INTERFACE
–JOURNAL OF EUROPEAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES
ISSN: 2519-1268

Issue 12 (Summer 2020), pp. 5-28
DOI: 10.6667/interface.12.2020.107

The Concept of Translation in Yoko Tawada's Early Work

HIROKO MASUMOTO
Kobe University

Abstract

Yoko Tawada chose a foreign language as her literary medium and enjoyed its foreignness, which simultaneously alienates her from her mother tongue. By writing in another language, she gained a distance from her mother tongue, but at the same time a new literary creativity was formed for her. Her poetics of "exophony," with which she tries to liberate a language from its fixed meaning and to revive it, is presented in her early work as a translation process. The idea of considering "exophonic" writing as "translation" is understandable because it involves a constant process of self-translation. The following article attempts to shed light on Tawada's concept of translation in her early work, especially in her first work *nur da wo du bist da ist nichts* (*Nothing only where you are*, 1987).

Keywords: exophony, translation, Yoko Tawada, L. Vygotsky, inner speech, W. Benjamin

The Concept of Translation in Yoko Tawada's Early Work

HIROKO MASUMOTO
Kobe University

1 Introduction: "Translation" as a writing strategy

"Exophony," literary writing outside the mother tongue, is one of the key concepts that characterise so-called transnational or transcultural literature in the present. Wright defines "exophony" as follows:

> Exophony describes the phenomenon where a writer adopts a literary language other than his or her mother tongue, entirely replacing or complementing his or her native language as a vehicle of literary expression).
>
> (Wright, 2013, p. 2)

The adopted language is usually acquired as an adult. According to Ivanovic (2010), the term "exophonic" means "that the author, by adapting another language, tries at the same time to express the distance to the literary community within which he moves with it" (Ivanovic, 2010, p. 172), and the function of "exophonic" texts is explained as follows:

> Exophonic texts are determined by secondariness in the relationship between language and speaker, which is made conscious in the writing itself; they articulate a *different* way of speaking, namely — in analogy to the concept of polyphony according to Bakhtin — the emergence of the voice (phonē) from the writing.
>
> (Ivanovic, 2010, p. 172)

Suga (2007, p. 28) underlines the polyphony of the "exophonic" texts and speaks of "omniphony": "Omniphone means a state of language in which many other languages of the world resonate".[1]

1 Suga is not thinking of Mihail Bakhtin, but of Edouard Glissant's concept of "echos-monde" when he speaks of "Omniphony".

In the field of German studies, the term "exophony" was first introduced at the conference organised by the Goethe-Institut in Dakar in 2002 (cf. Lufhofer, 2011, p. 3). Until then, literature written by authors whose first or native language was not German was referred to as "literature of foreigners" or "migrant literature". However, these have a colonialist aftertaste and presuppose "cultural or linguistic blocks separated from each other in various ways and are rather helpless in the face of a hybridity of cultures and languages or a transculturality that is recognised throughout today" (Lughofer, 2011, p. 3).

Yoko Tawada, who was born in Tokyo in 1960 and has lived in Germany since 1982, also took part in the Dakar conference and heard for the first time about the concept of "exophony" (cf. Tawada, 2003a, pp. 3-13). Since then, she became aware of this concept in her writing and subsequently wrote a volume of essays on this subject. She deliberately chose a foreign language as her literary medium and since then has enjoyed its foreignness, which simultaneously alienates her from her mother tongue. By writing in another language, she gained a distance from her mother tongue, but at the same time a new literary creativity was formed for her.

Before she got to know the concept of "exophony," she had often tried to explain her writing strategy with the term "translation". The idea is not necessarily original, because "exophony" and "translation" are closely related, as Suga (2007, p.27) claims: "exophonic writing, imaginably, involves a constant process of self-translation". The "self-translation" as "exophonic" writing of course does not mean that Tawada would first write a text in Japanese and then translate it into German. In the first phase of her literary activity in Germany, she wrote her texts exclusively in Japanese, but her Japanese was already alienated by the German language. Tawada's "self-translation" at the time took place on a completely different level, as she impressively describes her own language situation immediately after her migration to Germany:

> Six months have passed, and in those months I never spoke Japanese. It seemed to me that Japanese had gone out of my life. I

> could no longer find suitable Japanese expressions for the objects and my feelings. It goes without saying that I cannot find suitable German expressions, because German is after all a foreign language for me. But now my mother tongue left me and I became afraid. It was as if the writings had gradually become unreadable in the fog. At that time I felt something, thought and decided without language. [...] Then I began to »translate« this speechless life into German or Japanese. The Japanese language, which I had mastered earlier, died once and was reborn in another body.
>
> (Tawada, 1999a, pp. 11-12)

What she means here with the expression "to »translate« this speechless life into German or Japanese" can probably be better understood with the term "inner speech" by Vygotsky. In his book *Thinking and speech* (1934) he writes:

> This outline of the characteristics of inner speech leaves no doubt concerning the validity of our basic thesis, the thesis that *inner speech is an entirely unique, independent, and distinctive speech function,* that it is completely different from external speech. This justifies the view that inner speech is an internal plane of verbal thinking which mediates the dynamic relationship between thought and word. After all that we have said about the nature of inner speech, about its structure and its function, there is no question that the movement from inner to external speech is incomparable to the direct translation of one language to another. The movement from inner to external speech is not a simple unification of silent speech with sound, a simple vocalization of inner speech. This movement requires a complete restructuring of speech. It requires a transformation from one distinctive and unique syntax to another, a transformation of the sense and sound structure of inner speech into the structural forms of external speech. External speech is not inner speech plus sound any more than inner speech is external speech minus sound. The transition from inner to external speech is complex and dynamic. It is the transformation of a predicative, idiomatic

> speech into the syntax of a differentiated speech which is comprehensible to others.
>
> (Vygotsky, 1987, pp. 279-280)

In the first phase in Germany, Tawada felt, thought and made decisions without "external speech". She calls the transition from the inner to the external speech, which was very laborious for her, "translation". For Tawada, the inner speech seems to play a certain role in the translation on the level of the external speech (Japanese-German or German-Japanese) when she reads Paul Celan's volume of poetry *Von Schwelle zu Schwelle* (*From threshold to threshold*, 1955) in Japanese translation (by Mitsuo Iiyoshi, 1990) and asserts: "The original's encounter with its translation takes place during the composition of the text and not later" (Tawada, 1996a, p. 129). In a dialogue with the writer Natsuki Ikezawa, Tawada (2003b, p.148) says that language itself is already a translation of our amorphous, pre-linguistic thoughts, but she does not know whether these unformed thoughts can then be called "the original". She further explains that perhaps it is precisely the act of translating our thoughts into language that enables us to imagine an amorphous "original" from which we translate.

The following article attempts to shed light on Tawada's concept of translation in her early work (i.e. in the works before her encounter with the concept of "exophony"), especially in her first work nur da wo du bist da ist nichts / anata no iru tokoro dake nani mo nai あなたのいるところだけなにもない (Nothing only where you are, 1987). In this book, the Japanese original text is printed parallel to the German translation by Peter Pörtner. The book is bilingual, but Tawada as author was not yet bilingual. We had to wait another four years until she herself wrote a German text. However, she was no longer monolingual and was able to check Pörtner's translation. At that time she was in the middle of the process of moving out of her mother tongue. The following is a detailed analysis of the texts that address this process. The term "translation" is not necessarily understood as a translation of the Japanese language into German or vice versa, so the comparison of the so-called partner texts (two versions of the same work written by the author herself in

both Japanese and German) is not the main concern.[2]

2 The relationship between Tawada and her mother tongue

Tawada's first book begins with the poem *Der Plan* (*Keikaku* 計画, *The Plan*), if we read it in Japanese. In this book, as already mentioned, every text is printed in both German and Japanese: German from left to right, Japanese from top to bottom and from right to left. So we should turn the pages of the book in two different ways. If we read the texts in German, we turn the pages from the German point of view as usual, but if we read them in Japanese, we start to turn the pages from the back. That is why all pages in this book are numbered twice.

The poem *Der Plan* can be read as a parable of "exophony". It is primarily about the liberation from the mother tongue and from the ego bound in the mother tongue.

> Mutter hatte
> auf meinen Teppich
> Suppe verschüttet.
> Verärgert wischte ich
> am kommenden Tag
> und den Tagen danach
> mit einem Lappen
> die Bohnenreste und die Reste vom Fisch
> von meinem Teppich.
> Genauso wie Mutter
> die von der Großmutter verschüttete Suppe
> ihr ganzes Leben lang
> weggewischt hatte.

2 Matsunaga (2002) compared the partner texts from the 1990s in detail in her essay on the problem of self-translation in Tawada's work. Matsunaga understands exophonic writing, like Suga, as a constant process of self-translation: "Since Tawada always jumps between two languages, 'translating' is a permanent writing process for her" (p. 534). With the expression "between two languages" Matsunaga means between Japanese and German

MASUMOTO

Eines Tages
warf ich den Lappen weg
und brach mir einen Weg durch das Gelächter
das um mich aufkochte.

1. Laß den Blumenstrauß im Ohrloch überfließen
und singe in Richtung des Leuchturms.
2. Ruf die Ameisen herbei und laß sie ein Dreieck bilden.
3. Wirf ein gekochtes Ei in den Sternenhimmel.

(Mother had
spilled soup
on my carpet.
Angrily, I wiped
the next day
and the days after
with a cloth
the rests of beans and fish
off my carpet.
Just like mother
had wiped off
the soup spilled by the grandmother
all her life.
One day
I threw away the rag
and set out through the laughter
that boiled up around me.

1. Let the bouquet overflow in the ear hole
and sing towards the lighthouse.
2. Gather the ants and let them form a triangle.
3. Throw a boiled egg into the starry sky.)

(Tawada, 1987, p. 121/8)

The mother tongue is represented for the lyrical ego as a stain "auf meinem Teppich (on my carpet)," i.e. as a kind of (birth-)mark inherited from the mother. In the same way the mother had inherited the language of the grandmother. While the mother has remained with her mother tongue "ihr ganzes Leben lang (all her life)," the ego wants to leave its mother tongue. Plans No. 1, 2 and 3 can then be understood as a poetic practice that the ego intends to exercise exophonically.

In an interview with the journalist Lerke von Saalfeld, Tawada explains why people want to be freed from their mother tongue at all:

> [...] you become very cowardly in the mother tongue. If you live only in your mother tongue, you are very helpless. First of all, you have no means to fight against the language, the language dominates you, you can't do anything about it. If you know another language, then the distance between yourself and the mother tongue is noticeable. You are not quite under the power of language. That is a liberation, and only then you can become courageous.
>
> (Saalfeld, 1998, p. 188)

In this interview Tawada also speaks of the "ethnological" glasses (Saalfeld, 1998, p. 189), i.e. language as glasses through which we see

In the poem *Der Plan*, the poetess originally writes that the mother spilled "misoshiru 味噌汁 (miso soup)" on the "tatami 畳". These Japanese attributes show that the stain (i.e. the language) is supposed to be Japanese. In the German translation, however, the mother spilled "Suppe (soup)" on the "Teppich (carpet)," so that German readers who do not understand Japanese may think that the stain is German. Whether it is Japanese or German is irrelevant here, because this is the mother tongue par excellence.[3]

3 Pörtner's translation is quite free, but Tawada herself agrees with his translation. In an essay she argues against the criticism that the translation is wrong. She writes, "In Germany 'tatami' can be used as a foreign word, but the word associates young generation with the alternative interior, and it does not seem like the everyday life of a child still living with his parents" (Tawada, 2006, pp. 169-170).

After the lyrical ego has left its mother tongue, however, it does not immediately become creative, but first of all "mute," as the second poem Absturz und Wiedergeburt (Tsuiraku to saisei 墜落と再生, Crash and rebirth) is supposed to show. The poem consists of two parts. As the title suggests, the first part deals with the "Absturz (crash)" and the second part with the "Wiedergeburt (rebirth)". At the beginning of the first part a "Dolmetscherin (female interpreter)" (Tawada, 1987, p. 119/10) waits for a new beginning, but in vain.[4]

In der Muttersprache stumm sein

Aus dem Ei schlüpft ein Flugzeug
Die Blicke der Einzelteile
sammeln sich in der Sekunde des Starts

Namenlose Dinge beginnen ein namenloses Tun
Wann?

Am Ende der Rollbahn hebt es kräftig den Kopf
der Maschinenleib sticht in den Himmel
Das Lächeln zerbricht
ein Lied kann man noch nicht hören
Durch verstreute Flüge
hängt noch keine Brücke

(Being mute in the mother tongue

An airplane hatches from the egg
The gaze of the single parts
gather in the moment of the start

Nameless things begin a nameless doing
When?

4 In Tawada's works, a translator or interpreter often appears, but her translation always fails, as we find a typical example in the novel *The wound in the alphabet* (*Arufabetto no kizuguchi* アルファベットの傷口, 1993). On the subject of the failed translation in Tawada, see Matsunaga (2002, pp. 534-540).

At the end of the runway, it lifts its head strongly
the machine body stings into the sky
The smile breaks
a song is not yet heard
Through scattered flights
no bridge is hanging yet)

(Tawada, 1987, p. 118/11)

Things and their actions are "namenlos (nameless)" because the interpreter has not yet acquired a new language after leaving her mother tongue in order to be able to give them new names. An interpreter is usually a person who translates (übersetzen) what is said in one language into another. The word "übersetzen," spelled the same way, means, as a separable verb, to carry from one shore to another. This is why it is referred to as a "Brücke (bridge)".[5] In this context, the line "hängt noch keine Brücke (no bridge is hanging yet)" means that the interpreter cannot yet translate. The repeated expression "noch (yet) + negative word" such as "noch nicht (not yet)" and "noch keine (none yet)" implies the expectation that a bridge is about to hang. But still the attempt of the interpreter fails at first. She breaks into tears and the plane crashes.

Sie übersetzt „Ufer" mit „Gott"
Sie übersetzt „Herz" mit „Stadt"
Sie übersetzt „Warum" mit „Frau"
In den Tränen der schluchzenden Dolmetscherin
wird der Maschinenleib kühl

Zerbrechenschlingernsinkenstürzenfallenwirbelnuntergehenuntergehen

(She translates "riverbank" into "God".
She translates "heart" into "city"

5 We could also remember that "exophony" is actually a spatial concept ("ex" means "outside"). This is probably why Tawada always has a spatial idea when she speaks of "translation". For example, she compares the word "tüchtig" with its English equivalent "competitive" and says, "There is probably an ocean between the two words" (Tawada, 2002a, p. 127; Tawada, 2013, p. 68).

She translates “why” into “woman”
In the tears of the sobbing interpreter
the body of the aircraft becomes cool

Breakleanstumblefallturngoingdownanddown)
(Tawada, 1987, p. 118/11)

Fifteen years later, in her prose *Wörter, die in der Asche schlafen* (*Words sleeping in ashes*, 2002), Tawada once again mentions the problem of namelessness. Here she tells about the German swearwords that have to do with animals such as “Ziege (goat)” or “Kuh (cow),” and says:

> A living animal was caught and thrown into the fire. But how did the animal get caught? It had a keen sense of hearing. It could run like the wind when it wanted to. But it had a name and by name it was caught. The name, the net. The name was then used as a swearword and the animal was forgotten. The nameless animal sleeps in ashes like a word that has never been said. I will call its nameless name to wake it up, because it is not dead yet.
> (Tawada, 2002b, p. 30)[6]

The text is in the book Überseezungen, and this title is a pun on “Übersetzungen (translations)”. In both words, only one letter is different, but this makes the word “Zunge (tongue)” appear, which means “language”.[7] In the text quoted above, an animal sleeps in ashes, which in turn is an associative play on words with the swearword “Arschloch (asshole)”. To the first-person narrator, the word “Arsch” sounds like “Asche” (Tawada, 2002b, p. 29), and a “Loch (hole)” reminds her of an oven (p. 30). She now has a pictorial image that an animal whose name was used as a swearword is sleeping in the ashes in an oven because it is now nameless. It needs a new name to be awakened.

6 We can also see here that according to Tawada, the act of naming has a magical power. She also writes about this in the poem *Gebet* (*Kito* 祈祷, *Prayer*) in her first book. In this animistic-shamanistic poem a kind of glossolalia is shown, whose creativity leads the conventionalized language to rebirth. Cf. Tawada (1987, p. 99/30).

7 The book *Überseezungen* consists of three parts, each called “Euro-Asian tongues”, “South African tongues” and “North American tongues”. For Japan as an island state, all foreign languages are “Overseas tongues (Übersee-zungen)”. In this neologism we can also recognize a fish (“Seezunge”, sole). This gives the impression that a language is a living being.

Just as the sleeping animal with its "nameless names" is called and awakened, "the voice counts the voiceless breath" in the second part of the poem *Absturz und Wiedergeburt* (*Crash and rebirth*), so that the world may be revived:

Da die Stimme den stimmlosen Atem zählt
als verfolgte sie eine Erinnerung
fließt ein lauwarmes Wasser
zwischen der feuchten Erde und dem Körper der Frau
Die Sonne erscheint in den Wolken
färbt das Wasser rot
wärmt das Fleisch
Die Frau bemerkt daß sie liegt

auf der großen Erde die mit toten Dingen
verstopft ist öffnet die Dolmetscherin ihre Lider
Die Geschichte hat noch nicht begonnen

(As the voice counts the voiceless breath
as if she was chasing a memory
a lukewarm water flows
between the damp earth and a woman's body
The sun appears in the clouds
colours the water red
warms the flesh
The woman notices that she is lying

on the great earth which is filled with dead things
the interpreter opens her eyelids
The story has not yet begun)

(Tawada, 1987, p. 119/10)

What once died and was reborn in this poem are mother tongue and the ego bound up with it. All terms like "Frau (woman)," "Erde (earth)" and "Sonne (sun)" are connected with fertility. After her rebirth the inter-

preter must now revive dead things with their nameless names to tell a new story. The activity of the interpreter is presented here as something poetic and creative. Thus "translating" is "exophonic" writing per se.

But here, we have to pay attention to the fact that Tawada still wrote this poem in the Japanese language. After putting her mother tongue into question, she did not immediately switch to the German language. In reality she didn't leave her mother tongue, but the relationship between her and her mother tongue had changed in contrast to before. In other words, the status of the mother tongue had changed for the poetess since she had lived in the foreign language environment. This structuralist idea can be seen very clearly in her poem *Die zweite Person Ich* (*The second person I*), which was published in 2011:

> Als ich dich noch siezte,
> sagte ich ich und meinte damit
> mich.
>
> Seit gestern duze ich dich,
> weiß aber noch nicht,
> wie ich mich umbenennen soll.
>
> (When I used to call you "Sie,"
> I said I and meant
> me.
>
> Since yesterday, I've been using the "du" form,
> but I don't know yet
> what I'm going to call myself.)
>
> (Tawada, 2011, p. 8)

As is known, German has both a formal and a familiar form of "you" ("Sie" and "du"). Tawada thinks that if the relationship between "you" and "me" has changed, i.e. when someone is no longer called "Sie" but "du," not only "you" but also "I" must be called different. So the

relationship between the poet and the Japanese language should also be different after she had contact with the German language. This relationship only becomes different again when a third language is added, etc.[8]

3 The "imaginären Bücher (imaginary books)" and Benjamin's idea of translation

Tawada's first book *nur da wo du bist da ist nicht* begins with the prose *Bilderrätsel ohne Bilder* (*Etoki* 絵解き, *Picture puzzle without pictures*) when we read it in German. This story is the first literary text that Tawada wrote in Germany with great effort. In the first paragraph, the first-person narrator explains the circumstances of her departure from Japan. She talks about the "imaginary »books« that have not yet been written, that are not yet bound, that we keep turning pages in our dreams without being able to understand them," and confesses that she has "a passion for them that borders on insanity" (Tawada, 1987, p. 9/120). These "imaginary books" remind us strongly of the medieval, handwritten chronicle that Heinrich von Ofterdingen, the title character of Novalis' novel fragments, finds at an old hermit. It is written in Provençal, and therefore Heinrich only turns the pages without understanding the text. But it is provided with pictures, so he finally understands that it contains his life story.[9] Tawada's narrative is actually about visiting "an exhibition of handmade picture books". (p. 9/120.) As the reason why the narrator is so interested in this, she explains with her

8 The alienation effect of the German language can be lost if the poetess lives in Germany for too long. Then she needs another language, as she writes in the story *Porträt einer Zunge* (*Portrait of a tongue*): "It had become impossible for me to fall in love in Berlin. The sentences that sprang into my ears had an immediate cooling effect. People don't talk in America — or so I thought. How nice. I mean, of course they talk, but they speak only American English and that will surely be a refreshing change because the language bears no trace of my fingerprints yet". (Tawada, 2002a, p. 121; Tawada, 2013, p. 44.)

9 The "imaginary books" are leafed through in dreams, and the dream motif also plays a very important role in Novalis' novel fragments. The novel begins, as is well known, with the description of a dream in which Heinrich sees the symbolic blue flower, a symbol of aspiration and recognition. Ivanovic (2010) notes allusions to Heinrich von Kleist in this narrative (espcially *Über das Marionettentheater* (*On the marionette theatre*), cf. pp. 178-179), for Tawada begins the narrative as follows: "I remember that the tradition of puppet theatre had long been cultivated in R, for I had once read a report on it in a colourful museum brochure, but this time my short visit to R was not for the puppet theatre [...]" (Tawada, 1987, p. 9/120). It is reasonable to assume that this narrative is under the influence of German Romanticism.

passion for "imaginary books" and says:

> Two years before, when I was still in Japan, these dreams had begun to fade; from the books I picked up, I could only see the contents. Books full of foreign letters were responsible for the fact that I was seized again. For hours I leafed through the Arabic and Hindi books that lay in the bookstores and I could not read. Even the English translations of the Japanese classics enchanted me. These classics, which I had already had enough of reading, suddenly opened my eyes again to that imaginary book by means of the letters of the alphabet, which were like engineering plans. When I buried the box in which I had packed my dead Japanese books in a park outside Tokyo, I decided to go to Germany.
>
> (Tawada, 1987, pp. 9/120-11/118)

This concerns the alienation effect of the unknown letters, and further the liberation of language from its fixed meaning. The books that only convey a certain content are already dead for the narrator. The text quoted above clearly shows that Tawada does not regard language as a mere means of transmitting information.

Letters or characters are a favorite theme of Tawada. In her Tübingen poetics lecture *Schrift einer Schildkröte oder das Problem der Übersetzung* (*Writing of a turtle or the problem of translation*, 1998)[10] she deals with the difference between the Chinese characters and the Latin letters:

> The body of an ideogram is not puzzling, because it shows what it means. I can calmly let my eyes linger on it. There is no danger of falling into nonsense, even though an ideogram usually has several meanings that have been gathered in it throughout history. [...] A character is a picture that has been painted over several times.

10 With the expression "writing of a turtle" Tawada means Chinese characters, because they were carved in their original form as pictograms in turtle shells and cattle bones. With this expression the language is again represented as a living being.

> In contrast, every letter of the alphabet is a mystery. For example, what does an A want to tell me? The longer I look at a letter, the more enigmatic and alive it becomes: alive because it is not a sign that stands for a signifier. It is neither an image nor a pictogram. It must not be looked at, but immediately translated into a sound and its body must disappear.
>
> (Tawada, 1998, p. 30)

So a Latin letter could be a "picture puzzle without pictures". But the Japanese title of this story is actually "*Etoki* 絵解き" and means "rebus". The title could be related to Walter Benjamin's *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* (*The origin of German tragic drama*, 1925), because Tawada was working intensively on Benjamin's texts at that time with Sigrid Weigel at the University of Hamburg.[11] In his habilitation thesis Benjamin (1991b, p. 345) analyses, among others, allegory in the Baroque and the term "rebus" appears in this context. He claims: "The language of the Baroque is at all times shaken by the rebellion of its elements" (Benjamin, 1991b, p. 381), i.e. by the rebellion of the "Schriftbild (written character)" and "Sprachlaut (vocalization)" (Benjamin, 1991b, p. 376).

This mechanism also applies to Tawada's poetics: the emphasis on the materiality or corporeality of the language (sound bodies / written bodies) is one of the typical artistic devices of Tawada, and both the Japanese and German languages are constantly alienated and restructured in her works by "rebellion of their elements".[12] A typical example can be found in her short story *Im Bauch des Gotthards* (*In the belly of Gotthard*, 1996). It is about a trip through the Gotthard Tunnel in Switzerland:

> Suddenly the ray of sunlight pierced through the window glass: "Airolo". The letter "O" appears twice in this name, as if the

11 In her dissertation Tawada dedicated a chapter to Benjamin. Benjamin dealt a lot with the philosophy of language of German Romanticism, and Tawada's interest in Romanticism could also be understood in this context.

12 Concerning Tawada, we could note the additional influence of Russian avant-gardists such as Velimir Khlebnikov (1885-1922) and his "zaum" language (language beyond reason), for she studied Slavic studies in Tokyo. "Alienation" is also the term conceived by the Russian formalist Viktor Shklovsky (1893-1984). They are both Benjamin's contemporaries.

> name wanted to recreate the shape of the tunnel exits I had left behind. […] I looked at the map to decide where I wanted to go. To Como or to Locarno: Also in these names the letter "O" opened twice. All names reminded me only of the tunnel entrances, and I noticed that I wished nothing else but to return to Göschenen. I shouted "Göschenen" and heard stones in the word. Hard stones lived in "G," pebbles slid down the slope at "ÖSCHE," and soft stones became damp and loamy in "NEN".
>
> (Tawada, 1996b, p. 98.)

In an interview with the literary critic Yasuhisa Yoshikawa, Tawada talks about this passage of text and says that she associates the sound "NEN" with the Chinese character "粘" (sticky). Why soft stones became "damp and loamy in "NEN," German readers would not understand. Loam means "*nendo* (粘土)" in Japanese, that is why the author uses the word "loamy". In the interview she says: "In literary works there are passages that are only understood when they are translated into another language" (Tawada, 1997, p. 90). This statement, in turn, reminds us of Benjamin: the task of the translator is "to release in his own language that pure language which is exiled among alien tongues, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work" (Benjamin, 1991a, p. 19; Benjamin, 1996, p. 261).

Indeed, in her essay *Das Tor des Übersetzers oder Celan liest Japanisch* (*The gate of the translator or Celan reads Japanese*, 1996), Tawada refers to Benjamin's essay *Die Aufgabe des* Übersetzers (*The task of the translator*, 1921), which begins the discussion with the problem of translatability. Thus Tawada reflects on the translatability of Celan's poems in her essay. She writes that when reading the Japanese translation by Iiyoshi, she felt that Celan's poems are "peering into Japanese" (Tawada, 1996a, p. 122), and asks "why Celan's poems were able to reach another world that lay outside the German language" (Tawada, 1996a, p. 122). She came across a possible answer to this question when an acquaintance of hers said that "the radical 門 ['tor (sic)' in German, 'gate' or 'gateway' in English] played a decisive role in this translation," and then she suddenly had the idea: "It was precisely this radical that

embodied the translatability of Celan's literature". (Tawada, 1996a, p. 122.)

She claims that the ideograms with the radical "gate" such as 閾 (threshold), 聞 (hear), 閃 (gleam), 間 (in-between space), 開 (open), 闇 (darkness) are very important for understanding Celan's poems, although the poet himself could not possibly know how his poems are translated into Japanese:

> The translation is not the image of the original but rather, in the translation a meaning of the original is given a new body [a written body, in this case, not one for sound to resonate in]. Walter Benjamin writes: *Translatability is an essential quality of certain works, which is not to say that it is essential that they be translated; it means rather that a specific significance inherent in the original manifests itself in its translatability.*
>
> (Tawada, 1996a, p. 134)

We can understand Benjamin's sentence quoted here to mean that there is a certain hidden meaning in the original, which the translation sheds light on. Tawada practices this idea playfully in the episode of the sound "NEN" in the place name "Göschenen".[13] Tawada obviously reads Benjamin's texts not as a scientist, but as a writer of "exophony" when she writes:

I compare Celan's words with the gates and remember that Ben-

13 The following statement by Tawada in the interview with Yoshikawa should also be understood in this context. "In the beginning I always brought my poem to him [to her translator Peter Pörtner] as soon as I had written it. I wanted to see immediately how it would look in German. [...] At that time I felt a great joy to experience my own poem in German translation. I wrote poems in Japanese without knowing what I wanted to express, I just knew that the text and style had to be as I wrote it. […] After the poem was translated into German, I suddenly thought I understood what I was aiming at with the poem" (Tawada, 1997, p. 90). In the interview, Tawada also talks about Hölderlin's translations of the Greek tragedy, probably because Benjamin refers to Hölderlin in his essay *The task of the translator*. Benjamin drew inspiration for the concept of "pure language" from Hölderlin's theory of caesura, developed in *Anmerkungen zu Oedipus* (*Notes to Oedipus*, 1804). Caesura is a metric incision within a verse, it is a short (speaking) pause. Hölderlin does not regard this pause as a blank space; for him it is "the pure word, the counter-rhythmic interruption" (Hölderlin, 1954, p. 196). The word is "pure" in the sense that it carries neither meaning nor sound. The "pure word" is the basis of all languages that people use, and this basis is only audible during the (speech) pause, because it is usually covered with meaning and sound.

> jamin describes literalness in a translation as an 'arcade': *True translation is translucent; it does not conceal the original, does not block the light from falling upon it, but allows pure language–as if intensified though its own medium–to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax, which proves the word rather than the sentence to be the primary element [Urelement] of the translator. For the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, and literalness is the arcade.* An arcade consists, if you will, of many gates placed one behind the other. If each one of Celan's words comprises a *gate*, the poem as a whole might resemble an *arcade*.
>
> (Tawada, 1996a, p. 131.)

In her novel *The wound in the alphabet* (*Arufabetto no kuzuguchi* アルファベットの傷口, 1993), Tawada took Benjamin's idea of "*a literal rendering of the syntax,*" which is quoted here, indeed literally. In the novel, a translator wants to translate a German text into Japanese so that the German syntax remains in the Japanese translation, and this attempt fails, as we can easily imagine. The title of this novel for the paperback edition *Transplanting letters* (*Moji ishoku* 文字移植, 1999) probably shows the connection with Benjamin's idea even more clearly. Because Benjamin also uses the word "transplant (verpflanzen)" (Benjamin 1991a, p. 15; Benjamin 1996, p. 258).

4 Conclusion

Tawada's poetics of "exophony," of liberating language from its fixed meaning and reviving it, is presented in her early work as a translation process. She therefore speaks of "translation without an original". The concept of considering "exophonic" writing as "translation" is understandable because it involves a constant process of self-translation. Is an "exophonic" author like Tawada then actually a writer or translator? In his talk on Benjamin's essay *The task of the translator*, Paul de Man (1985, p. 34) distinguishes the poet from the translator as follows:

> Of the differences between the situation of the translator and that of the poet, the first that comes to mind is that the poet has some relationship to meaning, to a statement that is not purely within the realm of language. That is the naiveté of the poet, that he has to say something, that he has to convey a meaning which does not necessarily relate to language. The relationship of the translator to the original is the relationship between language and language, wherein the problem of meaning or the desire to say something, the need to make a statement is entirely absent.

In her earlier essay *Die verlorenen Manuskripte* (*Ushinawareta genko* 失われた原稿, *The lost manuscripts*), Tawada (1999b, p.26) describes the writing process of a novel. She obviously writes this text as a writer because it is about what she wants to say:

> There's something I want to write. I start to write a novel but soon I realize there is something wrong with it and then I have to start all over again and I write something completely different. The plot, characters, circumstances, style, everything is completely different. What are the relationships between different versions of a novel that is rewritten and reworked several times? Maybe like in the family tree, where parents create children and die? Or are they different versions of a single informal text when it takes on a form and becomes visible?

It is remarkable that she imagines her "statement" as a text, i.e. as something verbal, although it has not yet been verbalized and is therefore still "formless". This is the translation from "inner speech" to "external speech" in Vygotsky's sense. As an "exophonic" author, Tawada also needs an additional process of translation between the "external speeches" (Japanese-German). This double translation process probably takes place almost simultaneously for Tawada, which is why she equates her writing activity with translation.

The translation on the level of the "external speech" gives the original a new body of writing and sound, and emphasizing this corporeality of

language is one of the typical tricks for Tawada. By adopting another language, she gains a distance from her mother tongue, which is constantly alienated and restructured in her works by the "rebellion of its elements". The restructuring of language through translation processes provides the writer with the framework for writing.

"The translator can never do what the original text did. Any translation is always second in relation to the original, and the translator as such is lost from the very beginning," states de Man (1985, p.33). But when he derives the translator's "defeat" from the ambiguity of the word "Aufgabe (task)," he conversely shows the translator's creativity, which Tawada enjoys immensely:

> If the text is called "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers," we have to read this title more or less as a tautology: *Aufgabe*, task, can also mean the one who has to give up. If you enter the Tour de France and you give up, that is the *Aufgabe* — "er hat aufgegeben," he doesn't continue in the race anymore. It is in that sense also the defeat, the giving up, of the translator.
>
> (de Man, 1985, p. 33)

Tawada doesn't give up. On the contrary, she is extremely productive, because she is convinced that the translation is not a copy of the original. There is never the correct translation, which for de Man means the "defeat" of the translator, but it is precisely this inaccessibility of the original that allows the translation to be constantly renewed. According to Benjamin, the diversity of the languages that exist on earth is proof that every language is imperfect. While Benjamin therefore idealizes the language before the Tower of Babel and speaks of the "reine Sprache (pure language)," Tawada conversely enjoys the multilingualism after Babel. She deals with this problem in her novel *Scattered across the earth* (*Chikyu ni chiribamerarete* 地球にちりばめられて, 2018). The title is obviously an allusion to the tower-building myth. After all, before Babel no translation was needed.

References

Benjamin, Walter. (1991a). "Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers". In Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Unter Mitwirkung von Theodor W. Adorno und Gershom Scholem, herausgegeben von Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, Bd. IV-I, pp. 9-21.

–––. (1991b). "Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels". In Benjamin, Walter. *Gesammelte Schriften*. Unter Mitwirkung von Theodor W. Adorno und Gershom Scholem, herausgegeben von Rolf Tiedemann und Hermann Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, Bd. I-I, pp. 203-430.

–––. (1996). "The task of the translator". In Benjamin, Walter. *Selected writings*. Edited by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, Cambridge (Massachusetts): Harvard University Press, vol. 1, pp. 253-263.

Celan, Paul. (1990). *Shikii kara shiki e* 閾から閾へ (*From threshold to threshold*). Japanese translation by Mitsuo Iiyoshi, Tokyo: Shichosha, 1990.

de Man, Paul. (1985). "Conclusions". Walter Benjamin's "The task of the translator". Messenger Lecture, Cornell University, March 4, 1983. *Yale French Studies*, No. 69, pp. 25-46.

Hölderlin, Friedrich. (1954). "Anmerkungen zu Oedipus". In Hölderlin, Friedrich. *Sämtliche Werke*. Herausgegeben von Friedrich Beißner, Suttgart: Kohlhammer, Bd. 5, pp. 193-202.

Ivanovic, Christine. (2010). "Exophonie und Kulturanalyse. Tawadas Transformationen Benjamins". In Ivanovic, Christine (ed.). *Yoko Tawada. Poetik der Transformation. Beiträge zum Gesamtwerk*. Tübingen: Stauffenburg, pp. 171-206.

Lughofer, Johann Georg. (2011). "Exophonie. Literarisches Schreiben in anderen Sprachen. Eine Einordnung". In Lufhofer, Johann Georg (ed.). *Exophonie. Schreiben in anderen Sprachen*. Ljublyana: Goethe Institut, pp. 3-6.

Matsunaga, Miho. (2002). "Schreiben als Übersetzung. Die Dimension der Übersetzung in Werken von Yoko Tawada". *Zeitschrift für Germanistik* 12/3, pp. 532-546.

Saalfeld, Lerke von. (1998). *Ich habe eine fremde Sprache gewählt. Ausländische Schriftsteller schreiben deutsch*. Gerlingen: Bleicher.

Suga, Keijiro. (2007). "Translation, exophony, omniphony". In Slaymaker, Doug (ed.). *Yōko Tawada. Voices from everywhere*. Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, pp. 21-33.

Tawada, Yoko. (1987). *Nur da wo du bist da ist nichts / anata no iru tokoro dake nani mo nai* あなたのいるところだけなにもない. Aus dem Japanischen von Peter Pörtner, Tübingen: konkursbuch.

–––. (1993). *Arufabetto no kizuguchi* アルファベットの傷口 (*The wound in the alphabet*), Tokyo: Kawadeshobo-shinsha.

–––. (1996a). "Das Tor des Übersetzers oder Celan liest Japanisch". In Tawada, Yoko. *Talisman*. Tübingen: konkursbuch, pp. 121-134. English translation by Bernofsky, Susan. "Celan Reads Japanese". Retrieved on March 1, 2020 from http://www.the-whitereview.org/feature/celan-reads-japanese/

–––. (1996b). "Im Bauch des Gotthards". In Tawada, Yoko. *Talisman*. Tübingen: konkursbuch. pp. 93-99.

–––. (1997). "Kotoba ni sumu doragon, sono gekirin ni furetakute" 言葉に棲むドラゴン、その逆鱗にふれたくて ("I would draw upon me the wrath of the dragon that dwells in the word"). Interview with Yasuhisa Yoshikawa. *Subaru*, March, pp. 84-94.

–––. (1998). "Schrift einer Schildkröte oder das Problem der Übersetzung". In Tawada, Yoko. *Verwandlungen. Tübinger Poetik-Vorlesung*. Tübingen: konkursbuch. pp. 23-40.

–––. (1999a). "Subette koronde kakato ga toreta" すべって、ころんで、かかとがとれた ("Slipped, fell and became heelless"). In Tawada, Yoko. *Katakoto no uwagoto* カタコトのうわごと (*Half talk in dreams*). Tokyo: Seidosha, pp. 10-13.

–––. (1999b). "Ushinawareta genko" 失われた原稿 ("The lost manuscripts"). In Tawada, Yoko. *Katakoto no uwagoto* カタコトのうわごと (*Half talk in dreams*). Tokyo: Seidosha, pp. 24-26.

–––. (2002a). "Porträt einer Zunge". In Tawada, Yoko. *Überseezungen*. Tübingen: konkursbuch, pp. 118-152.

–––. (2002b). "Wörter, die in der Asche schlafen". In Tawada, Yoko. *Überseezungen*. Tübingen: konkursbuch, pp. 18-30.

–––. (2003a). *Ekusofoni: bogo no soto e deru tabi* エクソフォニー　母語

の外へ出る旅 (*Exophny. Traveling beyond the mother tongue*). Tokyo: Iwanami shoten.

———. (2003b). "Sakka no shisen, kotoba no omowaku " 作家の視線、ことばの思惑 ("The gaze of the poets, the intention of the languages"). A dialogue with Natsuki Ikezawa. *Subaru*, June, pp. 146-155.

———. (2006). "Aru honyakuka eno tegami" ある翻訳家への手紙 ("Letter to a translator"). Iwanami shoten henshubu (ed.) 翻訳家の仕事 (*The work of the translator*). Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, pp. 169-174.

———. (2011). *Abenteuer der deutschen Grammatik*. Tübingen: konkursbuch.

———. (2013). *Portrait of a tongue*. Translated from the German with an introduction and commentary by Chantal Wright. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

———. (2018). *Chikyu ni chiribamerarete* 地球にちりばめられて (*Scattered across the earth*). Tokyo: Kodansha.

Wright, Chantal. (2013). "Yoko Tawada's exophonic texts". In Wright, Chantal. *Yoko Tawada's Portrait of a Tongue*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, pp. 1-21.

Vygotsky, Lev S. (1987). "Thinking and speech". In Riber, R. & Carton, A. (eds.) *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky*, vol. 1. New York: Springer.

[received March 20, 2020
accepted June 10, 2020]