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Some aspects of prose translation

The process of translation may start even earlier than the reading of the text, in the building of general knowledge, language skills and lateral thinking. The first stage of any theoretical or pedagogical discussion is to look at what we read and what prior knowledge we bring to reading. Text should be thus regarded as an event, which happens, comes into being not only as it is being read, but starts much earlier both for the writer and the reader. All the formal and informal learning we have done, factual, ab-

stract and emotional, every memory, good or bad, vague or detailed, including the physical sensations that go with human activity, combine to bring understanding to our reading. The syntactic, semantic, lexical and orthographic clues, together with layout and structure of the text provide a 'formal schema'. This is the physical print framework in which the reader creates a 'content schema'. The content schema is an understanding of the informational and implicational content of the text. The translator applies the content schema to re-create the text within the framework of a new formal schema in the target language [1, p. 97].

It should be immediately noted that apart from the elements inherent in the text, there are also cultural factors that have to be taken into consideration in translation. A proper name, for instance, might have positive or negative associations either due to the historic background of the nation or due to some linguistic non-intended references (the classic example being the situation with translating Shakespeare's "The Winter's Tale": one of the characters in the original text is named *Perdita*, which bears unpleasant associations for Russian-speakers. Thus, for euphemistic purposes the translators decided to change the name for *Utrata*, to keep the rhythmical structure and to avoid possible awkwardness). Besides, sometimes cultural information conveyed by a seemingly minute detail becomes outdated. In this case it requires notes even for those who read the text in the original (usually prepared by editors). Translators often have to do the same to make up for cultural differences existing between the languages.

Every text, however incoherently written, or illogically constructed, has some kind of form. The shape, size, texture and components of the text give the first clues to its meaning and message. The title will tell us what the text is 'about'. That is perhaps an optimistic statement. In the case of literature, and even newspaper and magazine articles, authors may sometimes use a very subtle or humorous title or heading. The reader may only become aware of the meaning of the title by reading the whole work. Frequently an elegant, succinct title is followed by a colon and a phrase or two that tells you a little bit more. The colon has a meaning: it means 'what I am actually going to write about is ...' Even in situations where the title is not entirely transparent, it is a contribution to the meaning, a clue to the writer's attitude or character, and helps to build understanding of the work. Therefore the first rule that should be taught to beginner translators is not to translate the title until the final stage of work with the text.

The translator can learn a great deal from a linguist's analysis. It is not simply the case that long English sentences need to be broken up into short Chinese sentences or vice versa. Punctuation, including the different kinds of comma, needs to be mined for its meaning, so that the text and its component sentences can be appropriately restructured. It should be emphasised that not every sentence needs to be restructured. Thoughts which have followed the same pathways and networks in the Russian-speaking and English-speaking brain may need to follow the same syntactic pathway on the page.

The translator may write diagnoses and instructions, regulations for behaviour, inspirational thoughts on patriotism and narratives for the use of future generations. Any and all of these text types are potential ingredients of fiction. The tipping point is when the author becomes involved in the act of imagination. It is only through the sparking of that vision beyond reality that the translator can find the author's voice. The narrative of real life becomes the fantasy, allegory or sheer escapism of fiction. Creative writing is infused with all that pertains to life. Novelists and poets write for effect: that effect may

be the beauty of rhythm, the vividness of images, lessons in morality, the highlighting of anomalies or sheer story-telling. There exists a point of view that the translator should be merely a piece of transparent glass, so that the reader would "see" the original text clearly, not even noticing that what they are actually reading is a translation. However, retelling the story to a target audience compels the translator to become a story-teller, and to affect the reader in the way that the original author has done.

The decisions that have to be made are therefore more complex. Every text has formal features according to which we re-create the form of the target text: grammatical structures (tense, voice, case, etc.), punctuation, paragraphing. It will also have at least one register, which to a great extent decrees the register we use for the translation. It has lexis, and we select from the range of target language synonyms those words appropriate for our translation. These are concrete, but only very approximate aids to decision making. In the case of fiction, they work in combination with the dominant text type components: narration, dialogue, description or depiction, and introspection or reflection.

Novels and short stories need a plot, and it is primarily through the narration of events that the author conveys the plot to the reader. Other means may be used, but few authors can avoid, at some point in their work, a straight-forward telling of the story. Straight narrative may be one of the most risky areas for a translator: if an author decides to run swiftly and chronologically through events or incidents, style may suffer. We need to be able to avoid the 'and then, and then and then' style of writing. In narration we can deploy numerous means to keep the reader interested and anticipating. Translating into English gives us the opportunity to craft sentence structures so as to retain essential information and the excitement of the plot.

Dialogue is used by an author to achieve certain effects. Most important of these, perhaps, is to imbue the protagonists of the novel or short story with maximal credibility. It is through the characters' speech patterns that the author consolidates their personality traits as set out in narration and description.

Dialogue also reveals the relationship between characters, provides commentary, and reinforces descriptions of and attitudes towards third parties. Dialogue may be used to relate or to explain past events, though this is not always very natural-sounding to the reader. An important part of dialogue is idiolect, that is the unique expression of an individual which reveals not only personality, but also elements such as age, fashion, occupation and educational background. Translating dialogue or inner speech is an area in which the translator cannot afford to ignore the voice of the author and the character. We have to use all means at our disposal to get inside the character and speak with his or her voice.

The problem here is to avoid unnecessary "localization": trying to preserve the idiolect of a character not to transplant them into the reader's reality. For instance, in English, with its multitude of accents and dialects, it is a common thing to find these features reflected in fiction. Beginner translators into Russian might often fall into one of the pitches: either try to render phonetic aspects of the dialect, producing an idiolect which is both non-existing and difficult to read; or compensate for this by making use of Russian slang or dialectal units, thus making an English character look like a Russian native.

The translator, as reader, has to be acutely sensitive to the imaginary 'video' played out in the pages of a text. We must be alive to colour, shape, size, and perspective; these visual perceptions help us and the target reader to the right visual image. We need to

‘hear’ pitch, melody, harmony and volume; these are elements in distinguishing euphony and cacophony for the target reader. Smells are not just good or bad. They may be fragrant, aromatic or pungent, and create a world of homely or exotic associations for the reader. Texture connects the tactile and the visual, from velvety skin to thorny stares. Taste is the most personal of all the senses, very much a part of the interior person. Even the five senses do not give an exhaustive list of the means of depiction: touch and vision – our ‘haptic’ sensitivity – tell us about movement, speed and change.

To conclude, we can say that given the profound differences between any two languages and cultures, the translator is forced to think hard about the function of the text, which is to say its author’s intention. The translator’s sensitivity to the language and context of the original leads to an assessment of its intentions, and it is to those that he then strives to be faithful.

Leaving aside the question of exactly what any expression might mean, the important thing to grasp is the complexity and inner unity of the English, the way it hints at a possible metaphor, gives a weight to some words that goes beyond the immediate context, invites attention, begs questions. Looking at original and translation side by side and identifying those places where translation turned out to be especially difficult, we can arrive at a better appreciation of the original’s qualities and, simultaneously of the two phenomena we call translation and literature.

Prose translation presents particular challenges for the translator, not only because of its technical and stylistic features, but also because of the way prose and translation of prose are perceived by readers and authors. There are many pitfalls both for beginners and experienced professionals that should be avoided; and the secret of success in the field lies not only in constant improvement of technical skills (by practice and exchange of experience), but in never-ending broadening of one's outlook and refining linguistic taste.

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