“Orality” or stand-offish narrativity? *L’Étranger*’s ordinary language revisited through the contextualized Imperfects of its Finnish translation *Sivullinen*

We shall first question the degree of orality of Meursault’s account. *Passé composé* used instead of *Passé simple* hardly can be considered today a mark of orality *per se*: *L’Étranger* lacks most orality markers – detachment constructions, discourse particles, circular cohesion, intersentential repetitions… (Jousse 1925, Fernandez-Vest 2015). We shall then analyze with a functional-typological method the Finnish translator’s enunciative choices. Although reputed as other Finno-Ugric languages for its rich morphology, Finnish has a poor tempus system, based on the opposition Past vs. Non Past (a Present, but no Future). Conclusive or continuous, the Finnish Perfect (*Perfekti*) conveys a past event with present relevance, as noticed in several languages (Dahl 1985, Dahl & Velupillai 2013, De Swart 2016, Lindstedt 2000). The verbal form of narrative dynamism is the Imperfect (*Imperfekti*, also called *Preteriti*), which allows the speaker to take a stand as an observer of an action anchored in the past (Comrie 1985, ISK 2004:1452–1475): Imperfect is the perfect tempus for Meursault’s Finnish account. After inventoring the complementary devices used in different contexts (descriptions vs. direct or indirect conversation exchanges) in order to compensate the register standardization operated by quantitatively dominating Imperfects — e.g. changes of moods (“Il m’a semblé que le ciel s’ouvrait” > *Tuntui kuin koko taivaan avaruus olisi auennut* “It was felt as if all the sky’s space would have opened out”) or derivational suffixes (“la sueur amassée dans mes sourcils a coulé d’un coup sur les paupières” > *kulmakarvoihini kertynyt hiki vala-hi luomimi* “the sweat piled up in my eyebrows ran down all at once” (moment. suffix -ht-) on my eyelids”) —, we shall finally try to evaluate to what extent the naturality of ordinary language has thus been preserved.

[302 words]

References: