End of Chapter Exercises – Chapter 7

1. The following is a short essay from J. B. Priestley's *Delight*, a small collection of personal essays:

   Giving advice
   Giving advice, especially when I am in no position to give it and hardly know what I am talking about. I manage my own affairs with as much care and steady attention and skill as – let us say – a drunken Irish tenor. I swing violently from enthusiasm to disgust. I change policies as a woman changes hats. I am here today and gone tomorrow. When I am doing one job, I wish I were doing another. I base my judgments on anything – or nothing. I have never the least notion what I shall be doing or where I shall be in six months time. Instead of holding one thing steadily, I try to juggle with six. I cannot plan, and if I could I would never stick to the plan. I am a pessimist in the morning and an optimist at night, am defeated on Tuesday and insufferably victorious by Friday. But because I am heavy, have a deep voice and smoke a pipe, few people realize that I am a flibbertigibbet on a weathercock. So my advice is asked. And then, for ten minutes or so, I can make Polonius look a trifler. I settle deep in my chair, two hundred pounds of portentousness, and with some first-rate character touches in the voice and business with pipe, I begin: ‘Well, I must say that in your place —’ And inside I am bubbling with delight.

Try translating the above essay into your target language, paying particular attention to the question of implicature and the whole image that the writer draws of himself. If necessary, consider possible explanations (or other strategies) that could help the target reader draw the right inferences from the author's statements. Consider, for instance, whether an analogy such as changing policies as a woman changes hats is likely to have the same implicature in your target language.

This essay appeared in *Literature in English*, one of the
English for Today Series, published by the National Council of Teachers of English (1964), McGraw-Hill. The editors provide the following explanations of key words and expressions in footnote form. You may find these helpful.

*drunken Irish tenor:* A drunken singer is not in control of himself.

Priestley is suggesting that he manages his own affairs badly.

*fibbertygibbet on a weathercock:* A fibbertygibbet is a frivolous and giddy person. A weathercock is a wooden or metal rooster that turns on top of a building and shows the direction of the wind. The whole expression suggests a very undependable person.

*Polonius:* a character in Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* noted for giving advice.

*two hundred pounds of portentousness ...:* In other words, a large man (‘two hundred pounds’) using an impressive voice and using impressive gestures with his pipe (‘some first-rate character touches’) gives grave (‘portentous’) advice. This is a humorous description of the author’s pose.

2. The following extract from an article by Vanessa Baird which appeared in the *New Internationalist* (January/February 2010, special issue on population growth) raises similar challenges, but the article does not come with notes and explanations this time. You may therefore need to undertake some research of your own to ensure that you understand the references and relevant implications before translating it into your target language. A good starting point would be to visit the *New Internationalist* web site, unless you are already familiar with the magazine, to establish what type of publication it is and where the sympathies of its contributors are likely to lie, especially since the author in this case is also one of the editors of the magazine.

Too many people?

When she was young, my great aunt – a tiny sprightly woman who painted vast canvasses – had wanted to become a nun. Then she met a Flemish poet and they fell in love. She agreed to marry him on one condition: that they have 12 children. True to the old baking tradi-
tion, they made 13.

Her niece, my mother, also briefly flirted with the holy life. Her tryst with celibacy was equally convincing. As the eighth of her brood, I approach the subject of global population with a touch of trepidation. By anyone’s standard of reasonable family size I really shouldn’t be here.

But then the subject of population – and in particular population growth – is one that seems capable of provoking all kinds of emotions.

... Often the cause of concern is the speed at which others – be they people of other races or social classes or religions or political allegiances – are reproducing themselves, threatening, presumably, to disturb the wellbeing of whatever dominant group the commentator belongs to.

This was epitomized recently by Michael Laws, Mayor of Wanganui District in New Zealand, who proposed that in order to tackle the problems of child abuse and murder, members of the ‘appalling underclass’ should be paid not to have children. ‘If we gave $10,000 to certain people and said “we’ll voluntarily sterilize you” then all of society would be better off,’ he told the Dominion Post newspapers.

Most contemporary worries about population are less offensively expressed. For many, the issue is primarily an environmental one. The logic is simple. The more people there are, the more greenhouse gas is emitted, the more damage is done. Any attempts to reduce carbon emissions will be negated by runaway population growth.

This was echoed recently by the Financial Times when it called for an international debate on population. A leader column argued: ‘World population growth is making it harder to achieve cuts in carbon emissions’ and went on to quote a disputed London School of Economics study* maintaining that spending on family planning is ‘five times more cost effective at cutting carbon dioxide emissions than the conventional low carbon technologies’.

The UK-based Optimum Population Trust goes further, suggesting that to achieve sustainability we should be aiming to reduce global population by at least 1.7 bil-
Imagine that you have been asked to translate this article for an activist site that is committed to promoting global justice and wishes to make key counter arguments on sensitive issues such as population growth available in a wide range of languages. In this context, it is vital that you convey the attitude of the author to the topic. You therefore need to pay particular attention to linguistic and typographic signals of this attitude, such as *presumably* and the use of scare quotes. Note also the reference to ‘work of a student’ in the footnote. What implicature might the author be trying to communicate here, and how would you ensure its accessibility to the target reader? Similarly, how would you handle the reference to ‘baker’s dozen’ and the use of ‘made’ (rather than ‘have’) at the end of the first paragraph? How do you ensure that the target reader will understand these references and associated implicatures?

3. Here is a particularly challenging extract to translate. It is part of the well-known scene in Shakespeare’s *Othello* (Act III, Scene iii), in which Iago deliberately violates Grice’s maxims, certainly the maxim of relevance, in order to convey certain implicatures. Othello recognizes the violations and tries to get Iago to spell out what he means.

Iago: My noble lord –
Oth: What dost thou say, Iago?
Iago: Did Michael Cassio, when you woo’d my lady, Know of your love?
Oth: He did, from first to last. Why dost thou ask?
Iago: But for a satisfaction of my thought; No further harm.
Oth: Why of thy thought, Iago?
Iago: I did not think he had been acquainted with her.
Oth: O, yes, and went between us very oft.
Iago: Indeed?
Oth: Indeed? Ay, indeed! Discern’st thou aught in that? Is he
not honest?
Iago: Honest, my lord?
Oth: Honest? Ay, honest.
Iago: My lord, for aught I know.
Oth: What dost thou think?
Iago: Think, my lord?
Oth: Think, my lord? By heaven, he echoes me,
As if there were some monster in his thought
Too hideous to be shown. Thou dost mean
something.
I heard thee say even now, thou lik’st not that,
When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like?
And when I told thee he was of my counsel
In my whole course of wooing, thou cried’st ‘In-
deed?’
And didst contract and purse thy brow together,
As if thou hadst shut up in thy brain
Some horrible conceit. If thou dost love me,
Show me thy thought.

Consider how Iago conveys his intended meanings, both
conventionally and non-conventionally. What adjustments,
if any, do you feel you have to make to the lexis, syntax,
or the way in which the maxims are violated in order to con-
vey similar implicatures in your translated version?

of Time from the Big Bang to Black Holes* (1988) includes
a number of appendices, each giving an insight into the life
and personality of a famous scientist. This is one of them:

**Isaac Newton**

Isaac Newton was not a pleasant man. His relations
with other academics were notorious, with most of his
later life spent embroiled in heated disputes. Following
publication of *Principia Mathematica* – surely the most
influential book ever written in physics – Newton had
risen rapidly into public prominence. He was appointed
president of the Royal Society and became the first sci-
entist ever to be knighted.

Newton soon clashed with the Astronomer Royal,
John Flamsteed, who had earlier provided Newton with
much needed data for *Principia*, but was now with-
holding information that Newton wanted. Newton would not
take no for an answer; he had himself appointed to the
 governing body of the Royal Observatory and then tried
to force immediate publication of the data. Eventually he
arranged for Flamsteed’s work to be seized and pre-
pared for publication by Flamsteed’s mortal enemy,
Edmond Halley. But Flamsteed took the case to court
and, in the nick of time, won a court order preventing
distribution of the stolen work. Newton was incensed
and sought his revenge by systematically deleting all
references to Flamsteed in later editions of Principia.

A more serious dispute arose with the German phi-
losopher Gottfried Leibniz. Both Leibniz and Newton had
independently developed a branch of mathematics called
calculus, which underlies most of modern physics. Al-
though we now know that Newton discovered calculus
years before Leibniz, he published his work much later. A
major row ensued over who had been first, with scientists
vigorously defending both contenders. It is remarkable,
however, that most of the articles appearing in defense of
Newton were originally written by his own hand – and
only published in the name of friends! As the row grew,
Leibniz made the mistake of appealing to the Royal So-
ciety to resolve the dispute. Newton, as president, a-
pointed an ‘impartial’ committee to investigate, coinci-
dently consisting entirely of Newton’s friends! But that was
not all: Newton then wrote the committee’s report himself
and had the Royal Society publish it, officially accusing
Leibniz of plagiarism. Still unsatisfied, he then wrote an
anonymous review of the report in the Royal Society’s
own periodical. Following the death of Leibniz, Newton is
reported to have declared that he had taken great satis-
faction in ‘breaking Leibniz’s heart.’

During the period of these two disputes, Newton had
already left Cambridge and academe. He had been ac-
tive in anti-Catholic politics at Cambridge, and later in
Parliament, and was rewarded eventually with the lucra-
tive post of Warden of the Royal Mint. Here he used his
talents for deviousness and vitriol in a more socially ac-
cetable way, successfully conducting a major cam-
paign against counterfeiting, even sending several men
to their death on the gallows.

Imagine that you have been asked to translate the above
appendix into your target language. Your translated ver-
sion is to be included in a portfolio of light-hearted but factual background material for science students in secondary education, designed to stimulate their interest in the world of science at large.

Comment on the strategies you decide to use to convey Hawking’s implied meanings to your target audience. For instance, do you transfer typographic signals such as exclamation marks and the inverted commas around impartial (third paragraph), or are there better ways of signalling similar meanings in your target language? Does the text, as it stands, convey the same image of Newton in your target language as it does in English, or do you have to make adjustments to accommodate your target reader’s cultural background?

5. Much of our discussion of pragmatics concerned ways of ‘making sense’ of a text or interaction and finding ways of communicating our interpretation to the target reader. But some texts deliberately set out to undermine sense – nonsense literature is a good, extreme example. Other texts stretch the limits of ‘sense’ in less radical ways, using structures and expressions that would normally fail to cohere in less experimental texts but that are part of the message being communicated in this context. With this in mind, try your hand at the following opening paragraph of Robert Young’s article ‘The Procrastinator’ (Young 1999:7):

Too close to call, whether I am yet beyond the real deadlines that followed the final deadline because of course with deadlines there is always the possibility of a later insertion, at proof stage or even second proof stage, or even perhaps – No. That is no longer procrastination, that is living dangerously, the very thing the procrastinator wishes to avoid. The procrastinator is no revolutionary, leaping into the future: every procrastinator is at heart a conservative creature, cautious, politic, wishing to live on without the jolt of completion and the rush of emptiness that follows the offering up of a piece of writing no longer just one’s own, now exposed to the possibility of being read, ridiculed, rejected – and producing the inevitable question of what is coming next. Publish and perish. Unwilling to become the productive academic prestigateur, pulling ever more startlingly in-
novative writings out of a glamorous top hat, the procrastinator eyes the enfeebled mortar board warily. No key player he.

Nor she – though there is something very gendered about procrastination, an inexorable maleness in the spirit of Tristram Shandy, Leopold Bloom or Saleem Sinai. Viagra falls. The procrastinator hangs over the past, furtively stealing time’s proferred moments, seeking to retrieve what has already past, to delay what has not been done. He who hesitates is rarely lost. It may never happen. The present must live on into the future, at all costs it must be kept going, not detached from the past, but nurtured and maintained for its familiar comfort, recognisable, known, safe. Let us linger on, procrastinate that act of fulfilment that belongs to tomorrow, meanly measure out our lives as they unroll slowly through the debris of what has long since lapsed and elapsed. Stay with me, delay with me. Hang on a while.

Consider what Young is trying to achieve by the various structures he opts for. To what extent can you reproduce this effect in your translation, while still producing a coherent text that can make sense to the target readers?