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English-to-Russian Translation: Traduttore. Traditore (The Day of the Triffids)

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The paper focuses on translation mistakes in the Russian translation of the book by J.Windem. The author analyzes translator's inefficiency and mistakes and offers a typology of translation mistakes which might be instrumental in teaching translation.

Keywords: translation, metonymy, mistakes, translator.

General

I argue that in practical translation teaching practices it might be instrumental to look into translation (I use terms *translation* and *interpretation* here indifferently as this distinction is irrelevant for the purposes I am pursuing here) mistakes / follies / failures / malpractices and translator slips and to systematically relate them to each other.

It is an open secret that a considerable fraction of the translation market is usurped by “innocent” translators (sometimes complementarily referred to as natural translators), as the supply-and-demand ratio is still relatively low, and the market seems lucrative to those who opt for translator / interpreter career. These translating agents, more or less, mastered the practical language but when asked to rationalize their translation choice (why this particular version / word /

phrase) they normally fail to rationally explain the decision, stating they ‘just feel’ that the text must be translated the way they did it.

True it is that, provided life-long translation practice, the seasoned veteran translator (though even without professional training background) does ‘feel’ how to translate. On the contrary, for translation teaching / learning practices this ‘feeling’ is not instrumental – the instructor has to teach his students to

- first: find the best translation version,
- then translate, and
- finally analyze and explain his / her decision (Комиссаров 2002).

It is at this final stage that the analysis of translator's mistakes could be helpful.

By no means is it new to try and research into the mistaking practices – translation scientists have long been focused on analyzing translation mistakes, some typologies were offered. The

typologies rely on a variety of criteria, to name only a few. Let us address some of them.

1. Mistakes Typologies – State of the Art

In (Гарбовский 2008) the author distinguishes four basic reasons which lead to mistakes: lack of linguistic competence in the original language, lack of background encyclopaedic knowledge, lack of understanding of the subject-matter, and translator's inability to grasp individual styles of the speakers (Гарбовский 2008, 514).

Later the author actually relates the mistakes to the levels of language (concept, complex concept, proposition and situation) and looks into the semantic misinterpretation at those levels. Actually, he analyzes, first, lexical mistakes resulting from misunderstanding the meaning of culturally-specific concepts (*шляпа пирожком, абрикосовая, буйвице, Лисий оток* – *ibid.* pp. 517-521), then word combinations and, finally, utterances. In the latter case the mistakes in question are practically reduced to the “lower” level – misunderstanding of words and word combinations (or simply to translator's negligence due to the wrong representation of the situation and the frame). Stylistic mistakes are related to ignoring register (*ibid.* p. 533).

In other words, the mistakes here can be reduced to misunderstanding the meaning of the original word / word combination due to the lack of linguistic / cultural / encyclopaedic knowledge or simply translator's negligence.

This approach to mistakes interpretation cannot be instrumental in didactic perspective. The only logical conclusion we can arrive at here is that the prospective translator / interpreter should learn the language, read books and accumulate culture-related data – this statement cannot be challenged and goes without saying.

What we practically need in teaching translation in a step-by-step format is a

“mechanism”, “algorithm” which can help prospective translators / interpreters structurally analyze the resulting text and ultimately learn how to avoid statistically potential mistakes. Forewarned is forearmed.

Let us take a radically different typology – the one that is offered in (Бузаджи 2009). Within this frame the authors distinguish two mistake groups. Within the first cluster there are the ones which distort the original message by way of deliberate additions, omissions, and substitutions; then those which distort precise factual information. (I argue that here again we deal with translator's negligence.) Next comes relative information (*ibid.* p. 46) which implies distorting functional sentence perspective (FSP) and wrong logical connectors.

The second – they claim, less frequent ones – are stylistic mistakes; distorting the register and usage, expressivity – and author's axiology-related. It seems, however, that to qualify the mistake as the usage mistake is not enough – it would be instrumental to further specify the types: for example, distinguish structural ones (adjective-to-adverb change – English-Russian, or deverbal noun-to-verb change – Russian-English) and others (see below). A special group is formed by wrong translation / transliteration of foreign names and foreign graphic traditions.

Both of the above typologies have much in common (as well as are significantly different). Meanwhile, what one misses in both is a technically detailed typology, a kind of “formal” algorithm which can be taught, and learned.

2. Mistakes Typology

Let us try and analyze practical translations and deduce the common mistakes to see what to teach students, get some statistics and outline some research vistas.

For the purpose of the paper an English-Russian translation of a well-known novel by

J.Windem *The Day of the Triffids* was scanned (pp.50-129) for errors. The error corpus covered words / word-combinations, sentences which seemed / were allegedly judged incorrect or at least provoke the native speaker of Russian. It explains why (and to save the space, as well) we focused on the translated text only. In some cases the insight guesses were related to the original. I was surprised to discover that most of the mistakes were explained in terms of the target-language competence (though there were some which were source-language-related).

The typology of mistakes looks as follows: most typically they are related to

- 1.register (low colloquial);
- 2.structural;
- 3.culture-related;
- 4.lexical (prevalent): to be divided further into sub-classes (see below).

2.1. Register and Culture-Related Mistakes

What surprised me was to discover that the current perception that culture-specific terms and stylistic register are a serious challenge translation-wise is not well-grounded. The research revealed that in translating the book where the scenery is Britain-based the translator did not have to face such terms very often.

Ironically, culture-related terms were not a problem which can be accounted for by the plot and heroes who are pictured in everyday settings – there are no intertextual allusions, though some cultural terms provoked the translator to make mistakes. For instance, **Тиншэм Мэнор* actually comprises one name *Tinsham* and one common noun *manor*, so the translation is *поместье Тиншэм*; and **лужайка для игры в шары* is actually either *игровое поле* (generalization, without specifying the game), *поле для игры в гольф*.

Register-wise, we found only a few mistakes: first, using low colloquial instead of the original

neutral style, e.g. **живо разогнала комитет по креслам – быстро рассадил*; **рыжеволосый убийца* implies some romantic attitude towards the hero, which is absolutely out of place in the context of mass manslaughter, so the word *рыжий* must be used here (it can carry slightly negative connotation in Russian). Take wrongly used obsolete vocabulary – **к вящей* (obs., iron. – Ожегов) *пользе обитателей замка*. We can say *к вящему удовольствию, радости* (here I would suggest – *что будет даже выгодно для обитателей замка*). On the whole, there were surprisingly few register-related translation mistakes.

2.2. Lexical Mistakes

The next misleading belief is that one of the challenges the translator has to meet is international words, or translator' false friends. It is true only of innocent translators who tend to make most common mistakes of this kind, though the scope of potential challengers is gradually changing – for example, in practice such mistakes as translating *Medical* or *Law school* as Russian *школа*, or *hospital* as *госпиталь* are dying out (though they are still practiced in mass media discourse) and are giving way to new ones, which are “perfectly” exemplified in the book we are scrutinizing. Among these is *conference* which is translated as **конференция* (here we mark with an asterisk * the wrong translation variant). In fact, this word has another meaning (which is at present quite common and is reflected in Russian business practices – the meeting room is often called *conference room*, is meant for talks between partners and is usually quite small), which is *обсуждение / сбор / совет / совещание*. Another example is *orthodox* which makes a common stumbling stone as well – it is usually translated as **ортодоксальный*. This translation is undoubtedly wrong in religion-related contexts; it must be translated in such

contexts as *православный*; in other contexts it can be translated as *обычный* (as is the case here: **в добавление к ортодоксальным напиткам* should be rendered as *вдобавок к обычным напиткам*). Another set of examples are *discussion* - **будет общее собрание и дискуссия* – here the word *обсуждение* is the only option, as the informal meeting is meant; the utterance **Атмосфера в деловых и коммерческих кварталах была мрачной* should be changed into – *Обстановка / ситуация в деловой части города / деловом и торговом центре была мрачной* (*commercial = торговый, атмосфера = обстановка, кварталы = центр / часть города*); as there were no people in empty streets who make the atmosphere. Cf. also **Стал подниматься по трапу – лестнице* (the setting is in a shop); **претенциозное украшение – нелепое*; **романтическая меланхолия – грусть* (**в грядущие годы кто-нибудь исполненный романтической меланхолии придет взглянуть на аббатство – романтической грусти*).

Some other examples are – **вечерние классы* (=вечерняя школа instead is recommended); **стал практиковаться в их жаргоне – старался усвоить их жаргон* (here the metonymical shift is accompanying the change – if a person is practicing the language he is trying to master it). When the heroes found the place where they could take refuge, the place was defined as **отвечает требованиям компактности и изоляции* (*compact and isolated*) – though in fact it could be said to be *уединенное местечко* (the word *местечко* combines the concept of space and smth small); **гротескные породы на (породы?) собак* – becomes *нелепые породы*, **обреченный на деградацию – вырождение*, **двор не имел никаких утилитарных устройств* – becomes *во дворе / доме не было удобств* (here inanimate English subject logically transforms into Russian adverbial modifier of place, and

utilities here relates to modern conveniences – cf. *utility bills*); while **вакуумированная упаковка сигарет* becomes *новая пачка сигарет* (metonymy – as a new pack is definitely meant), then **тренированный голос* turns into *хорошо поставленный голос*.

2.3. English Adjectives in Translation Perspective

Lexical mistakes (not related to international vocabulary) are usually accompanied by structural mismatching between the languages. We found several typical mistakes, one of them focusing on adjectives.

Within this group metonymy is common – instead of **причастный к медицине* we recommend *понимающий в медицине*, **домашние манеры – непринужденные манеры*, **женщины с подрывными идеями – женщины со своими прогрессивными / феминистскими идеями*, **находка была более счастливой – удачной*, **зловещая чувствительность к звукам – их вселяющая страх / ужас / пугающая чувствительность к звукам* (the talk is about the triffids), **негодная попытка – неудачная попытка* (in addition, the wrong register – low colloquial is used here). Cf. also **тоскливо-умозрительное выражение – напряженное / тоскливое*, **смешной дом – нелепый, на *другом берегу – противоположном*.

The second translation mistake with the adjectives is related to the well-known feature of English – preference of adjectives to adverbs (which should be eliminated in translating into Russian) – of the kind *he is a fast runner* vs *он быстро бежит* (not **он быстрый бегун*). The translated text abounds in such mistakes, to list only a few: **будьте с ним хороши* – here a short Russian adjective in the predicative function is translated by an adverb in the predicative function *относитесь к нему хорошо* (besides,

a typical transformation is at work here: an English state predicate *be* (wrongly translated here as **будьте*) is translated by a Russian action predicate *относитесь*). Another example is **во всем была неразгаданная новизна*, where the adjective and the abstract noun are rendered as adverbs – *все было ново и непонятно*. In the sentence **глядя в зал темными глазами* the translator, first, mistakingly interpreted the meaning of the word *dark* as relating to *the lack of light* rather than more appropriate here as *sinister, gloomy*, second, the adjective takes on the adverbial form, to make the correct version *мрачно глядя в зал*. Or in the utterance **два флага ...висели.., вялые в теплом воздухе* we would suggest either *неподвижно* (adj-to-adv change) or *без движения* (adj-to-abstract noun change); and in either of the cases in Russian there is an (implied) negation (very typical in English-to-Russian relationships), the translation is based on antonymy. Cf. also **трудно находить свободный проезд – свободно проехать*; or **Мои слова вызывают у них этакий двойной смех – что было вдвойне смешно*.

The third type of adjective-associated mistakes is exemplified by a regular translation pattern, i.e. an English state predicate (with an adjective as the nominal part of the predicate, a predicative) and a corresponding Russian action predicate (Грамматические аспекты 2011). The two factors are at play here (as V.N. Komissarov observed, a translator's choice is determined by several simultaneous factors – Комиссаров 2002): English adjective is translated as either an adverb (e. g. *легко* instead of *легкий*), or – due to a regular metonymical transfer in English-to-Russian translation the verb of the category of state is rendered as an active one: **Я официальный летописец* – state predicate (in a broad sense – the term *state* refers to all nominal predicates expressing state, quality, etc.) is expressed as *Я веду учет / назначена / мне*

поручено вести учет / протокол, where the component *official* is transferred to the nouns referring to officialdom – *протокол, учет*. Cf. also **Не такой ...человек, чтобы утешаться легковесными ободрениями – которого можно легко убедить*, where *легковесный* turns into *легко*; **Я буду очень удивлен – Я удивлюсь*. Or **Вы ведь будете добры ко мне* (in the context of a single physiological contact) vs *не сделаете мне больно* (of special note in this context is the meaning of the word *good* which normally radically differs in its semantic scope from the seemingly respective Russian word *хорошо / хороший*; cf. also English *happy* which is seldom translated as *счастливый*, and the expression *Are you happy here?* at a party, for instance, is translated as *У вас все нормально?* Палажченко 1998).

2.4. Syntactical Mistakes

Syntactical (structural) mistakes which the text in question abounds in (though they cannot be reduced to) can be divided into two basic clusters, the first one relating to FSP, and the second one – to one type of infinitive constructions.

FSP-related problems are numerous, to name only a few word order cases: so **попытайтесь как можно больше сделать до темноты* the rheme is with *сделать как можно больше* and it should be transferred to the end of the sentence – *до темноты сделать как можно больше*. Or in **как мало можем мы предложить им – (мы) можем (мы) им предложить* the verb takes the rhematic position (rather than a normally unstressed personal pronoun *им* – unless specially put in the contrasting position).

Syntactical mistakes – quite surprisingly – often relate to the sentences with the infinitival constructions of the type *she woke up to see that it was raining heavily* which are mistakingly interpreted as conveying purpose (which is missing here), rather than a simple consequence

of events: **Я повернулся, чтобы идти* vs a correct variant *я повернулся и пошел* or ...** поехали дальше, чтобы забрать звонкую груду кастрюль, сковородок* vs *и нашли и забрали* (no purpose was implied in the text – the protagonist was looking for something that might be useful in the circumstances. Cf. also **он вышел, чтобы обследовать наш взнос* vs *вышел осмотреть / и осмотрел то, что мы нашли / привезли* (=взнос).

3. Semantic Mistakes

Then comes a cluster of semantic mistakes when the translator ignored the difference in the semantic scopes of the original and translated words (I would suggest qualifying it as a semantic mismatching): in the source language the scope can be wider as in **привели четыре полные грузовика – пригнали* where the mistake is provoked by a wider scope in the English word *brought* – it does not distinguish moving by means of transportation vs walking. Cf. also **пригнали грузовик и слепую девушку* vs ... *и привезли слепую девушку*.

The scope can simply differ, and in this case the translator opts for generalization, or, vice versa, – concretization. (In most cases here the transformation is based on metonymy.) : **засверкают светофоры* vs more general *загорятся* or even more general *заработают*; **мои каблук отчётливо стучали* vs *стук моих ботинок* or even *звук моих шагов отчётливо раздавался в тишине*. One more example is **отломил у дерева сук* vs ...*ветку*; **негромкий скрип шагов – звук*. **Облегчил свои чувства – выразил...*, or **те из нас, кто владел зрением – видел / мог видеть*, or even *зрячие*. In **свертки одеял и пледов* (something small is implied here) turn into *кипа, узлы*; while **звонкая груда кастрюль, сковородок – груда, куча кастрюль* (here the word *звонкая* can be omitted as the objects in question are usually

made of metal which is expected to produce specific metallic noise – it makes the word *звонкая* unnecessary. Moreover, this choice is supported by Russian non-occurrence of this word with the noun). In the sentence **Затем я уловил в сумерках двигающийся огонек* it is necessary to express a more concrete trajectory of the moving fire – *я увидел приближающийся огонек / что ко мне приближался огонек*. In **Сказал он, широко расставив пустые руки* the translator may specify the intention of the protagonist as in... *поднял руки, показывая, что не вооружен*; cf. one more example with the hands **показал ему пустые руки*, where the purpose should be explicitly worded, otherwise the activity remains unmotivated – *показывая, что у него нет ничего в руках*. **Это делает мои чувства по поводу произошедшего менее безнадежными* – this clumsy sentence generously offers a variety of mistakes: those related to English adjective-to Russian noun, English state predicate-to Russian active verb, and others – *вселяет в меня надежду несмотря на все произошедшее*. **Война приносит с собой общественные обязанности – взывает к чувству долга* (cause-effect metonymy – if the war brings in some social duties it appeals to our sense of duty, among other duties). In the utterance **обнаружили находку* there are, first, a semantic mistake (a find cannot be found) – so, we recommend either *нас ждала находка*, second, we could move on even further and suggest concrete object from the context *обнаружили три грузовика* (these lorries made the find in question).

This cause-effect metonymy is a typical kind of crosslinguistical metonymy: **делает все как минимум понимаемым* (понятным!) vs *позволяет хотя бы понять* (cause-effect + state vs action); **поставил меня перед проблемой* vs *создал мне проблему*. In **В траве зашелестели легкие шаги* the potential observer / implied

experiencer is made explicit, and the trajectory of movement is worded; besides, the kind of noise the agent produced is made more general – я услышал легкие шаги – кто-то шел ко мне по траве / через поле / по лужайке etc. In *внушить ей представление об истинном положении вещей the word истинном implies that the state of affairs is hidden and calls for uncover, which does not imply to instill, or bring home smth to smb – so here we have instead донести до нее правду об истинном положении вещей.

I spotted quite a new group of mistakes – the ones that result from either ignoring or, vice versa, ungrounded introduction of semantic feature intentional – e.g. *Машинам удалось так сцепиться – no intention can be attributed to automobiles, so the verb умудрились (lack of intention) is used. When speaking of radioactive emissions the sentence ...*так высоко, что люди во всем мире смогли получить прямое излучение is impossible, the recommended translation is either оказались or подверглись сильному излучению, where no intention is implied.

Another 9 sentences exemplify the wrong interpretation of the meaning of to be going to–phrase. When applied to inanimate entities it

conveys the idea of inevitable consequences of the present state of affairs, while speaking of human (animate) beings it implies intentions. Sentences like ...*из камня, которому предстоит медленное разрушение are better translated as ...в конце концов разрушится.

One more typical structural mistake is ignoring Russian linguistic map of the world which prefers adverbial modifiers in the initial position as compared to the English sentence structure which easily admits “formal” (=inanimate) subjects (to actually denote place, time, or reason) – a running example is *Она имела причины улыбаться vs у нее были причины для / inf; *Расспросы кончились тем что я всем страшно надоел – в результате расспросов я всем страшно надоел; мы очень любим его – он нам очень понравится.

Conclusion

The research into translation mistakes revealed that, first, they are often related to the target language competence of the translator; second, a detailed practical analysis can forearm the would-be translator with statistically grounded instrumental mechanisms which can help him / her in the job for the years to come.

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**Перевод с английского языка на русский:
переводчики–предатели
(типология переводческих ошибок
и их учет в практике преподавания)**

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В статье рассматриваются ошибки перевода на русский язык английского романа «День Триффидов» Дж. Уиндема. Автор анализирует существующие типологии ошибок и предлагает – на основе анализа переводческих ошибок – типологию ошибок на различных уровнях языка. Данная типология может использоваться при обучении переводу, может быть полезна для начинающих переводчиков.

Ключевые слова: перевод, метонимия, ложные друзья переводчика, переводчик, ошибка.
