

### **Sample Informal Assignment :: “Untranslatables”**

**Writing:** The excerpt you’re reading from *Le Ton Beau de Marot* contains Douglas Hofstadter’s personal reflections on the challenges involved in translation, particularly for writing (like poetry) that involves tricky wordplay, metaphor, imagery, or rhyming. You probably have some sense that certain types of writing might be easier or harder to translate than others; for example, the kind of poetry that Hofstadter explores in *Le Ton Beau de Marot* might seem more challenging to translate than a dry, technical piece of writing such as a legal document (or perhaps not!). For this assignment, reflect on a text of your choosing (we’re using Harris’s definition of “text”, here, so it could also be a movie, a song, or really almost anything that communicates a message) that you think would be *particularly* challenging from the perspective of translation. Don’t forget to tell your readers what text you’re writing about, and describe it to us - and if possible, give us a link or an excerpt so that we can look at/listen to it ourselves!

Why do you think this text would be difficult or impossible to translate? What about it seems particularly challenging? What message is the text conveying, *how* is that message being conveyed, and why would that message be difficult to convey via translation? What would be “lost in translation”? You might also consider the piece we read from Rawlins about audience: in what ways might the work you chose be different from other kinds of writing in terms of its purpose and effect on the audience, and how might that affect the problem of translation?

**Responding:** Read the Informal Assignments from your peers and give them brief feedback. Some questions to consider as you respond to your group members’ work: Do you notice similarities or differences between the types of texts that you’ve written about? Do you agree with your fellow group members’ reasoning? Why or why not?

**Objectives:** This assignment is aimed towards giving you the opportunity to critically consider the challenges posed by translating particular works. By doing so, you can begin to develop your own ideas about what translation might reveal about the human mind and its capacity for language, and think more deeply about the relationship between an author’s intended message and the linguistic and other choices the author makes in order to convey that message. In working on this assignment, you will also be developing your skills for close, careful, critical, linguistically-aware reading.

If you’d like, you can use the ideas you raise in this Informal Paper as a starting point for your Formal Paper #1. (Since the Informal Assignments are intended to be “preparatory” writing for your Formal Paper assignments, you can use anything that you write for this assignment, or any other Informal Assignment, in your Formal Paper(s).)