

To minorize a language

Translating Deleuze from French to Finnish

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Introduction

Works of Gilles Deleuze have been translated to many languages. One of them is a small North-European language called Finnish. Despite of Finland's distant location up in the North the first Finnish Deleuze translation was published as early as in 1984. It was Deleuze's "Pensée nomade", translated by Jussi Vähämäki and published in a student magazine called *Aviisi*¹ (Deleuze 1984). There were also a few other short Deleuze translations in the 1980s but the Finnish speaking readers had to wait until the 1990s to be able to read whole works by Deleuze in their mother tongue. The first Finnish Deleuze book was Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, translated by Leevi Lehto².

Since then the number of Finnish translations of Deleuze has increased: *Nietzsche et la philosophie*, for example, was translated in 2005, and *L'Anti-Œdipe* (written together with Guattari) and *Critique et clinique* both in 2007. In addition, Guattari's *Les Trois Écologies* was translated into Finnish in 2008³. All of the translations were

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¹ Gilles Deleuze, "Penseä numadi", translated by Jussi Vähämäki, in *Aviisi*, 10/1984. Reissued later in a collection of Deleuze's essays called *Autiomaan Kirjoituksia vuosilta 1967-1986*, Jussi Kotkavirta, Keijo Rahkonen and Jussi Vähämäki (ed.), Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 1992.

² Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *Mitä filosofia on?* Translated by Leevi Lehto. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 1993.

³ I am one its translators together with Mikko Jakonen and Eetu Viren.

published by minor Finnish publishing houses, and none of them has been a real best seller⁴. Of course, Deleuze and Guattari are not the only French contemporary thinkers that have been translated into Finnish. Jacques Derrida's *Positions*, only to mention one example, was translated into Finnish in 1988, and a collection of his essays called *Platonin apteekki* in 2003.

One might ask why should anybody bother translating Deleuze into such a small language like Finnish. The number of potential readers is relatively small while the work that a translation requires is huge. There are about 5 million Finnish speaking Finns of which only a tiny minority is interested in the Deleuze kind of philosophy⁵. Moreover, the scholars interested in Deleuze read the works mainly in English but also in French. Consequently, it is chiefly for the students and for an especially enlightened audience that the Finnish Deleuze translations are designated.

It is quite characteristic of the situation that the review concerning the Finnish translation of *Critique et clinique*, published in the major Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat*, was written by a poet who himself has used the Deleuzoguattarian concepts in his works. Another typical, and important, use of the Finnish Deleuze translations is – of course – left-wing politics and resistance. Despite of the small size of the audience, translating Deleuze is not worthless. Finnish Deleuze translations widen the potential readership by making Deleuze easier to approach. It also broadens the Finnish language's means of expression along with the Deleuzean terms and concepts. This makes it easier for the Finnish speaking ones to discuss certain philosophical (or political) problems and possibly create some of their own.

What is important, too, is that translating and translations open up new perspectives to the so called "original" texts. This is also why it is important to write about translations and translating. Louis Burchill and Jehanne Dautrey write about translating Deleuze in *Multitudes*:

⁴ In addition to the already mentioned monographies there are two Finnish collections of Deleuze's essays (1992 and 2005) and a few translated essays publishes in magazines.

⁵ French, for example, is a mother tongue for 136 million people.

Il [le projet du dossier] est aussi et surtout peut-être de lire autrement Deleuze par le détour de ces yeux, sachant que toute lecture est mise en relation du texte avec un dehors non philosophique: corpus de textes, archives silencieuses et personnels, mais aussi ensemble de pratique, de questions qui agitent les différentes cultures et ouvrent les textes sur des affects spécifiques⁶.

My viewpoint in this text is that of a translator although I have briefly discussed certain Finnish translations in my doctoral thesis concerning the poststructuralist conception of literature in the 1980s Finland⁷. I have translated *Critique and clinique* (1993) from French into Finnish with two other translators⁸ and, in addition, texts or interviews from *Pourparlers* (1990) and *Dialogues* (1977). I am also working on the translation of *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* (1975), but I suppose the translation will be published in Finnish not earlier than in 2011. The nature of this text is rather that of making remarks and posing questions than giving any exhaustive answers. I attempt, however, to take a closer look on certain details and make some more general remarks on the topic.

Initially, all this began of wonder, of questioning what is it that happens when Deleuze is translated to foreign languages. When you read Deleuze either in French, in English or in Finnish, for example, you may find the same “contents”, but yet, something is transformed between the texts written in different languages. It is of course a question of style, of how to translate a style. But there are other dimensions, too, especially when the language to which Deleuze is translated differs a lot from French.

⁶ Louise Burchill and Jehanne Dautrey, “Traduire Deleuze”, in *Multitudes*, 2/2007, p. 150.

⁷ Anna Helle, *Jäljet sanoissa. Jälkistrukturalistisen kirjallisuuskäsityksen tulo 1980-luvun Suomeen*. Jyväskylä Studies in Humanities 123. Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto, 2009. Also published on the Internet: <https://jyx.jyu.fi/dspace/bitstream/handle/123456789/21738/9789513936723.pdf?sequence=1>.

⁸ I have translated the book except for the previously translated essays “Bartleby, ou la formule” (translated by Pia Sivenius) and “Pour en finir avec le jugement” (translated by Merja Hintsa).

In any case, translating Deleuze requires a lot of inventiveness. He uses terms in an original way and creates concepts – such as *devenir* or *pli* – that admit several interpretations and are often difficult to translate to another language. The ambiguity of Deleuze’s language especially in the books written together with Félix Guattari is not, however, accidental. Around the same time with the publication of *Anti-Œdipe* (1972) Deleuze spoke about a need of a new style and about the kind of a book that would not rely on any codes⁹. According to Deleuze, Nietzsche had assisted in an attempt at decodification both in his thought and in his writings. Nietzsche wanted to transmit or express something that cannot be codified, and to confound all the codes (Deleuze 1985, 142–143). It is tempting to think that Deleuze (and Guattari) headed in their works toward the same direction, albeit by different means.

Deleuze wrote, of course, in many different styles, of which the one created with Guattari was the most experimental one. In this text I base my considerations mainly on translating Deleuze’s and Guattari’s *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* (1975), Deleuze’s *Pourparlers* (1990) and *Critique et clinique* (1993), in which the questions of language are often at the forefront.

Three examples of Challenges in translating Deleuze: *le pli*, *le devenir* and *minoritaire*

There are many challenges in translating Deleuze (and Guattari) from French to another language. One of them is the fact that besides philosophy Deleuze has influenced many different fields and disciplines, such as media studies, literature and social sciences. Another problem is due to the way in which Deleuze refers to other texts, often without using any quotation marks or mentioning the sources. This leads to two consequences: the translator must try and be as attentive as possible to be able to recognize hidden allusions. Secondly, some of the texts Deleuze refers to have previously been published in Finnish, and the Deleuze translator has to find the already existing translations – and make them fit to the Deleuze

⁹ The paper given in a Friedrich Nietzsche symposium was later published under the title “Nomad Thought”.

translation. This is, for instance, the case with the Kafka quotes not only in Deleuze's and Guattari's *Kafka* book but also in many other texts. But even if the translator did her or his best the translation always remains somewhat uncertain; there is always a possibility that the translator does not recognize references which may be crucial from the view point of understanding certain expressions in Deleuze's writing.

There are linguistic problems, too. Finnish and French are very different as languages. Finnish is a Finno-Ugrian language while French belongs to the Roman languages. The languages are different not only in respect to the vocabularies but also syntactically, morphologically and etymologically. This leads to a great amount of things that a Finnish Deleuze translator has to take into account.

For example, Deleuze forms groups of concepts based on the stems, such as *territoire – déterritorialisation – reterritorialisation* or *le pli – déplier – replier*. Deleuze also makes use of the ambiguity of terms like "becoming", and this is quite typical for other French philosophers/theorists of the time as well. Such ambiguities – as substantial as they may be from the viewpoint of Deleuze's style and theory politics – are often impossible to translate to other languages, especially when the languages are very different from each other.

Translating le pli

Let us take a look at a few examples. *Le pli*, or "the fold", can be used in many different meanings when talking about for example the baroque artistic style, geography or brain. In Finnish language, however, we do not have only one word to cover all the meanings. When you talk about the baroque, you can use the words *taitos* or *laskos* of which the first one is normally used when talking about paper and the latter in the context of cloth. When you talk about mountains or brain you have to use the word *poimu*. One can easily see, that the words have nothing in common, and that is why the Finnish readers cannot easily recognize that it is question about the same concept.

While Deleuze can use such French derivatives as *déplier* and *replier* that have the same stem but a little different meaning or

connotation, this is not possible in Finnish. *Déplier* means something like "to spread" or "to spread out" and *replier* something like "to fold" or "to wrap" but also "to withdraw" (for example in a war). This cannot be translated to Finnish as such because the linguistic structures of Finnish and French are different. Originally in Finnish, we do not have derivatives based on prefixes *dé-* or *re-*, but they are sometimes used in translations. Such is the case with deterritorialization and reterritorialization that cannot be translated to anything else but *deterritorialisaatio* and *reterritorialisaatio*. The concepts, then, ought to be explained for example in footnotes, because not only are the prefixes foreign to Finnish language but also the stem *territoire* (*territorio* in Finnish).

Translating devenir

Another example of the problems in translating could be the concept of *devenir*. Translating it to Finnish has varied and also aroused some discussion on the topic. *Devenir* has been translated to Finnish in two ways, of which I have myself used both. The first one is to use the word *tuleminen* that comes quite close to the English translation "becoming". *Tuleminen* also shares with the "becoming" (and maybe with the French *devenir*, too) most of the problems in understanding the nature of the concept properly. *Tuleminen* can easily be understood as "becoming something or someone" which is not what Deleuze wanted to express with the concept.

Tuleminen also refers to Hegel's concept of becoming just like does the English translation and the French *devenir*, too. In Hegel's philosophy the becoming means the process in which history progresses dialectically towards its *telos*. Though Deleuze chose to use the same term with Hegel, he did not want to do Hegelian philosophy, quite the contrary. It is not, however, accident that Deleuze uses the same term with Hegel to name a different concept. I think it is rather a way of making the meaning of the concept more open and more ambivalent, which resembles of the ways in which such French writers like Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida have written in their works. Derrida, for example, writes in *La Dissémination* about a "double writing" which means using concepts by kind of capturing an already existing concept and using it in a

new way. Consequently, the concept has at least two different meanings at the same time¹⁰. Barthes for his part is well known for his ambiguous concepts such as the “Text”. Maybe needless to say that despite of some likenesses between Deleuze (and Guattari) and Derrida or Barthes there are also crucial differences between the thinkers.

The other possibility for translating *devenir* to Finnish is *muutos*, and it has been used in a collection of essays based on *Pourparlers*, translated by several translators. *Muutos* was suggested by one of the translators in order to avoid *tuleminen*'s misleading connotations. *Muutos* means “change” or “alteration” in English. Unlike *tuleminen* which is not a word one might use outside the philosophical discussion *muutos* is a common word in Finnish language, just like *devenir* is in French. Moreover, one of the meanings of *devenir* is “change”.

One of the reasons for wanting to replace *tuleminen* with *muutos* was an attempt to underline the nature of Deleuze's thinking as a philosophy of change in the long tradition beginning as early as in Heraclitus (535-475 BCE). The Finnish Deleuze readers were not, however, comfortable with the new translation of *devenir*, and in the translation of *Critique et clinique*, published two years later, *devenir* was translated to *tuleminen* again.

Tuleminen has a few advantages when compared with *muutos*. *Tuleminen* can easily be distinguished from other terms describing different kinds of change, such as transformations and metamorphoses that are quite frequent especially in *Critique et clinique*. *Tuleminen* also resembles more the French *devenir*, even though it is not as ambiguous.

Translating mineur and minoritaire

Translating *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure* into Finnish, a work that I am only beginning, arouses questions on the concepts of *mineur* and *minoritaire*. In his diaries, Kafka writes about small nations and their small literatures, and he uses the German word

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, *La dissémination*, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1972, p. 10.

klein. In the English translation of Kafka's *Diaries*, the word is translated to “small”¹¹. Deleuze and Guattari for their part use the French word *mineur* when referring to Kafka's “small literature”, and in the English translation of the their *Kafka* book the word is translated to “minor”.

The word *mineur* has several meanings. It does not only mean “small”, “smaller” or “lesser”. It also refers to music in which it describes a certain kind of a mode. Deleuze writes in *Critique et clinique*:

*Ce qu'ils [les grands écrivain] font, c'est plutôt inventer un usage mineur de la langue majeure dans laquelle ils s'expriment entièrement: ils minorent cette langue, comme en musique où le mode mineur désigne des combinaisons dynamiques en perpétuel déséquilibre*¹².

What they [great writers] do, rather is invent a *minor use* of the major language within which they express themselves entirely; they *minorize* this language, much as in music, where the minor mode refers to dynamic combinations in perpetual disequilibrium¹³.

*He [suuret kirjailijat] pikemminkin keksivät suurelle kielelle pienen käyttötavan, vaikka toimisivatkin kokonaan suuren kielen sisällä: he minorisoivat¹⁴ tuon kielen, kuten musiikissa, jossa mollisävellaji ilmaisee jatkuvassa epätasapainossa olevia dynaamisia yhdistelmiä*¹⁵.

¹¹ Franz Kafka, *Diaries 1910-1923*, edited by Max Brod, New York : Schocken Books, 1976, p. 148-153.

¹² Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, p. 138.

¹³ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, translated by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco, London and New York, Verso, 1998, p. 109.

¹⁴ “Minorisoivat” is not a verb that a Finnish speaker would normally use, but one cannot find a better word for expressing its meaning.

¹⁵ Translation partially revised. Gilles Deleuze, *Kriittisiä ja kliinisiä esseitä*, translated by Anna Helle, Merja Hintsala and Pia Sivenius, Helsinki, Tutkijaliitto, 2007, p. 170.

This is interesting to keep in mind because Deleuze (and Guattari) use other musical terms such as *ritournelle* which is often translated to English as “refrain”.

Deleuze and Guattari also use the concepts of minority and majority and it seems that minor is in some kind of a relationship with minority and major for its part with the majority. The relations are not, however, unambiguous. For example in “Contrôle et devenir” (*Pourparlers*) Deleuze speaks about the minorities and majorities, and he connects them to politics but also to literature. According to him a majority is first of all a model to which one is expected to conform. It is important to notice that a minority can be bigger than a majority. Minority does not have a model, on the contrary; it is a becoming or a process, and anyone could actually be caught in a minority becoming if they opted to follow it through¹⁶.

This is where we come to the fact that *mineur* has also a meaning of “minor” in the sense of “under aged”. Politically, this has a particular meaning, since minor persons are not legally competent, and they cannot be responsible in front of the law. As René Lemieux pointed out in the Deleuze Conference in Cologne, this is an important side to the concept of *mineur* when understood in a relationship with minor politics as something opposed to the politics of State. Keeping this in mind, minor literature has an immediately political meaning¹⁷. One might say that minor literature is minoritarian; major literature with its masters and *chef-d’œuvres* forms models, while minor literature tries to find its own, uncoded ways of expression.

There is yet another significance for *mineur*, namely “miner”, “a man working in the mines”. This is particularly interesting from the

¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, “Control and Becoming”, in *Negotiations 1972-1990*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, p. 173.

¹⁷ Minor literature is political for Deleuze and Guattari also for another reason. They argue that in major literature it is the individual matters such as family, marriages or Oedipal questions that are essential. Minor literature – although it may consider the same kind of issues – is political because its constricted space causes that every individual business is at the same time political. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, translated by Dana Polan, Minneapolis and London, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p. 17.

viewpoint of language and literature, because this is, I believe, where refer such numerous verbs like “hollowing” (*creuser*) both in the *Kafka* book and in *Critique et clinique* when talking about minor literature. In the latter Deleuze writes about great writers who write minor literature in the sense that they try to create a foreign language in their own language. One of the ways doing so is *hollowing the language* from the inside – just like the minors hollow the mines. These remarks open up inspiring connections to for example D. H. Lawrence’s descriptions of English miners of which Deleuze writes in his essay “Nietzsche et saint Paul, Lawrence et Jean de Patmos”, published in *Critique et clinique*. The signification comes to mind also when reading Deleuze’s and Guattari’s biography by François Dosse¹⁸, according to whom Deleuze once said about the co-writing that it was Guattari who found the diamonds and Deleuze himself was the stonemason – quite a concrete vision of a writer as an artisan. Thus *littérature mineure*, minor literature, is a multilayered concept.

As inspiring as the notices on the complexity of the concept may be, they cause a number of problems for a translator. There are a few possibilities for translating *mineur* to Finnish, but none of them is satisfying. The most obvious choice is the Finnish word *pieni* meaning “small”, but this choice includes no other dimensions of the original concept. One could also consider using the Finnish word *vähäinen* that refers to “a small amount”. The advantage of this term would be the possible connection to the Finnish word *vähemmistö* for “minority”. But the obvious disadvantage is the word’s connotation “negligible”. Whence a list of words demonstrating the impossibility of including the different connotations of *mineur* to its Finnish translation: *pieni* means “small”, *vähäinen* “a small amount, negligible”, *kaivostyöläinen* “a miner”, *molli* “miner mode (in music)”... One can easily observe that the words and their stems have in fact nothing in common. Thus far, I have no satisfying solution for the problem. I suppose I will have to choose between using the word *pieni* (and add the other connotations into a footnote), and creating a more poetic solution if I manage to find a proper way to do it.

¹⁸ François Dosse, *Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari. Biographie croisée*. Paris, Éditions La Découverte, p. 18.

Translating minor literature?

Deleuze and Guattari sketch out three characteristics of minor literature in the *Kafka* book. According to the first one, minor literature does not need to be written in a small language, almost the opposite; for Deleuze and Guattari minor literature means literature written in a major language, but in a minor way. That is, for example, what Kafka did; he was a Jew living in Prague and he wrote in Prague German¹⁹.

What I would like to suggest is that what Deleuze (and Guattari) themselves write is a kind of a minor literature. They write in French that, no doubt, is a major language with a major literature (both in the sense of art literature and literature including philosophical heritage). Adapting Deleuze's and Guattari's own words one could say that they had the "misfortune" of being born in a country of great literature²⁰. They chose, however, to write in a language of their own. As they write in *Kafka*:

*Problème d'une littérature mineure, mais aussi pour nous tous: comment arracher à sa propre langue une littérature mineure, capable de creuser le langage, et de le faire filer suivant une ligne révolutionnaire sobre?*²¹

The problem of a minor literature, but also problem for all of us: how to tear a minor literature away from its own language, allowing it to challenge the language and making it follow a sober revolutionary path?²²

Pienen kirjallisuuden ongelma mutta myös meidän kaikkien ongelma: miten päästää omasta kielestään irti pieni kirjallisuus,

¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka, op. cit.*, p. 16-17. The second characteristic of minor literatures is that everything in them is political, and the third that in them everything takes a collective value (*ibid.*, p. 17).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²¹ Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Pour une littérature mineure*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1975, p. 35.

²² Gilles Deleuze et Félix Guattari, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature, op. cit.*, p. 19.

*tehdä se kykeneväksi kovertamaan kieltä ja saada se pakenemaan kohtuullista kumouksen viivaa?*²³

If the works of Deleuze and Guattari are understood in this sense as a kind of minor literature, does it influence somehow the way in which they should be translated? What happens when this kind of minor literature is translated to another language? This has already been discussed in *Multitudes*²⁴, but not from the viewpoint of a Finnish translator. To begin with, Finnish is not a major language with a major literature, at least when compared with the great literatures of the world. Can Deleuze in Finnish, then, be minor literature in any sense?

First there is a question of fidelity: can Deleuze in Finnish ever be the same as Deleuze in French? Should the translator try and imitate the "original" Deleuze (and Guattari) as far as possible? From the Deleuzoguattarian viewpoint the answer is maybe not. I think that translating Deleuze (and Guattari) cannot be an issue of writing like Deleuze (and Guattari) – imitating the original – but rather that of writing *with* Deleuze (and Guattari). As if the translator was singing along. And even if the Finnish Deleuze translator tried to be true to the original French version the attempt is – as we have already seen – doomed to failure (which I suppose is the case with other languages, too). Referring to the theme of *Trahir* one could say that in translation there is always a betrayal – *trahison* – and hence a lot of creation.

There are two possible ways of thinking about Finnish Deleuze as minor literature. Firstly, in the tiny Finnish speaking world the Finnish is a major language, at least compared with the minor languages spoken in Finland, namely Finland Swedish and Lappish. There are also rules of correct Finnish and spelling like in any other written language and they tend to form a model. The Deleuze translations are something very different from the ordinary Finnish language, both philosophically and stylistically. It reminds of what Deleuze writes in *Critique et clinique*:

²³ Unpublished translation by the author.

²⁴ Louise Burchill and Jehanne Dautrey, *loc. cit.*, p. 150.

Elle [la littérature] y trace précisément une sorte de langue étrangère, qui n'est pas une autre langue, ni un patois retrouvé, mais un devenir-autre de la langue, une minoration de cette langue majeure, un délire qui l'emporte, une ligne de sorcière qui s'échappe du système dominant²⁵.

It [literature] opens up a kind of foreign language within language, which is neither another language nor a rediscovered patois, but a becoming-other of language, a minorization of a major language, a delirium that carries it off, a witch's line that escapes the dominant system²⁶.

Kirjallisuus hahmottelee eräänlaisen vieraan kielen, joka ei ole toinen kieli eikä uudelleen löydetty kansanmurre vaan kielen toiseksi-tulemista, suuren kielen pienenemistä, hallitsevaa systeemiä pakeneva tietäjän viiva²⁷.

Although the Finnish is not a major language in the global scale (or in the geographical sense) one can think of its official and “correct” uses as a model that tends to form majority. Deleuze in Finnish is something very different, since his works simply cannot be translated to an ordinary language. That leads to the following question: how “readable” should the translations be?

Can the translations be judged by the rules of grammatical correctness of the so called Standard Finnish? In my opinion, the versatility and vivacity of Deleuze's (and Guattari's) language should be preserved in the translations, too. But the question is not that simple. Many of the terms Deleuze uses are difficult to translate and they may sometimes be quite weird in Finnish though the term in the French original does not attract that much attention. The translator has to find a way between a situation where Deleuze's (and Guattari's) text becomes too conventional and a situation where it becomes almost unreadable. A Deleuze translator must try and find a line of flight in the Finnish language and at the same time create minor literature in it by stretching a little – or should I say soberly – its possibilities of expression.

²⁵ Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et clinique*, op. cit., p. 15.

²⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, op. cit., p. 5.

²⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Kriittisiä ja kliinisiä esseitä*, op. cit., p. 23.

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