

## “My tongue, my own thing”: Reading *Sanaaq*

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### Article abstract

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# “My tongue, my own thing”: Reading *Sanaaq*

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## Abstract

Mitiarjuk, who has been called the “accidental Inuit novelist” (Martin, 2014), began writing *Sanaaq* in the mid-1950s and was “discovered” in the late 1960s by a doctoral student of Claude Lévi-Strauss. Bernard Saladin d’Anglure took up this text as his anthropology thesis topic, guided its completion, arranged for its 1984 publication in Inuktitut syllabics, and in 2002 published a French translation; his own former student, Peter Frost, has recently (2013) translated the French version into English. Without the training and tools that would equip an outsider to appreciate Inuit writing and the oral traditions from which it arises, and to judge it on its own merits, scholarly assessment by other than specialist anthropologists or ethnographers has often been felt to be beyond the reach of southerners. Nonetheless, a younger generation of literary scholars such as Keavy Martin, inspired by the work of J. Edward Chamberlin, Robert Allen Warrior and Craig Womack, are working to redress such attitudes. Bringing to bear for the first time the perspective of translation studies, this paper will suggest some ways we can move from ethnography’s purported aim of a systematic study of people and cultures to a rigorous and ethical study of these translated texts, reading them explicitly *as literature*, as well as (and perhaps more importantly) *as literary translations*.

**Keywords:** translation, Inuit, Mitiarjuk, *Sanaaq*, gender

## Résumé

Mitiarjuk, surnommée « the accidental Inuit novelist » (Martin, 2014), a commencé à écrire *Sanaaq* au milieu des années 1950 et a été « découverte » à la fin des années 1960 par un étudiant de Claude Lévi-Strauss. Bernard Saladin d’Anglure a repris ce texte comme sujet de thèse en anthropologie, en a guidé l’achèvement, a organisé sa publication en 1984 en écriture syllabique inuktitute et en a publié une traduction française en 2002. Peter Frost, ancien étudiant de Saladin d’Anglure, a pour sa part traduit la version française en anglais en 2013. L’étude de la littérature inuite est souvent considérée comme hors de portée des chercheurs non autochtones ou qui ne



INALCO in France, my progress has been painfully slow. Further, I have no claims to a specialization in ethnography. Nonetheless, I do bring to the table more than a decade of research on the translation of another minority literature—exploring the abrupt, even revolutionary 19<sup>th</sup>-century European “discovery” of Japan—and a track record that includes publications on world literatures in translation (e.g. Henitiuk, 2008a, 2008b, 2010a); women writers from various cultures and languages (e.g. Henitiuk, 1999, 2011; Henitiuk and Kar, 2016); innovative ways of conceptualizing translation (e.g. Henitiuk, 2010b, 2012a, 2012b); and literatures of restitution (Baxter, Henitiuk and Hutchinson, 2013). My current project looks at the circulation and reception of Inuit literary texts, raising issues such as (post)colonialism, globalization, power imbalance, gatekeeping, agency, memory, orality, and Indigenous ways of knowing—all of which take on increased importance as Canada grapples with the 94 Calls to Action set out in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). As Indigenous and settler Canadians finally begin to address the traumatic history of our engagements with one another, literature offers the possibility of “restitution over and above the mere recital of facts” (Sebald, quoted in Baxter, Henitiuk and Hutchinson, 2013, p. 1), while translation studies helpfully shares with ethnography an explicit and reflexive meta-discourse around the appropriation of voice, offering the possibility for productive debate as well as action.

Inuit and their narrative traditions represent one of Canada’s most “invisible minorities” (Cronin, 2003, p. 139; note that the Inuit experience was addressed only tangentially through the TRC). And it is through translation, humanity’s most vital means of mediating across language and culture, that we are able to increase consciousness about endangered knowledge systems, whether as students of ethnography or simply as readers of literature.

To those outside Inuktitut-speaking communities, Inuit source texts remain largely inaccessible.<sup>1</sup> Stories and song were traditionally passed down orally, and even where written versions

1. Granted, there is now a not-inconsiderable body of work produced directly in English, including graphic novels and children’s literature—see authors such as Alootook Ipellie, Rachel Qitsualik and Michael Kusugak—as well as long-established literary activity in Greenland. This article, however, will limit itself to texts originally composed in Inuktitut within what is now known as Canada.

exist, they tend to be located in what are often ephemeral, hard-to-find publications, or in collections by non-Inuit scholars, explorers or priests with, naturally enough, their own agendas. If Indigenous languages, cultures and literatures are to thrive (see Call to Action 14, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015),<sup>2</sup> it will be at least in part with the help of translation studies, which offers a much-needed “ethic acknowledging and accounting for power” (Canadian Association for Translation Studies, 2016, n.p.) within “a world of continuous relational adjustments” (Cronin, 2003, p. 156, citing Isobel Armstrong).

In a recent article (Henitiuk, 2017), I examine translator Catherine Ego’s intriguing use of a particular foreignizing strategy in her 2011 rendition of a separate Inuit text titled *Harpoon of the Hunter*. Rather than rendering “seal breathing hole” by “trou de respiration de phoque,” she opts to insert as a single example of Inuktitut vocabulary, in italics, the gallicized Inuktitut term *allou*. My speculative reading suggests that this translation choice may function to some degree as a means for avoiding the usual “trou de mémoire (pun intended),” whereby the experience of the source culture is domesticated and thereby elided. That article notes that these *allous*, or the holes opened up in the ice by seals to allow them to surface and breathe the air, function as a sort of meeting point, necessary for life yet fraught with danger, and thus prompt readers to think deeply about the meeting of two cultures. While contact zones—famously defined as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths” (Pratt, 1991, p. 34)—may be unavoidable in today’s globalized world, they do create opportunities for misinterpretation. Hopefully, my work will spark much-needed dialogue about the very interesting text composed by Markoosie in Inuktitut and then self-translated into English, from which language it was subsequently translated into French (twice) as well as other languages. While indirect or relay translation is not uncommon, the really quite complex translation journey undertaken by that particular text, which includes Hindi and Marathi versions relayed from French, is worthy of note.

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2. For a helpful discussion of the history and promise of bilingual education in Inuktitut in northern Quebec, the geographical region in which Mitiajuk lived and wrote, see, e.g., Patrick and Shearwood (1999).

*Sanaaq* provides another instructive case study of translation from a minority or peripheral language into a central or heavily translated one, again involving indirect translation presented as unproblematic, and how this tends to reflect an inherently unequal relationship. It demands to be read in the context of André Lefevere's theorizing of translation as a form of "rewriting" and "manipulation" (1992).<sup>3</sup> More specifically, it allows further exploration of the researcher/translator's influence on the reading/interpretation of Inuit culture along with his/her "fictionaliz[ing of] the Other" (Canadian Association for Translation Studies, 2016, n.p.); issues of gender also helpfully come to the fore with Mitiarjuk's text.

### **Inuit cultural production**

Inuit are an extensively studied people, figuring prominently in the career of such iconic figures as ethnographer Franz Boas or Greenlandic explorer Knud Rasmussen. As Michael P. J. Kennedy notes, ethnographic reports containing renditions of Inuit orature into English have existed for many decades. Far from being a neutral activity, this "transcription and translation" (by, e.g., Heinrich Rink, Boas, Rasmussen or Diamond Jenness) must be recognized as "in itself an act of critical evaluation" (Kennedy, 2011, p. 197; for a discussion of the power relationships inherent to transcription itself, see Bucholtz, 2000). The songs and myths as told to them orally were documented with care, with close observations of and commentary on their context added; but for the majority of early anthropologists, insofar as they were interested in prose and poetry, these myths' value lay in what they could reveal about a people, their history and how they live (e.g. Boas, 1904; Rasmussen, 1921, 1927; Saladin d'Anglure, 1990, 2000). Although the anthropological work of Saladin d'Anglure and others of his generation does fall within what Kate Sturge identifies as the discipline's growing interest in its literary dimension (2007, p. 7), the first truly literary studies of Inuit cultural production did not begin to appear until the last quarter

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3. Although there is no space in the present article to delve into all of this, further research on any number of significant shifts will be important, such as: 1) the move in Inuit tradition from oral to written; 2) the many changes involved in translation from Inuktitut into French, and then via relay translation into English; 3) the shift in perspective from ethnographic text to creative writing; and 4) the imposition of the European genre of "novel."

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, under the influence of Clifford Geertz's *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1973). Robin (Gedalof) McGrath's pioneering work was published in 1984 (coincidentally the same year as the Inuktitut version of *Sanaaq*). Significantly, no one has yet offered a translation studies perspective on Inuit literature (Timothy J. Pasch, a communications studies scholar, has published on translation from Inuktitut, but primarily around digital or new media resources). Given that virtually no outsiders and only a small proportion of Inuit are accessing such texts through the original syllabics, this constitutes a significant gap in understanding what is being read and how.

Written language and especially literature, as opposed to a centuries-old orature, is a recent arrival among Inuit. In Greenland, the development of writing in Inuktitut can be dated as far back as 1721, with the work of Danish-Norwegian missionary Hans Egede (see Dorais, 2010, pp. 173-174). However, widespread literacy in Canadian-Inuit communities occurred only around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (even if a small group of German Moravian missionaries had been teaching Labrador-based Inuit to read and write in their own language as early as the late 18<sup>th</sup> century). Eastern Canadian Arctic communities use a system of syllabics originally developed (based on shorthand) for the Ojibwa language by missionary James Evans, who then in 1840 adapted this writing system to the phonology of Cree. Within 40 years, Edmund Peck would translate the Bible into Inuktitut, introducing a syllabic system adapted to Inuit. While there has been and remains controversy over standardization of these symbols (see, e.g., Hopper, 2015), and indeed whether they should be replaced by the Roman alphabet entirely (N.B. Western Canadian Inuit use the Roman script), syllabics remain highly valued in many Inuit communities, where they are considered not only simple and useful, but also a distinctive marker of cultural identity (for a detailed discussion, see Dorais, 2010, pp. 174-183).

Until very recently, creative texts of any length crafted in Inuktitut have remained rare within Canada; Markoosie's *Harpoon of the Hunter*, widely described as "the first Inuit novel," did not appear until 1969-1970 (in Inuktitut; the self-translation into English appeared in 1970, and the French renditions in 1971 and 2011); although published with some fanfare and even political support, it did not lead to a flood of such books. Both translations

of Mitiarjuk's *Sanaaq* also insist on the front cover that this is a "roman" (Nappaaluk, 2002), "an Inuit novel" (Nappaaluk, 2014), albeit a "roman atypique" as the opening sentence claims (Saladin d'Anglure, 2002, p. 5); in Keavy Martin's review of the English translation, her editor added a title characterizing our author as an "accidental novelist" (2014, n.p.). The claim made by her translators and others is that Mitiarjuk somehow writes a novel without ever herself having seen, much less having read one.<sup>4</sup> At the time our author was being taught the syllabic writing system, and during the years she was initially writing (and as she had only just become literate, she had read nothing at all before this period), the only texts in Inuktitut she was likely to come across would be almost exclusively ecclesiastical in nature—translations of the Bible, hymns, and the like. Bearing this in mind helps focus our attention on Mitiarjuk's amazing achievement, namely her innovative use of this new writing technology not only to describe daily life (Saladin d'Anglure 1969, vol. 1, p. 359), but to do so in a sustained fictional form.

In an interview conducted in 2014, Mini Aodla Freeman, herself an author and translator, speaks explicitly of how odd it felt deciding to put pen to paper:

in my culture, we are not 'writing people'; we memorize everything: everything what people say, everything of where we went, everything what we plan to do. You know, it was all done by memory. And all our culture, our rules, our laws, our games are all from memory, passed on from one generation to another. And I said to myself, "One day, somebody is going to forget." So that's when I decided to write the book. (2015, p. xiv)

Her own, important volume, *Life among the Qallunaat* (1976; second, expanded edition 2014), can helpfully be characterized as "reverse ethnography." As her editors explain:

Building on her career as an interpreter for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Aodla Freeman was able to make use of the memoir form as an instrument of translation, as her narrative weaves together inherited Inuit knowledge, [an...] account of her time in

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4. Note that the cover of neither the French nor the English versions of *Sanaaq* actually indicates that what readers have in their hands is a translation, much less identifies the translator's name (which is listed only on the inside title page).



Ottawa and Hamilton, and reflections on the history and activity of the people of James Bay during a period of intense political and social change. (Rak *et al.*, 2015, p. 262)

Likewise, Mitiarjuk records a time of change, with a small, semi-nomadic community re-discovering its way of life from before the moment when it was irreversibly altered by the coming of the Qallunaat.

*Qallunaat*, the Inuktitut word for non-Inuit, is typically glossed as “heavy eyebrows” or “people who pamper their eyebrows” (Freeman, 2015, p. 86), or “outstanding eyebrows” (Dorais, 2010, p. 88); Sheila Watt-Cloutier posits that it refers to the fact that the bone of the eyebrow protrudes more in non-Inuit (2015, p. 4). Aodla Freeman notes the term’s apparent links to materialism or avariciousness (2015, pp. 86-87), but this etymological speculation does not appear to have been picked up by others. It is not only Inuktitut etymology that can be difficult to pin down. Especially before some standardization of Inuit orthography began in the 1970s, the imprecision of syllabics has meant that mere decipherment of any written text was a major hurdle. Here is just one example, helpfully provided by Saladin d’Anglure himself:

/b σ/

/kaanniq/ “le fait d’avoir faim”

/kaniq/ “les cristaux de givre qui tombent de la maison de neige”

/qaani/ “dehors”

/qaanniq/ “eau dégagée par l’éloignement des glaces de dérive”

/qaarniq/ “le fait d’éclater”

/qanik/ “neige qui tombe”

/qaniq/ “la bouche” (1969, vol. 2, p. vi)

### Indirect translation

As a newly minted PhD in physics, inspired by the exploits of early Arctic explorers in search of the northwest passage, Franz Boas set sail from Germany to the US and then north to Baffin Island in 1882. His nine months in an Inuit community would confirm his new career direction, leading him not only to become assistant curator at New York’s Museum of Natural History and, by 1899, professor of anthropology at Columbia University, but also to be

credited with establishing both anthropology and linguistics in North America.<sup>5</sup> As Kate Sturge underscores, for Boas (who in turn trained such noted figures as Edward Sapir, Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead) "it was the words—the cultural texts—[...] which were the proper object of cultural anthropology's attention" (2007, p. 102). And, although he would spend many decades studying other peoples of North America, his professional grounding was very much in Inuit culture.

In his 1911 *Handbook of American Indian Languages*, Boas writes of the "serious practical difficulty" (p. 60) faced by the ethnographer who seeks information about "customs of former times" (p. 60) and lacks mastery of the language in which enquiries must be made:

the investigator who visits an Indian tribe is not able to converse with the natives themselves and to obtain his information first-hand, but he is obliged to rely more or less on data transmitted by interpreters, or at least by the help of interpreters. He may ask his question through an interpreter, and receive again through his mouth the answer given by the Indians. (p. 59)

This account of working with interpreters goes on to characterize them as "unsatisfactory" (p. 59), "biased" (p. 59) or "misleading" (p. 61); Boas comments that even "a particularly intelligent interpreter" (p. 59) is easily influenced and thus often more of a hindrance than a help. Further:

the available men are either not sufficiently familiar with the English language, or they are so entirely out of sympathy with the Indian point of view, and understand the need of accuracy on the part of the investigator so little, that information furnished by them can be used only with a considerable degree of caution. (p. 59)

While not sharing Boas' mistrustful view of interpreters or translators, I am interested in exploring some of the challenges of mediated communication.

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<sup>5</sup> A sad footnote to Boas' tenure as director of the Natural History Museum is the story of Minik, an eight-year-old Inuk boy who along with his family was brought to New York City as museum specimens by Arctic explorer Robert Peary. Boas had in fact asked Peary for one middle-aged Inuk male, to be loaned to the museum for a year, but Peary simply dropped off six Inuit and left; only Minik survived more than a few months. See Harper (2000 [1986]).

Relay or indirect translation is “based on a source (or sources) which is itself a translation into a language other than the language of the original, or the target language” (Kittel and Frank, 1991, p. 3), and has long been a common practice in the case of minority cultures. For Inuit orature, relay translation remains the norm, as evidenced by the global circulation of Rasmussen’s early 20<sup>th</sup>-century transcriptions in Danish of traditional stories and songs (see also Henitiuk, 2017, as mentioned above). Nor is the choice of pivot language insignificant. Within Canada, translations from Inuktitut are differentially made available to each official language readership, depending on which comprises the initial translation; the 2014 English rendition of *Sanaaq* was done from the French version published—to significant acclaim—a full dozen years earlier.

Boas himself acknowledges the specific challenges facing those working with lesser studied languages:

Nobody would expect authoritative accounts of the civilization of China or of Japan from a man who does not speak the languages readily, and who has not mastered their literatures. The student of antiquity is expected to have a thorough mastery of the ancient languages. A student of Mohammedan life in Arabia or Turkey would hardly be considered a serious investigator if all his knowledge had to be derived from second-hand accounts. The ethnologist, on the other hand, undertakes in the majority of cases to elucidate the innermost thoughts and feelings of a people without so much as a smattering of knowledge of their language. (1911, p. 60)

And it follows that, as readers of these ethnographic studies, we are reliant on first the interpretation by Inuit helpers and then the interpretation of the ethnographer who is conducting the study and whose grasp of both language and culture may in many cases be tenuous.

### *Sanaakkut Piusiviningita Unikkausinnguangat*

In the early 1950s, the 23-year-old Mitiarjuk is asked by Father Robert Lechat, a Catholic missionary newly arrived in Kangirsujuak (Saladin d’Anglure, 1969, vol. 2, p. iii), to prepare word lists to help him learn Inuktitut. However, this creative and independent-minded woman rejects such a passive role in favour of a more equitable co-production of knowledge. In

what constitutes a striking act of self-assertion, especially for a female Inuk of the day, Mitiarjuk takes up the valuable tool of syllabic writing and begins writing stories, on which she was to work sporadically for some 20 years, long after Lechat had been transferred away. *Sanaaq* would eventually comprise 48 interlinked episodes concerning a young widow (who remarries not long into the story), her daughter, and their small community in the 1920s, and would detail the period of initial contact with missionaries, the imposition of a market economy, and the impact of government intervention that forever alters their traditional nomadic lifestyle.

Bernard Saladin d'Anglure was made aware of Mitiarjuk's initial writings as early as 1956 and by 1962 (Nappaaluk, 2002, p. 5) had taken them up as his doctoral project under the general direction of Claude Lévi-Strauss.<sup>6</sup> Saladin d'Anglure eventually shaped the stories for publication in both Inuktitut (this illustrated book came out in 1984 through Quebec's Association Inuksiutiit and was made available in many northern school libraries) and French—the anthropologist's own translation, published by Stanké in Outremont and Paris in 2002, almost 20 years later. An English translation, done by Saladin d'Anglure's former MA student Peter Frost, was not published until 2014.

In *Sanaaq*, we have a literary work authored by a woman, one who had somewhat unusually been taught hunting and fishing along with the traditional sewing and other homemaking techniques. Mitiarjuk is thus able to offer a uniquely comprehensive record of the daily life of all members of her community, whether male or female; so it is no surprise if anthropologists have shown an interest in her writing. However, the fact that this unique woman's text (and voice) comes to us exclusively through two male translators, neither of whom specialize in literature or claim any background in either women's studies or translation studies, should and does give pause.

As Martin rightly points out, "*Sanaaq* may be read as an ethnographic or historical document, but to do so would be to miss the skill and complexity of the storytelling" (inside cover blurb to Frost, 2014). Although Frost is an experienced and conscientious

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6. Although Saladin d'Anglure began his dissertation under the direct supervision of Jean Malaurie, and concluded it under Eveline Lot-Falck, he was throughout this time a research assistant in Lévi-Strauss's Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale.

French-English academic translator (he works regularly for *Études/Inuit/Studies*, for example, in addition to having translated many of Saladin d'Anglure's papers), his training is exclusively in anthropology (personal correspondence). Furthermore, rather than being done directly from the author's original Inuktitut, a language Frost does not read, his *Sanaaq* translation takes as its source text the published French version. With no wish to denigrate the considerable contributions of either Saladin d'Anglure, who was presumably aiming at what Christiane Nord has termed a documentary translation<sup>7</sup>, or Frost, I cannot help but wonder what the text would read like were we to have access through a less mediated route.

As I discuss in "Translating Woman: Reading the female through the male", reading is a learned social process:

an activity heavily influenced by what we are taught and the type of texts to which we are exposed: "We read well, and with pleasure, what we already know how to read, and what we know how to read is to a large extent dependent on what we have already read" [...]. (Henitiuk, 1999, p. 473)

Ethnographers are experts in bringing to the attention of the public unfamiliar cultures and traditions, thus by definition texts that may initially prove impenetrable (Geertz, 1973; Bachmann-Medick, 2006).

The way in which Mitiarjuk deliberately assumes a role as transmitter of cultural memory for her own community stands in stark contrast with the more typically imposed role of native informant for others. Of course, none of this is a simple or transparent matter—no text remains unmediated or "pure." Its translation history—involving a certain manhandling of this woman's text, a lack of literary training, or even any acknowledgement of the potential value of such training, of those speaking for her—was set in motion by the widely published anthropologist Saladin d'Anglure, as well as his former student. With this early work, Saladin d'Anglure established a long, successful career in which he became an acknowledged expert on Inuit. The noted anthropologist comments on the context of working closely with "informateurs-écrivains": "Mitiarjuk prouva

7. Nord (1997) makes a distinction between "documentary translation" which functions to report a text existing in another language, and "instrumental translation," which is intended to stand on its own.

d'abord par son oeuvre qu'une Esquimaude non scolarisée était capable de réaliser une production importante, à condition d'être sollicitée, encouragée et suivie" [Mitiarjuk proves first through her work that an unschooled Eskimo was capable of producing something important, provided others ask, encourage and oversee her] (Saladin d'Anglure, 1969, vol. 1, p. 372).

The decades of work undertaken by Saladin d'Anglure are not to be underestimated. This involved not only translation but also transliteration, which itself was preceded by the requirement to compile the existing texts and encourage the author to "complete" the text. The anthropologist underscores the need to work together with his author to ensure accuracy; although he found the partial transcriptions and translation done unilaterally by the missionaries to be helpful in the very early stages, he ended up starting almost from scratch. Saladin d'Anglure recorded Mitiarjuk reading her text, and produced a brand-new transcription of the whole, then translated the text into French and had this checked by 1) another missionary based in Kangirsujuaq, and 2) Mitiarjuk herself. She offered her own input into both transliteration and translation: "[s]es patientes explications nous sortirent bien souvent du découragement qui s'emparait de nous devant l'ampleur des difficultés à résoudre" [her patient explanations very often save us from becoming discouraged by the scale of the problems to be solved] (Saladin d'Anglure, 1969, vol. 2, p. v). Other Inuit also contributed, as did priest and esteemed lexicographer Lucien Schneider. Saladin d'Anglure ran their corrections again past Mitiarjuk, which apparently helped eliminate many misreadings (*ibid.*).

### ***Sanaaq atinga* ("Sanaaq was her name")/Mitiarjuk atinga**

Although commonly known as Mitiarjuk, the author's full name is Salomé Mitiarjuk Attasi Nappaaluk. Naming is a highly contentious topic in colonial and postcolonial Inuit culture (e.g., Alia, 2009). Traditionally, Inuit men and women used a single non-gender-specific name. Missionaries from the Moravian, Anglican and Catholic churches began baptizing Inuit in what is now Canada as early as the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 1940s, the federal government assigned each Inuk a number, issuing identification disks not unlike dog tags; then, in the late 1960s, Inuit were forced to adopt surnames, often those of their fathers or grandfathers. Addressing this particular history as well as other forms of colonial

abuse, the TRC's Call to Action 17 calls upon federal, provincial and territorial governments to facilitate the process whereby residential school survivors may reclaim names forcibly changed.<sup>8</sup>

Mitiarjuk, at least in part, turns the tables on what Talal Asad has characterized as the "asymmetrical tendencies and pressures in the languages of dominated and dominant societies" (1986, p. 164). She is no passive "informant" in either ethnography or translation, but rather insists on collaborative relations (NB: this is not to deny that power hierarchies exist and are implicated in the fate of her text). It is *her* tongue, after all, and Mitiarjuk wants to use it to "tell something that makes sense"—to herself and her community: not lists of isolated, deracinated, and decontextualized words and phrases, but rather coherent stories about people she recognizes, whose lives she knows and whose concerns are in many ways her "own thing," part and parcel of what she knows intimately and wants to ensure is not forgotten. Thus she makes use of her tongue, along with the new tool of literacy that she has acquired, in order to expand its reach and power.

Further, the choices Mitiarjuk herself makes are important, and deserve our attention; we can find examples of self-censorship, for example, or when the tongue chooses not to tell. In a passage describing a traditional game played with small animal bones, our author names these various bones: e.g. some are shaped somewhat like dogs, known as *qimmiinguat*, or seals, *nassingquaq*; others like women, *arnanguat*. In the early glossed version of this text (i.e. the one appearing in Saladin d'Anglure's 1969 thesis), Mitiarjuk's narrator comments: "mais certains d'entre eux, je ne les dis pas" (*ilangalli uqanniginakku*) (Saladin d'Anglure, 1969, vol. 2, p. 166). In the anthropologist's "free translation" (Saladin d'Anglure, 1969, vol. 1, p. 265), this becomes: "mais il y en a un parmi eux que je ne nomme pas" [but there's one that I don't name] accompanied by Saladin d'Anglure's "ethnographic commentary" on the facing page explaining that there are three

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8. Call to Action 17 of the TRC report reads as follows: "We call upon all levels of government to enable residential school Survivors and their families to reclaim names changed by the residential school system by waiving administrative costs for a period of five years for the name-change process and the revision of official identity documents, such as birth certificates, passports, driver's licenses, health cards, status cards, and social insurance numbers" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, n.p.).



bones called *ussulutuq*, or "vulva" (p. 264), and that the author opts not to name them since her writing at the time was addressed to the priests. What is significant here, to my mind, is not only how aware Mitiarjuk was of her readership, but also how she insists on the integrity of the cultural practice being described, even where she feels unable to name all its parts (i.e. she could easily have entirely elided any mention of the bone with the awkward name/shape, but opts not to do so, thus paradoxically ensuring that it is kept in plain sight). In the 2002 French translation of *Sanaaq*, we find in place of the original self-censorship (whether because the priests are no longer her primary readers or simply that the times have become somewhat less prudish) a straightforward bilingual rendering: "un *utsulutuq* (figure de vulve)" (Nappaaluk, 2002, p. 170). Interestingly, given Frost's (or his publisher's) decision to define all Inuktitut terms only in the glossary at the back of the book ("little bone, figurine of a vulva" [2014, p. 221]) the English version goes full circle, restoring on some level the original's coyness, with the body of the text reading simply and (to the vast majority of readers) opaquely: "an *utsulutuq*" (Frost, 2014, p. 121).

The emergence of strong and independent Inuit women such as Sheila Watt-Cloutier as leaders on the world stage, or the success of Inuit women artists such as Kenojuak may suggest a very recent shift from subordinate positions, something made possible by contact with *qallunaat* and the education and other opportunities they bring. However:

That would be misleading. The role of women in Inuit culture has always provided stability, nourished the youngest members and passed to them the accumulated wisdom of the culture. Though the present is clearly a time of transition, this role is still valid today. (Jackson, in LeRoux *et al.*, 1996 [1994], p. 39)

Nonetheless, self-censorship does have particular valences for women writers. As McGrath tells us, "[a]ccording to Inuit women, it is proper to recall the 'learning years,' to show themselves as children or young girls who make mistakes and accept correction, but it is improper to boast or attract attention as adults. For women to draw attention to themselves overtly is to invite ridicule" (1997, p. 225). Saladin d'Anglure is bemused when he discovers that, some 15 years after its publication, Mitiarjuk was hoarding all 50 author copies of her book (2002, p. 10), but



does not consider this possible explanation for her reticence in circulating those copies.

The lack of cultural background for understanding Inuit writing in general and for seeing culture-specific patterns can result in unfairly negative appraisals of literary quality, and this is only exacerbated where texts authored by women are concerned. As McGrath explains:

It could well be that Inuit women use patterns of narrative that are not as easily recognized, or that are unknown outside the culture because the majority of non-Inuit who recorded Inuit oral literature were male missionaries and male anthropologists who had no interest in or access to the female domain. (1997, p. 226)

I have written elsewhere about the dangers of male translators being blind to feminocentric discourse systems (Henitiuk, 1999, etc.), and the array of male mediators (i.e. three different missionaries, Saladin d'Anglure himself, his doctoral supervisor Claude Lévi-Strauss, his publisher Alain Stanké, and finally Frost) with their hands all over Mitiarjuk's text is far from a minor issue in the production of this book. Even if one assumes they each had the very best of intentions, the power imbalance is significant.

A major reason behind Saladin d'Anglure's attraction to Mitiarjuk's text is his own research interest in the so-called "third sex" among Inuit (1992), and he is a thoughtful reader of gender on many levels.<sup>9</sup> This complicates matters in an interesting way: while it is clearly essentialist and wrong to claim that one must be

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9. The English abstract to his well-known article in *Études/Inuit/Studies*, "Le troisième sexe," reads as follows: "The author introduces us to the mythology, system of thought and social practices of the Inuit in an attempt to discover their conception of social sex (or gender). Unlike the binary conception that predominates among westerners, the Inuit have a tripartite system in which some individuals, men or women, straddle the social frontier between the sexes/genders. This third social sex, which is prominent in mythology and among the great mythical figures, is also found at the heart of shamanistic mediations, as well as in many families, where the identity of dead relatives is transmitted to the 'newborn', regardless of their sex. When the sex is different, the children are cross-dressed till puberty, after which time they have to take on the gender corresponding to their sex, but a number of these young people used to become shamans and so continued to assume the mediations of the third social sex. This construction occurs without any reference to sexual orientation." (Available at: <<http://dio.sagepub.com/content/52/4/134.short>> [consulted 1 May 2016]).

biologically female to translate accurately the voice of a woman author, an engagement with issues of gender and translation should surely be considered essential, nonetheless, to a full teasing out of this early fictional text authored by a female Inuk, and the journey it has subsequently undergone. An informed feminist reader (male or female) of this literature could potentially offer a genuinely "thick" translation (Appiah, 1993 referencing Geertz, 1973<sup>10</sup>) that brings out and analyzes layers of the text hitherto downplayed. In Saladin d'Anglure's postface from 2002, we read:

In all this we have an original female viewpoint on Inuit life and psychology—too often described by men and by people from outside Inuit culture who have underestimated the contribution of women and ignored their viewpoint. (Frost, 2014, p. xvii)

How ironic then is the absence of Mitiarjuk's own voice, in that neither the English nor the French volumes contain an interview with the author, along with her almost complete elision from all of the book's paratextual matter. As Gérard Genette (1997) taught us, paratexts have important framing functions. Saladin d'Anglure's preface discussing the book's genesis contains not a single direct quotation from Mitiarjuk concerning her own views of how or why it came to be written, and his postface discussing its content, form and style contains only one (unreferenced) retelling of an anecdote. This is despite the translator-anthropologist's close working relationship with Mitiarjuk (over a period of some 40 years) and the fact that she lived until 2007. In Frost's English translation, the two paratexts are combined into a single foreword, but again the opportunity to rectify the omission and allow Mitiarjuk to speak for herself through insertion of, for example, an interview transcript or even simply a more extensive depiction of how she helped eliminate misinterpretations, is missed. This more recent volume even does away with the large-format author's photo, which comprises the cover of the French version, replacing this with a tiny thumbnail image on the inside flap.

### **His tongue. His own thing.**

Sturge's *Representing Others: Translation, Ethnography and the Museum* draws on the work of Dennis Tedlock, Talal Asad, and

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10. See also foundational work on feminism and translation such as Simon (1996), and von Flotow (1997).

many others regarding ethnography as a kind of translation, one that traffics in the ideally bilateral translation of cultures, to argue that ethnographers should be paying greater attention to the implications of the translation act. Questions of ethics in translation studies go beyond traditional concerns with faithfulness to address (for example) agency in cross-cultural work. These concerns have been an important part of translation studies since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the release of special journal issues (Pym, 2001 and Fiola, 2004) as well as Bermann and Wood's 2005 *Nation, Language and the Ethics of Translation* (for an overview of the central concerns, see Inghilleri and Maier, 2011). Questions arise of who speaks, on whose behalf, and who has ownership of meaning and its circulation; there are various challenges to "structures of inequality" (Sturge, 2007, p. 9) and especially "the singular authority of the translator's voice" (*ibid.*, p. 8) as s/he constructs his/her own "fictions" (*ibid.*, p. 7) of what others are up to (i.e. the ethnographic data they have compiled and analysed).

Rasmussen possessed unique qualifications and an exceptional aptitude for Arctic exploration and anthropological study. His mother being ¼ Inuit and his childhood spent among Greenlandic natives, this "founder of Eskimology" (Jean Malaurie qtd. in Cole, 1999 [1929], p. xi) had a rare fluency in and comprehension of both language and cultural traditions, in addition to practical skills such as handling dogs, hunting, fishing, and otherwise living on the land. The explorer proudly describes encountering the shaman Igjugarjuk, who called him the first white man he had ever met who was also an Eskimo (Rasmussen, 1927, p. 64). Further, as a highly educated man of literary sensibilities, his writing has not inaccurately been described as "half ethnology and half poetry" (Cole, 1999 [1929], p. xvi). In his own words, he was "endeavouring as far as possible, to give literal translations" (Rasmussen, 1908, p. 159), but of course "[l]iteralness is not neutral, at least not as long as we agree, as most translators would, that there is no simple token-for-token exchangeability between languages, so that any human translation involves motivated selection between alternative versions" (Sturge, 2007, p. 27). Unlike Mitiarjuk, Rasmussen's informants did not themselves have access to the technology of writing, and so we are very much reliant on him for our knowledge and appreciation of their oral literature as he

collected, transcribed and translated it.<sup>11</sup> And Rasmussen appears to acknowledge his hegemonic role when he continues: "I made the whole manner of storytelling my own" (1908, p. 159).

Rasmussen is responsible for propagating the not entirely accurate belief that not only do all "Eskimos" speak the same language, but that *he* could understand and communicate flawlessly with them all while travelling like a grand conqueror across their vast territory. In the course of the Fifth Thule Expedition—a 20,000-mile trek by dogsled from Greenland to Alaska between 1921 and 1924 (but for visa complications, they would have continued on to Siberia)—Rasmussen collected vast quantities of traditional songs, legends and stories. Collecting, it should be borne in mind, involved first prompting his often reluctant interlocutors to divulge their oral and shamanistic traditions, then listening to them, then remembering what he had heard (i.e. Rasmussen often didn't write anything down until hours later), and finally transcribing and translating (first into Danish, but later also into English). In all of his writings, readers are repeatedly reminded that many of these stories are exactly the same as those he had been familiar with since his Greenlandic childhood. The ethnographer's authority and ability to serve as our expert mediator are not to be questioned.

Sturge rightly points out that in most ethnographic work "the contribution of the interpreters" is "downplayed to the point of near invisibility, and likewise the task of translation is almost never discussed in detail" (2007, p. 14). She reminds us how important it is to

ask how such texts deal with plurality and specificity, heteroglossia and power differentials within and between the local and the receiving languages. Another relevant question will be how they envisage the role of the translator, as an innocent purveyor of reality or an agent of intervention, as an invisible hand or an active rewriter. How does the form of translation chosen arise from and play into global power relations? [...] Does the translation method used imply the language gap is a superficial difference, reasonably easily overcome and fairly ignored, or does it argue that difference is overwhelming in scale and impossible to overcome? (*ibid.*, p. 16)

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11. For a detailed examination of ethnography's treatment of the verbal art of oral cultures, see Sturge (2007, pp. 100-128).

Most ethnographers do need to rely on others to speak directly with the subjects of their research, and they have not always been either cognizant of or consistently respectful of the important role the native interpreter plays in their work (cf. Rubel and Rosman, 2003).

As someone who grew up fluent in the language, and thus in a position plausibly to deny that any language gap existed, Rasmussen was admittedly unique among early ethnographers studying Inuit. But there is another sense in which we might want to consider the phrase *his* tongue, as something that belongs very much to him, namely: it is exclusively through the academic's own words that outsiders learn about Inuit orature. No direct access to his long deceased native informants is possible (although he is conscientious about giving credit to individuals), as they had no written culture or tools to use to tell their own stories. While both Inuit and *qallunaat* today benefit immensely from Rasmussen having done the work he did, capturing a way of life and its verbal art at the very moment that these were changing forever, we must avoid being seduced by the myth that this was in any way a straightforward process.

Accordingly, it is important to pay real attention to works actually written by Inuit, especially those such as Aodla Freeman and Mitiajruk who may perform what is sometimes called "studying up," or ethnographizing the ethnographer, as they provide a view from the other side. For Saladin d'Anglure, the artistic value of *Sanaaq* is less important than its function as an anthropological resource, providing southerners with a view from inside the igloo:

A l'image de Mitiajruk, [l'héroïne] est une femme forte et équilibrée, sensible et déterminée, qui nous fait découvrir de l'intérieur, *comme aucun Occidental, fût-il anthropologue, n'a encore pu le faire*, la vie et la psychologie des Inuits confrontés à une nature extrême, à la nécessité du partage et à l'envahissement de leur territoire par les Blancs et leur civilisation." (back cover blurb; emphasis mine)

[Just like Mitiajruk herself, the heroine is a strong, stable woman, sensitive and outspoken, who shows us from inside, *as no Westerner, even an anthropologist, has been able to do*, the life and psychology of Inuit facing an extreme climate,

the need to share and the invasion of their territory by Whites and their civilization.]

Although there is no space here to discuss film or video, there is clearly much that could be said about how the prize-winning film director Zacharius Kunuk subverts Rasmussen's Thule narrative, wresting control of the story of that encounter away from outsiders and into the hands of Inuit themselves (see, e.g., Kilbourn, 2014 about Kunuk and Cohen, 2006). Kunuk's work provides an interesting counterpoint to the more generalized invisibility of the community, especially in relation to his groundbreaking *Atanarjuat*, which is based on an ancient legend and which won the *Caméra d'or* at Cannes in 2001, bringing Inuit language and storytelling to a global audience. Kunuk films entirely in Inuktitut.

### A hundred words for "translation"?

In *Is That a Fish in Your Ear: Translation and the Meaning of Everything*, David Bellos uses the example of the Great Eskimo Vocabulary Hoax, namely that Inuit have 100 words for snow (2011, p. 157), to counter the simplistic notion that language and culture are inextricably linked (known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis<sup>12</sup>), and thus that Inuit lack the capacity of the more "civilized mind" (*ibid.*, p. 163) to see the general rather than the specific.

But what about the Inuktitut for translation itself, for (re-)telling something more authentic, something that makes sense? The entry in Schneider's important bilingual Inuktitut-French dictionary (available also in Colis' English translation) suggests *tukiliurpaa* ("s/he translates"), and I asked Aodla Freeman to help me understand the term. Unfamiliar with it in terms of "translation," she commented that it meant instead "making understandable" or "explaining how things work." Together we consulted Qumaq's unilingual Inuktitut dictionary, but the definition there for *tukiliurtak* refers to other things entirely. We came across another word that Aodla Freeman said was related to translating, namely *tukilik*, "the understanding part" and, after some reflection, she suggested instead the word *tusajik* (literally "one whose habit it is to listen"), while cautioning that this was possibly a neologism.

12. Note that Whorf was one of Boas' students.

What particularly struck me about this conversation was how the emphasis in Inuktitut is very much about the effect of the translational act on the other person, i.e. its relational aspect, rather than more simply about words or their meaning, and much less about “carrying across,” “setting over,” “turning,” “speaking after,” or any of the other metaphors in various languages with which hegemonic translation studies is more familiar. And when I suggested as much, Aodla Freeman agreed. She further explained that Inuktitut is all about feelings, and that the process of adding affixes to a word (integral to the construction of Inuktitut sentences and phrases) is entirely to make something more understandable to the other person.<sup>13</sup>

I next reached out to Louis-Jacques Dorais, whose book *The Language of the Inuit: Syntax, Semantics and Society in the Arctic* serves as an invaluable resource, and we engaged in a lengthy correspondence about this. Dorais concurred that *tukiliurpaa* has no connotation of translation, and went on to suggest the paired terms *qallunaatituurtisijug*, ‘(s)he makes it [the text] do [i.e. speak] like Qallunaat’ and *inuktituurtisijug*, ‘(s)he makes it do like Inuit’ (personal communication, 2016). The equivalent for “making the text speak like Francophones” would be *uiguitituurtisijug* (‘makes it speak like the Oui-oui [people]’).

The translator/interpreter training programme offered at Nunavut Arctic College, in Iqaluit, uses the term *uqausiliriniq* (‘the fact of dealing with words’), which can also refer to linguistics or language planning (Nunavut Arctic College, 2016, n.p.). But, noted Dorais, when inviting students to join the program, it is called *tusaajiu[lauqsima]giaksaq*, ‘what leads to being a *tusaaji* [i.e. ‘interpreter’]’ (personal communication, 2016). The Research Group on Translation and Transcultural Contact based at Glendon College (York University) in Toronto produces a journal titled *Tusaaji: A Translation Review*; their webpage defines *tusaaji* as “one who listens carefully [, ...] who has an exceptional capacity to listen to others” (n.d., n.p.).

Under Qumaq’s entry for *tusaaji*, he defines *tukisititsiji* as “one who makes [people speaking different languages] understand each

13. Inuk writer and scholar Norma Dunning tells me that she titled her M.A. thesis *Tukitaaqtug*, which means explain to one another, reach understanding, receive explanation from the past.



other" (Qumaq, 1991, p. 232; Dorais, personal communication, 2016). The basic signification of *tuki* (meaning) is "axis," "one's thoughts and words become meaningful when ordered along a specific axis." Thus, in eastern Canadian Arctic dialects (other communities use different terms entirely), understanding literally means "encountering an axis," or aligning one's mind in the same direction as another's and thus allowing one's words to become meaningful, to make sense (Dorais, personal communication, 2016).

## Conclusion

As Peter Kulchyski writes, "more than one hundred years after franz boas traveled to and wrote about inuit of cumberland sound in *the central eskimo*, it is possible to suggest that the descendants of the people with whom boas worked still have something to teach" (2006, p. 155; lower case *sic*). I began this article with Taamusi Qumaq's definition of "tongue" and would like now to bring us back to a related Inuktitut word translated as "speech, words, language":

*Uqausiq:*

*Inuk uqarunnupaq qanutuinnaq uqarumajaminik qaninga qausigtuumat uqausirmik qanutuinnaq.* (Qumaq, 1991, p. 100)

Speech, words, language:

The individual can say anything he/she wants to say; because his/her mouth is moist, [he/she can utter] a word in any way. (Dorais, 2010, p. 262)

In this article, I have been interested in questions of autonomy, embodiment, and the ability to utter words in one's own way with one's own mouth—all of which have implications for our thinking about authorship and mediation, be it ethnographic or translational. Too many accounts of Inuit or other Indigenous peoples have been decidedly one-sided, as when Rasmussen from his position of privilege affirms that "[o]ne can never finish exploring a people" (1999 [1929], p. xxxix). Translation is what allows unilingual Inuit writers the means to communicate with those outside, to tell things that make sense. To make oneself heard is a real challenge, and even then instances of miscommunication



are inevitable.<sup>14</sup> I will, therefore, close with Mitiarjuk herself—albeit in her heavily mediated state as she is made to speak through various (male) mediators and gatekeepers—underscoring how important it is for *qallunaat* readers to do our part to listen attentively and critically to what Inuit authors have to tell us: “Sanaaq tried to have the last word. She fought to make her view prevail” (Frost, 2014, p. 159).

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14. As Saladin d’Anglure notes, “[c]ertes, de très nombreuses imperfections entachent encore notre translittération et notre traduction, nous en sommes conscient, mais ne sont-elles pas inhérentes à toute tentative de ce genre?” [Granted, we are aware that a great number of imperfections still dot both our transliteration and translation, but aren’t these inevitable in any attempt of this kind?] (1969, vol. 2, p. vii).

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