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Factors Influencing Translation within the Framework of Language Contacts: on the Interaction between the Russian and Chinese Languages

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This paper sheds some light upon the factors influencing the process of translation within the framework of language contacts. The authors describe the notion of translation relativity; describe some changes in the Chinese language, which were caused by the process of interaction with the Russian language.

Keywords: translation, translation relativity, language contact, interaction of languages, Chinese, Russian, linguistics.

Relativity of Translation

Identity is an epistemic goal of translation. As we wrote in one of our previous articles, translation is supposed to search for identity between different languages and cultures (Sokolovsky, 2010). G.D. Voskoboinik points out: "identity is an ideal, absolute goal of the translator`s activity, which is imposed by one of the basic philosophical principles of intellectual and practical activity operating at the level of subconsciousness" (Voskoboinik, 2007: 43). I. Levy reveals a similar point of view: "Fidelity of translation", just like truthfulness of a picture or plausibility of motivations – all are reflections of one common category, which can be determined as a gnosiologically generic category"(Levy, 1974: 47).

Nowadays the conception of correlation between the original text and translated text focusing its attention on the relativity of translation as the main principle is considered to be a more preferable choice for most scholars (Alexeeva, 2004: 133-134; Tulenev, 2004: 18-23; Voskoboinik, 2004: 6; 26). We believe that the idea of relativity of translation is a naturally determined result of searching for solutions to the problem of translation identity. It is well known that even ancient Romans used to say: «medio tutissimus ibis» – the middle road is the safest one, and Chinese Confucius wrote: "the inviolable middle is the highest virtue of all, but it has been quite rare among people for a long time" (Komissarov, 1976: 46).

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Similarly, A. Wezbicka rises a question about the correctness of the initial thesis concerning translatability \ untranslatability: "A correctly formulated question should not be "Can the sense be translated from one language into another" and should actually be "To what extent it can be translated" or even differently "To what extent languages are determined by the biology of humans and to what extent by our culture? (Wezbicka, 2011). A. Pym and H. Turk also regard translatability as a "dynamic category" (Pym et al., 2001), which lies in the middle between conceptions of total untranslatability and total translatability. They suppose that the category of translatability should be regarded as a dynamic notion, since, on the one hand, the idea of total translatability is nonsense, because of objectively difficult texts for translation, and, on the other hand, the idea of total untranslatability contradicts the practice of translation. Here the scientists write: "even if something can not be translated right here and right now in a particular situation, however it can be translated in other place and time, in the past or the future state of the target language and the target culture (Pym et al., 2001: 276). In order to illustrate the dynamics of translation we shall refer to the words of a famous Spanish philosopher José *Ortega* y *Gasset*: "I wanted to stress the poverty of translation, define its difficulties, its impossibility, but the only reason I did it for is not to stop, but to search for the brilliance of the art of translation…" (Nelyubin, 2006: 158).

In the current paper we cannot but agree with those who support the conception of translation relativity. It is apparent that interlingual translation does exist and there is a part in the original and a part in the translation which are identical (the fact that these parts are almost never equal to 100 % is a different story). This thesis corresponds to the words of V.N. Komissarov: "…any original text can be considered to be untranslatable due to the lack of absolute identity with the translation and can be considered to be translatable since we can create its functional analogue in the translation language and can convey any part of the original content, the part which a translator regards as an important one for the current act of interlingual communication…" (Komissarov, 1976: 15). Thus, a more fruitful way to look at the relationship between the original text and the translation text lies not in the matter of translatability or untranslatability, but in the **limits of translatability** (Catford, 2004: 179-198).

Factors Influencing Translation

The conception of relative translatability and the conception of total translatability are separated by a number of factors, which have their impact on the process and result of translation. Its nature, according to E. Nida, is determined by two main reasons: human language and human culture. This position is actually supported by A. D. Shveitser: "One should bear in mind that translation is not just a recoding of a source text into a target one, it is not just a mere change of the language code, but it is also a shift in orientation, a new orientation for a new reader, not only linguistic, but also a cultural adaptation" (Sveitser, 1987: 4).

Factors influencing translation identity demand close scrutiny. For example, the natural asymmetry of the form and the content in different languages is one of such factors. A Chinese researcher Xu Yuanchong points out that "the problem of identity and difference is a feature of any language, but the translator deals with at least two languages simultaneously, which poses an additional dilemma…." (Xu, 2006: 27). Describing linguistic paradoxes, complicating the process of translation E. Nida states the following: "Possibly, among all language paradoxes, the one we realize worse than others is the tendency of language to construct paralogisms, i.e. the fact

that the language non only reflects the outer reality, but also distorts it. For instance, we use the words "sunrise" and "sunset" to describe the motion of the sun across the sky, however nowadays we actually know that the sun does not "rise" and does not "set" and it is the Earth which goes round its terrestrial axis" (Nida, 2001: 6). Significant attention is given to this issue by the well known scholars E. Sapir and B.L. Whorf (Sapir, 1965; 17).

A separate aspect of the linguistic problems of translation is the problem of understanding of the message. A common place of the theory of information states that information, when transmitted via some channel, is always characterized by a certain extent of entropy, which denotes "a measure of information ambiguity (uncertainty)" (Kolmogorov, 1987: 35). The higher entropy in the message the more information is lost in the course of interaction. It is well known that there is no type of communication, where there would be no information loss. "Even when discussing an issue relating to the domain of their professional interest, specialists (professionals) comprehend not more than 80 % of information (Sdobnikov et al., 2006: 120). In order to eliminate this information loss and establish an effective channel of communication human language has a tendency to create messages with 50 % information redundancy, which operates as a safety "air-bag" to prevent communicative failures (Nida, 2004: 132). Here, we believe, an important point is to separate two kinds of reasons, which cause information loss: 1) information distortion caused by objective circumstances (e.g. a conversation over the telephone partially complicates the act of communication, since interlocutors have no visual source of information and all information is delivered only by the auditory channel), 2) limited comprehension (understanding) of the message, caused by subjective reasons, personal experience (e.g. a schoolboy will face difficulties in the

understanding of a doctoral dissertation, the vast majority of information will not be acquired). A.V. Nemirovskaya divides such factors in subjective and objective ones. The first displays itself, for instance, as insufficient language competence, the second can be revealed as discrepancies in cognitive schemes of the author and the translator (Nemirovskaya, 2007: 80).

Let us have a look at the cultural factors, which complicate the process of translation. A.L Semenov points out that "the quality of translation is usually determined by the depth of knowledge of the translator when dealing with translational concordances and discrepancies in the context. However, it is the context, which quite often causes difficulties in understanding by **different cultures**» (Semenov, 2005: 32). Li Heqing and his colleagues assume that a wide range of scientific works on the linguistic-cultural approach to translation emerged in the world from the beginning of 90-s (Li et al., 2005: 129). According to D. Katan, culture is not just "a mere factor, influencing communication, but an ambience forming any type of communication between people" (Katan, 2004: 241). A similar idea belongs to S. Bassnett, who believes that "translation always takes place in some kind of surrounding, not in a vacuum, so the translator is influenced not only by linguistic factors, but also by non-linguistic ones (extra textual)" (Bassnett, 2001: 123). T.A. Kazakova considers that folkloric and mythological contexts are most fruitful and challenging domains for a linguistic researcher of translation: "here we often face a need for cultural adaptation, i.e. adaptation of the target language for the transmission of culturally marked information" (Kazakova, 2006: 123). The need for such an adaptation is, apparently, described in one of the situations, narrated by a famous Russian sinologist (professor of Irkutsk State Linguistic University at present) Oleg M. Gotlib[1]. About 10 years ago he was performing

consecutive oral translation Russian to Chinese at a very important meeting between Russian and Chinese governors (officials). The Chinese guests made a wonderful speech, which contained a wish referring to the whole Russian Far East, which according to the Chinese guests of honor will develop, will be prosperous and will "fly high in the sky just like a dragon" (象龙似的飞起来). Oleg M. Gotlib points out that a formal correspondence in this translation is not the best choice, since the image of a dragon as a creature is quite different in the Russian and Chinese culture. The implicit information underlying this lexical unit in Chinese (龙 – dragon) has more positive associations, and very few negative connotations, whereas the Russian word "дракон" often denotes a terrifying three-headed creature, which represents a great hazard for any living human being. This example totally outlines the statement by E. Nida, who formulated main requirements for a professional translator: "he must understand not only the obvious content of the message, but also the subtleties of meaning, emotive values of words, and stylistic features which determine "the flavor and feel" of the message..." (Nida, 2001: 57). A Russian researcher E. G. Tareva on her lectures[2] also stresses the inadmissibility of mistakes when translating the socio-cultural code of a message.

Russian Translated into Chinese: Consequences of the Interaction

The process of translation can be viewed as a process of interaction between languages, or as a language contact (since the translator is always "in the middle", he\she has to switch between two (or even more) linguistic codes). Usage of two languages is a bilingualism, which we can split in two aspects: a natural bilingualism, i.e. proficiency in two languages, determined by a language ambience (in the family or people in neighborhood are used to speaking two languages); an artificial bilingualism (foreign language teachers, linguists, translators, interpreters, copywriters, etc.). The latter kind of bilingualism we suggest to call "a culturally imported bilingualism". Here we want to dwell upon the translation as a language contact and consequences of this kind of interaction, when a substantial number of Russian written works were translated into Chinese in the 20th century.

Study of language contacts is a special trend in modern linguistics. Some scholars even talk about "linguistics of language contacts" or "contact linguistics" (Rozenzveig, 1972: 10). It is well known that U. Weinreich is one of the founders of this conception. His monograph "Languages in Contact" (written in 1953) and his other works provided some guiding lines for the development of contact linguistics. The term "language contact" was suggested by a French linguist A. Martine at the beginning of the 50-s. (Rozenzveig, 1972: 15). U. Weinreich gives the following definition of the notion: "two or more languages are in a contact, when one and the same person uses them one after another" (Weinreich, 1953: 1). Here he also points out that two contacting languages often try to penetrate in each other, and linguistic norms of one of the languages start taking traits of the other language. This kind of interaction is a type of language interference. This kind of interference is able to leave significant traces on certain levels of the language system: phonetics, lexicology and even grammar. Translation as a type of language contact willingly or unwillingly reveals great impact on the language system in the vast majority of countries. For the most part nowadays it is provided by the means of publishing houses, information agencies, television, the Internet and all other possible types of mass media.

The relationship of the Russian and Chinese languages for the past century is a vivid example of this kind of impact. Thus, a famous Chinese

linguist Wang Li (王力) points out that the average sentence in Chinese became longer, than it had been before the 20th century (Li, 1985). The Russian language (compared to Chinese) quite often contains long detailed sentences. In the first half of the 20th century this feature of the Russian language was loaned by Chinese translators of the works of V. Lenin, M. Gorky and works of other Soviet outstanding people.

Translations of political and literary texts became the main channel for this "linguistic borrow-loan" interaction. Following the mottoes of Sun Yatsen "Russia – is a teacher" (以俄为师) and Mao Zedong "USSR is our best friend, we ought to learn from them" (苏联共 产党就是我们的最好的先生，我们必须向他们学习) the young Chinese republic started to borrow knowledge of the "Big Brother" over the translated literature. According to the Central People`s Government Committee (中央人民政府出版总署) only within three years from the foundation of the People`s Republic of China (1949) there were about 3131 books translated from Russian into Chinese. At those years the circulation of translated works of Lenin and Stalin amounted to 2 722 500 copies (Laidi, 2007: 23). The translation of literary texts, motion pictures, songs opened a broad channel for new changes in the Chinese language.

The grammar construction of the Russian language "если…. то…" (if…, then…..), expressing hypothetical relationship as a comparison is found in the Chinese language in the translated works of V. Lenin for the first time in 1929. Zhao Kecheng (赵克诚) and Xu Laidi (徐来娣) assume that Chinese had a sufficient amount of linguistic means to express this kind of relation, however the translators suggested a new grammar construction "如果…那么…". Mao Zedong borrowed this grammar cliché from the translated works of V. Lenin and started to use it in his writings of 1935-1937 years, and in 1939

this structure was used in the original literary text of Ni Huanzhi (倪焕之) by Ye Shaojun (叶绍钧), a founder of Literary Research Association (文学研究会). The language interference in this case is so strong, that modern citizens of China do not realize that they use an originally Russian grammar cliché in their everyday speech. The same story happened with the grammar "如此…以至 …", which was originally in Russian "так…что…", or "такой…. что…..". Once it appeared in the translated works of V. Lenin, it "immigrated" to the main grammar inventory of the Chinese language. Owing to the work of translators, the vocabulary of Russian and Chinese became more rich in loan words. For instance, a well known Russian "женьшень" (ginseng) originated from the Chinese "人参", which was firstly mentioned in the works of a Russian Translator N.G. Spafary, who worked at the Russian embassy in 1675 in China.

The Russian language became the first European language to translate works on the history of China. However, the history shows us that the Chinese are more active at translating Russian texts of all types: there are more than one thousand words in modern Chinese, which were loaned from Russian, whereas the amount of words in Russian borrowed from Chinese is less than a hundred. Also we need to stress that at the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21 century English took over Russian in the activity of translators in China, which will certainly result in new lexical and possibly grammar shifts in modern Chinese.

Conclusion

To sum up, we need to highlight the fact that the factors influencing the process of translation in the course of time result in new changes in the target language. The changes, on the one hand, reflect geopolitical preferences of a particular nation in this or that period of time, on the other

hand, linguistically they act as precious material, which scholars should put under close scrutiny. We believe that study of the consequences of language contacts will bring more fruitful results on the question: how does a language operate in our mind?

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1. This illustration was presented by O.M. Gottlieb in his report "Language and Culture" delivered at the scientific conference "Dialog of Cultures is Our Profession", which was held in April 2003 in Krasnoyarsk State University (a part of Siberian Federal University at present).

2. A professor of the linguistic didactics chair of Moscow State Linguistic University, Doctor of Pedagogical Sciences E.G. Tareva delivered a series of lectures named "Modern Translator`s Training: Competence Approach" (Siberian Federal University, Krasnoyarsk, March 2008).

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Факторы, влияющие на перевод
в контексте языковых контактов:
к вопросу о взаимодействии между русским
и китайским языками

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Настоящая статья описывает факторы, влияющие на процесс перевода в аспекте языковых контактов. Авторы описывают понятие относительности перевода, а также некоторые изменения в системе китайского языка, обусловленные процессом взаимодействия с русским языком.

Ключевые слова: перевод, относительность перевода, языковой контакт, взаимодействие языков, китайский, русский, лингвистика.