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## **Isomorphism as a Condition for Translation Within the Framework of the Bilateralism of Language Sign (the Case-Study of Self-Translated Works of I. Brodsky)**

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*The article dwells upon the notion of isomorphism and its relationship with the phenomenon of self-translation. The author tries to apply some formal criteria for the comparison of the original text and a self-translation by I. Brodsky.*

*Keywords: isomorphism, translation, self-translation, Brodsky, language sign.*

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### **Point**

Nowadays the principle of isomorphism reached the domain of contrastive linguistics and translation theory in particular. Moreover isomorphism claims for its own place among such general notions of translation theory as equivalence, adequacy, fidelity, identity. A number of recent profound scientific articles and monographs are devoted to this term (Nida 1996; Kulchitskaya 2000; Kazakova 2002; Sokolovsky, Razumovskaya 2011).

Epistemologists generally agree that isomorphism is “a relation of two systems, based on the established one-to-one (bidirectional) correspondence between them. The relation of isomorphism is reflexive, symmetric and transitive” (Kondakov 1975: 191). Being a logical figure by nature, isomorphism is easily extended to diverse scientific branches:

chemistry, physics, psychology, neuro-linguistic programming, biology and so on. Each science sets a certain peculiarity for the universal category of isomorphism. Based on the definition of isomorphism, the following basic concepts serve as the universal hyponymic categories and characteristics of isomorphism: system, structure, element, form, content and reflexivity, transitivity, symmetry.

Now we shall give brief descriptions of these notions. System (from the Latin *systema*) is defined as “an assemblage of objects, real or abstract, comprising a whole with each and every element interacting or related to another one” (Kondakov 1975: 511). Since the phenomenon of isomorphism deals with structurally correspondent relations between two or more systems, another term we need to examine is *structure*. Structure is defined as

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“a formal organization of an object; a firm set of connections between elements of a system” (Kondakov 1975: 572). Any system is made up of elements, therefore the notion of element is also worth of our attention. Element (also called a member) is “an object contained in a certain set (or more generally a class)” (Kondakov 1975: 602). Now we proceed to the concepts of *form* and *content*. Form is defined as “the external shape, appearance, configuration of an object, in contrast to the matter of content or substance of which it is composed” (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Philosophy 1989: 105). Content is defined as “a category denoting the internal basis of an object; an existing substantial force serving as a source of its development” (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Philosophy 1989: 595).

Next we need to inquire into the basic characteristics of isomorphism. As I have already pointed out above, the relation of isomorphism is characterized by *reflexivity*, *transitivity* and *symmetry*. Reflexivity is defined as a “relation such that it holds between an element and itself” (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Philosophy 1989: 115). Now we dwell on the notion of transitivity, which can take place between two or more objects on the condition that “relations between A and B and B and C result in a relation between A and C” (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Philosophy 1989: 205). Symmetry is defined as “a characteristic feature of geometrical shapes, systems, equations, and other real or conceptual objects – typically, in which one half of the object appears to be a reflection of the other half” (Encyclopedic Dictionary of Philosophy 1989: 301).

Having examined these isomorphism-related terms, now we shall consider the category of isomorphism extended to the domains of linguistics and translation theory.

Jerzy Kurylowicz was the pioneer, who extrapolated the logical category of isomorphism

into linguistics and proposed to use the term of isomorphism within the field of linguistics. He applied this term to the structural analogies, which exist between sound and semantic units of the language. Both kinds of linguistic units represent a hierarchic structure with a compulsory central element: the vowel for a syllable and the predicate for a sentence and marginal, optional elements: the consonant for the first unit and other sentence members for the second (Kurylowicz 1962: 21). His idea of the structural parallelism was supported by many linguists. Louis Hjelmslev wrote: “It turns out that the two sides (the planes) of language have completely analogous categorical structure, a discovery that seems to us of far-reaching significance for an understanding of the structural principle of a language or in general the essence of a semiotic” (Anderson: electronic resource).

E. Nida is believed to be the first person to dwell upon the productivity of isomorphism for translation theory (Nida 1982; 1996; 2001; 2004). In particular L. V. Kulchitskaya (Kulchitskaya 2000: 101) regards him as a pioneer in this field. Here she points out that the term “isomorphism” applies to relationships as well as to isomorphic structures themselves, besides in some cases in order to separate the type of relationship and structures the latter are called “isomorphs”. Translation theory became a “fertile ground” for the category of isomorphism, the significance of which is determined by the epistemological status of translation studies. Translation involves the creation of a secondary text the structural landmark of which is the structure of the primary text. In other words, this is a “transformation, which preserves information” (Krakowski: electronic resource). Applicability of this category for the theory of translation can be explained by the fact that there are voice messages are structured utterances. Confirmation of this idea is found in the work

by L. A. Chernyakhovskaya: "... in spite of diversity of the specific content of human speech, its organization and development of thought contain certain patterns caused, probably, by the unity of human categories of thought. Thanks to these laws of the content, whatever it is, it has a definite structure" (Chernyakhovskaya 1976: 6). In our paper we provide the following definition of isomorphism in translation: "the relationship of the structural identity between the original text, and a translated text, defined at a certain language level, expressed by certain language features (resources) (Sokolovsky, Razumovskaya 2011: 82).

Proceeding to the specificity of self-translation, it should be noted that this type of translation implies that a source text is translated into a target text by the writer of the source text. Self-translation has been known for a long time, but little attention has been given to this issue. Tradition has it that literary translation uses a translator as a collaborator of the original artwork, the author is regarded to be his opponent in a tight contest to create a work of art, which will perform an aesthetic function. Self-translation is not a sufficiently widespread practice of literary translation, in this regard; there are few scientific works on this subject. On the one hand, self-translation is close to bilingualism, since the author is supposed to know two languages, but on the other hand, self-translation is associated with literary translation, as it implies creativity.

In the case of self-translation the author decides to translate a certain text by himself, without any assistance of professional translators. Typically, an author not only has good knowledge of a second language already, but also has some experience and skills of literary translation. As a result he receives a new work, which, in comparison with the original, has a number of features imposed by both grammatical

characteristics of the second language and a new "cultural-historical background", without which the creation of the work in a foreign language is a loss of its aesthetic value. This translation is traditionally referred to as self-translation and it differs from the usual professional-literary translation so that it can combine completely new stylistic techniques and tools – trails, figures of speech, idiomatically used lexical items, as well as images, shades of meaning and even meanings, which were not displayed in the original.

We cannot, but mention that self-translation has at least one evident advantage over the regular type of translation. This advantage becomes clear from the following quotation by E. Nida: "Some people imagine that the greatest problem in translating is to find the right words and constructions in the receptor or target language. On the contrary, the most difficult task for the translator is to understand thoroughly the designative and associative meanings of the text to be translated" (Nida 2001: 5-6). That is the translator in this situation is always able to understand thoroughly the meaning of what is written in the original. Naturally, he (or she) comes across the same obstacles as a usual translator, when realizing objective difficulties of finding the "right words" in a translation, the words which will serve as an equivalent (i.e. a self-translator also has to resolve cognitive dissonance). Virtually it means that the content (one of two sides of language sign according to Ferdinand de Saussure) is known to such a translator, i.e. he or she has no need to "unpack" the original message in order to see "what is inside". Thus, self-translation within the framework of language bilateralism stands aside from all other types of translation.

### Example

In this section of our article we publish a table which compares the original text and a

translated text through a number of parameters. The material for our research is a well-known poem by I. Brodsky “In Memory of My Father” (the Russian original and self-translation in English). In this comparative table we made an attempt to detect a relationship of isomorphism at a formal language level.

Here we see that from the formal isomorphic point of view we have a number of isomorphic features between the original text and its translation: 1) number of lines and poetic form; 2) corresponding language means used in the original and in the translation, e.g. metaphor is translated by a metaphor and alliteration by alliteration.

	Original	Self-translation
1. Time of creation	1989	1989
2. Title	Памяти отца: Австралия	In Memory of My Father: Australia – the original has no possessive pronoun “My”, which grants additional semantic load
3. Number of lines	16	16
4. Number of strophes	3	3
5. Poetic Form	Rhyme AB, AB, ABC, AB, AB	Rhyme AB, AB, ABC, AB, AB
6. Number of words in a line (on average)	6	8,5
7. Number of words in one strophe	1 strophe=62, 2 strophe =19, 3 strophe =10	1 strophe =93, 2 strophe =30, 3 strophe =12
8. Total number of words	91	135
9. Number of syllables in a line (on average)	11,2	12,4
10. Number of syllables in a strophe	1 строфа=127, 2 строфа=39, 3 строфа=14	1 строфа=137, 2 строфа=47, 3 строфа=15
11. Total number of syllables	180	199
12. Phonostylistic means: а) sound repeat б) alliteration в) assonance г) sound pattern	а) климат – снимают б) ожил – жаловался – жаль – этаж; уехал – эхом; окликал – климат в) залога – голоса – монолога г) Аделаида, Аделаида	а) climate – stymied б) last – Australia; complaining – climate; Looks like – slippers – satellite в) so – echo; downtown – now; power – powder г) Adelaide! Adelaide!
13. Phonosemantic means: а) onomatopoeia б) sound symbolism	а) загремело, захлопало б) окликал и жаловался; завыло	а) rattling and crackling; pounding б) ebb and flowed; howling
14. Stylistical figures: а) metaphor б) metonymy в) allusion	а) и внезапно в трубке завыло «Аделаида, Аделаида», загремело, захлопало, точно ставень бился о стенку, готовый сорваться с петель.; с той поры, как ты обернулся дымом б) мягкий пепел (покойный отец) в) Аделаида, Аделаида (название столицы штата Южная Австралия)	а) And at once the receiver burst into howling “Adelaide! Adelaide!” – into rattling and crackling, as if a shutter, ripped off his hinges, were pounding the wall with inhuman power.; since you formed a cloud above a chimney б) silky powder в) Adelaide! Adelaide!

### Conclusion

No doubt, the notion of isomorphism needs further investigation. The presented analysis contains only most general guidelines, which

we shall try to make more precise in our further articles. Moreover, a special issue for research is a relationship between isomorphism in translation and its specificity in self-translation.

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**Изоморфизм как условие перевода  
в аспекте билатеральности языкового знака  
(на примере автопереводов И. Бродского)**

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*В настоящей статье кратко освещается понятие переводческого изоморфизма в его взаимосвязи с автопереводом. Автор предпринимает попытку использовать определённые формальные критерии для сравнения оригинального текста и автоперевода, выполненного И. Бродским.*

*Ключевые слова: изоморфизм, перевод, автоперевод, Бродский, языковой знак.*

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