

I have translated two passages of my own writing, one poetry and one prose. They started in English, went through eight of the ten most common languages around the world, then back into English. The only language spoken more often worldwide is Mandarin Chinese. I chose to leave it out of the process because my work was already back into English for comparison, and because there was no way for me to know if the Chinese listed on google translate was actually Mandarin dialect.

Something to note: two words in the poem were actually lost in the translation from Russian to Spanish because google translate failed to add a space between words and they were stuck as Romanized Russian for the next three translations. I had my friend Dixie check the Cyrillic to see what went wrong and after adding the space back in, it ran through perfectly.

It's interesting that somehow my poem (even though it was the less structured of the two writings) fared better when run through the series of translations. The specific words and several phrases were definitely changed, but the meaning is still similar, if a bit more literal. (I have included more comments on these differences below as I found it hard to summarize them without writing them directly parallel to the poem itself.

On the other hand, my three short paragraphs of journal writing were turned into something that seemed forced and halting, as if written by someone who learned English as a second language and didn't quite understand grammar. This makes a lot of sense when you look at how I chose to complete the translations, but it still makes a good point. We assume that words on paper will make the most sense to a wide audience, yet these words can be twisted quite easily depending on how well someone really understands the intent behind them. Grammar structures in the top ten most spoken languages around the world are wildly different. Even if someone was able to read every last one of these languages, they would probably get a slightly different reading from each version.

meet me there at twelve
the real time doesn't matter
midnight or at noon
the note lays loved and tattered

to dine, to talk, to walk a while
just a casual meeting
any time of day
the meaning is so fleeting

a friend, a partner, a lover dear?
it started small but slowly grew
time flutters fast away
take hold before it's through

how far will you go with me?
so much the future still will hold
the endings come so soon
don't let a friendship grow too cold

We met 12 years ago.
Real-time is not important
Between day or night
Note that he¹ loved and sliced

For dinner, talk, walk a little
Usually compliance²
Any time of day
The objective is³

Boyfriend, girlfriend, favorite mistress?
It started small, but growing slowly
It is time to get up on their wings.
Before deciding⁴⁵

To go with me?
So you always have a future
It was later
Friendship is not too cold to grow⁶

¹ It has managed to add a gender to what was originally a completely neutral set of words. My best guess is that this happened when going through Spanish as "el amaba" means "he loved"

² Compliance and being casual are not the same thing. Best example of this is that I imagine someone can be casually rebellious.

³ In this instance, the entire verb was lost in the translations, leaving the reader hanging unless they had the original text to refer to.

⁴ I don't even know where to start with these words. They mean something

completely different now. To me the original terms were friendly and full of warmth and comfort, the new ones are much more distant and cold ways to refer to the same set of people.

⁵ Again, what are we deciding? It's alright for poetry to be open ended like this, but it's interesting to see which bits were dropped along the way.

⁶ The subject of this entire line has been changed. Originally it was almost an imperative sentence directed at the reader, but after translation it has become a statement about friendship itself, requiring no action on the reader's part.

The sky was on fire our last night in Belize. It couldn't have been more perfectly framed in a travel brochure. I sat on the dock with the rough planks rubbing my damp calves a bit. It didn't matter though. I shivered a bit as the slightest breeze ruffled my loose night shirt. I opened my eyes again, looking at the stars above and then sitting up to gaze once more at the horizon where another lightning storm was giving off a brilliant show.

I felt myself growing increasingly sleepy and decided that it was the slightly rough boards that were keeping me from falling asleep. I got up carefully so I wouldn't disturb any of the other teens laying about the dock and climbed into the motor boat tied alongside it. I found my beach towel and spread it over the edge of the boat so I wouldn't have to lay my head on hard plastic.

The view from the boat was no different from before but somehow the slight change in angle reminded me once again how lucky I was to be in Belize. I looked again at the reddish glow over the ocean as it lit up the sky almost constantly. I knew I would miss these storms when I got home. I always had a fascination with lightning storms and when you combined the fantastic lightning here with the Perseids meteor shower that was occurring right above our heads, it was unbelievable.

Fire in the sky last night in Belize. Also presented in tourist brochures. When I first raw feet, and sat on the floor with wet rub. Despite this, however. I ruffled shook loose a little air like my jacket. I opened my eyes and there was a very good performance, the horizon, another storm has seen the stars, and sat down to watch it again.

I seem to sleep faster, and a little rough decided this advice prevents sleep. Set does not bother me, boats moored at the dock engine and other teens to be careful. I found a beach towel and put it on the side of the boat, so I will not have a hard plastic head.

View from the boat is different from before, but for some reason I Belize, a small change in the angle was again reminded of how fortunate. It was a new feeling, because it is almost always light in the sky, and the Red Sea. I went home, and I know I'll miss the storm. I have always been fascinated by storm and Perseid meteor shower was just over our heads, and a great flash, included was amazing.