Localising television programmes and literary texts —
one way of producing material where primary production is weak?

I

Localisation

This paper deals with some issues of content, primarily in the media of publishing and television, in the contexts of certain smaller modern European languages. In the paper, while I refer specifically only to the Irish language, other Celtic languages, notably Breton and Welsh, may occasionally be present by association.

The ideas presented in the paper derive from the speaker's experience of work in a number of fields – television, publishing, and translation – in various countries – Brittany, Wales and Ireland – since about 1990.

The catalyst for the present formulation of the ideas expressed below is a project currently underway at the Mercator Centre, University of Wales, Aberystwyth. This project, called AGORED, has as its aim, over a period of two years, to produce a Welsh language version, including interface, help-screens and handbook, of the computer software programme OpenOffice 2.0.

(OpenOffice is a programme, similar to Microsoft Office, which includes a word-processing suite, spreadsheets and databases, drawing facilities and graphics, as well programmes to make calculations and work with mathematical formulae. OpenOffice is an open source software product, and as such is available free of charge – through downloading for example – while Microsoft office is a closed source product for which the user must pay.)

Producing the Welsh language version of OpenOffice, means translating and adapting elements of the programme already available in other languages – English, French and German for example. The object of this process of translation-adaptation is, rather than to represent the original as faithfully as possible, to use the original to produce a product suited to the needs of users in the local target group.

In the world of computer software, this process has given rise, as we know, to the term *localisation*.

II

Audience Fragmentation and Critical Mass

In the late 20th century, much time was devoted to the establishment of forums for the dissemination of languages such as Irish. Since then, there has been a shift in the employment of people's energies from, for example, pressure groups, lobbies, protest, and canvassing for more broadcasting hours on radio and television, to a concentration of energies in the fields of production of material and provision of content for existing antennae.

Thus, the media landscape we now know is very different to that of a generation ago, and much broadcasting and publishing is now taking place in the major Celtic languages. However, socio-linguistic and demographic developments in recent times mean that the context of broadcasting and publishing has been modified.

Efforts to establish language radio and television antennae originated at a time when traditional communities were, arguably, stronger than they are today. At this time, the perpetuation of community, and, as a consequence, the safeguarding of language within community, was perceived as an important part of the role the media would come to play.

In recent decades, however, while the importance attached to community remains strong, other phenomena have taken their place on the social stage. Among these is the growth of multiple niche groups within society.

Also, the hand of the state is, by now, omni-present in matters pertaining to certain major Celtic languages. It funds the languages, employs people to promote them, and decides more and more which direction the languages will take.

All things described above illustrate, perhaps not an intrinsic weakening of community, but a decreased relative pre-eminence of community in the realm of propriety and transmission of language.

The target audience of radio and television stations in Ireland has therefore, with the mutation of community, undergone much change, as it has in Wales. The same is of course true of the target audiences of radio and television station broadcasting in other and major languages.

One area where smaller and greater languages differ from each other in this respect, however, is in the area of critical mass. A niche English-language audience – gardeners for example – can constitute a large number of people and a potentially large audience. But Irish-speaking gardeners are a tiny number of people, and they, in all probability, will watch the English language programmes devoted to their area of interest.

In recent times therefore, part of the debate surrounding the media has been the identification of contemporary target groups, the definition of target groups, and ultimately, ways of catering for perceived target groups.

Having established the pertinence of defining target groups and establishing how best to cater for them, let's now consider the question of human resources.

III

Human Resources

A major concern for content-providers in Ireland and elsewhere is the pool of actors, presenters, script-writers and professionals available to them.

Until a certain time in Ireland, it was not uncommon to find young adults whose mastery of their native language was complete, and whose confidence in speaking their language, whether in public or in private, was high.

By today, levels of competence vary greatly. The ability of young native speakers of Irish to think coherently and to discuss a wide range of things without recourse to the majority language would seem to be rarer than before. Fewer young people of today's generation than of yesterday's can stand in front of a camera, or sit at a microphone, and speak at will. Most need a script which they learn and follow.

Thus, it seems, to a time in history when more broadcasting hours than ever are available in Irish corresponds a time when fewer fluent speakers than ever are available to provide content for these hours.

Coupled with limited funding for the production of primary material, this penury of people means that, in today's world, Irish finds it difficult to sustain a good flow of material for screen, airwave and shelf.

Given limited resources, both human and financial, the question, viewed from a certain angle, is, rather than being solely political or artistic, partially a logistical one: how can we produce more consumable material?

IV

Linguistic Territory

Linguistic territory, in the context of the Irish language, amongst others, has, in recent decades, and indeed generations, been synonymous with a form of linguistic cartography. Irish is, or has been, the language of the people who lived in certain places, and these places have been home to speakers of the language.

The linguistic territory I wish to refer to here however is less geographic than cultural. Debate, and a full spectrum of opinion about a limitless number of subjects, will often emerge in a monolingual context. In a bilingual context, certain subjects tend to form part of conversation conducted in the smaller language, other subjects less so. The range of things most often discussed in the smaller language may be said to form part of the cultural specificity of the smaller language.

One might argue, therefore, that, along with numerical differences, one striking dissimilarity between languages big and small is to be found in the extent, depth and breadth of their respective linguistic territories.

According to my experience of life in the Irish Gaeltacht over a period of decades for example, people would talk more about turf-cutting than playing chess, more about potatoes than pine apples, more about government grants than shares in the stock market, more about country and western singing than about the Slavic string quartet, and so on.

This brings us to the question of content in broadcasting and in publishing. Would people in the Irish Gaeltacht rather have programmes and books about turf-cutting, potatoes and country and western music than have programmes and books about chess-playing, pine apples and Dmitri Shostakovitch?

Here we meet the dichotomy of Gaelach and Gallda (native and foreign) which has been of interest to some speakers of Irish during modern times. On one hand, in an increasingly homogenous world, it seems that the cultural specificity of a language is something that makes it attractive, vibrant and worthwhile. On the other hand, a language preoccupied with itself and with its own past risks breeding at best nostalgia, and at worst something akin to fascism.

V

Yfory Ddaw and *Sarah Arall*

In the past two years, a number of Irish-language books for teenagers have been translated from Welsh, some adapted or localised. Why? For a number of reasons. Because material was needed for, amongst other things, the secondary schools market in Ireland. Because primary native production is weak. Because Welsh and Irish are both part of the English sphere of influence, their cultures being, therefore, sufficiently inter-translatable. (And because, let it not be forgotten, government grants were available to pay both translator and publisher.)

But there is another reason for localising rather than translating the books *verbatim*, as a German book might be translated into Russian, or another from English into Spanish. This has to do linguistic territory, a notion introduced and briefly discussed above.

Two of the books, *Yfory Ddaw* and *Sarah Arall*, by Sioned Wyn Jones and Aled Islwyn respectively, both translated by the present speaker (Cló Iar-Chonnachta 2004 and 2005), form part of the corpus I wish to comment on today. I concentrate on *Sarah Arall*.

Sarah Arall (Another Sarah) is a novel. It roots are to be found in history. In the late 19th century, in the parish of Llanfihangel in Carmarthenshire, a young girl, Sarah Jacob, fasted, survived for long months, and finally, having become the object of media attention and public wonder, died. In *Sarah Arall*, a late 20th century work (1982), a young girl from Cardiff, recuperating from illness, comes to stay in Llanfihangel. Here she hears the story of Sarah Jacob, and proceeds to model her own life, and death, on her 19th century namesake. The novel is, then, an insight into copycat anorexia.

To produce an Irish language version of this story, two considerations needed bearing in mind. One, it was required that references in the text, while continuing to represent the original text, reflect, as consistently as possible, the culture in Connemara in the 1980s, and, to an extent, in the late 19th century. Two, it was required that the language of the text be accessible to at least more advanced readers in the final years of the secondary school cycle in Ireland.

To illustrate the work, I have chosen six short extracts. In each case, the original Welsh text is followed by a literal translation into English. The Irish text follows, and, finally, a literal translation of the Irish into English. Some of you may wish to compare the two English texts. The extracts are introduced as a series of questions.

Extracts from *Sarah Arall/Sarah Eile*

1

How did young men wear their hair in Dublin and Connemara in the 1980s?

Canodd cloch hen ffasiwn y drws a throes Sara i weld gwr ifanc yn dod i mewn i'r siop. Ei wallt wedi ei gyrlio'n dwmpath o gyrliau man. Roedd hynny'n ffasiynol iawn tua Chaerdydd, ond doedd Sara ddim wedi disgwyl ffasiwn felly yno yng nghanol y wlad.

The door's old fashioned bell rang, and Sara turned to see a young man coming into the shop. His hair was a mound of tight curls. This was very fashionable down in Cardiff, but Sarah hadn't expected a similar fashion here in the middle of the countryside.

Bhuail an seanchlog os cionn an dorais. Chas Sara timpeall agus chonaic sí fear óg ag teacht isteach sa siopa. Bhí mullach mór catach gruaige air. Gruaig ghearr a chleacht na fir óga i mBleá Cliath. Scéal eile a bhí anseo.

The old bell rang above the door. Sara turned round and saw a young man coming into the shop. His hair was thick and curly. The young men in Dublin wore their hair short. Things were different here.

2

What cigarettes were smoked and what papers read in Connemara in the 1980s?

‘Paced o ffags,’ ebe’r llanc. Dechreuai hwnnw fynd yn fyr ei amynedd. Cododd fys at y sigarennau a chwenychai ac estynnodd Mrs Ifans becyn iddo. ‘Papur i finnau,’ ebe Sara, gan gymryd un o’r pentwr papurau oedd wrth ochr y cownter.’

‘A packet of fags,’ said the youth. He was becoming impatient. He pointed at the cigarettes that he wanted and Mrs Ifans handed him the packet. ‘A paper for me,’ said Sara, and took one from the pile of papers by the counter.

‘Fiche *Major*,’ arsa mo dhuine. Bhí mífhoighid air. Shín sé méar leis na toitíní. Shín Máire Bhríd chuige. ‘An *Independent*’, arsa Sara. Thug sí ceann léi ón gciseán le taobh an chabhantair.

‘Twenty *Major*,’ the other said. He was becoming impatient. He pointed at the cigarettes. Máire Bhríd handed them to him. ‘The *Independent*,’ said Sara. She took one from basket by the counter.

3

How does one deal with differences in school curricula and education?

Wrth gwrs, does gen i fawr i'w ddweud wrth addysg,' aeth Sara yn ei blaen yn fawreddog. 'Doeddwn i ddim yn dda iawn. Ac maen nhw mor afiach o *keen* ar ochr academaidd pethau yn yr ysgolion Cymraeg 'ma. Yr unig bethe rown i'n eu hoffi'n wirioneddol oedd chwedlau a storïau tylwyth teg a phethau felly. Pan own i yn yr ysgol gynradd oedd hynny. Yr unig beth tebyg i hynny wedyn oedd Ysgrythur.

'Of course, I don't think much of education,' continued Sara grandly. 'I wasn't very good. And they're so unhealthily keen on the academic side of things in these Welsh schools. The only things I really liked were legends and stories of the little folk a things like that. That's when I was in primary school. The only thing similar afterwards was Scripture.'

'Ar ndóigh, níl aon spéis agamsa sa scoil,' arsa sí go postúil. 'Ní raibh mé ró-mhaith. Bíonn oiread grá acu do na leabhra ann. B'fhearr liomsa go mór na seanscéalta agus caint ar síóga agus rudaí mar sin. Sin é an chaoi a raibh sé sa mbunscoil. Ní raibh a leithéid ar an meánscoil dáiríre. Seachas an teagasc Críostaí agus scéalta an Bhíobla b'fhéidir.

'Well, I'm not a bit interested in school', she said grandly. 'I wasn't very good. They're so caught up with books. I really prefer the old stories and talking about the fairies and that sort of thing. That's how it was in primary school. There was nothing like that in secondary school really. Apart from Catechism and stories from the Bible maybe.'

4

Did young girls drive pony traps in Connemara in the late 19th century?

‘Ydych chi wedi clywed am Sarah Jacob?’ holodd Sara Mrs Ifans.
‘Sarah Jacob! Honno oedd yn byw yn Llethr-Neuadd! O! Mae pawb rownd ffordd hyn yn gwybod yr hanes ’na. Wrth gwrs ’oedd e ’mhell cyn ’yn amser i. Ond o’dd ’y mam-gu i’n cofio’r amser yn iawn. O’dd hi yn yr ysgol gyda’i brodyr a’i chwiorydd hi. Fi’n cofio hi yn dweud wrtho i bod plant yr ardal wedi ’neud ffortiwn un haf yn arwen pobl o stesion Pencader lan i Lethr-Neuadd. Byddigions yn dod o bob man ‘w gweld hi, chi’n gweld. ‘*Take us to the Fasting Girl*,’ o’n nhw’n arfer dweud wrth Mam-gu.

‘Have you heard of Sarah Jacob?’ Sara asked Mrs Ifans.
‘Sarah Jacob! The girl who lived in Llethr Neuadd! O! Everyone around here knows that story. Of course, that was before my time. But Grandma remembered the time well. She was in school with her brothers and sisters. I remember her telling me me how the local children made a fortune that summer bringing people from the station up to Llethr-Neuadd. Big shots from all over coming to see her, you see. ‘*Take us to the Fasting Girl*’ they would say to Grandma.

‘Ar chuala tusa caint ar Sara Seoighe?’ arsa Sarah le Máire Bhríd an tsiopa.
‘Sara Seoighe? Nach shin í a bhí ina cónaí sa nGleann Buí? Tá an scéal sin ar eolas ag madraí an bhaile. Ach fadó riamh a bhí sí ann. Chloisinn mo Mhamó ag trácht uirthi. Bhí sí ar scoil leis an nglúin sin. Dúirt sí liom faoin airgead mór a bhain *lads* na háite de na daoine a tháinig ar cuairt chuici an bhliain sin. Thagaidís go Maam Cross ar an traein, agus cairrín capaill as sin go Ros na gCaorach. ‘Take us to the fasting girl’ an port a bhíodh acu.

‘Have you heard of Sarah Jacob?’ Sara said to Máire Bhríd an tSiopa.
‘Sarah Jacob she lived in Gleann Buí, didn’t she? That story is common knowledge around here. But it happened a long time ago. I used to hear my grandmother talk about it. She was at school with that generation. She used to tell me how the local lads made a fortune from the people who came to see her that year. They’d come to Maam Cross on the train, and take a horse and trap from there to Ros na gCaorach. ‘*Take us to the Fasting Girl*’ they’d say.’

5

How important are names?

Darllenodd ragor o enwau ar frys. Cymaint o enwau Beiblaidd. Enwau pell (fel Sadrach a Seffora). Eraill yn gyfarwydd (fel David a Martha). Rhai yn hardd. Fel Sarah. A Sarah. A Sarah.

She read more names hurriedly. So many Biblical names. Distant names (like Sadrach and Seffora). Others more familiar (like David and Martha). Some beautiful. Like Sarah. And Sarah. And Sarah.

Léigh sí tuilleadh ainmneacha faoi dheifir. Seanainmneacha cuid acu: Éanna agus Mac Dara. Bhí ainmneacha coitianta ann chomh maith: Máirtín agus Bríd. Ainmneacha áille cuid acu: Sorcha, Sara, Sarah.

She read more names hurriedly. Some were old. Éanna and Mac Dara. There were common names too: Máirtín and Bríd. Some of the names were beautiful: Sorcha, Sara, Sarah.

6

What items of valuable furniture were to be found in Connemara in 1950, and what was likely to be hanging on the walls of the houses?

Yn yr ystafell hon roedd y gorau o hen ddodrefn ei Mam-gu. Roedd yno gist o ddroriau dderw fawr. A bwlynnau crwn yn agor pob dror; a'r rheini'n drwm a llyfn yn ei dyrnau...Ar y wal gyferbyn a'r gwely crogai hen *sampler* o waith ei hen fam-gu.

In this room was the best of Grandma's old furniture. There was an big oak chest-of-drawers. And round knobs to open each drawer, and they were smooth and heavy in her fists. On the wall opposite the bed hung an old *sampler* of her grandmother's work.

Is ina seomra féin a bhí an chuid ab fhearr de sheantroscán Mhamó. Bhí trunca mór darach ann agus búclaí mín snasta air lena oscailt...Bhí an croí rónaofa ar an mballa. (Sa gcistineach a bhíodh sin nuair a bhí an tseanbhean beo.)

The best of Grandma's old furniture was in her own room. There was a big oaken trunk with smooth, shiny clasps on it to open it. The Sacred Heart hung on the wall. (It used to hang in the kitchen while the old woman was alive.)

Conclusions

Time requires that we begin to bring to a close this brief discussion of localising Welsh literature in Ireland.

Among the questions which arise, some of which the audience may wish to pursue, now or later, are the following:

1) To what extent, if at all, is localising rather than literal translation necessary or desirable?

2) Can people be trained to be literary translator-localisers?

3) How far need or dare the translator go in adapting the book?

One reaction to the book *Sarah Eile* is to be found in the newspaper *Lá* on the 31st of August 2005. Writing in Irish, a teenage reviewer, Meadhbh Ní Eadhra, made the following remarks:

'Ní maith liom é seo a rá, ach bíonn na leabhair do dhéagóirí a aistrítear go Gaeilge, ón mBreatnais, i bhfad chun cinn ar na leabhair a scríobhann na hÉireannaigh féin....Sampla breá atá sa leabhar seo, *Sarah Eile*, den chineál ábhair atá de dhíth ar dhéagóirí na linne.'

'I am loath to say it, but books for teenagers translated into Irish, from Welsh, are far better than the books written by the Irish themselves...*Sarah Eile* is a fine example of the type of book much needed by the adolescents of today.'

Any point of view may of course be countered by another. Just as localising some books for certain target groups may be a good idea, so may literal translations of other works prove successful.

<u>Ultimately, a mix of many different things is desirable, and a flow of material to match the demands and heterogenity of the contemporary market-place.</u>

Diarmuid Johnson 10.05