Creolization, Translation, and the Poetics of Worldness: On Wu Ming-Yi’s French Translation

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Abstract

This article attempts to provide a reflection on both the practice and the ontology of translation through a discussion of my experience translating Taiwanese writer Wu Ming-Yi’s fiction. In some of his works, Wu Ming-Yi, like some other authors (such as Wang Chen-ho) before him, uses a mix of languages, including Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Hokkien, and even fictional languages. Faced with such a flood of languages, the translator often finds herself/himself at wits’ end and must develop original strategies to respond to this challenge. The strategy I suggest for the translation of Wu Ming-Yi’s Shuimian de hangxian (Routes of Sleep) into French is that of “creolization.” This contribution seeks to offer a new experimental translation method in order to preserve the interactions between the different languages present in the original text, and I will also discuss the potential limitations involved in this method. I will try to show that what is revealed by creolization as a translation strategy is that the translation act is not so much a communicative transmission or a transfer of “equivalent” contents as the actual practice of the translation of a particular poetics. I conclude by contesting the idea that Wu Ming-Yi’s fiction belongs to a formulaic “world-literature,” arguing instead that it corresponds more to what Édouard Glissant calls a “tout monde” literature and that its translation can contribute to the development of a “poetics of Worldness.”

KEYWORDS Wu Ming-Yi, French, translation, creolization, Édouard Glissant, Worldness
Introduction

As Itamar Even-Zohar and other polystem scholars have argued, unequal relations and asymmetries between literatures are particularly revealed by the phenomenon of translation, which can show how a work or an author is positioned in the hierarchy of prestige and centrality in the literary world (Even-Zohar 122). If we consider indeed that literary space is a place of rivalries and of balance of power, then the translation and the choices adopted during its process appear as a major vector for understanding the canonization of the so-called “world literature” works. As Kathleen Shields writes, the study of translation should be “not only an ethic of translation, but also a geopolitics of literature.”

The present contribution comes in the form of a hybrid text, both a translation self-analysis and a preliminary consideration of the practice of translation in the context of a “global literary ecology” (Beercroft). Unlike an ordinary academic article, this work aims to be a subjective report of translation experiences of multilingualism in the novels of contemporary Taiwanese writer Wu Ming-Yi, and more generally of Taiwanese literature, as well as a discussion of my own reflections during this translation experience.

It is now well admitted that translation (and above all, literary translation) is not so much an art of equivalence or an exercise in applied linguistics as a practice of uncertainty—an “experimental poetics,” as conceived by Henri Meschonnic (44)—in the sense that the text to be translated opens up a creativity that allows multiple readings and that is indefinitely transformed by them. At no time will I suggest in this article the validity or accuracy of this or that translation of content, but I will try to insist on the obstacles I have faced during my translations, and how these difficulties have helped me develop some new strategies that may be interesting to share in this special issue.1

To explore the issue regarding choosing the language of writing in Taiwanese literature through Wu Ming-Yi’s case, especially its translation into French, offers an opportunity to question the practice of translation in the constitution of a “poetics of Worldness,” as opposed to a more commodified and more exotic world literature, which would reproduce the schema of (non-Western) “small particular

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1 I have already discussed some of these experiences in an article published in French (“Creolization”). Some of the reflections presented here (mainly in the section “Creolization as a Translation Strategy”) are derived from this French article.
literatures” that speak about and for themselves against (Western) “great universal literatures” that speak about everything and for everyone.

Taiwanese Literature and the Choice of the Language of Writing

The multilingual\(^2\) dimension of Taiwanese literature first appeared to me during the writing of my master’s thesis in 2010 on the novel *Meigui meigui wo ai ni* (*Rose, Rose, I Love You*, 1984), by Wang Chen-ho.

This novel is quite unanimously considered as one of the founding novels of a postcolonial Taiwanese poetics (Chiu). Its plot follows the construction of a brothel in Hualien, the author’s hometown. To best accommodate US GIs at war in Vietnam for their R&R (Rest and Recreation) program, the four owners of the biggest brothels in the neighborhood try to train prostitutes to serve future American “customers” as best as possible. In order to achieve this goal, they organize, with the help of a local intellectual, accelerated courses in English, American culture, and hygiene for the prostitutes in the township church. This story is a pretext for a polyglossic deluge of appropriations, frictions, and (mis)translations between a multitude of languages: from a national language (Mandarin Chinese) to Taiwanese (Hokkien), through American English, Chinglish, Japanese, Taiwanese Mandarin,\(^3\) Cantonese, and even classical Chinese.

By plunging the reader into the carnivalesque vertigo of Taiwanese sociolinguistic complexity, Wang’s novel not only juxtaposes different languages, but also mixes them, sometimes with a metafictional criticism of the hierarchical categorization of languages on the island. Taiwanese scholar Lee Yu-lin argues that the novel itself is written in the “language of translation,” and that Wang Chen-ho simultaneously adopts the roles of writer and translator (137). Chiu Kuei-fen speaks of *Rose, Rose, I Love You* as a postcolonial novel *par excellence*. She explains

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\(^2\) Although this is not directly the purpose of my study, it is probably worth recalling the difficulty of giving a normative definition of “multilingual text,” especially when it comes to literary texts, in which the border of linguistic codes can very well be hidden behind aesthetic experiments. While multilingualism has an institutional basis and status, the phenomena embraced by multilingualism in its official meaning sometimes appear to be confined to simplistic and arbitrary demarcations between several legitimate languages, which are supposed to be homogeneous, identifiable, and delimited, neglecting the multilingual nature of languages themselves, as shown by Renée Balibar through what she has called “colinguism” (1993).

\(^3\) Taiwanese Mandarin (*Taiwan guoyu*) is a hybrid language born after the introduction of Mandarin Chinese as a national language by the Chiang Kai-shek government. In addition to the influence of the pronunciation and grammar of other Chinese languages of Taiwan (Hakka, but especially Hokkien), we also find many terms inherited from the Japanese colonial language or even English. On Taiwanese Mandarin as a “dialect,” see Kuo.
that “the languages of the novel function as a miniature of centuries of colonialism in Taiwan. By a mixture of different languages, it reproduces the peculiarities of the transcultural mold of the colonial history of the island, in which its past, present, and future merge” (167).

While there is no French translation of Rose Rose I Love You to date, it is interesting to note that the English translation published in the US in 1998, seems to ignore the linguistic variations of the original text. This choice is assumed by translator Howard Goldblatt, who claims in an interview to have knowingly decided to simplify Wang’s linguistic experiments in order to promote the development of Taiwanese literature abroad, without taking the risk of diverting the reader. Goldblatt also says that his choice is intended to change a “bad” (in his own words) Chinese prose into a readable, accessible, and more marketable text (10).

In recent decades many scholars have emphasized the importance of the hybridity of the languages of writing used by Taiwanese writers during the period of Japanese rule and after World War II in the elaboration of postcolonial-inspired discourses (besides Chiu and Lee, see also Chen; Tee). From a more global perspective, Homi Bhabha and many others after him have shown that all languages are inherently hybrid, particularly in postcolonial regions. Languages, along with the work done by a literary writer on languages, are thus “cultural sites,” “cultural switches,” “third-spaces” that offer a “disruptive temporality of enunciation” (Bhabha 37). The choice of a language (or languages) of writing shows that the “postcolonial” is an acting poetics, a poiesis in its original meaning of a “bringing into being” (Agamben 68).

An incident from a few years ago testifies to the tensions that still exist in the Taiwanese literary scene today concerning the diglossic relationship between Mandarin Chinese and Hokkien and the choice of a language of writing. During a public lecture given by famous Taiwanese writer Hwang Chun-ming, known for his realistic writing and his focus on characters coming from the lower strata of the Taiwanese population, the writer and professor of Taiwanese literature Chiung Wi-vun publicly opposed Hwang and accused him of choosing for his novels the language of the Chinese colonizer rather than his mother tongue, Hokkien. Chiung’s remarks were strongly condemned by several Taiwanese cultural and literary figures, including Chen Fang-ming, one of Taiwan’s leading theoreticians of postcolonialism, who criticized Chiung for his narrow-minded vision of Taiwanese culture, wondering whether writers such as Yang Kui, Lung Ying-tsung, Chang

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4 On this translation and the ideology that underlies it, one can read Teng Chien-ju’s excellent criticism.

5 On diglossia in Taiwanese history, see Heylen.
Wen-huan, or Wu Chuo-li, who used to write in Japanese before 1945, were not then “Taiwanese authors.” Another Taiwanese writer and critic, Chang Ta-chun, known for his adherence to the idea of a great cultural China of which Taiwan is supposed to be the heiress and the refuge, asked that National Cheng Kung University, which employed Chiung, be condemned and held responsible for the personal conduct of its employee.6 This seemingly anecdotal episode, which upset the Taiwanese literary scene for a few weeks, revealed the importance of the written languages and their complex relationship to Taiwan’s postcolonial literature and history.

**Multilingualism in Wu Ming-Yi’s Works**

In reaction to this debate, Wu Ming-Yi posted a comment on his Facebook in which he expressed his vision of Hokkien writing and gave an account of his first literary experiments. Without taking sides, Wu explained that, at the time of publication of his first collection of short stories, *Benri gongxiu* (*Closed for Holidays*, 1997), he consulted the elder writer Sung Tse-lai, known for his poems and short stories written in Hokkien, on Hokkien literary writing. The latter told Wu Ming-Yi that it was better to write in the language that was most familiar to him, “Beijing language” (*Beijing hua*) in Wu’s case, rather than “Taiwanese language” (*Taiwan hua*) (*Wu, “It’s When I Write”).7

However, Wu Ming-Yi remains concerned, from his earliest writings to his most recent ones, with Taiwanese society’s inherent multilingualism. In his second collection of short stories, *Huye* (*The Tiger God*), published in 2003, the short story “Cesuo de gushi” (“A Story of Toilets”) features a lot of dialogues (and part of the narration) written in Hokkien, via a hybrid system of both Chinese characters and Latin alphabet with which to transcribe the Hokkien language. This story has originally been published in a Taiwanese-language literature journal: *Tai-uan e bun-ge*. The writing and use of Hokkien, as well as languages other than Mandarin, has changed a lot throughout Wu’s career, but it remains a constant of his approach to the language of a text, as we will see below.

This concern can be found not only in Wu Ming-Yi’s works but also in other writers of his generation such as Tung Wei-ko or Kan Yao-ming (the latter writes

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6 A website affiliated with the Southern Taiwan University of Science and Technology retraced the incident and provided publications and media coverages both positive and negative toward Chiung: http://faculty.stust.edu.tw/~tang/shallow/taiwans.htm

7 It should be noted here that even though Wu Ming-Yi did all his schooling in Mandarin Chinese, his mother tongue is Taiwanese (Hokkien) since he comes from a Hoklo family.
in both Mandarin Chinese and Hakka), writers whom the researcher Fan Ming-ju has regrouped under the label “post-nativist” literature (hou xiangtu) (Fan 251-90), an extension of the so-called “nativist” literature in which Wang Chen-ho was sometimes classified. The development of this polyphony of the post-nativist literature, which borrows, according to Fan, from “post-theories” (postmodernism, postcolonialism, etc.), is a direct heritage of Wang Chen-ho’s works: contrary to what we can imagine, Wang Chen-ho’s handwritten manuscripts reveal that his mixing of languages comes from a very elaborate process of rewriting and self-hybridization, rather than from a realistic or intuitive approach to writing (Gaffric, “Multilingual Writing”).

Like Wang Chen-ho, Wu Ming-Yi chooses to interweave Chinese Mandarin and Hokkien by using the same graphic system (sinograms). It must be specified here that transcriptions of Hokkien do not benefit from an absolute consensus; in Taiwan, linguists and writers deploy different strategies to transcribe language: sinograms, alphabetic writing, phonetic symbols, or even mixed systems. In Wang Chen-ho and Wu Ming-Yi’s fictions, as in most Taiwanese authors’ works, paragraphs in Hokkien and Mandarin are thus transcribed according to the same graphic system. However, the (graphic) familiarity of Mandarin Chinese and Hokkien is such that a speaker of Mandarin Chinese (whether he speaks Hokkien or not) can understand most, if not the entirety, of a section in Hokkien, while inevitably noticing the presence of a different language from the one previously used.

Wu’s use of different languages in his dialogues and his stories is not limited to Mandarin and Hokkien. In his novels Fuyan ren (The Man with the Compound Eyes, 2011) and Danche shiqieji (The Stolen Bicycle, 2015), Wu Ming-Yi inserts, for example, elements of Austronesian languages spoken by Taiwanese indigenous populations (yuanzhumin). In The Man with the Compound Eyes and in his latest collection of short stories, Kuyu zhi di (The Land of Little Rain, 2019), Wu even pushes further his experiments on languages, creating at least two idioms: the Wayonese language (spoken by an imaginary Polynesian ethnic group) and an original sign language designed for deaf people to reproduce the songs of birds in the short story “Ren ruhe xuehue yuyan” (“How the Brain Got Language?”). It is, however, his use of Mandarin Chinese and Hokkien in his stories that marks his

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8 On the question of different ways of writing Taiwanese and their linguistic and political implications, see Tiunn; Klöter.

9 This familiarity is far less intelligible in oral communication. For example, the sinogram used in Hokkien and Mandarin Chinese for the verb “to speak” could be the same: 講話, while their pronunciations differ significantly: jìnghuà for Mandarin and kóng-úé for Taiwanese.
linguistic peculiarities and which constitutes—according to my own experience\textsuperscript{10}—the main challenge for his translator.

Published in 2007, the novel *Shuimian de hangxian* (*The Routes of Sleep*) features a parallel plot following mainly the destiny of a father and his son amidst a complex kaleidoscope of heterogeneous characters, including a turtle, a Buddhist goddess, and an American aviator. The first narrative tells the story of Saburō, a young Taiwanese teenager who joined the Japanese colonial metropolis in the late 1940s to build planes and participate in the war effort against the US enemy. At the same time, the reader follows the adventures of a young journalist in the twenty-first century. This young man happens to be Saburō’s son, whose sleep is disturbed and whose dreams suddenly disappear. The journalist decides to go in search of his father’s past. This novel does not present linguistic experiments in such a hybrid and extravagant fashion as Wang Chen-ho’s *Rose, Rose, I Love You* does, but the author tries in several places to use multilingual writing: some sections thus appear in Japanese (which are usually translated into Mandarin in parentheses), but it is especially his use of Hokkien that is remarkable. Indeed, although, as in Wang Chen-ho’s novel, standard Mandarin Chinese is still used for the narration of the story, Wu Ming-Yi uses Hokkien to transcribe the dialogues between Saburō and his family members, since Mandarin was not spoken on the island at the time of Japanese colonization.

A prime instance of such language blend in *The Routes of Sleep* can be found in the description of the cosmopolitan population of the Chunghua market, a highly symbolic site of Taiwan’s “economic miracle” between the 1970s and 1990s:

\begin{quote}
...即使一時之間還沒辦法用同一種語言講話, 但透過鄰居彼此你一句我一句的猜謎, 每個人似乎每種語言都會了一點。雖然彼時收音機裡傳來的已是對你而言極為艱難的「國語」, 但你印象中, 竹仔厝沒人能講標準的國語, 大家講的都像二樓廣東仔賣的「雜菜麵」那樣的「雜菜話」。 (*Shuimian* 86-87; second ellipsis in orig.)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} I have so far had the opportunity to translate two novels, a collection of short stories, and two other independent short stories by Wu Ming-Yi into French.
Speaking of the bamboo huts (Tīk-á tshù), it is very possible that many of the second-generation youths did not know these dwellings. Most of them were indeed born after the completion of the construction of the market. They were born in this complex of concrete which did not allow the rain or the wind to pass. But before the foundation of the market, people who came to the city to look for work were doing business here in bamboo huts built haphazardly. Among these people, some had left behind their farms in their native village to move to the North, others had seen their business fail elsewhere, and still others were soldiers who came to Taiwan with the Nationalist government. . . . That is why some inhabitants spoke Japanese, others the dialects of Fuzhou and Shandong, and some the indigenous Pangcah language. . . . The bamboo huts were a world of complex languages. . . . Even if the inhabitants could not instantly communicate by using the same language, each one came to know a little of everyone else’s language by trying to constantly guess the meaning of each other’s phrases. The “national language” broadcast on the radio [Mandarin Chinese] was dizzyingly elusive to you [the father]. But as far as you could remember, no one could speak perfectly standard Mandarin in the bamboo huts. Just like the “mixed vegetables” that the Cantonese sold on the second floor, everybody here spoke some kind of “mixed language.”11

As Chang Ti-han points out:

Wu has chosen [in The Routes of Sleep] to employ only common words that are widely known to Taiwanese readers. For instance, words like tshàu-hī-lâng 臭耳郎 [a hearing-impaired person], tsai-iánn 知影 [to know/knowing] and siánn-mïh 啥米 [what] are inserted in the text in place of longzi 聾子, zhídào 知道 and shenme 什麼 in Mandarin Chinese. . . . Likewise, in [The Stolen Bicycle], Wu again uses this unique style of “multilingual writing.” Furthermore, Wu has tried different ways to explore this language hybridism in representation. In the ways that the text treats the subject of identity and colonial memory, [The Stolen Bicycle] could be said to be one of Wu’s most successful attempts at representing the hybridity of languages. Firstly, Wu has used the alphabetic system in order both to facilitate and engage his readers in vocalizing the Hokkienese languages. On many occasions, when he makes references to a Hokkienese word or phrase, he further adds alphabetic spellings to help readers to pronounce that word/phrase [and he also gives them a Chinese

11 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine.
translation of it]. (174-75)

Unlike in *The Routes of Sleep*, where Hokkien intermingles with Mandarin, the language mix appears more didactic and scientific in *The Stolen Bicycle*. In *The Stolen Bicycle*, Wu’s Hokkien-Mandarin translation gives the reader the opportunity to participate, as indicated by Chang Ti-han, “both in terms of translating meaning and [in terms of] phonetic articulation” (175).

Here are two examples taken from *The Stolen Bicycle*:

因為合理來講 (kóng), 一台孔明車會使 (ē-sái) 騎五十冬, 甚至閣較 (kohn-khah) 久。而且, 佇咧 (ti-leh) 阮的時代, 真濟人上貴重的財產就是孔明車, 一生一台。(Danche 41)

Because let me tell you son, a *thih-bé* can last fifty winters, or even longer. And you know what? Back in the old days, a man’s most valuable possession was his iron house. One life, one bike. (*Stolen Bicycle* 41)

水電, 塗水 (thôo-tsúí, 水泥工程), 也加減捌 (bat, 懂) 一寡仔 (tsít-kuá-á, 一些)。(Danche 35)

I do piping and wiring, and I know my way around concrete. (*Stolen Bicycle* 34)

It should be noted here that in Darryl Sterk’s English translation (quoted above), there is no irruption of a different language into the narrative, or of a phonetic transcription or translation: both narration and dialogue are translated into standard English, despite the presence of words in Hokkien directly given by the translator in phonetic transcription. In his defense, Darryl Sterk, a connoisseur of Hokkien language and literature—he has translated some Hokkien fictions by the famous Taiwanese writer Lai Ho—explains his choices and offers readers, in his “translator’s note” (373-76), some keys to understanding Taiwan’s socio-linguistic situation.

**Creolization as a Translation Strategy**

The specificities of this writing, which can easily be the object of literary interpretation and analysis, are much more problematic (but no less exciting) when one proposes a translation of the original text in France, where the elimination of all languages other than French has been the foundation of a unified nation-state.
As I could hardly rely on the experiences of other translators, I was inspired by French translations of non-Chinese-speaking authors known to be enthusiasts of interlinguistic games such as James Joyce, Umberto Eco, Ken Saro-Wiwa, and authors who wrote mostly in French but whose works were full of creole vocabulary and disrupted linguistic experiments including Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant. These translation projects helped me develop new perspectives in my attempts to translate Wang Chen-ho and Wu Ming-Yi. My goal was not really to draw a direct line between these authors and Wu, but their original and translated works reinforced my intuition that the very essence of translation is not so much an act of communication or transmission of semantic content as, according to Antoine Berman, “the fulfillment of the relationship of the work to its language” (53)—or, to paraphrase Meschonnic, as the reproduction of what the work did to the language (55). My project was not about reproducing or adhering to any ideological postulate dictated by postcolonial interpretation, but about grasping and accounting for writing in its process of hybridization. In any case, this was for me a challenge to the idea of a supposed untranslatability that would have resulted in ignoring the co-presence of different languages in the same literary text.

If this translation had been published by a university press, or produced as part of a scientific article, it would have been justified to include many page notes and to explain the choices made by the author. However, its publication by a commercial publisher did not allow for an intensive use of didactic information. Therefore, it was necessary to reflect on the strategy of translation to be used whenever different languages coexist in the same paragraph (code-switching, juxtaposition, hybridization, self-translation, etc.).

In other words, the challenge for me was to find ways to transcribe the reading effects produced by the linguistic variations within the original text without making readers feel as if they were reading an essay on linguistics or a literary analysis. Various strategies have been envisaged for this purpose:

1) Smooth the translation to make it a text without asperities or linguistic variations by simply explaining particularities in a foreword or footnotes. This option was abandoned from the beginning because it would have decreed that the linguistic experiments of the text were not an important component of its poetics.

2) Transcribe the sections in Hokkien in italics or a different font. However, this strategy would have been limited to a graphic variation, which would have reversed the intention of the original texts (where Hokkien is transcribed in Chinese characters). Moreover, it would have been a strange approach to spoken dialogues, in which the writing matters less than the orality.

3) Use more oral or slang expressions. I rejected the two options above
because the sections in Hokkien are not more “oral” or “slangy” than those written in Mandarin, and also because Hokkien is not a cruder language than Mandarin.

4) Use a French regional language or a patois. In addition to the problem of linguistic competence this method assumed (I confess I do not know any French regional language), it seemed to me more difficult to preserve the ambiguity that exist between two languages that are graphically and phonetically close. For instance, Breton—a French regional language spoken by 207,000 people as of 2018\textsuperscript{12}—is very different from French and cannot be understood by non-Breton speakers.

After I decided to reject these options, I ultimately erred on the adoption, for the translation of these sections, of a slightly creolized language, swarming “standard” French paragraphs with words, expressions, and orthographic transcriptions from Martinican Creole. In doing so, my objective was to make readers feel the variations of languages in the text, while taking advantage of the orthographic and grammatical familiarities of Martinican Creole and French so that French-speaking readers—whether they speak Creole or not—would understand the meaning of the sentences almost completely. The use of creolization as a translation strategy was not so much in the spirit of producing an exact equivalence of the relationship between Mandarin and Hokkien on the one hand, and that between French and Creole on the other—although some peculiarities of their diglossic relation, as well as their structure (Hokkien also mixes regional languages and colonizer languages) are apt for comparison. Instead, creolization as a translation strategy enables us to think beyond the model of languages as fixed identification markers with Chinese on one side and French on the other.

Three samples from the French translation of \textit{The Routes of Sleep} illustrate the strategy used. These paragraphs are not, of course, the only ones in the novel in which Hokkien-language dialogues appear, but they are interesting in that they are associated with the presence of narrative elements written in Mandarin Chinese.

In the first excerpt, Saburō and Eiko, two young children born in Taiwan during the Japanese colonization period, use Hokkien to discuss the arrival of American bombers:

──米國的飛翔機什時來？三郎問。
──不知道。英子回答。
──對何位來？

\textsuperscript{12} Data compiled by the Regional Council of Bretagne : “Langues de Bretagne: combien de locuteurs et quelles attentes?”, 2018.
——英子回答。
——米國仔天頂伊邊喔？三郎問。
——天頂伊邊是觀音媽住的所在，米國是仔海的伊邊，伊位是魔神仔住的所在，米國仔對海的伊位來。英姿這樣回答。（28）

— Quand viendront les aviyons ricains ? avait une fois demandé Saburō
— Je sav pas, avait répondu Eiko.
— De ki koté viennent-ils ? avait demandé Saburō.
— De laba.
— Oh, les Ricains viennent de laba, du zénith ? avait demandé Saburō.
— Le zénith, c’est où habite Manman-Pusa Guanyin, les Ricains sont laba, koté mer. De ce koté vivent les petits démons. Les Ricains viennent de l’autre koté de la mer, avait ainsi répondu Eiko. (Lignes de navigation 32-33)

(—When will the American planes come? once asked Saburō.
—I don’t know, said Eiko.
—Which way are they coming from? asked Saburō.
—From there.
—Oh, Americans come from there, from the zenith? asked Saburō.
—The zenith is where Pusa Guanyin lives. The Americans are there, on this side of the sea. On this side live the little demons. The Americans are coming from the other side of the sea, said Eiko.)

In the second excerpt, the entire oral narrative that the mother shares with her son is written in Hokkien, while the first two sentences, belonging to the narration, appear in Mandarin:

母親繼續講著她的故事, 她說你知道阿公家隔壁那個金花姨嗎？「伊十六歲救生一個囝仔呼做阿蓋仔, 也不知影是跟誰郎生的。阿蓋仔跟阮們感情不歹, 有攏空襲的時陣, 伊的左手予一個炸彈的破片插入去。因為無錢看先生啊, 金花姨就用布替阿蓋仔清菜包包哩。過幾工阿蓋仔將布打開予阮們看, 汝知影按怎? 手的肉都爛了了, 還生白白的蟲哩。隔兩工阿蓋仔就死囉, 再經過三工阿本仔投降, 戰爭就結束囉。」（301）

Ma mère poursuivit ses récits et me demanda : tu connais Tante Kim-hua, tu sais, celle qui habitait à côté de la maison de Grand-Père ? Puis elle commença son récit : « À seize ans, elle a accouché d’un petit bonhomme qui s’appelait
A-kah, on sav pas avec quel bougre elle l’avait fait. A-kah s’entendait plutôt bien avec nous. Un jour de bombardement, des morceaux chiktayés d’une bombe sont venus s’incruster dans sa main gauche. Comme il n’avait pas sifizanman d’arjent pour aller chez le médecin, Tantan Kim-hua lui a fait un bandaj avec ce qu’elle a pu. Plusieurs jours plus tard, A-kah a enlevé le bandaj pour nous faire voir, tu sav pas quoi ? La peau de sa main était toute pourrie, il y avait même des vers blancs en dedans. Il est passé encore quelques jours, A-kah est mort. Puis trois jours après, les Jap se sont rendus. La guerre était finie. » (Lignes de navigation 403)

(My mother asked me: do you know Aunt Kim-hua, you know, the one who lived next to Grandpa’s house? Then she began her story: “At sixteen, she gave birth to a little boy named A-kah, we don’t know with what guy. A-kah got along with us fine. One day, during an air raid, fragmentsed of a bomb flew into his left hand. Since they didn’t have enough money to go to the doctor, Aunt Kim-hua bandaged him with a piece of cloth. A few days later, A-kah removed the bandage and showed us his hand, and you know what? The skin was all rotten, and there were even white worms in it. A couple of more days later, A-kah was dead. Three days later, the Japanese surrendered. The war was over.)

In the last excerpt, Saburō sees an ice cube for the first time and rushes to show it to his sister:

——這是啥？
——冰角啦。凸目仔 回答。三郎背著剩下的掃帚跑到他跟大姐約好的地方，興奮地把摀在手裡的冰塊給大姐看。大姐看到三郎像抓著某種會跳跑小動物的手裡空無一物，只有濕濕涼涼的一攤水。她問：
——啥米？
——冰角啊。冰角汝無知影？三朗愉快的回答，他伸出舌頭，把融化的冰塊珍重地舔乾淨。(126)

– Dèkwa ?
– Ah ça, c’est un glason ! avait répondu Le Globuleux.
Saburō s’était aussitôt précipité, les balais invendus sur le dos, au lieu du rendez-vous prévu avec sa grande sœur. Puis, il lui avait montré avec excitation le glacon qu’il tenait encore dans sa main. En voyant sa main refermée, Grande-sœur avait cru qu’il avait attrapé un animal pouvant s’échapper à tout instant. Mais celle-ci était vide : il ne restait plus qu’une petite flaqué humide et glacée.
Elle avait demandé :
— Dèkwa ?
— Un glason ! Un glason, tu sav pas ce que c’est ? avait joyeusement répondu Saburō. Il avait sorti sa langue et léché avec amour le glaçon fondu jusqu’à ce qu’il n’en reste plus rien. (Lignes de navigation 171)

(—What is it?
—Ah, that’s an ice cube! “The Globular” said.
The unsold brooms still on his back, Saburō immediately rushed to the place when he was supposed to meet his sister. Then he excitedly showed her the icicle he still held in his hand. Seeing his hand closed, his sister thought he had caught an animal that could escape at any second. But it was empty: there remained only a little icy water. She asked:
—What is it?”
—An ice cube! An ice cube, don’t you know what it is? Saburō happily replied. He pulled out his tongue and licked the molten ice with love until there was nothing left.)

The boldfaced parts in the original text are terms and expressions in Hokkien whereas those in the French translations are grammatical terms or constructions derived from Martinican Creole.

In the first excerpt, besides the use of Creole, I choose to use the French slang “Ricains” instead of “Americains” because it sounds like “riz-cains” (“rice-cans”), while the character used in Hokkien is also that of rice 米 (bî). The first names (transcribed in sinograms) of the two children are obviously Japanese names in the original text (Saburō/Eiko), even if they are read differently in Mandarin Chinese (Sanlang/Yingzi), and I therefore choose to give pronunciations in Japanese and not in Mandarin.

In contrast, in the second excerpt, I transcribe the names of the characters 阿蓋仔 and 金花姨 (who live in postwar Taiwan) through their phonetic transcriptions in Hokkien, neither in Japanese nor in Mandarin Chinese: A-kah and Kim-hua.

In the third excerpt, besides the use of the Creole expression “sav pas” (for “do not know”), I choose to translate 冰角 (ping-kak) through the Creole term, which also has a definite advantage: glaçon (French) and glason (Martinican Creole) have different spellings, but are homophones. It is not difficult for French readers who have not mastered Creole to recognize and understand this word and to grasp its general context, just as Taiwanese readers who do not speak Hokkien
can feel the presence of another Chinese language without being unsettled by a misunderstanding of the object held by Saburó in his hands.

The strategy of using a Creole language for the translation of a Sinophone novel was, to my knowledge, unprecedented. It seemed to me necessary to inform French readers of this approach, so as to not catch them off guard. Consequently, I proposed in the published French translation of the novel, in addition to a foreword describing the historical context of the story, a translator’s note on the chosen translation strategy:

If most parts of the original novel are written in Mandarin Chinese, the author has chosen to use in some dialogues the “Taiwanese” language (tai-gi). Spoken by the majority of the island population born in Taiwan before or during the Japanese period (1895-1945), Tai-gi was first banned in the aftermath of the war, with the arrival of the Chinese Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek on the island, which made Mandarin Chinese the national language. Tai-gi was later tolerated. It is estimated that it is still spoken today by more than 60% of the Taiwanese population. Derived from a Sinitic language named “Hokkien,” the influence of both the syntax and vocabulary of Japanese and Mandarin Chinese is still felt today. Although the author transcribes this language with the same writing system as the one used for narration, in so-called “traditional” Chinese characters, Mandarin-speaking readers will inevitably notice the presence of another language when they read the novel, and can seize all or most of the text, depending on whether they are Taiwanese speakers or not. Since the practice of translation necessarily implies the choice of one strategy over another, the translator has adopted in these sections a slightly creolized language (using a few words, expressions, and orthographic transcriptions derived from Martinican Creole) in order to enable French-speaking readers to perceive language variations in the French text while allowing them to understand the meaning of the sentence.13 (“Avant-propos du traducteur” 13)

However, I am aware that the strategy adopted does come with certain limits:

1) The method of translation adopted does not really use Creole as a circumscribed language but is limited to the creolization of some nouns, verbs, and expressions. My goal was, above all, to keep the hybridity of Wu Ming-Yi’s approach and to highlight the variation of sentences and words at the crossroads of several

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13 I must admit that these experiments would probably not have been possible for most French publishing houses. Without the total freedom—for better and worse—granted by the French editor of The Routes of Sleep, I would probably not have had the chance to carry out this approach.
linguistic codes, not to create a text that would not be understandable to non-Creole French readers.

2) Even if it is assumed that the approach advocated here is more poetic than linguistic, the calque of a reality specific to Caribbean societies might give the misimpression that I find in Martinican Creole a social equivalent for Hokkien. It goes without saying that the colonial and postcolonial history of the Martinican Creole language is substantially different from the history of the current Hokkien language. However, conversely, no one will blame a translator from Chinese to French for modeling a French reality on a Chinese/Taiwanese reality.

3) One could eventually blame the exoticism of such an approach. Why use Creole and not just a French patois? As exposed above, the first reason is not scientific and is due to my language skills: I do not know any patois, although I was given the opportunity to work with a Martinican friend for reviewing my translation. Similarly, my reading of Raphaël Confiant and Patrick Chamoiseau’s Creole writings, as well as more theoretical works on Creolization and Creoleness, contributed significantly to this choice. Much more than patois, the use of Creole seemed to me closer to the work of ambivalence and deterritorialization exercised by Wu Ming-Yi and Wang Chen-ho in their texts, especially if we understand creolization as a process of distortion of the conception of languages as culturally and locally closed objects.

Translation, Creoleness, and the Poetics of Worldness

The practice of translation is not the exclusive domain of the translator, but encompasses all the agents of the literary field (authors, editors, proofreaders, readers) as well as academic agents, who are producers of knowledge concerning languages and cultures. Translation is then necessarily constituted by and constitutive of discourses projected on any language and culture, be they official or fostered by academic authorities. All translation activity, whether consciously or not, necessarily takes place in relation to a representation of the relations between languages and spaces. For instance, the romantic tradition of translation often embraced the idea of a cultural mission, understood as a navigation process between two homogeneous (and preferably national) languages (Berman). This representation of translation is criticized by scholars such as Naoki Sakai, who insists on highlighting the heterogeneity that operates in this practice:

Strictly speaking, it is not because two different language unities are given that we have to translate (or interpret) one text into another; it is because
translation articulates languages so that we may postulate the two unities of the translating and the translated languages as if they were autonomous and closed entities through a certain representation of translation. (2)

Creolization as translation, which is proposed here, invites us, I hope, to ask the fundamental question regarding the mainstream mode of constructing linguistic and cultural differences, a mode that tends to deny the internal variations in each language and dictate the criteria of “good” translation—such homogenization, nevertheless, seems to be a common practice in the case of translating Asian literatures, where it is often assumed that a successful translator must be as invisible as possible. By contrast, creolization proposes a concrete, albeit perhaps imperfect, strategy for translation as a heterolingual address mode, as proposed by Naoki Sakai.

I insist here that creolization as a translation strategy is not only a recipe, but also a reading grid, a methodology, or better, an ontology, to quote Walter D. Mignolo on Creolness:

[A]s far as Creolness is a mode of being, of thinking and writing in a subaltern language, from the subaltern perspective and using and appropriating a hegemonic language—all this is not only limited to a particular local history but is similar to several local histories made at the intersection with global designs, the coloniality of power, and the expansion of the modern world system. . . . Creolness offers another “methodology,” thinking at the crossroads and in the borders of colonial history which, like French language for Creole, cannot be avoided but must be appropriated and then turned inside out, so to speak. (243, 246)

In their Éloge de la Créolité (In Praise of Creoleness), Caribbean writers Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiant, and Patrick Chamoiseau recall that “Creolity is an annihilation of false universality, monolingualism, and purity” and that this processual reality is not peculiar to the American continent alone: “it is not a geographical concept” (28, 30). This kind of common ground is also advocated by Pascale Casanova in her attempt to build a “world republic of letters,” as she analyzes the Swiss Creoleness of authors like Charles Ferdinand Ramuz and compares it to Patrick Chamoiseau’s Caribbean Creoleness.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that a novel by Wu Ming-Yi has been prominently featured in Laura Miller’s 2016 book Literary Wonderlands: A Journey through the Greatest Fictional Worlds Ever Created, a compendium of “lands that
exist only in the imagination,” covering 2,000 years of literary creation. Wu Ming-Yi appears alongside contemporary authors Salman Rushdie, Kazuo Ishiguro, Alan Moore, and Ursula K. Le Guin. Le Guin even praised the novel The Man with the Compound Eyes after its release in English:

South America gave us magical realism—what is Taiwan giving us? A new way of telling our new reality, beautiful, entertaining, frightening, preposterous, true. Completely unsentimental but never brutal, Wu Ming-Yi treats human vulnerability and the world's vulnerability with fearless tenderness.

It should be noted that the most successful of Wu Ming-Yi’s novels outside Taiwan, The Man with the Compound Eyes (translated into nearly a dozen languages), is the only one that does not contain any section in the Hokkien language. Its translator still has to grapple with non-Mandarin lexicons, such as idioms from the Austronesian languages Pangcah and Bunun, or the fictional language of the Wayo Wayo island, but each time, Wu Ming-Yi offers translations (in Mandarin) of the terms used, and it is not so difficult for translators to resume this strategy on their own. Does this mean that the presumed untranslatability of a multilingual text would make the works of an author less “worldly”?

Following Emily Apter’s work, Robert T. Tally Jr. contends that “world literature has become a marketing genre, a commodified and easily consumed product for which ‘exotic’ is merely an advertising label, and whose consumers are likely no worldlier than consumers of other products manufactured in the far-flung regions of the planet but available at retail chains like Walmart, Amazon, and so on” (414). In a recent article, Duncan McColl Chesney analyzes what Alexander Beecroft calls the “global literary ecology.” As Chesney shows, Beecroft alerts against “the emergence of a standardized world-novel, designed for easy translation and consumption abroad” (qtd. in Chesney 253).

In many respects, The Man with the Compound Eyes can indeed satisfy a desire for exoticism, without presenting reading obstacles that would be related to the presence of different languages in the same text.\footnote{Of course, this does not mean that The Man with the Compound Eyes presents no difficulty for readers and translators. Besides, much of the novel is traversed by the very nature of translation and language, especially in the relationship between Alice and Atihei.} Does this mean that a novel like The Man would be more strongly connected to the world than narratives that are richer in linguistic experimentation (and perhaps also more centered on the Taiwanese socio-historical context)? Does a translator need to follow Goldblatt’s translation strategy for the English version of Rose, Rose, I Love You and try to make
a novel easier, more accessible, readable, and marketable? Or does the normative definition of “world literature” criticized by Tally, Chesney, and Apter fail to capture the fullness of different ways of being in the world?

Like translation, creolization could be the fabric that weaves the unpredictability of contacts and relationships and encourages putting back to the center of the practice and the ontology of translation the indeterminacy that arises from contacts between languages. As Édouard Glissant has pointed out, creolization and multilingualism are not only the products of a given socio-historical or linguistic context, but also the products of a new sensibility, what he calls a “poetics of Worldness” (poétique de la mondialité) (“La relation”). Rather than trying to introduce Wu Ming-Yi as a “Taiwanese light” (Taiwan zhi guang) (Ling) that would make Taiwan shine on the global literary stage, perhaps it would be more relevant to consider Wu’s work in light of the Glissantian concept of the “Tout-monde,” to make it not a representative of the Taiwanese nation on the codified map of the literary globe, but a participant in this poetics of Worldness, a poetics that “holds account of the tissues of the Relation, a global proposition certainly, but also a proposition that would be relief from very particular breaths, from a poetics of place and detail” (Glissant, Philosophie 86).

Conclusion

In this hybrid contribution, halfway between a non-academic reflection on my translation practices and an attempt to assess these practices in the light of the work of creolization theorists, I do not intend to give a surefire method of translation for plurilingual texts, as each different text and context (cultural, linguistic, editorial) requires different strategies. The strategy introduced here is intended to be a preliminary dialogue with Édouard Glissant, for whom the “world is being creolized” (Introduction 16), an intuition that I believe Wu Ming-Yi also shares in his fictional works. And the reality of this phenomenon of creolization, which is neither to glorify nor to reject but to take into account the practice of translation,

15 “What is ‘Worldness’? First, it must be said that it is not a theory; it is not an ideology and it is not a mechanical principle. Worldness is the imaginary feeling that diversities (diversités) can be multiplied only by putting them in relation to one another. It is the idea that we have a place that is common to us and a place that is particular to us. The place which is peculiar to us is the place where we are, where we are born, it is our country; and the place that is common to us is the Tout-Monde” (Glissant “La relation”).

16 In an article where he explores with a critical point of view Glissant’s concept of “Tout-monde” with Michel Le Bris’s concept of “littérature-monde,” Eric Prieto rightly recalls that the Glissantian theory of “Tout-monde” is to be understood “as an epistemological program, a mode of inquiry that seeks to get a better sense of the meaning of objects, events, people, and communities by emphasizing their participation in the larger webs of relation that link them to analogous phenomena elsewhere in the world” (116).
involves participating in the “recomposition of the mental landscape of humanities today” (Glissant, Introduction 16).

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