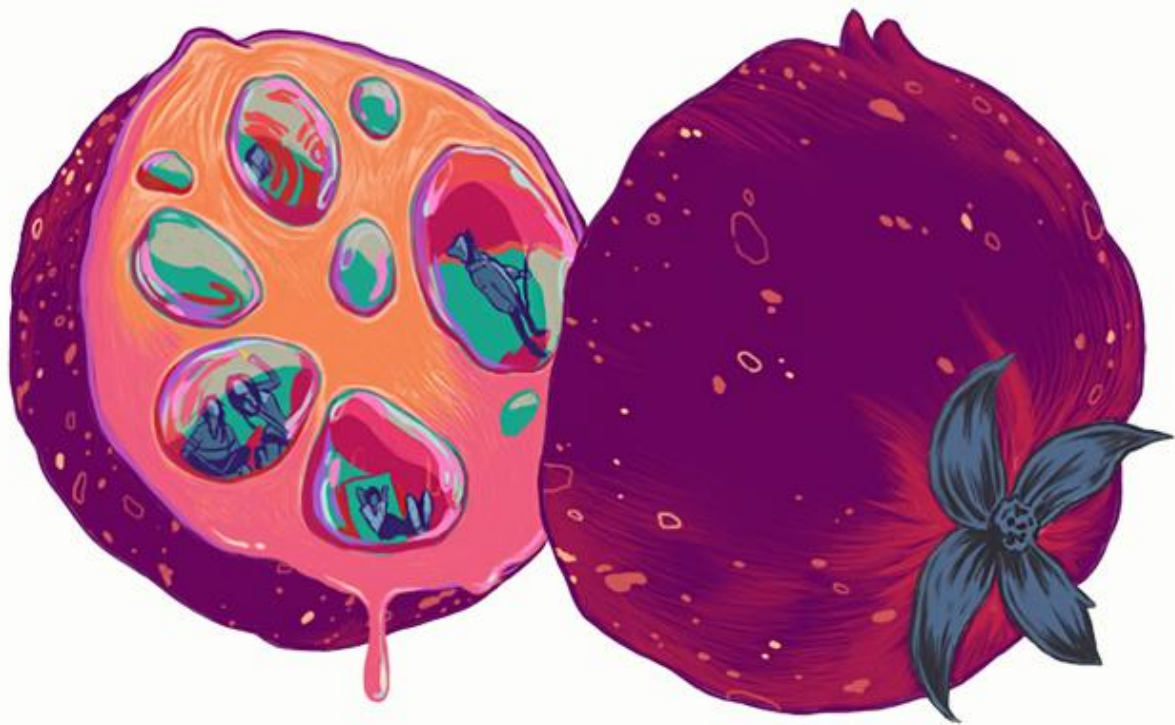


ASYMPTOTE EDUCATORS' GUIDE

Fall 2016



Verisimilitude



EDUCATORS' GUIDE
FALL 2016 | VERISIMILITUDE

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the **Fall 2016 *Asymptote* Educators' Guide**. With each new issue, we release this guide to provide materials designed to support educators who want to integrate *Asymptote* content into their classrooms.

We hope that *Asymptote's* educational materials find their way into a wide range of classrooms and contexts, across regions and disciplines, and so we have tried to design a flexible resource that can supplement various learning environments. This guide is arranged into **six sections**, each representing a different classroom concept which we believe can be reinforced through the study of world literature in translation and includes lesson plans for each concept.

The [Fall 2016 issue of *Asymptote*](#), themed “**Verisimilitude**,” asks readers to think critically about the identity markers that we use to understand self and other in an ever more complicated world. By moving characters through universes both familiar and slightly parallel, these rich and lovely texts interrogate the ways in which we are and aren't defined by our gender, nationality, language, heritage, profession, sexuality, and more. We hope the following materials will help you to engage with the abovementioned concepts at their intersections with this versatile theme and with the work already occurring in your classroom.

We realize that the appropriate age ranges for each lesson will vary widely, so we encourage educators to adjust these lessons to meet their needs, and to record these modifications. Your classroom experience is very important to us, and hearing about it helps us to improve our offerings. Please leave **feedback and suggestions** [here](#).

Finally, if you like what we do and want to get involved, we would love to hear more from you! We are currently seeking **contributors** willing to share **thoughts** and **experiences** about teaching world literature for the *Asymptote* for Educators **forthcoming blog**. We'd especially love to read and share your **anecdotes** from the lessons you teach based on this guide, or using other *Asymptote* content. Let your stories inspire others! The *Asymptote* for Educators blog is interested in publishing **student work** as well. If your students have produced excellent responses to the assignments offered in this guide, other work to do with *Asymptote* content, or if they want to participate in the global conversation about translated literature as it relates to them, we are currently accepting submissions.

If you're interested in contributing, or if you'd like to give us additional feedback, please contact us at **education@asymptotejournal.com**.

LITERATURE IN WORLD CONTEXT

Nationalism and the Individual

Our friendships are in vain as long as our nations are in arms, but it shall become twice as precious after this great struggle. The world will then be full of much petty bitterness, low rancor, and abject viciousness instead of this sacred rage. Then let us be good Samaritans and heal the wounds that our brothers inflicted. Let us try, as best we can, to make our human friendships exemplary for a friendship of nations.

– ‘To Friends in Foreign Lands’ by Stefan Zweig

From This Issue: Stefan Zweig’s [*To Friends in Foreign Lands*](#), translated by David Kretz

Learning Objective:

Students will

- Think critically about the relationship between individual and group identity
- Analyze the ways in which genre conventions affect the way content is presented and the way readers interpret a text
- Consider the role of literature and other artistic modes in the formation of individual and group identity
- Practice creative writing

Approximate Grade Level(s): Lower-level high school

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 1 hour

Lesson Plan

Warm-up Activity

Making sure each student has a personal copy of the text, read through it once round-robin style. One student reads aloud a few sentences, then another student takes over, and so on.

Give the students some time to choose a short passage (no longer than two sentences) that particularly strikes them and free-write a response to that passage.

In-Class Activity I – Nationalism

Have the students scan the text independently, highlighting instances in which the narrator refers to his experience identifying with his nation and underlining instances in which he refers to his experience as an individual.

In pairs, have the students compare their highlighted text with their underlined text in terms of the following:

- Imagery
- Moral ideals
- Tone/mood

While the students discuss, create a chart that looks like the following and is visible to everyone. Come back together as a class to fill in the chart based on the students' discussions in pairs.

Feature of the Text	Nationalist Identity	Individual Identity
Imagery		
Moral ideals		
Tone/mood		

In-Class Activity II – Literature and Identity Formation

Pose the following questions to the students

- Consider the genre of this piece. It appears in the Nonfiction section of a literary magazine, but utilizes some of the conventions of personal correspondence. How does the genre affect your expectations of the piece? How does it impact your interpretation?
- Imagine a text with similar content, but in the form of a newspaper article, an actual personal letter, or a fictional short story. How would the content be presented differently in each of these cases?
- How can literature and other forms of art affect the formation of a group's identity? What about the formation of an individual's identity in relation to that group?

Closing Activity

Have a short discussion based on the following prompts

- Have you had any personal experiences with a disconnect between your identities as individuals and as members of particular groups?
- Can you relate to Zweig's experience? Why or why not?
- Have you been able to reconcile this disjunction in a satisfying way? If so, how? If not, what might that look like?

Home Assignment

Letter to the Other: Have each student write an open letter to someone from a culture that is in some way conceived to be at-odds with her own. Perhaps this is a nation with which the student's own nation is in conflict, like in Zweig's piece, but perhaps not. Students can write to people of a different religion, language, class, gender, etc.

A successful letter will:

- Consider the narrator, the addressee, and the audience
 - The narrator should be the student as an individual aware of belonging to a particular group

- The addressee should be an anonymous member of a different group
- The audience is the general public
- Include at least one of the student's preexisting observations about the other culture (regardless of the source of that observation)
- Include at least three questions for the other individual

Submit the letters to us at education@asymptotejournal.com and who knows? Maybe they'll get some responses.

Resources

A clear and basic description of nationalism: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism/>

WRITING, READING, AND TECHNOLOGY

Humanity and the Humanities in a Digitized World

Just as new technologies, like writing and the printing press, once changed definitions of what literature was and could be, the internet now challenges us to expand and adapt our understanding of the “literary.” Broadly speaking, new technology impacts literature in the following ways:

- **Thematically:** Literature set in contemporary society encounters technology just as contemporary humans do.
- **Linguistically/formally:** Technology creates new vocabulary, new connotations for existing vocabulary, and new conventions for different modes of communication (for example, the way language is used in the news, on twitter, on facebook). For writers and artists, these become new materials to incorporate into their creations, pushing traditional boundaries of possibility ever-farther.
- **The Digital Archive:** Performance and oral literature are no longer bound to the single moment, but can be recorded and shared. Meanwhile, the written word is no longer bound by the static page, but can be affected by reader interaction.
- **Digital Humanities:** The intersection of traditional humanities studies and computational research and data analysis.

Asymptote's online platform exemplifies the ways in which digital archives can bridge various forms of media, and in so doing, challenge the frontiers of literature. *Asymptote* brings together texts and creators from across the world, and presents this work in ways that traditional print cannot—through audio recordings, videos, and visuals. In this section, we hope to offer lessons that use *Asymptote* features to encourage fruitful critical analysis of the points of contact between literature and technology.

From This Issue: Emmanuela Carbé's [High Tide](#), translated by Isabella Livorni

Learning Objective:

Students will

- Discuss the impact of technology on gender roles
- Practice rooting a discussion of a particular theme in a literary text
- Analyze the relationship between a text and the context that gave rise to it

Approximate Grade Level(s): Upper-level High School; First-Year Undergraduate level

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 1 hour

Lesson Plan

Pre-Class Activity

Assign *High Tide* for homework. Divide the class randomly into three groups

- Group one will underline examples from the text referring to gender
- Group two will underline examples from the text referring to literature and the humanities
- Group three will underline examples from the text referring to technology

Warm-up Activity

Have the students join together with the other members of their assigned group. Each group will briefly discuss their examples, questions, and impressions from their reading.

In-Class Activity I – Gender, Technology, and Society

Use the following questions to prompt class discussion. Encourage students to use the examples from their homework to support their arguments.

- In her translator’s note, Isabella Livorni states that, “Carbé sets her story in an almost-contemporary Italy: a slightly different Italy in the not-too-distant future (or perhaps an Italy in a slightly adjacent universe), in which the problematic dynamics of our current Italy have reached what appears to be their inevitable apex.” In the universe in which [*High Tide*](#) takes place, do technological advances in society affect women disproportionately to men? How or how not?
- Compare the femininity of the main character to that of her mother and the Real Women.
- Discuss the portrayal of technology’s potential in the story. In what ways is it ominous and in what ways exciting? In what ways does it affect only the surface levels of society and in what ways does it deeply impact how human beings interact with each other and with themselves?

In-Class Activity II – Text vs. Context

Pose the following question to the students: How easy was it to root our discussion solely in the text? Did you find yourself wanting to speak about personal experience or current events?

Have them answer the question by using the classroom space as a spectrum; one end represents complete ease keeping to the text, and the other end represents complete desire to speak from experience outside of the text. Have a brief discussion about why students placed themselves as they did.

Then pull up the text on the *Asymptote* website for everyone to see. Explore the various features - the scroll-over footnotes, bios, translator’s note, audio, etc.

As a class, re-read the paragraph in which the narrator explains her work with digital books.

Discuss the extent to which a text can be approached as a separate entity from the context in which it arose and is read. This discussion can be adapted to the level of the class. At the high-school level, discussion can be rooted in experience and opinion. At the university level, discussion can be part of a larger lesson about literary theory and the shift from the formalist/structuralist moment to the post-structuralist. The handout following the main lesson plan would be an appropriate aid in any classroom in which literary theory is NOT a main focus.

Home Assignment

The Book of the Future: Using your class discussion, it is your task to design the ideal book of the future. Feel free to use any medium on hand. You can write a description of your book, you can use images, you can build a website, you can build a physical object, you can record yourself giving a mock-press conference, you can write a mock-press release, you can write an interview for a blog, etc. Please get creative. Remember to submit successful projects to education@asymptotejournal.com to be considered for display on our website!

A successful project will address the following:

- In what physical form will the book appear?
- With which senses will the reader engage with the text? Will there be an audio element? Can the reader move through a virtual reality space?
- Can the reader mark the text in any way? If so, how?
- What information will the book include? Consider the “special features” of the digital texts referred to by the narrator.
- What will be the spatial-temporal relationship between the text and any extra-textual information? Is there a main menu? Is there a beginning and an end, or can the reader move through the information in any desired order? Can text and extra-textual information be viewed simultaneously?
- Will translations be available in your book? If so, how will they appear?
- How much will the book cost?
- Does one own your book or just access it?

Resources

On women, technology, and higher education: <http://femtechnet.org/about/white-paper/>

A quick and dirty run-down of the history of literary theory including mention of the pioneers of each theoretical model. A good starting point for classrooms that don't focus particularly on literary theory: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/literary/#H5>

LITERARY THEORY: TEXT VS. CONTEXT

The following briefly explains the position of some prominent schools of literary theory on the issue of whether or not it is important to consider the context in which a text was produced and received in its interpretation.

Formalism and New Criticism	The text is to be approached as a unified entity completely independent of the context in which it arose. A text should be evaluated and interpreted based entirely on its formal structures and literary devices.
Structuralism	The literary form of a text is still the object of study. However, language is understood as a more or less arbitrary set of signs that only refers to anything because of mutual agreement within a society. Structuralists, therefore, aim to decode the way in which a text creates meaning as an instantiation of a particular language.
Post-Structuralism	Less of a unified set of ideas than a movement away from the notion that a text can create meaning that is entirely separate from the context in which it was produced and has been read through time. The following schools of thought can all be considered post-structuralist.
New Historicism	A text is always already embedded in the historical context in which it was produced and can be considered an expression of the systems of power out of which it arose.
Reader Response	Meaning is created not only in the interaction between a text and the context in which it arose, but also in the context in which it is read.
Deconstruction	Language can only ever refer to more language. It can never refer to a concrete thing that exists in the world. Therefore, an endless play of signification is possible within a text. There, therefore, is no concrete difference between text and context.
Race and Ethnic Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Feminist and Gender Studies	These schools aim to interpret literature as an instantiation of the history and positionality of a particular identity group.

CRITICAL ESSAY WRITING: BEYOND THE FIVE PARAGRAPH ESSAY

Writing Comparison Papers

At some point or another, most young writers are exposed to the five paragraph essay: introduction, three body paragraphs of supporting examples, and conclusion. This is for good reason. The five paragraph essay teaches students how to make themselves understood by crafting an organized argument. However, once this skill set is mastered, we believe the model can become restrictive. *Asymptote* offers both abundant examples of artful critical writing and opportunities for students to practice such writing themselves.

From This Issue:

Gwen Benaway's [Akij](#); Rokhl Korn's [This Wrist of Mine](#), translated by Tanjil Rashid
U Sam Oeur's [The Saccamng and the Eisej](#), translated by Ken McCullough
Jan Dammu's [Four Poems](#), translated by Suneela Mubayi

Learning Objective:

Students will

- Learn and practice using tools to develop sophisticated compare and contrast essays
- Write complex thesis statements
- Learn, choose, and successfully employ organizational structures that best serve their arguments and evidence

Approximate Grade Level(s): Upper-level high school; Undergraduate level

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 50 minutes

Lesson Plan

In-Class Activity I – The Canadian Poetry Feature

Choose one of the two poems to start with. Pass out paper copies to each student (or students can access the poem on personal computers if this is an element of your classroom). It would be helpful to display the poem's *Asymptote* page with a projector as well.

Have a student read the poem out loud. Take five minutes for each student to annotate her personal copy independently. Then read the contextual information from the poem's *Asymptote* page together as a class. If necessary, you can use the websites listed in the **Resources** section below to introduce relevant contextual information.

Repeat with the second poem.

Have the students take five minutes to write a reflection about multiculturalism. Offer the following questions as prompts

- Are you surprised to consider both these poems equally and authentically Canadian?
- How diverse or homogenous do you consider your own society?
- How has the movement of people around the world affected your conception of national identity?

Encourage students not to stop writing, even when they don't think they have anything left to say, or don't know the best words. Even if they have to write nonsense words, they should keep going.

Take a few minutes to allow them to share their answers.

In-Class Activity II – Prepping a Compare and Contrast Essay

During this part of class, students will be brainstorming together to prepare a sophisticated comparison essay.

Use the prompt: How do the narrators of the two pieces speak as contemporary individual expressions of particular traditions/heritages?

Create the following chart and display it for everyone to see

Axis of comparison	Thesis	Organization	Evidence from Text A	Evidence from Text B

In the second row, you will define each element for the students. Then in the final row, you will brainstorm potential examples together.

Start with the axis of comparison. Write the following definition in the second row: "The reason why it is fruitful to compare these two texts." You can further explain that the axis of comparison must explain why the texts are similar enough to be compared at all, but different enough that they somehow shed light on each other. Then, ask the students to brainstorm potential axes of comparison that apply to the two poems and record their answers in the third row.

Shifting to the second column, write the following in the second row:

- Your argument in response to the prompt
- Whereas A, B.
- Whereas A might seem _____ at first glance, read through the lens of B _____.

Explain the two thesis styles that work best for a comparison paper. The first style (Whereas A, B) indicates that the paper will consider the similarities and differences between text A and text B to draw a fruitful conclusion. The second style (A through the lens of B) indicates that the paper will explain how text B sheds light on text A, somehow advancing or complicating the reader's understanding of it in relation to the prompt. Have the students brainstorm potential thesis statements and record their examples in the third row.

Moving on to the third column, write the following in the second row:

- Block of A then block of B
- A B A B

Explain that these are structures with which students can organize their textual evidence and supporting arguments. In the first structure, the paper presents all the evidence from text A followed by all the evidence for text B. In the second, the paper follows evidence from text A directly with comparable evidence from text B. In the third row, have students brainstorm which organizational structure would best serve each thesis example.

In the last two columns, write in the second row which poem is text A and which is text B. In the third row, record student examples of supporting evidence from each text.

Home Assignment

Write a Comparison Essay

Option A: Each student can write a comparison essay using the prep work completed in class.

Option B: Each student can write a comparison essay using the same prompt as was used together in class, but instead of comparing the same two poems from, students can use *one* of the poems from class and one of the following:

U Sam Oeur's [*The Saccamng and the Eisei*](#): A prose non-fiction piece. The author is Cambodian and the source language is Khmer.

Jan Dammu's [*Four Poems*](#): Dammu is Iraqi and the source language is Arabic. These poems work especially well for this prompt if the students already have knowledge of Arabic language and the Arabic poetic tradition.

Resources

On writing comparison essays:

<http://writingcenter.fas.harvard.edu/pages/how-write-comparative-analysis>

On indigenous peoples of Canada:

<https://intercontinentalcry.org/indigenous-peoples/anishinaabe/>

<http://www.metisnation.ca/>

On two-spirit people: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2010/oct/11/two-spirit-people-north-america>

CLOSE READING THROUGH TRANSLATION

An Indigenous Imagery

‘Translation is the most intimate act of reading’ – Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

It has been said that the process of translating is the closest a reader can come to a text; the process of translation is related to the process of textual analysis in that both are acts of re-creation. The analytical reader, like the translator, joins in the continued creative existence of the text through the art of close reading. As Anita Raja put it in her spectacular essay, *Translation as a Practice of Acceptance*, “The text of the other jostles the language of the translator, creating friction, producing a new text in its image and likeness. That is why translating is not transcribing but rather re-writing in a different language, in a way that remains bound to the original and yet is inventive on its own. The translator’s inventiveness is wholly dedicated to accommodating the original in the best possible way.”

In this section, we ask readers to identify the translator’s goals, and then to use the strategy of close reading to evaluate how successfully these goals were met—to discuss what is successfully transferred, what is “lost”, and also what is gained through translation. Close reading requires attentiveness to grammar, sentence structure, parts of speech, vocabulary choices and the multiple valences or significances of words and phrases. It can also prompt discussion about cultural and historical context.

From This Issue: Natasha Kanapé Fontaine’s [Gathering](#), translated by Howard Scott

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Develop and strengthen their close reading skills
- Gain a deepened appreciation of the proposed text
- Acquire or refine their skills for cross-cultural understanding

Approximate Grade Level(s): Undergraduate level

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 50 minutes

Lesson Plan

Introduction

This poem is part of *Asymptote*’s special feature on Canadian poetry – that is, simply put, poetry written by Canadians, giving voice to a broad spectrum of languages, cultural perspectives, and identities. This feature offers poems in French, English, Anishinaabemowin, Cree, Yiddish, and Spanish, written by Canadian poets of Passamit, Cherokee, Bolivian and Jewish descent, to name just a few.

The following lesson plan focuses on Kanapé Fontaine’s poem [Gathering](#), but some of the activities could be used for any of the texts in the [Canadian Poetry Feature](#), as each one of these poems provides a particular entry point to the wealth of literary diversity that characterizes the Canadian landscape.

Warm-up Activity

Give each student a sticky note and have them write *one word* that they associate with Canadian poetry.

Have the students post their notes to a board or wall and quickly organize the notes by theme or category.

Use the resulting conceptual constellation (visually impactful if sticky-notes are star-shaped) as the basis for an introductory discussion on what 'Canadian Poetry' comprises.

In-Class Activity I – Nature

Have students scan the text quickly one time and underline all the words referring to nature.

Divide the students into groups and assign each group two or three stanzas. Ask the groups to choose one or two natural images from their assigned section, and discuss them using the following prompts:

- How is the image constructed? Is it a metaphor, a simile, or another particular trope?
- What is the relationship of the natural world, or of a particular element of the natural world, to the poetic I?
- Notice how the natural images are gradually intertwined with or overtaken by bodily images. In your opinion, what does this shift signify? What is the effect of this lexical shift on the unit of the poem as a whole?

Have the students come back together as a class to share the findings from their group discussions.

In-Class Activity II – Innu Heritage

In groups or pairs: have students find all the references in the text to the poet's Innu cultural heritage and discuss them.

Have students underline all the "I's," "we's", and "you's" in the poem and pose the following questions

- What do you notice about the characterization of each?
- Who is, in your opinion, the addressee of the poem?

If students understand French, they can watch [this](#) interview with the poet (also linked in the **Resources** section at the end of the lesson) and discuss her view of Innu identity and the way her ideas are reflected in this particular text.

Closing Activity

Final discussion. Suggested topics:

- Form and Structure
- What are the main images/tropes that Kanapé Fontaine utilizes in this text?
- What effect do they have on you as a reader?

- How is the text articulated? What can you tell of its structure? The narrator's voice?
- How does this affect your reading of the text?

Themes

- How would you characterize the poem's treatment of highly politically charged issues such as the status of Native Peoples in Canada? Make references to the text.
- What is, in your opinion, the overall message that this poem communicates? Going back to form and structure, what are the poetic devices that allow the poet to achieve these results? Make references to the text.
- Do you know any other texts that deal with similar issues? If so, how do they compare? The other poems in the [Canadian Poetry Feature](#) are a great starting point.

Home Assignment

Option A: Short Paper. Pick a different text from the *Asymptote* [Canadian Poetry Feature](#) (or one of your choice), and do a close reading of it. Choose to focus on only one or two aspects of the poem. Consider imagery, the role of narrator, poetic devices, punctuation, syntax, voice, etc.

Option B: Slam Poetry. Natasha Kanapé Fontaine is a renowned slam poet in Canada. Do a little research on slam poetry in your language or cultural context, pick one slam poet, and compare his or her work to Natasha's. Choose one of the following formats for your comparison:

- Response Poems: Compose and perform your own slam poetry – two poems, each mimicking the style of one of the poets. Reflect upon the similarities and differences between the two styles, and your experience employing them, by writing a short essay or blog article, or by giving a short presentation to the class.
- Podcast: Compose a podcast in which you compare the work of the two poets. Though your critical analysis is of the same quality that an academic essay would be, your tone can be informal, and you can use audio clips of the two performers as your textual evidence.

Don't forget to send us your students' work at education@asymptotejournal.com!

Resources (In French)

Natasha Kanapé Fontaine's official website: <https://natashakanapefontaine.com>

Interview with Natasha on language and culture:

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2015/07/05/understand-our-culture-or-lose-it-innu-poet-natasha-kanape-fontaine-language-160964>

Video interview with Natasha: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCgjAcKq8kg>

Video of Natasha declaiming a poem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2QJzj1sKzo>

TRANSLATION THEORY

Translating Time and Place

Too often we talk about what is lost in translation. By drawing attention to *Asymptote's* more experimental features, we can witness instead what we stand to gain politically, artistically, and conceptually from the process of translation. Translation involves an endless set of choices. In this section we offer lessons that encourage students to identify and critically analyze these intentional choices and their effects. We also hope to engage a non-anglocentric understanding of the act of translation, in recognition of the fact that our conception of the process is already mediated by the dominant culture of translation.

From This Issue:

Su Qing's [Ten Years of Marriage](#), translated by Amanda Lee Koe
Halldór Laxness' [Wayward Heroes](#), translated by Philip Roughton

Learning Objectives:

Students will

- Learn the difference between source-oriented translation and target-oriented translation
- Analyze the pros and cons of each strategy
- Reflect upon gender roles in 1920s China
- Refine their skills for cross-cultural reading

Approximate Grade Level(s): Undergraduate level
Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 50 minutes

Lesson Plan

Introduction

This powerful excerpt brings our attention to an often overlooked protagonist of the Chinese “Missy Writers” movement, Su Qing. Together with other female writers such as Eileen Chang, Su Qing advocated for the betterment and modernization of women’s conditions in China, documenting, as translator Amanda Lee Koe puts it: “the transitive passage between Chinese feudalism and modernism.” “The frank sexuality and acerbic wit of [Ten Years of Marriage](#),” Lee Koe continues, “polarized Chinese readers, who found it shocking and scandalous on the one hand, and enlightened and progressive on the other.”

Both traits are observable in the featured passage, which, as the full novel has not (yet) been translated into English, gives readers a unique opportunity to peek into the work of an author still vastly unknown in the English speaking world. It is also a challenging exercise in confronting open-endedness, since the continuation of the story is not available to us.

Pre-Class Activity

In preparation for this class, have students read the excerpt and do a little research on Su Qing and the Missy Writers.

Suggestion: have students post short reactions to the story (a word, a sentence) to an online discussion board or have them pair their reaction with an image and pin it to a classroom Pinterest board.

Warm-Up Activity

Bring up students' reactions from the homework (if you have the option, use a projector to show them the online discussion board) and have students reflect on their initial reactions to the story.

In-Class Activity I – Source Oriented Translation vs. Target Oriented Translation

Have the students independently read through the passage from the text about the heckling of the bedroom and underline anything that reads unnaturally in English.

Ask the students to read some examples out loud.

Pose the following questions for class discussion

- Can you pinpoint what makes a particular phrase sound strange? Is it incorrect English?
- Does all the language in the piece read unnaturally? If not, can you make any generalizations about when the translator chose to use this type of language?
- What is the effect of these passages on you as the reader?

Then introduce the following information to the students

- Target language – The language into which a piece is translated.
- Source language – The language from which a piece is translated.
- Target oriented translation – The goal of the translator is that the translation comes across as if it were originally written in the target language. This type of translation is the most common.
- Source oriented translation – The goal of the translator is to preserve some features of the source language in the target language, even (or especially) when the translation sounds strange or unnatural.

Pose the following questions for class discussion

- If you have any knowledge of another language, can you think of an example of a phrase that would sound strange in English if translated word for word? (ex. 'De nada' in Spanish is 'you're welcome' in English, not 'for nothing')
- Most translations are not solely source or target oriented, but somewhere in between. In what circumstances might each be useful?
- Revisit the passages we discussed earlier. In light of our discussion, has your opinion about these passages changed at all?

In-Class Activity II – The Missy Writers

Ask the students to share some of the information they discovered about the Missy Writers.

Pose the following questions for discussion

- Can you think of any analogous literary figures from your native language's literary tradition? If so, how are they similar or different?
- Translator Amanda Lee Koe says that, "The frank sexuality and acerbic wit of [Ten Years of Marriage](#) polarized Chinese readers, who found it shocking and scandalous on the one hand, and enlightened and progressive on the other." Compare your own reaction to the reactions of the Chinese readers referred to by Lee Koe.
- Consider our previous discussion about the foreignizing language of parts of the translation. Do you think this feature affects your reaction to the content of the text?
- Have you ever been to a wedding from your own culture or a different one? Discuss the gender roles as you witnessed them.

Home Assignment

Read Halldór Laxness' [Wayward Heroes](#). Write a paragraph that does the following

- Defines the extent to which the text is source or target oriented
- Supports your assertion with a close reading of one paragraph from the text
- Discusses the effect of these choices on you as the reader

Then, rewrite the paragraph from *Wayward Heroes* that you have just analyzed. If you thought that it was more source oriented, make your revision entirely target oriented. If you thought that it was more target oriented, make your revision entirely source oriented.

Don't forget to submit successful assignments to us at education@asymptotejournal.com.

LINGUISTICS 001

Pidgins and Creoles

From This Issue: Marie-Célie Agnant's [Balafres](#), translated by Siobhan Marie Meï

Learning Objective:

Students will

- Learn the differences between pidgins and creoles
- Discuss possible causes for the creation of pidgins and creoles
- Discuss and reflect upon the role of grammar in language
- Conduct a formal analysis of Haitian Creole grammar

Approximate Grade Level(s): Upper-level high school, first year undergraduate level

Approximate Length of Class Period(s): 75 mins

Lesson Plan

Introduction

[Balafres](#) is written in the French by Haitian-Canadian writer Marie-Célie Agnant. Though she writes in French and lives in Quebec, *Balafres* is, as translator Siobhan Marie Meï puts it “an intimate (though troubled) ode to the Haiti of her childhood.” Meï goes on to describe the unique challenge of rendering in English Agnant’s intentionally critical wielding of the “French-language expressions of xenophobia and cultural intolerance” that, in part, shape her immigrant experience. Given the texts engagement with themes of immigration and exile and the French colonial history that underlie them, we decided to form this lesson around a language that arose in Agnant’s birthplace at the intersection of those same themes – **Haitian Creole**.

As is suggested by the name, the Haitian Creole is not the only creole, and in fact the word ‘**creole**’ is a general term for a type of language (definition given below).

This lesson, in part 1, primarily focusses on creoles, but the term ‘pidgin’ has been included in the title too. This is because they are also an important concept to consider when thinking about creoles and their formation. Part 2 delves into a more formal analysis of the Haitian Creole itself.

Some definitions of pidgins and creoles have been given below, but it should be noted that in the field of linguistics, an exact definition of the two terms is not straight forward and many theories to do with the creation of creoles exist.

In-Class Activity I - Pidgins and Creoles

A **pidgin**, loosely, is often the predecessor to a creole. It is the ‘marginal language’ used when two communities or people with no common language need to communicate. This was very common in the slave trade, for example. The slaves who had been brought onto the same

plantation from all over the world might not have any common language, but they lived together and worked together, and so found ways to communicate. They also had to grapple with English, and so within the communities that developed, pidgin languages would arise. These languages are choppy strings of sentences, a simplified means of communication with no consistent grammatical rules, like word order or regular affixes.

A **creole** would often arise from a pidgin (but not always). If we go back to the example from the slave trade, often the first generation of pidgin speakers would maintain their choppy pidgin language. However, when they had children, their children would learn this pidgin language as their mother tongue, and at this point, when the pidgin is adopted as a mother tongue, we can call this new language a creole. This process is called **nativisation**. The creole might differ from the pidgin in that the new generation of speakers adds grammatical richness and a greater flexibility to the language. It is no longer a blend of other languages, it is now a language truly in its own right, with its own phonological and grammatical system. It will of course bear resemblances to its mother languages, but it is distinct.

Grammatical Redundancy

Redundancy, in grammar, can be taken as material that is expressed more than once. For example, the following English phrases have a lot of redundant material, as marked in bold:

- a) *That woman is a doctor*
- b) **Those women are doctors**

Sentence b expresses a plural and so the articles (that vs. those; a), the nouns (woman vs. women) and even the verb (is vs. are) must change so that they are in **agreement** with each other. In standard British English, the following are incorrect (marked with an asterix (*)):

- c) *Those women is a doctors
- d) * Those women is a doctor
- e) *That woman are doctors

The list goes on.

During creation, pidgins are thought to drop a lot of the redundant material present in their mother-languages.

Take this example from Tok-Pisin, an English pidgin language from Papua New-Guinea:

- f) wanpela man I kam
ONE MAN COMES
- g) sixpela man I kam
SIX MEN COME

The noun and verb forms stay the same in the singular and the plural. Imagine going on holiday to a place where the language the natives speak is not closely related to your own language in

any way. Even English and French are too close. English and Malayalam, a South Indian Dravidian language, might be two good candidates.

Imagine trying to communicate with the local people. Even just asking for the time might become difficult.

Would you ask 'excuse me, could you tell me the time, please?'

The transatlantic slave trade created an even more complex situation, because the slaves themselves came from many different parts of Africa and the slaves would not all speak the same languages themselves.

Imagine a French person and someone from Finland, both transported to Southern India to work together (with no internet and no google translate!).

Class Discussion

Think about grammatical redundancy and the role of grammar in language. Is grammar essential for language and/or communication?

When a pidgin is adopted as the mother tongue of a community, often as the result of the birth of a new generation, we can say a creole has been formed. Why do you think the children of the pidgin speaking generation add the grammatical richness (relative to the pidgin) and distinctiveness to the language they speak? Do you think it is done on purpose, or is there something else going on?

Thinking about the previous questions might help address the following one, which brings this debate to one of the bigger questions in the field of Linguistics - to what extent is language innate or learnt?

What does the formation of pidgins and creoles tell us about the innate or learnt parts of language?

Read [Balafres](#) together as a class. Then have the students each re-read the poem on their own and underline each mention of migration and movement. As a class, discuss the examples. Pay special attention to the images employed and the relationship between the narrator and the addressee.

Read the translator's note together, paying special attention to the challenges that Meï describes, recognizing the ways in which her own positionality may have impacted her interpretation and rendering of the poem. Have the students consider their own socio-ethnic identity and how it might affect their readings of the poem.

In-Class Activity II - Haitian Creole

Formal analysis - grammar

Haitian Creole has French as its root and bears many resemblances to French, but is totally independent from French. A French speaker would most likely not be able to understand the Haitian Creole (although might be able to make some good guesses).

Below is a table with a few words from the Haitian Creole, and their equivalents in French and English. French is included because of its close relationship with the Haitian Creole (from this table itself it is possible to spot the French roots words that have been retained in the Haitian Creole). The English has been included because it is useful to compare an unknown language to one that is known. The last column is for the student's native language, if it is not English.

The focus of this lesson is on the definite article ('the') and pluralisation, which both fall under the category of grammar, although phonology is also relevant to this lesson.

Haitian Creole	French	English	
liv	livre	book	
Liv la	Le livre	The book	
Liv yo	Les livres	The books	
chat	chat	cat	
Chat la	Le chat	The cat	
Chat yo	Les chats	The cats	
kravat	cravate	tie	
Kravat la	La cravate	The tie	
Kravat yo	Les cravates	The ties	

1). Find out, if it isn't already known, how gender is indicated in a noun phrase in French and mark 'masculine' or 'feminine' on the table next to each word. Is this pattern seen in the Haitian Creole?

2) How is the definite article expressed in the Haitian Creole? How does this differ from French or the student's native language?

3) Now consider the following additions to the table:

machin	voiture	car	
Machin nan Machin lan	La voiture	The car	
Machin yo	Les voitures	The cars	
plim	stylo	pen	
Plim nan	Le stylo	The pen	
Plim yo	Les stylo	The pens	
lamp	lampe	lamp	
Lamp lan	La lampe	The lamp	
Lamp yo	Les lampes	The lamps	
Kouto	couteau	knife	
Kouto a	Le couteau	The knife	
Kouto yo	Les couteaux	The knives	
fanmi	famille	family	
Fanmi an	La famille	The family	
Fanmi yo	Les familles	The families	

How is the definite article expressed here? In what way is it different?

4) Look at the last or last two sounds (or phonemes) of the noun and the first sound (or phoneme) of the definite article in the Haitian Creole. Can you come up with a rule that would dictate this sound change for the expression of the definite article? Do bear in mind that the given set of words is not exhaustive. Use what has been provided to get a feel for thinking about grammatical and sound rules.

5) Fill in this table according to your rule(s) from question 4:

Haitian Creole	French	English	
bonbon	bonbon	candy	
	Le bonbon	the candy	
	Les bonbons	The candies	
gato	gâteau	cake	
	le gâteau	the cake	
	Les gâteaux	The cakes	
mi	mur	wall	
	le mur	the wall	
	Les murs	The walls	
plent	plainte	complaint	
	La plainte	the complaint	
	Les plaintes	The complaints	

6) How is pluralisation marked in the Haitian creole?

7) If you look at the English equivalent to the Haitian Creole plurals, both the definite article and the pluralisation is overtly expressed (by use of the word 'the' and by the insertion of an 's' on the end of the noun). The French is even richer, as the definite article itself changes to agree with the noun. Is this the case in the Haitian Creole?

8) Fill in the table from question 5 with the plural forms of Haitian Creole words

9) **Redundancy**, in grammar, can be taken as material that is expressed more than once. This has already been touched upon in Part 1. For example, in the French noun phrase *les voitures*, both of the following must occur to mark the pluralization

- An s must be added at the end of the noun.
- The definite article has to change from its singular form *la*

This is called **agreement**. Find the Haitian Creole counterpart of *les voitures*. Write a short paragraph about the role of grammatical richness in expressing meaning in a given language.

Home Assignment

Choose one of the following prompts and write a short response paper

- In Haiti, French is often taught in schools, despite the fact that the majority of the population have the Haitian Creole as their mother-tongue. Why do you think this is? Think about social attitudes towards pidgins and creoles.
- The transatlantic slave trade is listed as one motivator for the creation of pidgins and creoles. In what other situations might a pidgin or a creole be formed?
- Describe your understanding of the immigrant experience in your own community. If you feel so inspired, you can write your response in the form of a poem.

FEEDBACK

Thanks for taking the time to read the *Asymptote* Guide for Educators. We hope you found it useful and engaging. Have questions, comments, critiques, or testimonials? Please leave your feedback [here](#). We look forward to hearing from you!

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