

Imperial Messages

On Translating Franz Kafka's "Eine kaiserliche Botschaft" into Ayeri

This treaty is a compilation of a series of semi-weekly blog posts titled "Imperial Messages", dealing with a translation of Franz Kafka's short story "Eine kaiserliche Botschaft"¹ (1917) into Ayeri. The series was published to the blog part of my website on the Ayeri language between February 15 and April 4, 2012, with a round-up on April 7.²

The fourteen individual installments comment on the process of translating the text into Ayeri and quote from the original German text with the equivalent excerpt from an English translation of the story³ added in order for non-speakers of German to be able to follow. My translation largely follows the German text and my interpretation of it, however. The whole text in Ayeri is:

တိုဝ်းၤ ညးတၢ်ရဲၤ
လိာ်တၢ်တၢ်တၢ် ဒ်ရုာ်
ပုၤတၢ်ခိၣ်တၢ်ပၤတၢ်သးၤတၢ်
ခိၣ်တၢ်ခိၣ်တၢ်ခိၣ်တၢ်ခိၣ်
တၢ်သးၤတၢ်ခိၣ်တၢ်ခိၣ်တၢ်
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Sindan Hangkang⁴
BUDANG LANYANA IRAY
Yam turakaya lanyāng iray – da-ningrey
– va, si kebak, avanaya dipakan, karano,
si iyin marinya perinena desay iray nay
si danguvāng mangasaha timangya kahu-
vā: yam māy turakaya va pakas lanyāng
iray budangas mangasara pinamya pang-
vā yana. Sā sarayya ya ninayāng pinamya
nay ang naraya taran budangas tangya
ninayana. Budangang kapo-ing

¹ Cf. Kafka, Franz. "Eine kaiserliche Botschaft." *Drucke zu Lebzeiten*. By Franz Kafka. Eds. Wolf Kittler, Hans-Gerd Koch, and Gerhard Neumann. Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 1994. 280–82. Print.
² Cf. Becker, Carsten. "Imperial Messages." 15 articles. *Benung. The Ayeri Language Resource*. By Carsten Becker, 15 Feb. to 7 Apr. 2012. Web. 7 Apr. 2012.
³ Cf. Kafka, Franz. "A Message from the Emperor." Trans. by Mark Harman. *NYRblog*. The New York Review of Books, 1 Jul. 2011. Web. 9 Feb. 2012.
⁴ *Sindan* < sino 'free' + -dan 'MASC' < Ger. *Franz* < Lat. *Franciscus* 'Frenchman' < MLat. *francus* 'Frankish; free' (cf. *Duden Herkunftswörterbuch*, though *OED* notes actually from [PG?] **frankon-* 'javelin'). *Hangkang* < onomatopoeia of crow calls, cf. Ayr. *haka* 'crow'; cf. Cz. *kavka* 'jackdaw' (cf. *Duden Familiennamen*).

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 နိၣ်ခိၣ်ခိၣ်ကၣ် —

mandayjas sayling – nay mitanas
 menikaneng – nay edāre manga luga
 pericanyēa samang – nay ang pragongya
 panca manga agonan kunangyēa pang-vā
 ikan – nārya amangoyreng tadoy – ang
 yomongyo tarela ayromitan marin yāy,
 Terpeng Mavayena, sang nujoyos deng
 idaseri avan sitang-yona. Ang ming
 lugaya ranya – ang da-miraya nilarya-vā
 kayvo budangya nyānena tenya. – Ang
 nedrasava nārya silvenoya vana nay ri
 sitang-tivāng budangas mangan tadayya
 si apanjo perinang.

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Glossing abbreviations used

2	second person	GEN	genitive	NMLZ	nominalizer
3	third person	HAB	habitative	P	patient; plural
A	agent	INAN	inanimate	PF	patient focus
AF	agent focus	INS	instrumental	PL	plural
AGTZ	agent nominalization	INSF	instrumental focus	PROG	progressive
CAUF	causative focus	IRR	irrealis	PTCP	participle
DAT	dative	LOC	locative	REL	relativizer
DATF	dative focus	LOCF	locative focus	S	singular
EMPH	emphatic	M	masculine	SUPL	superlative
FOC	focus	MOT	motion		
FUT	future	N	neuter		

1. “Budang lanyana iray” (ed. 2012-02-10, publ. 2012-02-15 as 1)

EINE KAISERLICHE BOTSCHAFT

Der Kaiser – so heißt es – hat Dir, dem Einzelnen, dem jämmerlichen Untertanen, dem winzig vor der kaiserlichen Sonne in die fernste Ferne geflüchteten Schatten, gerade Dir hat der Kaiser von seinem Sterbebett aus eine Botschaft gesendet. (Kafka 1994, 280:15–281:2)

A MESSAGE FROM THE EMPEROR

The emperor – it is said – sent to you, the one apart, the wretched subject, the tiny shadow that fled far, far from the imperial sun, precisely to you he sent a message from his deathbed. (Kafka 2011)

BUDANG LANYANA IRAY

Yam turakaya lanyāng iray – da-ningrey – va, si kebak, avanaya dipakan, karano, si iyin marinya perinena desay iray nay si danguvāng mangasaha timangya kahu-vā: yam māy turakaya va pakas lanyāng iray budangas mangasara pinamya pang-vā yana.

1.1. Interlinear glossing

BUDANG LANYA-NA IRAY

message king-GEN high

A MESSAGE FROM THE HIGH KING

Yam turaka-ya lanyang iray – da=ning-rey – va, si kebak, avanaya dipakan,

DATE send-3SM king-A high – such=tell-3S.INAN.P – 2S.FOC, REL single, subject pathetic

karano, si iyin marin-ya perin-ena desay iray nay si dangu-vāng mangasaha

shadow, REL tiny face-LOC SUN-GEN noble high and REL flee-2S.A towards

timang-ya kahu=vā: yam māy turaka-ya va pakas lanyang iray budang-as

distance-LOC far=SUPL: DATE EMPH send-3SM 2S.FOC especially king-A high message-P

mangasara pinam-ya pang-vā yana.

away_from bed-LOC last 3SM.GEN

To you – as is told – the single one, the pathetic subject, the shadow that is tiny in the face of the high-noble sun, and that has fled to the furthest distance: yes, precisely to you the high king has sent a message from his final bed.

1.2. Notes on translation

First of all, it has to be noted that I have developed only little cultural background about the fictional people that are supposed to speak the Ayeri language so far. However, let us assume that like in many parts of both the Occident and the Orient, there used to be an

empire with an emperor. Actually, the Ayeri-speaking countries themselves belonged to an empire once that crumbled and split into what is three nations today. However, there is no individual word for an ‘emperor’ in my dictionary yet because I have never seen the need for one. There is, however, *bayhi* ‘ruler’ as a general term, and also *lanya* ‘king’ as a more specific one. For the sake of translating the title of the short story and also this series, I chose to call the emperor *lanya iray* ‘high king’, since this person would be the Great King, the Principal of a group of rulers.

Likewise, there is no word for ‘subject’ yet. Since the whole sentence stresses how small and utterly insignificant the addressee is in comparison to the imperial court, let us go with something derived from *avan* ‘bottom’ here – ignoring possible connotations of proletarianism. *Avanan*, the direct (re-)nominalization of this word, already exists and means ‘basis, funding, groundwork’. It is possible to make a word like *avanaya* < *avan* ‘bottom’ + *-maya* ‘AGTZ’, though.

Another word for which there has not yet existed a definition is ‘pathetic, wretched’, for which I recycled the word *dipakan* ‘pity’ as an adjective. Another such recycled word is *desay*, which prior to this translation exercise was only defined as ‘noble’, though together with *iray* ‘high’, it may just as well be understood to pattern with *lanya iray* ‘high king, emperor’, also by extension of ‘noble’ with ‘royal’.

There has not been a word for ‘deathbed’ either so far, but I chose to translate that as *pinam pang-vā* ‘last bed’, thus not naming death overtly. Interestingly, *pang-vā* ‘(the) last’ was so far listed as a noun in the dictionary probably because it was used only in that context when I coined it earlier. However, it patterns with *ban-vā* ‘(the) best’, which can also be used as an adjective, since *ban* ‘good’ is one and *-vā* is an adverbial quantifier expressing superlative amounts, cf. the verb *va-* ‘to be (the) most’.

Syntactically, the addressee is kept as the topic of the sentence throughout the passage, as is implied also in the German and English version, albeit only by recursion to it by means of a great number of coordinated modifying clauses. The phrase that was probably the most difficult to translate in this passage is “dem winzig vor der kaiserlichen Sonne in die fernste Ferne geflüchteten Schatten” (Kafka 1994, 281:16–17), which in German is very complicated. The English translation renders this as “the tiny shadow that fled [...]” (Kafka 2011), however, this is not exactly what it says in German, since “winzig” does not agree in case with “Schatten”, or otherwise it would have to be “dem winzigen [...] Schatten”.

What happens instead is that “winzig vor der kaiserlichen Sonne” (‘tiny in the face of the imperial sun’) forms a syntactic unit, and “in die fernste Ferne geflüchteten” (‘fled into the furthest distance’) does so as well, so that the sentence contains two coordinated modifying clauses that refer to “Schatten”, bracketed by “dem [...] Schatten” (Kafka 1994, 281:16–17). The Ayeri translation breaks this highly complicated structure up into two coordinated relative clauses. Note as well that like in the first half of the sentence, the topicalized second person pronoun *va(-yam)* stays in its syntactic slot after the patient as usual. However, at the beginning of the text, it is buried between the other sentence constituents, which is amplified by the parenthesis of “da-ningrey”, thus mirroring the insignificance of the addressee even in sentence structure, while the effect is not as strong in the occurrence of this construction towards the end. Now that I’m thinking of it, why not add a grammatical rule to prevent the burying of zero-marked pronouns by moving them right behind the verb phrase if focussed?

2. “Sā sarayya ya ninayāng ...” (ed. 2012-02-10, publ. 2012-02-22 as II)

Den Boten hat er beim Bett niederknien lassen und ihm die Botschaft ins Ohr zugeflüstert; so sehr war ihm an ihr gelegen, daß er sich sie noch ins Ohr wiedersagen ließ. (Kafka 1994, 281:2–5)

He bade the messenger kneel by his bed, and whispered the message in his ear. So greatly did he cherish it that he had him repeat it into his ear. (Kafka 2011)

Sā sarayya ya ninayāng pinamya nay ang naraya taran budangas tangya ninayana. Budangang kapo-ing padangyam sitang-yana, sā na-narayāng yos tangya yana bayhi.

2.1. Interlinear glossing

Sā saray-ya ya ninaya-ang pinam-ya nay ang nara-ya taran budang-as

CAUF bow-3SM 3SM.FOC messenger-A bed-LOC and AF say-3SM quiet message-P

tang-ya ninaya-na. Budang-ang kapo=ing padang-yam sitang=yana, sā

ears-LOC messenger-GEN. message-A important=so heart-DAT self=3SM.GEN, CAUF

na~nara-yāng yos tang-ya yana bayhi.

again~say-3SM.A 3SN.P ears-LOC 3SM.GEN ruler

He had the messenger bow at his bedside and quietly said the message into the messenger’s ears.

The message was so important to his own heart that the ruler had him say it again into his ears.

2.2. Notes on translation

The only newly coined word here is *ninaya*, from *nin-* ‘to carry’ and *-maya* ‘AGTZ’: a messenger is literally a ‘carrier’, thus. I chose *saray-* ‘to bow’ instead of ‘kneel down’ because I did not like to derive a word from the existing expression for ‘knee’, that is, *sirayila* (lit. ‘foot bend’).

This paragraph contains a structure I’m struggling with every time I come across it even twice: causatives. There is theoretically no need for expressions like “have sth. done” or “let s.o. do sth” in Ayeri, since the same meaning can be expressed by marking the motivating constituent as a causer, which is distinct from the agent in this language. The construction demands that the causer be the topic of the sentence (CAUF for ‘causative focus’), while the entity forced to act is marked with the agent case according to its semantic role. The use of the reflexive morpheme *sitang-* ‘self, own’ in “*padangyam sitang-yana*” is for emphasis.

The decision to resolve the semi-colon of the German text (cf. Kafka 1994, 281:4) as a full stop was made for more or less stylistic reasons. The semi-colon certainly underlines the parallel structure of the two clauses, however, a full stop works just as well.

3. “Ri kaytisyāng halinganley ...” (ed. 2012-02-10, publ. 2012-02-25 as III)

Durch Kopfnicken hat er die Richtigkeit des Gesagten bestätigt. (Kafka 1994, 281:5–6)

With a nod of his head he confirmed the accuracy of the messenger’s words. (Kafka 2011)

Ri kaytisyāng halinganley narānjas ninayana naban devona yana.

3.1. Interlinear glossing

Ri kayt-is(a)-yāng haling-an-ley narān-jas ninaya-na nab-an devo-na yana.

INSF right-CAU-3SM.A exact-NMLZ-P.INAN word-PL.P messenger-GEN wag-NMLZ head-GEN 3SM.GEN

With a wag of his head he confirmed the accuracy of the messenger’s words.

3.2. Notes on translation

First of all, how to translate “nod”? As far as I know (though I cannot quote literature here), nodding your head in agreement is a European gesture that is not necessarily applicable to other cultures. I do not know how my fictional people will show agreement, so I translated “nod” with “swing” (*nab-*), which received an extended meaning for this purpose and may

probably better be translated as “wag”. Another difficulty was the word “accuracy”. At first I had translated it with *kalam* ‘truth’, but using *haling* ‘exact’ seemed more suitable to extend with ‘accurate’. The dictionary in fact lists two words for ‘exact’: *haling* and *tarika*.

In terms of grammar and style, not much needs to be said. Participles cannot be marked for focus but instead need to be nominalized for this purpose, hence we get *naban* ‘wag’ rather than *nabyam* ‘wagging’.

4. “Nay marin yenuya silvayana ikan ...” (ed. 2012-02-11, publ. 2012-02-29 as IV)

Und vor der ganzen Zuschauerschaft seines Todes – alle hindernden Wände werden niedergebroschen und auf den weit und hoch sich schwingenden Freitreppen stehen im Ring die Großen des Reichs – vor allen diesen hat er den Boten abgefertigt. (Kafka 1994, 281:6–11)

And before the entire spectatorship of his death – all obstructing walls have been torn down and the great figures of the empire stand in a ring upon the broad, soaring exterior stairways – before all these he dispatched the messenger. (Kafka 2011)

Nay marin yenuya silvayana ikan tenyanena yana – manga adru-ran merengyeley-hen bidis nay ang manga beng-yan nyān-ye tiga simil-ena hican-ya ling rivan-ya ehen, si-ya ling-reng iray nay apan – sā tav-ya mayisa ya ninaya-ang marin enya-ya=hen.

4.1. Interlinear glossing

Nay marin yenu-ya silvaya-na ikan tenyan-ena yana – manga adru-ran
 and in_front_of group-LOC spectator-GEN complete death-GEN 3SM.GEN – PROG destroy-3P.INAN
 mereng-ye-ley=hen bidis nay ang manga beng-yan nyān-ye tiga simil-ena
 wall-PL-P.INAN=all obstructing and AF PROG stand-3PM person-PL honorable country-GEN
 hican-ya ling rivan-ya ehen, si-ya ling-reng iray nay apan – sā tav-ya
 circle-LOC top_of mountain-LOC stair, REL-LOC ascend-3S.INAN high and wide – CAUF become-3SM
 mayisa ya ninaya-ang marin enya-ya=hen.
 ready 3SM.FOC messenger-A in_front_of everyone-LOC=all

And in front of the whole group of spectators of his death – all obstructing walls were being destroyed and the honorable persons of the country were standing in a circle on top of the mountain of stairs which ascended high and wide – in front of everyone of them he dispatched the messenger.

4.2. Notes on translation

Few new words needed to be coined here: one is *bidis* ‘obstructing’, which I derived from the previously existing verb *bidisa-* ‘to block, obstruct’, which seems to be a causative

derivation of the noun *bidan* ‘block’. Also, there was only a word for ‘stair in a staircase’ in the dictionary, *ehen*, but I discovered the lack of a regular way to derive sets of things. I left the word as *ehen* in the text, but made a compound with *rivan* ‘mountain’ as its head, since the setting Kafka describes reminds me strongly of Mayan pyramids or similar religious architecture with long and high-climbing stairs found in Asia. It should be noted that the compound is *rivanehen* ‘stair-mountain’ as an individual word, but the compound, headed by a noun, is regularly split after the the head for case marking: *ling rivanya ehen* ‘on top of the stair mountain’. *Tiga* ‘honorable’ was derived as an adjective from *tigan* ‘honor’.

One striking thing in the German text that has not been translated in the same way into English is the change to present tense in the parenthesis: the walls “werden niedergebroschen” (Kafka 1994, 281:8) in present tense, dynamic passive, while in English the walls “have been torn down” (Kafka 2011) in present perfect, stative passive, although the great ones “stehen” (Kafka 1994, 281:9) as well as they “stand” (Kafka 2011). Since Ayeri uses morphologic tense rather sparingly and does not employ an epic preterite like German and English do, I used the progressive marker *manga* to achieve a similar effect of immediacy.

A nifty feature of Ayeri comes into play in this sentence: usually, verbs have agreement in person and number with the agent of the clause, however, in “manga adruran merengyeley-hen bidis”, the verb *adru-* ‘to destroy’ has third person plural inanimate agreement (*-ran*), which refers to “merengyeley”, from *mereng* ‘wall’ + *ye* ‘PL’ + *-ley* ‘P.INAN’, which is itself marked as a patient so that the clause does not contain an agent and thus is in passive voice.

What’s more, the German text has an adverbial clause right at the beginning of the sentence that is picked up again for emphasis after the parenthesis. However, usually Ayeri requires the verb phrase to come first, with the verb phrase here marked for location focus, since this seems like the prevalent perspective in the original. Still, for stylistic purposes, I think it might be better to keep the original structure, so that the constituent order of the sentence becomes marked in the face of this epic moment.

An issue I found problematic is that in the original, the circle of dignitaries is so strongly emphasized, while the structure in the last part of the sentence, “before all these he dispatched the messenger” (Kafka 2011) is translated in the most straightforward way by using a causative construction again (“sā tavya mayisa ya ninayāng”), thus the locative

topic that should have been used must be replaced with the causative one out of syntactic constraints. I tried to compensate by overspecifying *enya* ‘everyone’ with the quantifier *-hen* ‘all’, which basically results in the meaning ‘all of them all’.

5. “Ang saraya edauyikan ...” (ed. 2012-02-15 to 16, publ. 2012-03-03 to 07 as v-vi)

This is a rather long sentence (though not the longest of the piece yet!), so I’ve split this into two parts.

5.1. Part I (ed. 2012-02-15, publ. 2012-03-03 as v)

Der Bote hat sich gleich auf den Weg gemacht; ein kräftiger, ein unermüdlicher Mann; einmal diesen, einmal den andern Arm vorstreckend schafft er sich Bahn durch die Menge; [...] (Kafka 1994, 281:11–14)

The messenger set out at once; a strong, an indefatigable man; thrusting forward now this arm, now the other, he cleared a path though the crowd; [...]. (Kafka 2011)

Ang saraya edauyikan ninaya sasanyam: ayonang mico nay pisu tadoy – ri tiya itingley manga luga ikananya pinkasān tinuna patameng yana menanyam, tinuna nuveng yana palunganyam – [...]

5.1.1. Interlinear glossing

Ang sara-ya edauyi=ikan ninaya sasan-yam: ayon-ang mico nay pisu tadoy –
 AF leave-3SM now=very messenger way-DAT: man-A strong and tired never –
 ri ti-ya iting-ley manga luga ikanan-ya pinka-asa-an tinu-na patameng yana
 INSF make-3SM path-P.INAN MOT among crowd-LOC push-HAB-NMLZ arm-GEN right 3SM.GEN
 men-an-yam, tinu-na nuveng yana palung-an-yam – [...]
 one-NMLZ-DAT, arm-GEN left 3SM.GEN other-NMLZ-DAT – [...]

The messenger immediately left for the road: a strong and never tired man; by pushing (out) his right arm once, his left arm another time, he makes a path through the crowd; [...]

5.1.2. Notes on translation

Following the pattern of the previous stages, let us have a look at words first. Potential difficulties were posed by “unermüdlich” (Kafka 1994, 281:12) or “indefatigable” (Kafka 2011), respectively. Instead of making up a new word, I chose to translate this straightforwardly as *pisu tadoy* ‘never tired’. A word I had not expected to be missing from the dictionary was *ikanan* ‘crowd’, which is a nominalization of *ikan* ‘much, many, very’. “Vorstrecken” (Kafka 1994, 281:13) or “thrusting” (Kafka 2011), respectively, made me think

a little, too, and in the end I chose to use *pinka-* ‘to push’ for this purpose. I chose to use the habitative aspect for this verb because this action would go on habitually for a while, until the messenger would have left the crowd behind.

As for grammar, “einmal diesen, einmal den andern Arm vorstreckend” (Kafka 1994, 281:12–13) was slightly tough to deal with and I chose to name the arms by their sides, right and left, and use *menanyam* ‘once’ and *palunganyam* ‘another time’ instead of repeating the word for ‘once’, for stylistic purposes. An interesting grammatical feature in this passage is the use of *manga* ‘MOT’, which is an auxiliary preposition in a way, and which makes otherwise stative prepositions like *luga* ‘among’ active, i.e. have a sense of motion, so *manga luga* as a compound means ‘through’.

5.2. Part II (ed. 2012-02-16, publ. 2012-03-07 as VI)

[...]; findet er Widerstand, zeigt er auf die Brust, wo das Zeichen der Sonne ist; er kommt auch leicht vorwärts, wie kein anderer. (Kafka 1994, 281:14–16)

[...]; every time he meets resistance he points to his breast, which bears the sign of the sun; and he moves forward easily, like no other. (Kafka 2011)

[...] – ang bidisaya arilinya itingley, ang mapaya ninaya hevenya yana sijya telbānley perin – saylingyāng kovaro naynay, ku-ranyāng palung.

5.2.1. Interlinear glossing

[...] – ang bidisa-ya arilinya iting-ley, ang mapa-ya ninaya heven-ya yana

[...] – AF obstruct-3SM someone way-P.INAN, AF point_at-3SM messenger chest-LOC 3SM.GEN

si-ya-ya telbān-ley perin – sayling-yāng kovaro naynay, ku=ranya-ang palung.

REL-LOC-LOC sign-P.INAN sun – progress-3SM.A easy also, like=nobody-A different.

[...]; if someone stood in his way, the messenger pointed at his chest on which the sun-sign was; he also got on easily, like nobody else.

5.2.2. Notes on translation

“To meet resistance” is such a nice idiom, I almost wanted to steal it. Let’s *not* do that! The German text has *finden* ‘to find’ here (Kafka 1994, 281:14) instead of the more current *treffen auf* ‘to meet upon’. After some thinking I decided to use a phrase: *Ang bidisaya arilinya itingley* ‘If someone blocks the way’. This is also a nice parallel to the *merengye bidis* ‘obstructing walls’, which were mentioned earlier: just like the walls are torn down to clear the view and spread the word, the messenger overcomes resistance from individuals in the

crowd to get the Message out to its recipient. A new word is *sayling-* ‘to progress’, which is from *sayling* ‘further’.

As far as morphophonology is concerned, the relative pronoun complex *sijya* ‘in/at/on which.LOC’ is interesting in so far as it is a contraction of **siyaya* ‘REL-LOC-LOC’ that I introduced here: the plural marker *-ye* combined with a case marker that begins with a vowel or *-y*, like e.g. *-ang* ‘AGT’, *-as* ‘PAT’, *-yam* ‘DAT’, already contracts to just *-j-*, as I described in an earlier blog posting.⁵ The decision to do that with *-yaya* as well, but only if both parts are grammatical suffixes, is thus rather consequential. Since this feature does not occur in previous texts, let’s assume it’s an acceptable variant.

Of syntactic interest is the rather literary conditional construction without conjunctions in this passage, which is similar to the equally literary variant of conditional phrases used in the German text, although with a twist: unlike German, which inverts the order of subject and verb in this case (“findet er” instead of “er findet”, cf. Kafka 1994, 281:14), Ayeri does not change the word order, so the fact that it is a conditional clause must be inferred from context.

6. “Nārya ikananang kāryo-ing ...” (ed. 2012-02-16, publ. 2012-03-10 as VII)

Aber die Menge ist so groß; ihre Wohnstätten nehmen kein Ende. (Kafka 1994, 281:16–17)

But the crowds are so vast; their dwellings know no bounds. (Kafka 2011)

Nārya ikananang kāryo-ing – ang tahoyyon midayanye tan litoley.

6.1. Interlinear glossing

Nārya ikanan-ang kāryo=ing –ang taha-oy-yon midayan-ye tan lito-ley.

but crowd-A big=so – AF have-NEG-3PN neighborhood-PL 3PM.GEN border-P.INAN

But the crowd was so large; their neighborhoods had no boundaries.

6.2. Notes on translation

After a long sentence now a very short one, and probably the one that is most typical of Kafka in the whole story by thematizing an unsurmountable task a single person is charged

⁵ Becker, Carsten. “Plurals with *-yam* and *-ya*.” *Benung. The Ayeri Language Resource*. By Carsten Becker. 7 Mar. 2011. Web. 16 Feb 2012.

with, only to find themselves doomed to fail. No new words had to be coined here, and nothing of importance needs to be said about grammar. Except one thing: Ayeri distinguishes masculine, feminine, neuter, and inanimate in its third person pronouns. But how then should I handle groups of indeterminate or mixed gender? So far I've usually followed the French rule: default to masculine. Hence *midayanye tan* 'their neighborhoods' uses the masculine third person plural genitive pronoun. However, I seriously wonder how common defaulting to masculine is in languages that have gender if there also is a neuter/inanimate category.

7. “Ya sahongyāng simil apan ...” (ed. 2012-10-18, publ. 2012-03-14 as VIII)

Öffnete sich freies Feld, wie würde er fliegen und bald wohl hörtest Du das herrliche Schlagen seiner Fäuste an Deiner Tür. (Kafka 1994, 281:17–19)

If open country stretched before him, how he would fly, and indeed you might soon hear the magnificent knocking of his fists on your door. (Kafka 2011)

Ya sahongyāng simil apan, āh, ang nunaya ku-vipin nay ang pətangongva ankyu haruyamanas nanang megayena yana kunangya vana.

7.1. Interlinear glossing

Ya saha-ong-yāng simil apan, āh, ang nuna-ya ku=vipin nay ang

LOCF come-IRR-3SM.A land wide, oh, AF fly-3SM like=bird-P and AF

pə-tang-ong-va ankyu haru-yam-an-as nanang mega-ye-na yana kunang-ya vana.

IMM-hear-IRR-2S truly beat-PTCP-NMLZ-P great fist-PL-GEN 3SM.GEN door-LOC 2S.GEN

If he came to the wide land, oh, he would fly like a bird and you would indeed hear his magnificent beating at your door very soon.

7.2. Notes on translation

No new words had to be coined here, though I should add 'magnificent' as a meaning of *nanang* 'great'. Both the German and English passages have “fly” here (cf. “fliegen” in Kafka 1994, 281:18; Kafka 2011) which for some reason I felt necessary to clarify as a metaphor by turning it into a simile in my translation. Notably, *ku-vipin* 'like a bird' is used here as an adverb, not as a noun phrase like earlier *ku-ranyāng palung* 'like nobody else', which is why there is no case marking here. Furthermore, I wrote *haruyaman* 'beating' instead of *haruan* 'beat(ing)' because I wanted to emphasize the process of beating as an

incomplete action. This is possible here because the word is not topicalized and neither is it marked as a dative, which would also require *haruyamanyam* ‘beat-PTCP-NMLZ-DAT’ to become *haruanyam* ‘beat-NMLZ-DAT’ (the participle marker *-yam* is derived from the dative case ending *-yam*).

8. “Da-yamva nārya ...” (ed. 2012-02-19 to 21, publ. 2012-03-17 to 28 as IX–XII)

Again a rather long sentence, even longer than the one in 5 above. This passage is split into four parts.

8.1. Part I (ed. 2012-02-19, publ. 2012-03-17 as IX)

Aber statt dessen, wie nutzlos müht er sich ab; immer noch zwängt er sich durch die Gemächer des innersten Palastes; niemals wird er sie überwinden; [...]. (Kafka 1994, 281:20–22)

But instead, how uselessly he toils; he is still forcing his way through the chambers of the innermost palace; never will he overcome them; [...]. (Kafka 2011)

Da-yamva nārya, da-penyāng riayo – ya manga pastayāng tarela sangalye mitanena kong-vā – ang sēyraya tadoy adanyās – [...].

8.1.1. Interlinear glossing

Da-yamva nārya, da=pen-yāng riayo – ya manga pasta-yāng tarela sangal-ye
 such=instead_of though, so=fight-3SM.A useless – LOCF PROG squeeze-3SM.A still room-PL
 mitan-ena kong=vā – ang sē-eyra-ya tadoy adanya-as – [...].
 palace-GEN inside=SUPL – AF FUT-overcome-3SM never that_one-P – [...]

Instead of this, though, how uselessly he fought; he was still squeezing through the rooms of the innermost palace; he would never overcome that/those; [...]

8.1.2. Notes on translation

In this passage, I only extended the meanings of some words, so for “abmühen” (Kafka 1994, 281:20), literally ‘to labor off’, I used *pen-* ‘to fight’, since that is also tedious in the long run. I was quite surprised I had a word for ‘useless’ actually that has nothing to do with the word for ‘useful’ that I could also find in the dictionary, *merambay*. I can’t explain how I came up with either of them in retrospective, since I can’t find any related words in the dictionary. Instead of “Gemächer” (Kafka 1994, 281:21), or “chambers” respectively (Kafka 2011), I simply translated *sangalye* ‘rooms’. Another vocabulary-related issue was “des innersten Palastes” (Kafka 1994, 281:21–22), respectively “of the innermost palace” (Kafka

2011), where I simply used the preposition for ‘inside’, *kong*, and added the superlative suffix *-vā* to it.

What is possibly of interest grammatically are the words preceded by the prefix *da-*, that is *da-yamva* ‘instead of that’ and *da-penyāng* ‘so/thus he fights’. This *da-* is related to the demonstrative prefixes *eda-* ‘this’ and *ada-* ‘that’ and together with verbs it assumes the meaning ‘so’ or ‘thus/in this way’, while it means ‘such’ generally. It appears in a compound with the postposition *yamva* ‘instead of’ here because that requires a prepositional object. I could have translated *adaya yamva* ‘that-LOC instead_of’, or *raya yamva* ‘3S.INAN.LOC instead_of’, however I preferred the more concise expression at the beginning of the sentence here.

8.2. Part II (ed. 2012-02-20, publ. 2012-03-21 as X)

[...]; und gelänge ihm dies, nichts wäre gewonnen; die Treppen hinab müßte er sich kämpfen; [...]
(Kafka 1994, 281:22–24)

[...]; and were he to succeed at this, nothing would be gained: he would have to fight his way down the steps; [...]. (Kafka 2011)

[...] – *nay viturongyāng, le gamarongyāng ranya – ang rua kotongya apanjam rivanley ehen – [...]*

8.2.1. Interlinear glossing

[...] – *nay vitur-ong-yāng, le gamar-ong-yāng ranya – ang rua kot-ong-ya*

[...]; and succeed-IRR-3SM, PF manage-IRR-3SM.A nothing – AF must toil-IRR-3S

apand-yam rivan-ley ehen – [...]

descend-PTCP mountain-P.INAN stair – [...]

[...]; *and if he succeeded, he wouldn’t have managed anything; he would have to toil at descending the stair mountain; [...]*

8.2.2. Notes on translation

Today’s bit had me thinking about how to translate “nichts wäre gewonnen” (Kafka 1994, 281:23) idiomatically rather than literally. The English translation with “gained” (Kafka 2011) instead of literal “won” is accurate: the idea behind this is that nothing would be achieved even by overcoming all the previously mentioned obstacles. Hence, I chose to translate this with *gamar-* ‘to manage’, which I stupidly did not give an example sentence

for in the dictionary when I coined the word. Let us assume I intended it to mean ‘to achieve’ rather than ‘to conduct an enterprise’ originally.

Also, in order to translate “müsste er sich kämpfen” (Kafka 1994, 281:24), which I interpreted as toiling rather than literally fighting like in the English translation (cf. Kafka 2011), I brought myself to coin a word for that after all, although I chose to use *pen-* ‘to fight’ in the previous passage.⁶ The word *kot-* ‘to toil’ (with a causative derivation *kotisa-* ‘to torture’?) is derived from the word *kotas* ‘thorn, prick’, a relation that I found not unreasonable.

The passage “ang rua kotongya apanjam” in the Ayeri translation is interesting in that it includes both ways Ayeri handles complement of verbs with verbs. Modal verbs are uninflected when they are not used as full verbs; instead, the content verb receives all inflection (this is the opposite of how German does it, by the way). For other verb-verb combinations, the second verb is marked with the participle/dative ending *-yam* and the noun phrase dependent of that second verb is usually in the patient case. In the above quotation, the content verb *kot-* ‘to toil’ is both modified by the modal *rua* ‘must’ (deviation from head-first order?) and complemented by *apand-* ‘to descend’.

8.3. Part III (ed. 2012-02-20, publ. 2012-03-24 as XI)

[...] und gelänge ihm dies, nichts wäre gewonnen; die Höfe wären zu durchmessen; und nach den Höfen der zweite umschließende Palast; und wieder Treppen und Höfe; und wieder ein Palast; und so weiter durch Jahrtausende; [...] (Kafka 1994, 281:24–282:1)

[...]; and were he to succeed at this, nothing would be gained: he would have to cross the courtyard and, after the courtyard, the second enclosing outer palace, and again stairways and courtyards, and again a palace, and so on through thousands of years; [...]. (Kafka 2011)

[...] – nay viturongyāng, le gamarongyāng ranya – sa rua lugongyāng mandayye – nay pang mandayēa, samanas mitanyena si midaytong – nay ehenyeley nay mandayjas sayling – nay mitanas menikaneng – nay edāre manga luga pericanyēa samang – [...]

8.3.1. Interlinear glossing

[...] – nay vitur-ong-yāng, le gamar-ong-yāng ranya – sa rua luga-ong-yāng

[...] – and succeed-IRR-3SM, PF.INAN manage-IRR-3SM.A nothing – PF must pass_through-IRR-3SM.A

⁶ Cf. page 15.

manday-ye – nay pang manday-ye-ea, sam-an-as mitan-ye-na si miday-tong –
 court-PL – and behind court-PL-LOC, two-NMLZ-P palace-PL-GEN REL surround-3PN.A –
 nay ehen-ye-ley nay manday-jas sayling – nay mitan-as menikaneng – nay
 and stair-PL-P.INAN and court-PL.P further – and palace-P another – and
 edāre manga luga perican-ye-ea samang – [...]
 this_way MOT among year-PL-LOC myriad – [...]

[...]; and if he succeeded, he wouldn't have managed anything; through the courtyards he would have to pass; and beyond the courtyards, two palaces which surround it; and further stairs and courts; and another palace; and thus for myriads of years; [...]

8.3.2. Notes on translation

Today's passage is an admittedly rather large chunk compared to earlier passages, but most of it is just an enumeration, which is not terribly difficult to deal with. No words needed to be coined or extended here.

As far as syntax and grammar are concerned, I could have sworn that it should be *mandayēa epang* 'court-PL-LOC after', with a postposition, instead of (*e*)*pang mandayēa* '(after/behind court-PL-LOC' with a preposition, but even in my jumbled handwritten notes I could not find anything to that effect going as far back as 2007.

A grammatical intricacy that tripped me up was the last words of this passage, “durch Jahrtausende” (Kafka 1994, 282:1), respectively “through thousands of years” (Kafka 2011). For one, Ayeri counts in units of twelve, and the word for the third power of twelve is literally ‘ten-hundred’, which is rather uncatchy here. Since the next larger unit is the fourth power, or a myriad, I went for that term because ‘hundred’ felt too weak. In addition to this decision, Ayeri usually does not inflect nouns modified by numbers or measure adverbs for plural. Without plural inflection in “pericanyēa samang”, however, the noun phrase would simply mean “a myriad of years”, but not “myriads of years”, as is intended here. In order to take plural inflection, the numeral could be nominalized and then pluralized, so that you would get *samanganyeley pericanyena* ‘myriad-PL-P.INAN year-PL-GEN’, which is quite a mouthful and more similar to the construction used for ordinal numbers. Thus, I decided to keep the original order with the number as a modifier, but with the modified noun exceptionally pluralized.

8.4. Part IV (ed. 2012-02-21, publ. 2012-03-28 as XII)

[...]; und stürzte er endlich aus dem äußersten Tor – aber niemals, niemals kann es geschehen – liegt erst die Residenzstadt vor ihm, die Mitte der Welt, hochgeschüttet voll ihres Bodensatzes. (Kafka 1994, 282:1–4)

[...]; and if he were to burst out at last through the outermost gate – but it can never, never happen – before him still lies the royal capital, the middle of the world, piled high in its sediment. (Kafka 2011)

[...] – nay ang pragongya panca manga agonan kunangyēa pang-vā ikan – nārya amangoyreng tadoy – ang yomongyo tarela ayromitan marin yāy, Terpeng Mavayena, sang nujos deng idaseri avan sitang-yona.

8.4.1. Interlinear glossing

[...] –nay ang prag-ong-ya panca manga agonan kunang-ye-ea pang-vā ikan – nārya

[...] – and AF tumble-IRR-3SM finally MOT out_of door-PL-LOC last very – but

amang-oy-reng tadoy – ang yoma-ong-yo tarela ayron-mitan marin yāy,

happen-NEG-3S.INAN.A never – AF exist-IRR-3SN still city_residence in_front_of 3SM.LOC,

Terpeng Mavay-ena, si-ang nuj-yos deng idas-eri avan sitang=yona.

Middle World-GEN, REL-A pour-3SN.P full dirt-INS bottom self=3SN.GEN.

[...]; and if he would finally tumble out of the very last gate – but this will never ever happen – still the residence city, the Center of the World, which has been poured full with its own sediment, would still be in front of him.

8.4.2. Notes on translation

Words that had to be made here were *prag*- ‘to tumble’ – which is coincidence and not related to the German name of Kafka’s home town, Prague, since I wanted a word that sounded somehow tumbly to me – and *idas* ‘dirt’, which I derived from the adjective of the same shape and meaning. *Kunangye* is also taken to mean ‘gate’ here, not just plainly ‘doors’, which is the definition of *kunang* that is in the dictionary, to wit, the entry to a house. I’ve translated “die Mitte der Welt” (Kafka 282:3–4) as a title here, “Terpeng Mavayena”, which is used attributively, so that *terpeng* ‘middle’ is not inflected for case. As for grammar and style, I used a double negation for emphasis in “amangoyreng tadoy”, which I have never done before. However, I think it fits quite well here.

9. “Ang lugaya ranya ...” (ed. 2012-02-21, publ. 2012-03-31 as XIII)

Niemand dringt hier durch und gar mit der Botschaft eines Toten. – (Kafka 1994, 282:4–6)

Nobody reaches through here, least of all with a message from one who is dead. – (Kafka 2011)

Ang ming lugaya ranya – ang da-miraya nilarya-vā kayvo budangya nyānena tenya. –

9.1. Interlinear glossing

Ang ming luga-ya ranya – ang da=mira-ya nilarya=vā kayvo budang-ya

AF can penetrate-3SM nobody – AF so=do-3SM improbable=SUP with message-LOC

nyān-ena tenya. –

person-GEN dead. –

Nobody can penetrate here; he does so least probably with the message of a dead person.

9.2. Notes on translation

This sentence may likely have caused me the most effort to translate in the whole series up to now. And not because I did not realize I already had a word that means ‘to penetrate’ at first, but because of the little word “gar” (Kafka 1994, 282:5), which may be translated into English as “even” in this context. The sense of the sentence is pretty clear, I think: having a message from a deceased person with you makes it even less likely you will find a way through. And after I tried hard to figure out a way to express “least” by means of the comparison verb *varya-* ‘to be the least’, only to find that it is unsuitable here because there is no comparison between A and B regarding a property C, I decided to go for the less complicated construction I used above, which uses the newly coined *nilarya* ‘improbable’ as an adverb, from *nilay* ‘probably’ (possibly derived sometime from *nil-* ‘to think’, but I forget), with our favorite superlative suffix *-vā* stacked on because adverbs can only be compared that way. I am not entirely happy with “da-miraya”, as for some reason I perceive this literal “do so” as terribly English-like, but I wanted to avoid repetition, and having no verb there at all felt awkward as well.

One grammatical feature of note here is that Ayeri distinguishes two meanings of “with” by means of different constructions. If the “with” entails the use of a tool, means, or the help of something or someone to accomplish the action, the constituent noun phrase

will be in the instrumental case. If the “with” refers to accompaniment, however, like in “mit der Botschaft eines Toten” (Kafka 1994, 282:5–6; “with the message from one who is dead”, Kafka 2011) above, the preposition *kayvo* is used and the dependent noun phrase will be in the locative case, thus “*kayvo budangya*”.

10. “Ang nedrasava nārya ...” (ed. 2012-02-21, publ. 2012-04-04 as XIV)

Du aber sitzt an Deinem Fenster und erträumst sie dir, wenn der Abend kommt. (Kafka 1994, 282:6–7)

You, however, sit at your window and dream of the message when evening comes. (Kafka 2011)

Ang nedrasava nārya silvenoya vana nay ri sitang-tivāng budangas mangan tadayya si apanjo perinang.

10.1. Interlinear glossing

Ang nedra-asa-va nārya silveno-yavana nay ri sitang=ti-vāng budang-as mangan

AF sit-HAB-2S though window-LOC 2S.GEN and INSF self=create-2S.A message-P dream

taday-ya si apand-yo perin-ang.

time-LOC REL descend-3SN sun-A.

You, though, sit at your window as usual and create the message yourself with a dream when the sun descends.

10.2. Notes on translation

One interesting thing I can think of to comment on for this passage is the habit of both *nārya* ‘but’ and *naynay* ‘also’ to differ slightly in meaning depending on their position in the phrase. If *nārya* precedes the verb it works as a concessive adverb with a contrastive meaning – essentially, ‘but’. If it follows the verb like in case of today’s sentence, however, it has a stronger antithetical meaning: ‘however, though’. Similarly, *naynay*, literally ‘and-and’, preverbally has a meaning of ‘and also’, while postpositioned means something more like ‘furthermore, in addition to that’.

Note also that Ayeri does not like to introduce relative clauses with question pronouns like English does, which is exemplified here by how “wenn der Abend kommt” (Kafka 1994, 282:7; “when evening comes”, Kafka 2011) is relativized as a noun-phrase construction with the regular relative pronoun *si* connecting the attributive main clause: *tadayya si <CLAUSE>* ‘time-LOC REL <CLAUSE>’.

A notable difference between the German and English translation in this sentence is that in German, the message is created by the recipient within a dream by and for themselves since the messenger won't come (cf. Kafka 1994, 282:6–7), while in English, the message is merely dreamed about, as though it was general knowledge (Kafka 2011). Other than that: We're through!

11. Conclusion

So what was gained from this experiment? For one, so far I've only ever translated texts into Ayeri without actually documenting choices and problems I've come across. Only the result counted. That way, however, especially questions about syntax, style, and pragmatic aspects of the language were left mostly undocumented. Forcing myself to document exactly those aspects of translating left you, as the reader, as well as myself with an idea of what was going on in my head at the time of editing. And I think this is a good thing, even though translating this not too long text took ten times longer than usual. And fourteen times longer to publish, which was torture for impatient little me. I am still to finish writing the Grammar and don't get anything done, sadly, but I hope that the thoughts and ideas written down in the individual parts of these series will add to the undertaking.

And by the way, you can also listen to a recording of the text at <http://soundcloud.com/chrpistorius/a-message-from-the-emperor> or at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xCt5Pnac4_U.

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13. Post-publishing corrections

Sloppy proofreading is the bane of every editor. Unfortunately, some mistakes only show with time, hence this addendum.

2012-04-12

Originally published to *Benung. The Ayeri Language Resource*.

2012-05-12

In 6. “*Nārya ikananang kāryo-ing ...*” (ed. 2012-02-16, publ. 2012-03-10 as VII), page 13, it must be *tahoyyon* ‘have-NEG-3PN’ rather than *tahayon*, which would be the unnegated verb, in order to mean “they haven’t.”

2012-08-08

Added rendering of the text in *Tahano Hikamu*.