

Inunye kora: Weirdly arpeggiated fishes

At least in my opinion, “Weird fishes/Arpeggi” is the most fascinating song on Radiohead’s (2007) album *In rainbows* with its sparkling string sound. It recently occurred to me that the lyrics are very straightforward and the spheric soundscape affords one not to be overly strict with the meter when translating it. All things considered, it seemed worthwhile to try making an Ayeri adaptation, because translating poetic texts is always a fun challenge.¹

Karonya tasang-vā,		Ang tavay kondanley
tasangya makārya—		limajyam rina
Sā tila-		nay kimbisanas
yang niva.		inunjyam kora,
Sinyaley yamanreng		inunjyam kora,
perisānena nā?		inunjyam kora.
Nasyoyya depāng-nama.		Māy, ang—
Māy sa kacvāng ay!		Ang haray avanya,
Sā tila-		haray avanya nay
yang niva		nimpyang.
vana dimajyam.	(kunangreng)	Ang—
Yam nasyyang vās lito	(kunangreng)	Ang haray avanya
na Mavay—	(kunangreng)	haray avanya nay
nay lesayang.		nimpyang.
Ang sagonya enya māy,	(kunangreng)	
ang sungya mimānley.	(kunangreng)	
Nay eda-...	(kunangreng)	
da-nā.		

1 Analysis of the translation

The song is divided into four parts, of which the first two form a unit in both text and melody as more and more layers of guitar arpeggi are stacked on top of each other. Then, after a break, the arpeggi become more muted for the third part. A concluding and very sober sounding coda follows after an instrumental section. I will go through my translation part by part, commenting on each sentence about what stands out to me as worth mentioning regarding grammar, style, and the process of translation as such.

¹ This derivative fan work is neither endorsed nor licensed by Radiohead, their publisher, or the legal representatives of either of them. It neither pursues nor implies any intent of financial gain.

1.1 First part

My translation of the first stanza is given in examples number (1) to (3).² I think that in English, the text corresponding to (1) and (2) can be interpreted as a single sentence: “In the deepest ocean, the bottom of the sea, your eyes, they turn me.” However, due to the requirements of both melody and syntax, as well as to keep up the parallelism with (6), it wouldn’t have made sense to pull the other half of the statement in (2) all the way to the front and have the location adverbials in (1) act as modifiers to that instead, the way you’d normally have it in Ayeri. I thus decided to keep the lines in (1) at the beginning of the song and use them to establish context and mood, as in English, though at the expense of making the second line, $\text{karonya tasang-vā, tasangya makārya}$, an anacoluthon.

- (1) *Karonya tasang-vā, tasangya makārya* —
ocean-LOC deep=SUP abyss-LOC black
‘In the deepest ocean, in the black abyss—’

Consequentially, the text in (1) doesn’t form a complete sentence. Since karon can mean both ‘sea’ and ‘ocean’, I couldn’t replicate the way the English lyrics use these two words for large bodies of water as basically synonyms. Instead, I played on the fact that *tasang* can mean either ‘deep’ or ‘abyss, chasm’ depending on whether it’s used as an adjective or noun, and chose to use *makārya* ‘dark, black’ as an accompanying adjective accordingly for near-parallelism with karonya tasang-vā . The word used for ‘black’ here, *makārya*, literally means ‘unwhite, unbright’. I don’t remember why I chose to coin the word that way. There is also *gisu* ‘dark’ in the dictionary, but this is a worse fit considering both the number of syllables of the original line and assonance in /a/.

The next two lines posed something of a challenge as well, since the English phrasing “Your eyes, they turn me” with what basically amounts to a topic–comment sentence structure doesn’t work this way in Ayeri. Instead, (2) can only be translated as a regular statement with no syntactic break in the middle. In order to omit the plural marker -ye , I decided to use *niva* ‘eye’ in the singular with the extended meaning ‘gaze’. The topicalization of “eyes” in the English text can be adapted by using a regular causative construction, as topic marking is grammaticalized in Ayeri.

- (2) *Sā tilayang niva*.³
CAUT= change=ISG.A gaze
‘The gaze makes me change.’

Since the translation of these two lines only amounts to three words, another question is where to divide the lines. I decided to make the cut according to the number of syllables, so right inside the word *tilayang* before the heavy syllable -yang . This slightly changes the distribution of syllables per line from 2 + 3 in English to 3 + 3 in Ayeri, though it works because “your eyes” is rather drawn out in the recording, so another syllable can be sneaked in easily.

² Note that where animacy is concerned, I’m only explicitly marking inanimate referents in the glosses throughout.

³ *niva* ‘eye’, extended here to mean ‘gaze’.

At least to my non-native ears, the phrase *turn somebody* in the English original of (2) sounds strange, and looking up the verb in a dictionary didn't yield any clarification either. So for all intents and purposes, I suppose that the line can only be understood in the context of its continuation in (6). Additionally, grammatical information about the owner of the gaze (or eye?), ᄃᆞᆫ *vana* 'your', falls victim to keeping the line length similar to the English text. The Ayeri verb ᄃᆞᆫ: *tila-* can mean 'change' when used intransitively, so the sentence is still more or less sensible on its own, but the context as to whose gaze and the how or why of changing is similarly lost.

The next two lines in (3) can be more easily expressed as a single statement in Ayeri again, compared to the English "Why should I stay here? Why should I stay?" The 8 + 5 syllables of the English lyrics get redistributed and shortened by one syllable overall to 6 + 6 in the Ayeri translation, with the break right between the four words.

- (3) *Sinyaley yamanreng perisānena nā?*
 what-P.INAN reason-A.INAN hesitation-GEN ISG.GEN
 'What's the reason for my hesitation?'

In consequence, the urgency of the question evoked by repetition in the English text doesn't carry over well. I will grant that reading hesitation into the English lines is my interpretation. Since the song climaxes with thoughts of escape, though, an expression of ambivalence toward feelings of infatuation at least doesn't seem far-fetched to me in the context of the song (or Radiohead's oeuvre as such). Besides this, I decided to reverse the order of the subject and object noun phrases in (3) because of the genitive attribute. It seemed awkward to me to leave ᄃᆞᆫ *sinyaley* 'what' dangling at the end, where it would more usually occur because Ayeri doesn't do question-word fronting (Becker 2018: 153–155).

1.2 Second part

The next two lines, "I'd be crazy not to follow, follow where you lead" form a unit in English, with the repetition of "follow" binding the two together. I made this less explicit in the corresponding Ayeri translations in (4) and (5), also because anadiplosis doesn't work well in Ayeri for syntactic reasons. Literally using ᄃᆞᆫ *sadayo* 'crazy' in (4) proved awkward as to line length, so I rephrased the text as below, though I still had to reach into my bag of tricks and contracted ᄃᆞᆫ *depangang* to ᄃᆞᆫ *depāng* 'fool'. This also eschews the awkwardness of ᄃᆞᆫ *-angang* with regard to the corresponding English line's rhythm.

- (4) *Nasyoyya depāng-nama.*⁴
 follow-NEG-3SG.M fool-A=only
 'Only a fool wouldn't follow.'

I completely rephrased the English text in (5) as well to yield the same number of syllables. For rhetoric effect I used a "pseudo-passive" construction with a patient topic and an affective ᄃᆞᆫ *māy* at the beginning (cf. Becker 2018: 361–362).

- (5) *Māy sa kacvāng ay!*
 AFF PT= draw=2.A ISG.TOP
 ‘Oh how I’m drawn by you!’

At first, I tried ယူနီကော့နီယာယာ *ya nasyyang iting vana* ‘your path, I’m following it’, which is slightly closer to the English text, but is longer by one syllable and thus doesn’t fit the melody as well. The rephrased line now lacks a mention of following, though this motif is at least alluded to by using ကေ: *kac-* ‘draw, pull’, and is still explicitly referred to in (7) again.

The single sentence in (6) is actually spread over three lines and picks up on the text in (2), which was noted before to lack context. In English, the context of “your eyes, they turn me” is provided by “turn me into phantoms”. The Ayeri translation follows the English text very closely here.

- (6) *Sā tilayang niva vana dimayjyam.*
 CAUT= change=ISG.A gaze.TOP 2.GEN ghost-PL-DAT
 ‘Your gaze makes me turn into ghosts.’

Still, the construction as such is maybe even trickier in relation to its musical context. Relevant information about the origin of the gaze, *ၚ vana* ‘your’, is stated almost like an afterthought by tearing the noun phrase apart. This effect is reinforced by musical phrasing, since “turn me into phantoms” and *ၚသီယာယာ vana dimayjam*, respectively, forms a unit with the next three lines subsumed in (7). In Ayeri, the feeling of *non sequitur* may thus be even stronger than in English. Moreover, the haunting repetition of “way out” as part of the background vocals starts here, foreshadowing the lines in (8) and (9). I chose *နွံဂရံ kunangreng* ‘the door’ for the Ayeri translation in order not to double the verb *နွံ: sagon-* ‘exit, quit’ with the corresponding noun *နွံနွံ sagonan* ‘exit’ in (8).

The three lines encompassed by the sentence in (7) again invoke the motif of following, though the caution introduced in (3) finds an echo here in the consequence of falling off the edge of the world after being misled by infatuation. The translation follows the English text closely, despite there being no way to mark an action as involving a punctual change of state in the same way English uses *fall off* as opposed to just *fall*. Moreover, I decided to use *မာယာ mavay* ‘world’ as a name to resemble the stress pattern of the English line. The alternative would have been using *မာယာယာ mavayena* with penultimate stress and an additional syllable, which seems worse.

- (7) *Yam nasyyang vās lito na Mavay — nay lesayang.*
 DATT= follow-ISG.A 2.P edge.TOP GEN= World and fall=ISG.A
 ‘To the edge of the Earth is where I’ll follow you—and fall.’

The sentence in (8) corresponds to the English “Yeah, everybody leaves if they get the chance”, which divides into one clause per line. The number of syllables in the English text is one less per clause compared to the Ayeri one: 6 + 5 in English as opposed to 7 + 6 in Ayeri. The overall stress pattern is similar enough that it works, though. The expression *နွံ-မိမံလီ sung- mimānley* ‘find the opportunity’ strikes me as rather influenced by German(ic), but offhand, I couldn’t think of a different but succinct way that fits well with the melody.

- (8) *Ang sagonya enya māy, ang sungya mimānley.*
 AT= quit-3SG.M everyone.TOP AFF AT= find-3SG.M opportunity-P.INAN
 ‘Yeah, everybody quits, if they find the opportunity.’

The last two lines in the second part are given in the sentence in (9). The English lyrics are “And this way out is my chance.” Part of the sentence is provided by the background vocals, and I replicated this peculiarity with *ႼႺႺႺႺ kunangreng* ‘door’. I couldn’t find a concise way to translate “way out” literally, for instance as *ႼႺႺႺႺ ႼႺႺႺႺ sasānreng agonanyam* ‘the way to the outside’, so I chose metonymy as *my way out*. I also used *ႼႺႺ da-nā* ‘mine’ instead of something more literal like *ႼႺႺႺႺႺ mimānley nā* ‘my chance’, again in order not to exceed the length of the English text.

- (9) *Nay eda-kunangreng da-nā.*
 and this=door-A.INAN one=1SG.GEN
 ‘And this door is mine.’

From a morphosyntactic point of view, the construction *ႼႺႺ da-nā* ‘mine’ in (9) is a little peculiar since Ayeri normally marks predicative complements with the patient case. However, I determined in Becker (2018: 310–311) that predicative possessive pronouns don’t follow this pattern. This rules out a form like **ႼႺႺႺႺ *da-nāley*.

1.3 Third part

The third part of the song contains the lines that provide the first part of the title, “Weird fishes.” As the sentence in (10) shows, I extensively rephrased the Ayeri text compared to the original “I get eaten by the worms and weird fishes, picked over by the worms and weird fishes.”

- (10) *Ang tavay kondanley limajyam rina⁵ nay kimbisanas inunjam kora.*
 AT= become=1SG.TOP food-P.INAN worm-PL-DAT slithery and prey-P fish-PL-DAT rare
 ‘I become food for slithery worms and prey for rare fishes.’

The necessity to rephrase mainly arose from avoiding to coin new words, so I had to find a different way to express “picked over” while still keeping the grammatical structure of the lines in parallel and the meaning reasonably similar to the English text. The *ႼႺႺႺ limaye* ‘worms’ thus gained an adjective *ႼႺႺ rina* ‘slippery, slithery’ in my translation for parallelism with the adjective *ႼႺႺ kora* ‘rare’ of *ႼႺႺႺ inunye* ‘fishes’.

In addition, a literal translation of the first half like *ႼႺႺႺႺ ႼႺႺႺႺ ႼႺႺႺႺ Sa konjon ay lima-jang nay inunjang kepaṽ* ‘I get eaten by the worms and weird fishes’ proved awkward in length and rhythm again. I also didn’t like the sound of *ႼႺႺ kepaṽ* ‘strange, weird, odd’ with its accent on the final syllable and the rare *au* diphthong. I replaced it with *ႼႺႺ kora*, referring here to the peculiarity of rarely observed things, compare Dutch *raar* ‘strange, odd, weird, unusual’.

⁵ *ႼႺႺ rina* ‘slippery’, extended here to mean ‘slithery’.

As for case marking, I would've rather used the genitive forms of ၵ်းလိမာ် *limaye* 'worms' and ၵ်းလိမာ် inunye 'fishes'. Adding ၵ်း-na to those stems would've made the words longer, though. Conversely, using the dative case in ၵ်းယမ် *-yam* saves a syllable through the contraction of ၵ်းယမ် *-yeyam* to *-jyam*—the changed sound is not reflected in the Tahano Hikamu spelling, which is more conservative (Becker 2018: 111–112). Saving a syllable makes the Ayeri text a closer fit to the original syllable count of four in the line “and weird fishes.” The Ayeri text amounts to five syllables for both ၵ်းလိမာ်ယမ် *limajyam rina* 'slithery worms' and ၵ်းလိမာ်ယမ် inunjam kora 'rare fishes'. The latter is also what is repeated multiple times and even though the syllable count exceeds that of the corresponding English text, the melody halfway supports it. English's mere three syllables are hard to match.

1.4 Fourth part

The last section also consists of what amounts to one sentence, which is repeated twice. Its Ayeri adaptation is given in (11). The English text contains a combined anacoluthon and anadiplosis: “Yeah, I—I hit the bottom”. Since Ayeri works differently from English and the full clause begins with the agent-topic marker ၵ်း ang, I translated this bit as မာ် ၵ်း *māy ang* and ၵ်း ang in the reprise, respectively.

- (11) *Māy, ang haray avanya nay nimpyang.*
 well AT= hit=ISG.TOP ground-LOC and run=ISG.A
 ‘Well, I hit the ground and run.’

The English text says “I hit the bottom,” but I was reluctant at first to copy English and go with ၵ်း *har-* ‘hit, punch, smack’. I considered using the more general ၵ်း *gren-* ‘reach (for, out)’ instead, though the dictionary—and my vague memory of coining the word—implies that this verb is more about extending your arm than arriving at a destination. This is what the similar verb ၵ်း *girend-* ‘arrive’ is for, which is one syllable too long in this context, however. So ၵ်း *har-* it became after all, but with the destination ၵ်း *avanya* ‘on the ground’ in the locative case to distinguish it from the victim, in the patient case, of a blow with one’s fist, for example.

Furthermore, my translation only uses ၵ်း *nimp-* ‘run’ here instead of what the dictionary returns for ‘escape’, that is, ၵ်း *nimp- mangasara*. The adverb *mangasara* ‘away (from)’ would make the line too long, but without it, the sentence should still be comprehensible. Also, I’ve always tried to avoid introducing prepositional verbs into Ayeri.

2 Conclusion

Even though the English lyrics aren't particularly complex and allow some leeway with regard to line length, the challenge was in finding alternate ways to phrase lines in order to make the Ayeri text fit. As usual, Ayeri is much less concise than English because of the former's agglutinative and the latter's isolating tendencies. I tried not to coin new words as *prankas* and largely succeeded with that.⁶ Only two words had their definitions slightly extended, and established grammar had not to be bent much either.

I guess I should grab my guitar and practice playing the song now.

Abbreviations

I	first person	DAT	dative	P	patient
2	second person	DATT	dative topic	PL	plural
3	third person	GEN	genitive	PT	patient topic
A	agent	INAN	inanimate	SG	singular
AFF	affectionate	LOC	locative	SUP	superlative
AT	agent topic	M	masculine	TOP	topic
CAUT	causative topic	NEG	negative		

References

- Becker, Carsten. 2018. *A grammar of Ayeri: Documenting a fictional language* (Benung. The Ayeri Language Resource). Marburg: Self-published, Lulu Press. <https://ayeri.de/grammar> (22 September, 2024).
- Radiohead. 2007. Weird fishes/Arpeggi. In *In rainbows*, Track 4. London: XL Recordings.

⁶ ጥጥጥ *pranka* 'thing added to make things fit, even the score', a tongue-in-cheek coining in relation to making up a single word including /u:/ for the sole purpose of having one at all (cf. Becker 2018: 25).