

УДК 81

Modeling Translating as a Dynamic Process: Autopoietic Framework

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Received 24.11.2013, received in revised form 03.12.2013, accepted 15.01.2014

The paper focuses on different approaches to modeling translation process. It argues that those models which have been developed within conventional translation theory as well as some contemporary approaches fail to unveil the very dynamics of translating. In order to construct an activity-focused model which algorithmizes the steps made by a translator when effecting translation and accounts for his/her translation-related choices one may consider adopting the concepts and foundations of the theory of autopoiesis. This methodological framework enables the researcher to construct a translation model with a focus on the translator whose ability to prioritize and choose between various factors is key for translation process. These arguments are further supported by a brief analysis of several translations of one text.

Keywords: translation models, autopoiesis, autopoietic system, structure of the autopoietic system, adaptive behavior, recursive steps.

1. Introduction

One of the long-standing challenges of translation studies has been the task of algorithmizing translation process and devising a model which would have sufficient prognostic potential to account for translators' divergent choices given similar/identical contexts.

Conventional translation theory as well as some contemporary approaches within the framework of translation studies view the mechanism of translation as a system of transformations on various language tiers which result in a translated version of the text which is compatible (among commonly employed terms are *equivalent* or *adequate* translation) with the original (see works by

V.N. Komissarov, Ja.I. Rezker, L.K. Latyushev, etc.).

Many popular translation models are aimed at identifying a hierarchy of overlapping and differentiating features in the original and the translation. The situational-denotative model proposed by I.I. Revzin and V.U. Rozentsveig [17] views translation as a series of cognitive transformations: a sequence of language units (words) -> an arrangement of denotates (objects) with a focus on their relations (situation) -> recoding this situation in a different language. Alternatively, the semantic translation model (J. Catford [2]) focuses on analyzing the semantics of language units. This analysis results in a semantic map featuring the number and

the arrangement of the smallest semantic units (semes). These findings are employed when deciding which foreign word or word combination offers an identical or similar semantic structure. It is not critical to find a word which features identical semantics: in some cases this job proves futile. It is crucial that semantic structures are relatively close (as in a popular example by V.N. Komissarov: *студент* – *student*, where the number of semes present is different, though these differences are insignificant and can't prevent us from employing *student* as an equivalent of *студент* in an English translation of the text). Similar principles lay the foundation for other translation models: transformational model based on the premises of the generative grammar by N. Chomsky [4], three-phase model by O. Kade [7], interpretational model by D. Seleskovitch [19] and M. Lederer [12], correlative model described by J.I. Rezker [18], A.V. Fedorov [5], L.S. Barchudarov [1], V. Koller [10], etc.

Even such a superficial overview of approaches to modeling translating suggests that conventional translation models focus on individual practical steps, relevant when translating, still they shouldn't be seen as tools to model translating as a complex activity. Besides, they have limited prognostic potential and can hardly be employed when algorithmizing translator's work. On the contrary they are meant to classify and interpret those translation choices which have already been made. A.N. Kryukov suggests, that "contrastive paradigm is lagging behind practical translation. This relates to the fact that contrastive paradigm is based on the assumption that the text of translation is equivalent to the original. In other words, the equivalence of two texts is merely stated rather than seen as a scientific concern" (*Translated by the author.* – K.K.) / «Сопоставительная парадигма обрекает построенную в ее рамках теорию на роль вечно идущей «в

хвосте» практики перевода. Дело в том, что сопоставительная парадигма исходит... из презумпции эквивалентности текста перевода тексту оригинала, т.е. эквивалентность текстов постулируется, но не проблематизируется и не может проблематизироваться» [11, p. 50].

Therefore, even though this approach is beneficial when training and coaching as these operations can be implanted into the minds of trainees and developed into skills to be applied in translation practice, it is certainly a simplified vision of the translation process. These models turn translating which is a continuous activity into a number of operations. However, when performing real-life translating, these operations are commonly arranged in a complex sequence and this arrangement is by no means chaotic. In other words, every new step a translator makes is navigated by such factors as intention (motive), goal, characteristics of recipient(s), features of the text, translator's background and experience, etc.

These factors cannot be reflected in structural models. As a result, substitutional-transformational approach appears to be irrelevant when a researcher aims to unveil and interpret the differences between several translations of the same work (for instance, various translations of poetic verses as with Shakespeare's sonnets):

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Thou blind fool, Love, what dost thou to mine eyes,
That they behold, and see not what they see
They know what beauty is, see where it lies,
Yet what the best is take the worst to be.
If eyes corrupt by over-partial looks
Be anchor'd in the bay where all men ride,
Why of eyes' falsehood hast thou forged hooks,
Whereto the judgment of my heart is tied?
Why should my heart think that a several plot
Which my heart knows the wide world's common
place?
Or mine eyes seeing this, say this is not,

To put fair truth upon so foul a face?
In things right true my heart and eyes have erred,
And to this false plague are they now transferr'd.

Перевод С.Я. Маршака

Любовь слепа и нас лишает глаз.
Не вижу я того, что вижу ясно.
Я видел красоту, но каждый раз
Понять не мог – что дурно, что прекрасно.
И если взгляды сердце завели
И якорь бросили в такие воды,
Где многие проходят корабли, –
Зачем ему ты не даешь свободы?
Как сердцу моему проезжий двор
Казаться мог усадьбою счастливой?
Но все, что видел, отрицал мой взор,
Подкрашивая правдой облик лживый.
Правдивый свет мне заменила тьма.

Перевод М. Чайковского

Слепой Амур, что сделал ты со мной?
Гляжу и вижу то, чего не вижу.
Ведь знаю, что зовется красотой,
Но высшая мне чудится всех ниже.
Когда глаза в тенетах взора страсти
Должны пристать к приюту всех людей,
Зачем они, твоей подавшись власти,
Связали сердце с лживостью твоей?
Зачем я должен видеть чудеса
В том, что в глазах у света заурядно?
Зачем в чертах немилостивого лица
Рассудку вопреки мне все отрадно?
Мой взгляд и сердце в правде заблуждались
И в этот омут лжи теперь попались.

Перевод Н. Гербеля

Слепой и злой Амур, что сделал ты с глазами
Моими, что они, глядя, не видят сами,
На что глядят? Они толк знают в красоте,
А станут выбирать — блуждают в темноте.
Когда глаза мои, подкупленные взором
Твоим, вошли в залив, куда все мчатся хором,

Зачем из лживых глаз ты сделала крючок,
На жало чье попал я, словно червячок?
Зачем я должен то считать необычайным,
Что в брэнном мире всем считается случайным,
А бедные глаза, не смея отрицать,
Противное красе красою называть?
И так ошиблись глаз и сердце в достоверном —
И рок их приковал к достоинствам неверным.

Substitutional-transformational approach can also prove futile when a researcher aims to identify and account for translation flaws and imperfections or assess how well the translation reflects culture-specific context. When stating such research problems the research object can't be reduced to the text translated and the text of the translation, as translation process incorporates at least one more domain – that is the cognitive system of a translator, which facilitates transformation of one text into another (the contact of two languages and cultures). U. Weinreich argues that it is the homo loquens who enables the contact of languages [22].

2. Modeling translating as a dynamic process

When focusing on comprehensive modeling of the activity of a translator, a researcher typically opts for a psycholinguistic approach, as this framework offers those research tools which are indispensable in constructing such models and in the analysis of the translation-related decisions. Besides, psycholinguistics offers a variety of approaches to empirical verification of hypotheses and scholastic models as well as tools to construct a theoretical model (as psycholinguistics brags a wide range of models meant to outline and interpret speech production and comprehension patterns). Psycholinguistics (as it is viewed in the Russian tradition) focuses on the senses (meanings) emerging in the cognition of an individual both in monolingual and

bilingual verbal interaction. When constructing psycholinguistic models it is common practice with Russia-based scientists to consider the following aspects of speech production: motive, goal, cognitive characteristics of communicants, their worldviews and verbal aptitudes, to name just a few. Such models are further verified in various psycholinguistic experiments, which serve as a workable tool to accumulate data on how different people tend to translate from one language into another, what strategies they employ and whether there are apparent discrepancies in their outputs (see works by A.N. Novikov, N.N. Nesterova, T.G. Pshenkina, theses by E.A. Volokhova, I.G. Proskurin and others).

Most translation models which focus on translator's choices language- and culture-wise are labeled activity-focused. However, it should be mentioned that these models are built upon different foundations and can be roughly compartmentalized into three clusters: (1) models which give prominence to the mechanism of probabilistic prognostication (G.V. Chernov [3]; A.F. Shiryayev [20], etc.); (2) models which focus on translating as complex activity (A.N. Kryukov [11]; N.L. Galeeva [6], etc.); (3) models which focus on the cognitive and linguistic aptitude of a translator/interpreter (T.G. Pshenkina [16], etc.).

An alternative vision of translation is featured in the works by I.E. Klyukanov [8; 9]. The researcher views translation as a prerequisite for any communication. This approach stems from the fact that any communication implies transformation and reconceptualization of signs (from the perspective of semiotics). Hence translation is viewed as continuous approximation between the object and the interpretant which aims to become identical with the object through sign transformation.

These approaches are certainly very promising when the research object lies in modeling the very activity of a translator/

interpreter. However, most of them fail to grasp the immanent dynamics of translation process. Perhaps, this dynamic can be reflected in a translation model built upon the foundations of **autopoiesis**. This methodology was first developed by H. Maturana and Fr. Varela [13; 14; 15, etc.] as a part of their large-scale research of biological species. Since then it has transgressed the domain of biology and has been successfully adopted to explain the evolution and functioning of various systems (in medical science, in computer modeling and robotics, in social sciences, in psychology, in linguistics, etc.).

There have been some attempts to employ autopoiesis as the methodological foundations for modeling inter-personal communication. With translating viewed as a complex cross-cultural and cross-language communication, a similar approach may be applicable in modeling translation process.

Within the autopoietic framework, a translator can be viewed as an autopoietic (self-organizing and self-referential) system capable of adapting in a new, hostile environment. To ensure balance with the environment this system undertakes a number of steps to coordinate its own structure with the structure of the environment, however each step it makes results in a certain transformation taking place in the environment whose structure and properties are determined by the structure and properties of the autopoietic system. This means that it is impossible (and irrelevant) to consider the universal environment which is perceived by every species similarly. Alternatively, species construct their own environment which is referred to by H. Maturana and Fr. Varela as the **niche** (for instance, a human being and a cat would construct different niches). Even within one biological kind different beings form different niches. This implies that a translator who is challenged with the job of translating

somebody's speech/text is in the position of an **observer** incapable of grasping the message to the brim (an observer invariably constructs his/her own niche (discordant with that of the author) with his idiosyncratic choice of relevant factors and hierarchy of these factors).

Within the frame of this approach a popular way of modeling translation as a dual communication act (*Fig. 1*) receives an alternative interpretation with the translator in the shoes of an observer rather than an intermediary between languages and cultures. On the other hand, he/she is also an autopoietic system constructing his/her own niche by identifying relevant factors and prioritizing them.

This dual role of a translator is reflected in his/her adaptive behavior aimed at ensuring a sufficient overlap between his/her structure and that of the author.

When a translator is challenged with the job of translating a text, he should be aware of various culture- and language-specific connotations embedded in the text as well as the speaker's personality, his/her personal experience and background. These latently featured in the text meanings trigger such cognitive processes in the translator that facilitate his/her adaptive behavior and ensure that the translated version is an accurate and linguistically-appropriate equivalent of the original. Unlike monolingual interpersonal communication in which adaptation reveals itself in the form of a response, in translating adaptation should go as far as to help the translator identify with the author of the original text. In fact, he/she

is expected to ensure such an overlap of his/her structure with that of the author as to be capable of grasping the motives of the addresser of the original.

In other words, translation can be featured as an activity incorporating a number of steps each of which is meant to get a translator closer to the message of the original text and its appropriate representation in the translation. These are **recursive**, or repetitive, **operations** which result in activating certain knowledge / experience in the translator and help him/her find an appropriate cultural component to be explicated in the translation.

The complexity of this adaptive behavior lies in the fact that a translator is to deal with two linguistic codes and two cultures which feature different components and different hierarchies of these components. Unlike a participant to a monolingual communication act a translator is expected to establish links between certain components of the language and culture referred to in the original text and the components of the language and culture to be explicated in the translated text. Needless to say, these two languages and two cultures will feature sufficient discrepancies. When effecting a translation a human intermediary will often have to search for alternative reference points in a referential situation and feature this situation from a different perspective, with the choice of words in the original and translated versions metonymically associated. A vivid example is *to sweat over one's graduation paper* in which the verb should be

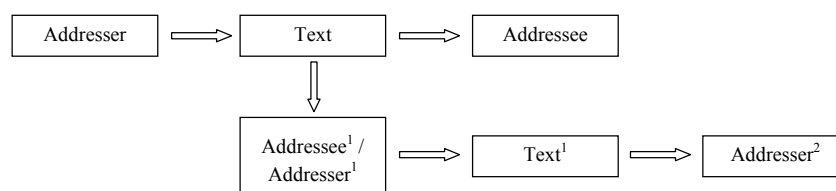


Fig. 1. Communication model of translating by A. Shveytser [21, p. 61]

reconsidered and translated as *много и усердно работать* rather than *пометь*. The use of *пометь* is not out of the equation (www.gramota.ru which is seen by many as a credible academic resource specifies similar contexts – *пометь над чертежом*, *пометь над задачей* – though they are featured towards the end of the list), still this is not a common choice with a native speaker of the Russian language. Another example is *the phone buzzed to life* which needs the translator to identify both the action (to come to life) and the accompanying sound (to buzz) implanted in the predicate of the sentence and to reflect them in the translation (for instance, *телефон ожил и зазвонил*).

The choice of the shift and the wording hinges on the translator's experience and expertise, his/her feel of the language and culture (both own and learnt) and his/her creative potential. With so many diverse factors at play the adaptive behavior of the translator can pursue various avenues and end up in unique, idiosyncratic translations of the original. Within the framework of autopoiesis this discrepancy is referred to as **the structure of an autopoietic system**. In other words, when stepping in the shoes of an intermediary translators are limited in their choice of translation strategy by their structural foundation which incorporates *his/her communication experience* (enhancing his/her awareness of standardized, clichéd uses), *his/her cognitive base* (facilitating recognition of the contents and implied references, genre and stylistic features of the text) and *his/her linguistic potential* (ensuring apt use of both languages).

Thus, when working on a translation of a text, a translator is recursively fluctuating between various factors at play (which are featured in his/her niche) attempting to attain a balance between his/her own structure and the structure of the niche. The translator's further steps are naturally determined by the hierarchy of the components of his/her niche. With the motives of the addresser

at the top of the scale, the translator focuses on grasping the message (which hinges on the structure of an autopoietic system: communication experience, cognitive base, linguistic potential). With the linguistic codes being most relevant, the translator puts specific effort into wording. With the culture-related factors weighing most heavily, he/she searches for culture-determined references attempting to fit his/her translation into the cultural context.

Each recursive step implies prioritizing factors and casting away irrelevant ones (sacrificing certain elements).

Another component indispensable in this translation model is **an observer** who is responsible for the quality control of the translation. What is unique about human beings (unlike other species) involved in various types of social interactions is their potential to step in the shoes of an observer and view their own communication patterns from the perspective of an outsider. In the context of translation this role is supported by the translator him/herself aiming to ensure the required degree of quality.

This continuous activity of a translator can be visualized in the chart to follow (Fig. 2):

To support these arguments with examples we have considered several translations of "Fire and Ice" by R. Frost, effected by professional translators as well as translation studies majors with Moscow City Teachers' Training University (Moscow, Russia).

FIRE AND ICE

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I've tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

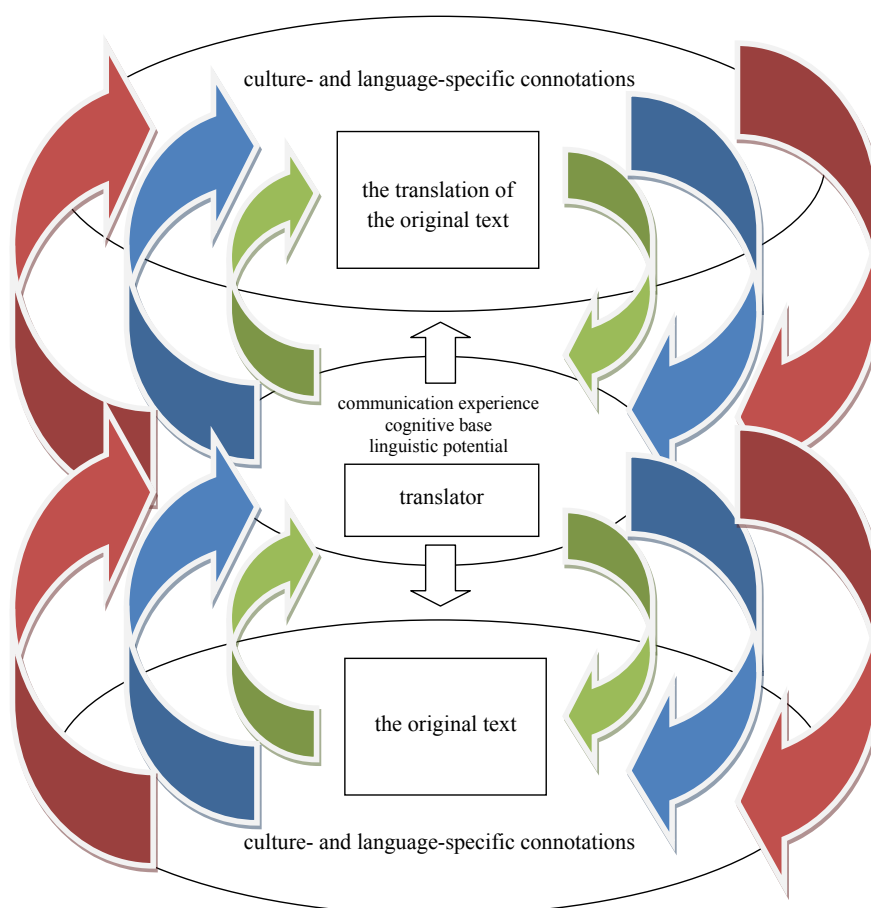


Fig. 2. Translation framework (relying on the key concepts and foundations of autopoiesis)

The choice of a poetic verse is arbitrary as we argue that the same adaptation mechanisms are at work when a translator deals in any text regardless of its structure, genre or type. When a translator is challenged with the task of translating a poetic verse, he/she attempts to unveil the message embedded in the text by the author and simultaneously determine which choices can be made to ensure its compatible translation into the Russian language.

Before we look at various translations of the verse, let us consider some of the messages embedded in the original text:

On the surface there lies a contrast between fire and ice as two opposing **natural forces** which are conventionally associated with two alternative

yet likely finales of the mankind: fire resulting in immediate and all-encompassing demise versus ice inflicting gradual and tormenting death.

On another level fire and ice serve as metaphors of **human emotions** which are further supported by explicit nominations of *desire* (associated with fire) and *hate* (associated with ice).

Yet, there is another tier for interpretation and it relates to **two visions of death** – quick and painless in case of fire and slow and torturous in case of ice.

The contrasts are reconciled at the end of the poem with an implication that we await **the same demise** no matter what. Another avenue for interpretation is that passion and indifference as two forces navigating human behavior and

interactions are also simply two roads leading to **the same cul-de-sac**.

Moreover, the final four lines are overtly ambiguous with *destruction* suggesting **two alternative interpretations**: that of the demise of the planet or the destruction of the human being unable to survive hostile treatment (this is further supported by the pronoun).

These meanings and interpretations are intertwined in the original verse and make translating this miniscule verse into Russian a tedious, even tortuous job. Recursive steps made by a translator call for certain choices: some are on the surfaces and can easily be comprehended by anybody, others are latent and require a complex, sophisticated structure of an autopoietic system (= translator) to be recognized. Let us consider some of the translations suggested by professional and student translators.

The opposition of fire and ice as two similarly destructive forces has been recognized by every translator. In fact, many translators then reevaluated the factors and focused further on linguistic code with this sole message featured throughout their version of translation.

Most student translations are lacking another opposition – that of passion and hate (and hence metaphors peppering the original text are lost) with only two exceptions (T. Popenkova: *Но испытал я вкус желанья... И ненависть, познав сполна, могу сказать...*; S. Amoyan: *Лишь раз, изведав горечь искушения... И дважды испытал страдания...*).

In fact, only two professional translators gave prominence to this two-tier message of the original (I. Kashkin: *Поскольку мне знакома страсть... То ненависти лед давно мне довелось узнать...*; T. Kazakova: *Мы так снедаемы страстями... То ненависть – все та же страсть...*). Some student translations reveal the reference to human emotions either in the first or the second parts of the verse with no

consistency in representation of both messages (M. Kravchenko: *и я, испив чашу желанья...*; E. Yarkaeva: *И мысли плещут избытком страстей...*; A. Vasilieva: *Но жизни страсть опробовав слегка...*; V. Chistyakova: *Я тот, кто страстью увлечен...*).

The ambiguity of the final part of the poem is reflected in one professional translation. Similarly to the original, I. Kashkin supports this controversy by employing a personal pronoun *меня*: *То ненависти лед давно / Мне довелось узнать. / И, в сущности, не все ль равно, / Как пропадать.*

For students translators rhyme and rhythm serve as a framework steering them along the translation helping them to hold on to some tangible benchmarks (V. Chistyakova: *Но если миру дважды пасть, / Мне злобы хватит, и тогда / Я льду отдал бы эту власть / Вот это – да! / Вот это – страсть*).

In some cases logical links and sentence structure are sacrificed to fit into the framework of rhyme. Sometimes the text is intentionally extended to embrace the intended message (K. Grinenko: 19 lines vs. 9 lines in the original; M. Kravchenko: longer 8/9-word lines).

The choices made by translators are summarized in the table to follow (Table 1):

3. Conclusion

The findings of this curtailed analysis suggest the translation is always a choice between different options, between different scenarios. Autopoiesis offers a tool to analyze and interpret these choices without merely criticizing one translator's work and favoring another's. It helps explain choices through the analysis of the adaptive behavior of the translator and his structure (communication experience, cognitive base, linguistic potential).

Moreover, different elements of this dynamic process can be further verified in a series of

Table 1. Translation-related choices made by professional translators and Translation Studies majors

Criteria	Professional translators					Translation Studies majors						
	M. Zenkevich	V. Vasiliev	I. Kashkin	S. Stepanov	T. Kazakova	M. Kravchenko	E. Yarkaeva	A. Vasilieva	S. Amoyan	V. Chistyakova	T. Popenkova	K. Grinenko
1. Two opposing natural forces	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
2. Opposing human emotions	-	-+	+	-	+	-+	-+	-+	+	-+	+	+
3. Two visions of death (from fire vs from ice)	-	+	+	+	-+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
4. Similar demise	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	-	+	+
5. Emotional void	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-+	+
6. Ambiguity of the final lines	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-+	-
7. Rhyme / rhythm	+	+	-+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
8. Close to the original structure-wise	+	+	-+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	-

experiments which can insulate a particular component of adaptation process (communication experience, verbal aptitude, cognitive base, type of text, type of translation, etc.) and accumulate data to see how relevant it is in the adaptive behavior of the subjects.

Besides, autopoietic approach makes it possible to view translator as the pivotal element of translation process whose priorities and choices result in a certain version of translation

rather than merely an intermediary between cultures.

This translation model can also be helpful in coaching. When training a prospective translator it is key to implant in him/her awareness of various factors which can be at play (help him/her identify the niche) and train to prioritize these factors. In most cases the equivalent in the other language is not the first choice specifically when some other factors affect this process.

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Моделирование перевода как динамического процесса: с позиций теории аутопоэза

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В статье рассматриваются различные пути моделирования процесса перевода. Для классического и отчасти современного переводоведения характерно рассмотрение процесса перевода как системы разноуровневых трансформаций, применение которых позволяет создать соотносимый с оригиналом текст на языке перевода. Однако представляется, что при анализе переводческого процесса, предполагающем его препарирование до уровня отдельных операций, не может (и не должна) решаться задача описания собственно деятельности переводчика как сложного континуального процесса. Для решения этой задачи исследователю необходимо опираться на методологию, основу которой составляет имманентная континуальность. Так, перспективным представляется моделирование переводческой деятельности с опорой на постулаты теории аутопоэза, поскольку в центре внимания модели, построенной с опорой на аутопоэтическую методологию, оказывается собственно переводчик, чья адаптивная деятельность лежит в основе процесса перевода. Одновременно переводчик выполняет роль наблюдателя, благодаря чему оценивает степень достигнутой эквивалентности между текстом оригинала и текстом перевода. Теоретические доводы подтверждаются фрагментами анализа переводов одного текста, выполненных разными людьми.

Ключевые слова: переводческие модели, теория аутопоэза, аутопоэтическая система, структура аутопоэтической системы, адаптивное поведение, рекурсивные шаги.
