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Found in Translation: The Standard in Jhumpa Lahiri's “Interpreter of Maladies”

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Though English is rarely the mother tongue of Indian writers, it is, as well as Hindi and the respective regional languages of each region, one of the official languages and is taught in the schools. English in India today, according to *The Oxford Concise Dictionary* has the following status:

It is the state language in Manipur; Meghalayan Nagaland, and Tripura, and the official language of eight union territories the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Arunachal Pradesh; Chadigarth; Dadar and Nagar Haveli; Delhi; Lakshadwip; Mizoram; and Pondicherry. It is used in the legal system, pan-Indian and regional administration, the armed forces, national business, and the media. English and Hindi are the *link languages* in a complex multilingual society, in which English is both a *library language* and a *literary language*. The National Academy of Letters/Sahitya Akademi recognizes Indian English literature as a national literature.

In this paper, I will examine how Jhumpa Lahiri's use of two spoken Standard Englishes — American Standard English, and Indian Standard English is at the heart of the narrative tension in her story. These two Englishes work as a complimentary motif against the backdrop of the Standard written English of the main third person narrative voice. We will examine the characteristics of the two spoken Standard Englishes, paying particular attention to Standard Indian English. We will then examine what Lecercle has termed the metatext of culture in regards to this story to attempt to elucidate how “Interpreter of Maladies”, and perhaps other

Postcolonial or diasporic literature work in many ways like works found in translation.¹

Standard English and India

As Tony Bex points out: "Since the seventeenth century the concept of Standard English has referred to a 'common core of language', an ideal or value to be met, the 'true' meanings behind words, the language of the literati, and those items of vocabulary listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. More often than not, however, linguists and educationalists attempt to unite all these senses, giving rise to paradoxical and confusing theses." (Bex & Watts 1999, 86) We will take as a starting point Trudgill's definition of what Standard English is not:

- Standard English is not a language since it is only one variety of English among many. It is the variety associated with the Education system in all the English speaking countries in the world and is therefore the variety spoken by those referred to as 'educated people'; and it is the variety taught to non-native learners.
- Standard English is not an accent. Standard English speakers can be found in all English-speaking countries, and it goes without saying that they speak this variety with different non-RP accents depending on whether they come from Scotland or the USA or New Zealand or wherever.
- Standard English is not a style. [...] We characterize styles (see Trudgill 1992) as varieties of the English language, viewed from the point of view of formality. Styles are varieties of language which can be arranged on a continuum ranging from very formal to very informal.
- Standard English is not a register. [...] In English, this is almost exclusively a matter of lexis, although some registers, notably the registers of law are known to have special syntactic characteristics. (Trudgill 2002, 118-123)

¹ Though technically speaking Lahiri is an American author, I have taken the liberty to include "Interpreter of Maladies" in the category of Postcolonial literature because the dilemma developed in this story and Lahiri's work in general is central to the postcolonial debate on identity. Her characters are, to borrow and extend from Rushdie's contention that 'British Indians are 'translated' men. "Rushdie] opposed the commonly held view that something gets lost in translation believing that something can also be gained. This gain is mirrored in the pollinated and enriched language and culture that results from the act of translation – not just of bearing across but of a fertile coming together". (Prasad 1999, 41)

He concludes that spoken Standard English is a dialect - a sub-variety of English.

Sub-varieties of language are usually referred to as *dialects* and languages are often described as consisting of dialects. As a named dialect, like Cockney or Scouse, or Yorkshire, it is entirely normal that we should spell the name of the Standard English dialect with capital letters. (Trudgill 2002, 123)

In the specific case of India, of the 1635 languages inventoried in India in 2001, Hindi and English are the two official languages. According to that census, English is the primary language of only 230 000 Indians, but it is the second language of more than 86 million people and the third language of 39 million (*The Times of India*, March 14 2010 timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Indiaspeak-English...). This implies that in Indian fiction, English-speaking Indian characters are speaking in translation.

Postcolonial Literature and Translation:

“Interpreter of Maladies” is the title story of a collection by the same name by Jhumpa Lahiri. Lahiri was born in London to Bengali parents, but numerous trips to Calcutta as a child left an indelible print on her:

India is the place where my parents are from, a place I visited frequently for extended time and formed relationships with people and with my relatives and felt a tie over time even though it was a sort of parenthesis in my life to be there” (Charters [2003] 2011, 773)

In her “Interpreter of Maladies”, an American Bengali family, Mr. and Mrs. Das and their three children are being toured around Hindu temples by their guide, Mr. Kapasi, who elsewhere uses his linguistic dexterity for his main job which is to translate/interpret the maladies of patients to a doctor who does not understand Gujarati — one of the four Indian languages Mr. Kapasi speaks. Portrayed as a totally self-centred woman, Mrs. Das begins to take interest in Mr. Kapasi when she finds out about his job. The interest she shows in him triggers off a totally unrealistic fantasy in Mr. Kapasi, who suddenly imagines he has found a kindred spirit, with whom he will carry on a long correspondence leading to an intimate relationship.

Finding herself alone with him, Mrs. Das confides in him that Bobby, their second child, is not her husband's. He was conceived during the brief visit of a Punjabi friend of her husband's, who was in town for a job interview. She asks Mr. Kapasi to interpret her pain the way he does for the patients in the doctor's office. Her confession bursts Mr. Kapasi's fantasy bubble. When he hesitatingly but correctly interprets it as guilt – she storms off.

Mrs. Das' taking offence at what she first believes to be an erroneous translation of her woes, but which in fact hits the nail on the head can be seen as a metaphor on translation and reception. As Bassnett and Trivendi underline:

Translation is not an innocent transparent activity but is highly charged with significance at every stage; it rarely, if ever, involves a relationship of equality between texts, authors or systems. [...]

(Bassnett & Trivendi 1999, 2)

Lahiri is translating culture, but not only Indian culture, she is also translating the culture of the Bengali/American family. Of her stories, Lahiri has said "the characters I am drawn to all face some barrier of communication. I like to write about people who think in a way they can't fully express." (Charters 2011, 773) The different Standard Englishes employed add a supplementary hurdle, and thus some of the same challenges in regards to literary analysis that we are confronted with in a translated text are also found in a postcolonial text.

First of all we must settle on a definition of Standard English. Here is what Trudgill has to say about it:

Standard English is that variety of English which is usually used in print, and which is normally taught in schools and to non-native speakers learning the language. It is also the variety which is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations. The difference between standard and non-standard, it should be noted, has nothing in principle to do with differences between formal and colloquial language, or with concepts such as 'bad language'. Standard English has colloquial as well as formal variants, and Standard English speakers swear as much as others. (Trudgill 1995, 6–7)

However, within this very broad definition of Standard English we need to work with another subcategory which is Indian English. Pingali details the different Englishes in India the following way.

Since it is a second language, it is believed that Indians can never reach the same competence as a native speaker. These terms imply overtly and

implicitly that the Indian variety of English is substandard. However Kachru (1965, 1982) does make a distinction between the different types of IE that are used in India, ranging them on a cline of bilingualism that consists of three measuring points. The lowest ranked are the uneducated speakers who are at the zero point or the basilect – these include such people as guides, vendors and domestic staff. The central point or the mesolect consists of speakers who are less than well educated and generally are clerks, notaries etc. The ambilingual point or the acrolect is that of educated speakers such as civil servants, educationists, creative writers etc. The samples of the second variety are labelled Babu English. Indian English as used by the third category of people is even equated with British standard English. [...] The division among the varieties is not absolute and there is considerable overlap in this cline. That there is a standard variety of Indian English is accepted. This standard has been called educated Indian English and the circularity in giving this name has been acknowledged by both Parasher (1991) and Hosali (1999). (Pingali 2009; 14)

There is thus a Standard Indian English used by educated Indians.

Indian English or the English of India

“But we do not face a language barrier. What need is there for an interpreter?” Mr. Kapasi remarks to Mrs. Das when she asks him to interpret her pain. But though the words they both speak are in English, it is not the same language. Between the Indian English of Mr. Kapasi, through whose eyes most of the story is seen, the American colloquial English of the Das, the diverse types of English of the Lahiri’s international readers, and the two narrative voices, various language and cultural codes are being deployed. And it is this multitude of codes Lahiri deftly wields in her telling that is one of the chief sources of tension in the story. Mr. Kapasi’s English will be placed in the category of Standard Indian English. It is formal and perceived by the reader as stilted. It is the English of an educated man, but of a self-educated man:

He was a self-educated man. In a series of notebooks, in the evenings before his parents settled his marriage, he had listed the common etymologies of words, and at one point in his life he was confident that he could converse, if given the opportunity in English, French, Russian, Portuguese, and Italian, not to mention Hindi, Bengali, Orissi, and Gujarati”. (Lahiri, 781)

The only western language he now speaks is English. But in order to fathom the effect of his English on our understanding of the story, we

must first discern what characterizes the English used in India. Pingali sums up the use of Indian English in the following way:

The role of English is therefore seen as that of a high language, used for certain specified purposes. Dasgupta (1993) argues that a diglossic situation prevails in India, where one variety of language ranks higher relative to the others, with English occupying the high position. In fact, he calls it 'the Auntie tongue' and emphasises that it is an 'other' language. At the level of the family and friends, English has restricted use. The topic being discussed is often a crucial determining factor for the language. Politics, education, medicine are likely to be discussed in English. Relationships and emotions are likely to be discussed in one's own language, especially by those who consider English to be a second language. Yet, personal letters are also written in English. Overall, it is quite clear that English is not used in domains that are more emotional and non-intellectual. English is the language of the intellect and formality. (Pingali, 6)

It is interesting to note that Mr. Kapasi's emotions, are delivered to the reader through the intermingling of two narrative voices: the third person focalised thoughts of the tour guide as he ponders the foreignness of the Das family, and the more objective external focalisation of another authorial narrative voice. There is something of a stilted tone in Mr. Kapasi's exchanges in English with Mr. and Mrs. Das. This stilted tone contrasts sharply with the fluidity of the Standard written English of the main extra diegetic narrative voice, which surreptitiously glides into the innermost thoughts of Mr. Kapasi.

Same words different messages

The "high language" of Standard Indian English is thus Mr. Kapasi's vehicle of communication. But it comes across as stilted and foreign to the western reader. However it is not only Mr. Kapasi who comes across as foreign. The rather unflattering portrait of the Das couple in this story (Mrs. Das' complete disregard for her children, the couple bickering about whose turn it is to accompany the young child to the toilets, Mr. Das' incapacity to act when the monkeys are attacking Bobby) is enhanced by their use of English. Let us take as an example the following dialogue:

Mrs. Das reached the car. "How long's the trip?" she asked, shutting the door.
"About two and a half hours," Mr. Kapasi replied.

At this Mrs. Das gave an impatient sigh as though she had been traveling her whole life without a pause. She fanned herself with a folded Bombay film magazine written in English.

"I thought the Sun Temple is only eighteen miles north of Puri," Mr. Das said tapping on the tour book.

"The roads to Konorak are poor. Actually it is a distance of fifty-two miles," Mr. Kapasi explained (Lahiri, 778)

Though both Mr. and Mrs. Das are college educated, we note that Mrs. Das is reading a film magazine. The indirect speech syntax of Mr. Das is incorrect according to the prescriptive grammar of Standard English. As the introductory verb in the main clause is in the preterit, the verb in the subordinate should also be in the preterit, and not in the present. The interesting point here is, according to Pingali, this non respect of the concordance of grammatical tense is a characteristic of Standard Indian English: "When a sentence is complex, the tense across the clauses often does not match as it does in native varieties of English." (Pingali, 44)

The contracted forms, which are standard for conversational English, are systematically used by the Das couple, whereas Mr. Kapasi systematically uses the full forms. This also concords to what we find in Pingali — in all the examples of spoken forms given in her book, there are no contracted forms. It is perhaps for this reason that Mr. Kapasi's English seems wooden. He is speaking like a foreign text. His syntax and lexical terms are more complex than necessary. "Actually it's fifty-two miles from here', His use of the redundant 'It is a distance of'... reads like the poor translation of a syntax of a foreign language. This too concords with Pingali. In chosen samples of Indian English, she explains that one way Indian authors have of Indianizing English is to complexify the syntax. (Pingali, 133, 134).

The fact that the information in the guidebook does not correspond to the reality is another tongue-in-cheek reference to the fact that the practical information in guide books can never quite capture the immensity and complexity of India.

When Bobby asks why the driver is sitting on the wrong side, Mr. Kapasi responds:

"Oh yes, I am well aware. [...] I see it on *Dallas*, the steering wheels are on the left-hand side."

Here again, there are no contracted forms in Mr. Kapasi's speech and the predicative adjective "aware" is normally used as a prepositional adjective or followed by a nominalization introduced by "that". All the examples proposed by The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*

stipulate the above or alternatively to propose "aware" being pre-modified by an adverb.

The reference to *Dallas*, a programme no longer available at the time in the US, is Mr. Kapasi's reference for America. If Mr. and Mrs. Das are portrayed as nearly a caricature of the American tourist, the fact that the only cultural reference that Mr. Kapasi can refer to is the defunct TV series is yet another indication that his cultural references are not developed or current enough to be able to fully grasp everything the Das family says or does.

From the colloquial Standard English of the Das couple, which Mr. Kapasi does not fully understand, to the stilted Standard Indian English of M. Kapasi, Lahiri's short story illustrates the difficult task of translating English into English.

"Romantic", "Straw in the throat" and the Metatext of Culture

One of the main challenges in translation studies is what to do with the cultural question. Jean-Jacques Lecercle's term "the remainder" (Lecercle, 1990) is taken up by Venuti for whom this component should be an intrinsic part of any good translation. The remainder, according to Lecercle is that dimension of language that is there beneath the surface and resists the prescriptive rules of grammar. It is the factor in language that resists the confines of rules; it is the "other" of *Langue*. (Lecercle, 141) Venuti reminds translators that the intrinsic foreignness of the text must remain in the final translation so that readers be made constantly aware that they are reading a translation. (Venuti 1999, 67) In "Interpreter of Maladies", this intrinsic foreignness is maintained throughout the story thanks to Lahiri's juggling with the different types of English. How words both possess and not possess their ordinary meanings is a dominant trait of the story. The metatext of culture Tymoczko explains is:

the range of cultural factors that a writer must address when writing to a receiving audience composed partially or primarily of people from another culture. The culture or tradition of a post-colonial writer acts as a metatext which is rewritten — explicitly and implicitly, as both background and foreground in the act of literary creation. (Tymoczko, 20-21).

In an age of Internet, the notion of unfamiliar cultural information may appear obsolete. But what, in fact, do we 'know' about India — that poverty and misery run rampant, that there are thousands of gods, as

many languages, and cows are considered sacred? Our knowledge of India, if it is summed up so scantily, is as caricatured as Mr. Kapasi's notion of the U.S. based on what he has seen on the defunct TV series *Dallas*. It is in Lahiri's capturing of the metatext of culture itself that she invites the reader to nuance their oversimplified vision of India. In fact the cultural information mentioned above is scattered throughout her text, but with an interesting twist in that it is not only Mr. Kapasi and India that emerge as foreign, but also the Das, not to mention the reader. Just as the Englishes seem the same but are not, Mr. and Mrs. Das look Indian but are not. They are as foreign to India as India is to them.

When Mr. Kapasi explains his regular job to Mr. and Mrs. Das, as being an interpreter for a doctor who doesn't understand Gujarati, Mrs. Das' reaction is strange. She responds by saying that his job is "so romantic." (Lahiri, 776) To the more than justified question from her husband, "What's so romantic about it?" she answers, "I don't know. Something." Readers cannot help but ask themselves if she herself understands the word. Why does Lahiri put a word that makes no sense in the mouth of her protagonist? Mrs. Das continues:

"Tell us more about your job, Mr. Kapasi."

"What would you like to know, madame?"

"I don't know," she shrugged, munching on some puffed rice and licking the mustard oil from the corners of her mouth. "**Tell us a typical situation.**" She settled back in her seat, her head tilted in a patch of sun, and closed her eyes. "I want to picture what happens."

"Very well. The other day a man came in with a pain in his throat."

"Did he smoke cigarettes?"

"No. It was very curious. He complained that he felt as if there were long pieces of straw in his throat. When I told the doctor he was able to prescribe the proper medication."

"That's so neat."

"Yes", Mr. Kapasi agreed after some hesitation.

"So these patients are totally dependent on you," Mrs. Das said. She spoke slowly, as if she were thinking aloud. "In a way more dependent on you than the doctor." (778)

Mr. Kapasi uses the formal "madame", and once again there is a grammatical mistake in Standard English, but correct in Indian English: "Tell us a typical situation." Here we have the verb "tell" incorrectly used

transitively,² but it is Mrs. Das who makes the mistake and not Mr. Kapasi. Mr. Kapasi hesitates when Mrs. Das uses the term "so neat". What Mrs. Das' erroneous use of the word "romantic" does accomplish is the setting off of a romantic fantasy where Mr. Kapasi imagines a continuing epistolary relationship with the woman. Mr. Kapasi becomes exotic in his own eyes, when seen through the eyes of Mrs. Das. As for Mrs. Das, her fantasy is only poetic. And when Mr. Kapasi cannot find a poetic metaphor for her pain, branding it out loud as "guilt" and to himself as a "common, trivial little secret", though Mrs. Das is furious, her rushing off in anger suggests that Mr. Kapasi's diagnosis has struck a chord.

Along with these the two versions of Standard English, which illustrate the cultural load which comes with any language in order for it to be understood, Lahiri adds another Standard English which corresponds to the standardized correct written English learned in school. This is the English of the predominant narrative voice. It is through this narrative voice that Lahiri portrays what Tymoczko refers to as the translational dimension of postcolonial writing:

[...] The primary difference is that, unlike translation, post-colonial writers are not transposing a text. As background to their literary works, they are transposing a culture – to be understood as a language, a cognitive system, a literature (comprised of a system of texts, genres, tale types and so on), a material culture, a social system and legal framework, a history and so forth. [...] A translator by contrast, has seemingly a much more limited domain, only a single text to transpose. (Tymoczko 1999, 19)

Culture exposed as a language and the inherent conflict therein is evident from the first paragraph.

At the tea stall Mr. and Mrs. Das bickered about who should take Tina to the toilet. Eventually Mrs. Das relented when Mr. Das pointed out that he had given the girl her bath the night before. In the rearview mirror Mr. Kapasi watched as Mrs. Das emerged slowly from his bulky Ambassador, dragging her shaved largely bare legs across the back seat. She did not hold the little girl's hand as they walked to the rest room. (Lahiri, 774)

From the bickering of the parents and the multitude of negative terms — verbs: *bicker*, *relented*, *dragging*, *did not hold the little girl's*

² The verb "tell" is transitive in expressions like "tell the truth", "tell a story. But other than these set expressions "tell" takes the preposition "about", or "of". Or it is bi-transitive (i.e. She told them the truth).

hand; nouns: *toilet, rearview mirror, back seat*, to Mr. Kapasi's alert observation of Mrs. Das' *shaved largely bare legs* the reader is given indicators of two distinct cognitive systems, the decoding of which or rather, the failure to do so, are vital to the development of the story. One paragraph further down mentions the abortive first greeting; the traditional *namaste* Indian greeting, Mr. Kapasi pressing his palms together in greeting, and Mr. Das squeezing hands like an American, so Mr. Kapasi "felt it in his elbow". All these point to details relating to the cultural metatext that Lahiri weaves into her story in order to intimate that the "standard" in regards to cultural guidelines is the starting point for communication even more so than the language.

The tea stall, the names Kapasi and Das, and the anachronism in the names "Tina" and "Bobby" — obviously not Indian — all surreptitiously introduce the cultural metatext from the very first lines. For Mr. Kapasi, the fact that a father might be called upon to take his daughter to the toilet let alone give her a bath are surely causes for surprise, or again the shaved, largely bare legs of Mrs. Das as they slip into the car. All this indicates culturally loaded notions that invite interpretation. Bare legs on hot summer days are par for the course in the Western English world. But here there is an added sexual connotation which is obvious, to the reader, but not to Mrs. Das. Had those legs been seen through the eyes of a Westerner, they would have only been seen as shapely. The mention of "shaved" and largely "bare", introduces a dimension of degree that indicates Mrs. Das' legs are being judged according to Indian standards, where legs are concealed.

But the interesting point here is Lahiri's portrait of Mr. and Mrs. Das. Oblivious of and insensitive to the cultural codes of the country of their parents, they are perceived as utterly out of place. Just like the different Englishes that can be understood on the surface but are resilient to everything they imply, Mr. and Mrs. Das are perceived as Indians only on the surface. We note the only dimension conserved from their heritage, turns out to be the fact that their marriage was probably arranged as well — not as systematically as Mr. Kapasi's — but arranged just the same. Mr. and Mrs. Das are almost caricatures of the American tourists and when the caricatured portrait of India that I mentioned above is introduced into the text, it is through the insensitive eyes of a blasé Mr. Das who wants to get a photo of a "guy" over on the side of the road :

"Hey, do you mind stopping the car. I just want to get a shot of this guy."
Mr. Kapasi pulled over to the side of the road as Mr. Das took a picture of a barefoot man, his head wrapped in a dirty turban, seated on top of a cart

of grain sacks pulled by a pair of bullocks. Both the man and the bullocks were emaciated." (Lahiri, 779).

The "guy" in question in a sadhu—a holy man who has surrendered his life to aestheticism and meditation so as to escape the cycle of rebirth and to be dissolved into the divine. And this brings us to yet another element of translation in the text and that is the meaning of the names Lahiri has given to her characters.

According to the Hindi-English dictionary "das" means « surrender to God », and Raj means "rule". and Kapasi means "swindler" or "cheat" The reader, of course, is not required to translate foreign names into English to understand the story. But since we are dealing with how translation issues are vital to the pleasure we find in the text, when the names are translated, we cannot help but detect a little tongue-in-cheek irony on the part of Lahiri. Raj (Mr. Das) seems to *rule* nothing in his family. He cannot even protect Bobby from the monkeys because of his cowardly fear. Mr. and Mrs. Das, have not *surrendered* themselves to God (or the gods), but Mrs. Das pain is portrayed as stemming not only from her guilt-provoking affair, but of having had to surrender to diasporic codes. Like many of Lahiri's characters she is not portrayed as moving freely between two cultures giving her greater depth and breadth, but on the contrary, bogged down by both. She thus emerges as shallow and superficial. Her husband has been *cheated* on by his wife and best friend and *swindled* of his fatherhood. Mrs. Das herself feels *swindled* by Mr. Kapasi's failure to apply an attractive metaphor on her suffering. In short she feels swindled by his interpretation. But cheated though she might initially feel, there seems to be no doubt that Mr. Kapasi's interpretation does ring a bell for Mrs. Das. (not clear).

The Challenge of Translation

Mrs. Das has not been swindled. Mr. Kapasi has hit the nail on the head. And though she storms off in a huff, an important truth has been made known to her. Mr. Kapasi is not depicted in any way as a swindling tour guide. Though tour guides are, according to Pingali traditionally on the lowest rung of the English linguistic ladder, Mr. Kapasi has broken free from that stereotype through his own perseverance and openness to language. This openness to language is also what is asked of the reader. In a short story, where every word counts, we cannot help but be interested in the description of the temple given to us twice — the description in the

guidebook that Mr. Das is reading, and the description given by the extradiegetic narrative voice:

Mr. Das read [...]

‘Each wheel is divided into eight thick and thin spokes, dividing the day into eight equal parts. The rims are carved with designs of birds and animals, whereas the medallions in the spokes are carved with women in luxurious positions.’

What he referred to were the countless friezes of entwined naked bodies making love in various positions, women clinging to the necks of men, their knees wrapped eternally around their lovers’ thighs. (Lahiri: 782)

The narrative voice, in translating the erotic references in more explicit terms, is translating them for the reader, who in turn will have to try and make sense of a culture where a husband never sees his wife naked, but where the Kama Sutra decorates the places of worship.

Pingali explains the very reserved relationships Indian couples entertain amongst each other, the wife’s never referring to her husband by name, and where even the pronoun “you” is considered too direct. (Pingali, 86-88)

The reader will have to make sense of a culture where an English grammar school teacher earns less than a doctor’s assistant and where the death of a child will be buried in a syntax that includes its mention in a long enumeration of other inconveniences.

He had taken the job as an interpreter after his first son, at the age of seven, contracted typhoid—that was how he had first made his acquaintance with the doctor. At the time Mr. Kapasi had been teaching English in a grammar school and he bartered his skills as an interpreter to pay the increasingly exorbitant medical bills. In the end the boy died one evening in his mother’s arms; his limbs burning with typhoid, but then there was the funeral to pay for, and the other children who were born soon enough, and the newer, bigger house, and the good schools and the tutors, and the fine shoes, and the television, and the countless other ways he tried to console his wife and to keep her from crying in her sleep, so when the doctor offered to pay him twice as much as he earned at the grammar school, he accepted. (Lahiri: 786)

The tragic loss of the Kapasis’ child is simply included in an enumeration of material and familial problems and thus somewhat loses its hierarchy. Compare this to the way the narrative voice divulges Mrs. Das’ dark secret. There is first a long passage in direct speech during which Mrs. Das munches away at puffed rice and tells Mr. Kapasi her story:

“My entire life I saw him every weekend, either at our house or theirs. We were sent upstairs to play together while our parents joked about marriage.

Imagine! They never caught us at anything, though in a way I think it was all more or less a set up. The things we did those Friday and Saturday nights, while our parents sat downstairs drinking tea... I could tell you stories, Mr. Kapasi." (Lahiri: 785)

The cultural and social code of America encourages the divulging of private matters and thus enables Mrs. Das' to divulge intimate details of her life to a complete stranger. The passage continues:

After marrying so young she was overwhelmed by it all, having a child so quickly, and nursing, and warming up bottles of milk and testing their temperature against her wrist while Raj was at work, dressed in sweaters, and corduroy pants, teaching his students about rocks and dinosaurs. Raj never looked cross or harried, or plump as she had become after the first baby. (Lahiri, 785)

This passage, where the voice of Mrs. Das and the narrator mingle in a sort of indirect speech, conveys the humdrum of any young housewife overwhelmed with the change a new baby brings. As with the evocation of Mr. Kapasi's hardships, the structure used is polysyndeton to enumerate her problems, but the passage is shorter, and the narrative voice recounting the events does it in chronological order tends to accentuate the banality of the events. And unlike the evocation of Mr. Kapasi's tragedy this lament does not incite more than a possible commiseration for Mrs. Das on the part of the reader. The cold clinical account of the sexual encounter between Mrs. Das and her husband's old friend sends a chill up the spine:

Bobby was conceived in the afternoon, on a sofa littered with rubber teething toys, after the friend learned that London pharmaceutical company had hired him, while Ronny cried to be freed from his playpen. She made no protest when the friend touched the small of her back as she was about to make a pot of coffee, then pulled her against his crisp, navy suit. He made love to her swiftly, in silence, with an expertise she had never known without the meaningful expressions and smiles Raj always insisted on afterward. (Lahiri 785)

The passage serves as a cohesive link to Mr. Kapasi's musings at the beginning of the story: "*Mr. Kapasi noticed that this child was paler than the other two children*", (Lahiri 783), and again it is the main narrative voice speaking and not the voice of Mrs. Das' colloquial American. We cannot help but be struck by these shifts in cultural viewpoint which enable Lahiri to confront two sets of standards, the Western diasporic one echoed through Mrs. Das, the Asian one echoed through Mr. Kapasi, and the relay between the two communicated through the main narrative

voice. As Sherry Simon has pointed out: “Every culture speaks a language traversed by two kinds of codes: the complicit idioms of the vernacular and the vehicular codes of international communication.” (Simon 1999, 58) But every culture speaks a language traversed by standard social codes specific to their culture.

The achievement of “Interpreter of Maladies” is Lahiri’s orchestration of these different social code standards, as well as the different Standard Englishes to create the narrative tension in her story. To do so she also had to take into consideration the cultural standards and background of her reader for whom the cultural codes of India and that of the diaspora might very well be foreign. Her text becomes the relay between these various standards and it is thus that Lahiri has herself become an interpreter herself of sorts. “Interpreter of Maladies” is indeed a work on translation where the concept of the “remainder” is fully integrated. The success of the short story comes from Lahiri’s capacity to work the “remainder” into her text, weaving in, as Venuti has explained, the multiplicity of meanings susceptible to be revealed but also to obstruct the transparency of language. (Venuti 216.)

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