Another extract from Bellos:

5. *Fictions of the* Foreign: The Paradox of ‘Foreign-Soundingness’

For most of the last century reviewers and laymen have customarily declared in order to praise a translation to the skies that it sounds as if it had been written in English. This is hollow praise, since the self-same community of reviewers and laymen has often shown itself unable to tell when an alleged translation *was* written in English. All the same, the high value placed on naturalness and fluency in the ‘target’ or ‘receiving’ language is a strong feature of the culture of translation in the English-speaking world today. But there are contrarian voices. If a detective novel set in Paris makes its characters speak and think in entirely fluent English – even while they plod along the Boulevard Saint-Germain, drink Pernod and scoff a *jarret de porc aux lentilles* – then something must be wrong. Where’s the bonus in having a French detective novel for bedtime reading unless there is something French about it? Don’t we want our French detectives to sound French? Domesticating translation styles that eradicate the Frenchness of Gallic thugs have been attacked by some critics for committing ‘ethnocentric violence’.

An ethics of translation, such critics say, should restrain the translators from erasing all that is foreign about works translated from a foreign tongue.

How then should the foreignness of the foreign best be represented in the receiving language? Jean d’Alembert, a mathematician and philosopher who was also co-editor of Diderot’s *Encyclopédie*, came up with an ingenious answer in 1763:

> The way foreigners speak [French] is the model for a good translation. The original should speak our language not with the superstitious caution we have for our native tongue, but with a noble freedom that allows features of one language to be borrowed in order to embellish another. Done in this way, a translation may possess all the qualities that make it commendable – a natural and easy manner, marked by the genius of the original and alongside that the added flavor of a homeland created by its foreign colouring.

The risk of this approach is that in many social and historical circumstances the foreign-soundingness of a translation – just like the slightly unnatural diction of a real foreigner speaking French (or English, or German …) may be rejected as clumsy, false or even worse. (41–42)

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