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## On the Reconstruction of the Dominant Meaning of the Poetic Text in Self-Translating: the Descriptive Approach in Translation Studies

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*In this paper, we describe an attempt to apply the concept of dominant meaning by V.A. Pishchalnikova for the Descriptive Approach to study the relationship between the poetic text and its self-translation on the example of self-translations by J. Brodsky. V. A. Pishchalnikova points directly to the need to develop a theory of translation based on conceptual analysis, "when the content of the text is presented as a function field of meaning, rather than verbal actualization of the semantic field of a lexeme, it should be studied the relationship of the components of the dominant meaning of the text, represented in different lexemes which do not usually implement an abstract systemic meaning, but fix actual author's subjective meanings using conventional units". A significant part of reconstructed personal meanings of poetic texts by J. Brodsky are aestheticised emotions. The technique proposed by Pishchalnikova allows to present the cognitive structure of each literary text as a set of cognitive features (including the relationship between these features). The analysis of correlation of semantic schemes of original text and the translation of the poem by J. Brodsky proves the relations of isomorphism (the identity of the form of original text and self-translation, where the form means formal-explicable personal meaning, according to the method by V. A. Pishchalnikova).*

*Keywords: isomorphism, translation studies, equivalence, psycholinguistics, literary translation, literary text.*

*Research area: philology.*

To read is to translate, for no two person's experiences are the same

W.H. Auden

### Point

This article is methodologically based on the concept of dominant meaning by V.A. Pishchalnikova (Pishchalnikova 1999). In this paper, we describe an attempt to apply this theoretical framework for the Descriptive

Approach to study the relationship between the poetic text and its self-translation on the example of self-translations by J. Brodsky.

In her concept, V.A. Pishchalnikova bases on well-known psycholinguistic concept of Leontiev of subjective author's meaning (Leontiev 2001).

So, from the point of view of D. A. Leontiev, there are three dimensions of meaning: 1) objective relationship between the subject and the world, so called “meaning of life”; 2) image of the world in the consciousness of the subject, one of the components is the personal meaning. Personal meaning in this case is “understanding (interpretation) by the subject of their role and a place in the activity” where the personal meaning and the reflection of the dynamics of subjective image of reality is “the phenomenological aspect of meaning”; 3) “unconscious mechanisms of internal regulation of life are psychological substratum of the meaning”, so called “semantic structures of the personality” related to “activity” or “substrate” aspect of meaning. As a part of our thesis research the main focus of our attention is directed to the second dimension, so called “personal meaning”, according to D. A. Leontiev. These are subjective relations generated by the author of the text between the functional conventional units of the language embodied in the text (in our case, the literary text). And here let us remember the words by A. A. Leontiev: “we are not talking about the meanings themselves, abstracted from the person’s identity: the component of the image of the world is a personal meaning, “meaning-for-me” (Leontiev, 267). A. A. Leontiev referring to D. A. Leontiev points out “there is a system of mechanisms, working for the correlation, ordering, hierarchization, and, if necessary restructuring of motivational-value-semantic personality sphere. This <...> subsystem of consciousness can be attributed to the right to the structure of personality as well; in fact, it binds the identity and consciousness and corresponds to what in ordinary words is called “the inner world of personality” (Leontiev: 269). Here he explains that “enduring meanings of meaningful objects and phenomena arising from a unique personal experience and personal values are the main components of the inner world of

personality” (Leontiev, 270). V. A. Pishchalnikova points directly to the need to develop a theory of translation based on conceptual analysis, “when the content of the text is presented as a *function field of meaning*, rather than verbal actualization of the semantic field of a lexeme, it should be studied the relationship of the components of the dominant meaning of the text, represented in different lexemes which do not usually implement an abstract systemic meaning, but fix *actual author’s subjective meanings* using conventional units” (author’s italics – notes A. Sosna) (Pishchalnikova 1999, 150). Yu. A. Sorokin believes that to reason epistemologically we can “talk about the literary text as about a potentially pluralistic state of signs in their content-formal aspects” (Sorokin 1985, 29), but it is important that the reader, interpreting, forms a “dominant meaning” that we reconstruct in translation from this “potential” field of meanings.

A significant part of reconstructed personal meanings of poetic texts by J. Brodsky are aestheticised emotions. In this regard, we believe it is important to give the opinion of V. A. Pishchalnikova, based on the study of modern psychology, where she concludes: “emotions to some extent are the only meaning-centered point of a literary text. The main function of emotions here is regulative, they direct the stream of various author’s associations, allow to compare different realities on the basis of the same subjective-emotional attitude towards them” (Pishchalnikova 1992, 18).

### Example

Relying on the theory of the dominant meaning by Pishchalnikova we performed the analysis of cognitive structure of a number of poems. It should be note that in our analysis, we do not seek to formalize all the possible meanings of the poem. Obviously, it’s impossible due to subjective factors (and especially our own

subjectivity of perception as a researcher). We just demonstrate the applicability of the concept of dominant meaning by Pishchalnikova to the comparative analysis of self-translations of poems. The technique proposed by Pishchalnikova allows to present the cognitive structure of each literary text as a set of cognitive features (including the relationship between these features). In this case, due to the domination of the aesthetic function of language (according to Jakobson) signs often represent a particular emotion. For example, the poem "Letter to an Archaeologist" (Brodsky, Electronic resource):

Original text:

Гражданин, лох, гогочка, перестарок,  
враг народа, бомжара, бежидец – годный  
драить толчок,  
кожа черепа, столько принявшая ошпарок,  
что сваренным себя чувствует мозжечок.  
Да, мы жили здесь – в этом трухлявом щелбе  
и кирпиче, тобой просеянном до муки,  
в перекрученных проводах, ошетиленных  
как терновые стебли.  
Не давали любви, зато женщины были  
давать легки.  
Лязг кирпичи, рвущей то, что было железом,  
Все ж нежнее, чем утверждали мы,  
или твердили нам.  
Полегче! Что тебе кажется мертвечиной  
по взрезу,  
в сущности, есть свобода от плена  
цитомембран.  
Что до наших имен – не старайся,  
воссоздавая  
вокализм и т. д. Трелей в них не желай  
услышать: там иступление суки, что,  
захлебываясь, сжирает  
собственный кал, следы и в довершение –  
лай.

Self-translation :

Citizen, enemy, mama's boy, sucker, utter  
garbage, panhandler, swine, refujew, verrucht;

a scalp so often scalded with boiling water  
that the puny brain feels completely cooked.  
Yes, we have dwelt here: in this concrete,  
brick, wooden  
rubble which you now arrive to sift.  
All our wires were crossed, barbed, tangled,  
or interwoven.  
Also: we didn't love our women,  
but they conceived.  
Sharp is the sound of pickaxe that hurts  
dead iron;  
still, it's gentler than what we've been told  
or have said ourselves.  
Stranger! Move carefully through our carrion:  
what seems carrion to you is freedom  
to our cells.

Leave our names alone. Don't reconstruct  
those vowels,  
consonants, and so forth: they won't resemble  
larks  
but a demented bloodhound whose maw devours  
its own traces, feces, and barks, and barks.

In this poem, the author actualizes the emotion of "disgust", which is represented by the following features:

- **disgusting sounds** (clang, barking),
- **disgusting sensations** (a scalp so often scalded with boiling water that the puny brain feels completely cooked),
- **disgusting taste** (a bloodhound whose maw devours its own traces, feces),
- **unpleasant environment, conditions** (rotten rubble, barbed wires),
- **unpleasant people** (mama's boy, panhandler, refujew, sucker),
- **unpleasant actions** (scrub a push, women were easy for making love, to tear what was iron, devours).

The language units put in brackets actualize a particular feature of the original text of the poem. We found the following compliances between the original text and the self-translation:

- 1) barks;
- 2) a scalp so often scalded with boiling water that the puny brain feels completely cooked;
- 3) a bloodhound whose maw devours its own traces, feces;
- 4) wires ...barbed;
- 5) mama's boy;
- 6) panhandler;
- 7) refujew;
- 8) sucker;
- 9) devours.

Some original language units, objectifying these or other signs of cognitive emotion "disgust" have no compliances in the translated text: 1) "исступлень"; 2) "трухлявый"; 3) "годный драить толчок". At the same time a part of language units with the same cognitive features has no compliances in the original text: 1) "demented"; 2) "verrucht"; 3) "utter garbage". Another part of the language units of the original text and the translation take "intermediate position" in the sense that they have compliances, but they aren't in vocabulary, but subjectively selected by the author-translator: 1) враг народа (enemy); 2) рвущей то, что было железом (hurts dead iron), 3) sharp is the sound (лязг). Thus, in

this poem in the original text and in the translation in total there are at least 27 units of language, marked by objectifying personal meaning and 18 language units (67 %) form 9 pairs of compliances close in vocabulary.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, we note that the poetics by Joseph Brodsky, in general, is an example of metapoetics, in the sense that the interpretation of the text becomes a search for proliferating sources belonging to different linguistic cultures and eras. One would think, diverse range of aesthetic patterns must inevitably lead to the disintegration of the integrity of the poetic system, but this does not happen, in contrast, the poetics by Brodsky demonstrates rare completeness and maybe if it is not particularly harmony, but the inner conditionality of its constituent elements. The analysis of correlation of semantic schemes of original text and the translation of the poem by J. Brodsky proves the relations of isomorphism (the identity of the form of original text and self-translation, where the form means formal-explicable personal meaning, according to the method by V. A. Pishchalnikova).

<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted that the original and translated text of the poem are given here for educational and academic purposes only. The copyrights on these texts belong to J. Brodsky.

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## **К вопросу о реконструкции доминантного смысла поэтического текста в ситуации авторского перевода: deskриптивный подход в переводоведении**

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*В данной статье мы описываем попытку применения концепции доминантного смысла В.А. Пищальниковой для deskриптивного подхода к изучению взаимоотношений между художественным поэтическим текстом и его авторским переводом на примере авторских переводов И. Бродского. В.А. Пищальникова прямо указывает на необходимость разработки теории перевода на основе концептуального анализа, «когда содержание текста представляется как функциональное поле смысла, а не речевая актуализация семантического поля какой-либо лексемы, т.е. следует изучать взаимоотношение компонентов доминантного смысла текста, представленного в разных лексемах, как правило, не реализующих некоего абстрактного системного значения, а фиксирующих актуальные субъективные авторские смыслы с помощью конвенциональных единиц». Значительная часть реконструированных нами личностных смыслов поэтических текстов И. Бродского представляют собой эстетизированные эмоции. Предложенная Пищальниковой методика позволяет представить когнитивную структуру каждого художественного текста как набор когнитивных признаков (включая отношения между этими признаками). Анализ соотношения смысловых схем оригиналов и авторских переводов текстов исследованного нами стихотворения И. Бродского указал на присутствие отношений изоморфизма (тождество формы оригинала и авторского перевода, где под формой понимается формально-эксплицируемый личностный смысл, выделяемый по методике В.А. Пищальниковой).*

*Ключевые слова: изоморфизм, теория перевода, эквивалентность, психолингвистика, художественный перевод, художественный текст.*

*Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.*

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