future, and conjugated with the verb see, – or with these questions added to them; – Is it? Was it? Will it be? Would it be? May it be? Might it be? And these again put negatively, Is it not? Was it not? Ought it not? – Or affirmatively, – It is; It was; It ought to be. Or chronologically, – Has it been always? Lately? How long ago? – Or hypothetically, – If it was? If it was not? What would follow? – If the French should beat the English? If the Sun go out of the Zodiac? (V.43, 277–278.)

And in the Hungarian rendering of Győző Határ:

> – A szóban forgó segédigék (és igeképzők) a következők – olvasta: – vagyok, valék; leszek, levék; (nékem) vagyon, vala; fogok, fogtam, kell, kényszeredék; -andok, -endek; lészek -andó, endő; -hatok, -hetek, -hatom, -hetem, -haték, -heték, -hatám, -hetém; -gatok, -getek, -gálok, -gélek, -dallok, -dogálok, -delek, -degélek meg a többi, de váltogatva igeidők szerint, jelen, múlt és jövő időkben, végigragozva teszem a látni igével avagy kérdő formában, vagyon-é? vala-é? leend-é? lehetend-é? lehetséges-é? vaj lehetséges vón-é? Majd ugyanezt, tagadólag: nemde vagyon? nemde vala? nem de

> kellene? Avagy állítva: vagyon, vala, kellene; avagy időhatározóval: mindig volt? a minapában volt? mennyi ideje volt? Avagy feltételesen szólva: lett légyen így, ha nem lett légyen amúgy: mi következett volna? A franciák ha megverik légyen az angolokat? A Nap ha kilép az Állatövből? (425–426.)

Határ's insertion of "igeképzők" into the first line of the passage is emblematic of the problems this passage may serve to illustrate. (An "igeképző" is a kind of Hungarian ending (infix) which has no equivalent in English – one of its functions is to modify the grammatical classification of a word (it can turn a noun into a verb, for instance).) The entire passage demonstrates the contrast between an isolating and an agglutinative structure: while reading the two versions in their entirety makes it clear that Határ's passage is a translation of Sterne's, finding one-on-one correspondences between individual elements seems an almost complete impossibility. This impossibility is not the translator's fault, of course, but the result of structural differences between the two languages. In this respect, it is telling that some of the Hungarian endings used by Határ are not only absent from the English version but are practically untranslatable into an Indo-European language. The so-called "iterative infix," for instance, has no equivalent in English, mainly because it does not refer to frequency of action in the strictest sense. Formal differences within the Hungarian paradigm also carry connotations which might require a lengthy explanation and are dependent on contextual rather than logical or grammatical differentiation. Thus, while many of these infixes can be used interchangeably, in certain cases their connotations and situational usages differ: the two "iterative" formations *megyeget* and *mendegél* (both from the verb *megy*, "go")[7] are used in quite different contexts with different meanings.

Translation adds to the text something that the original is completely ignorant of. At the same time, Határ's Hungarian version probably sounds "stranger" to a contemporary Hungarian reader than Sterne's original to today's English-speaking readers. Moreover, the majority of auxiliaries enumerated by Walter should be familiar to most non-native speakers of English, even those with a relatively rudimentary knowledge (familiarity with most, though not all, of these auxiliaries is a requirement at an intermediate-level proficiency exam of English in the Hungarian educational system). Határ's translation, on the other hand, contains items which are not ordinarily used in 20th-century Hungarian. The addition of these archaic-sounding phrases ("lészek -andó", "lett légyen") is necessary because they communicate the complex system of tenses typical of Indo-European languages, which is alien to today's Hungarian. Archaic forms, which reflect a tendency to be "faithful" to the original, undoubtedly shatter the illusion of the perfect fluency and transparency of the translated text. Fidelity and fluency are the two terms which are traditionally set off against one another in translation theory. In some 20th-century trends, the well-known aporias stemming from their incompatibility

are avoided by referring to the horizon of the translated text which can never fully cover yet may exceed the horizon of the original. This potentiality within translation adumbrates the problem of communicability between languages.

To illustrate this tendency, I will quote two scholars whose theoretical backgrounds are strikingly dissimilar, and yet, in this question they seem to be in almost perfect agreement. One of the most important proponents of literary hermeneutics in Hungary, Ernő Kulcsár Szabó, sums up what he believes to be the crucial connection between translation and alterity as follows: "the fact that the translator, hermeneutically speaking, is situated between languages, does not mean that his/her belonging to one of these languages can be suspended. That is, translation – as it cannot break free from its native language – must make it an experience of its own language that the other has something that one's own does not (this is what truly makes it an other) or, at least, that the other's own is completely different from one's own. What I believe to be my own can be recognized as such only if contrasted by another's perspective of delimitation."[8] Compare this with what Lawrence Venuti, himself a practicing translator with a considerably different theoretical background from that of Kulcsár Szabó, has to say about interlingual communicability:

> Translation is a process that involves looking for similarities between languages and cultures – particularly similar messages and formal techniques – but it does this only because it is constantly confronting dissimilarities. It can never and should never aim to remove these dissimilarities entirely. A translated text should be the site where a different culture emerges, where a reader gets a glimpse of a cultural other, and resistancy; a translation strategy based on an aesthetic discontinuity can best preserve that difference, that otherness, by reminding the reader of the gains and losses in the translation process and the unbridgeable gaps between cultures.[9]

The above quoted passage from Határ's translation exemplifies the impossibility of translation between an agglutinating and an isolating structure. The structure of isolating, however, is not only the material but also the dominant subject of Sterne's text; and therefore, the failure to produce a seamless translation brings to the fore what Venuti calls the economy of "gains and losses." This should indicate that original and translation are not related to each other as the signified is to the signifier in the Saussurean sense; on the contrary, they cooperate to represent and interpret something which is not present in either. (The Benjaminian image of pieces of a shattered vessel is suggestive.) Reading a translated text may provide us with an insight that is not necessarily alien to the original but is not accessible to someone who knows the original only.

Walter's speech on auxiliaries is probably one of the most crucial episodes in the novel: partly because it is situated in the geometrical center of the book, partly

because it throws light on how our narrator-hero, Tristram, acquired (or was intended to acquire) language. More important than these, however, is that Walter's theory of auxiliaries parallels both his attitude as an educator and the formal structure of the "hobby-horse," the metaphor which serves to elucidate the eccentric behaviour of many a character in the novel. Moreover, this theory of helping verbs can be read (albeit somewhat arbitrarily) as an apotheosis of literary fiction, as it is intended to prove that it is indeed possible to discuss something that is nothing but pure invention, with no equivalent in phenomenal experience (that is, the white bear). For my present purposes, it is not relevant whether (1) Walter's discourse invokes ancient or Renaissance models of rhetorical pleasure in an inadequate context,[10] (2) exemplifies Locke's associationist principle gone awry, and thus the blending of the border between reason and madness,[11] or perhaps (3) criticises Locke's theory of understanding by alluding to Addison, Hume, and Hartley.[12] What does seem impossible to miss, on the other hand, is the fact that Walter's discourse, in stating the separability of language and experience, theory and practice, signifier and signified, also serves as a model for (a model of?)[13] the attitude typical of the main characters in the novel. What has come to be known as the structure of the "hobby-horse" is none other than the automatization of behavioral patterns, which thus become autonomous and uncontrollable by shared experience and common sense. As is well known, the behavior of each of the main characters in *Tristram Shandy* is governed by a recognizable topic – these topics are signifiers of a person's discourse but they are also purely verbal and, as such, they are incapable of bringing the discourse to a halt. On the contrary: they keep the discourse moving. For Uncle Toby, each discourse is about warfare; Yorick sacrifices reason (and his life) for wit; the widow Wadman sees courtship and love everywhere; while Walter himself is a fool for systems, encyclopedic and formalizable knowledge. His lecture on auxiliaries contains a program for the linguistic behavior of its author – it exemplifies as well as elucidates what is meant by a "hobby-horse."

In the context of Sterne's novel, it would not seem wise to criticize Walter for his lack of "realism," i.e., to account for his failure as an educator by pointing to his theory of non-coincidence between sign and meaning. The Hungarian translation of the passage manages to reveal the absurdity of Walter's theory of auxiliary verbs by purely linguistic means – by demonstrating the incommunicability between the isolating and the agglutinating pattern. Határ is forced to insert dashes before his endings. These dashes indicate the absence of something (of the verb, that is). The same impression is strengthened by the fact that, in the Hungarian, each ending is represented by multiple forms, due to the rule of vowel harmony (even in the absence of the verb the ending must harmonize with, a grammatical function can only be expressed by invoking not only one but all the corresponding forms, as in "-hatok, -hetek," "-gatok, -getek" etc.). Moreover, infixes must be presented here along with suffixes, which inevitably specify the grammatical sub-

ject of an action, while in Sterne's version, the isolated auxiliary gives no clue as to who acts. In Hungarian, even the lack of such a suffix is indicative as the so-called "zero morpheme" specifies the subject as third person singular. What all this amounts to is that the Hungarian text reveals one of Walter's supposedly universal presuppositions as local, limited, flawed or simply false – the auxiliaries Walter Shandy uses to establish a universal lexicon are not words but morphemes, having no lexical meaning, only a grammatical function.

This is not to falsify Walter's conclusion but to point out the tautology which facilitates the justification of the theory of auxiliaries. The rules of linguistic governance (such as vowel harmony) have no extralingual control mechanism whatsoever; and therefore, a system which is composed of syntactical rules only cannot be constrained in terms of content but neither can it be made meaningful by referring to experience. The conclusion that can be drawn from comparing the two passages is that the discourse based on auxiliaries is universal precisely because it is unable to move beyond the purely verbal. In the Hungarian translation, the limited scope of Walter Shandy's theory is illustrated formally and visually, by the necessity to indicate the absence of the verb and to multiply the forms expressing a grammatical function. In the English, spacing and the formal identity of each auxiliary allow one to think that auxiliaries – contrary to what their name would suggest – are words in their own right, thus covering up the distinction between vocabulary and syntax. Walter himself compares auxiliaries to a sort of machine, contrasting them with the singularity of a lexical item:

> The highest stretch of improvement a single word is capable of, is a high metaphor, – for which, in my opinion, the idea is generally the worse, and not the better; – but be that as it may, – when the mind has done that with it – there is an end, – the mind and the idea are at rest, – until a second idea enters; – and so on.
>
> Now the use of the Auxiliaries is, at once set the soul a-going by herself upon the materials as they are brought her; and by the versability of this great engine, round which they are twisted, to open up new tracks of enquiry, and make every idea engender millions. (V.42, 277/425.)

In a sense, Hungarian endings destabilize the operability of this engine, as they cannot function as the engine "round which" words and concepts can spin. This is so because grammatical governance is revealed to be a two-way process in the agglutinating structure: auxiliaries do govern but, at the same time, they are also governed by the verb they are attached to (the phonetic structure of the verb determines which infix is used, in accordance with the rules of vowel harmony). The principle of gravity that governs Walter's linguistic engine, that keeps it spinning, cannot be derived exclusively from the paradigm of auxiliaries.

It is even more telling that Határ's Hungarian translation is bound to deviate from the original significantly. The final clauses of the Hungarian passage ("minden gondolat mögé az eszmék légióit sorakoztatják, új meg új vidéket hódítva meg a vizsgálódás számára a segédigék csapataival") contain a longer, more elaborate, and more explicit *metaphor* than Sterne's version ("open new tracks of enquiry, and make every idea engender millions"). This is because, in order to make transition to the next paragraph possible, Határ has to make the double meaning of the word *auxiliary* perceptible in Hungarian. In the next paragraph, both Yorick and Corporal Trim (Uncle Toby's understudy) express their interest in what Walter has to say, the latter openly declaring that Walter's words remind him of the Danish auxiliary troops present at the siege of Limerick. The rare coincidence of individual (iniosyncratic) interests is due to the double meaning of the English word *auxiliary*, referring both to helping verbs and skirmishing troops. Uncle Toby, rather uncharacteristically, recognizes the accidental character of the *double entendre* and the fact that Walter is not talking about military affairs but this means for him having to give up following the argument any further.

In the Hungarian, this duplicity cannot be contained in a single word. For this reason, the translator circumscribes it, using ostentatiously figurative language (literally, "enlisting legions of ideas to support every thought..."). Needless to say, this very strategy contradicts Walter's theory, which linked *metaphor* to the single word, while Határ's translation contrasts the singularity (and the consequent duplicity) of a word with metaphoric circumscription. Simultaneously, the Hungarian translation is forced to give up representing the process of miscommunication so typical of *Tristram Shandy*. In the Hungarian, it is Walter who deliberately uses a military metaphor to illustrate his theory as if to tailor his discourse to Toby and Trim's interest. This is acting rather out-of-character by Walter, who, in another episode, chides Toby for taking every speech to be about warfare. The contrast between original and translation parallels that of lexical condensation and syntactical unfolding, which also appears to correspond to Walter's opposition between single word and the "engine" of auxiliaries. Interestingly enough, this is exactly the context in which Michael Riffaterre discusses the problem of translation when he identifies the task of the translator with the transference of presuppositions:

> No literary translation therefore can ever be successful unless it finds equivalents for these literariness-inducing presuppositions. Some equivalencies however may not be found in the target language at the same level as in the source language: equivalencies to lexical features of the original may have to be found at the syntactical level in translation, and the reverse is true as well.

> The near-untranslatable simply demands that we replace the lexeme-for-lexeme substitution with a syntagm-for-lexeme substitution.[14]

The consequences derived from the double meaning of the word *auxiliary* allow only two extreme possibilities when it comes to an encounter between diverging discursive practices. Whenever such an encounter occurs, understanding can come about only by way of complete assimilation; that is to say, by restructuring the entire discourse to suit one's own hobby-horse. The other way is giving up understanding the other's discourse altogether – this is what Toby does in our episode. It is the contrast between single words and the machine of syntax that, in the Hungarian, reveals Walter's theory as tautological but even this opposition cannot explain the extreme number of communicative failures which occur in the novel. The lack of a clear explanatory model is partly due to the fact that the narrator's discourse is not marked off from those of the characters.

A scene which occurs not much later in the novel is connected to the previous episode in more than one way. The most important thematic link is that here, too, the subject is Tristram's education. In the first chapters of Book VI, Walter declares having completed his theory of auxiliaries, then he goes on to discuss (with Toby and the others) matters of education and proper breeding. In Chapter 5, Walter suggests taking Tristram out of women's hands and hiring a private governor. The father enumerates what he thinks are the most significant traits of an ideal educator. True to himself, Walter lists character traits which are external signs of good breeding and manners, while Toby and Yorick insist on the importance of spiritual and emotional virtues which are less formalizable. On the basis of these "inner" character traits, the two recommend the deceased Le Fever's son, adopted by Uncle Toby. The following chapters narrate the famous story of Le Fever the senior, then in Chapter 11 Tristram hastens back to his own childhood. It is here he lets us know what it was that "has unaccountably led [him] into this digression" (VI.11, 292/451). It was none other than Yorick's sermon, delivered over the elder Le Fever's grave, curiously appended with a self-congratulatory "Bravo" *(ibid.)* and later "~~Bravo~~" (293/452). Tristram suggests that in Yorick's character, solemnity and wit are not completely separable, and that it seems the minister occasionally "snatched on the occasion of unlacing himself with a few more frolicksome strokes at vice, than the straitness of the pulpit allowed." *(ibid.)* The strokes are characterized as follows:

> These, though hussar-like, they skirmish lightly and out of all order, are still *auxiliaries* on the side of virtue.
>
> Huszáros, könnyed vagdalkozás volt ugyan s rendezetlen portyázók csupán, mindazáltal *segédhadak* az erény oldalán. (*Ibid.*, emphasis added)

When evaluating the Hungarian translation, one must take it into account that Tristram uses an English word (*hussar*) which is regarded by most dictionaries as a loan from the Hungarian language (although, according to the OED, the origins of this word can be traced back to the Latin *cursus* by way of the Italian *corsaro* ('pirate') and its derivations in Serbian and other southern Slavic tongues.) The word, especially in this adjectival construction ("hussar-like") is definitely not very common in English. The usage of the word definitely stands out for a Hungarian reader, especially because we read on the next page that Le Fever the junior had gone to Hungary to fight the Turks on the side of Eugene de Savoy. It is practically impossible to decide whether Sterne deliberately placed these elements in relation to one another but, once recognized, such a connection definitely strengthens the impression that we are dealing with a highly complex structure. In a recent book on chaos theory and narrative fiction, Hans C. Werner remarked that the complexity of Sterne's novel takes on a dimension which cannot be reduced to human inventiveness:

> The new order is created through self-organization from chaos: meaning organizes itself and the novel is brought to life, as this order/meaning changes and develops into greater complexity. Human beings cannot create such complexity, but they can sometimes create conditions to promote it.[15]

Any speculation of authorial intention or readerly competence is obviously futile once a connection like this is established, recalling Paul de Man's insistence that translation has something to do with the inhuman nature of language.[16]

The word *auxiliary* has connotations opposing those that it had in the previous episode. For Walter, it implied order and system, while here it means the exact opposite, disorder and chaos, contrasted to the "straitness of the pulpit" and the conventions associated with a sermon. If we follow the Hungarian connection, we can find a matching inversion of values. The phrase "huszáros könnyedség" ("hussar-like lightness") is perfectly idiomatic in Hungarian, unlike Sterne's original, which sounds conceited and idiosyncratic. In Hungarian, the adjective *huszáros* connotes not only heroism, valiance, and uncontainability but also "Hungarian-ness," an implication clearly lost on readers of the original. The phrase "huszáros könnyedség" sounds self-evident in this context, referring to what for today's English readers could probably be better expressed by the phrase "cavalier attitude," connoting nonchalance and a sweeping cavalry charge just as the Hungarian does.The whole passage sounds as if Sterne had translated it from Hungarian, and Határ had only restored the original. Here it is Sterne's linguistic ingenuity that makes his text sound "translationese." But this is not the end of the story. The complexity can be further increased if one brings to mind that another "natural" collocation for the adjective *huszáros* is the noun *virtus*, which of course

means "manliness" in Hungarian (derived from the Latin *vir*), yet it is a cognate of *virtue*, that which the auxiliaries skirmish lightly on the side of. Whatever the translator does, here s/he cannot translate the exotic impression made by the original. The problem of the translator, though perhaps incidentally, resembles that of the French translator of *A Sentimental Journey*, or a virtual Hungarian translator of Thomas Pynchon's works who has to transmit the (broken) Hungarian (or Swedish, or Romanian) in the original.[17] Another obvious analogue is the Hungarian author Péter Esterházy, who is fond of appending his untranslatable wordplays with the remark ("untranslatable wordplay"), which is even less translatable than most puns, since, once translated, it will be taken to refer to the already translated pun. These examples all indicate chiasmic reversals of original and translation, familiarity and strangeness.

Using the word *auxiliary* is clearly a choice made by Tristram himself, which means that the narrator connects Toby and Trim's militaristic discourse to the problem of linguistic behavior. This connectedness between various forms of discourse is expressed not only in the singularity of the polyvalent word but also elaborated in the figurativity of the sentence *("they skirmish lightly ... on the side of virtue"),* which makes the word a sort of meta-figure, the emblem of linguistic figuration itself. What is more, Tristram uses the word to describe a linguistic behavior (Yorick's "frolicksome strokes") which is not alien to his own use of language, and thus throws into doubt the absolute separability of idiolects represented in the novel. These idiolects can only be encountered if mediated by the discourse of the narrator. It is crucial to understand, though, that this inevitable hierarchization notwithstanding, the idiolects are bound to remain isolated in terms of mutual incomprehensibility. The transmission of individual words or tropes from one idiolect to another, therefore, multiplies the identity of these linguistic atoms as much as it forms a mutual horizon for various individual attitudes. This obviously makes weighing any interpretative decision extremely difficult. For instance, it is this problem (among others) that makes it at the same time necessary and impossible to decide whether Tristram's own discourse is parodized, whether he himself is the butt of the joke in his own narrative (like the narrator of Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*), or whether one can set up a hierarchy in which certain characters represent a higher level of wisdom than others. Flavio Gregori insists that Tristram's and Yorick's attitudes are distinct from those of the others, since the two of them are able to view their world as a totality.[18]

The transmission of individual words from one discourse to another illustrates the difficulties of translation. It also associates the singular word not with metaphor but with *paronomasia*. Many of the "double entendres" linked with puns and other figures based on homophony in the novel are well known, as well as the fact that Sterne often had to face accusations of unnecessary bawdiness and bad taste on their account. When translating Sklawkenbergius's tale (in Book IV), Tristram

finds himself in trouble trying to establish an acceptable single meaning for the word *nose*, given that he is unable to exclude possible sexual connotations even by means of the strictest definition. The same problem is encountered with regard to "whiskers." Far more interesting and subtle than these are the paronomastic structures which are only suggested in the text, one element in a homophonic relation being absent or only implied. In some cases, two episodes which are found relatively (or very) far from each other in the novel are connected by a verbal correspondence (like the two occurrences of the word *auxiliary*) which probably remains hidden upon first reading. In his excellent book, Jonathan Lamb offers two such examples.[19] Trim makes up for what he misses in linguistic skills by using his body: first he expresses his grief over Bobby's death (and, probably, illustrates mortality in general) by the sudden dropping of his hat; second, he accompanies reciting the Catechism with routine exercises learned in the army, since words escape him in themselves, so he must rely on bodily exercise to aid his memory. What seems a preference of bodily immediacy over language, however, turns out to be based on a verbal correspondence – Lamb remarks that it is not by accident that *Corporal* Trim excels in things *corporeal.* Upon first introducing Uncle Toby, Tristram mentions his "most extream and *unparallel'd* modesty of nature," immediately adding: "tho' I correct the word nature, for this reason, that I may not prejudge a point which must shortly come to a hearing; and that is, Whether this modesty of his was natural or acquir'd" (I.21, 43/73, emphasis added). Not much later, we find out that his famous modesty towards women is in all likelihood a consequence of his groin wound suffered at the siege of Namur (the name itself could be a pun),[20] in a trench called *parallel.* The meticulous distinctions drawn between fortification terms suggest that Toby's modesty is by no means unparalleled. Lamb hastens to add, correctly, that this play-on-words is hyperreflexive, as it is an example of linguistic parallelism using the word *parallel* as its material. Translating puns such as these is of course impossible, but they draw attention to a strategy of writing that affects the evaluation of a translation as well.

The atomization of linguistic elements scattered throughout the text indicates that eliminating the differences between isolated idiolects is impossible, especially by a single stroke, however "frolicksome." The constant failure of understanding, however, can be made visible from a horizon which transcends (but does not integrate) the individual discourses. The seemingly identical repetition of words exemplifies the fact that the diverging individual discourses are bound to speak the same language. Paradoxically, the mistranslations between idiolects are caused by the illusion that their shared language connects rather than, as in G. B. Shaw's famous aphorism, separating them. This paradox adumbrates the importance, but also the near-impossibility of the translator's task. This is also why correspondences or differences found between passages far from each other in the

novel are so significant. An example of it is found just after the passage quoted at the beginning of my paper, in Walter's auxiliary-speech:

Did my father, mother, uncle, aunt, brothers or sisters, ever see a white bear? What would they give? How would they behave? How would the white bear have behaved? Is he wild? Tame? Terrible? Rough? Smooth? – Is the white bear worth seeing? – – *Is there no sin in it?* Is it better than a black one? (V. 43, 278.)	Atyám, anyám, nagybátyám, nagynénéim, fivéreim avagy nővéreim láttak-é már fehér medvét? S mit adnának érte? Mit tennének, ha látnák, szemtől szembe? S mit a fehér medve, ha őket látná? Vad-é? Szelíd-é? Rémületes-é? Kócos-koloncos-é? Sima-selymes-é? – Becses látvány-é? – *Nincs-é benne bűn avajh?* – Vaj szebb-jobb-é a fekete medvénél? (427.)

Toward the end of the book Tristram attempts to communicate the facial expressions of the Widow Wadman after Uncle Toby has offered to show her where he was wounded. The problem is caused by another unclarified misunderstanding: Toby means the place on the map, whereas the widow means the place of the wound on his body. The widow first becomes pale, then blushes, and Tristram interprets her predicament as follows:

which, for the sake of the unlearned reader, I translate thus – 'L – d! I cannot look at it – What would the world say if I looked at it? I should drop down if I looked at it – I wish I could look at it – *There can be no sin in looking at it.* – I will look at it.' (IX. 20., 427)	mit is, az avatatlan olvasónak ilyképpen tolmácsolhatnék: 'Uram Isten! Már hogy nézhetném én meg azt, Mit mondanának mindenek, ha én azt még nézegetném is, Ledobbannék menten, hacsak odanéznék, Vajha megnézhetném pedig – *miért ne?* Megnézem biz én…' (659.)

Comparing the two passages in Sterne makes the similarity between Walter's and the widow's styles obvious. This similarity puts a stress on the repetition of the word *sin*. Határ, surprisingly, keeps *sin* in reference to the bear but omits it from its more immediate, self-evident context, the widow's plight. This is all the more striking because Határ, recalling the process of translating *Tristram Shandy*, makes reference to what he considers typically English prudishness which, he argues, creates situations in the novel not evidently comprehensible for a somewhat more sexually open-minded Hungarian audience. (Határ mentions the opening of the narrative, and the question by Tristram's mother which provoked *The Clockmaker's Outcry*.)[21] One could ask whether it is a sin by the translator[22] to

substitute a rhetorical question ("miért ne" [why not?]) for the widow's self-justifying assertion ("there can be no sin in looking at it") and thus weakening the correspondence of the two passages. The similarities of syntax perceived between the two passages imply that the thing the widow wishes to see is informed by the paradigm of what Walter calls the "white bear," stressing the similarity between the bear and Toby's groin. Juxtaposing the two excerpts creates another paronomastic structure, based on the homophony of *white bear* and *white bare*... The pun is perhaps not very tasteful or subtle, for that matter, but, as Sigurd Burckhardt's excellent essay[23] testifies, it is not alien to Sterne's style. While we cannot chastise the translator for not translating this pun, the reading given by Burckhardt poses questions regarding the importance of sin in the novel.

One of the main thrusts of Burckhardt's article is that bawdy and tasteless wordplays are not to be treated separately from other (thematic, stylistic) features of the novel. *Tristram Shandy,* in his view, embodies a linguistic model in which what is at stake in verbal communication is the very possibility of transmission – the transmission of a message from the sender to the addressee. These two are always situated on two sides of some kind of a gap, and this gap between communicative partners is as important as the one between signifier and signified. The existence of such gaps is obvious in some well-known episodes: it surfaces in the constant miscommunication between the brothers Shandy, in the fallout between Didius and Tribonius, and, perhaps most importantly, in the very fact that Tristram is aware of the unbridgeability of the distance between a life lived and a life written. Burckhardt also adds the question of original sin, discussed in the novel before Tristram is born. The debate whether the child can be christened in the womb or only after being born is decided in favor of the latter option, indicating that the fallen nature of humankind cannot be reversed. One must be born a sinner, and the possibility of salvation is only offered afterwards (leaving a chance that the child dies unredeemed). From this perspective, the significance of Walter's rhetoric can change as well, since his engine of auxiliaries also dramatizes a gap between language and what language aims at. This structural analogy might also explain his question regarding the contemplation of the non-existent white bear: "Is there no sin in it?"

The problem of the Fall is linked to a series of words which also includes *gravity*. Many of the most important scenes in the novel narrate something falling – and, incidentally, these trajectories almost invariably end in a man's lap. Toby's groin wound is due to a falling stone, the hot chestnut ends up in Phutatorius' lap, and Tristram's accidental circumscision is the consequence of a loose sash window. The latter accident is also in a causal relationship with Uncle Toby's military hobby-horse, as Trim steals the sashes in order to make mortars for Toby and his military playground. Toby's hobby-horse is a direct result of his injury, Tristram's wound is a result of his uncle's hobby, and this is why Burckhardt can rightfully

claim that Toby "transmits" his own wound to his nephew "through the mediation of the sash window."[24] We can see how falling in the physical sense and the problem of the Fall are both integrated into the playful structure of the text.

The problem of transmission is of crucial importance. Burckhardt's unwaveringly consistent argument shows how the various plotlines stage this problem in different ways. Toby is immersed in the study of ballistics (Tartaglia is his favorite author on the subject), both the destroyed model-fortifications and Tristram's broken nose have to be "bridged" again, Walter elaborates on various ways of instruction (transmitting knowledge, that is), and Tristram struggles with the impossibility of narrating his own life. One of Burckhardt's most perceptive remarks is that all these structures follow the line of some sort of a cycloid, mainly the *parabola*:

> In fact, the book ends before it began; Uncle Toby's concluding disappointment in love happens some five years before Tristram's birth. The only story that is told with reasonable (by Shandean standards) straightness and completeness is carefully placed so that it turns the whole back upon itself. No critical debate has been more idle than the one about whether *Tristram Shandy* is complete as it stands or whether Sterne simply gave it up after Book IX and left it a fragment. The novel is as carefully, as calculatedly "brought around" as so ambitious an enterprise to set forth and get the better of the mystery of language can be.
>
> In this fact, perhaps, the secret of the cycloid lies. A circle, coming to nothing in itself, perfect but intransitive, rolls along on a straight line. But the straight line, as Tartaglia showed, is a mere 'imposition,' at least for things that have substance and weight and are to be got across; therefore the real line of communication must be the cycloid curve, indirect, similar to the projectile's parabola.[25]

The critique of linear narration – and linear interpretation – gains authority from Tristram's own remarks. The well-known graphic depiction of possible narrative lines for the novel is found at the end of Book VI. The closing lines of the chapter are somewhat enigmatic, and it is perhaps the "translation" of these enigmas that motivates Burckhardt's paper as well. Tristram identifies a preference for straight lines as a tendency of good Christians, Ciceronian wise man, and – cabbage planters. This, he says, is all well, but then he adds: "Pray can you tell me [...] how it has come to pass, that your men of wit and genius have all along confounded this line, with the line of GRAVITATION." (VI. 40, 324/498.) The Hungarian version simplifies matters somewhat, as it has "a nehézkedés görbéje [lit. 'curve of gravitation']" and thus makes it clear that the distinction between cabbage planting and gravity is that between straightness and curvilinearity. What is only implied in the original is made unequivocal in translation. The English word *gravity*, on the other hand, appears in a context which is impossible to imitate in Hungarian – the three different meanings of the word are conflated here in one

passage. In associating "straightness" with wisdom, piety, and quotidian pragmatism (cabbage planting) at the same time, the passage adds to the word *gravity* the connotations of (1) 'seriousness' (2) 'falling, the Fall' (3) 'the Newtonian principle of gravity as a model of how the Universe works'.[26] This conflation of different meanings shows signs similar to some of the structures mentioned earlier. The theory of auxiliaries made the law of gravitation (linguistic governance) its basic principle (and we have seen how the Hungarian translation reveals the one-sidedness of Walter's argument by making auxiliaries and verbs mutually determine each other). Walter's theory translates language into a constantly spinning engine, which can at best momentarily encounter its signified. Tristram's narrative is similar to it in that it presupposes a chronology of events, which it constantly deviates from.[27]

A highly problematic feature of this complexity is that most of the heretofore discovered significances are derived from linguistic couplings made between distant passages in the novel *(auxiliary, sin),* one of whose elements is almost always only implied in the text *(corporeal, parallel, bare, gravity).* It would be hard to overestimate the complexity of the text in this respect and thus the extreme difficulties the translator has to face. More important, however, is the fact that this writing strategy is tied to the thematic level of the novel. The *double entendre*s, puns, allusions in the novel are only suggested most of the time, and when a reader "gets the joke," s/he inevitably becomes an accomplice in Sterne's game. One of Burckhardt's conclusions is drawn from this fact. The trajectory of the parabola is associated with Sterne's *double entendre*s, because the model of gravity is intended to prove that words also have "weight and substance." Walter's paradigm seems consistent only because language, contrary to all appearances, is not entirely self-sufficient; its referential function is inherent in any act of communication. Puns in Sterne reveal something, but it is impossible to decide whether this something (the meaning) exists in the author's or the reader's consciousness. Meaning seems to inhabit language itself, and yet it is unthinkable without reference to somebody's mind. Tristram wants to "halve the matter amicably" (II. 11, 71/115) between himself and his reader just as the abbess and the novice try halving what they judge an obscenity in French between them to get the ass going because they "see no sin" in saying only half of it respectively (VII. 25, 347/533 – the Hungarian omits the word *amicably* in the second instance, thus weakening the link between the two episodes). Needless to say, halving the word does not get the two nuns anywhere, neither do Tristram's apparent conversations with his readers make the novel a "dialogic" one in any specific sense.[28] As soon as the word is halved, its magical powers are lost – the effectivity of language is inseparable from its potential sinfulness. "But Sterne is never as simple as that. It seems as though he cannot rest until he has embodied any abstract point he has made, parabolised it and thus turned it to his true purpose; his jokes are experiments. If

words were magical, we may assume that they would do their business automatically; whether they are composite or integral would not matter. But words are not magical, they are sinful; somebody must accept responsibility for them. Sterne is responsible, but only because he is willing to accept language in its nature as it is, because he does not fling words away, but picks them up and makes them serve, as Newton made the apple serve. To speak of "Sterne's dirty mind" is as meaningful, and meaningless, as to speak of "Newton's law of gravity."[29]

The problem of communication in *Tristram Shandy* is due to the fact that not only the "whatness" but also the "whereness," the location of meaning is uncertain. The ensuing hermeneutic confusion is also thematized in the novel – most spectacularly where real interlingual communication is concerned.

> The French are certainly misunderstood: – but whether the fault is theirs, in not sufficiently explaining themselves; or speaking with that exact limitation and precision which one would expect on a point of such importance, and which moreover, is so likely to be contested by us – or whether the fault may not be altogether on our side, in not understanding their language always so critically as to know "what they would be at" – I shall not decide; but 'tis evident to me, when they affirm, "*That they who have seen Paris, have seen every thing*," they must mean to speak of those who have seen it by day-light.

> A franciákat bizonnyal félreértik; de hogy kiben van a hiba, bennük-é, mert nem fejezik ki magukat elég világosan, s nem szólnak oly akkurátus, szabatos körülhatárolással, miként ily fontos kérdésben elvárnók, amely kérdést még megvitathatnánk is, avagy, hogy mibennünk a hiba, kik nem értjük nyelvüket eléggé s nem mindig tudjuk, mi légyen "szavaik megett" – mindezek eldöntése nem rám tartozik; annyi bizonyos, mikor a franciák azt állítják, hogy "aki Párizst látta, látott mindent" – nyilván olyanokra gondolnak, akik napvilágnál látták. (VII. 18, 339; 522.)

Typically, the real object of misunderstanding is only revealed at the end of the paragraph. Until then, only a proleptic remark ("on a point of such importance") indicates that the French are perhaps not always misunderstood since the passage is about the truthfulness of a single French saying. Tristram's digressive style here allows for the displacement of the relationship between the general and the specific. By the time Tristram tells us what exactly he is talking about, the general statement is already inscribed: "[t]he French are certainly misunderstood," and the specific remarks can only qualify it. The undecidability between the specific and the general can be said to correspond to the undecidability between (linear) storyline and (digressive, cyclical) narrative discourse. With regard to this passage, it means that while there is an event in the past which serves as the virtual starting point to Tristram's discourse (the fact that he saw Paris by candle-light as opposed to day-light), the arrangement of the passage makes it impossible to re-

duce the entire discourse to this reference. The material design of the text and the story derived from it enter a relation of undecidability – the correspondence between them is as uncertain as that between different languages. This is why one cannot be sure which partner (the French, the English, the author, the narrator, the reader) is responsible for failures of communication. Accusations of eccentricity, bawdiness, and obscenity can be easily reversed; we cannot know whether Sterne/Tristram is not speaking "with the exact limitation and precision" one would expect him to do or whether the reader does not understand his language "always so critically" as to know "what he would be at."

The conclusion comes close to being self-evident: the linguistic model corresponding to the narrative strategy of *Tristram Shandy*, though everything is "halved amicably" between author and reader, is not that of a Bakhtinian dialogism but rather translatability, in the Benjaminian sense. This statement is corroborated even by the pictorial similarity of Burckhardt's cycloid to Walter Benjamin's famous image:

> "Just as a tangent touches a circle lightly and at but one point – establishing, with this touch rather than with the point, the law according to which it is to continue on its straight path to infinity – a translation touches the original lightly and only at the infinitely small point of sense, thereupon pursuing its own course according to the laws of fidelity in the freedom of linguistic flux."[30]

Burckhard's above-quoted description can be said to complement or even correct this image, as the gravitational force of words alters the trajectory of the straight line, though it can never turn it completely back upon itself. The seductivity of this geometrical image lies in the fact that it can be made to refer to narrativity, translatability, and even readability, the unparalleled contamination of which is easily recognized in *Tristram Shandy.* In the passage last quoted from the novel, the slight deviation of the Hungarian translation can demonstrate that translation and original touch one another only punctually. The Hungarian phrase "a szavaik megett [lit. 'behind their words']" translates "what they would be at" perfectly idiomatically, but at the same time it adds a dimension which is absent from the original. The Hungarian phrase connotes the "hiddenness" of meaning, its ulterior status to words, an implication which is present in the English language as well, yet is missing from Tristram's "what they would be at." Tristram's expression implies the purposefulness of the verbal act instead: referring both to meaning as a target and communication as action (since the question "What are you at?" can mean "What are you doing?"). The problematic nature of translation is yet again adumbrated; the two texts clearly have diverging connotations, and still, we cannot fault Határ for making this choice, since the translated text itself says that slippages like this are inevitable.

At this point, it is not surprising that *Tristram Shandy* (as well as *A Sentimental Journey*) includes many references to translation as a model for narration. We have already seen an example, when Tristram translates the Widow Wadman's glance into ordinary language. A few lines later, however, we encounter a similar structure:

> – You shall lay your finger upon the place – said my Uncle Toby – I will not touch it, however, quoth Mrs. Wadman to herself.
> This requires a second translation: – it shews what little knowledge is got by mere words – we must go up to the first springs.

> – Mindjárt: még rá is teheti ujjacskáját a helyre, ahol kaptam az ütést – mondotta Toby nagybátyám.
> (Hozzáérni? Azt már nem) – szólott magában Wadmanné asszonyság.
> Ez újfent tolmácsolásra szorul, és ez is csak azt mutatja, hogy mily csekély tudásra tehetünk szert a puszta szó által; annakokáért le kell hatolnunk mindenek első eredetéig. (IX.20, 427/660.)

The fact that a similar structure is repeated within the same page may overshadow the significant difference between this and the previous passage. In this second excerpt, the arrangement differs from the previous one in that the Widow Wadman's inner speech is communicated before the necessity of translation is declared. Translation (which Határ calls "tolmácsolás," that is, "interpretation from one language to another") is not necessary between what is seen and what is understood but between what is meant by one person and another person trying to understand the first one. Translation, therefore, is explication. (The Hungarian word *magyaráz*, "to explain" has for its root *magyar*, "Hungarian." To explain is to "Hungaricize," to translate into Hungarian. Just as in English, explaining something is repeating it in "plain English.") Strangely, the original ("This requires a second translation") suggests more clearly than Határ's translation that here something that is already translated has to be translated again: the widow's facial expression is translated into her fictional inner monologue, which, in turn, is translated into something meaningful. Not surprisingly, this "something meaningful" is quite meaningless, since the chapter continues (and ends) as follows: "Now in order to clear up the mist which hangs upon these three pages, I must endeavour to be as clear as possible myself. Rub your hands thrice across your foreheads – blow your noses – cleanse your emunctories – sneeze, my good people – God bless you – " *(Ibid.)*. This and the preceding declaration that "mere words" are not sufficient makes it obvious that a second translation will not restore anything originary, it will not clear up misunderstandings, or correct what has gone awry in the first translation. The reference to nose-blowing recalls Sklawkenbergius' tale and, with it, the dangerous connotations unavoidable by clear definition. These

connotations can only be contained if language ceases to mean, if it is caught in an endless chain of tautological definitions. A nose is a nose is a nose...

"Tristram's predicament can be summed up in the obvious and unfathomable fact that 'word' is a word."[31] This paradox of linguistic doubling, which is beyond the reach of any phenomenalist theory of self-reflexivity, can be linked to the view, often traced back to Benjamin, that what language communicates is communicability itself. This is why a translation should not be translated further, let alone back to the original language. And this is also the reason that any interpretation of a work, which, like *Tristram Shandy*, claims to be already a translation in some sense (in the most general sense, a failed attempt to translate one's life and opinions into a narrative), is bound to come up against self-perpetuating aporias. While these aporias in the novel are discovered through the multiplication of lexical units, they cannot be resolved by isolating and defining lexical meanings because the iterability of these units leads to the conflation of contextual determinations. This explains the deeply disturbing character of puns, self-quotations and parallelisms in *Tristram Shandy*.[32]

If there is a single episode in the novel which illustrates this problem complex in a highly condensed manner, it is in Chapter 30 in Book VII. The chapter informs us that Tristram was held back for a while during his journey through France. This fact is vexing in itself, but the causes of the delay are additional vexations. Our narrator describes the situation in these words:

> To those who call vexations, VEXATIONS, as knowing what they are, there could not be a greater than to be the best part of a day in Lyons, the most opulent and flourishing city in France, enriched with the most fragments of antiquity – and not be able to see it. To be withheld upon *any* account, must be a vexation; but to be withheld by a vexation...
>
> Kik a bosszantást – BOSSZANTÁSNAK nevezik, tudva-tudván, hogy mit értsenek rajta, mi sem szolgálhatna nagyobb bosszantásukra, mint ha Lyonban, Franciaország egyik leggazdagabb s legvirágzóbb városában majdnem teljes napot időzve, nem láthatnák ókori emlékeit, melyeknek se szeri, se száma; ez bosszantásnak már magában éppen elegendő, tartotta légyen volna vissza őket *bármi*; hát még ha tetejébe egy *más bosszantás* tartotta vissza... (353, 543–544 – emphases in the original).

The passage starts out with a tautological definition, as in the case of a *nose*. Vexation is what we call vexation. The differentiation between two levels of vexation indicates that the self-sufficient identity of the word is not so self-explanatory after all: if we want to understand the difference between the two levels, the only valid point of departure is the situational context, and not the lexical meaning (perhaps one can distinguish between genuine and supplementary vexations). Határ's

Hungarian syntactically delimits the difference that is left unspecified in Sterne – he says "egy *más* bosszantás [lit. 'another vexation']" where the original has "a vexation" only. The most curious part of the translation is what follows:

> to be withheld by a vexation – must certainly be, what philosophy
> justly calls
> VEXATION upon VEXATION (353.)

> hát még ha egy *más* bosszantás tartotta vissza: akkor ez nyilván már –
> amint a mathematikusok kifejeznék:
> BOSSZANTÁS$^{\text{a hatványon}}$ (544.)

Határ translates "philosophy" as "mathematics," which at first seems to be a mistake from this paper's perspective. Mathematical signs are obviously different from words, even from the more abstract concepts of philosophy, in that they are unaffected by the disseminative effects of everyday use and the multiplication of contexts. (It is noteworthy, in view of his omission of *philosophy*, that Határ himself mentions the lack of a philosophical language in Hungarian.[33]) While it is true that Határ's shift from "philosophy" to "mathematics" results in some loss of meaning, it also creates an extraordinary significance, which is also not alien to Sterne's logic. Sterne's *upon* is here translated by the Hungarian *a hatványon* ["to a degree," in the sense of "exceedingly"], which is perfectly compatible with contemporary Hungarian. But the greatest trick is to have this very word printed in superscript. In Hungarian, the mathematical term *hatvány* means the exponent, which denotes the power a term is to be raised to. The mathematical sign x^2, for example, can be translated into ordinary Hungarian as "x a második hatványon [x on the second degree]". To print the word *a hatványon* in superscript, in the position of the exponent [*hatvány*] in Határ's Hungarian equals to saying "vexation on the degree*th* degree," an absurdly tautological definition worthy of Sterne's novel.

The translation is worthy of Sterne's original partly because it confirms that the primary field of reference for *Tristram Shandy* is the two-dimensional realm of the printed page.[34] At the same time, the regressive movement of "degree upon degree" implies the preemptive, deprivative function of linguistic self-consciousness, revealing as illusory the belief that reflexive, self-flaunting narratives can serve as examples of "the mimesis of process" (Linda Hutcheon), which would make the reality of literary communication graspable; and the belief that in this function, they could serve emancipatory movements by unveiling the social practices associated with the modern novel.[36] What focusing on the problems of translatability and communicability reveals is that the strategies flaunting the arbitrariness of literary creation in the novel – "for I begin with writing the first sentence – and trusting to Almighty God for the second" (VIII.2, 370/569) – are reinscribed in a structure of inevitable pre-mediation. A clear example is the duplicity of Tristram's proper name. One can never be certain whether Tristram is a

name for a mere fictional puppet whose sole purpose is to communicate his creator's thoughts (as he communicates the Widow Wadman's). Moreover, the structure of this undecideability can be thought of by analogy of the *double entendre*s in the book, and as such, it can suspend the reader's identity as well.[37] A more detailed explanation of this problem would have to involve a discussion of narrative irony and the function of the *buffo*, the actor whose role is to be always out-of-character.

In a recent commentary on Walter Benjamin's theory of language, Rodolphe Gasché has established a close link between the problem of translatability (and communicability) and the Benjaminian concepts of fate and tragic character. In this analogical structure, mythological predetermination is to tragic character as the profane webs of language are to language's Other (the concept of truth detached from intentionality and ordinary frames of reference). It is owing to this system of correspondences that Gasché can claim that a reference to translatability and communicability "is a reference not to a particular philosophical problem but rather to philosophy itself."[38] The difference between the opposing poles is ineliminable, and yet grasping them is a cognitive impossibility because translatability and communicability are "epistemological concepts of difference" (p. 77), and the "radically differing pole of philosophical difference or opposition is not at hand" (p. 79). The profane, referential web of language is pervasive in Sterne's novel, and it is responsible for untranslatable and very often latent double meanings. This web is insurmountable, but also analogous (if one accepts Gasché's analogy) with the calamities that befall Tristram. In the Hungarian translation by Győző Határ this "mythical" system of references is inevitably transformed and, for the most part, destroyed. Translation, therefore, appears capable of "violently tearing [...] to shreds" the texture of "the mythical interconnectedness of language" (p. 81). It remains an open question, however, whether this capacity of translation can be made into a normative requirement for all translations to aim at, since it is meant to name a (negative) potentiality inherent in all translations. ("Now, translatability represents in the work of art the objective call for overcoming this still-natural unity rooted in mythical linguistic relations. Translatability, is, in the work of art, the yearning to break the symbolic relations that constitute it as a mythical web – or, for short, as a text. Translations, *if they are to be successful*, must indeed achieve this goal" (p. 69 – emphasis added).)

The ironic structure of naming and self-naming in *Tristram Shandy* shows obvious similarities with Gasché's description. The narrator's name, as well as the host of multiplied, disseminated and meaninglessly repeated words can be viewed as the constant demonstration and subsequent retraction of the difference between words and things. Language's Other is a "radical and nonphenomenal Other" (p. 79), whose absence proves that a text is always-already translated, and thus makes

every paper on literary interpretation (written in whichever language) face up to the impossible task of translating a translation.

Notes

1. Gabriella Hartvig, *Laurence Sterne Magyarországon 1790–1860* [Laurence Sterne in Hungary 1790–1860], Budapest: Argumentum, 2000.
2. This logic is, needless to say, that of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, albeit in a necessarily simplified form. It is noteworthy that the English translator of Derrida's book applies Derrida's interpretation of the supplement to her own translation. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Translator's Preface" to Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore–London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, lxxxvii. "It is now time to acknowledge that this theory would likewise admit – as it denies – translation, by questioning the absolute privilege of the original."
3. Adam Smith, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, ed. J. C. Bryce, Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985, 7.
4. Gabriella Hartvig speaks of Határ's "great translation that even matches the original in terms of wit". Hartvig, 8.
5. Laurence Sterne, *The Life & Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.*, New York: The Heritage Press, 1935, 255. Emphasis added. Further references to this edition are in the text.
6. Laurence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy úr élete és gondolatai*, trans. Határ Győző, Budapest: Európa, 1989[2], 392. Emphasis added. Further references to this edition are in the text, separated from references to the English edition by a slash.
7. The word *megyeget* can be used if one says that her work is 'coming along okay,' for instance, while *mendegél* refers to unhurried strolling. What the two have in common is an impression of comfort, tranquility and slowness.
8. Ernő Kulcsár Szabó, "A saját idegensége" ["The Alterity of What is One's Own"] in *A megértés alakzatai* [Figures of Understanding], Debrecen: Csokonai, 1999, 79–80.
9. Lawrence Venuti, *The Translator's Invisibility. A History of Translation*, London–New York: Routledge, 306.
10. Cf. Richard A. Lanham, *Tristram Shandy's Games of Pleasure*, Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 1973, 53–76. Lanham characterizes Walter as a belated Sophist.
11. Wolfgang Iser, *Sterne: Tristram Shandy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, especially 20-24.
12. Jonathan Lamb, *Sterne's Fiction and the Double Principle*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, 28, 64–65.
13. The distinction between "models *of*" and "models *for*" reality is from Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic, 1973, 93.
14. Michael Riffaterre, "Transposing Presuppositions: on the Semantics of Literary Translation," in Rainer Schulte – John Biguenet, eds, *Theories of Translation. An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, Chicago–London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992, 205, 217.
15. Hans C. Werner, *Literary Texts as Nonlinear Patterns. A Chaotics Reading of* Rainforest, Transparent Things, Travesty, *and* Tristram Shandy, Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1999, 156.
16. The reference is especially to Paul de Man's lecture on Walter Benjamin and the ensuing discussion in *The Resistance to Theory*, Minneapolis–London: University of Minnesota Press, 1986, 73–105.

17 "Good morning, *kicsi káposta* (sic)" – that is how the character Zsuzsi Szabó greets her friend in Chapter 54 of Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1997, 540). Incidentally (?) Zsuzsi first appears in the novel wearing the uniform of the Nádasdy-hussars, a famous regiment fighting in various wars of succession in the 18th century.

18 Cf. Flavio Gregori, *Il 'wit' nel Tristram Shandy. Totalità e dialogo*, Roma: Edizione dell'Ateneo, 1987, 86.

19 The examples are from Lamb, 123; 50.

20 Peter de Voogd suggested that the name might be a pun on "ne amour" or "no more". Quoted in Werner, 146.

21 See Győző Határ, *Életút* [A Journey through Life], ed. Lóránt Kabdebó, Szombathely, 1993–1995, Vol. 2, 396.

22 Some argue, from a Freudian perspective, that translation is inevitably a sin committed against the author (and not only the text) of the original. See Andrew Benjamin, *Translation and the Nature of Philosophy. A New Theory of Words*, New York–London: Routledge, 1989, 137.

23 Sigurd Burckhardt, "Tristram Shandy's Law of Gravity," *English Literary History*, 28 (1961), 70–88; about the pun 'bear/bare' see p. 84. What follows on the next few pages draws heavily on the argument put forward by Burckhardt, to which I am deeply indebted.

24 Burckhardt, 82.

25 Burckhardt, 80–81.

26 Cf. Gregori, 70–91.

27 Theodore Baird ("The Time-Scheme of Tristram Shandy and a Source", *PMLA* 51 (1936), 803–820 demonstrated long ago that a chronological sequence of events can indeed be reconstructed from *Tristram Shandy*.

28 For a rather simple but effective critique of dialogism in the novel, see Corinne Fourny, "Dialogues in 'Tristram Shandy': Openness or Control?" *The Shandean* 9 (1997), 70–82.

29 Burckhardt, 86–87.

30 Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," trans. Harry Zohn, in *Selected Writings*, Vol. 1 (1913–26), ed. M. Bullock and M. W. Jennings, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996, 261.

31 Burckhardt, 75.

32 Interesting "parallels" can be found in Ugo Foscolo's footnotes to his Italian translation of *A Sentimental Journey*. (The translation was made under the pseudonym Didimo Cherico, as if to mirror Sterne's games with the names of Tristram and Yorick.) Foscolo comments on translating a translation. In a note made to the chapter called "The Translation. Paris" he explains why he had replaced, in the second edition, the phrase "traduzione salviniana" with "traduzione plebea" (standing for "vile translation " in Sterne). Foscolo explains that the first version, of course unbeknownst to the speaker, Yorick, is derived from the name of the author of a failed Italian translation from Terence. In another footnote, he gives reasons for translating into archaic Italian a fragmented old French text, which Yorick quotes in contemporary English. Foscolo, somewhat comically and yet astutely, insists that a translation must give a sense of the historicity of language – that is its main didactic function. Foscolo, *Viaggio sentimentale di Yorick lungo la Francia e l'Italia* (1813), in *Opere*, ed. Mario Puppo, Milano: U. Mursia & C., 1966, 465 n74., 507 n119.

33 See Határ, 397.

34 See for instance. Giovanna Capone, *Spazi della scena comica nella narrativa inglese*, Pisa: Editrice Libreria Goliardica, 1973, 98.

35 Lamb, 136.

36 Robert Siegle, *The Politics of Reflexivity. Narrative and the Constitutive Poetics of Culture*, Baltimore–London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986, especially 224–247.

[37] Jacques Berthoud, *Shandeism and Sexuality*, in Valerie Grosvenor Myer, ed., *Laurence Sterne: Riddles and Mysteries*, London–Totowa, NJ: Vision – Barnes & Noble, 1984, 36.

[38] Rodolphe Gasché, *Of Minimal Things. Studies on the Notion of Relation*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 73. Further references to this edition are in the text.