

Practical 7 Tutor notes

Discussion of the chapter is straightforward, as long as discussion – and performance! – of the examples is not rushed. Half an hour is not too long for this part of the practical.

7.1 Grammatical and sentential issues

A demanding assignment, best done at home. In addition to the obvious grammatical challenge, it requires a few cultural borrowings with exegetic additions. It is also a reminder of the potential importance of graphics in translation. For production reasons, the pictures that accompanied the text are not reproduced in the coursebook, but the contextual information makes it clear that they are a major priority. In point of fact, the page facing the text has a dramatic picture of the levelled vine terraces captioned 'Für die Reben planiert: der Kaiserstuhl'. This underlines the importance of requesting any visual material to be supplied if at all possible. (The point was first brought home to one of the present authors by a list of titles of modern paintings to be translated urgently, and blind. One picture was entitled 'Möpfe und Möpse'.)

7.2 Grammatical and sentential issues

This assignment can be satisfactorily done in class, working singly or in groups. In general, the language of the ST poses nothing like as formidable a strategic challenge as arises from the extended participial phrases of 7.1. The travelogue style is much more modern. Its sentences are not all short, but the longer ones are long through accumulation of detail and are not very complex syntactically. Altogether this text is grammatically more compatible than 7.1 with natural modern English. In terms of content, there is a skilful balance to be held. The ST writer has taken for granted that the readers – Lufthansa long-haul passengers and possibly personnel – will want to read a text which shows South Africa (specifically Cape Town) as an attractive and interesting place to visit, yet does not ignore the uglier sides of recent history and current reality. This has been achieved through a 'jabbing' approach, with the social criticism showing serious intent (see e.g. the epigram quality of lines 1–2, 'die kleine europäische Lüge'), but the redeeming features also being given incisive, non-modalized short sentences, and paragraphs 1 and 3 providing the usual come-ons for tourists in a similar short-winded way. The TT in this case will do well to avoid gathering this chequered pattern too clumsily into longer sentences.

One specific problem might not be identified until detailed translation is undertaken, yet is serious enough to demand consideration, late or not, at the strategic level. In lines 26–8, the ST was printed with the verb in the indicative mood: 'So konnte Südafrika zur Demokratie werden [. . .]'. Although there can be no certainty about the writer's

intention, what is certain is that the published TT – with an imaginative, successful solution – has translated not ‘so konnte Südafrika’ (a factual, historical statement), but ‘so könnte Südafrika’. Linguistic context, textual context and historical background – the text dates from 2003 – offer no evidence that ‘konnte’ is a typographical error for ‘könnte’. Faced with a contradiction between ST and published TT as printed, students will have to revisit the semantic issues associated with indicative and subjunctive uses of ‘können’. In other, minor, points the published TT includes some elegant restructurings, e.g. the focus problem in line 31 (‘Gerade am Kap’ – cf. our remarks on sentential focus in the present chapter and in Chapter 16), the idiomatic rendering of ‘retten’ (l. 45) (where ‘save’ could only be used in off-puttingly strong combinations such as ‘from total mediocrity’), and the simplicity of ‘A lovely city’ for ‘So hübsch die Stadt’ (ll. 3–4). Finally, one example of a compact SL phrase requiring – and receiving – expansion is the description of Desmond Tutu as ‘der wohl berühmteste Kapstädter’ (l. 21). This is a slightly more difficult case for translation than the example we give in Chapter 15 (p. 196), of ‘eine[r] der wohl stärksten Reden, die . . .’. Here, for once, the Lufthansa translator might perhaps have found a more compact rendering.

7.3 Grammatical and sentential issues

The most striking feature of the ST is the detailed interplay of indicative and subjunctive moods – mainly narrative indicative with interspersed items of indirect speech, straightforwardly introduced (‘sagte er’, ‘er log sich vorwärts’). Then (ll. 10–11) there are what amount to items of direct speech inserted in stream-of-consciousness style. ‘Das war eine Frau wie eine Trophäe’ (l. 12) is a remark whose vulgar directness marks it as from Helmut’s perspective even though it is inserted like narrative, with neither subjunctive nor explicit attribution to Helmut to distance or frame it. Lines 12–21 are taken up by an extended fantasy attributed to Helmut. Its content is what he thinks he ought to have said to Klaus at this stage but, as we hear at the end, chooses not to say. After this extended interior monologue, which has subjunctive distancing throughout, the narrative returns to the mixed approach used earlier. There do not seem to be major *strategic* difficulties arising from this narrative approach, but there are problems of detail. The difficulty lies not in reproducing the formal contrast between the two types of syntax, but in finding a way to reproduce Walser’s gently debunking treatment of conventional social insincerity, in which the elaborate formal structure (ll. 5–21) suggests the hollowness of social artifice. While the earlier part of the passage presents no special problems in translation of the reported and directly narrated elements, it is more difficult in lines 12–21 to keep the TT reader abreast of the information which the verb forms are providing so economically. The relevant subjunctives (‘sei’, ‘aussehe’, ‘müsse’, ‘habe’, ‘könne’ and the final ‘sei’) report words that Helmut never utters. The omniscient narrator is using the linguistic convention of the non-omniscient ‘reporter’ in a slightly over-the-top way to underline the artificiality of the expected courtesies and generate anticipation in the reader: is Helmut’s silence, while these courtesies are being rehearsed in his mind and not spoken, the prelude to an outburst of robust truthfulness? The comic potential will be lost if the translator does not tread carefully. It is not easy for an English TT to compensate to any significant extent for the absence of a real correlative to Walser’s string of subjunctives. But a start could be made by working on a mincing, over-precise type of diction for that passage, aiming to recreate something of the ST tension between artifice and truculent reality.

PRACTICAL 7.1 CLASS HANDOUT

'DER VULKANISCHE KAISERSTUHL' TT AND COMMENTARY

(i) *Strategic decisions*

The contextual information makes it clear that the photographs get much more space than the text and, in effect, demand priority. The translator has to bear in mind that points mentioned in the text may be made graphically as well. Important though the unseen photographs are, however, the text is no perfunctory add-on amounting to a mere set of captions. On the contrary, it is densely informative, with a notable concentration of extended participial phrases. Here, as in other informative texts (e.g. technical, academic), they are used for the sake of concision. However, the present assignment imposes two additional strategic constraints on the translator. First, concision is not simply a genre characteristic, but imposed by the layout of the book: if the typeface is made smaller, the written text will lose some of its appeal. Second, the text is intended to entertain its readers – and indeed to ‘sell’ what it describes. This implies a correspondingly relaxed, even discursive, tone in the English TT. As our brief discussion in Chapter 7 indicated, these extended participial phrases generally entail syntactic restructuring in English, in less compact form. So the main challenge is to satisfy two constraints which are in direct conflict.

(ii) *TT*

A new look for the Kaiserstuhl's volcanic hills¹

5 Whichever side you approach it from: far off, there it is,² the Kaiserstuhl, rising abruptly out of the Upper Rhine plain which stretches from the Vosges in the west to the Black Forest in the east.³ Reaching 557 m (1,933 ft)⁴ at its highest point, this compact range of hills certainly lives up to its imposing name (which means ‘Emperor’s Throne’),⁵ because it was formed by ancient volcanic activity – long since extinct – in the shape of a giant horseshoe open towards the south-west, and in its general outlines actually does resemble a vast armchair, commodious enough for any sun-loving⁶ fairytale giant to sprawl in comfort.

10 And the sun really is a major player⁷ here – no-one can fail to see that. One sign of this is the comprehensive re-landscaping of the vine terraces everywhere. Over the last two decades, this has given the Kaiserstuhl a completely new look – and dismayed⁸ the conservationists. But⁹ if you focus on what is close at hand, you can still see that lots of wayside flowers and plants are of Mediterranean origin, confirmation¹⁰ that the dominant influence on the climate here¹¹ is southern.

15 Nearby, too,¹² there is still ‘unreformed’ natural landscape to enjoy, in the Old Rhine country¹³ at Taubergiessen.

New vine terraces, ancient sunken tracks¹⁴

20 The most rewarding view of the Kaiserstuhl landscape is from the hill known as the

25 'Badberg'.¹⁵ To get up on to this treeless, humpy,¹⁶ grassy upland region the best route is via the Schelingen pass,¹⁷ where a cabin with long tables and benches outside attracts passing walkers with the prospect of hearty country fare.¹⁸ On the left is the Totenkopf range, easily picked out because of its TV mast,¹⁹ and over towards the Rhine, in the distance, you can make out the distinctive terracing – step rising above step like slabs hefted into place by some giant builder²⁰ – of the 'Oberbergener Mondhalde' (Oberbergen Moonbank)²¹ which produces one of the Kaiserstuhl's celebrated wines.²²

(iii) *Decisions of detail*

1 The double title fulfils three functions, all of which need to be preserved without major loss of concision: (1) the geographical name; (2) the distinctive geology (with its strong link in the source culture to wine-growing); (3) the 'news' value of the then recent major re-landscaping of the vineyards in the context of 'Flurbereinigung'. None of these interest-catching features should be lightly relinquished. Our TT suggests one solution, a little ingenuity will suggest others. A cultural problem remains unsolved in our rendering: TL readers should ideally get a hint – within the space constraints – of what the ST reader recognizes without help, the importance attached to volcanic soil in wine-growing.

2 'Egal' is a snappier opening gambit than anything correspondingly idiomatic in English; on this point one has to make the best of a bad job. The ST then rapidly introduces the name 'Kaiserstuhl' and tests the translator by insisting on the distant view even before delivering the first batch of descriptive details. The TT syntax needs to be so structured as to retain this order of perception as nearly as possible while remaining short-winded and simple. Hence the introduction of 'there it is', which allows 'the Kaiserstuhl' an appropriate isolated prominence.

3 The exegetic addition of 'in the west' and 'in the east' is one of several cultural adjustments necessary if the target audience are to read the text with roughly the same level of background understanding as the ST's readers.

4 The height in feet is of little use to anyone in Britain born after about 1975 – but to most older UK residents and to most North Americans of any age, it probably says more about a hill and its size than the metrical height can.

5 The writer's remarks of course require the name 'Kaiserstuhl' to be explained in English – but only as an aside. All other references must use the name found on maps and known to locals. (See also note 17.)

6 The little flight of fancy gives some excuse for a more whimsical rendering with 'sun-hungry fairytale giant', but this would be to mark the TT with an adjective sounding considerably more exotic than its ST counterpart, which is used of plants as well as people.

7 The sentence construction 'Daß die Sonne . . .' is a compact version of a type we illustrate towards the end of Chapter 16, and is probably not reproducible in the TT without damage to the relatively informal register the piece requires. There is also a lexical point here. The term 'a major player' introduces something of an alien note, from the world of big business and politics. But it avoids the unidiomatic translationese of 'plays a [. . .] role', while retaining the dynamic quality of the ST metaphor.

8 Our translation 'and dismayed' has an obvious alternative in '(much) to the dismay of'. However, use of a second main verb keeps the focus on acting and events. The translation strategy involves keeping a not particularly intellectual target audience

interested, and in a descriptive text (as G.E. Lessing recognized over 200 years ago) this in turn involves supplying the readers with action.

9 The ST's coherence is not readily transparent, as what is said about the wayside flowers is of course not antithetical to the earlier point that the sun is dominant. The antithesis is between the new look imposed on the landscape at large, and the continuity to be seen in the close-focus things mentioned here. We therefore retain 'But'.

10 More conventional (and faithful) translations of 'verraten' are available (e.g. 'betray', 'give away'), but 'confirmation' here makes it easier for the TT reader to follow the logic of the paragraph: the landscaping is unfamiliar and testifies to the local importance of the sun; the flowers are familiar and testify to it too.

11 The switch to close focus and the invitation for a little imaginative projection justify the switch to 'here' from the more distanced, objective 'in the Kaiserstuhl'. The advantage is that this makes the TT less wordy.

12 'Übrigens', a weak cohesion marker not explicitly dealt with among others in Chapter 8, is clearly not used here in the sense of 'By the way . . .', which introduces an unrelated topic and in any case is not much used by native speakers outside personal communications.

13 'Altrheingebiet' poses a real difficulty, as there is no widely known and accepted TL terminology for land which was in historical times the bed and banks of a major river. However, 'Old Rhine' should be sufficient indication of what the visitor would find. The second part of the term, '-gebiet', is difficult for the translator without the intimate knowledge of the place which would permit safe use of a particularizing translation like 'meadows' or 'plain'. Possibilities considered and rejected include 'area' (second-best, but too strongly associated with urban culture); 'region' (much too large); 'district' (too strongly associated with administrative divisions, and rather too large); 'tract' (too specialized except in the combination 'tract of land'), 'site' (bounded), 'locality' (does not readily collocate with place names, in the UK at any rate). The term 'country' has some backing in TL usage for restricted localities (e.g. 'Hardy country', 'Quorn country'), but the area it suggests is likely still to be too large.

14 Against all journalistic precedent, the 'Hohlwege' reference in the subheading remains unexplained in the text: probably the result of an editing error. The outside translator is again disadvantaged – though not acutely, as the term is fairly explicit in itself.

15 The TL reader needs to have this particular name explicitly introduced as a proper name; the form of words chosen makes it possible to simultaneously supply the information (useful for non-linguists) about why the Badberg is a vantage point.

16 The 'Buckel' idea, used here for the second time in the ST, should not be taken too literally, as the Kaiserstuhl hills ('aufgebuckelt[e]' in the ST) are not obviously 'hunchbacked' in form. But 'Buckelwelt' here does strongly suggest a terrain with many small ups and downs; hence 'humpy'.

17 The proper name issue is less clear-cut here than with 'Kaiserstuhl' itself (cf. note 5). It takes local knowledge to determine whether 'Schelinger Paß' (now 'Pass') is a fully established proper name, or simply a pass in the hills named after a place or possibly a person. A decision to translate rather than leave alone carries a certain risk unless research is undertaken: the ST term could in theory derive from any of 'Scheling', 'Schelinger' or 'Schelingen'. In fact the map shows the village of Schelingen to be the likely source of the pass name.

18 ST 'zur zünftigen Vesper' arouses a suspicion of urban or North German irony

directed at self-conscious rustic homeliness laid on for tourists. However, to replace 'country' in our TT with 'rustic' would at the least constitute a more open invitation to an ironic reading; given the brief, it is not a risk that should be taken.

19 The particularization 'TV mast' is – without local knowledge – a risk for the translator. The risk assessment balances a distinct but fairly small chance of factual error against the certainty of translation loss incurred by use of the unusual term 'transmission mast'. That loss is only moderate. However, as the putative factual error risked by 'TV mast' does not have major implications for the TT user, the risk is taken.

20 One would hardly bet on more than a 50 per cent recognition value for 'Cyclopean' among the projected TT users, and those who do recognize the term are more likely to recall that Cyclops was one-eyed than that he was a giant.

21 'Oberbergener Mondhalde' raises another proper name issue. As the TT promotes the Kaiserstuhl and, indirectly, its wine, the German name (which can be expected to cover wines of various types from a very limited area adjacent to the named village) must be provided for the book's users, with future purchase in mind. However, in the source culture, the individual 'Weinlage' names are clearly a significant factor in the marketing. 'Oberbergener Mondhalde' is a typical example: polysyllabically resonant, geographically explicit (the visitor cannot miss Oberbergen village), and, in the 'given' name for the individual vineyard, evocative of attractive natural things. Consequently the TT should seek to reproduce what is evocative and translatable in the second part of the name.

22 'Weinlage', listed in Collins as 'vineyard location', could be translated here as 'vineyard'. However, a formulation like 'one of the Kaiserstuhl's famous/celebrated vineyards' would end this essentially 'selling' text with something of an anti-climax. For sensuous appeal, 'wines' are more powerful than 'vineyards', and even aurally they provide a more satisfying 'Ausklang'.

PRACTICAL 7.3 CLASS HANDOUT

EIN FLIEHENDES PFERD TT

Compare your TT with the published one:

No, the man in blue with the blaze of golden hair, with such white eyeballs and such white teeth and his bare feet and beautiful pristine toes, was no student, he was Klaus Buch. And Klaus Buch refused to believe that his classmate and boyhood pal and fellow student Helmut did not recognize him. Helmut could merely reiterate his apologies. His
5 memory for faces and names was professionally exhausted, he claimed; he had had to remember far too many faces and names. Klaus Buch . . . – he lied his way along – . . . of course, now both the name and the face began to seem familiar. And so that's Sabina, Helmut's wife. And this is Helene, known as Hella, Klaus's wife. As he shook hands with Hella, he sensed that Klaus expected a compliment. This woman was like a trophy.
10 At least Helmut should now have told his former friend Klaus how puzzled he, Helmut, was because Klaus looked more like a student of Helmut's. Although now forced grudgingly to admit having had a friend whose name was Klaus Buch and who had looked like the young man confronting him, he was totally unable to relate this person to the Klaus Buch who was gradually surfacing in his memory, simply because by now
15 *his* Klaus Buch must also be forty-six, whereas the man confronting him must surely be closer to twenty-six. Like his girl. Above all *because* of his girl. Helmut said nothing of all this. No compliments. That'll get you. He looked down at their feet. Her toes, too, lay straight and snugly side by side. The two were talking away. Still talking, they sat down. Seated, they went on talking.

(Walser 1980: 9–10)

