Synaesthesia, the senses, and Scottish voices: Translating Tartan Noir.

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(This paper is based on parts of my research for my PhD thesis)

Abstract: Synaesthesia - or associations across modalities - has been widely explored in literary studies and has been considered fundamental since I. A. Richards, and recently J. Simner and Lawrence E. Marks have explored the cognitive dimensions of synaesthesia and its repercussions for language and literature. Curiously, however, translation studies seem to have ignored synaesthesia and have concentrated on sense and meaning rather than the senses. On the other hand, translators consciously or intuitively respond to both sense and the senses, in taking into consideration, the reader, the author, the narrator, and the characters of novels. In this respect, translation has always been a great test for style. But to what extent do translators succeed in handling the dynamic encounter of the senses? My paper explores the new wave of Tartan Noir novels by focusing on Chris Brookmyre, Val McDermid and Neil Broadfoot in order to explore how Scottish Tartan Noir style plays on our feelings and stimulates our senses by orchestrating various characters and situations. My paper highlights the ways these three authors deal with touch and hearing by referring to metaphor, synaesthesia, rhythm, plot and point of view. Exploring representation of 'gravelly voices', 'watery voices' and 'biological voices' allows us to discuss the way translators respond to the body, the way it is treated, and the way it responds within this language-specific universe. I argue that, when using associations across modalities, Scottish crime fiction authors draw on their bodies and physical environment to characterise sounds, and that they draw on these associations to embody the land and history into their characters. Plus, even though some associations may be considered as merely conventional, I develop the idea that implied cultural aspect shouldn't be neglected in translation.

Keywords: Tartan Noir, translation, senses, synaesthesia, sense

Introduction

Over the past decades research on synaesthesia – or associations across modalities – have been increasing, in fields as diverse as science, literature[i] and linguistics[ii]. Magazines[iii] and podcasts[iv], and so the general public, have also taken an interest in the subject. However, its absence from the recent Lawrence Venuti's *The Translation Studies Reader*[v] would seem to suggest it has been somewhat neglected in translation studies. In this paper, contrary to the the medical definition provided by Julia Simner and Edward M. Hubbard ('"a neuropsychological condition which gives rise to extraordinary sensations"' [Simner and Hubbard, 2013:xxi]), I'll refer to associations across modalities as allocating a word, whose features are typically associated with one of the senses, to another sense. Associations between hearing and touch, such as 'warm voice' will be highlighted since my main research interest deals with translating hearing and touch in Scottish crime fiction.

Running alongside the view of Scots as hardmen, Scotland has a tradition of sensibility; sensations and emotions have been tackled by Robert Burns in his poems, by the philosopher David Hume in his thinking, and even by Adam Smith to a certain extent. In this paper, I'll endeavour to show that Scottish crime fiction writers have a heightened sensibility to senses by analysing the way Tartan Noir style plays on the readers' feelings and stimulate their senses.

Touch applied to hearing gives the readers clues as to the context in which a character produces a sound at a given time, to a change in a character's voice – intonation or texture-, and it also provides information regarding specific sounds. Interestingly, the forms of the associations are more varied and more numerous in Scottish crime fiction than in French crime fiction. In hearing-touch associations, 'voice' is often used as key noun. The readers can spot fake emotions or genuine behaviours expressing angriness or annoyance, or a character's characteristic features. However, in touch-hearing associations, hearing-related words constantly vary, and can be induced by objects as well as humans. Slight variations in metonymy exist for 'voic'.

Associations across modalities are often metaphorical, and thus like metaphorical language they pervade both literary language and everyday language: which is reflected in crime fiction as well. The cognitive scholars writing in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s Lakoff and Johnson (Johnson and Lakoff, 1980) as well as Fauconnier and Turner (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002) suggest that metaphors and body are linked, that metaphors are embodied. That emotions are associated with the body follows from I.A Richards's work as well (Richards, 1924). It is worth pointing out that associations across modalities in Tartan Noir appear in examples varying in terms of language figurativeness. I'll argue that, when using associations across modalities, Scottish crime fiction authors draw on their bodies and physical environment to characterise sounds. Even though some associations may be considered as

merely conventional, the implied cultural aspect shouldn't be neglected. Then, I'll suggest some keys for the translator to translate the dynamic encounter between hearing and touch.

So as to limit the scope of my argumentation, I selected extracts from books written by Neil Broadfoot, Chris Brookmyre, and Val McDermid. My remarks result from a literary analysis of the novels followed by comparisons between my translations and translations made by machine translation websites Google and DeepL.

1. Environment-inspired voices

1.1. Gravel voices:

Table 1

Val McDermid – *Killing the Shadows,* P375	She knew the springy feel of heather beneath her feet, the treacherous pull of peat hags, and **the hard clatter of ancient stratified rock** beneath her boots.
Neil Broadfoot – *No man's Land*, P169	'So you admit you sent this to Ka- a female I know?' he asked, **his voice as hard as chips[vi] of flint.**
Chris Brookmyre – *The Sacred Art of Stealing,* P72	Her **voice** still appallingly **gravelly**

Rocks and minerals in Scotland have caught the attention of researchers, as shown in a *Scotland Outdoors[vii]* episode on the matter. Along with other materials, they have also been part of the narrative of older Tartan Noir novels such as *Resurrection Men* by Ian Rankin (2004) or *Strange Loyalties* by William McIlvanney (1991): '**His mouth was carving its words like a stone-mason**'. Clear and concise in his writing, associations across modalities allow him to say more about a character and a context with fewer words; readers get a vivid picture. In this section, I chose to focus on a few examples among myriad examples, but other rock-related occurrences such as 'pebbles', 'sandstones' and 'granite' can be noticed in other novels. It's worth noting that adjectives such as 'ragged' tend to work in collocation with 'mountains' as in 'montagnes escarpées', which makes sense because of Scotland's mountainous, hilly and coastal landscapes.

As well as 'ragged', they may be 'smooth', 'rough' or 'cracked', just like voices as in '**her breath ragged**' or '**his voice cracked and dry[viii]**'. These terms are reminiscent of the mining [ix]and quarry historical importance in Scotland – flint mainly in the east, stones in the centre

and east, but also coal and others used by the building industry and factories. 'Gravel' and 'pavement' in '**his voice as hard as the pavement**' remind us of the urban landscapes found in Tartan Noir; 'Graveyard dirt' in '**her voice was flat and cold as graveyard dirt**'[x] echoes the central death theme in the genre.

The most conventional associations include compounded adjectives (**smoothly-spoken[xi]**)-or participles-, adjectives and nouns (**stony silence**), verbs and adverbs (**said smoothly**), or nouns and verbs (**voice starting to break up**), nouns and verbs and then adjectives (**his voice was cracked**). By developing such structures, or by using comparisons and metaphors, the writers are able to add details and let their creativity speak.

Val McDermid relies heavily on landscapes –northern England and Scotland- and links their beauty to the beauty of language. Hence, her associations across modalities are used in descriptive passages. While recycling natural elements too, Neil Broadfoot creates an underlying network of ideas linking nature, characters and crime fiction. The first example reminds us of erosion and split rocks encountered in the real world. The second one shows how Connor transfers his being a hardman with a certain softness to his language when he wants to be intimidating, while drawing on the hardness of stones.

1.2. Watery voices

Table 2

Val McDermid - *How the Dead Speak,* P68	streams of song
Neil Broadfoot - *No Man's Land,* P171	the wet, crunching[xii] thud of bone (was sweet music…)
No Man's Land, P309; The Storm, P83 and P135	voice (..) slow-flowing stream, a woman's voice: soft, with a gentle undercurrent of Belfast (…), (…) as he strained to hear anything other than the polite undercurrent of noise (…)
No Man's Land, P8	A roar that filled his ears, drowning out even the hammering of his heart

Weather -dampness and wetness -is a recurring theme in Scottish literature, all the more so in crime fiction where it helps create a sense of atmosphere. Moreover, Scotland is surrounded on three sides by water; lochs, rivers and 'Sounds' criss-cross the country. And entire communities relied – and some still do- on fishing. In an episode of *Stories of Scotland* entitled 'Rain, Plowtery, Dreich', Jenny and Annie explore the way 'a wet climate shapes nature, beliefs and people'. When trying to define Scottishness for his thesis, David Leishman picked up weather as a major feature of Scottish identity. To illustrate his view, he quotes the

Scottish hymn, 'Scotland the Brave'. Plus, although not an example of association across modalities, one of Chris Brookmyre's protagonists in *The Cut,* confesses that she missed the rain when in jail.

Examples of hearing-touch associations do appear in William McIlvanney's *Strange Loyalties*, as words become rain and a voice is drowned by other sounds. The *Leipzig Corpora*, the *Corpus of Contemporary American English*, the *British National Corpus*, and the *Scottish corpus* provide us with many examples associating the adjective 'wet' to weather or to sounds.

In the table, Val McDermid's 'streams of song' describes the sound made by birds using another natural element, water. Even though corpora provided examples associating 'wet' and sounds, Neil Broadfoot goes further by adding another reference to sound as well as where this sound came from, followed by a verb and yet another instance of association across modalities. It is worth pointing out his linking voice and accent to water in extended metaphors. William McIlvanney too tended to use associations across modalities, if more sparsely, in extended metaphors for characterization.

2. <u>Biological voices</u>

After having explored the association water-voices, other liquid-sound associations must be introduced. They are crucial because of their figurative bodily dimension, and because of what they represent in the genre: human beings share an experience of blood, faeces and urine, and these matters become more obvious once people die – which people tend to do a lot in crime fiction[xiii].

2.1. Shit and piss

Table 3

Chris Brookmyre – *The Cut,* P292	Sergio's **demand** had presumably gone down like **a cup of warm diarrhoea** with Lucio, but he was playing it canny.
The Cut, P52	He didn't know how they did it: hold forth in front of peers or strangers with absolute conviction and seemingly no self-consciousness, even when they were **talking utter shite**. (…) First term, he heard a bloke do that in a lecture. Not even a tutorial, a fucking lecture. Interrupted the woman who was paid to actually know what she was talking about in order to say, 'Well, I think…' followed by a massive **mouth-jobbie**. Did they teach this stuff at public school? That the second you opened your gub, the room would become rapt with attention, everybody on

	tenterhooks waiting for the next precious word that dripped from your lips, and **whatever pish you spewed** would be instantly transmuted by virtue of your better breeding?

Both William McIlvanney and Neil Broadfoot evoke the fact of talking crap in their books. However, the former doesn't seem to delight in such associations, instead valuing concise, incisive remarks to fight hypocrisy. But Chris Brookmyre regularly mixes organic fluids to sounds, in a vivid, graphic manner[xiv]. The examples in table 3 allow him to trigger various reactions in his readers: they may find them funny, disgusting, or both. Here, the sociolect of Jerry, a young working-class student from Glasgow is naturally reproduced. We first encounter a recycled idiom. 'To go down like a cup of cold sick'[xv] means that apologies haven't really been accepted. Vomit actually is used as well in other examples. In the book's extract, the demands of a character don't go down well with another character.

The next three examples can be read over a single page. 'Shite', a variant of 'shit', means 'dire de la merde' (talking utter shite) in the sense of 'dire des conneries' (talking bullshit) just like in 'to spew pish'. The latter being defined in the *Dictionaries of Scots Language Online*[xvi] as '"**1**.n. Urine. Also *fig*. something of no value, rubbish. Gen.Sc. Phr. *no a pish*, not a jot, not at all. Dim. *pishock*, the dandelion (Per. 1966)."' This meaning can also be found in the Scottish slang noun 'mouth-jobbie'[xvii].

2.2. Blood

Table 4

Neil Broadfoot – *The Storm,* P36	…The **heavy, liquid slap** as Greig's guts and entrails exploded from his torso and hit the table in front of him.
The Storm, P16	Blood and viscera erupted onto the table in front of him with a **horrible wet slap** and glistened there, horribly dark and textured with shreds of ruined organs
Chris Brookmyre – *One Fine Day in the Middle of the Night,* P1	**The slick red goo made a wet snicking sound** as it licked the dung-carpeted ground

As far as blood is concerned, the most vivid, detailed descriptions are to be found in Neil Broadfoot's novels. In *The Storm*, a journalist is shot and the touch-hearing associations describing the effect of a bullet help the readers empathise with the shocked characters. In *One Fine Day in the Middle of the Night*, it is raining blood from mercenaries: a funny,

disgusting scene. In both cases the accumulation of senses and the sense of messiness are what bring about a response in readers.

3. Layers of senses: hearing and touch

Table 5

Neil Broadfoot – *No Place To Die,* P15	**The dull, echoing thuds of the punches ricocheted off the walls of the room, cut through by the almost-musical jangle of chain** anchoring the heavy bag to the ceiling as it danced and jerked. He **glanced up** at the clock mounted above the mirrors that dominated the far wall. (…) He darted forward again, chasing the bag, shock juddering up his arms as **he dug into** it in a combination of jabs, uppercuts and crosses. **Saw** faces in the bag, taunting, mocking him, **heard voices in the shimmer of the chain**.
Chris Brookmyre – *The Sacred Art of Stealing,* P36	Terror and revulsion were the principal **overwhelming emotions**, buffeting her like a sparrow in the tail-wake of a 747 as the magnitude of what she had escaped finally made itself felt. It was as though she was involuntarily subjected to an **all-sensory playback** of what had happened, containing everything her mind had censored at the time in order to get her through it. Each memory, **vivid even in taste and smell**, came with a payload of suppressed fear that had to impact before any sense of relief was possible.
Val McDermid – *Killing the shadows,* P387	With a wordless **moan** that was closer to a **sob,** Fiona rushed forward, falling to her knees and **throwing her arms around his chill flesh**. Her eyes were already brimming with tears. To her amazement, she **felt** a flicker of movement against her face. Then **a breath like a soft groan tickled her ear**. 'Kit?' she stammered. 'Kit? Can you hear me?' **She put a hand to his neck and felt** a weak and irregular pulse. She took his head between her hands and gently raised it level with hers. His eyelids flickered, the **whites of his eyes showing** through the lashes.

In numerous passages, associations across modalities are backed up by layers of senses crammed into a given page or paragraph, thus increasing the sensory dimension and triggering emotions.

Each of the examples in table 5 illustrate this, and in each of them, the body is central. The first one presents two instances of associations across modalities – one being hearing-

touch or sound as blade - in the first sentence, backed up by sight, hearing and touch occurrences in the following sentences, emphasis the aesthetic, dimension of the passage. It conveys the character's fury and the importance of boxing in Neil Broadfoot's novels. The second one evokes all the senses, including two instances of associations. Through free indirect discourse, readers access the mind of a character coping with a traumatic event. Finally, the last one includes one touch-hearing association – or texture/consistance and sound, but also sight, touch and hearing on their own. In this example, a terrified character believes her partner to be dead, she is then relieved when she finds out he is still alive. Readers share the character's emotions.

4. Translating synaesthesia:

What about translation? None of the comparative analyses by H. Chuquet and M. Paillard, J. Guillemin-Flescher, or J.P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet include a section dedicated to synaesthesia or associations across modalities, which shows the lack of interest from French linguists regarding the subject in the late 1980s and 1950s. It is surprising since the three books share insights in translating metaphors and personification. Vinay and Darbelnet advise translators to literally translate or find equivalent solutions (Vinay and Darbelnet, 2004: 199). Chuquet and Paillard suggest corresponding metaphors or modulations (Chuquet and Paillard, 2002: 26-27, 213-215). Guillemin-Flescher provides examples dealing with verbs of perception and personification of reified objects. (Guillemin-Flescher, 1981: 373, 381-387) On the other hand, in 'Translation and Trial of the Foreign', Antoine Berman states that losing phrases, idioms and proverbs is one of the twelve deforming tendencies to be found in translation. (Berman, 2012: 248).

Thus, underlying historical and cultural networks hiding behind senses and associations across modalities should be taken into account. Indeed, these networks and the world perception differs depending on communities and countries. To these networks, secondary networks drawing on the writers' experiences should be added. This translation choice is not without echoing Scottish author and translator Tom Hubbard, who advises translators to bear in mind '"the aesthetic, the linguistic, and the cultural"' (Hubbard, 2019: 2).

Could a translator rely on machine translation, and more specifically the free versions of Google Translate and DeepL? In some cases the results are convincing: the extended metaphor 'the fury and pain finally **erupting** from him in a **roar that filled his ears**, **drowning out** even the hammering of his heart' was not a problem for example. However, they often fail to spot the precise sound involved: to translate 'She knew the springy feel of heather beneath her feet, the treacherous pull of peat hags, and **the hard clatter of ancient stratified rock beneath her boots.**' into French, I would suggest 'Elle connaissait la sensation de rebond

causé par la bruyère sous les pieds, l'aspiration traitre des tourbières et **le martèlement dur de ses chaussures de randonnées sur l'ancienne roche stratifiée**'. Indeed, as well as not rendering the rhoticity of this passage, both websites fail to identify hiking shoes. DeepL ends up keeping a general, unrevealing term – 'bruit' whereas Google choses a sound suggestive of iron soles – 'cliquetis'. Yet, even though English-French comparative studies claim that there are fewer French terms to speak about sounds, several translations for 'clatter' are available. Both machine translation website translated 'hard' into 'dur', which works.

To their difficulties in translating a type of sound, I would add that their complete lack of cognitive skills leads to their failing in stylistically managing to translate what surrounds the association across modalities themselves. In '**The slick red goo made a wet snicking sound** as it licked the dung-carpeted ground', both Google and Deepl identified the 'wetness' without being able to reproduce the cognitive process allowing a human translator to make their choice. A good solution could be 'La gelée rouge visqueuse produisit **un bruit de succion** lorsqu'elle rencontra le sol tapissé de merde'.

In 'Blood and viscera **erupted onto** the table in front of him with a **horrible wet slap** and glistened there, horribly dark and textured with shreds of ruined organs standing out against the white of the forgotten pages of the schedules', prepositions and tense are wrong. But the most important feature is that they just can't visualise a scene and picture the effect of the action: a liquid splashing on the ground. Google's 'horrible claque humide' would probably usually refer to someone's face being slapped; DeepL 'horrible claquement humide' is contradictory: a 'claquement' is a 'dry' sound. Plus 'en ruine' triggers the image of a building instead of a body being ripped apart by a high calibre bullet. I would then focus on the result and translate as 'Sang et viscères **jaillirent** pour retomber dans un **bruit épouvantable de flaque humide** sur la table devant lui et restèrent là à luire, leur noirceur terrible parsemée de bouts d'organes désintégrés contrastant avec le blanc des pages de plannings oubliées.' It fits the author's style. Not censuring or smoothing these passages somewhat echoes the authors' claims that they write 'organically'.

Associations across modalities involving slang and scots have also proved a challenge for Google Translate and DeepL. Indeed, both Google and Deepl managed to translate the creative comparison '**like a cup of warm diarrhoea**', Google failed to use the correct verb. The phrase is similar to the vulgar French 'chier une connerie'. An echo can be found in the French version of Clint Eastwood's Gran Torino[xviii] in 'Crache ta merde !' when the old bitter man answers the door after young Tao rang the bell. The 'pish' example is trickier as we haven't got an equivalent for 'urine'. Compensation could be the solution: I'd suggest literally translating 'like a cup of warm diarrhoea' and figuratively translating 'pish' in the sense of 'bullshit'. The expansion[xix] in the target text resulting from the compensation would then be an informed decision.

The scots compound noun '**mouth-jobbie**' in ''Well, I think…' followed by a massive **mouth-jobbie**' resulted in an absence of meaning, with Google translating it as '**boulot de**

bouche' and DeepL as '**léchage de bouche**'. Both only managed to identify 'mouth'. 'Léchage' came out of nowhere whereas 'boulot' was incorrectly taken from 'job' followed by what the machine wrongly identifies as the suffix -ie, as in meaning a 'small job'. None of these mean anything in context, and the effect is that of incongruity. In a discussion, 'gueulée de merde' was suggested to me[xx]: this satisfying suggestion both refers to the speaking of words, or to shouts, and to eating, or the mouth. However, its use is limited to the old Normand 'patois' that we now rarely encounter[xxi]. As a consequence, I would favour '« Eh bien, à mon avis… suivi d'**une merde sans nom** »' or '«(…) suivi d'un **truc franchement à chier** »', thus transposing the noun into a verb in the latter solution.

On the whole, it all comes down to a matter of corpus and of cognitive and language skills.

Conclusion :

It is obvious that senses matter in Scottish crime fiction novels. Nature and culture influence the language and help embodying the characters. While each author has a different style and thus pairs senses differently, they all draw on the natural[xxii] and bodily reality surrounding them, especially as far as touch-hearing associations are concerned. Of course, the latter are not used in the same proportions. Although conventional associations and structures appear in the novels, authors know how to reclaim them for their plot and characterisation. Touch-hearing associations are part of the authors' style, but while they are a main feature of Neil Broadfoot's style, it isn't so for Chris Brookmyre, particularly because the latter reflects a lot on politics and put the emphasis on satirical aspects. Moreover, these associations are complemented by heavily sensory passages, enhancing the readers' ability to share – or not, as they can reject what they find shocking or disgusting - in the characters' feelings and intentions.

In addition, the underlying networks found in Scottish crime fiction seem way more complex than in French crime novels, and as part of such a network, associations across modality definitely appear to be a salient stylistic feature not to be overlooked in translation.

Then, to translate the dynamic encounter of senses into French, the best solution I advocate is that, when faced with various possibilities, a translator should always favour a translation including touch and hearing properties, so as not to lose the echoing Scottish historical and cultural nuances, and to convey this sensibility to senses. Various translation procedures[xxiii] such as equivalence in a given conceptual framework, transposition, modulation or compensation may indeed be used to achieve these goals.

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[ii] See Underhill, James William. (2011) *Creating Worldviews: Metaphor, Ideology and Language*. Edinburgh University Press, and Digonnet, Rémi. (2018) *Pour une Linguistique sensorielle*. Paris : Honoré Champion

[iii] Science et vie, Science et avenir in 2019 and 2014.

[iv] BBC Podcast: The Listening Service: Texture. Tom Service, 12/01/2020

[v] Venuti, Lawrence. (2012) *The Translation Studies Reader*. 3e éd., New York: Routledge

[vi] '"That saws the silence into dry little chips"'. 'Chips' being pieces of woods or stones. Sommer Elyse and Weiss Dorrie. (1996) *Metaphors Dictionary.* P398, Detroit: Invisible Ink Press

[vii] Understanding the Rocks Beneath Our Feet – A Scottish Geology Special, Fife, 08/09/2021, https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p09vcdk6

[viii] Both by Val McDermid

[ix] David Leishman mentions mineral-related metaphors that are to be found in other Scottish books, Leishman, David. (2005) 'Nouvelles figures de l'identité écossaise : représentations de la scotticité dans les œuvres de fiction, 1979-1999', P262, PhD thesis, Université Stendhal – Grenoble III

[x] Both by Neil Broadfoot

[xi] Chris Brookmyre

[xii] Similar to the wet + forme -ing + sort of sound structure in 'a wet popping snap' used by the author in *No Place to Die,* but also by Chris Brookmyre in *One Fine Day in The Middle of the Night.*

[xiii] To learn more about body and crime fiction, see Plain, Gill. (2001) *Twentieth-century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body.* Psychology Press.

[xiv] '"I've always revelled in inappropriate humour"', see https://webtv.univ-rouen.fr/videos/interview-with-christopher-brookmyre-with-daphne-cousin-martin/. Chris Brookmyre's readers expect this, but innocent readers used to Agatha Christie might be surprised.

[xv] As shown by the websites Wiktionary and UrbanDictionary

[xvi] https://www.dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/pishII

[xvii] https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Jobbie

[xviii] Directed by Clint Eastwood (2008), with Hervé Jolly for the French dubbing.

[xix] Chris Brookmyre recycled 'a cup of cold sick', so we might surmise that he wanted something new, to be kept in translation.

[xx] I'd like to thank Professor Michael Toolan for his stimulating comments.

[xxi] In my own experience, my grandmother was the only one using it at home.

[xxii] By environment or natural, I mean elements from rural as well as urban settings – although the later haven't been developed in this particular article and will also be explored in my PhD thesis.

[xxiii] As defined by Vinay and Darbelnet and recycled by Chuquet and Paillard.