Aging as a motive for literary retranslation
A survey of case studies on retranslation

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One of the concepts that is regularly referred to in studies on retranslation, but has not yet been extensively investigated or operationalized, is the (alleged) aging of (literary) translations. While the assumption that every generation deserves its own translation of canonical literary works is taken for granted, particularly by non-academic critics of literary (re)translations, this notion does not seem to be as prevalent in academia. In this article, I review the scholarly literature on retranslation in order to determine how the concept of aging has been defined and described in translation studies so far. The findings of this survey will subsequently be tested out with a number of case studies on literary retranslation, allowing us to determine the relative importance of the concept and define its different aspects. Finally, I present the first results of an empirical pilot study on aging in literary translation, and will suggest several lines for further investigation that would allow translation studies to further operationalize the concept for future, more comprehensive and systematic analyses of aging in all its different (linguistic, translational, and cultural) aspects.

Keywords: retranslation theory, literary translation, linguistic change, translational aging, cultural aging

Introduction

Retranslation

In Translation Studies (TS) the notion of ‘retranslation’ is generally used in a double sense, as it can refer to both “the act of translating a work that has previously been translated into the same language” and “the result of such an act, i.e., the retranslated text itself” (Tahir Gürçağlar 2009: 233). In this article, the term

1. Throughout this paper the following abbreviations will be used: TS = translation studies, ST = source text, TT = target text, SL = source language, TL = target language, TC = target culture.
will be discussed in its latter meaning only in reference to the products of literary translation. More specifically, it will consider how TS scholars have treated the notion of ‘aging’ in theoretical discussions and case studies on literary retranslation.

Retranslation is a very old practice that has constituted a considerable share of the translation market worldwide at least since the twelfth century (see Burton 2011). Sacred and other canonical works have always been translated and retranslated into several languages, but, for a long time, it attracted relatively little attention as a topic for academic investigation, despite the abundant number of retranslations available for research purposes. The academic discussion of (literary) retranslation was actually initiated in 1990, when Paul Bensimon and Antoine Berman edited a special issue of *Palimpsestes* on *Retraduire* [Retranslate], and since then, it has received a fair share of the attention in TS. More recently, it became the key theme for a number of multi-faceted analyses of retranslation that were published as separate volumes, e.g., O’Driscoll (2011), Pokorn (2012), and Deane-Cox (2014), and in 2015, *Target* devoted a special issue to *Voice in Retranslation*. So, perhaps Isabelle Collombat (2004) was right when she referred to the twenty-first century as “The Age of Retranslation”?

The majority of writings on retranslation, however, take the form of case studies, a respectable number of which were collected in the five volumes that will be used as the corpus for the current survey: “(t)he theoretical body of literature on retranslations includes detailed and insightful studies, but they are often single case studies, or they address issues other than retranslation itself” (Paloposki and Koskinen 2010: 30). Consequently, a comprehensive body of theoretical material on retranslation is still lacking and very much needed. As was highlighted by Outi Paloposki and Kaisa Koskinen (2010: 30–31), retranslation “has been touched from many angles but not properly mapped out, and (…) there exist a number of intuitive assumptions which have not been thoroughly studied,” an observation I would like to take as a starting point for this article.

The aging character of (literary) translations

One of the concepts that is regularly referred to in studies on retranslation, but not extensively investigated, is the (alleged) aging of (literary) translations. According to Isabelle Vanderschelden (2000: 5) "(r)etranslation (…) corresponds to historical updating, in the form of modernization of the TT, to accommodate the evolution of linguistic norms and changes in idiomatic usage,” but this description does not cover the concept in its entirety. As I am about to illustrate in this article, the aging character of translations includes not only linguistic and idiomatic aspects, but also translational and cultural ones.
The assumption that every generation deserves its own Dostoevsky, Shakespeare, Cervantes, Kafka or Montaigne is especially taken for granted by non-academic critics of literary (re)translations: “(t)he ageing of translations is one of the most common arguments in reviews and media discourse in favor of new translations” (Paloposki and Koskinen 2010: 30), but it does not seem to be as prominently present in academia. As a matter of fact, both in literary reviews and in scholarly research, the concept of aging translations has not been operationalized fully, which turns this issue into a challenging subject for further research, following the call, launched by Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva (2001: 167), to surpass the level of individual case studies and “concentrate also on multiple units of analysis for comparative and contrastive purposes, and for enhancing research results.”

Design of the article

The structure of this article is threefold. First, I will provide an overview of the scholarly literature on (literary) retranslation in order to determine how the concept of aging has been defined and described in TS so far. I will analyze a number of articles on the motives for retranslation and summarize the ways in which the phenomenon of aging is treated in theoretical articles. Moreover, I will try to establish which aspects of aging are acknowledged and in what circumstances.

Second, the article presents the findings of a survey of 70 case studies on literary retranslation, in which I will single out all references to aging and categorize them according to the linguistic or discursive levels on which they are detected and discussed. This survey will give an indication on the relative importance of the concept for the study of retranslated literary works, while also providing some insight into the various aspects of aging that are discussed in academia.

Finally, I will present the first (still limited) results of two case studies on Dutch translations of Anton Chekhov, and suggest possible lines for further investigation so as to further operationalize the concept of aging for future, more comprehensive and systematic analyses that go beyond the limitations of case studies and to allow ‘retranslation theory’ to incorporate the findings from older case studies into a more generic approach to aging in all its different (linguistic, translational, and cultural) facets.
Aging in retranslation theory

Motives in retranslation theory

Despite the fact that interest in (literary) retranslation has been growing steadily in academia since the 1990s, the term ‘retranslation theory’ (RT) was coined only recently by Siobhan Brownlie (2006) in an effort to gather “theoretical discussions and observations concerning the phenomenon of retranslation” (168) under one single ‘umbrella’ concept. A clear-cut overview of recent evolutions and trends in RT was recently composed by Cecilia Alvstad and Alexandra Assis Rosa (2015: 3–24) in their Guest Editor’s Introduction to the special volume of Target on Voice in Retranslation, in an attempt to “organize the main tenets of the state-of-the-art research on retranslation by applying the so-called Five W’s and One H approach (what, who, where, when, why and how)” (9).

The “most widely studied” (14) among these six variables is the Why? question, which was indeed raised from the very start of RT back in 1990. In the seminal special volume of Palimpsestes on retranslation, Berman listed two possible motives for retranslation, which have, up to now, attracted the lion’s share of research: the so-called ‘retranslation hypothesis’ (RH) and the (alleged) aging character of translations. The former, which claimed that later translations tend to be closer to the source text than first translations, has been examined in a series of articles (see the discussions in Milton and Torres 2003, Desmidt 2009, Paloposki and Koskinen 2010, Monti 2011, and Deane-Cox 2014, among others) and the final judgment on this issue – providing opinions of this kind can ever be final in scientific research – is that the hypothesis does not hold. It is this concept of aging, which has been less exhaustively investigated, that will be the subject of this article.

Apart from the two motives that were suggested by Berman, academia has identified a number of other extratextual and intratextual motives for the retranslation of literary works (e.g., Vanderschelden 2000; Tahir Gürçağlar 2009; Monti 2011; Tegelberg 2011): (1) a new edition or new interpretation of the ST (Vanderschelden 2000: 4–6; Tahir Gürçağlar 2009: 235); (2) deficiencies in earlier translations (Vanderschelden 2000: 4; Tahir Gürçağlar 2009: 235; Monti 2011: 14; Tegelberg 2011: 462); (3) the absence of a direct connection between the ST and the TT, for instance in cases of ‘indirect translation’ (Monti 2011: 15; Tegelberg 2011: 468); (4) a change in the function or skopos of the translated work in the TC, due to institutional or ideological changes in the receiving culture (Vanderschelden 2000: 5; Tahir Gürçağlar 2009: 234; Monti 2011: 17; see also the discussions in Kujamäki 2001 and Venuti 2013); and (5) changing norms of translation that turn earlier translations into “less readable” works (Tahir Gürçağlar 2009: 234; Monti 2011: 16), leading publishers and translators to provide the reader with updated
versions, whether this is done by means of revision or retranslation. Finally, the different agents in the translation process (translators, editors, publishers, censors, …) also play a prominent role in the decision-making process regarding retranslation for mainly commercial or ideological reasons (see Tahir Gürçağlar 2009: 234; Paloposki and Koskinen 2010; Monti 2011: 17).

As a matter of fact, “more than one translation of the same source text may come about within a very short time span,” as is illustrated by Susam-Sarajeva (2003: 5) in her analysis of the Turkish market for literary (re)translations. The almost simultaneous appearance of translations of the same work may serve as a working example that changes in linguistic or translational conventions alone cannot sufficiently explain the swift appearance of new versions of a literary translation and that there have to be other processes at work (see also the discussion on active and passive translations in Pym 1998: 98 and Koskinen and Paloposki 2015). In the following discussion, I will focus on only one of the motives for retranslation, i.e., the (alleged) outdated character of earlier translation(s), which will be linked to a number of key issues in RT, that are all, in some way or another, connected with the concept of aging.

Aging as a motive for retranslation

When Berman (1990: 1) first mentioned the aging character of translations, he argued that retranslation is a natural act, “inscribed in the very fabric of the act of translation itself” (my translation). 2 According to Berman, STs never become old, but translations do, since they are unable to keep up with the continuously changing state-of-the-art of “language, literature and culture.” Since the very beginning of RT, the existence of a process of (linguistic and cultural) aging has been taken for granted, but the concept has not yet been sufficiently proven empirically, nor has it been operationalized for future research projects.

In the following sections, ‘aging’ will be the umbrella term covering all aspects of translations that comply with (linguistic, translational, cultural) norms and conventions that are replaced in retranslation because of the (alleged) outdated character of the feature, whether that be part of the lexicon, syntax, style, register or translation strategy.

2. All translations from French into English are my own translations.
Great translations

According to Berman (1990: 1–2), no translation can ever become the translation because, unlike their ST, all translations age and may even die in the fullness of time. For him, this is the case for all first translations, which tend to be less faithful toward the ST and, hence, more target-oriented than retranslations because the primary goal of their translators and publishers is to introduce a literary work into the receiving literary system (see the aforementioned RH). Only later, when the fame of the ST author has been fully established in the TC, ‘great translations’ can be produced, that show no signs of aging, even after a few decades, thus creating a “translational event” in the receiving culture, turning the result of the translation act into a “not to be missed precedent” for future translators (2–3). Ambitious translators may aim for a retranslation of a canonical literary work as it gives them the opportunity to establish a certain reputation, which is significantly more difficult when they translate an unknown author for the first time.

To illustrate his point, Berman refers to a list of great translations that are expected not to age and that will need no modernization. Among the translations in his list figure Luther’s Bible translation, Baudelaire’s translations of Poe, and Schlegel’s version of Shakespeare, works of art that, indeed, are still read and referred to, despite their respectable ‘age’ (2). According to Berman, a great translation, this non-aging product of a skillful translator, is the result of a number of coinciding conditions. Great translations are done in an extremely systematic way. Situated on the crossroads of SL and TL, they create a strong link with the original and are, above all, retranslations (2–3). Later, Yves Gambier (1994) elaborated on Berman’s assumptions regarding great translations, arguing that they tend to amplify the differences between SL/ST and TL/TT and reinforce the tension of the “interlingual contact” by stressing the “strangeness” of the text for the TC readers (415–416). This is an important contradictory statement, as this would mean that only by refraining from explicit modernization of the language in a literary work could a translator produce a translation that resists time. While most (but not all) retranslations of literary works tend to modernize the outdated character of an earlier version, translators need to refrain from modernizing the translation too much if they want to deliver a great translation. After all, the more target-oriented a translation is, the faster the process of aging seems to be (see Alvstad and Assis Rosa 2015: 15; Rodriguez 1990: 71; Topia 1990: 45). Vanderschelden (2000: 7) stresses the importance of the readers’ expectations in this matter, as they “respond primarily to quality criteria such as readability, fluency and accessibility of the TT,” thus favoring modernization.
Genre

When aging is discussed in RT, the phenomenon is often related to genre-specific circumstances. Not all types of STs seem to age in the same way. Miryam Du-Nour (1995: 331), for instance, refers to “rapid changes (…) both in language and in the cultural situation” to justify retranslations of children’s books. In her opinion, aging is linked to both linguistic and cultural developments. From a linguistic point of view, “it stands to reason that translations intended for children” are “adjusted to TL norms” (330), as children are usually familiar with contemporary language use only, which is especially relevant in cultures with rapidly-changing linguistic norms. The cultural changes, referred to by Du-Nour, are mainly related to the norms of translation, and the acceptability (or non-acceptability) of “cultural adaptation and massive textual deletions” (337), which seem to be more accepted in translated children’s literature than in other genres.

Similarly, the outdated language of drama translations is also regularly updated. Elisabeth Tegelberg (2011: 456) highlights the extreme sensitivity of theater translations to aging since translated drama (Shakespeare and other canonical works are not taken into account here, as they are more often considered as literature than proper theater text to be performed on stage; see Aaltonen 2003 for a discussion of ‘targeting’ of theater texts) usually has a higher degree of functionality and, hence, needs to be modernized more frequently. As mentioned by Susan Bassnett (1991: 105–106) there are two kinds of drama texts, with their respective modes of translation: the ones that are perceived as poetic text and translated as literary text, and the ones that are “reshaped” according to the “very basic needs” of the performance – “audience expectations, size of company, repertoires of performers, limitations of time and space, etc.”

In contrast, poetry is usually retranslated for reasons other than the replacement of outdated TTs, as poetry retranslation has more to do with various possible interpretations of a lyrical text, independent from changes in linguistic or translational norms (Tegelberg 2011: 464–465). Sacred texts, finally, belong to a different category altogether, as they play a different kind of role in society. The sacred character of the narrative often hampers attempts to modernize the translation, as the slightest misinterpretation of the narrative may result in involuntary blasphemy. Sometimes translators do not even attempt to modernize old STs in translation, as was shown by Liliane Rodriguez (1990) and further developed by Collombat (2004). When translating canonical STs, a possible translation strategy is to retain the ‘alienating’ effect of the ST by deliberately preserving outdated features in the TT: “that what was strange (…) 20 or 30 years ago, will still remain so now” (Rodriguez 1990: 71), which is a valid counterargument against the modernization of certain canonical literary works.
Ideology

Apart from formal, linguistic characteristics of translations, Collombat (2004: 5–6) also highlights ideological aspects of aging. Ideology in this context refers to the influence of external forces (politics, religion, institutions, and culture in its broadest sense) on the decision to retranslate a certain ST. A TT may be ideologically outdated, for instance, when the earlier translation makes use of an expression the connotative meaning of which has changed through time and is, hence, no longer ‘politically correct.’ In the cases provided by Collombat, we find examples of racist and colonial connotations (see also Benhamou 1990 in the corpus), but a translator may also be dealing with sexism or intolerance toward sexual and other minorities. In extreme cases (e.g., censorship), these external forces may radically change the connotative meaning of a large number of words and expressions, which was the case, for instance, in Russia after the 1917 October Revolution.

In her analysis of ideological censorship of translated children’s literature in Yugoslavia in the Socialist period, Nike Pokorn (2012) focuses on a number of different forms of censorship, the most prominent of which was the removal of all traces of religion. She demonstrates how some recent retranslations try to erase the ideological manipulation, but, interestingly, the ideologically ‘adjusted’ versions are also reprinted, “in order not to spend additional money on a new translation, thus augmenting (the publisher’s) profit” (157).

Operationalizing the concept of aging

There is a serious contradiction in the fact that aging is, indeed, a hot topic in RT, for which, however, very little empirical evidence is provided. The concept has not yet been operationalized for future research, since much of the research is concentrated in individual case studies. Paloposki and Koskinen (2010: 30) try to explain why RT does not seem to find a tangible interpretation of the notion of updating aging translations: “measuring concepts such as improvement, closeness or accuracy in translations is singularly difficult,” which is why “theoretical writings on retranslations show a variety of starting-points and methods of inquiry, and employ different units of comparison with which to study texts.”
Survey of case studies

In the following section, I will examine a survey of 70 case studies on retranslation in search for references to aging. The results of this survey will subsequently be compared with the findings from the theoretical articles discussed above.

Corpus

As the corpus for the current survey, I will use five volumes dedicated to the phenomenon of retranslation: three special issues of TS journals and two conference proceedings: (1) *Palimpsestes* 4, entitled “Retraduire” [Retranslate] (1990); (2) *Cadernos de Tradução* 11 (2003); (3) *Palimpsestes* 15, entitled “Pourquoi donc retraduire?” [Why then retranslate?] (2004), (4) *La retraduction* [retranslation] (2010, edited by Kahn and Seth) and (5) *Autour de la retraduction. Perspectives littéraires européennes* [About retranslation. European literary perspectives] (2011, edited by Monti and Schnyder).

These five volumes contain a total of 83 contributions, 13 of which can be regarded as general, introductory or theoretical in their approach, and 70 case studies on retranslation, which cover a broad range of different translational directions. The most represented SLs are English and French (19 times), German (8), Spanish and Italian (4), while the most frequently used TLs in the papers are French (44), English (7), Polish (6), Italian (5) and German (4). The striking abundance of papers on translations into French can be explained by the fact that four of the five volumes are published in France, where the study of retranslation apparently has attracted a great number of researchers who continue the line of investigation, initiated in the seminal *Palimpsestes* 4 volume. Future research should reveal whether retranslation is treated differently in different cultures, as the predominance of French sources could slightly bias the results of this article.

Method and background

All case studies in the corpus deal with retranslation in general, but aging is not necessarily the major – or even minor – object of the studies. Hence, I will scan the corpus of 70 studies for references to aging and outdatedness in any of its forms, categorizing the discussions according to the aspects of aging mentioned. Furthermore, as I link the findings from the survey with data from the theoretical articles, I will suggest lines for future research.

As the analysis of theoretical articles revealed, we have to distinguish between different kinds of aging. The first, and perhaps most visible, aspect of aging is
linguistic. All languages are in a state of permanent flux, and this circumstance is bound to have direct consequences for literary translation. In those cases where the lexicon, grammar or style of an earlier translation seems marked and outdated, translators and publishers have to decide whether the outdatedness of the translation is serious enough to require a retranslation, rather than a small-scale revision.

Rather than going into the theory of linguistic evolution in great detail, I will mainly rely on the findings from Lightfoot 1999, van der Horst and van der Horst 1999, and Mair 2006 to bring to light a number of issues of linguistic change that could be relevant for RT as well, and, as such, could be used as parameters to scan the case studies in the survey. Linguistic evolution is detected on lexical, grammatical and stylistic levels. By “comparing the state of the language at at least two different points in time” (Mair 2006: 21), in this case applied to the use of language in (re)translations, it is possible to detect “diachronic developments.” As a rule “(f)or lexical change, the minimum span of observation may be shorter whereas, for grammatical change, it will almost certainly be longer” (21), which leads me to believe that features of aging in translations will be more easily detected on a lexical than on a grammatical level. Words and expressions that seemed perfectly acceptable – and in general use – at some moment in time can be ousted by new ones, even to refer to objects and concepts that look exactly the same as they did decades before (e.g., what was formerly known as a ‘bathhouse’ still has approximately the same function as before but is now called a ‘sauna,’ ‘wellness center’ or ‘spa’ and any reference to a ‘bathhouse’ is now considered to be rather retro).

Less eye-catching but equally important in the discussion of aging translations is linguistic dynamism at the syntactic level: certain grammatical categories (the gerund in Russian, the passé simple [simple past] in French, the inflected form whom in English, to name but a few examples) are more often found in older (written) discourse than they are in modern texts, which means that an adaptation of an older translation to modern language use – if that is the objective of the translator at all – should try to avoid these grammatical forms.

The same applies to the stylistic features of a literary work, like register, style, and rhythm. If ‘readability’ is an issue for the editor or retranslator, the style of the translation should not sound too marked, formal or old-fashioned to the reader. Examples given in Mair (2006) include cutting long sentences into smaller chunks, and avoiding formal register in the rendering of direct speech.

A second major aspect of aging appears independently of linguistic evolution. The change of translational and cultural conventions and habits – I will try to avoid the much debated concept of norms here – over the course of time has specific consequences for literary translation, as the expectations of the (assumed) readers will usually evolve accordingly. It suffices to refer here to the well-known concept of the infamous, and currently no longer acceptable, belles infidèles (or
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‘beautiful unfaithful ones,’ the French seventeenth-century habit of producing beautiful translations to the detriment of accuracy) to understand to what extent translation is influenced by the market: “(e)ach translation is received within the framework (or ‘the horizon’) of literary conventions that inevitably influence the choices of the translator” (Eco 2003: 143). This category also includes ideological aspects of aging. As mentioned above, censorship of all kinds (political, religious, cultural) may have a significant (unfavorable) effect on retranslation. When traces of ideology are detected in the case studies, they will be included in the discussion on translational and cultural aging.

Results

The results of the survey confirm a number of the aforementioned findings from RT. First of all, aging is not the sole motive for retranslation. Multiple factors are at stake when analyzing retranslated literary works. This is clearly illustrated by the total absence of (linguistic, translational, cultural) aging in 26 of the 70 case studies.

If aging is not discussed in 26 case studies, why is that and what are the aspects of retranslation highlighted in those case studies? The case studies in question can be classified according to the W’s and H approach taken by Alvstad and Assis Rosa (2015). Ten of the cases mainly answer the What? question as they study specific characteristics of poetry (three cases) and theater (four cases) translation, without going into aging. Of the remaining cases, one addresses the translation of philosophical terminology and two the rendering of the specific style of writers, in particular of Joyce and Faulkner. Only two cases address the Who? question by focusing on the role of the (self)translator in retranslation. The Where? question is the object of five case studies that center on retranslation in specific contexts (two cases on China and Tibet) or on the adaptations of cultural references for political or ideological reasons (three cases), but without touching on the theme of aging. The category of Why? comprises a total of six cases, four of which discuss the RH, one, censorship, while the last one is a plea for a third translation because of the inadequacy of the first two translations. Finally, another three cases address the How? question by investigating the way paratexts label retranslations for market purposes.

This means that a striking 44 case studies refer to aging, which demonstrates the relative importance of the phenomenon in scholarly research. In the discussion below, I will try to group the different arguments into four categories, three of which are linguistic, followed by a category that combines translational and cultural issues.
Linguistic aging: Lexicon

‘Outdated lexicon’ is mentioned in 10 of the 44 case studies on retranslation in which aging is the object of discussion, and none of them refers to the phenomenon in its most elementary form, i.e., to illustrate how older lexicon (for instance, marked as being outdated in contemporary dictionaries) is replaced by more contemporary words in retranslations. There may be a number of reasons for this. If it is taken for granted that older lexicon is replaced in retranslation, then perhaps it does not merit a specific discussion in case studies on retranslation? Or do languages evolve too slowly to allow for the detection of such changes in translation? At least in cases where retranslations follow each other in relatively quick succession (see Susam-Sarajeva 2003, Paprocka 2011) this can, indeed, never be an issue. Taking into account the different aspects of aging discussed in RT, one may well ask whether retranslators always intend to modernize the lexicon of a literary work and if so, to what extent.

The discussions in the case studies roughly follow the lines of investigation that I distinguished in RT. The question as to whether or not to modernize the lexicon of (very) old or sacred (canonical) STs (Perrault, Cervantes, Shakespeare, the Bible) is, for instance, linked to the argument about producing a great translation that will not age. Henri Meschonnic (2004: 20) refers to English Bible translations and the hybrid character of retranslating sacred texts: on the one hand, the 1970 *New English Bible* was announced as a new version “in current English,” but even then the retranslators preserved the special character of the ST by retaining the “thou” and “thy” of the ‘traditional’ Bible translations. A similar discussion appears in cases that draw a distinction between translation strategies and market
considerations. The acceptability of archaisms and formal lexicon appears to be significantly higher in translations for prestigious, philological literary series, such as the *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* [Pleiades Library] (Canavaggio 2010), than for retranslations that are meant to be more readable than earlier editions and, hence, are made for mere market purposes.

The cases in the corpus also link the concept of aging with the specificity of literary genres. Fairy-tales, for instance, are read by adults and children, but in order to keep the translation readable for a younger audience, (re)translators ensure that the concepts and cultural references in the text can be recognized and understood by children, which is the object of Martine Hennard Dutheil de la Rochère’s (2011) case study of English translations of Perrault’s *Cinderella*. According to her, it is perfectly acceptable to replace Perrault’s “aux cornettes à deux rangs et aux mouches de la bonne Faiseuse” [with double-pinners and patches from the fashionable maker] with “(They sent for) a good hairdresser to cut and curl their hair and they bought the best cosmetics” (169) if that conveys the message of the fairy tale in conformity with the image contemporary readers (children) have of beauty.

A third aspect of lexical changes that is observed in retranslations and discussed in the case studies is the lowering of the register, an issue that will be broached in the coming sections, as this is more closely linked to matters of style and register than the choice of lexicon alone.

Overall, the cases hardly show clear evidence of outdated lexicon being replaced by more contemporary words just for the sake of modernizing the TT. As far as lexical aging is concerned, the results from this survey seem to bear out the hypothesis that lexicon is not merely modernized as an objective on its own, because language has evolved and translations have to be adapted accordingly. As far as we can judge from this limited survey of case studies, lexical refreshing is always linked to other needs: readability for a special audience (children, theater audience). Where we are dealing with canonical literary works, which is very often the case as those are usually the works that are considered to be worthy of retranslation, the readers acknowledge that the language of the ST is old and tend to accept its outdated character in translation as well. Research is needed in order to establish to what degree lexical aging alone may be the deciding factor in favor of retranslation.

**Linguistic aging: Grammar and syntax**

The evolution of grammar and syntax is less present in the corpus of case studies, as it is mentioned in only six of the 44 case studies. This is perfectly understandable since syntactic features evolve at a slower speed than lexical ones (Mair 2006).
Preservation of the syntactic features of the ST in translation is, generally speaking, only discussed within the constraints of the foreignization-domestication dichotomy.

The first feature of syntactic updating mentioned in the case studies addresses a general question of linguistic change, namely should retranslators respect odd and old-fashioned syntactic features in retranslation, even if those features are a distinguishing characteristic of the ST? The answer to this question, which is raised in four case studies in the corpus, is mixed. Geoffrey Wall (2004: 96) explicitly criticizes Eleanor Marx for too faithfully respecting Flaubert’s sentence boundaries and syntactic order in her translation of *Madame Bovary* and explains how this leads to “a perpetual engaging oddity” in English. Similarly, Ana Pano Alamán (2011: 446) stresses the undesirability of preserving Cervantes’s complex syntax in French translation: “pour le lecteur moderne, la syntaxe complexe du roman et son ironie subtile sont difficiles” [to the modern reader, the complex syntax of the novel and its subtle irony are difficult (to follow)]. According to her, it is precisely the syntax of *Don Quixote* that presents the (French) translator with the biggest challenge, since preserving the complex syntax adversely affects the readability of the novel in translation and preserving the repetitions in Cervantes’s text would run counter to the classical taste of the French reader (446). The oddity of preserving the syntax of the ST is also mentioned by Jean-Michel Déprats (2010) in connection with the “problems and commitments” of translating Shakespeare into French (121) and by Jean Canavaggio (2010: 170) in his study of translating Cervantes into French.

In two other cases, Sylvine Muller (2004) and Felipe Aparicio Nevado (2011) detected traces of modernization that are very language-specific, e.g., the use of the French ‘*passé simple*’ [simple past] in older translations, replaced by the ‘*passé composé*’ [compound past] in modern retranslations, and the replacement of ‘*subjonctif imparfait*’ [imperfect subjunctive] by ‘*subjonctif présent*’ [present subjunctive] in French, mirroring natural oral and written evolutions in French, and thus making the retranslation more target-oriented.

The two preceding sections raise a few common issues: both refreshing outdated lexicon and syntax mainly attract the attention of scholars who discuss retranslations of canonical, in this case sixteenth-century authors (Cervantes, Shakespeare), whose syntactic structures can hardly be retained in contemporary translation if readability is the retranslator’s main concern. Contrary to the discussion on lexical changes (some are not adapted to give the reader a flavor of the historicity of the original), however, the consensus in the case studies is that syntax has to be adapted to that of the contemporary TL in any case. Since syntax is less dynamic than lexicon, outdated syntax appears more odd and marked than outdated lexicon.
Linguistic aging: Style and register

No fewer than 15 case studies in the corpus refer to aging form, style, rhythm, or register, and again the themes from RT are raised in the case studies, in particular the link with genre-specificity.

With regard to the translation of poetry, the modernization of style is not seen as a priority (as outdated style is no real oddity in poetry), but the cases include two discussions on whether rhythm and meter should be retained when translating Baudelaire (Brzozowski 2011) and whether register can be lowered when translating Apollinaire (Bruera 2011). Another case study links poetry translation with questions of fashion: Françoise Wuilmart (2011: 259) illustrates how poetry was translated in 1902 in a pure *Art Nouveau* style that was only appropriate at the time and quickly sounded outdated, compelling translators to retranslate the literary works by German realist Theodor Fontane (1819–1898).

The modernization of register appears much more relevant to theater translation. The discussion in three case studies of the corpus focuses on the rendering of the (indeed dynamic) vernacular, which also has consequences for translators: “The dialogue will date first, because the colloquial is essentially ephemeral. Then the translator’s unspoken cultural and literary assumptions will slowly fade into view” (Wall 2004: 93). The performability of translated plays is one of the key issues in Déprats’s (2010) paper on French (re)translations of Shakespeare, and Christine Zurbach’s (2003) paper on Portuguese retranslations of Molière’s drama, while Anne-Françoise Benhamou (1990: 24–29) mentions similar problems with the rendering of Shakespeare’s plays into French, emphasizing the importance for the translator to adapt the text to changing conventions of diction and pronunciation.

The nine remaining case studies concern prose translation, and, more specifically, the use of colloquial style (three cases) and the general simplification of the specific style of the ST (six cases), which is especially relevant when the translator is dealing with an author having a very specific idiom, for instance James Joyce (Topia 1990). As spoken language is one of the fastest evolving aspects of language, translators should be attentive to the rendering of vernacular in translation (see Topia 1990; Kaplansky 2004; Muller 2004) if respecting the colloquial character of the literary work is the translator’s objective.

The case studies reveal a general tendency toward simplification and the use of words of a somewhat lower register than in older translations in cases where retranslation is not triggered by the presence of colloquial style. A good example of this phenomenon is given by Aparicio Nevado (2011: 219): the retranslator of Delibes replaces “méditer” [meditate] by the much more common “penser” [think], “rien de commun avec” [nothing in common with] by “pas comme” [not like], and “demoiselle de petite santé” [young lady of poor health] by “jeune fille maladive”
[feeble young girl], which has more to do with the lowering of the register than with updating the lexicon. Similar effects are observed in the survey by Benhamou (1990: 17), Michel Morel (2004: 103), Joanna Górnikiewicz (2011: 196), and Jerzy Brzozowski (2011: 296). This is an aspect of aging that had not been touched upon in RT but is not at all new to TS: ‘simplification’ and ‘conventionalization’ are two of the so-called “potential T-universals,” “characteristics of the way in which translators process the source text” (Chesterman 2004: 39–40). If simplification is, indeed, a typical feature of translation, then this process may be yet enforced in retranslation, a challenging hypothesis to be tested in future RT studies (see further).

Translational and cultural aging

Finally, much attention in the case studies is devoted to features of translational or cultural aging as well, i.e., the conventions and habits of translation and readers’ expectations. No fewer than 15 authors include these aspects in the discussion of retranslations, yet, again, the process of aging is assessed in only nebulous terms, without much empirical evidence, and with mainly intuitive references to the “changing taste of the public.”

The discussions revolve around two major aspects of translational and cultural aging: the choice of translation strategy and the role of the different agents in the translation process. The former is linked to issues of aging and updating in eight case studies, but the question can be asked whether the choice of a source- (‘foreignizing’) or target- (‘domesticating’) oriented translation strategy is really related to aging. Natalia Paprocka (2011), for instance, detects some evidence for the RH in Polish translations of Le Petit Prince [The Little Prince], but the majority of the other cases record that different translations of one literary work often co-exist. Muller (2004: 91), for example, wonders “ne faut-il pas une multiplicité de traductions” [whether there is not a need for a multitude of translations] in order to fulfill the desires of different types of readers. Morel (2004: 108) confirms the idea of Berman about great translations: a more faithful retranslation may easily sound more outdated than the (domesticated) first translation. In my opinion, the competition between different (foreignizing and domesticating) translations at the same time proves that translation strategies are not a matter of time and aging but of individual choices and decisions by translators and editors. The preferences for source- or target-oriented translations cannot evolve at such a pace to explain the emergence of retranslations within a time span of one generation.

This brings us to the other major theme highlighted in seven of the case studies, namely the role of the various agents. Several authors (Hennard 2011; Hœpffner 2011; Laurent 2011; Pano Alamán 2011; Skibińska 2011) refer to commercial
considerations that urge publishers to order revisions or retranslations of canonical literary works by adapting the outdated earlier translation to what they believe to be the taste of the public, with a view of reaching a wider audience. As Maryla Laurent (2011: 392) indicates, some changes in the text are included by editors who did not even consult the ST and, hence, did not have the objective to update aging language.

As was indicated in RT, aging also has an ideological dimension, an aspect that is brought forward in two other case studies. Sirkku Aaltonen (2003: 150) shows how translated plays used to be reset for ideological reasons at the time when the national theater was established in Finland in the nineteenth century. As this ideology lost its validity with Romanticism, the older texts were retranslated. Benhamou (1990: 13) raises the question of (verbal) racism in translations of Othello, and Brzozowski (2011: 297) highlights another aspect of ideology: during the 1950s in Poland, the public’s taste was manipulated by ideological constraints and therefore poetry translations that were “too beautiful” because they were “too free” were considered to be outdated and therefore unwanted because of changing aesthetic trends. Of course, this change in translation politics is not really linked to (natural) aging, but has merely artificial foundations.

Discussion and case study

One of the notable contradictions arising from the discussion in the preceding sections is that aging is apparently taken for granted in non-scholarly reviews on literary translation (see Paloposki and Koskinen 2010: 30) but is much less discussed and elaborated in RT. The phenomenon is mentioned in connection with the notion of great translations and with genre-specific issues, but a clear definition of what aging is and how it should be detected in literary translation is still lacking. Moreover, the studies consulted for this article show very little empirical evidence that translations do, indeed, age at such a pace that a new version is necessary every generation. As Tania Collani (2011: 156) states: readers might have the feeling that translations age, but “sans que l’on sache vraiment pourquoi” [without people knowing exactly why]. Hence, most case studies in the corpus keep their discussion of aging on the level of general observations of outdated aesthetic criteria and changing readers’ expectations, indirectly suggesting that aging is not so strictly linguistic – since linguistic changes can be illustrated in practical examples – but are features of cultural and translational evolution, which are much harder to prove.

Empirical evidence to operationalize the concept in an unambiguous way can be obtained in a number of ways, for instance, by using the techniques of corpus
translation studies for a micro-analysis of translations and retranslations (from several genres). These findings can then be compared with the labels (such as ‘formal’ or ‘outdated’) in contemporary dictionaries and with evidence of diachronic language use in corpora of literary and journalistic texts. Findings from separate case studies can be combined to establish empirical data for specific genres or languages.

To test the feasibility of this kind of research, I first conducted an analysis at the macro level (i.e., without providing a detailed word-for-word analysis of the texts) in which three different Dutch translations of four plays by Anton Chekhov (The Seagull, Uncle Vanya, Three Sisters and The Cherry Orchard) were compared with each other in search of general tendencies behind the changes (Van Poucke 2016). The results revealed several traces of aging and updating. First, the purpose or target of the TTs (Benhamou 1990; Bassnett 1991; Aaltonen 2003) determines the translation strategy of a theater play more than its linguistic evolution: the 2010 literary versions are much closer to the 1989 stage versions than the 1989 versions were to the literary 1956 versions, although the two respective time gaps are quite comparable. The retranslated plays mainly contain traces of syntactic and stylistic aging: the (often) long and complex phrases and clauses from the earliest translation are reduced in length or split up into smaller units, and formal, literary language is generally replaced by a more contemporary and informal register. As for translational and cultural aging, the differences between the versions are confined to minor differences in approach, i.e., with regard to loanwords and culture-specific elements in the ST. The 1989 stage version avoids Russian words as much as possible but illogically retains the Russian word verst [verst] instead of replacing it with the target-oriented kilometer [kilometer], demonstrating at the same time that an update of an aged text will always leave more room for updating by the next generation of retranslators.

In addition, a small-scale pilot study was conducted at the micro level, in which two different translations of Chekhov’s 1886 short story Dlinnyi iazyk [Loose tongue] were compared. Both translations were published by the same publishing house (van Oorschot) in the prestigious Dutch series of literary translations De Russische Bibliotheek [The Russian Library], the first in 1954 (Tsjechov 1954; trans. by Charles Timmer), the second in 2005 (Tsjechow 2005; trans. by Aai Prins). The choice in favor of two works in the same series was made in order to rule out the influence of possibly incompatible translation policies by different publishers. De Russische Bibliotheek has held an unaltered quality label for 50 years, which enhances the comparability of the two versions. Both texts (the Russian original contains 955 words) were compared through close reading. For each of the changes in the retranslation, compared to the earlier translation, I looked for an explanation, and when aging was detected as a motive, the changes were categorized into linguistic (lexical, grammatical, stylistic) and translational (cultural) features.
On a lexical level, the analysis was limited to verbs, nouns, adjectives and adverbs only, which are the basic parts of speech. The findings on the lexical level were compared with data from the online *Van Dale Groot woordenboek van de Nederlandse taal* (15th edition, 2015), the most comprehensive explanatory dictionary in the Dutch language. Only four words and expressions from the 1954 version are labeled “obsoles” in the dictionary: “het heet dat” [it is said that], “eigenaardig” [peculiar], “Moor” [Moor] and “uitbarsten in lachen” [to burst out laughing] are considered to be ‘old,’ but only three of them are replaced by more contemporary lexicon, while “Moor” is retained in the 2005 retranslation. Out of a total of nearly 1000 words, this can hardly be considered empirical evidence for lexical aging.

On a syntactic level, the changes are, if anything, even less conspicuous. For each of the changes in syntactic structure in the two translations, the question was asked whether they reflect the evolution of Dutch language as described by Joop and Kees van der Horst (1999) in their work on the Dutch language in the twentieth century. The retranslator considerably reduced the number of subordinate clauses in comparison with the 1954 version, and split up a number of long sentences into smaller ones, but these changes belong to the category of style rather than grammar. No obvious syntactic aging was found in the 1954 version.

Considerably more evidence of aging can be found on a stylistic level. In accordance with the findings in the corpus of case studies, simplification and lowering of register appear to be prominent in the retranslated short story. In the majority of cases, the basic parts of speech from the earlier translation were replaced by more contemporary and frequently used lexicon. The following resources were used to check the frequency of the words in the text in contemporary Dutch: *A Frequency Dictionary of Dutch: Core Vocabulary for Learners* (Tiberius and Schoonheim 2014) and the *Corpus Hedendaags Nederlands* [Corpus of Contemporary Dutch] (https://portal.clarin.inl.nl/), that is based on textual material (newspapers, journals, legal texts) from the period 1814–2013 and contains more than 70,000,000 words. In all but nine cases were the expressions used in the 1954 translation replaced by more frequently used, and often less formal, language in the 2005 version, typical examples being: “daarginds” [yonder] becoming “daar” [there], “beweren” [assert] – “zeggen” [say], “echtgenoot” – “man” [the more formal and informal versions for ‘husband’], and “dienen te” [need to] – “moeten” [have to].

Finally, the changes in the retranslation also reflect different views on literary translation: the verbosity of the 1954 version (apparently more accepted at that time) is replaced by an austerity that is much more in keeping with Chekhov’s original: while the earlier version needed four full pages to be printed, the new version (with the same font and paper size) barely exceeds three pages. The retranslator
also adopts another, more source-oriented, strategy with regard to loanwords: while the 1954 version replaced the Russian *versta* [verst] with *kilometer* [kilometer], the retranslator remained closer to the ST and retained the Russian item by using a loanword (*werst*). Preliminary summarizing of this pilot study leads us to conclude that aging is relevant to register (style) and translation strategy, but not empirically proven on the lexical and syntactic levels. Similar studies can be conducted to check the validity of these partial findings for larger corpora, including other genres and time lapses, and expanding the scope of this pilot study to other languages and cultures as well.

**Suggestions for future research**

I would like to draw on the results of both the survey in the third section and the case studies in the fourth section to call for a scientific, rather than intuitive, approach to the alleged aging character of literary translations, in order to demystify the concept and turn it into a useful tool for further investigation. The following research questions can be formulated:

- Can we find hard evidence for *lexical* aging? And if so, is that a typical feature for translated texts or do non-translated texts age in a similar way? (If not, then we are dealing with a translational, rather than a linguistic, phenomenon)
- Can we empirically support the hypothesis, based on the case studies, that style evolves quicker than lexicon, and that, in turn, lexicon evolves quicker than grammar?
- Do retranslations always use a lower register than the earlier translation(s), as a number of case studies clearly suggest? Has simplification, attributed to all translations, been enforced in retranslation?
- What kind of aging is referred to in non-professional reviews of retranslations? Do they provide empirical evidence of aging?
- How can we define a ‘great translation’ and why should it be less susceptible to aging? What is typical of the translational style of the author of a ‘great translation’?
- Is aging a ‘deficiency’ to be erased in all cases, or are some translations better off when they remain ‘old-sounding’?
- Is aging equally important for all languages? Are some languages more resilient to aging than others? (Umberto Eco (2003: 82), for instance, suggested that “Italian, in the course of the last seven centuries, has changed less than other European languages,” a claim that could be checked against the background of (re)translation research.)
Is aging equally important for all literary genres? Are theater plays translated differently from other texts?

Apart from comparing two translations on macro- and micro-level, as mentioned in the fourth section of this article, a second type of analysis of aging in retranslation may include the use of readers’ surveys in order to find out what the public considers to be outdated, especially in those cases where dictionaries adopt a more reserved attitude (as is the case for Dutch). The readers of the retranslations can be included in the investigation through the use of (internet) surveys, in which excerpts from different translations and retranslations are presented together, without mentioning the order of succession of the texts. Participants can then be asked to indicate which text parts they prefer and if they consider any phrasings in the texts as outdated. A survey of the elements that are indicated by the readers as outdated should shed light on what is intuitively seen by the public as old and no longer acceptable. Complementary questions could be asked to clarify what is acceptable to the majority of readers, for instance, the use of loanwords, footnotes, omissions in translation, etc., and, hence, reflects the public’s taste, in whose name publishers take decisions on the level of translation strategy.

Finally, in addition to comparative textual analyses and readers’ surveys, a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon of aging can only be achieved by involving the other players, or agents, in the process: translators, editors and publishers may use prefaces, afterwords, footnotes, blurbs, and other paratexts to explain their choices to the public and this can even include an explanation why an earlier translation was not modernized at all. With so many questions still unanswered, the twenty-first century could not only become the *Age of Retranslation* but also the *Age of Retranslation Research*.

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