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Self-Translation as Science-Art: Joseph Brodsky Legacy

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The article deals with the issues of self-translator's creativity which are considered in the context of the linguistic concepts of identity. When creating a secondary translated text self-translator's efforts are directed towards the creation of a text which is culturally symmetrical to an original text. Effective strategies of translation in the situation of self-translation are self-commentary and self-editing. The Russian text of the series "Chast' Rechi" and English self-translation "A Part of Speech" by Joseph Brodsky are research material.

Keywords: self-translation, creativity, linguistic identity, self-commentary, self-editing, "A Part of Speech", Joseph Brodsky.

Introduction

Translation has a centuries-old history including a comparatively long period of theoretical reasoning about translation-related issues. The diversity of views on the problems of translation theory and practice has led to appearance of a considerable number of definitions reflecting the constitutive features of translation: translation as a process and as a result of this process; translation as socially oriented interlanguage communication; translation as a complicated act of communication; translation as intended approaching of multilanguage communication to monolanguage communication (Sokolovsky 2009). Without the purpose of making a comparative analysis of many existing definitions of translation suggested at different times and by various schools of translation studies, we believe

it necessary to draw attention to the definition of translation as creative activity (Alekseyeva 2004: 7; Solodub 2005: 5). Understanding of translation as creative work does not refer to a certain kind of translation determined by the classification basis being used, which makes creative work a universal characteristic of any kind of translation as a complex communicative activity. It should be noted that the division of translation into three main types suggested by R. Jakobson in 1959 (intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic) is still highly relevant at the present stage of the development of translation thought. Obviously, the most well-studied type of translation is interlingual translation.

It goes without saying that translation is not only creative work, it is also a technology. The ratio of creative and technological components in

translator's work varies depending on subjective and objective circumstances: form and type of translation, translator's competencies, translation time, linguistic and sociocultural characteristics of the original etc. In this context, the following view of translation scholars, linguists and literary critics can be useful: literary translation as a special kind of written translation is situated at the intersection of subject areas of science and art. Such understanding of literary translation was frequently expressed by famous translators and translation scholars (Etkind 1970; Chukovsky, Fyodorov 1930; Levy 1974). Defining translation as a special form of art, translation scholars have never denied its considerable scientific component. Literary translation has always been thought of as a complex and unique combination of science and art that is impossible to separate. To be more specific, literary translation can be defined as a complex creative process including different creative processes typical of both science and art. Being a creative individual, a literary translator combines artistic and scientific creative abilities. That is why the term "science-art" can be applied to literary translation. According to the Egyptian translation scholar M. Enami studying literary translation issues in Arabic and English in synchrony and diachrony, literary translation is a modern science at the confluence of philosophy, linguistics, psychology and sociology (Enami 2001). Literary translation – and especially translation of poetry – is an unique, individual and creative process in which each translator makes his own translation decisions aimed at reaching the desired results in each specific translation situation for each specific translation object. Literary translation has a compulsory *ad hoc* status that varies depending on literary fashion, translation "politics" of the recipient culture, and dominating translation tradition at the time of translating. That is why literary texts of certain cultures having been regular objects

of translation for a long time (for example, texts by Homer and Pushkin) are translated differently into different languages and at different times.

Literary Self-translation and Linguistic Identity

This study is focused on such form of interlanguage translation as self-translation. In a broad sense, self-translation is translation of a work into a foreign language by the author of such work. The possible objects of self-translation include written texts of any genre and style (scientific article, report, instruction, story, novel) or oral texts (presentation, greeting speech).

In most cases, self-translation is made not by a professional translator, but by an expert in a certain field of knowledge who is the author of the original text and a bilingual speaker. In other words, the subject of self-translation is a person who is knowledgeable about the domain to which the original text belongs and who has the language and translation abilities necessary for interlanguage interpretation of the original text.

A particular variant of self-translation is literary self-translation where the author of the original text is a prose or poetry writer. In the situation of "classic" interlanguage translation an author of the original text and a translator are two different physical persons. The unique feature of self-translation is that no doubling of physical person occurs in the process of interlanguage and intercultural communication. In case of self-translation an author and a translator are one and the same person. In this connection, self-translation can be studied in the context of linguistic concepts of identity: linguistic, discursive and communicative. Every person as a personality (in a broad scientific sense implying social and psychological characteristics of an individual) combines the above mentioned types of identity in terms of linguistics. In modern linguistics linguistic identity is defined according

to Yu.N. Karaulov as “the totality of a person’s abilities and characteristics enabling him to create and perceive speech products (texts) differing by: a) degree of structural and language complexity, b) depth and accuracy of reflection of reality, c) certain goal” (Karaulov 1989: 3). The possible number of linguistic identity of a translator is determined by the sum of his primary language personality which traditionally develops as a result of his birth circumstances and upbringing in the native language and cultural environment and secondary language personalities developing as a result of learning foreign languages or living in a different (non-native) culture and language environment. Having two or more linguistic identities, an individual (a translator, in our case) simultaneously possesses several languages systems. In its turn, a communicative identity is a language personality performing communication. The owner of a communicative identity interacts with other participants of a communicative act, which means following a specific model of communicative behavior, and thus acts as an addressor or addressee of a message. The notion of discursive identity is also a derivative from the notion of language personality and implies production of a certain discourse in the form of a certain message (Plotnikova 2008a). Speculating on the similarities and differences of language, discursive and communicative spaces, S.N. Plotnikova makes a conclusion that “the essence of a translator’s work is substitution of the missing linguistic identity of a communicator and enabling his interaction with interlocutors in the given communicative space. In these conditions the communicator has one communicative identity and two linguistic identities one of which belongs to another person – translator” (Plotnikova 2008b: 135).

Developing the idea about the differences between language, communicative and discursive identities, it is possible to conclude

that the principal feature of self-translation is that communicative, discursive and two linguistic identities (of the original and translation) actually belong to one person – author and translator. This essential characteristic obviously affects the process of perception and understanding of a text being translated by a translator. A translator’s perception and understanding of the original text at the initial phase of translation process, in the case of “classic” interlanguage translation, are identical to the mental actions of a “classic” reader perceiving the original text and understanding (deciphering, decoding) the information complex of a literary text in the process of reading. At the initial stage of translation, a translator is first of all a reader. A translator is a very attentive and highly motivated reader intending to perceive and understand as much as possible information from the text being read. Information in a literary text is expressed by means of a certain language system aimed at formal implementation of the author’s artistic concept and is refracted through the language consciousness of every person reading this text. The modern cognitive concept of language consciousness states that a language system can be a very important means of information categorization and can act as a special cognitive filter or cognitive matrix (Boldyrev 2002). In every natural language there is a unique conceptual grid making it possible to divide and shape the cognitive and semantic space of every language in a certain way, which manifests itself primarily in the meanings of lexical units belonging to a specific language system.

Information Ambiguity

in Translation Process:

Perception and Understanding Issues

Perception of information seen by psycholinguists as the initial stage of understanding and subsequent understanding of the original

text as the initial stage of translation implies that both a “classic” reader and a translator must overcome the original informational ambiguity of the text being read. Informational ambiguity is found at the intersection of understanding and failure to understand information in the process of reading. A literary text undoubtedly has a high degree of regular informational ambiguity. Ambiguity implies that more than one variant of interpretation is possible with regard to the information contained in a specific information carrier. Ambiguity can often be found in works of art, because one and the same object (piece of music, graphic image, architectural structure) necessarily implies ambiguity during perception. Ambiguity is the basis for such universal semantic properties of natural languages as polysemy and homonymy. The category of ambiguity is closely related to the information category of uncertainty. But in case of uncertainty the possibility to make the right conclusion is predetermined to a greater extent than in case of ambiguity. In case of uncertainty there can be several conclusions as a result of interpreting the information and all of them will be characterized as correct.

Ambiguity in terms of translation has a heterogeneous character and includes different types of ambiguity: ambiguity of the information complex of the original text (original ambiguity), ambiguity of understanding of the original’s information complex by a reader (and, thus, by a translator as a reader), ambiguity of chosen strategies and decisions in translation, and ambiguity of the information complex of the secondary text (translation) in the process of its perception by a potential reader. Ambiguous information characteristics of the original and of the translation, in their turn, can be cognitive, aesthetic, semantic, pragmatic, cultural, etc. Ambiguity also characterizes each participant of such complicated communicative act as translation: an author of the original literary text,

a translator and a reader of translation. Studying the scientific category of ambiguity at an artistic, cultural and psychophysiological level (level of perception), the Italian physicist G. Caglioti convincingly demonstrates the modern process of blurring distinctions between the humanities and exact sciences and believes that the category of ambiguity can be found in all academic fields and forms of art: architecture, art, graphic arts, sculpture, literature, music, choreography, theater, photography, and cinema. It is the category of ambiguity that not only unites different objects of science and art in a certain way, but also makes it possible to characterize human activity in these spheres as scientific and artistic creative work. In the process of such creative work the flow of irregular external signals perceived by organs of senses is transformed into regular states of a human’s brain (visual and auditory images). It is in the creative process that the original ambiguity and uncertainty of our thought are overcome. Thus, it can be stated once again that ambiguity plays a central role among factors unifying science, art and translation. “At the very place where science meets art, truth meets beauty, beauty meets nature, language becomes at the same time analytical and syntactical, precise and polysemantic, rational and intuitive, esoteric and exoteric. In one word, it becomes ambiguous. Thus, we obtain an «unshaped shape», a surprise shape. Lost like in a maze and stimulating in its dynamic instability, this form becomes a factor of varying stability of taste that is passed on from one generation to another. And ambiguity goes up to become an eternal cultural value” (Caglioti 1992: 171). Ambiguity appears at critical points of any choice: where entropy meets order, evolution meets stability, and symmetry meets asymmetry. The existence of two mutually exclusive incompatible aspects gives rise to ambiguity.

Understanding information in an original literary text consists in multiple processes of

decoding and interpreting of ambiguous aesthetic information of the original text by a translator who: isolates the aesthetic focus of the original text; builds the structure of dominant meaning; interprets the author's meaning and replaces it with his own variant of meaning choosing the most adequate of possible translation decisions. Studying the problems of meaning in literary texts, V.A. Pishchalnikova makes a conclusion that the author-reader interaction in cognitive aspect can be described as relationships between the conceptual systems of the author and the recipient (reader). The larger is the degree of coincidence (correspondence) between the conceptual systems, the more fully and adequately a reader can understand the "author's" content of the text. If the conceptual systems of the author and reader do not coincide, a literary text can also be perceived, but the nature of such perception is mostly interpretational and probabilistic; adequate understanding is impossible and even total misinterpretation can occur (Pishchalnikova 1992).

Certain differences between the conceptual systems of the author and reader result in cognitive dissonance. This phenomenon was described in psychology as a special type of intrapersonal conflict and as a certain mental state caused by collision of contradictory knowledge, judgments, behavioral attitudes in a person's conscience which makes him want (often without realizing it) to overcome such contradictions (Festinger 1957). Studies of cognitive dissonance soon exceeded the bounds of psychology and became one of the objects of cognitive linguistics. Scientists explored the appearance of cognitive dissonance and described verbal means to reduce it using English language diplomatic discourse as a material (Weber 2004). In modern translation studies cognitive dissonance was thoroughly looked into in the context of translation equivalence (Voskoboinik 2004). Full coincidence of the

conceptual systems of an author and a reader is impossible due to the individuality, singularity and uniqueness of their language personalities, as well as due to objective and subjective differences in their personal life experience. And, consequently, equally impossible is understanding of a text by the reader that would be totally identical to the author's intention expressed in a literary text. Thus, success of translation is directly related to the invariance of the conceptual systems of an author, a translator and a reader that are often separated in time and space.

In view of the above, it becomes obvious that in the situation of self-translation the information of the original text is available to the author-translator in its immediate "pure" form. The author-translator doesn't have to perceive and understand the information contained in the object of translation, because the whole information complex of the original already exists in the language consciousness of the author-translator. All cognitive efforts of the author-translator are directed at the search for a language form in the target language that would match the transferred content. Relationships between the translator and his own text are outlined in the following statement of the well-known Bulgarian translation theorists: "Being the sole master of his own work, not limited in his translator's activity by any translation attitudes, he is free to rethink and rewrite the text in any way and to any extent, change the composition, images and expressive means <...> In such conditions a new work of art can appear. The positive moment of self-translation is that the author-translator sees his work «from inside» which allows him to produce a really impeccable translation" (Vlakhov, Florin 1986: 189). However, one cannot but agree with the opinion of A. Popovic that self-translation is similar to any kind of translation in that it does not guarantee optimal results. "Creative coexistence of an author and translator in one

person does not necessarily lead to the identical outcome of text realization” (Popovic 1980: 57). However, the history of literary translation and literary self-translation, in particular, demonstrates examples of successful self-translations made by the authors of the original texts. One of the most outstanding poets, translators and self-translators is undoubtedly Joseph Brodsky, the 1988 Nobel Prize winner in literature. Brodsky's activity as a poet and translator was very diverse: creation of poetic texts in Russian and English, translation of his own works, translation of other poets' works. Creative diversity combined with high exactingness towards himself and his colleagues allowed Brodsky to become not only an outstanding poet, but also a highly professional translator. Translation issues were part of the wide spectrum of the poet's interests, though he did not leave any separate and complete author's theory of literary translation or self-translation. Speaking about poetry translation, Brodsky never shared the widely spread view of V.V. Nabokov, R. Frost and many other theorists and practitioners of poetic translation that poetry is what is lost in the process of translation (Volkov 1998: 58). Joseph Brodsky was firmly convinced that any poetic text is translatable. His motto in translation was “Nothing is impossible” (Polukhina 1998: 52). However, he rightly noted that translations of one and the same poetic text can be different in quality. One of the key ideas of Brodsky's translation concept is the idea of congeniality: the translator should be congenial to the poet, and if it's impossible to find such a translator, the poet himself should become his own translator. Brodsky defends the idea that translating his own texts he becomes congenial to the author of the original, i.e. to himself (Brodsky 1999). Present-day Brodsky studies have produced multiple works dedicated to studying of the poet's self-translations from the point of view of literary studies, culturology and translation theory

(Razumovskaya 2011). Looking at the creative workshop of Brodsky as a self-translator from a cognitive angle is of great interest. The working assumption is that the original and the target texts are connected by the relationship of translation equality as the reflections of the poet-translator's cognitive activity at the border of two languages, two cultures and two cognitive spaces.

**From “Chast' Rechi”
to “A Part of Speech”:**

Self-commenting and Self-editing,

A special place in the artistic legacy of Joseph Brodsky is occupied by the cycle “A Part of Speech” (1975-1976). The significance and importance of this cycle is explained by the fact that it includes the poetic texts created by Brodsky during the first years of his emigration. Creation of the cycle convinced Brodsky to continue his poetic activity away from Russia and became his first self-translation experience. It is necessary to note that the Russian original text and the English version were created and published almost simultaneously which is extremely important for understanding of the fact that both texts were produced by one creative person not separated in time by background, creative and emotional experience. The researchers of Brodsky's works note that this cycle undoubtedly has a “representative” function reflecting the facts of his real biography: hardships of his creative career, love story, expulsion – everything that makes this cycle extremely personal (Smirnova 2011).

The original composition of the cycle consists of 20 small poems. All poems are connected into a single whole by deep conceptual and figurative bonds (Semenova 2001). In the English-language version of the cycle the author-translator changed the order of the poems of the original, thus giving new logic and new integrity to the resulting sequence of poetic texts, and reduced the number

of poems to 15. Since the Russian-language cycle “Chast’ Rechi” and its English-language version are poetic, semantic and aesthetic-informational unities, in this research we compare the Russian and English variants of the cycle, not separate poems. The artistic worldview of the author includes such topics as loneliness, creative work, love, expulsion, memories of the home lost forever – represented by descriptions of nature, winter, cold, water areas etc. Researchers of Brodsky’s artistic legacy, in particular of the cycle “Chast’ Rechi” and its English-language version, underline that using the material of the translation it is possible to trace the transformation of the artistic worldview of Joseph Brodsky as an author and translator (Smirnova 2013). The result of such transformation is reflected in certain differences between the conceptual spaces of the original and translation.

In this context it is especially important to understand self-translation as self-commenting and self-editing, which are forms of complicated cognitive activity of an author-translator, just like self-translation. Analyzing the self-translations of Brodsky published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux in 2000, A.V. Nesterov comes to the interesting conclusion that the self-translations of the poet are in fact self-commentaries of a certain kind (Nesterov 2001). Comparative analysis of original texts and translations makes it possible to determine what the author-translator gives up in the process of translation. In connection with the above, one cannot but remember that traditionally translation (especially poetic translation) was regarded as necessarily leading to information losses. In this context it would be reasonable to turn to the notion of “remainder” described in the works of L. Venuti as a phenomenon complicating communication, making it polyphonic and focusing on linguistic, cultural and social conditions of a communicative act. L. Venuti uses the term “remainder” to describe all types of

information losses in the process of assimilating translation (Venuti 1998: 226).

Having set his mind to preserve the form (rhyme) of the original, which made the English language of the translation slightly artificial, Brodsky remains true to the Russian poetic tradition. Asymmetry of the original and translation manifests itself in changes of tonality, intonation and losses of cultural realia. What is the most evident in Brodsky’s self-translation is the cultural asymmetry standing out against the background intention of the author-translator to create cultural symmetry within the boundaries of two poetic and cultural spaces that are connected in a thematic, semantic and aesthetic way (Razumovskaya 2012). The author-translator deliberately gives away a number of information details of the original that might not make sense to an English-speaking reader. A figurative description of self-translation compares interlanguage translation with “alchemic sublimation” of meanings which implies isolation of meaning from form and reshaping the meaning within another language (Nesterov 2001). In this case information losses are not caused by the failure of the translator to understand the cultural meanings of the original (which he created himself) or by his inability to recreate such meanings within other languages and cultures. Translation losses are in fact deliberate and targeted translation substitutions aimed at making the secondary poetic text more available and clear for a reader speaking another language and belonging to another culture.

Remarkable examples of combining self-translation with self-commenting and self-editing are replacements of proper nouns in translations. For example, the personal name “Sedov” was replaced with “Scott” in translation. Indeed, the images of famous polar explorers have much in common. The Russian organizer of the expedition to the North Pole G.Ya. Sedov experienced a

failure and died during the expedition in 1914 at the age of 36. The fact that the polar explorer came out of the poorest social strata and his voyages made his name famous and popular during Soviet time. Many objects were named in honor of G.Ya. Sedov: settlements, ships and airplanes, naval schools, an island, a cape and a glacier. Several works of art were dedicated to the Russian explorer: poems (“Sedov” by N. Zabolotsky, “Ice Ballad” by E. Asadov), a play (by N. Podorolsky) and a feature film (“Georgy Sedov”, 1974). G.Ya. Sedov is considered to be one of the prototypes of Ivan Tatarinov in the novel by V. Kaverin “Two Captains” – a popular adventure novel that was frequently reprinted, and was filmed and staged several times. The Englishman Robert Falcon Scott was one of the discoverers of the South Pole. Having reached the goal of his expedition, on the way back, Robert Scott and his comrades died from a combination of exhaustion, starvation and extreme cold in March 1912 at the age of 43. The success of his first expedition to the Antarctic in 1901-1904 made him a hero in Great Britain.

From the information above it is evident that both real people whose names are used by Brodsky in parallel poetic texts have many biographic facts in common: both were polar explorers, both died during expeditions (were “killed” by the harsh land they wanted to reach and to understand (Smirnova 2011)); both were young and almost the same age (36 and 43); both were famous at their motherlands. An important fact uniting the images of Sedov and Scott at a symbolic level is the use of the precedent-setting text from the poem “Ulysses” by Lord Alfred Tennyson, written in 1833 and dedicated to the tireless traveler Odysseus – “To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield”. The last line of the poem is carved at the memorial cross erected in honor of Robert Scott and his comrades on Observation Hill in the Antarctica. The same line is the motto of Kaverin’s novel “Two Captains”. This suggests

that Robert Scott is, too, in some way a prototype of the literary character Ivan Tatarinov. It should be noted that the figure of Odysseus (Ulysses) can often be found in the works of Brodsky at different periods: “I, like Ulysses” (1961), “Odysseus to Telemachus” (1972). The proper nouns “Sedov” and “Scott” can give rise to similar cultural and emotional connotations in Russian- and English-speaking readers, respectively: brave explorer, exhausting struggle with harsh circumstances, death from cold. Therefore, this example of self-commenting and self-editing can be deemed reasonable and adequate.

Another interesting example of self-commenting is the replacement of the Russian word combination “kaisatskoye imya” with the English version “Kazakh name”. It is possible to suppose that the replacement of the ethnonym “Kaisak” with “Kazakh” was also caused by the author’s intention to make the text information clearer for readers of the translation. The ethnonym “Kaisak” (coming from “Kyrgyz-Kaisak” or “Kyrgyz-kazak”, a common name for the Kazakhs in the official documents of the Russian Empire) is not always clear even for Russian readers. Since the cycle “A Part of Speech” is deeply autobiographic, it is possible to suppose that “kaisatskoye imya” is a direct allusion to the name of Marina Basmanova, Brodsky’s Leningrad love. The anthroponym “Basmanova” has Turkic origins, and the ethnonyms “Kaisak” and “Kazakh” both refer to the representatives of Turkic peoples.

One more example of cultural replacement is the use of the word combination “Persian pie” instead of the original “khalva Shiraza” (“halva of Shiraz”). The author-translator applies the generalization method replacing the name of the Iranian (Persian) city Shiraz with the name of the country. The toponym “Persia” is easier to understand for Western readers. The author also took a translation decision to change the

name of the Middle Eastern sweet “halva”, which is a piece of cultural realia, to “pie”, in order to avoid possible problems with understanding by English-speaking readers.

Conclusion

The translation decisions made by Joseph Brodsky in the process of self-translation of poetic texts (“A Part of Speech”) are certain forms of self-commenting and self-editing with regard to the target text aimed at overcoming the potential

cultural asymmetry of the original and translation. These types of cognitive activity become effective translation methods due to the author-translator’s situation at the border of two languages (possession of two language personalities), two cultures and two cognitive spaces. Exclusion of the perception and understanding processes from a translator’s activity allows him to concentrate his creative efforts on production of a target text which is conceptually and culturally symmetric to the original text.

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Автоперевод как Science-Art: наследие Иосифа Бродского

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Статья посвящена вопросам переводческого творчества автопереводчика, рассматриваемых в контексте лингвистических концепций личности. При создании вторичного переводного текста усилия автопереводчика направлены на создание текста, который культурно симметричен тексту оригинала. Эффективными стратегиями перевода в ситуации автоперевода становятся автокомментирование и авторедактирование. Материалом исследования послужил русский текст цикла «Часть речи» и английский автоперевод «A Part of Speech» Иосифа Бродского.

Ключевые слова: автоперевод, творчество, языковая личность, автокомментирование, авторедактирование, «Часть речи», Иосиф Бродский.
