

Negotiating a Punctuated Landscape: A Study of Asyndetic Translation Based on Relevance Theory

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Abstract

Little thought has been given to asyndeton in modern texts, including the translated text. In fact, if manuals on French-to-English translation even mention this troublesome case of punctuation, they almost certainly warn the student translator against replicating it in English, even in literary translation. Writing norms would forbid it, they warn. It would be taken as merely a sloppy case of comma use. Although asyndeton is typically considered a faux pas in English, replicating it may not always be a mistake. Inspired by Québécoise author Catherine Harton's *Traité des peaux* (an especially asyndetic collection of short stories published in 2015), this thesis aims to study how asyndeton may be successfully translated from French into English in literary texts. To do so, it adopts Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory, noting how this theory not only accounts for poetic effects but also provides a principle that can guide translators as they seek to replicate these effects. This thesis then uses relevance theory to analyze cases of asyndeton drawn from three stories in Harton's collection. The study concludes that there are at least six cases where asyndeton may be effectively translated as asyndeton in literary texts.

Résumé

Il existe peu d'études sur l'asyndète dans les textes modernes, y compris les traductions. En fait, si les manuels de traduction français-anglais prennent la peine de mentionner ce signe de ponctuation quelque peu encombrant, il est presque toujours certain qu'ils suggèrent à l'étudiant de ne pas répliquer la virgule asyndétique, même en traduction littéraire. Les pratiques d'écriture ne permettant pas, défend-on, une telle reprise. Elle serait reçue comme un type de négligence rédactionnelle, insistent-ils. Bien que l'asyndète soit typiquement considéré comme étant à proscrire, sa reprise n'est pas toujours une erreur en traduction français-anglais. Inspirée par *Traité des peaux* de l'auteure québécoise Catherine Harton (un recueil publié en 2015 doté librement, voire exceptionnellement de l'asyndète), cette thèse a pour but d'étudier comment ce cas de ponctuation peut se traduire avec succès du français à l'anglais dans les textes littéraires. Avec cet objectif, elle adopte la théorie de la pertinence de Sperber et Wilson, et vient souligner en particulier comment cette théorie explique certains effets poétiques et fournit un principe que les traducteurs peuvent utiliser afin de rendre ces effets en traduction. Cette thèse applique la théorie de la pertinence pour mener son analyse d'exemples de la traduction de l'asyndète, telle que cette dernière est exploitée dans trois nouvelles du recueil de Catherine Harton. Cette étude conclut qu'il existerait pas moins de six cas où l'asyndète se traduirait *pertinemment*, dans les textes littéraires, par l'asyndète.

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1. Introduction: Negotiating a Punctuated Nordicity

1.1 Struck by a Bypassed Inuksuk: Inspiration for Study

It may be surprising to find a master's thesis concentrated solely on the translation of punctuation—and the asyndetic comma in particular—but that is what the reader will find in the pages that follow. It is true that punctuation has rarely been addressed in Translation Studies and, to my knowledge, there is in existence only one study of asyndeton in French-to-English translation. This absence may be due to the nature of the investigation; the examination of commas is meticulous work, and few may have the appetite for such a tedious, unfashionable task. They may find trendier topics more to their fancy. The dearth of attention paid to punctuation in Translation Studies may also be indicative of an unspoken consensus; it could be that the interlingual study of punctuation is considered of little importance to the translator. For some, punctuation is merely a grammatical indicator and not a rhetorical device. They may hold that, except in “minor or peripheral cases,” punctuation is not “concerned with expressing emotive or rhetorical overtones.”¹ Moreover, punctuation usage is in constant flux, the rules for commas are particularly loose, and the freedom to apply and break away from norms great. Why bother investigating such unpredictable writing practices?

Both this thesis does. It makes the claim that punctuation has rhetorical effects,² effects that the translator should keep in mind, effects, rhetorical power that should and can be

¹ Quirk et al., *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (London; New York: Longman, 1985), III.2.

² The term *rhetorical effects* can be defined as the cognitive effects of skillful writing or speaking, especially those effects produced by figures of speech.

infused into translations. Punctuation may have oft been neglected, but it is not without importance. In fact, as this thesis aims to show, even the comma, so seemingly drab, can artfully colour a text. Punctuation can be a mark of distinguishment.

And a mark of distinguishment it is in Catherine Harton's *Traité des peaux*.³ When I began translating this collection of short stories in the spring of 2016, I was struck but the abundance of commas stippled across the pages and especially struck by the number of commas hasping independent clauses together. After all, these marks could be punctiliously written off as comma splices in English. In the story "Il faut toucher l'oiseau au cœur," interclausal asyndeton occurs an average of 10 times per page—217 times in total. When asyndeton between conjugated predicates is added to this count, it becomes very clear that Harton's writing is unusually asyndetic. She uses interclausal, interpredicational asyndeton 15 times per 500 words in "La mémoire des habiles," 24 times per 500 words in "Il faut toucher l'oiseau au cœur," and 28 times per 500 words in "Les baleines sont les doigts de la mer." If, as indicated by these three stories, Harton uses asyndeton an average of 22 times per 500 words, she is over four times as much an asyndetic writer as Marguerite Duras. Although she is known as a paratactic writer, Duras has an average of only 5 such asyndetic cases per 500 words in her most asyndetic novel.⁴ Asyndeton is, by far, one of Harton's most distinguishing features.

³ Catherine Harton, *Traité des peaux* (Montréal: Éditions Marchand de Feuilles, 2015).

⁴ Fiona Rossette, "Translating Asyndeton from French Literary Texts into English," *Target: International Journal on Translation Studies* 21, no. 1 (2009): 106.

When I began translating *Traité des peaux*, my intention was to use it to complete an M.A. in literary translation. I set out to produce translations of approximately three stories in *Traité des peaux* and to accompany these translations with a short thesis on a shared feature that posed an interesting translation question. However, it became apparent that the most common, the most shared, the most original feature of the text was asyndeton. After I researched the topic, it became equally apparent that very little had been written about contemporary asyndeton in or outside of translation—despite the fact that dictionaries of stylistics accredited the device with numerous rhetorical effects. Moreover, while asyndeton was considered stylistically efficacious, no one had ever explained its power to anything but a very superficial extent. I began to wonder whether asyndeton truly had the effects it had been praised for and, if it did, how these effects might be successfully translated between French and English. After all, translation manuals have warned students against replicating the French asyndetic comma in English ([see Section 2.2.1](#)), likely because of the marginal place occupied by asyndeton in English writing practices compared to the wider room made for asyndeton in French ([see Section 2.2](#)).

Since asyndeton had been considered in such little depth, it became apparent that an entire thesis could be devoted to investigating asyndeton in French-to-English literary translation. I then decided to take up the challenge and explore where truly few had gone before. As for *Traité des peaux*, my translation of the entire book is to go to press as a project only indirectly related to the M.A. Meanwhile, this thesis is reserved for a more in-depth examination of literary asyndeton in French-to-English translation.

A brief word then about the book that inspired this investigation. *Traité des peaux* is the Québécoise poet Catherine Harton's first collection of short stories. These are 10 narratives which paint an austere picture of the North, where the indigenous people brace against a land that is often grim and forbidding, a land that is gripped with stories of dispossession. In Greenland, in Nunavik, in Quebec. These are the stories stippled with asyndeton. How does asyndeton contribute to the force of their narrative? How might the power of asyndeton be translated? These are questions this thesis will explore.

1.2 Headed into the Barrens: Objective of Study

To state it formally, the objective of this study is to shed light on how literary asyndeton might be approached in French-to-English translation.

First, this study will examine the rhetorical effects produced by asyndeton. As will become evident in the first chapter, the putative effects of asyndeton are numerous, too numerous to be comprehensively studied in one M.A. thesis. This investigation will identify only key poetic effects⁵ in Harton's work.

Second, this investigation will identify a theoretical approach to translating asyndeton.

Against the backdrop of translation-specific theories, it adopts relevance theory as developed by Sperber and Wilson, because this theory offers not only a means of explaining

⁵ The term *poetic effect* refers to a type of rhetorical effect and is defined in relevance theory as a cognitive effect that achieves its relevance through an array of weak implicatures ([see Section 4.1.2](#)). This study adopts relevance theory's definition of *poetic effects*.

how to translate asyndeton optimally but also a means of explaining the poetic effects of asyndeton itself—effects that, I repeat, have not been explained in any known research.

Third, this investigation will assess how the poetic effects of asyndeton might be translated effectively. Because translators have been encouraged to avoid asyndeton in French-to-English translations ([see Section 2.2.1](#)), this investigation will pinpoint uses of asyndeton that may be optimally translated as asyndeton according to the principle of relevance.

1.3 Guided by Interrogational Polares: Research Questions

This investigation will be guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How is asyndeton understood by grammarians and stylisticians in French and English?
- 2) How is asyndeton approached in translation studies and translation pedagogy in French and English?
- 3) What are the poetic effects achieved primarily by asyndeton in Harton's *Traité des peaux*?
- 4) How might asyndeton achieve those poetic effects?
- 5) How might the production of these effects and the translation of asyndeton be approached theoretically?
- 6) How might the poetic effects of asyndeton be translated effectively from French into English in literary translation?

1.4 Planning a Route: Chapter Summaries

These questions will be tackled in four chapters.

The first chapter will establish whether the general conception of asyndeton in French differs from the English counterpart in terms of its definition and its effects. It will outline the norms and rules indicated by contrastive studies, translation manuals, and punctuation guides. It will thereby establish whether asyndeton is conceptualized similarly in both languages and whether it is more accepted in French than in English.

The second chapter will examine the little research that has been conducted on asyndeton. It will consider a critique of the claims of contrastive studies regarding junction⁶ in French and English. Then it will consider studies that have analyzed the use of interclausal, interpredicational asyndeton, especially in translation.

The third chapter will lay out a theory that can be used to explain the effects of asyndeton. By presenting the principle of relevance, it will also offer a guiding principle for the translation of asyndeton.

Using examples drawn from *Traité des peaux*, the fourth chapter will provide an analysis of specific poetic effects created by asyndeton. It will provide an explanation for how these poetic effects are achieved and propose a way of optimally replicating these effects in translation.

⁶ Mason, the author who writes the critique, defines junction “as a cohesive [lexical] device for signalling inter-clausal or inter-sentential relations” and, in particular, as an interclausal or intersentential device involving explicit coordination. When Mason contrasts “junction-less juxtaposition in French” (asyndeton) with “explicit co-ordination” in English, it is clear that he associates the term *junction* with conjunctives. Ian Mason, “Translator Behaviour and Language Usage: Some Constraints on Contrastive Studies,” *Hermes: Journal of Language and Communication in Business* 14, no. 26 (2001): 65.

This thesis wraps up with a conclusion summarizing the findings of this study, noting its limitations, and proposing points for further research.

Let us begin.

2. What in the Whorl? Detangling Asyndeton

Slightly less famous than the Gordian knot—and yet just as convoluted—is the rhetorical device classically showcased in Caesar’s declaration *Vini, vidi, vici*. Conceptions of asyndeton diverge and intersect across both French and English. The purpose of this chapter is to map out the tangled asyndetic routes language theorists have taken. It does so for two reasons: to clarify what is meant in the literature by *asyndeton* and *asyndète* as well as to show how asyndeton raises a translation question.

This chapter outlines the definitions and perceived effects of asyndeton in French and English. It also sketches the differences in usage between the two languages according to contrastive studies, translation manuals, and punctuation guides. How differently is asyndeton conceptualized and accepted in French compared to in English? What follows is the answer to this question.

2.1 A Double Knot: Intertwined Asyndetic Lines

2.1.1 Sorting out Definitions of Asyndeton

A review of the literature on asyndeton (or *asyndète*) reveals that the term has become snarled by numerous definitions, more or less precise, more or less overlapping, and more or less contradictory. In this asyndetic knot, the definitions are spliced together by two commonalities. First, asyndeton always involves the absence of a word. Second, asyndeton always involves punctuation in the place of the absent word. There are, nevertheless, a few tattered kinks to sort out in this knot.

To begin with, language specialists differ on what asyndetic punctuation connects. There is a minority in French who assert that asyndeton occurs between only parts of a sentence. For example, Buysens highlights the fact that his definition of asyndeton excludes the use of punctuation to connect sentences,⁷ and Dupriez appears committed to a similar definition.⁸ In English, Ervin too suggests that asyndeton arises between typically shorter units, namely individual words as well as nominal and verbal phrases.⁹ Meanwhile, some language researchers remain ambiguous about whether they consider asyndeton to occur between only parts of a sentence or between sentences as well.¹⁰ At the same time, Corbett and Connors declare that asyndeton occurs between “a series of related clauses.”¹¹ Then there are those who make a distinction between asyndeton and brachylogia.¹² Preminger and Brogan explain that when asyndeton occurs between words (as opposed to phrases and clauses), it is technically brachylogia. However, “many writers now use [asyndeton] as the cover term.”¹³ Despite these variations, in both French and English, most language specialists agree that asyndeton occurs between not only individual words but also phrases and even sentences.¹⁴

⁷ Eric Buysens, “Juxtaposition parataxe et asyndète,” *La Linguistique* 10, no. 2 (1974): 23.

⁸ Bernard Dupriez, “Asyndète,” *Gradus: Les Procédés Littéraires* (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1980), 84.

⁹ Hazel Arnett Ervin, ed., “Asyndeton,” *Handbook of African American Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

¹⁰ Nicole Ricalens-Pourchot, “Asyndète,” *Dictionnaire des figures de style* (Paris: Amard Colin, 2011), 43; Dinah Birch, ed., “The Oxford Companion to English Literature” (Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹¹ Edward P. J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 387.

¹² Sister Miriam Joseph, *Shakespeare’s Use of the Arts of Language* (New York: Hafner Publishing Company, 1966), 289.

¹³ Alex Preminger and T. V. F. Brogan, eds., “Asyndeton,” *The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

¹⁴ Trésor de la Langue Française informatisé, s.v. “Asyndète,” accessed July 20, 2017, <http://stella.atilf.fr/Dendien/scripts/tlfiv5/advanced.exe?8;s=969295290>; Axelle Beth, “Asyndète,” *Figures de style* (Paris: Libro, 2011), 67; Hendrik Van Gorp et al., “Asyndète,” *Dictionnaire des*

Language specialists also differ on what type of punctuation asyndeton entails. Many dictionary definitions of asyndeton do not specifically mention punctuation (although the use of punctuation is consistently implied). Accordingly, many French and English reference books do not associate asyndeton with a particular punctuation mark. That being said, Georgin does specify that it is “la ponctuation qui en tient lieu et qui marque l’enchaînement des idées [punctuation that fills in and marks the connection between ideas]” in asyndetic cases.¹⁵ Moreover, there are authors who explicitly link asyndeton with comma usage.¹⁶ Other authors, however, do not make the comma a criterion for asyndeton. Both Van Gorp et al. and Preminger and Brogan provide an example of asyndeton that uses semi-colons.¹⁷ Meanwhile, Grevisse implies (through meshed definitions of parataxis, juxtaposition, and asyndeton) that asyndeton may involve colons,¹⁸ and Ervin takes an outlying approach when she suggests that asyndeton can occur with even a period. Nevertheless, in both French and English, the most common examples of asyndeton are those which entail commas only. Rossette corroborates this finding. Summing up the

termes littéraires (Paris: Honoré Champion Éditeur, 2001), 50; Michèle Aquien, “Asyndète,” *Dictionnaire de rhétorique et de poétique*, La pochothèque. Encyclopédies d’aujourd’hui (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1999), 73; Jean Mazaleyrat, “Asyndète,” *Vocabulaire de la stylistique* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), 34; Mireille Ruppli, “Juxtaposition, morphème zéro et autres connecteurs en français,” *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 84 (1989): 112–114; René Georgin, *Les Secrets du style* (Paris: Éditions sociales françaises, 1968), 140; Robert-Léon Wagner and Jacqueline Pinchon, *Grammaire du français classique et moderne* (Paris: Hachette, 1965), 421; Robert Plath, “Asyndeton,” *New Pauly*, October 1, 2006, <http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/brill-s-new-pauly/asyndeton-e205120?s.num=0&s.q=robert+plath>; Chris Baldick, “Asyndeton,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Malcolm Hebron, “Seven Types of Asyndeton in ‘Paradise Lost’ (John Milton),” *English* 52, no. 202 (2003); Katie Wales, “Asyndeton,” *A Dictionary of Stylistics* (Harlow, England; New York: Longman, 2011).

¹⁵ Georgin, 140.

¹⁶ Dupriez, 84; Ricalens-Pourchot, 43; Baldick.

¹⁷ Van Gorp et al., 50.

¹⁸ Maurice Grevisse, *Le bon usage: grammaire française* (Louvain-La-Neuve: De Boeck Supérieur, 2016), 129.

literature on asyndeton, she maintains that “the tendency is for asyndeton to refer uniquely to cases of juxtaposition which use a comma.”¹⁹

In the same way that language specialists are unclear on what type of punctuation mark makes for a case of asyndeton, they differ on what type of word is absent. Some take an encompassing approach when they define asyndeton as an omission of “*éléments de liaison* [linking elements],”²⁰ “l’absence de coordonnant (ou joncteur) [the absence of a coordinator (or junctor)],”²¹ or “une absence systématique d’outils de liaison [the systematic absence of linking tools].”²² For others, these connecting elements are connectives and conjunctives²³ or conjunctions and adverbs.²⁴ For still others, simply conjunctions,²⁵ or even copulative conjunctions.²⁶ Baldick takes a marginal position when he states that asyndeton is not only the “omission of connecting words (usually conjunctions)” but also occasionally the omission of pronouns. While some might consider the omission of pronouns to be mere ellipsis, Baldick is not alone in his definition. He is backed by both Ervin and Cuddon, who go further, adding the omission of articles to the

¹⁹ Rossette, “Translating Asyndeton from French Literary Texts into English,” 101.

²⁰ Van Gorp et al., 50.

²¹ Ruppli, 112.

²² Mazaleyrat, 34–35.

²³ Wales, 36.

²⁴ Aquien, 73.

²⁵ *Dictionnaire Quillet de la langue française*, L’Art d’écrire et de bien rédiger (Paris: Librairie Aristide Quillet, 1975); Raclalens-Pourchot, 44 and 167; Birch; Plath; Corbett and Connors, 387; Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 315; Preminger and Brogan; Joseph, 289.

²⁶ *Dictionnaire Littré*, quoted in Bernard Dupriez, “Asyndète,” *Gradus: les procédés littéraires* (Paris: Union générale d’éditions, 1980), 84.

mainstream definition. In the end, the absence of at least some sort of conjunction is covered by every definition in both French and English.²⁷

2.1.2 Pointing out Relations between Units

Closely related to how language specialists understand asyndeton in terms of type of a word omitted is how they differently understand the implied relationship between units. In the French sources, little attention is given to such relations. Nevertheless, some authors mention these relations in brief. Within his restricted definition of asyndeton, Dupriez understands the relation to be copulative.²⁸ Providing examples that could come under asyndeton, Wartburg and Zumthor describe causal relations.²⁹ Van Gorp et al. add that the relationship between linked elements can be adversative.³⁰ Ricalens-Pourchot suggests that asyndeton can involve relations of concession, enumeration, and accumulation.³¹ Georquin concurs with the above authors and adds explicitation to the list.³²

Most of the English sources consulted were silent on the implied relationships formed by asyndeton. In the context of classical studies, Plath, however, deviates from this norm and

²⁷ It is important to note that while it is common for asyndeton to be considered in terms of lexical *suppression*, it could be considered in terms of simply *absence*, as Béguelin and Bonhomme point out in their respective discussions of parataxis and asyndeton. Marie-José Béguelin, “Noyaux prédicatifs juxtaposés,” in *La parataxe*, ed. Marie-José Béguelin, Mathieu Avanzi, and Gilles Corminboeuf, vol. 1 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010) ; Marc Bonhomme, “Les avatars de l’asyndète: entre rhétorique, stylistique et grammaire,” in *La parataxe*, ed. Marie-José Béguelin, Mathieu Avanzi, and Gilles Corminboeuf, vol. 1 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010).

²⁸ Dupriez, 84.

²⁹ Walther von Wartburg and Paul Zumthor, *Précis de syntaxe du français contemporain* (Bern: Francke, 1947), 66–67.

³⁰ Van Gorp et al., 50.

³¹ Ricalens-Pourchot, 43 and 167.

³² Georquin, 141–142.

furnishes a list of what he terms the functions of asyndeton: “enumerative (additive, climax or anticlimax), adversative, summative, consecutive, explicative or causal.” Plath does not supplement this catalog with any explanations or examples. To fill in the lacuna, Leenknecht elaborates on the relations covered by Plath’s categories and by an additional category mentioned in a Dutch source.³³ A final taxonomy of implied relations formed by asyndeton is provided by Hebron, who professedly draws his system of classification from Lausberg. Hebron develops seven asyndetic categories, most of which overlap with Leenknecht’s. They are asyndeton additivum, summativum, distinctivum, adversativum, causale, explicativum, and conclusivum. As Hebron himself notes, “there is nothing sacred about” his taxonomy; other types of asyndeton could be identified.³⁴ The point is—I admit it is not a surprising one—that asyndeton implies a relation between the conjoined units.

This point is recognized in both French and English.

2.1.3 Sorting out Effects of Asyndeton

Asyndeton exerts several purported rhetorical effects. Some state that asyndeton speeds up a passage,³⁵ rendering the text “*cinglant* [terse]”³⁶ or infusing it with a sense of “haste,”³⁷ “swiftness of movement,”³⁸ or even “breathlessness.”³⁹ Harrington explains that this rapidity is “not necessarily [a] more rapid pronunciation of words” but “a reading with the

³³ Annelies Leenknecht, “An Analysis of Asyndeton in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *The Lowland* and Its Dutch Translation” (M.A., Ghent University, 2015).

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁵ Ricalens-Pourchot, 43; Van Gorp et al., 50; Georgin, 141; Quillet; Cuddon, 56; Ervin.

³⁶ Mazaleyrat, 35.

³⁷ Hebron, 22.

³⁸ Joseph, 289.

³⁹ Preminger and Brogan.

impression or illusion of speeches and events following hard upon each other.”⁴⁰ Related to the effect of rapidity is the way asyndeton seemingly injects a text with “une impression d’activité débordante [the impression of a flurry of activity],”⁴¹ of energy,⁴² of vigour,⁴³ and of vivacity.⁴⁴ Asyndeton is also thought to imbue a passage with emotional intensity.⁴⁵ Another possible effect is a sense of disorder.⁴⁶ Finally, asyndeton is thought to spotlight contrast between ideas.⁴⁷ Language specialists suggest asyndeton has the same effects in French and English.

2.2 A Twist: Splitting Differences in Asyndetic Usage

2.2.1 Divide and Theorize: Contrastive Studies and Translation Manuals

Asyndeton and *asyndète* are virtually exchangeable in terms of how they are defined, what implicit relations they are thought to denote, and what rhetorical effects they are thought to create. That being said, asyndeton is not treated as an equivalent characteristic in French and English by comparative studies and translation textbooks.

In a comparative study, Rossette claims that asyndeton (with a comma) is more common in French than in English, although it is a “minor construction” in both languages. Moreover, asyndeton is more likely to be used across genres in French, while in English it “features

⁴⁰ David V. Harrington, “Narrative Speed in the ‘Pardoner’s Tale,’” *The Chaucer Review* 3, no. 1 (1968): 52.

⁴¹ Van Gorp et al., 50.

⁴² Ricalens-Pourchot, 43; Quillet.

⁴³ Georjin, 141.

⁴⁴ Mazaleyrat, 35.

⁴⁵ Ricalens-Pourchot, 43; Van Gorp et al., 50; Mazaleyrat, 35; Lausberg, 315; Rossette, “Translating Asyndeton,” 114; Hebron, 22; Preminger and Brogan.

⁴⁶ Beth, 67; Dupriez, 84; Hebron, 22.

⁴⁷ Ricalens-Pourchot, 43.

mainly in literature” and is excluded from newspapers and academic writing.⁴⁸ In fact, according to Rossette, translators are unlikely to retain asyndeton when they translate French newspapers into English.⁴⁹ If Rossette is correct, asyndeton is less characteristic of instrumental writing in English.

Nevertheless, even when it comes to literary translation, students are encouraged to veer away from replicating the French asyndetic comma in English. In her corpus composed mostly of literary texts, Guillemin-Flescher finds that it was relatively rare for independent clauses to be juxtaposed with commas in English. Instead, the relation between clauses was generally rendered explicit.⁵⁰ Newmark comes to a similar conclusion. Without differentiating between literary and instrumental texts, Newmark suggests that a conjunction and not another punctuation mark might be appropriate between independent clauses; after all, “French tends to use commas as conjunctions.”⁵¹ Chuquet would reinforce this statement with a didactic word of caution. In a handbook that bases the majority of its chapters on literary texts and specifically in one such literary chapter, Chuquet insists that, in the case of two independent clauses joined by a comma, the comma must be replaced

⁴⁸ Rossette, “Translating Asyndeton,” 104. It should be noted that when Rossette makes this claim, she cites her doctoral thesis, which uses a corpus consisting of British, American, and Australian English texts. It includes 14 journal articles and 10 “essays.” See Fiona Rossette, “Parataxe et connecteurs observations sur l’enchaînement des propositions en anglais contemporain” (Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2003).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 105.

⁵⁰ Jacqueline Guillemin-Flescher, *Syntaxe comparée du français et de l’anglais: problèmes de traduction* (Paris: Ophrys, 1981), 141–142.

⁵¹ Peter Newmark, *A Textbook of Translation*, Prentice Hall International English Language Teaching (New York: Prentice-Hall International, 1988), 58.

with another punctuation mark, most likely a period or a semicolon.⁵² She and Paillard repeat this directive in their textbook on literary and instrumental translation.⁵³

As for cases of enumeration, Chuquet warns that asyndeton is less common in English than in French. In fact, English texts are more likely to feature polysyndeton.⁵⁴ Hoarau study, which was based on a corpus of literary texts and their translations, supports Chuquet's warning. It found that polysyndeton occurred in only 5% of cases in French, whereas asyndeton occurred in only 8% of cases in English.⁵⁵ Admittedly, asyndeton is acceptable in English when the list is non-exhaustive and it might be used for an intentionally marked rhetorical effect.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, even when a list is open, English tends to "présenter les choses sous l'angle de la coordination, signalée [mark the information it presents with coordination]."⁵⁷ Student translators are cautioned against using asyndeton: "[e]n règle générale, il est conseillé de ne pas abuser de virgules en anglais [as a general rule, it is advisable to not overuse commas in English]."⁵⁸

Upon a perusal of these comparative observations and didactic guidelines, the question arises, "Does the use of asyndeton differ between French and English mainly in terms of

⁵² Hélène Chuquet, *Pratique de la traduction: anglais-français* (Paris: Ophrys, 1990), 91.

⁵³ Hélène Chuquet and Michel Paillard, *Approche linguistique des problèmes de traduction: anglais-français : français-anglais* (Paris: Ophrys, 1989), 419.

⁵⁴ Chuquet, 19.

⁵⁵ Lucie Hoarau, *Étude contrastive de la coordination en français et en anglais* (Gap: Ophrys, 1997), 165.

⁵⁶ Chuquet, 85.

⁵⁷ Chuquet, 83; see also Hoarau, 165.

⁵⁸ Chuquet and Paillard, 420.

comma usage? In other words, is the comma the only punctuation mark framed as the asyndetic translation stumbling block?"

On one hand, the first response may be no. The issue may be that English simply has a greater tendency towards coordination and not a particular aversion against asyndetic commas. After all, Guillemin-Flescher notes that in her corpus, there were many "propositions juxtaposées, séparées par des virgules, des points virgules ou par des points [juxtaposed clauses separated by commas, semicolons, and periods]" but that it was rare for the clauses to be juxtaposed like this in English. The English translations often added conjunctions and adverbials to render the relations between clauses explicit, leading Guillemin-Flescher to conclude: "[i]l faudra généralement marquer la relation, tout au moins entre deux des propositions [generally the relationship must be indicated, at least between two clauses]."⁵⁹

On the other hand, the answer may potentially be yes; the comma may be the only punctuation mark at issue. In her guidelines for two independent clauses joined by a comma, Chuquet sees the problem to be the particular punctuation mark, not the existence of juxtaposition.⁶⁰ She explains: "la virgule française pourra correspondre à [. . .] un point virgule ou un point en anglais si la virgule sépare deux propositions indépendantes [the French comma corresponds to a semicolon or period in English if the comma separates two independent clauses]."⁶¹ Rossette also suggests that it is the comma that is the real

⁵⁹ Guillemin-Flescher, 141.

⁶⁰ Chuquet, 91.

⁶¹ Chuquet and Paillard, 419.

translational point of contention and not the existence of juxtaposition.⁶² Furthermore, Rossette's study indicates that, while translators do explicate the asyndetic relationship between independent clauses by means of lexical connectives,⁶³ sometimes they simply transform the asyndetic comma into another punctuation mark.⁶⁴ It would appear that it is the comma—as opposed to the other punctuation marks that are occasionally associated with asyndeton—that creates the apparent translation quandary.

2.2.2 Jump through the Loop: Monolingual Punctuation Guides

This possibility is supported by a brief comparison of French and English handbooks that lay down the rules governing their respective punctuation systems. Although no extensive study has been conducted, the perusal of a number of language manuals offers some interesting findings: French and English equally appear to welcome colons and semicolons in contexts of juxtaposition, but asyndetic commas are more recognized and accepted in French than in English.

To begin, it would appear that French handbooks are more likely than English handbooks to promote asyndetic commas in cases of enumeration. Admittedly, there are French language specialists who do not mention asyndetic enumerative commas in their works.⁶⁵

⁶² Rossette, "Translating Asyndeton," 104–105.

⁶³ Leenknecht, 42; Rossette, "Translating Asyndeton," 116; Guillemin-Flescher, 142.

⁶⁴ Rossette, "Translating Asyndeton," 116.

⁶⁵ Marie-Éva Villers, Annie Desnoyers, and Karine Pouliot, *La nouvelle grammaire en tableaux + un recueil de conjugaison: les modèles pour conjuguer tous les verbes d'usage courant*, 6th ed. (Montréal: Québec Amérique, 2015); Jean-Pierre Colignon, *Un point, c'est tout! la ponctuation efficace*, 3rd ed., *En français dans le texte* (Paris: Victoires Éditions, 2004); Bureau de la traduction du gouvernement du Canada, *Le Bellerive – Didacticiel Sur Les Principales Conventions Typographiques Françaises* (Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada, 1999).

However, other French language specialists take asyndetic commas so much for granted that they do not bother to provide guidelines for whether an asyndetic comma should be used in a list. They provide examples of asyndetic enumerative commas without any explanations.⁶⁶ Houdart and Prioul even furnish examples of asyndeton before mentioning any rule governing coordinating commas.⁶⁷ Meanwhile, Narjoux explicitly states that a comma is necessary when words, syntagms, and clauses are coordinated without a linking word, including in lists.⁶⁸

English handbooks appear to be largely devoid of any mention of asyndetic enumerative commas. Crystal, Casagrande, Lukeman, Truss, *Peck's English Pointers* and *HyperGrammar2* provide no rules for or examples of asyndetic enumeration in their sections on commas.⁶⁹ Quirk et al., however, do acknowledge the existence of asyndeton in lists. These grammarians explain: "Syndetic coordination is the more usual form, and we shall therefore generally exemplify coordination with a coordinator present." Nevertheless,

⁶⁶ Olivier Houdart and Sylvie Prioul, *L'art de la ponctuation* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2016), 117–119; Myriam Laporte and Ginette Rochon, *La nouvelle grammaire pratique: secondaire et adulte* (Anjou: CEC parasco, 2012), 336; Roland Jacob and Jacques Laurin, *Ma grammaire*, Rev. ed. (Montréal: Éditions de l'Homme, 2006), 297; Bureau de la traduction, *Le guide du rédacteur*, 2nd ed. (Ministre de Travaux publics et Services gouvernementaux Canada, 1983), 6.1.23.

⁶⁷ Houdart and Prioul, 117–119.

⁶⁸ Cécile Narjoux, *La ponctuation: règles, exercices et corrigés* (Louvain-la-Neuve: De Boeck Duculot, 2014), 45.

⁶⁹ David Crystal, *Making a Point: The Pernickity Story of English Punctuation* (London: Profile Books, 2015); June Casagrande, *The Best Punctuation Book, Period. A Comprehensive Guide for Every Writer, Editor, Student, and Businessperson* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2014); Noah Lukeman, *The Art of Punctuation* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (New York: Gotham Books, 2004); Frances Peck and Translation Bureau, *Peck's English Pointers*, 2nd ed. (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2017); David Megginson and Translation Bureau, *Hypergrammar2* (Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2017).

asyndetic coordination is possible. It is “usually stylistically marked” and employed to intensify a text or “to suggest an open-ended list.”⁷⁰

When it comes to punctuation marks between independent clauses, French is clearly more receptive of the asyndetic comma than English. Laporte and Rochon, for instance, declare that the comma “s’emploie pour séparer des phrases très liées par le sens [is used to separate sentences closely connected in meaning]” and therefore treat the asyndetic comma as a legitimate form of punctuation.⁷¹ Meanwhile, Jacob and Laurin indicate that either a comma or a semicolon can be used to join independent clauses not linked by a conjunction; whether a comma or a semicolon is preferable simply depends on how long of a pause the writer is seeking to create.⁷² Colignon holds that the comma “est couramment utilisée en guise de deux-points, en quelque sorte, ou à la place de *car*, de *parce que*, etc. [is currently used as a sort of colon or as a substitute for *because*, *since*, etc.]”⁷³ And Houdart and Prioul assert that a comma can join independent clauses and can thus stand in for a period or semicolon.⁷⁴ Finally, Dürrenmatt proposes that the asyndetic comma often even trumps the semicolon: “La norme préfère un point-virgule lorsque les propositions ‘ont une certaine étendue’ mais l’habitude aujourd’hui est de privilégier la virgule.”⁷⁵ Narjoux

⁷⁰ Quirk et al., 13.1.

⁷¹ Laporte and Rochon, 336.

⁷² Jacob and Laurin, 300.

⁷³ Colignon, 34.

⁷⁴ Houdart and Prioul, 122.

⁷⁵ Jacques Dürrenmatt, *La ponctuation en français*, Collection L’essentiel français (Paris: Éditions Ophrys, 2015), 38.

disagrees: while a comma is acceptable between independent clauses, a semicolon is better.⁷⁶

English does not greet asyndeton quite so warmly as French. Many guides on mechanics in English suggest that asyndetic commas between juxtaposed independent clauses are incorrect. Twice, in examples of where to use a semicolon, Lukeman states that “a comma won’t do” between “complete sentences.”⁷⁷ Crystal takes a somewhat ambivalent approach. He warns against the “comma splice,” advising that, unless a conjunction is already in place between the sentences, a comma should not take the place of a semicolon.⁷⁸ However, when arguing that the comma implies a closer connection than the semicolon, Crystal does hold that “in a few instances, we *can* link independent sentences by a comma. This happens when the tightness is signaled by other features, usually by the sentences being completely parallel in construction and the rhetorical effect of the whole being greater than the sum of the parts.”⁷⁹ Quirk et al. tackle the asyndetic comma similarly; they insist that two independent clauses must be linked by a coordinator and not a comma alone, but they also admit that “coordinate clauses are occasionally separated asyndetically only by commas, especially when the clauses are short, parallel, and (often) three in number.”⁸⁰ Although it cautions against comma splices, *The Canadian Style* too is careful to note that a “comma will suffice [. . .] if the clauses are short, or if the writer wishes to emphasize a contrast or lead

⁷⁶ Narjoux, 45.

⁷⁷ Lukeman, 58 and 59.

⁷⁸ Crystal, 204.

⁷⁹ Crystal, 323.

⁸⁰ Quirk et al., III.6

the reader on to the following clause as quickly as possible.”⁸¹ While the asyndetic comma is usually considered incorrect in English, it is not always a prickly point. Truss provides a punchy summary of the issue: “so many highly respected writers adopt the splice comma that a rather unfair rule emerges on this one: only do it if you’re famous.”⁸²

It is worth noting that when punctuation guides make room for the asyndetic comma in English, they do not limit its use to the literary genre. Instead, they base their exceptions on the features of the sentences involved. For this reason, student translators who refer to punctuation guides may be inclined to avoid the asyndetic comma even in the case of literary translation.

2.3 And Why Knot?

Clearly, the principal problem in translating asyndeton is not that asyndeton does not exist in both languages (it does), nor is it that juxtaposition is more common in one language than the other. The chief hurdles that translators encounter are the norms that govern comma usage in French and English.

The following questions can be asked: How reliable are the norms uncovered by contrastive studies? How does asyndeton work? How do translators tackle asyndeton in their translations? In other words, how is it translated? When is asyndeton likely to be translated a certain way? Why is it translated this way?

⁸¹ Williams, Malcom, Vitalijs Bucens; Canada Translation Bureau, *The Canadian Style: A Guide to Writing and Editing* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997), 17.5b.

⁸² Truss, 88.

Using the term *asyndeton* to refer solely to the use of a comma between juxtaposed independent clauses and conjugated predicates, the following section will describe the research that has sought to answer these questions.

3. What on Dearth? Exploring the Rare Studies of Asyndeton

Although translators have no choice but to deal with asyndeton (especially in French-to-English translation), there is a dearth of studies on the subject. Unearthing those that do exist, this chapter will explore the relevant research. It begins by justifying the limits of this exploration. Then it surveys three studies that examine interclausal, interpredicational asyndeton that involves commas.

3.1 Giving Grounds for Limits Set

Very little research has been conducted on asyndeton and especially on asyndeton in translation. Most of what exists focuses on asyndeton in ancient Greek and Latin texts. Such studies will not be examined here, since the punctuation systems featured in these classic texts contrast with today's systems in terms of both available punctuation marks and their usage.⁸³ Instead, this exploration will focus on only those works that explicitly address asyndeton in modern French and English.

Before reviewing the relevant literature, it is important to note that asyndeton is often either contrasted with or —perhaps more commonly—absorbed into definitions of

⁸³ Nunberg explains: “While it is possible to trace the antecedents of modern English punctuation back to the English and Latin manuscript traditions [. . .] it is not until well after the introduction of print that there appears anything like the standardized, elaborated and autonomous system of punctuation that is found in the public uses of intellectualized written languages like English or French.” Geoffrey Nunberg, *The Linguistics of Punctuation* (Stanford: Centre for Study of Language and Information, 1990), 10. For more detailed accounts of the origin and development of the French and English systems of punctuation, see Nina Catach, *La ponctuation: histoire et système*, 1st ed., *Que sais-je?* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1994); Christopher Mulvey, “The English Project’s History of English Punctuation,” *English Today* 32, no. 3 (2016): 45–51; Malcolm Beckwith Parkes, *Pause and Effect: An Introduction to the History of Punctuation in the West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

parataxis and juxtaposition. Ruppli, for example, does not distinguish between juxtaposition and asyndeton. She declares that the absence of a coordinator between two clauses is known by the terms *asyndeton*, *juxtaposition*, and *parataxis*. Hartmann and Stork concur; they define asyndeton as a “construction in which clauses or sentences are joined without the use of conjunctions,”⁸⁴ and they similarly define parataxis as the “joining together of sentences or clauses by juxtaposition, without the use of conjunctions.”⁸⁵ A common alternative position is offered by Kiesler, who understands parataxis to include both implicit and explicit coordination. He understands juxtaposition to be a type of parataxis, which he calls asyndetic parataxis.⁸⁶ It is in this line of thought that most grammarians consider asyndeton and juxtaposition to be subcategories of parataxis,⁸⁷ although, as Benzitoun points out, “[i]l existe presque autant de définitions du mot *parataxe* que de linguistes ou grammairiens l’ayant utilisé [there are almost as many definitions of the word *parataxis* as there are linguists and grammarians who have used it].”⁸⁸

Bandied about by different theorists, the three terms do not share equal status within linguistic theory. Parataxis is frequently addressed in the plethora of studies on coordination and subordination, whereas juxtaposition and especially asyndeton are rarely

⁸⁴ Reinhard R. K. Hartmann and F. C. Stork, eds., *Dictionary of Language and Linguistics* (New York: Wiley, 1972), 22.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁸⁶ Reinhard Kiesler, “Pour Une Typologie Des Phrases Complexes,” *Zeitschrift Für Romanische Philologie* 129, no. 3 (2013): 612.

⁸⁷ Bonhomme, 45.

⁸⁸ Christophe Benzitoun, “Comment tirer profit de la parataxe? Étude sur les enchaînements de constructions verbales,” in *La parataxe : Entre dépendance et intégration*, ed. Marie-José Béguelin, Mathieu Avanzi, and Giles Corminboeuf, vol. 1 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 153.

mentioned in their own right.⁸⁹ Because there exists little research on asyndeton, it might be expected that this exploration would draw on the existing research on parataxis, particularly where parataxis is treated synonymously with juxtaposition. However, the literature on parataxis often studies parataxis/juxtaposition between sentences, that is, between linguistic units delineated by a period.⁹⁰ Accordingly, it does not address what is generally understood to be asyndeton. “Although asyndeton and juxtaposition [appear to be for] all intents and purposes synonyms, the metalanguage does not treat them as such: the tendency is for asyndeton to refer uniquely to cases of juxtaposition which use a comma.”⁹¹ Because this study aims to research asyndeton in terms of comma usage between clauses and conjugated predicates, it examines only the literature on parataxis/juxtaposition that coincides with asyndeton defined as such.

3.2 Surveying the Field

3.2.1 Rethinking the Findings: Mason 2001

As mentioned in [Section 2.2.1](#), contrastive studies have indicated that juxtaposition is preferred in French where explicit coordination is prioritized in English. Mason warns against treating this apparent phenomenon as “an unconditional rule of contrastive usage

⁸⁹ Rossette, “Translating Asyndeton,” 99.

⁹⁰ The understanding of a sentence as a linguistic unit delineated by a period is found, for instance, in Rossette, “Parataxe et connecteurs,” 32. It is also what Nunberg terms “a text-sentence” when he contrasts this stretch of written language generally “bracketed by a capital letter and a period” with sentences defined by their grammatical composition, prosodic independence, or semantic completeness (22). It should be noted that a graphical sentence can also end in a question mark, an exclamation mark, and ellipsis points. Marc Wilmet, “‘A peine avions-nous poussé un cri de surprise, qu’il en arriva une seconde’: Considérations sur la subordination inverse,” in *La parataxe*, ed. Marie-José Béguelin, Mathieu Avanzi, and Gilles Corminboeuf, vol. 1 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), 73.

⁹¹ Rossette, “Translating Asyndeton,” 101.

in English and French, to which translators instinctively adhere.”⁹² After all, there are several factors that complicate the results of such studies.

Contrastive studies base the validity of their results on two requirements: first, that the analyzed translations be the work of experienced translators (who should therefore produce idiomatic target texts) and, second, that only statistically significant trends be noted.⁹³

These requirements may appear sound, but the explicitation hypothesis, for one, questions their solidity. This hypothesis proposes that the trend toward explicitation in translation may not be due to the norms of the target language but to a tendency of translators to explicitate regardless of the target language. According to Blum-Kulka, this tendency to explicitate is not matched by a tendency to implicitate.⁹⁴ This hypothesis supported by Granger, who “found that suppression of connectors in English-to-French translating was much less frequent (10%)” than addition of connectors in French-to-English translating (19.5%).⁹⁵ More support for this hypothesis is found in Mason’s analysis of Kibbee’s corpus

⁹² Mason, 66.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁹⁴ Shoshana Blum-Kulka, “Shifts in Cohesion and Coherence in Translation,” in *Interlingual and Intercultural Communication: Discourse and Cognition in Translation and Second Language Acquisition Studies*, ed. Juliane House and Shoshana Blum-Kulka, Tübinger Beiträge Zur Linguistik (Tübingen: GNarr, 1986), 17–35.

⁹⁵ Sylviane Granger, “Linguistique de corpus et traduction: les connecteurs logiques anglais-français” (Association for French Language Studies Workshop on Translation and Contrastive Studies, University of Surrey, 1998), quoted in Ian Mason, “Translator Behaviour and Language Usage: Some Constraints on Contrastive Studies,” *Hermes: Journal of Language and Communication in Business* 14, no. 26 (2001): 68.

of French translations of *Alice in Wonderland*; he found that only one of sixty *but*'s was ellipted in translation.⁹⁶

Another factor that tests the solidity of contrastive studies is that translation is a contextual, co-textual motivated response.⁹⁷ Contrastive studies do not account for the translator's orientation toward domestication or foreignization. They also run the risk of "consider[ing] isolated sentences without regard for the rhetorical purposes which give rise to them."⁹⁸ It is difficult for contrastive studies to meet the challenge of considering utterances in light of genre (the "use of language appropriate to a given social occasion"), discourse (the "attitudinal expression conventionally associated with particular institutions"), and the purpose of a text and its translation.⁹⁹ Moreover, contrastive studies do not account for how textual elements interact, ignoring the fact that "a particular translator may, for the sake of creating a cohesive and coherent TT in its own right, revise or reinterpret ST junction."¹⁰⁰

As Mason himself straightforwardly points out, his article is not meant to be comprehensive but simply "illustrative," highlighting the issues surrounding the assertions of some contrastive research.¹⁰¹ Although inconclusive, Mason's critique encourages translators to question the claims of the didactic approaches to asyndetic translation. He makes clear the need to keep in mind that a translator approaching asyndeton may have a

⁹⁶ Mason, 67.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

natural tendency to explicitate. The translator should consider how giving in to what may be a translation tendency might cause them to efface certain relevant asyndetic features. Moreover, the translator should consider the rhetorical purposes of asyndeton in a particular text.

3.2.2 Plotting the Points: Rossette 2009

In the only known study on asyndeton in French-to-English translation, Rossette undertakes to investigate asyndeton from a linguistic perspective. She draws from a corpus composed of the first several pages of eight literary texts (and their translations) by four different authors, all of whom adopt asyndeton “in a comprehensive way,” sporting its use 1 to 5 times per 100 words.¹⁰² Relatively detailed, Rossette’s research explores the relations asyndeton suggests; the conditions under which asyndeton is likely to appear in literary French; the ways in which it is translated; and linguistic factors that may influence translation decisions.

Holding that “asyndetic construction encourages us to look for a relation, which we would not necessarily do if the clauses were part of separate sentences,” Rossette bravely attempts to analyze the semantic relations signified by asyndeton in her corpus. She avers to have identified nine types: narrative, correlative, causal, adversative, explicative, accumulative, motivational, gradational, and syntactic.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Rossette, “Translating Asyndeton,” 106.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 110.

In addition to documenting how often these different types of relations appear in her corpus, Rossette also identifies the conditions under which asyndeton most frequently occurs. Asyndeton is more likely to appear in literary French when the grammatical subject is repeated. In five of the novels, 60% “of asyndeton involves clauses sharing the same subject.”¹⁰⁴ The shared subject is reintroduced by means of ellipsis, repetition of the initial pronominal subject, or repetition of the initial nominal subject as a pronominal subject. Asyndeton is most likely to appear in cases where the pronoun was repeated (33% of all cases of asyndeton), then in cases where the subject was ellipated (20% of all cases), and minimally in cases where the nominal subject was pronominalized (13%).

The literary corpus also indicates that asyndeton is more likely to occur in contexts of concision. In particular, asyndeton most often joins only two clauses, although “ternary structures are also common.”¹⁰⁵ Rossette implies that asyndeton is also generally found between short clauses.¹⁰⁶ Duras, one of the authors in the corpus, pushes asyndetic norms “to the limit” by stringing together clauses of different semantic relations, varying lengths, and syncopated rhythms.¹⁰⁷ In other words, asyndeton is more common in cases of semantic and durational isotopy.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 115–116.

¹⁰⁷ Syncopated rhythms are created by combining clauses composed of various lengths and containing heterogeneous elements, such as nominal groups, parenthetical insertions, and enumerations. Rossette, “Translating Asyndeton,” 115–116.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

After identifying when asyndeton is most likely to appear in French literary texts, Rossette meticulously examines the ways in which asyndeton is translated. She pinpoints 11 translational forms. The four most common forms of translation were the following:

1. Retaining asyndeton;
2. Creating a new sentence;
3. Replacing the comma with another punctuation mark; and
4. Adding the coordinator *and*.

Two less common methods of translation include

5. Introducing a non-finite present participle and
6. Reprising one of two identical verbs.

The remaining methods below were employed only “spasmodically” (2009: 118):

7. Adding the coordinator *but*;
8. Introducing a subordinating conjunction;
9. Introducing a past participle;
10. Introducing a nominal group; and
11. Introducing an adverbial phrase.

Interestingly, Rossette expected that “certain linguistic parameters would prove decisive in whether or not asyndeton is carried over into English.”¹⁰⁹ However, linguistic variables

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 131.

could not explain translation choices. [F]or example, the likelihood of finding asyndeton is not increased by “the ellipsis of the grammatical subject, the presence of an intransitive verb, or the number of asyndetic clauses in the sentence.”¹¹⁰ In addition, translation decisions significantly differ between the translations.

While Rossette stresses that there are no rules that can predict how asyndeton will be translated, she does highlight trends that are associated with linguistic features. These trends relate to the length and homogeneity of the clauses, to the semantic relations between the clauses, as well as to tense and aspect within the clauses.

The trends related to length and homogeneity are straightforward. In the corpus, asyndeton is most likely to be retained in translations of short and concise clauses. Meanwhile, “asyndeton which links unbalanced clauses, producing a more syncopated rhythm, generally undergoes some type of transformation in the English translation.”¹¹¹

In contrast to these straightforward tendencies, the translation trends surrounding the semantic relations widely differ. For example, when asyndeton occurs between two identical clauses, the comma is almost never carried over. However, when the comma links clauses that “share a common semantic denominator but feature some small variation” or when the second clause paraphrases the first, asyndeton is often retained.¹¹² Similarly, asyndeton is especially preferred in situations containing “complementary elements,”

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 118.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 121.

¹¹² Ibid., 123.

which include antonyms and the cohesive pair *some/others*.¹¹³ At the same time, in general-specific sequences, asyndeton is usually disregarded in exchange for a different punctuation mark. It is also unlikely to be retained in cases of more than three linked clauses with different relations or with accumulative or adversative relations, being translated instead with sentence breaks or the addition of an adversative coordinator.¹¹⁴

When it comes to trends associated with tense, isotopy generally has sway: when the tense is the same, asyndeton tends to be retained, but, if the tense is different, it is not. With regard to aspect, asyndeton is usually disregarded when the different clauses contain bounded and unbounded verbs; when the verbs are punctual and dynamic; and when there is a series of actions. In contrast, asyndeton in direct speech is generally retained.

When Rossette highlights these various trends, she accounts for them in terms of norm-oriented translation tendencies. Because asyndeton is common in both French and English in cases of concision and isotopy,¹¹⁵ unless either of these two conditions applies, translators tend to abandon asyndeton in their translations in order to conform to target language expectations. Having given this explanation, Rossette is still quick to point out that these trends do not represent rules and that they do not make the carrying over of asyndeton impossible.

¹¹³ Ibid., 125.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 126.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 131.

Emphasizing that “[c]ause-combing is situated half-way between the domains of grammar and discourse,”¹¹⁶ Rossette’s research helpfully highlights that linguistic factors are not final determining factors for how translators deal with asyndeton. While Rossette achieved her goal of studying the French-to-English translation of literary asyndeton in terms of linguistic features, her work, as she herself points out, is unable to fully account for translation decisions. Moreover, linguistic features may provide clues but do not explain how asyndeton achieves rhetorical effects. Further research is required for a systematic explanation of the translation of asyndeton.

3.2.3 Unearthing a Clue: Leenknecht 2015

Although Leenknecht studies the translation of asyndeton in a language pair other than French and English, her research is worth examining since little research on the translation of asyndeton has been conducted in the latter combination. Unlike Rossette, Leenknecht does not limit her study of asyndeton to clausal juxtaposition. Scrutinizing a corpus consisting of the English novel *The Lowland* and its Dutch translation *Twee broers*, she studies the absence of connectives between clauses, phrases, and even words. Her goal is to uncover the stylistic functions of asyndeton in the source text, the way asyndeton was translated (adoption or non-adoption), and the effects of the way asyndeton was translated in the target language.¹¹⁷

Meeting her first goal, Leenknecht notes many of the rhetorical effects commonly mentioned in definitions and discussions of asyndeton: a sense of liveliness, an impression

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 99.

¹¹⁷ Leenknecht, 23.

of incompleteness, an oral tone, a feeling of abruptness, and intensification of emotions (such as confusion, panic, and detachment). She adds that asyndeton can emphasize certain aspects of a sentence, often making a sentence appear to be framed from a particular character's point of view. Uniquely, she also claims that asyndeton can generate “the impression of organization and structure.”¹¹⁸

Attending to her second goal, after comparing randomly selected passages with their translations, Leenknecht finds that, in most cases, asyndeton was adopted in translation. Asyndeton was disregarded mostly when the original text contained an *-ing* or *-ed* form. Leenknecht attributes this tendency to the fact that a literal translation of these forms in Dutch would be unidiomatic.

Addressing her third goal, Leenknecht notes that it is in these cases of non-adoption that a change in effect—namely a shift in emphasis—can be noted.

Leenknecht was pioneering in her study of the translation of asyndeton, but—even for this reason perhaps—her results are muddled by confusion over what constitutes asyndeton. In other words, Leenknecht frequently cites examples of asyndeton that are not asyndetic at all. For example, she furnishes the following sentence:

¹¹⁸ Leenknecht, 32. To be clear, Leenknecht does acknowledge that the effects she perceives are unmistakably entrenched in the co-text (44).

*Acquiring a set of tools, he figured out how to repair defective cords and switches, to knot wires, to file away the rust that compromised the contact points of the table fan.*¹¹⁹

Here Leenknecht holds that there is an instance of asyndeton between *tools* and *he*. This is not the case. Instead of asyndeton, there is a non-finite clause, in other words, simply an introductory participle phrase. If any further explanation is even needed, the comma usage here cannot be labeled asyndeton because it does not link two or more corresponding elements, i.e. two or more finite clauses, phrases, words. This and other similar misapplications of the term asyndeton make Leenknecht's report on the effects and the (non-)adoption of asyndeton in her corpus less convincing. What Leenknecht's study does reveal is that participle phrases may not always easily be literally translated into Dutch.

While this miscomprehension of grammatical structures clouds the study, Leenknecht does provide examples of types of asyndetic effects. Moreover, in passing, she highlights how asyndeton might achieve them. She explains that, because there is no conjunction, "asyndetic structures [may stimulate] the reader to search for a relationship between the linked elements, whereupon more attention is paid to their meaning."¹²⁰ In fact, "the strength of the asyndeton lies in the fact that the link is not explicitly mentioned, which gives the impression that what needs to be inferred is important."¹²¹ While Leenknecht

¹¹⁹ Lahiri quoted in Leenknecht, 40.

¹²⁰ Leenknecht, 26.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

here raises a point worthy of further research, she does not pursue it, in line with the goals she has set for her study.

3.3 Identifying the Next Direction

Mason has pointed out that the guidelines given by contrastive studies and translation textbooks cannot be followed unquestioningly. In fact, translators should actually be aware of their tendency to explicitate and should keep in mind the rhetorical purpose of asyndeton. Rossette has shown that asyndetic translation decisions cannot be easily explained by linguistic factors. Linguistic factors alone do not explain how asyndeton might have certain rhetorical effects and how these effects might be successfully translated. Accordingly, this study seeks to explain the translation of asyndeton in light of Leenknecht's suggestion that the strength of asyndeton lies in what is kept implicit. To do so, this study adopts the principles of relevance theory and applies them to asyndetic translation.

To the drawing board then.

4. A Theoretical Framework for the Power and Translation of Asyndeton

How might the emphatic power of asyndeton lie in what it keeps implicit? And how might translators recreate this emphatic power across language pairs? Although numerous claims have been made regarding the various effects of asyndeton, no one appears to have explained in any depth why asyndeton might have these effects nor does anyone appear to have provided a rationale for how asyndeton can be translated while taking these rhetorical effects into account. This chapter, however, will seek to unpack how relevance theory may provide such an explanation and such a rationale.

It is important to note why this chapter does not consider other translation theories. Functionalism, for instance, may seem applicable to this study. After all, this thesis takes the approach that the purpose of a text is important and that the effective translation of asyndeton may be different in literary and instrumental writing (see [Section 6.2](#)). Another example of translation theories with which this study may appear easily capable of engaging are those of the domestication and foreignization debate. Those of Valéry, Nabokov, Meschonnic, Berman, and Venuti may come to mind. As will become clearer in the analysis, this study takes a position that privileges features of the source text. Unlike other source-oriented approaches, however, this study does not do so for the sake of preserving the source text itself or for the sake of addressing power relations; it does so with the aim of achieving rewarding cognitive effects in translation. Functionalism and the domestication and foreignization theories are—to a limit degree—related to this study. However, they cannot provide a framework to explain the effects of asyndeton or a guiding

principle for how to translate these effects. Therefore, they are not adopted and are not examined in this chapter.

This chapter outlines how human communication is made possible by a search for relevance. It also unpacks the principle of relevance, which can be used as a guide in translation decisions. Paving the way for the analysis of asyndeton, this chapter shows how relevance theory can explain style and poetic effects, and it contextualizes punctuation within relevance theory. The chapter closes with a summary of how relevance theory applies to translating asyndeton and with an assessment of Gutt's application of relevance theory to translation.

4.1 A Foundation: Relevance Theory's Cognitive Account

4.1.1 Thoughtful Failure: Beyond Code to Relevance

Launched into the world of language theorists by Sperber and Wilson in 1986, relevance theory is an explanatory account of human communication. Challenging the code models, it argues that these theories cannot explain the gap between thoughts and the phonetic sounds (or graphical marks) used to represent and understand them. To communicate successfully, mere coding and decoding is not enough.

One sentence may have multiple interpretations; "a linguistic utterance is generally full of semantic ambiguities and referential ambivalences, and is open to a wide range of

figurative interpretations.”¹²² What then allows an audience to take the exact same unit and derive multiple meanings from the code? Audiences can comprehend utterances because they supplement the code with inference. This means that the communicator and her audience must share not only a common code (language) but also a common set of premises.

The set of premises used to interpret an utterance is what Sperber and Wilson term *context* and define it as “a psychological construct, a subset of the hearer’s assumptions about the world.”¹²³ As such, context is not restricted to the hearer’s immediate physical and verbal environment; it also includes “expectations about the future, scientific hypotheses or religious beliefs, anecdotal memories, general cultural assumptions, [and] beliefs about the mental state of the speaker.”¹²⁴ Context is part of the hearer’s cognitive environment, that is, part of a set of assumptions that are manifest to him on the basis of his cognitive abilities and physical environment.¹²⁵ An assumption is “*manifest* to an individual at a given time if and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.”¹²⁶ Communication is possible when individuals are *capable* of sharing the same assumptions at the same time.¹²⁷

¹²² Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1995), 33.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

¹²⁵ Physical environment can be broadly defined as an individual’s experiences over time and space.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹²⁷ Admittedly, mutual manifestness (the capability to mentally represent assumptions at a given time) is a weak basis for human communication, but human communication is, in fact, rife with failures, and any theory of communication must not gloss over their existence. With the concept of mutual manifestness, relevance theory acknowledges that “failures in communication are to be expected,” and it builds toward an explanation for what is perhaps more surprising: successful communication. Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 45. Relevance theory sharply differs from some

Communication takes place when a communicator acts on two main intentions: an informative intention and a communicative intention. The informative intention involves making manifest a set of assumptions to the audience, and the communicative intention involves making ostensive this intention to communicate. In other words, Sperber and Wilson's ostensive-inferential model depicts communication as occurring when a "communicator produces a stimulus which makes it manifest to the communicator and audience that the communicator intends, by means of this stimulus, to make manifest or more manifest to the audience a set of assumptions {I}."¹²⁸

An audience will be drawn to pay attention to such a stimulus because "[o]stension comes with a tacit guarantee of relevance,"¹²⁹ and, as innately curious human beings, audiences are constantly seeking information to improve their cognitive environments.¹³⁰ By means of their cognitive environment and deduction, the audience contextualizes new information and thus achieves cognitive effects, that is, "worthwhile difference[s made to their] representation of the world."¹³¹ To update their representation of the world and possible

other pragmatic approaches in the way it recognizes how much misunderstanding is a normal part of communication. Nicola T. Owtram, *The Pragmatics of Academic Writing: A Relevance Approach to the Analysis of Research Article Introductions* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2010), 165.

¹²⁸ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 63.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 49. A communicator communicates because he has reason to believe that the audience will pay attention to his stimulus (otherwise there would be no point in communicating), but an audience will pay attention only to phenomenon that appear relevant. Therefore, "a communicator who produces an ostensive stimulus must intend it to seem relevant to her audience." Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 156.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 47.

¹³¹ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, "Relevance Theory," in *The Handbook of Pragmatics*, ed. Laurence R. Horn and Gregory L. Ward, Blackwell Handbooks in Linguistics (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 608.

worlds, an audience seeks out relevant information that will achieve one of four cognitive effects: contextual implication, reinforcement, revision, and abandonment.

With the constant goal of enhancing their cognitive environment, humans seek to maximize relevance. In fact, the principle of relevance—the principle on which Sperber and Wilson’s theory rests—asserts: “Every act of ostensive communication communicates the presumption of its own optimal relevance.”¹³² In other words, in every act of ostensive communication, it is presumed

1. That a communicator intends to make manifest a set of assumptions that is relevant enough for the addressee to bother processing the ostensive stimulus and
2. That the communicator will seek to use the most relevant ostensive stimulus to communicate the set of assumption.

But what exactly is relevance? It is “a potential property of external stimuli (e.g. utterances, actions) or internal representations (e.g. thoughts, memories) which provide input to cognitive processes.”¹³³ Based on Sperber and Wilson’s use of the term, relevance consists of two extent conditions:

1. An “assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large.”

¹³² Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 158.

¹³³ Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, “Pragmatics, Modularity and Mind-Reading,” *Mind and Language* 17, no. 1–2 (2002): 12.

2. An “assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it in this context is small.”¹³⁴

Essentially, in a world where human cognition is “bent on improving the individual’s knowledge of the world”¹³⁵ and where “human communication [thus] creates an expectation of *optimal relevance*,” there is “an expectation on the part of [the audience] that his attempt at interpretation will yield *adequate contextual effects at minimal processing cost*.”¹³⁶

It is worth noting that *minimal processing cost* may be understood differently in literature than in instrumental writing. Readers of some literary genres do not expect a text to have low processing costs because the high processing costs demanded lead to what they consider sufficiently rewarding cognitive effects.

Of course, communication failures do abound: communicators are not always as relevant as they intend to be and sometimes they do not intend to be very relevant. The fact remains, however, that ostensive communication communicates the *presumption* of its own relevance; an ostensive stimulus is the most relevant one a communicator is willing and able to produce.¹³⁷ Admittedly, if the communicator fails to be optimally relevant, the audience must work harder to understand and communication may even fail completely.

¹³⁴ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 125.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹³⁶ Ernst-August Gutt, *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Basil Blackwell Ltd., 1991), 30.

¹³⁷ Sperber and Wilson, “Relevance Theory,” 613.

Nevertheless, “[t]o be consistent with the principle of relevance, an interpretation does not actually have to be optimally relevant to the addressee; it must merely have seemed so to the communicator.”¹³⁸ When the communicator befuddles the stimulus, the audience’s task is still to arrive at what will be the first most optimally relevant interpretation of it.

Like any other audience, translators approach source texts with the expectation that authors have provided an optimally relevant message that can then be translated. Although authors may fail in being optimally relevant, translators seek to understand source texts and analyze their graphical clues, which they must recommunicate effectively. Moreover, although they may fail to attain perfect relevance in their translations, translators too seek to be optimally relevant.

4.1.2 No Replicas: The Poetics of the Impressionists

The code models suggest that communicators encode their thoughts into sentences, which their audience then decodes. Relevance theory, however, argues that sentences do not encode thoughts. “Sentence meanings are sets of semantic representations,” which are “incomplete logical forms, i.e. at best fragmentary representations of thought.”¹³⁹

Audiences entertain thoughts because they enrich semantic representations with inference, that is, with contextual information. Communication is, quite simply, “a matter of enlarging cognitive environments, not of duplicating thoughts.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 169.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

As a communicator seeks to modify her audience's cognitive environment, the assumptions she communicates become manifest to differing degrees. This gamut of manifestness is a key aspect of relevance theory—it accounts for the communication of impressions.

Impressions are “noticeable change[s] in one's cognitive environment, [. . .] resulting from relatively small alterations in the manifestness of many assumptions, rather than from the fact that a single assumption or a few new assumptions have all of a sudden become very manifest.”¹⁴¹

The drawback in standard accounts of verbal communication is that they have misunderstood all communication to be ideally strong: “the difference between explicit content and implicit import has been seen as a difference not in what gets communicated but merely in the means by which it is communicated, and the vagueness of implicatures and non-literal forms of expression has been idealized away.”¹⁴² Relevance theory accepts weak manifestness as not an exception but an ordinary part of human communication.

Communicators can create no thought replicas, but they can paint impressions.

Ordinary communication consists of explicatures and implicatures. Explicatures are “those analytic implications which the communicator intends to convey”¹⁴³ and are accessible “via decoding, disambiguation, reference resolution, and other pragmatic enrichment processes.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, an “explicature is a combination of linguistically coded and contextually inferred conceptual features. The smaller the relative contribution of the

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 59.

¹⁴² Ibid., 60.

¹⁴³ Gutt, *Translation and Relevance*, 38.

¹⁴⁴ Sperber and Wilson, “Relevance Theory,” 615.

contextual features, the more explicit the explicature.”¹⁴⁵ Implicatures are everything not explicitly communicated,¹⁴⁶ and they rely more heavily on the audience for context than explicatures do. Implicatures are the contextual assumptions (implicated premises) and contextual implications (implicated conclusions) which the communicator intends to convey. The more implicit the implicature, the more responsibility given to the audience to supply sufficient context.

Although implicatures demand more from the audience, they are not less relevant. The principle of relevance suggests that “an indirect answer must achieve some relevance in its own right.”¹⁴⁷ If a communicator does not make a direct statement, she must intend to communicate something that justifies the extra processing effort. When a communicator encourages her audience to expand the context suggested by the propositional form of the utterance, she relies on them to “derive a range of cognitive effects that [they] would not have recovered otherwise.”¹⁴⁸

A communicator’s use of explicature and implicature reflects her style, which is shaped by her perception of her audience and of the relationship they share. In other words, with no choice but to make some assumptions about the audience’s “cognitive abilities and contextual resources,” the communicator “assumes a certain degree of mutuality, which is

¹⁴⁵ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 182.

¹⁴⁶ Owtram, 180.

¹⁴⁷ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 197.

¹⁴⁸ Diane Blakemore, “Apposition and Affective Communication,” *Language and Literature* 17, no. 1 (February 1, 2008): 45.

indicated [by] her style.”¹⁴⁹ The more the communicator leaves implicit, the more mutual cognitive environment she suggests she and her audience share. In particular, when the communicator employs weak implicatures, she indicates that, due to their mutual cognitive environment, she trusts the audience with “a large share of the responsibility in imaging” what she means.¹⁵⁰

Style is impacted by the extent to which a communicator depends on poetic effect, that is, on “the peculiar effect of an utterance which achieves most of its relevance through a wide array of weak implicatures.”¹⁵¹ With such a reliance on implicature, poetic effects are better “defined in terms of mental representations and mental processes [. . .] than in terms of the linguistic properties of texts.”¹⁵² Poetic effects enlarge the mutual cognitive environment of the communicator and audience by “marginally increas[ing] the manifestness of a great many weakly manifest assumptions. In other words, poetic effects create common impressions rather than common knowledge” and may “be used precisely to create a sense of apparently affective rather than cognitive mutuality.”¹⁵³ Affective mutuality (a type of cognitive effect) is the sense of emotional connection and shared understanding between a communicator and her audience. It is “the sort of intimacy that derives from the belief that one is sharing essentially private experiences and feelings.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 218.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁵² Adrian Pilkington, “Introduction: Relevance Theory and Literary Style,” *Language and Literature* 5, no. 3 (1996): 160.

¹⁵³ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 224.

¹⁵⁴ Blakemore, “Apposition and Affective Communication,” 54.

As seen in [Section 2.1.3](#), asyndeton is considered a rhetorical device that produces various poetic effects, effects at least some of which relevance theory may well be able to explain. It is then worth considering how relevance theory may give an account of how punctuation may produce cognitive effects through implicature.

4.2 A Performance: Punctuation within Relevance Theory

4.2.1 Affective Punch: The Brio of Weak Procedural Guides

Asyndeton appears to have never been addressed in the terms of relevance theory.

Similarly, punctuation, which is closely associated with asyndeton, has also received little attention in research based on relevance theory.¹⁵⁵ In what may be the sole study of punctuation conducted from the framework of relevance theory, Figuras introduces the idea that punctuation provides procedural guidelines on how to interpret a text. In taking this approach, she handles punctuation in the same way that discourse markers have been treated within relevance theory. Inspired by Figuras, Owtram explicitly states that punctuation is an implicit marker of relations between sentences and a constraint on

¹⁵⁵ There appear to be only a handful of writers who have explicitly connected punctuation and relevance theory. Moreover, almost all these writers do not develop the connection in any depth. For instance, although Fabb considers punctuation in his examination of the relation between literary and linguistic form, he refers to relevance theory only loosely. While Kreml applies relevance theory directly to her study of literary style, she mentions in passing the role of punctuation in “signal[ing] to the reader need to recover complex implicatures.” “Implicatures of Styleswitching in the Narrative Voice of Cormac McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses*,” in *Codes and Consequences: Choosing Linguistic Varieties*, ed. Carol Myers-Scotton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 44. The link Walaszewska and Piskorska draw between punctuation and relevance theory is hardly more developed; they too mention punctuation in a short aside: “Most languages also have a cluster of procedural items (e.g. punctuation [. . .]) which are indeed intrinsically linked to communication, and whose function is [to] guide the interpretation process in one direction or another.” Ewa Walaszewska and Agnieszka Piskorska, *Relevance Theory: More than Understanding*, *Advances in Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis* (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Pub, 2012), 36.

interpretation.¹⁵⁶ Since asyndeton involves the use of punctuation in the suppression or absence of conjunctives, asyndetic punctuation serves as a weak substitution for conjunctives (a type of discourse marker). In this line of thought, asyndeton can then be addressed from the angle of discourse markers.

Reboul and Moeschler define discourse markers as linguistic units whose ranks consist of conjunctions and adverbials and whose functions include (a) providing guidelines on how to interpret connections between linguistic segments and (b) impelling readers to draw conclusions from these connections that they would not have come to otherwise.¹⁵⁷

Williams explains: “Interpreting an utterance entails following specific instructions (encoded by the discourse marker) to grasp the meaning of the utterance as intended by the communicator.”¹⁵⁸ Discourse markers serve the communicator’s goal of optimal relevance by minimizing processing effort, “imposing a ‘semantic constraint on relevance’” and pointing the reader towards a particular inferential process. On the opposite side of the same coin, they optimize contextual effects “by giving instructions [. . .] on how those effects are to be retrieved.”¹⁵⁹

It is important to note that discourse markers do not encode connections (relations) between linguistic segments; they affix signposts pointing towards an intended

¹⁵⁶ Owtram, 75.

¹⁵⁷ Anne Reboul and Jacques Moeschler, *Pragmatique du discours: de l’interprétation de l’énoncé à l’interprétation du discours*, Collection U. Série linguistique (Paris: Armand Colin, 1998), 77.

¹⁵⁸ Malcolm Williams, “Explaining Shortcomings in the Translation Student’s Reasoning Process: A Fresh Look at the Etiology of Translation Error,” *Forum* 9, no. 2 (October 2011): 88–89.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 89.

interpretive direction.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, discourse markers do not generally represent concepts; they generally represent procedures. They are usually not semantic representations themselves; they usually impose restrictions on semantic representations.

Punctuation marks share certain features with discourse markers. Like many discourse markers, they are not semantic representations. Moreover, like discourse markers, they may point towards a direction meant to bring about the cognitive effects the communicator intended. Punctuation marks do, however, differ from discourse markers: their instructions on how to interpret utterances are more implicit.

Why would authors chose to use punctuation marks alone instead of using them in conjunction with discourse markers? After all, the weak implicature of these punctuational graphemes suggests higher processing costs. Relevance theory would explain such a choice according to the principle of relevance. Communicators aim at optimal relevance. If higher processing costs are demanded by punctuation alone, these costs must be offset by heightened cognitive effects. Therefore, if a communicator chooses to use punctuation marks in the absence of conjunctives (as in asyndeton), the communicator must believe these punctuation marks in isolation will achieve greater cognitive effects, and, considering the weak implicature of punctuation marks, even poetic effects.

In other words, as communicators aim to enlarge mutual cognitive environments, they may choose to employ asyndeton because it may make numerous weakly manifest assumptions

¹⁶⁰ Diane Blakemore, *Relevance and Linguistic Meaning: The Semantics and Pragmatics of Discourse Markers* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 167.

slightly more manifest and thereby cause their audience to attain cognitive effects they would not have otherwise experienced. In other words, the poetic effects created by asyndeton's weak implicature may create a sense of affective rather than intellectual mutuality.

4.2.2 Foils and Understudies: The Thespian Personas of Punctuation

If punctuation can indeed achieve poetic effects through weak implicature, how do different punctuation marks compare in their ability to achieve the same cognitive effects? Can a semicolon have the same effect as a period? Can a comma have the same effect as a semicolon or a colon? The very existence of different types of punctuation marks suggests that, at least to a certain extent, these different marks fulfill different procedural roles.

For example, in English, the dash flings a stroke of drama across a page: unreserved playfulness, unveiled shock, pointed precision, even flagrant ostentation. Colons are similarly dramatic but more heraldic. They “theatrically announc[e] what is to come”¹⁶¹ whether it be “un exemple, une citation, une énumération, un discours direct, une explication, une définition, un sous-titre [an example, a citation, an enumeration, direct speech, an explanation, a definition, a subtitle.”¹⁶²

So maybe the colon and dash are hard competitors for the comma, but what about the period and the semicolon? Could at least these three—the comma, semicolon, and

¹⁶¹ Truss, 180.

¹⁶² Noëlle Guilloton and Hélène Cajolet-Laganière, *Le français au bureau*, ed. Martine Germain and Noëlle Guilloton, 6th ed. (Sainte-Foy: Publications du Québec, 2005), 485.

period—tie if they were to compete? Fleurquin suggests that these marks, however similar, still sport their own nuanced tendencies. She quips: “Point-virgule égale une grosse virgule; ou alors un petit point. Un point qui laisserait de l'espace pour regarder des deux côtés de la phrase. Une petite barrière, en quelque sorte [A semicolon is the same as a strong comma; or a weak period. A period that makes room to examine two sides of a sentence. A little barrier of sorts].”¹⁶³ Semicolons are like those horn-rimmed connoisseurs that want to pause every passerby in their trajectory to help them savour the wonders of the art of parallelism (syntactic or semantic). In the place of semicolons, commas are more like wannabe protégés, weak-willed amateurs.

But is this true? Does a comma, in some cases at least, direct an audience towards cognitive effects that the dash, the colon, the semicolon, and even the period cannot achieve?

Of course, the fact remains that French appears to recognize commas as being officially qualified for the task typically (and formally) fulfilled by only semicolons in English (see [Section 2.2.2](#)). Furthermore, according to Demanuelli’s study, French also prefers commas to indicate “interdépendance étroite” where English is more likely to opt for colons and hyphens.¹⁶⁴ This difference is, of course, a matter convention, but that is not to say that conventions do not cause particular graphical units to prompt particular cognitive representations. Just as the conceptual representations induced by most words are made possible through usage developed over time, it is through conventions that the procedural

¹⁶³ Véronique Fleurquin, *Virgule*, vol. 8, Les petits carnets (Paris: Syros, 1994), under “point-virgule.”

¹⁶⁴ Claude Demanuelli, *Points de repère: approche interlinguistique de la ponctuation français-anglais* (Université de Saint-Etienne, 1987), 151.

import of each punctuation mark is made possible. Asyndeton is not impossible in English, but, since it is less common, a degree of markedness is more likely to characterize the carrying over of asyndeton in an English translation. Such markedness may have a strong effect on the reader's perception of a text.

How then should asyndeton be translated? The answer lies in the theory that has been laid out above. In translating asyndeton, translators must seek to optimize relevance, producing the greatest cognitive effects for the lowest processing costs. Asyndetic processing costs may be high (since the effects may depend on weak implicature) and additionally high in English (due to its writing practices). The translator must determine to the best of her abilities what effects are caused by asyndeton and whether these effects will offset the processing costs in English. The following chapter will explore how the translator may achieve optimal relevance when translating asyndeton.

Before moving on, it is necessary to review Gutt's application of relevance theory to translation. Since this is a thesis in Translation Studies, it is thought necessary to explain why this analysis can be based on Sperber and Wilson's theory alone and not on Gutt's translation application of it.

4.3 A Second Thought: Relevance Theory and Gutt's Application

Sperber and Wilson did not apply relevance theory to translation, but in 1991 Gutt published *Translation and Relevance*, expounding a theory that was deliberately built on the foundations of the principle of relevance.

Setting out to define translation in the terms of relevance theory, Gutt declares that translation is a case of interpretive use “across language boundaries.”¹⁶⁵ In other words, translations are constructed to share the explicatures and/or implicatures of another utterance in another language.¹⁶⁶

According to Gutt, there are two types of interlingual interpretive use: direct translation and indirect translation. Direct translation reproduces all the source text communicative clues or properties,¹⁶⁷ in a way similar to how intralingual direct quotation perfectly repeats all the superficial linguistic properties of the original utterance. Direct translation is thus the absolute reproduction of all explicatures and/or implicatures; it “presumes complete interpretive resemblance and excludes the explicitation of implicit information,” the implicitation of explicit information, and summarization.¹⁶⁸ After all, “[s]ince implicit and explicit information differ so significantly, it is likely that [such changes] will change the meaning of the translated texts.”¹⁶⁹ The goal of direct translation is always to reproduce the same cognitive effects as the utterance it interpretively resembles.

¹⁶⁵ Gutt, *Translation and Relevance*, 100.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁶⁷ Ernst-August Gutt, *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, 2nd ed. (Manchester; Boston: St. Jerome Publishing, 2000), 128. Communicative clues are the abstraction of communicative properties, that is, those linguistic properties that are “influential in the interpretation process” (not all verbal stimuli are influential). Ernst-August Gutt, “On the Significance of the Cognitive Core of Translation” 11, no. 1 (January 1, 2005): 41.

¹⁶⁸ Sang Zhonggang, “A Relevance Theory Perspective on Translating the Implicit Information in Literary Texts,” *Journal of Translation* 2, no. 2 (2006): 46; Ernst-August Gutt, “A Theoretical Account of Translation - Without a Translation Theory,” *Target* 2, no. 2 (January 1, 1990): 155.

¹⁶⁹ Ernst-August Gutt, “On the Nature and Treatment of Implicit Information in Literary Translation: A Relevance-Theoretic Perspective” (Symposium on the Pragmatics of Literary Translation, Akademi University, Turku, Finland, 1992), http://cogprints.org/2494/2/IMPINF8.htm#_edn1.

Since explicatures and implicatures remain fixed in direct translation, direct translation presumes a static context.¹⁷⁰ The target audience is expected to adopt the context envisaged by the original communicator just as the audience would be expected to do in the case of original literary and historical documents. Of course, gaining the information required for constructing a context like the originally envisaged one may be laborious and may be reserved for those with time to devote to building up such a knowledge base.

Even supposing an audience has the historical and cultural context necessary for understanding a text, is direct translation possible considering the linguistic barriers implied by translation? Is it possible to reproduce all communicative clues without adjusting the explicatures and implicatures? Is direct translation merely an idealistic goal? Essentially, yes. In the same way that Sperber and Wilson hold that “effability in the strong sense does not exist,”¹⁷¹ translatability does not exist “in the strong sense entailed by direct translation.”¹⁷² Direct translation presumes complete resemblance but does not necessarily achieve it. “[L]anguage differences may make it impossible to achieve complete interpretative resemblance.”¹⁷³ Direct translation is the limiting case on the continuum of interlingual interpretive resemblance, a continuum consisting mostly of indirect translation.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁰ Ernst-August Gutt, *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation* (Dallas; New York: Summer Institute of Linguistics; United Bible Societies, 1992), 66.

¹⁷¹ Gutt, “A Theoretical Account,” 158.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 159.

¹⁷⁴ Gutt, *Translation and Relevance*, 164.

What then is indirect translation, especially in comparison to direct translation? Where “direct translation is committed to complete interpretative resemblance” and assumes a static context, indirect translation purports to “adequately resembl[e] the original in respects relevant to the target audience.”¹⁷⁵ Just as any communicator can be expected to seek optimal relevance, translators can be expected to seek optimal resemblance in indirect translations. This means that translators can be expected to seek interpretive resemblance to the original text (resemblance of explicatures and/or implicatures) while seeking adequate contextual effects without gratuitous processing effort.¹⁷⁶ The context of the audience will shape how optimal relevance can be achieved. Thus, translation decisions are ideally informed by the audience’s expectations for translation, genre, literariness, and the like.

Gutt’s application of relevance theory was informed by his work as a Bible translator, and his distinction between direct and indirect translation reflects the cultural barriers often encountered in Bible translation. As an application for the French-to-English translation of a modern literary text, Gutt’s extension of relevance theory is less useful. The source and target audiences of Harton’s *Traité des peaux* share very similar cognitive environments. In fact, differences in their cognitive environments were only a problem with regard to language and writing practices. In the end, the way to apply relevance theory to the translation of Harton is to apply the principle of relevance or, as Gutt puts it, to seek optimal resemblance.

¹⁷⁵ Zhonggang, 47.

¹⁷⁶ Gutt, *Translation and Relevance*, 101.

Let's see how this works out in practice.

5. A Punctuated Landscape: Preserving Asyndetic Inuksuit

How should asyndeton be translated? This analysis is based on the hypothesis that asyndeton should be translated according to the principle of relevance. What exactly does that mean in concrete terms? This chapter will explore the answer by looking at how the asyndetic effects in Harton's *Traité des peaux* can be explained and at how these effects might be successfully translated.

The chapter begins by briefly explaining how the stories analyzed were selected from *Traité des peaux*. The chapter then presents the stories from which examples will be drawn for the purposes of this analysis. Next the chapter examines possible effects of interpredicational asyndeton: comparative implicatures, rhythmic imitation, and non-exhaustiveness. The chapter goes on to examine interclausal asyndeton. It analyzes the ways that asyndeton can collaborate with other punctuation marks and “shared units” to achieve comparative and contrastive implicatures. It also examines the way asyndeton significantly contributes to the affective mutuality of free indirect thought.

5.1 Locating the Narrative Landscape: Methodology

Three stories were selected from the ten stories Harton's *Traité des peaux*. These stories were not chosen for being especially asyndetic. (In fact, the number of cases of asyndeton in each story was tallied only after the stories were chosen.) Instead, these stories were selected because they all featured a different type of focalization (see [Section 5.4.3](#) for the type of focalization in each story). If only stories with the same type of focalization had happened to be randomly selected, it would not have been possible to analyze whether

there was a relationship between the type of focalization and the frequency of asyndeton. If only stories with mono-focalization had happened to be selected, it would also not have been possible to analyze whether there was a relationship between the frequency of asyndeton and a particular character.

In the end, there appeared to be no relationship between the frequency of asyndeton and the type of focalization. Also, no relation was detected between the frequency of asyndeton and particular characters; in other words, asyndeton did not seem to be used to characterize one personage more than the other.¹⁷⁷

5.2 Sketching the Narrative Landscape: Harton's stories

As mentioned, the following analysis draws on three stories in Harton's *Traité des peaux*: "La mémoire des habiles," "Les baleines sont les doigts de la mer," and "Il faut toucher l'oiseau au cœur."

"La mémoire des habiles" is a pensive tableau, the recollections of a man whose face is marked with passages of time. A man who awaits death. A man, who in waiting, is sustained by memories, by a store of eighty long years. He weaves his way, meandering through them, tapping their emotive force, recalling details of joy and pain, imbibing the intoxicating draft, the bitter dregs, then the refreshing sip again. The experience of a life lived long, a life lived full, a life in ending. This is Pavia's story.

¹⁷⁷ Because these findings concern the absence of effects, they are not covered in the analysis below. They are mentioned here only because they are relevant to why certain stories were selected from Harton's book.

Like two strings dipping with vignettes, “Les baleines sont les doigts de la mer” juxtaposes the thoughts of two lives stranded alongside one another. Undeveloped negatives of the sea, its memories, legends thrown up on shore. A daughter is sobered by the stale breath she observes through the lens of a bottle, but buoyed by facts of marine life, captivated by whales encircling their little ones. Before her, her mother. She barricades herself in, behind hollow colonnades of glass. She drenches herself in watery visions of the past, magnificent images, thundering mists. The silver flash of tailfin. Their lives, side-by-side, like the pages of a book. This is the story Leena and Pauline share.

The putterings and palpitations of a heart awaiting love, “Il faut toucher l’oiseau au cœur” is summer melting the ice fields. It’s a man writing and waiting, waiting and writing, netting the sky, preparing a feathered feast. It’s the promise of sunlight after long months of darkness. It’s the renewed wonder of the hunt, wings clasped against the clouds, sustenance. The promise of hope and affection in the foreground of torment, in the foreground of disappointment. It’s a call to strike the heart, the very core. This is Imaru’s story, Joseph’s story.

These are the stories this analysis will examine.

5.3 Finding Strength Alone: Interpredicational Asyndeton

5.3.1 Scrutinizing Doppelgängers: Asyndeton and Apposition

In beginning this analysis, it is important to consider how asyndeton resembles and often

coincides with apposition.

Apposition is a relationship between two or more units that refer to the same thing.

Appositives are often grammatically parallel and are often noun phrases.¹⁷⁸ However, they need be neither nominal nor parallel to qualify as apposition. For example, Meyer gives examples of apposition consisting of a nominal phrase and a sentence,¹⁷⁹ of two sentences,¹⁸⁰ and of two verbal phrases.¹⁸¹ Another common characteristic of apposition is juxtaposition: 89% of appositives have been shown to be juxtaposed in well-known English corpora.¹⁸² The term *apposition* is also often used for two units that are so completely identical in reference that one unit supposedly could be removed without much effect on the sentence. However, the units need not be so very identical. Meyer identifies eight types of semantic classes common in apposition. These include identification, appellation, particularization, exemplification, characterization, and paraphrase.¹⁸³

Some language specialists have noted that apposition and asyndetic coordination are hard to distinguish from one another.¹⁸⁴ Typically, apposition and asyndeton both use commas to juxtapose units, and both can involve the juxtaposition of clauses and predicates that are not semantically identical. Apposition and asyndeton are difficult to differentiate not

¹⁷⁸ Bas Aarts, "Apposition," *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁷⁹ Charles F. Meyer, *Apposition in Contemporary English*, Studies in English Language (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 25.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

simply because they share certain features but because they are not mutually exclusive.

Why is this important?

Although she has not related her findings to asyndeton, Blakemore has analyzed “the rhetorical effects of structures that involve the apposition of two (or more) segments with similar, but not identical, interpretations.”¹⁸⁵ First, she finds that apposition is not equivalent to a structure containing a discourse marker of reformulation. If a reformulation marker were inserted into the appositional structure, the text would have a very different cognitive effect.¹⁸⁶ For example, the effects of (1) and (2) below are quite different.

(1) He felt weary, or, in other words, threadbare.

(2) He felt weary, threadbare.

Blakemore argues that apposition bears more resemblance to repetition than to reformulation in the sense that, without the discourse marker, the communicator may assign the readers greater responsibility to explore their mental encyclopaedic entries and to assemble an interpretation.¹⁸⁷ Admittedly, the extent to which readers have greater responsibility is limited.

Analyzing apposition more closely, Blakemore explains that it can have the effect of

¹⁸⁵ Blakemore, “Apposition and Affective Communication,” 37. In what follows, *apposition* will be used to refer exclusively to structures involving the juxtaposition of two or more units with similar but not identical interpretations.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 39. For more on repetition, see Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 219–222.

intensification if the right-located appositive is informationally stronger than the left-located appositive. The use of both left- and right-located units is more effective than the use of the right-located unit alone, because the reader is prompted to consider the differences and similarities between the two units and thus to achieve a range of weak implicatures which he would otherwise not have entertained.¹⁸⁸

Apposition can have an emphatic effect even when neither unit is informationally stronger than the other. The first unit gives the readers certain contextual assumptions. The readers are then prompted to expand this initial context in the contextual assumptions made available by the second unit: “The result is a wider array of implicatures and a more vivid understanding of the narrator’s thoughts.”¹⁸⁹ In both types of apposition, with so much responsibility for interpretation assigned to the reader, the result is affective mutuality. As defined in [Section 4.1.2](#), affective mutuality is “the sort of intimacy that derives from the belief that one is sharing essentially private experiences and feelings.”¹⁹⁰

It is important to note that in interpreting any text—with or without apposition or asyndeton—a reader will use the context made accessible by the co-text to arrive at cognitive effects. The point Blakemore makes is that apposition does so by means of very weak implicatures that may result in greater affective mutuality than would have been produced if discourse markers had been employed.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 49.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 51.

¹⁹⁰ Blakemore, “Apposition and Affective Communication,” 54.

In *Traité des peaux*, there are numerous cases of asyndeton that coincide with or at least resemble verbal apposition. What are their effects and what does this mean for the translator? Let's consider a few examples.

*Il lui fait parfois penser à un mergule, il ne parle pas, il **pépie, arrache** de drôles de syllabes à sa gorge.¹⁹¹*

(1) *He sometimes reminds him of an auk, he doesn't speak, he **chirps, tugs** odd little syllables from his throat.*

(2) *He sometimes reminds him of an auk, he doesn't speak, he **chirps, in other words, tugs** odd little syllables from his throat.*

(3) *He sometimes reminds him of an auk, he doesn't speak, he **chirps and tugs** odd little syllables from his throat.*

In this example, the predicates *chirp* and *tug* are clearly used to communicate the way Imaru's friend talks. According to Blakemore, to insert a reformulation marker between them would diminish the affective mutuality of the text. To insert a copulative conjunction such as *and* would weaken the synonymy and unduly increase processing effort, since the conjunction could suggest—at least momentarily—that the verbs represent two different actions. It makes sense to leave this case of asyndeton as apposition. No great translation dilemma here.

A less straightforward example is in order:

*Pauline **revit** ses pêches à la bouteille, **colmate** ce qu'elle peut de ses souvenirs d'été avec Jos.¹⁹²*

¹⁹¹ Harton, 26.

¹⁹² Ibid., 94.

(1) Pauline **relives** her memories of fishing in her bottles, **stops up** what she can of summers with Jo.

(2) Pauline **relives** her memories of fishing in her bottles **and stops up** what she can of summers with Jo.

The two segments are synonymous; they both refer to how Pauline seeks to relive her past in inebriated dreams. What is striking about the apposition is that, in the first unit, Pauline is draining bottles dry and, in the second unit, she is figuratively trying to stop up memories that are leaking through her grasp. The imagery used is ironic, perhaps suggesting that by drinking Pauline is wasting opportunities to live life with Jo and to create new memories together. While it does not impede such irony, the lack of coordination may highlight the identical core of the two units. If Blakemore is correct, the juxtaposition may encourage the reader to explore not only the differences but also the similarities between the segments to achieve an array of weak implicatures, that is, poetic effects. If so, it may be best to retain the asyndeton in translation.

Retention may also be the best option in the next example where Leena contemplates the tragedy that caused so much grief and loss.

*C'était la mère de Leena qui l'aidait à l'accouchement, elle ne s'en remettait pas, elle **cessait** de pratiquer, **se terre** maintenant chez elle entourée de sa forteresse de verre.¹⁹³*

(1) Leena's mother was the one attending the birth, she never could get over it, she **stopped** practising, now **buries** herself at home encircled in by her glass fortress.

(2) Leena's mother was the one attending the birth, she never could get over it, she **stopped** practising **and** now **buries** herself at home encircled in by her glass fortress.

¹⁹³ Ibid., 96.

This sentence is found in a paragraph where Leena thinks back to when she was five years old, when her mom was still a midwife. Because Leena considers going on a school exchange to Montreal earlier in the story (meaning Leena is probably at least in junior high), the reader can infer that it has been many years since Leena's mom was a midwife. What the reader does not know is whether Leena's mom became a recluse immediately after the tragedy, trying to escape her pain in an addiction. In this sentence, there are two actions, which may not have occurred simultaneously. However, the second action can easily be taken as the converse of the first. The lack of conjunction may reinforce the idea that the two actions are appositives to one another; when the practice ended, the habit began. The lack of conjunction may subtly emphasize that Leena's mother's troubles have stretched out over the years. Arguably, the lack of conjunction in (1) may encourage the reader to compare the two actions more closely than when the conjunction is present in (2). According to relevance theory, the greater responsibility assigned to the reader for interpretation may create a range of weak implicatures.

While the effects of asyndeton are very subtle in the example above, the effects of weak implicature are more evident in the example below, where Pauline tries to convince her husband they need to go home:

*Elle lance la ligne de Jos à la mer, le **presse** de réagir, celui-ci se fâche mais fait tout de même tourner le moteur à contrecœur, il analyse l'orage qui prend forme sous ses yeux.*¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 101.

- (1) She **hurls** Jo's line into the sea, **urges** him to do something, he gets angry but reluctantly turns the boat around anyway, he takes in the storm looming up before his eyes.
- (2) She **hurls** Jo's line into the sea **and urges** him to do something, he gets angry but reluctantly turns the boat around anyway, he takes in the storm looming up before his eyes.

Here the asyndeton could be interpreted as either appositional or non-appositional. That is, the verb *presser* could be interpreted to mean that when Pauline hurled Jo's line into the sea, she urged him to do something or it could be interpreted to mean that Pauline hurled Jo's line into the sea *and* verbally urged him to do something. It goes without saying that the reader could also infer that the urging involved both throwing the line and speaking. If a conjunction were to join these predicates, the reader would be guided to understand that two distinct actions occurred and, even if the reader understood that throwing the line into the sea was meant to provoke Jo to action, the reader would more definitively understand *presser* to refer to Pauline verbally entreating her husband. Because asyndeton allows for different interpretive possibilities, it may increase processing effort and produce a range of weak implicatures. To ensure the possibility of a range of weak implicatures, it may be best to retain the asyndeton in translation.

The semi-appositional nature of the asyndetic case above is not at all uncommon in the text. Another interesting example is found when Leena studies an informational pamphlet.

*Elle hésite, lisse la couverture, sur une image une rue bondée de gens, des asiatiques pour la plupart : le quartier chinois, elle se demande si les Inuits ont leur quartier à Montréal, ce qu'ils y font.*¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 99.

(1) She **hesitates, smooths** out the front of the brochure, an image of a street bursting with people, mostly Asians: Chinatown, she wonders if the Inuit have their own neighbourhood, what they do there in Montreal.

(2) She **hesitates and smooths** out the front of the brochure, an image of a street bursting with people, mostly Asians: Chinatown, she wonders if the Inuit have their own neighbourhood, what they do there in Montreal.

Here again, the predicates can be interpreted as either two distinct actions (Leena hesitates and then smooths out the brochure) or as one action (when Leena smooths out the brochure, she is hesitating) or as a combination (Leena hesitates—perhaps staring at the brochure—and then continues to hesitate as she smooths out the brochure). The asyndetic form carries the greatest potential for an array of weak implicatures, thus translation option (1) is more likely to be optimally relevant.

It is worth considering another example of interpredicational asyndeton that is clearly not synonymous. It depicts Pauline, who is frustrated by life and a grocery store:

*Arrivée devant un réfrigérateur qui contenait des pièces entières de poissons, elle en **prenait un, le suspendait** au-dessous du nez de Leena.¹⁹⁶*

(1) she **grabbed one, dangled** it in front of Leena's nose.

(2) she **grabbed one and dangled** it in front of Leena's nose.

Clearly, these two actions occur consecutively; Pauline cannot dangle the fish right in front of Leena's nose if she has not first taken the fish up in her hand. If these two actions are distinct from one another, why would they be juxtaposed in the appositional form? Relevance theory would suggest that the lack of conjunction gives the reader more

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 97.

responsibility in interpretation. The reader may be encouraged to compare the two actions, leading to a range of weak implicatures, such as the consecutive nature of the actions and the confrontational nature of dangling something in front of someone's nose compared to the neutral nature of merely picking something up. Adding a conjunction would change these effects as much in translation as in French. As a comparison of translation options (1) and (2) suggests, the explicit nature of the conjunctive may reduce processing effort but it may also reduce the range of weak implicatures.

In short, weak implicatures are not impossible with conjunctions, but the absence of a conjunction may encourage the reader to compare the juxtaposed verbs. The absence of discourse markers—the mere use of a comma—may have poetic effects.

5.3.2 Keeping the Beat: Commas and Rhythm

In translating asyndeton, it is worth noting the rhythmic conventions of commas. In the sentence already examined above for the semi-appositional effects between hesitating and smoothing out the brochure, the comma imposes a pause that mimics the very hesitation the text describes. This pause may reinforce the reader's sense of hesitation. That is, the comma may encourage the reader to visualize the scene or it may enhance the reader's visualization of the scene.

A similar effect is found in another sentence where Leena contemplates leaving her mother to participate in an exchange program down South:

*Elle **inspire, range** la brochure dans sa commode.¹⁹⁷*

*(1) She **sighs, tucks** the brochure away in her dresser.*

*(2) She **sighs and tucks** the brochure away in her dresser.*

The comma may cause the reader to mentally mimic the pause a sigh normally conveys. It may therefore make the text more vivid to the reader. In both examples, the weak implicatures communicated by the lexicon and those communicated by asyndeton combine to create such an effect.

The rhythm produced by asyndeton need not reinforce only those weak implicatures associated with visualization. Through the rhythm it creates, asyndeton can encourage other associations. Consider the example drawn from a section where Pavia recalls his daughter's stormy teenage years:

*L'enfant devenait insolente, **injurieuse, écoutait** des litanies gothiques, de la musique métal, comme elle disait.¹⁹⁸*

*The child became insolent, **rude, listened** to gothic litanies, heavy metal, as she put it.*

In cahoots with the two other commas, the asyndetic comma breaks this relatively short sentence into five pieces. The pounding effect produced appears to mimic the rebellious music the teenager enjoys. Using the coordinating conjunction *and* to connect the compound predicate would not have created the same insistent correspondence.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 99.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 12.

5.3.3 Dropping Hints: Non-exhaustiveness

As indicated above, even when interpredicational asyndeton consists of two verbs that are obviously not synonymous, translating asyndeton as asyndeton may still be worthwhile because the reader may be encouraged to compare the juxtaposed units more closely. This is not the only reason why asyndeton may be the optimal translation choice. Consider the following examples taken from a portion of “Les baleines sont les doigts de la mer,” where Leena is horrified by her mother’s drunken riot in the grocery store:

*Sa mère **regardait** le prix de chaque article, **pestait**, **commençait à arracher** les tiges moisies d’un brocoli.¹⁹⁹*

*(1) Her mother **looked** at the price of every item, **swore away**, **took to ripping** moldy lumps off a broccoli.*

*(2) Her mother **looked** at the price of every item, **swore away**, **and took to ripping** moldy lumps off a broccoli.*

*Pauline continuait de scruter chaque aliment à la loupe, elle **arrachait** les protubérances aux pommes de terre, **lançait** un sac d’oignons mous au fond d’une allée.²⁰⁰*

*(1) Pauline persisted in minutely scrutinizing every single item of food, she **tore** sprouts from the potatoes, **hurled** a bag of mushy onions down an aisle.*

*(2) Pauline persisted in minutely scrutinizing every single item of food, she **tore** sprouts from the potatoes **and hurled** a bag of mushy onions down an aisle.*

As mentioned in [Section 2.2.2](#), convention has caused asyndeton to be associated with non-exhaustiveness in cases of enumeration.²⁰¹ To drop the asyndetic comma and add a

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 96.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 97.

²⁰¹ It is worth noting that in her study of closed and asyndetic lists, Damamme-Gilbert found that asyndeton in a list was not always used to broaden “le champ des possibilités [field of possibilities]” (86); sometimes it was used to express uncertainty, impulsivity, or imprecision (88). Damamme-

conjunction is to create a sense of finality and completeness, that is, to suggest that Pauline did five things: swore, examined prices, inspected food, picked at broccoli, and threw onions. To keep the asyndetic comma is to leave room for the reader to imagine that Pauline may have embarrassed her daughter in other ways too. The weak implicatures conveyed by the asyndetic comma are exactly that—weak—but the subtle impression they give can enliven the scene.

Intensification seems to be the effect of enumerative asyndeton in the following example where Pavia is harassed by a merciless coworker:

*Cet homme s'amusait en blessant Pavia, il **crachait** dans sa soupe, **urinait** sur sa couette, comme un chat, il marquait son territoire, humiliant l'homme pour la simple raison qu'il était inuit et que les Inuits, cet homme les détestait, les maudissait.²⁰²*

(1) *This man took pleasure in making Pavia's life miserable, he **spit** in his soup, **peed** on his duvet, like a cat, he marked his territory, humiliating the man just because he was Inuit and because Inuits—well, because this man hated Inuits. Loathed them.*

(2) *This man took pleasure in making Pavia's life miserable, he **spit** in his soup **and** **peed** on his duvet, like a cat, he marked his territory, humiliating the man just because he was Inuit and because Inuits—well, because this man hated Inuits. Loathed them.*

Without the conjunction, the comma suggests that the man did more than spit and pee. It could be that because readers are primed to expect a conjunction at the end of a list, they

Gilbert points out that co-textual factors play an essential role in creating the meaning asyndeton suggests. She also holds that "l'efficacité de [l']emploi [de la structure asyndétique] ne peut s'évaluer que sur un cas individuel, en fonction des autres données [the effectiveness of the asyndetic structure can be evaluated only on an individual basis, in light of other factors]" (91). Béatrice Damamme-Gilbert, "La coordination dans les énumérations littéraires est-elle plus 'normale' que l'asyndète?" *Language and Style* 23, no. 1 (1990): 85–91.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 14.

may anticipate more antics to be listed further on in the sentence; they may be left with the impression the grown-up bully had other pathetic ways of making Pavia's life hell. By creating the impression of non-exhaustiveness, asyndeton can have intensifying effects, as shown in this example. As the number of antics becomes non-exhaustive, the situation is depicted as more severe, as more intense.

5.4 Finding Strength in Unity: Interclausal Asyndeton

5.4.1 Priming Thoughts: Group Think

With so little research existing on asyndeton, this thesis attempts to ensure that connections can be made between its findings and previous work. Because contrastive studies have suggested coordination is typical of French-to-English translation and because interpredicational asyndeton is part of Rossette's 2009 study, this thesis seeks to be relevant by considering interpredicational asyndeton.

In terms of punctuation, interpredicational asyndeton poses only the translation question of whether the asyndetic comma should be retained (and whether a conjunctive should be added); it rarely broaches the topic of other punctuation marks because periods and semicolons are hardly ever used to separate conjugated verbs. Interclausal asyndeton, however, does raise the question of whether to translate with other punctuation marks, and it will now be examined here.

One way that interclausal asyndeton creates poetic effects is by grouping units into

sentences²⁰³ that encourage readers to compare and contrast certain units with one another. Consider the following example:

*Pavia défait le jour de ses longs **bras**, **il** rebat les rideaux ; il quitte l'accumulation de flocons des **yeux**, **devine** leur étrange géométrie.*²⁰⁴

*Pavia undoes the day with his long **arms**, **he** draws the curtains; he shuts out the sight of the accumulating **snowflakes**, **imagines** their peculiar geometry.*

The two cases of asyndeton here subtly enhance the symbolism of the drifting snow, which throughout the text is an obvious metaphor for Pavia's life and impending death. This sentence, located in the first paragraph, metaphorically foreshadows the symbolism gusted throughout the story. Here, as his days draw to a close, Pavia draws the curtains. Confined to his chair, unable to walk more than a few steps, Pavia is prevented from experiencing life as he once did. Just as the snow is shut off from his sight, Pavia is shut off from his old life, and yet he can envision it, just like the snow; he projects memories on the walls of his mind.

The segmentation of the sentence gently encourages the reader to compare the clauses conjoined by asyndeton and to draw a parallel between the snow and Pavia's life. The first two clauses can easily be interpreted as apposition. Moreover, the high processing costs of the marked collocation of *défaire* and *jour* reinforces the effects of apposition, since it encourages the reader to consider what this clause could mean and to search for clues in the succeeding clause. The last two clauses could also be taken for apposition—at least initially. Both predicates refer to that which is either physically or imaginatively seen. The

²⁰³ Recall that the term *sentence* is used in this thesis to refer to a linguistic unit delineated by an uppercase letter on the left and a period, an exclamation mark, a question mark, or ellipsis points on the right.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

tight juxtaposition of *yeux* and *devine* in French especially highlights this commonality. However, the predicates are far from synonymous. In fact, they are practically paradoxical; while Pavia bars the physical snow from sight, he welcomes the sight of it in his mind. The contrast would have existed without asyndeton, but asyndeton, by mimicking apposition, may jar the reader who notices the camouflage of the foil. The mimetic apposition may come with higher processing costs but may have the effect of emphasizing the contrast between the two predicates.

Would different punctuation be as effective? Admittedly, this sentence could have been divided into four individual sentences and the foreshadowing symbolism would still have implied by their very juxtaposition. However, the splicing of the clauses creates one unit, a summative miniature of the entire story. Even more importantly, the current punctuation presumably creates an expectation of parallelism. The first two clauses are clearly appositives, and the clause following the semicolon is essentially a third appositive of these first two clauses. Because semicolons often imply parallelism, the reader could be led to expect the fourth subunit to be a fourth appositive. This expectation would not have been as pronounced if there were no semicolon joining subunits linked by asyndeton. Because of this expectation, the contrast between the final subunit and the preceding subunits is heightened. Although the significance of this structure may not be clear at this point in the story, the contrast created by this structure may create weak implicatures related to the significance of envisioning the snowflakes' peculiar geometry. Since the structure would have the same poetic effects in English, it would be best to translate asyndeton as asyndeton in this sentence.

Another instance where asyndeton appears to achieve relevance through punctuational grouping is in the following sentence where the wind is casted as a foe to be feared:

*Depuis quelques jours, le vent est devenu un **ennemi**, il étend son pouvoir de décision sur les parties de chasse, de pêche ; la moindre activité devient une **lutte**, il faut être aux aguets pour ne pas périr.*²⁰⁵

*In the past few days, the wind has become an **enemy**, it extends its decisive power over the hunting, fishing parties; the slightest activity becomes a **struggle**, to let down one's guard is to perish.*

Again, asyndeton works with another punctuation mark to form distinct groupings. On one side of the semicolon, asyndeton works to join two clauses that forefront the threatening power of the wind. On the other side, asyndeton unites two clauses that forefront the human struggle for survival. This division may emphasize the antagonism between the opponents by reducing processing effort for the reader. It therefore makes sense to retain the asyndeton in translation.

Here is another example of asyndeton highlighting connections between subunits, an example that also highlights the potential for asyndetic contrast between sentences. It occurs in a passage where Leena takes a walk outside within view of the river:

*Leena arpente l'allée de **gravier**, l'air salin a vivifié son **corps**, l'odeur des algues et du poisson sont des armes redoutables contre la **tristesse**, elle a longtemps regardé la mer, comme si elle espérait qu'elle en recrache un secret. Les goélands s'encanaillent de leur **ricanement**, **quelques** enfants jouent avec un ballon, près de la **berge**, ils crient plus fort que les oiseaux encore.*²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 9.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 102.

*Leena paces up and down the gravel **driveway**, **the** salty air is **invigorating**, **the** smell of seaweed and fish is a powerful weapon against **sadness**, **she** studied the sea for a long time, as though she hoped it would spit out a secret. The gulls disgrace themselves with their jeering, **a** few children play ball, at the **shoreline**, **they're** screeching even louder than the birds.*

Asyndeton divides this paragraph into two sentences. The first is arguably about Leena. *She* walks the driveway. The salty air refreshes *her*. The smell of seaweed is comforting to *her*.²⁰⁷ *She* looks at longingly at the river. The second sentence does not describe Leena at all (although it may describe what she sees); it is about the hooligan gulls and their jeering screeches, about the excited children and their enthusiastic yells. Interestingly, with the words *ricanement* and *crient*, this second sentence focuses on sounds, whereas the first sentence focuses more on smells and does not mention sounds at all. This contrasting mention of the senses may encourage the notion that Leena is silent and alone. Not talking with anyone, not playing with anyone, gazing at the river, Leena contemplates. This lexical difference clearly creates contrast between the two sentences. Asyndeton arguably reinforces this contrast, grouping the units in an admittedly subtle way that may optimize relevance.

In a passage particularly dense with asyndeton, the punctuation again appears to group the clauses into certain topics already existing in the paragraph. The reader finds Leena in a book while her mother lies slumped over in a drunken slumber.

*Elle lit un passage à voix **haute**, **il** décrit l'emploi de la graisse de l'animal pour les lampes à **l'huile**, **Leena** a lu quelque part qu'on employait la graisse de baleine pour la fabrication du rouge à **lèvres**, **elle** trouvait ça **écœurant**, **jamais** elle ne se tartine la*

²⁰⁷ The text does not, of course, state that the fishy smell was comforting to her. The reader can infer that this is so because the four surrounding clauses mention Leena.

*bouche avec du rouge. Elle lit de plus en plus **fort, le** corps devant elle bronche à peine, un léger spasme tout au plus. Toute la maison empeste le tabac de la veille et la bière **brune, les** murs ont emprisonné l'odeur et la mère de Leena. Elle dormira encore jusqu'à deux **heures, c'est** comme ça tous les jours, depuis des mois, des **années, les** rêves sont enfouis au fond de la mer.²⁰⁸*

*She reads a passage out **loud, it** describes how the animal's blubber was used for oil lamps, Leena had read somewhere that whale blubber was used to make **lipstick, she** found that **sickening, she** never applies lipstick to her lips. She reads louder and **louder, the** body in front of her barely **moves, a** faint twitch at most. The whole house reeks of dark beer and last night's **tobacco, the** walls have trapped in the smell and Leena's mother. She'll keep sleeping until two **o'clock, it's** been like this every day for months, for **years, dreams** are buried at the bottom of the sea.*

The first sentence is all about Leena reading out loud to herself and her reaction to what she has read. The second sentence can be interpreted as Leena's interaction with her mother; no matter how loud she reads, her mother does not seem to hear or react. The third sentence is about Leena's gloomy surroundings. The fourth sentence is about Leena's mother sleeping. Clearly, asyndeton could be used in English to group these themes in the same way.

Asyndeton is used in a similar and yet more striking way in a paragraph where Pavia remembers the secret shame he hid from his family, the shame he had thrown in his face by his more privileged coworkers.

*Il n'est jamais descendu au fond d'une **mine, il** n'a jamais connu les températures souterraines. Il restait à la **surface, il** épluchait les chemises des hommes, tachées par la sueur et le **minerai, il** épluchait, en blanchisseuse, ses pans de honte.²⁰⁹*

*He never went down to the bottom of a **mine, he** never experienced the underground temperatures. He stayed at the **surface, he** scrubbed the men's shirts, dirtied with sweat and **ore, he** scrubbed, like a washerwoman, the stains of those sad days.*

²⁰⁸ Harton, 93.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 13–14.

The asyndeton in these sentences groups clauses that belong in one of two categories: the category of what Pavia did not do and the category of what Pavia did do. Each category is represented by a sentence. Thus, the comma between *mine* and *il* accentuates the stop between *souterraines* and *il*. The asyndeton creates a starker contrast between the romantic image of the miner's toil and the unimpressive, monotonous "woman's" work that Pavia actually did. Arguably, the asyndeton also puts greater emphasis on the *il* that comes after the period, perhaps pointing out—in almost ironic mockery—that it was *Pavia* who dealt with everyone's dirty laundry. By maintaining the asyndeton, the translation may encourage the reader to contrast the miners' work and the launderer's work, to compare Pavia to the others. Because asyndeton may group the units in a way that reduces processing effort, optimizing relevance, asyndeton may be successfully translated as asyndeton.

5.4.2 Looking in Two Directions: Condensed Chiasmus

Asyndeton creates a unique possibility for independent clauses. It allows them to share various dependent clauses, phrases, and even words that would otherwise be joined to only one clause. The possible implications of these shared units are fascinating.

Take, for example, a sentence where Pavia reflects on the aggressive power of the wind:

*Depuis 80 ans, Pavia croit que cette force lui est toujours étrangère, bien qu'il ait son répertoire de tempêtes, **chacune** est un passage différent : un toit arraché, un chien égaré, un mort.*²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

*For eighty years Pavia has felt that this strength has always been a stranger to **him**, despite his repertoire of storms, **each** one a different experience: a wrenched roof, a lost dog, a death.*

The dependent clause between the asyndetically conjoined independent clauses encourages the reader to apply the dependent clause first to the independent clause on the left and then to the independent clause on the right. This double application may create a sense of pseudo-repetition. This condensed chiasmus may emphasize that no amount of storms could ever prepare Pavia for the brutality of this force. It would always confound him, always mark his life with destruction. Because the same structure can be replicated in translation with the same effects, translating asyndeton as asyndeton may be desirable. A period or a semicolon would not allow for the dependent clause to apply to both independent clauses as clearly as does the asyndetic comma.

In a less hair-raising but still adrenaline-pumping context, an adjectival phrase alongside asyndetic commas has an emphatic effect similar to that of the example above. It is here that Pavia meets his future wife, Lilian, for the very first time at a night of drumming, revelry, dance. . . and falling in love.

*Elle s'était assise sur une chaise, bien **droite**, timide comme une adolescente, **elle** attendait qu'on l'invite à danser.²¹¹*

*She was sitting on a chair, **stiffly**, as bashful as a thirteen-year-old, **she** was waiting for someone to ask her to dance.*

The phrase *timide comme une adolescente* can easily be understood to refer to both how

²¹¹ Ibid., 16.

Lilian was self-consciously seated on the chair and how she shyly waited for someone to approach her. When asyndeton allows the phrase to apply to both sentences, a sort of condensed chiasmus occurs, putting emphasis on how bashful she was feeling when Pavia discovered her. The emphasis on her diffidence contrasts this sentence with the next, in which the young woman relaxes and puts her whole heart into the dance. The adjectival phrase would add emphasis in the translation if the asyndeton were retained.

Emphasis on a shared unit also occurs in a sentence already cited above:

*Elle dormira encore jusqu'à deux heures, c'est comme ça tous les jours, depuis des mois, des **années**, **les** rêves sont enfouis au fond de la mer.²¹²*

*She'll keep sleeping until two o'clock, it's been like **this** every day, for months, for years, **dreams** are buried at the bottom of the sea.*

Because *every day, for months, for years* can modify both the independent clause on the right and the independent clause on the left, another condensed chiasmus occurs. These adverbials may emphasize how the situation has been dragging on for a long, long time. Thus these adverbials may also emphasize the dreariness that has accompanied Leena's mother's sad and miserable state. Because asyndeton in English may also create such an emphasis, it makes sense to retain the device in translation.

Considering how asyndeton is often credited with intensification, the following example (taken from Pavia's memories of the Canadian who made his life miserable) is especially relevant to an analysis of asyndetic effects.

²¹² Ibid., 93.

*Cet homme s’amusait en blessant Pavia, il crachait dans sa soupe, urinait sur sa **couette**, comme un chat, **il** marquait son territoire, humiliant l’homme pour la simple raison qu’il était inuit et que les Inuits, cet homme les détestait, les maudissait.²¹³*

*This man took pleasure in making Pavia’s life miserable, he spit in his soup, peed on his **duvet**, like a cat, **he** marked his territory, humiliating the man just because he was Inuit and because Inuits—well, because this man hated Inuits. Loathed them.*

Here the intensity of the situation described may be reinforced by the sentence’s complexity. The prepositional phrase *like a cat* modifies both *[he] peed on his duvet* and *he marked his territory*. The array of very weak implicatures produced by the condensed chiasmus applying to the right and left may give the impression of incessant, unescapable torment. The asyndeton may thereby heighten the desperation Pavia felt in having to deal with this man who hated him not because Pavia had done him any wrong, but simply because this man held that it was wrong—even despicable—to not be white. The asyndetic comma may demand greater processing costs than a period for a reader, who may reread the sentence when he notices that the prepositional phrase applies backward and extends forward. Nevertheless, the effect of intensification may offset these processing costs.

Pavia’s nightmare continues:

*Cet homme a été jusqu’à tabasser **Pavia**, un soir de beuverie, **il** se moquait des Groenlandais, les sauvages, qu’il **disait**, mimant leur démarche un peu lourde, **il** s’égosillait en faisant de grands cris gutturaux, imitant la langue autochtone.²¹⁴*

*This man went so far as to beat Pavia **up**, during a night of drinking, **he** was mocking the Greenlanders—the savages, he **said**—imitating their somewhat heavy steps, **he** was making himself hoarse, uttering loud guttural cries, imitating the aboriginal language.*

²¹³ Ibid., 14.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 14–15.

Here the adverbial phrase *un soir de beuverie* links so well with both the clause that precedes it and the clause that follows it that it compounds the inexorable mockery of the anecdote. The participle phrase *mimant leur démarche un peu lourde* may also facilitate the intensification. In doing so, both cases of asyndeton may produce an array of weak implicatures that highlight Pavia's annoyance and his exasperation.

Interestingly, after Pavia finishes running through this anecdote, "La mémoire des habiles" has one of its longest breaks from asyndetic use. That is to say, after the climax of the fight, a temporary denouement occurs. The text slows down, and Pavia seems to catch his breath. This is worth noting, since only three major breaks from asyndeton occur in the story. One of the other two cases takes place after the most hair-raising event, that is, after the polar bear attack. Asyndeton may have intensifying effects.

In most of the above examples, the shared unit occurred between independent clauses that could be understood as quasi-appositives. In the next example, the independent clauses cannot be interpreted as appositives. Beneath a sky of fluttering wings, Joseph continues the hunt:

*Il se déplace **tranquillement**, à l'autre extrémité du rocher, **les** oiseaux sont moins nombreux mais plus faciles à saisir.²¹⁵*

*He effortlessly makes his way, around the other side of the rock, **there** are fewer birds but they are easier to snag.*

²¹⁵ Ibid., 42.

This shared prepositional phrase makes the structure particularly interesting when another option is considered in French:

Il se déplace tranquillement à l'autre extrémité du rocher, où les oiseaux sont moins nombreux mais plus faciles à saisir.

What didn't the Harton write a less asyndetic sentence like this? Perhaps she simply got too caught up in commas to think of it. Alternatively, perhaps Harton's choice was motivated. Perhaps the shared unit allows the reader to better view the scene panoramically and even from Joseph's perspective. Through asyndeton, the reader's mental image may smoothly follow Joseph skimming over the rock, joining the sparser scene of birds. Meanwhile, the word *où* would accentuate second half of the image. The word *où* arguably would also suggest that Joseph went over to the other side because the birds were easier to net there. The asyndeton makes such a motivation more implicit. The asyndeton also maintains a sentence structure that could represent one of Joseph's own thoughts, *les oiseaux sont moins nombreux mais plus faciles à saisir*. In this way, asyndeton may enhance free indirect thought and affective mutuality ([see Section 5.4.3](#)), and it may be replicated in translation to create a similar panoramic and thought-sharing effect.

5.4.3 Triggering Mindreading: Free Indirect Thought

As explained in [Section 4.1.2](#), style is a reflective of an author's perception of her readers and of the relationship they share. The more an author sees a common mutual cognitive environment shared by her readers and herself, the more she will leave implicit in her text. By giving the readers more responsibility to imagine what she means, an author

encourages a sense of intimacy between herself and her readers. This is “the sort of intimacy that derives from the belief that one is sharing essentially private experiences and feelings.”²¹⁶

As Blakemore points out, authors can create a sense of affective mutuality not only between themselves and their readers but also between their readers and a fictional character.²¹⁷ These authors may adopt a style known as free indirect thought, which aims “to reveal or show the thoughts or ‘inner speech’ of their characters [. . .] rather than tell the reader what those characters thought and did.”²¹⁸ Free direct thought representations are realized through a range of devices, including “self-interruption, sudden changes in direction, incomplete sentences, reformulations which give the impression of a character struggling to identify his/her emotions,” and so forth.²¹⁹ A device that could be added to this list is asyndeton.

There is not room enough to explore to what extent focalization occurs in each of the three stories examined here, but this thesis does make the claim that focalization is characteristic of—albeit different in—each. “La mémoire des habiles” unfolds from the perspective of an old man revisiting memories of his life as he sits alone at home (mono-focalization); “Les baleines sont les doigts de la mer” from the perspectives of a withdrawn mother and an aloof daughter (strong bi-focalization); and “Il faut toucher l’oiseau au cœur” mostly from

²¹⁶ Blakemore, “Apposition and Affective Communication,” 54.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

²¹⁸ Diane Blakemore, “Voice and Expressivity in Free Indirect Thought Representations: Imitation and Representation,” *Mind & Language* 28, no. 5 (2013): 579.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 584.

Imaru's perspective but also occasionally somewhat from his friend Joseph's (weak bi-focalization).

Asyndeton is not the sole device that makes these texts focalized. Asyndeton combines with numerous other features commonly associated with free indirect thought. In fact, Harton's ubiquitous asyndeton is especially striking because it is woven into a text thickly threaded with apposition, absolute phrases, strings of intrasentential and extrasentential fragments, and non-exhaustive lists.²²⁰ In "Il faut toucher l'oiseau au cœur" alone, there are 246 cases of asyndeton, accompanied by approximately 26 non-exhaustive lists, 19 fragmental strings, 14 absolute phrases, and 43 non-sentential, non-predicational appositives.

Asyndeton in combination with all these other devices may well lend to a very strong sense of free indirect thought in the text. While it is difficult to separate the effects of asyndeton from the effects caused by other devices, it can be argued that asyndeton plays a major role in free indirect thought as is particularly evident in the examples that follow.

It may be worthwhile to begin with an example that clearly depicts how free indirect thought can function. In this paragraph, Imaru putters about outside his house on his stiff legs:

*Il fait quelques pas autour de sa **maison**, **ses** jambes le font souffrir. Une banale histoire de chasse, une banquise trop mince, à certains endroits elle n'est gelée qu'en surface, une mince couche de gel et de frimas. Mais Imaru n'a toujours suivi que son instinct, les limites de la glace, les étoiles qu'on dénombre dans le ciel. Joseph l'avait pourtant prévenu, mauvaise glace, un piège sous quelques centimètres. Il boite un **peu**, **l'important** est de savoir courir, de flairer le danger. Il ramasse les pièges que la neige*

²²⁰ *Non-exhaustive lists* refers here to lists of phrases and words missing a final conjunction, i.e., asyndeton, although not asyndeton as the term is used in this thesis.

*avait **gardés**, il rit en pensant que n'importe qui aurait pu se prendre le pied là-dedans. Il faudra repeindre la façade, en rouge peut-être, pour accueillir Ana. C'est sa couleur préférée. En attendant, l'extérieur de la maisonnette est décati, la peinture, écaillée, les murs, rongés par le froid. Imaru organise déjà mentalement ses prochaines journées. Peut-être qu'Ana aimerait elle aussi repeindre la maison.*²²¹

*He walks a bit outside around his **house**, **his** legs are killing him. A typical hunting story, a very thin ice field, frozen only at the surface in some places, a thin film of frost and winter. But Imaru always followed only his instinct, the limits of the ice, the stars tallied in the sky. All the same, Joseph had warned him, bad ice, a trap a few centimetres below. He limps a **bit**, **what's** most important is to know how to run risks, how to detect danger. He gathers up the traps the snow had **safeguarded**, **he** laughs thinking that anyone could have caught their foot in there. He would have to repaint the sides, maybe red, to welcome Ana. It's her favourite colour. In the meantime, the outside of the little house is shabby, the paint peeling, the walls gnawed away by the cold. Imaru is already mentally organizing the next few days. Maybe Ana would also like to paint the house.*

This paragraph contains three cases of asyndeton, four intrasentential fragments, two appositives, and one non-exhaustive list.

The paragraph begins as any third-person, non-focalized narration might. Imaru is walking around outside his home. His legs are killing him—so far nothing nonstandard in the text (other than the asyndeton used to link these two clauses that would not be joined with even a semicolon in English). However, the paragraph quickly becomes focalized and the relationship between units quickly implicit. The paragraph introduces two intrasentential fragments that mention “une banale histoire de chasse” and “une banquise trop mince.”

What is the connection between Imaru's sore legs and the hunting story and thin icefield?

The fragments create incompleteness, and the connection is left implicit. The reader is given the responsibility to use contextual assumptions; in other words, the reader must

²²¹ Ibid., 24.

derive implicated premises and arrive at implicated conclusions from the information given. The reader may therefore process as follows:

Given: Imaru's legs are killing him. A hunting story exists and is relevant to this story. There was a thin icefield.

Implicated premises: Thin icefields are very dangerous. People can fall through thin ice. People are often injured by falls. Injuries cause people to be in pain. Someone was hunting.

Implicated conclusion: Imaru may have injured his legs on the dangerous icefield while he or someone else was hunting.

As the paragraph continues, the reader is confronted with significant ambiguity. For example, what is *mais* intended to contrast with? The answer is not found explicitly in the text. As the paragraph plays out, the reader is forced again and again to use their context to arrive at other implicated premises and conclusions to make a sense of the broken pieces of story that must somehow fit together. How reliable were Imaru's instincts? How much did he ignore Joseph's warning? Did Imaru fall through the ice into a trap? How confident is Imaru now about being able to detect danger?

As the reader tries to read between the lines of a limp and an icefield, traps and stars, the paragraph jumps to the idea of Imaru having to paint something red. It is not until two sentences later that the reader is given enough information to conclude that it is not the traps that needs painting but Imaru's house. This abrupt and initially confusing change of topic majorly contributes to the impression that the reader is following Imaru's thoughts. If Imaru is thinking to himself, there is no need to explicitly state that he is looking at the sides of the house. This fact is already obvious to him.

With the sudden change in topic, incomplete sentences, and numerous implicatures, this paragraph is a prime example of free indirect thought. With so much responsibility for interpretation, the reader is encouraged to develop affective mutuality with the character.

How might asyndeton contribute to cases like this of free indirect thought?

Throughout Harton's stories, asyndeton is often used where the connection between the independent clauses is not evident, especially at first. In the above paragraph, the connection between the first two independent clauses joined by asyndeton is not too difficult to make out. The reader may conclude that when Imaru walks even for a few moments, his legs ache. The connection between the third pair of asyndetically conjoined clauses is hardly more difficult to make out. For instance, the reader may conclude that *as* Imaru gathers up the traps, he laughs. The connection between *Il boite un peu* and *l'important est de savoir courir, de flairer le danger* is not as evident. Admittedly, the reader may understand the connection to be that Imaru limps because he did not know how to detect the danger. However, this may not be the connection at the forefront of the readers' mind. After all, "the interpretation of information which has just been processed will provide a highly accessible context for the interpretation of an utterance."²²² With the context in mind, the reader may also be tempted to understand *l'important est de savoir courir, de flairer le danger* as being less connected to *Il boite un peu* than it is connected to the sentences *Joseph l'avait pourtant prévenu, mauvaise glace, un piège sous quelques*

²²² Diane Blakemore, "Discourse and Relevance Theory," in *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis*, ed. Deborah Schiffrin, Deborah Tannen, and Heidi E. Hamilton (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2005), 106.

centimètres and *Imaru n'a toujours suivi que son instinct, les limites de la glace, les étoiles qu'on dénombre dans le ciel*. In other words, in a paragraph where so little is made explicit, the reader may be more inclined to compare this second clause to other sentences that could be interpreted as referring to knowing how to run risks and detect danger. Thus, in interpreting the significance of the second clause, the reader may downplay the first clause *Il boite un peu*, seeing it as break in Imaru's thoughts presented in third-person.

But is the asyndetic comma the only punctuation mark that could cause the reader to see the first clause as a break in a string of broken thoughts? Could a period not have had the same effect? Perhaps. But by linking together independent clauses that do not appear closely connected semantically, Harton uses asyndeton in a way that is atypical not only in English but also in French.

[Section 2.2.2](#) mentions that French punctuation guides declare the asyndetic comma perfectly acceptable. But under what conditions? Houdart and Prioul hold that the asyndetic comma can be used only if the relationship between the conjoined clauses is obvious.²²³ Similarly, Jacob and Laurin maintain that commas can be used as semicolons between clauses and hold that semicolons join only independent clauses that are closely connected in meaning. In other words, they imply that asyndetic commas can be used only in such cases as well.²²⁴ Laporte and Rochon concur, declaring that the “virgule s’emploie pour séparer des phrases très liées par le sens [the comma is used to separate sentences

²²³ Houdart and Prioul, 122.

²²⁴ Jacob and Laurin, 300.

that are closely connected in meaning].”²²⁵ Colignon, for his part, maintains that an asyndetic comma implies some sort of logical connection.²²⁶

A liberal use of the asyndetic comma may suggest that the narrator feels no need to conform to expectations, that she feels she can simply let her thoughts fly down on the paper without much concern. The narrator is not necessarily writing for anyone else but herself. In other words, the narrator (or, by extension, the character) assumes that she is the only one who will process the text; in other words, the narrator (or character) assumes that no cognitive environment other than her own will be used to interpret the text. With such an impression communicated in the text by asyndeton, the reader may be encouraged to see the text as the character’s thoughts.

Another example of asyndeton playing into free indirect thought comes from a passage where Pavia remembers how excited his children were when he came home from working away in the mine:

*Quand Henry a eu cinq ans, il se rappelle son arrivée tardive cette **fois-là**, il y avait trop de poudrerie et l’atterrissage était risqué.*²²⁷

*When Henry was five years old, he remembers arriving home late that **time**, **there** was too much drifting snow and landing on the runway was very risky.*

This sentence is quite disjointed, especially in the context of the paragraph from which it is taken. The preceding sentence, which ends with Pavia anticipating memories of “la joie

²²⁵ Laporte and Rochon, 336.

²²⁶ Colignon, 34.

²²⁷ Ibid., 13.

immense qui émergeait des enfants lorsqu'il revenait à la maison [the children bursting with ecstatic joy when he came home]" leads the reader to expect a description of five-year-old Henry's excitement. The reader is confronted instead with a jolting parenthesis. The subject switches from the little boy to the old man; the tense flips from past to present; and the topic changes from children to drifting snow. It could well be that the momentary focus on the snow plays into the characters' anguish of anticipation. Although the connection is not stated implicitly, Pavia may have been late because of the weather conditions. It may have been the snow that kept the family in the thrill of expectation, that kept a little boy—with a party hat, deflating balloons, and a hand-made card—waiting for his father. However, the causal relationship between Pavia's late arrival and the drifting snow is not definite. After all, Pavia does not have to make explicit connections; the connections are evident enough to himself.

Could a period or semicolon have been used here instead of an asyndetic comma? These punctuation marks would not have made the connection any more explicit, right? The answer is no; they would not have. The only argument for retaining asyndeton in such a case is this: because Harton's stories feature asyndeton to such an unusual extent in French, the overall abundance of commas may suggest that the character perceives no need to censor his thoughts but let them flow as they come. Such an impression would be true in English as well. In fact, it would be more true in English, where asyndeton is typically treated as the unacceptable comma splice (although to some extent less so in literature).

Of course, this argument for retaining asyndeton, while legitimate, may not be entirely convincing. Therefore, one more example is in order. The following excerpt is taken a passage in which Pavia appears to be looking at photographs hanging on the wall:

*Sa fille en lavandière noire, puis sa fille enceinte jusqu'aux joues, sa petite famille, toute jeune encore, ils ont eu Angi sur le **tard, il était déjà vieux.***²²⁸

*His daughter in black wagtail feathers, then his daughter so pregnant she could scarcely see over her belly, his precious family, still so young, they had had Angi **late, he was already old.***

This example showcases a stream of incomplete thoughts. Pavia appears to look at one photo of his daughter, then at another photo of her. Next he looks at a family portrait or perhaps at a few photos of different family members. Someone is young, likely his daughter or his wife. Or maybe Pavia is looking at one photo of the family, one photo in which they all look so young. Is Angi not in this photo because they had her late? Or is Pavia looking at another photo with Angi and her parents who are beginning to show their age? Is this the photo Pavia is referring to when he says he is already old? Or is it another? Asyndeton plays into the wandering of Pavia's thoughts as Pavia's eyes wander over the memories on the wall. Of course, it could be argued that the very ambiguity of these sentences contributes to the free indirect thought and that periods or semicolons would have little effect on the ambiguity. However, other punctuation marks would disconnect the final clause from the rest of the mental wandering and might encourage readers to interpret the final clause as stressing that Pavia is no longer young. Although Pavia is indeed old, the source text does not suggest such an emphasis here. Hence it makes sense to maintain the

²²⁸ Ibid, 12.

asyndetic comma simply to reinforce the idea that the reader is following Pavia's unstructured thoughts.

5.5 Negotiating for Asyndeton: When to Follow the Asyndetic Comma

This chapter has identified six cases where the translator may find it advantageous to maintain asyndeton in French-to-English literary translation.

- 1) In both French and English, asyndetic commas may reinforce or imitate the effects of apposition, encouraging readers to compare units to the left and to the right, thereby emphasizing certain features of the text and prompting an array of weak implicatures.
- 2) In both French and English, asyndetic commas may also imitate real-life rhythms and, in doing so, emphasize what is being described in the text.
- 3) In both French and English, asyndetic commas may cause an array of weak implicatures by provoking readers to imagine or at least sense that which is implied by an incomplete list.
- 4) In both French and English, asyndetic commas may be used to group independent clauses in ways that reduce processing effort for the reader in identifying similarities and differences in the statements made.
- 5) In both French and English, asyndetic commas may be used to attach units to two independent clauses, enabling these shared units to modify both clauses to achieve emphasis, intensification, and weak implicatures.
- 6) In both French and English, asyndetic commas may contribute to a sense of free indirect thought by indicating that a cognitive environment identical or

at least nearly identical to the featured character's cognitive environment is assumed.

Translators, like other communicators, aim for optimal relevance. According to relevance theory, they seek to ensure that their readers will achieve the greatest cognitive effects for the least processing effort. The above analysis shows that asyndeton may facilitate impressionistic effects and, in a few cases, may actually reduce processing effort. Thus, at least in the types of cases outlined above, asyndeton may be successfully translated as asyndeton.

6. Conclusion: A Study of Asyndeton Based on Relevance Theory

6.1 Achieving Relevance Through Asyndeton

Translation manuals have advised against translators replicating asyndeton in French-to-English translation, and their advice is backed up by contrastive studies and punctuation guides. Although French and English language specialists share similar notions of asyndeton, writing practices have assigned asyndeton a marginal place in English.

To date, little research has been invested in studying asyndeton in modern texts. Those studies that do exist either warn against uncritically accepting the findings of contrastive studies or study how linguistic and semantic features may impact the appearance of asyndeton. Although both Rossette and Leenknecht suggest that the rhetorical effects of asyndeton lie in what is left implicit, neither author develops a systematic explanation of how asyndeton achieves these effects and how these effects might be translated.

This thesis adopts relevance theory to develop such a systematic explanation. Relevance theory holds that poetic effects are achieved through an array of very weak implicatures which encourage a sense of affective mutuality between the communicator and her audience. Relevance theory introduces the principle of relevance, which states that every act of communication carries the presumption of its own optimal relevance. Optimal relevance is achieved when adequate cognitive effects are realized at minimal processing costs. Guided by such a principle, translators would seek to reproduce asyndeton where the conditions of optimal relevance are fulfilled.

With the principle of relevance in mind, this thesis has demonstrated that asyndeton may be successfully translated as asyndeton in French-to-English literary translation. Because English writing practices may not hinder asyndeton from facilitating the achievement of cognitive effects that are sufficiently rewarding to justify the processing costs, asyndeton may indeed be a viable translation option. Optimal relevance may be achieved by asyndeton in at least six cases:

- 1) By reinforcing or imitating apposition, asyndeton may encourage readers to compare units and it may thus increase processing costs. However, these costs may be offset by the array of weak implicatures provoked.
- 2) By reproducing real-life rhythms in a text, asyndeton may decrease processing costs or at least produce greater cognitive effects, thereby optimizing relevance.
- 3) By implying that a list is incomplete, asyndeton may achieve optimal relevance by increasing cognitive effects through an array of weak implicatures.
- 4) By grouping independent clauses in thematic sentences, asyndeton may reduce processing effort and thus achieve optimal relevance.
- 5) By allowing “shared units” to modify two independent clauses, asyndeton may increase processing costs, but these processing costs may be offset by an increase in cognitive effects.
- 6) By indicating that the text will be read with a cognitive environment that is (at least almost) identical to the character’s cognitive environment, asyndeton may create an array of weak implicatures that optimize relevance, despite potentially high processing costs.

6.2 Acknowledging the Limits of the Study

This study has, of course, certain limitations.

Firstly, this study does not consider where relevance may be better achieved through non-asyndetic means and even non-punctuational means. There may certainly be other ways to achieve similar effects, and there may be instances where asyndeton may not be the optimal translation choice. Take for example, the following sentence cited above:

*Cet homme s’amusait en blessant Pavia, il crachait dans sa soupe, urinait sur sa couette, comme un chat, il marquait son territoire, humiliant l’homme pour la simple raison qu’il était inuit et que les Inuits, cet homme les **détestait, les** maudissait.²²⁹*

(1) *This man took pleasure in making Pavia’s life miserable, he spit in his soup, peed on his duvet, like a cat, he marked his territory, humiliating the man just because he was Inuit and because Inuits—well, because this man hated **Inuits, loathed** them.*

(2) *This man took pleasure in making Pavia’s life miserable, he spit in his soup, peed on his duvet, like a cat, he marked his territory, humiliating the man just because he was Inuit and because Inuits—well, because this man hated **Inuits. Loathed** them.*

As a comparison of these two translation options suggests, setting the last predicate off with a period puts emphasis on the word *loath* and therefore reinforces the antagonism featured in the text. This option, which deviates from the original text, may actually optimize relevance, since it may strengthen more effectively (and not unjustifiably) existing contextual assumptions.

There are also instances where a dash may produce a more relevant translation than the asyndetic comma. One such instance occurs when at last the sea recompenses Pavia’s son

²²⁹ Ibid., 14.

Abel. The little boy yells, “J’ai reçu une réponse!” And the following sentence expresses his excitement:

*Abel trouva sur le rivage une vieille bouteille **ambré, il y avait un message à l’intérieur.***

(1) *Abel found an old amber-coloured bottle along the **shore, there** was a message inside.*

(2) *Abel found an old amber-coloured bottle along the **shore—there** was a message inside.*

Abel did not find just any dirty bottle washed up against the shore; he found a special bottle, one like those in the fairy tales where a message is received by mysterious stranger from afar. A dash could be used to highlight the child’s delight and perhaps even his eagerness—he probably could hardly wait to carefully draw the paper out.

Another instance where a dash may be more relevant than an asyndetic comma is the following sentence, where Pavia braces to take on a massive bear:

*Il tendit sa carabine un peu en l’air, sans faire de **bruit, un** petit craquement et il serait repéré.*

(1) *He raised his rifle, without making a **sound, the** slightest noise and he would be spotted.*

(2) *He raised his rifle, without making a **sound—the** slightest noise and he would be spotted.*

The dash, as a sharper mark than the comma, dramatically outlines the grave repercussions of attracting the bear’s attention. In moment of tension, the use of the punctuation mark

that is more commonly associated with emotion is probably a more effective means of heightening the reader's sense of suspense.

If Demanuelli's findings are correct²³⁰ and Tarif's observations generalizable,²³¹ writing practices assign the em dash a relatively marginal place in French. The comparative scarcity of dashes in French does not preclude their use in translations. Their introduction must simply produce optimally relevant translations.

Unfortunately, the aim of this thesis—to identify where asyndeton may be successfully translated as asyndeton—may have biased the analyses conducted. Perhaps the effects of various punctuation marks and non-punctuational features may need to be weighed against the effects of asyndeton. Further research should consider other translation options in depth.

A second limitation of this study is that it is undeniably subjective. Multiple interpretations can arise from one text, and the very implicit nature of asyndeton increases the potential for varying interpretations. Accordingly, the interpretations provided in this analysis are but possible interpretations. Moreover, the principle of relevance is not an infallible guide; optimal relevance in translation largely depends on the translator's interpretation.

²³⁰ Demanuelli, 151.

²³¹ Julie Tarif, "Perdre ; ou ne pas perdre ; le rythme de la ponctuation dickensienne : là – – est la question !" in *Tension rythmique et traduction = Rhythmic tension and translation*, ed. Christine Raguette and Marie Nadia Karsky, *Vita traductiva* 7 (Montréal: Éditions québécoises de l'oeuvre, 2014).

It should be noted that relevance theory does not ignore the challenge of textual determinacy. On the contrary, Gutt notes that “information can be communicated with varying degrees of strength, moving along a cline from strongly communicated to not communicated at all, and that “there is not necessarily a sharp dividing line between what a communicator did and did not communicate.”²³² Sperber and Wilson concur, decisively stating, “The fiction that there is a clear-cut distinction between wholly determinate, specifically intended inferences and indeterminate, wholly unintended inferences cannot be maintained.”²³³ Textual indeterminacy is an inextricable part of the translation process. It is an ordinary feature of all human communication that relevance theory cannot solve but at least recognizes.

A third limitation of this study is that it an explanatory account of how asyndeton may achieve certain effects and how similar effects may be replicated in translation; this study does not prove that asyndeton achieves these effects in French or in English translation. Further research is necessary to test whether asyndeton does have the poetic effects this thesis has shown relevance theory capable of explaining.

Since the poetic effects of asyndeton largely depend on very weak implicatures, such testing may be very difficult to perform. However, it may be possible. For example, a researcher could have four different groups of participants. The first group would read

²³² Ernst-August Gutt, “Textual Properties, Communicative Clues and the Translators,” in *Transcultural Communication: Pragmalinguistic Aspects*, ed. Navarro Errasti et al., vol. 9, *Textos de Filología* (Zaragoza: Anúbar, 2000), <http://cogprints.org/2584/1/TextualPropertiesCommunicativeClues.htm>.

²³³ Sperber and Wilson, *Relevance*, 199.

passages with asyndeton in French. The second group would read the same passages without asyndeton in French. The third group would read the same passages with asyndeton in English. Finally, the fourth group would read the same passage without asyndeton in English. The participants' reactions to these passages could be assessed by a carefully designed questionnaire. Then the overall reactions of the different groups could then be compared to determine whether asyndeton does tend to achieve affective mutuality and if it can do so as much in English as in French. The researcher may wish to adopt reader-response theory as their theoretical framework or at least consider reader-response theory as they develop their theoretical framework.²³⁴

A fourth limitation to this study is that it is applicable to literary translation only. It is highly doubtful that its findings would apply to much specialized, administrative, technical, and commercial translation. There are several reasons for this:

- Dubbed as it is with the label *comma splice*, asyndeton is more likely to encourage readers to see the author/translator as an unprofessional and incompetent writer than encourage a sense of affective mutuality between the author and her readers.
- Affective mutuality is unlikely to be the goal of publications in these genres (except for advertisements, of course).
- The asyndetic comma may create very long sentences that would increase processing costs for the reader who is largely unaccustomed to asyndetic usage in

²³⁴ Reader-response theory was not used for this thesis because it could not provide as strong a guiding translation principle as relevance theory does, especially considering that there was only one reader for this study.

English. In technical writing, these processing costs are more likely to outweigh any cognitive effects asyndeton may achieve.

6.3 Negotiating for an Asyndetic Landscape

Despite its limitations, this study does make a significant contribution on a subject largely neglected by Translation Studies. It provides an explanation for asyndetic effects and a means of assessing translation options. It suggests that asyndeton is not always a translation mistake. Many authors have adopted an unorthodox manner of punctuation to achieve certain effects.²³⁵ Punctuation usage is elastic, and punctuation marks can be exploited. In French-to-English literary translation, asyndeton is not an impossibility—in fact, it may be desirable and even powerful.

²³⁵ Tarif, 138.

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