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THE MYTH ABOUT TRANSLATABILITY

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Traditionally, (un)translatability is considered in linguistic theory of translation as an undesirable phenomenon caused by the use of units that do not have correspondences in the target language. This lack of equivalence is usually explained by differences between the structures of the two languages and between the two cultures. The analysis of common views on the issue of translatability presented in the text-oriented approach to translation convinces us of the erroneous understanding of the essence of translatability. According to the communicative-functional approach to translation, the degree of (un)translatability is determined by the extent to which the translation conveys the communicatively relevant information necessary for the recipients of the translation to carry out their substantive activities. Reproduction of such information is the purpose of translation, and in a broader sense, the purpose of translation is to ensure the substantive activities of the recipients and commissioners of the translation by creating a text that meets their needs. The nature of the relevant information may vary from communication situation to situation and what appears to be untranslatable at the unit level may be insignificant or fully translatable at the level of the text as a whole.

Keywords: (un)translatability, communicative-functional approach, text-oriented approach, communicative situation, relevant information.

МИФ О ПЕРЕВОДИМОСТИ

Традиционно (не)переводимость рассматривается в лингвистической теории перевода как нежелательное явление, связанное с использованием в тексте оригинала единиц, не имеющих соответствий в переводящем языке. Подобного рода безэквивалентность обычно объясняется расхождениями между структурами двух языков и между двумя культурами. Проведенный анализ распространенных воззрений на проблему переводимости, представленных в рамках текстоцентрического подхода к переводу, убеждает в ошибочности представлений о сути переводимости. Согласно коммуникативно-функциональному подходу к переводу, степень (не)переводимости определяется тем, насколько полно передается в переводе коммуникативно релевантная информация, необходимая получателям перевода для осуществления ими их предметной деятельности. Воспроизведение такой информации и является целью перевода, а в более широком смысле цель перевода – это обеспечение предметной деятельности получателей перевода и инициаторов перевода посредством создания текста, соответствующего их потребностям. В разных коммуникативных ситуациях характер релевантной информации может быть различным, и то, что представляется непереводимым на уровне отдельных единиц, может оказаться несущественным или вполне переводимым на уровне текста в целом.

Ключевые слова: переводимость, коммуникативно-функциональный подход, текстоцентрический подход, коммуникативная ситуация, релевантная информация.

MITUL DESPRE TRADUCERE

În mod tradițional, (in)traductibilitatea este considerată în teoria lingvistică a traducerii ca un fenomen nedorit, asociat cu utilizarea în textul original a unităților care nu au corespondențe în limba de traducere. Această lipsă de echivalență se explică de obicei prin diferențele dintre structurile a două limbi și dintre două culturi. Analiza viziunilor pe scară largă asupra problemei traductibilității, prezentată ca parte a abordării centrate pe text a traducerii, ne convinge de înțelegerea eronată a esenței traductibilității. În conformitate cu abordarea comunicativă și funcțională a traducerii, gradul de (in)traductibilitate este determinat de cât de complet este transmisă în traducere informația comunicativă, care este necesară pentru beneficiarii traducerii pentru a-și desfășura activitățile de fond. Reproducerea acestor informații este scopul traducerii și, într-un sens mai larg, scopul traducerii este de a asigura activitățile de fond ale beneficiarilor traducerii și inițiatorii traducerii prin crearea unui text care să corespundă nevoilor acestora. În diferite situații comunicative, natura informațiilor relevante poate fi diferită, iar ceea ce pare netransmisibil la nivelul unităților individuale se poate dovedi a fi nesemnificativ sau complet traductibil la nivelul întregului text.

Cuvinte-cheie: traductibilitate, abordare comunicativ-funcțională, abordare centrată pe text, situație comunicativă, informație relevantă;

Introduction

It is obvious that mankind has always been in quest of the unknown, albeit the tools used might be unreliable and ineffective, and might not allow understanding the genuine nature of phenomena of the world. Not

infrequently, the quest resulted in concepts which are kind of mythological in their nature. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, myth is "1.: a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon…2a.: a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone…2b.: an unfounded or false notion…" [1]. James Frazer claims that some myths are explanatory, being pre-scientific attempts to interpret the natural world [2]. The fact that myths do not reveal the true inwardness of things does not matter as long as mankind possesses unreliable methods of interpreting the natural world. Another important premise to be borne in mind is that mythology neither questions the truth of the obtained knowledge nor admits any doubts or interpretations. People have *to believe* in myths if scientifically based knowledge is lacking. The mythological approach has been most apparent in the fields of social studies, natural sciences and humanities.

It is not surprising that a similar situation is observed in Translation Studies which has attempted more than once to explain the translation process that occurs in a translator's brain, in that "black box" which is so difficult to permeate in. I believe that quite a number of scientific concepts developed in Translation Studies are pure myths, and cannot be used effectively to explain the objectivity of the translation activity. Among them is the concept of translatability. The purpose of this study is to prove that this concept must be revise in accordance with the new paradigm developed in Translation Studies recently. To do that we should first analyze the concept as it is presented in the traditional translatology.

Translatability in Traditional Translation Studies

First, I should specify what I mean by "traditional" Translation Studies. I use the term to denote that type of translation studies which emerged at the initial stage of formation of science of translation, mainly, in 1930s-1960s, both in the West and in Russia. It was the time when translation scholars paid attention mostly to linguistic factors underpinning the translation process. The most significant factor among them was the so called "linguistic gap", i.e. the structural, semantic and stylistic differences between languages. As Chaim Robins put it, "translation involves two distinct factors, a 'meaning,' or reference to some slice of reality, and the difference between two languages in referring to that reality" [3, p.79]. It was that gap between the languages that was viewed as the main obstacle to rendering a message from one language to another in full. And they still are – by some translation scholars. Inability to reproduce the exact meaning of a word, a phrase or some characteristic feature of a source text has resulted in the notion of untranslatability as an extreme case of scholars pessimism or, otherwise, in the notion of relevant (limited, restricted) translatability which may be treated as a sign of their cautiousness. Ali Reza Ghanooni quotes L. Venuti as saying: "Ideas are formed by disciplinary trends and change to a great extent, ranging between the extremes of philosophical skepticism and practical optimism" [3, p.78]. The extreme approaches have their proper names and are provided with appropriate substantiation: "…scholars have taken on two different approaches to the notion of untranslatability: the monadist approach and the Universalist approach … They believed that translatability is ensured by the existence of linguistic universals such as syntactic and semantic categories shared by all languages. Other scholars adopted the second approach based on which the reality is interpreted in different ways by different linguistic communities and thus the translatability is jeopardized. This approach is known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis" [4, p.139]. In my perception, nowadays translation scholars' views concerning translatability are located somewhere in between, devoid of any extremism.

It is only fair to say that the notions of untranslatability and relevant translatability do not serve to represent all attitudes to the issue of translatability shared by investigators in the past and present. Much can be said about views of Dante and Cervantes who regarded literary translation, especially translation of poetic diction, as impossible, or views of Humboldt and his followers Ed. Sepir and B. Whorf who denied the possibility of translation completely. True, the Sepir-Whorf hypothesis "is generally not applied in its strongest form, since this would imply the impossibility of effective communication between the members of different linguistic communities" [5, p.548]. Opposed to these views are conclusions made by other scholars who stick to the idea that since the universe is common for all nations it is reflected – in one way or another – in all languages; therefore, what is said in one language can be expressed in another. Thus, the attribute "relative" is not sufficient for the task of describing the situation with translatability in Translation Studies. We can say that various attitudes to the problem have been concretized in the concepts of universal untranslatability, universal translatability and relevant translatability, at least, in Russian Translation Studies.

Regardless of the attributes used, translatability is defined in two ways: it is either a possibility of translation in principle or a possibility to render a speech unit from one language to another, particularly, to find an equivalent of the given speech unit of the source language (SL) in the target language (TL). The latter interpretation of translatability seems to be widely represented in translation scholars manuscripts and, consequently, in their thinking. Theorists are still concerned with the ways and means of rendering metaphors [6; 7], onomatopoeic words [8], euphemisms [9], puns and the like in translation. To be specific, I shall quote R. van den Broeck who argues that "presumably one of the main obstacles for a theory of translation to overcome is the intuitively subscribed and generally accepted "inadequacy of any single generalization about the translatability of metaphor" [6, p.75]. Pedro A. Fuertes Olivera and Marisol Velasco Sacristán consider subjective factors "since they allow or inhibit the translators' choices in the decision-making stage of the translation process" [7, p.73]. Translation of onomatopoeic words is seen as a challenge due to "the huge typological differences between" Japanese and English in the article of Olga Bartashova and Anton Sichinckiy [8, p.222]. It is obvious that the paradigm used to investigate difficulties and challenges of translation in these studies is equivalence-oriented. Another proof of this idea is provided by the following statement: "the success of a given translation may be defined as transmitting a similar, though rarely identical, semantic frame reference in the Target Language (TL) as was intended by the Source Language (SL) and may be quantified by comparing alternate translations and choosing the one with the highest number of equivalent frame references" [10, p.229].

Yet, it would be unfair to claim that all the research conducted with the purpose of defining (un)translatability and the factors influencing it are equivalence-oriented. Translation Studies witnessed the so called "cultural turn", which resulted in a special attention to differences between cultures. It is those differences which make translation even more challenging an undertaking. Since 1980s, abundant research has been conducted in the field with very impressive results. They provided the basis for differentiating between two kinds of untranslatability: linguistic untranslatability (when there is no lexical or syntactical substitute in the target language) and cultural untranslatability (the absence of the meaning of a word in the target language) [11]. These definitions of the two types of untranslatability are just simplified versions of what J. Catford said as early as in 1965, defining linguistic untranslatability: "failure to find a TL [target language] equivalent is due entirely to differences between the source language and the target language" [12, p.98]; and cultural untranslatability which arises "when a situational feature, functionally relevant for the SL [source language] text, is completely absent from the culture of which the TL [target language] is a part" [ibid., p.99]. Catford's concluding remarks are very illustrative. In the final chapter of his book he says: "If, indeed, it should turn out that 'cultural untranslatability' is ultimately describable in all cases as a variety of linguistic untranslatability, then the power of translation-theory will have been considerably increased…" [12, p.103]. The statement reveals the fact that the founders of the linguistic theory of translation were concerned very much with linguistic factors guiding the translation process. Their followers and supporters still are.

It must be added that it is not only linguistic factors, the gap between the languages as well as cultures, that make obstacles to complete (universal) translatability. Some theorists strongly believe that the level (degree) of (un)translatability depends to a large extent on the type of the source text. E. Kharitonova states that "the final set of parameters relevant to the translation process depends, in our opinion, primarily on the text" [13, p.58]. Moreover, still another factor is relevant in establishing and assessing the degree of translatability. It is the availability of a similar text type in the target language and culture. E. Kharitonova argues that "the presence of texts of the same type in different languages greatly simplifies the task of the translator, leveling to some extent the specificity of the language in which the text was created. In other words, the complexity of the translation of Russian camp literature depends greatly not only on the specificity of the source and target languages, but on the presence or absence in the target language culture of texts with a similar communicative function and subject content that could serve as a kind of 'donor texts'…" [ibid., p.59]. There is no doubt that the presence of "donor texts" in the target language significantly simplifies the translator's task of creating a target text with a certain content and form. Still, I believe that the importance of this factor in Kharitonova's considerations is exaggerated. I can hardly agree with the statement that "text is still the main object of the translation process, since it is the text that determines the primary and secondary communicative situations" [13, p.58]. I argue that it is the communicative situation that determines the type of the text created for a specific purpose, not vice versa. A text is a tool of achieving a *specific* goal in a *specific* communicative situation, not *Ding an sich* in I. Kant's interpretation. Neglecting the principal premises of the communicative-

functional approach to translation postulated by me [14] and my predecessors, E. Kharitonova ignores many other factors and parameters inherent in a communicative situation in general and in a translation event, in particular. Below I shall speak about these parameters in detail. In general terms, if we agree that the degree of (un)translatability depends on the type of the source text, we should also agree that texts exist in their own right as objects of the objective reality, created with no purpose whatever. They may have interpreters, but they seem not to have authors. And most importantly, they are used by translators as translation objects for the sake of translation itself. That is, the purpose of translation is completely ignored here.

Upon the whole, the traditional, i.e. linguistic, theory of translation uses the equivalence-oriented approach (I prefer to call it text-oriented). I fully agree with Werner Koller who argues that "the range of the equivalence-oriented approach and the possibilities it offers for systematic description and explanation of translational phenomena are, however, limited" [15]. The reason is the lack of attention to extra-lingual factors that influence the translation process and its outcome. Previously, I have argued that the text-oriented approach seems to be inadequate for the task of revealing the intrinsic nature of translation as a form of human activity. When a ST is perceived as an independent and self-sufficient entity that exists in a vacuum, in isolation from the environment in which it has been produced, Translation Studies become incapable of revealing the whole complex of factors, both lingual and extra-lingual, that impact the translation process and must be taken into account by any translator or interpreter who feels responsible for the results of his/her professional activity [16, p.93]. Therefore, our task is to offer another approach that would possess a greater explanatory power.

The New Translation Paradigm

I have mentioned above the communicative-functional approach to translation. That is what I call the new paradigm in Translation Studies formulated over the recent decade. This paradigm is rooted mainly in the theory of Eugene Nida and skopos theory of Hans Vermeer and Katharina Reiß [17; 18] developed by Christiane Nord [19]. Thus, the communicative-functional approach is a result of absorbing the main ideas voiced by adherers of what is known in the Western Translation Studies as the functionalist approach, and developing them ad maximum. "Skopos theory concentrates mainly on the purpose of the translation, which determines the translation methods and strategies that are to be employed in order to produce a functionally adequate result… Hence, two main points for the translator to keep in mind is knowing why a ST is to be translated and what the function of the TT will be" [3, p.81]. In essence, this approach belongs to the domain of anthropological paradigm in Translation Studies. I claim that with the development of this approach, the process of translation has acquired, so to speak, a "human face".

The communicative-functional approach implies consideration of a translation event in a specific, frequently imaginary, yet realistic environment within which this even happens or *may* happen. Instead of the term "environment" we may use a more traditional term "communicative situation". The latter seems to be more precise, as it implies an interaction of human beings. The necessity to interact arises when any substantive work performed by people cannot be done unless they communicate. In case of communication across languages and cultures, mediation by a translator/interpreter is needed. It is self-evident that the mediating translator is supposed to take into consideration the aims with which the communication actors get engaged into the communication process, the needs and requirements of their substantive work, possible or definite ways in which they will use the target text produced. In fact, the first questions the translator is supposed to ask are "when, where, why and for whom I translate" and what results should be achieved by means of translation. The answers to the questions would help the translator understand the nature of the CST [20, p.1450], i.e. the communicative situation of translation. Only after the translator has realized the needs and expectations of the target audience, he/she is able to understand and formulate the purpose of translation. In general, the purpose of translation is not to simply produce a text that would be acknowledged as equivalent to the ST by an idle outsider who is capable of comparing the TT to the ST. In real life it is communication actors as well as the translation commissioner who eagerly or reluctantly assess the translation in terms of its usefulness for the activities they perform. The purpose of translation is to create a text that would serve as an effective tool used in performing the substantive activity by the communication actors.

It follows that translation must be viewed as both the tool of communication and the tool of any substantive work being done by communication actors. Any common activity is performed in various communicative situations. The communicative situations in which translation is performed are strikingly diverse. Yet, despite this diversity, all of them fall into two main categories: 1) situations in which translation is initially planned

(CST-1 – communicative situations of translation of the 1st type), and 2) situations in which translation is not initially planned (CST-2 – communicative situations of the 2nd type). In the first class of situations the text is addressed directly to the audience that speaks another language. In the second class of situations the text is addressed to the audience speaking the same language, and only after that the translation is made, in a different setting, culture and time.

In any of the two categories of communicative situations various translation strategies can be used by a translator.

Translation strategy is one of the most mysterious concepts of Translation Studies, and is ambiguous in its meaning. Definitions of translation strategy range from the broadest definitions possible to the most specific ones. Some scholars define translation strategy as "the art of translation or a program of the translator's behavior" while others use the term in the meaning of "a way or method of rendering a certain linguistic unit from one language to another". In the latter meaning the term is synonymous to "a means of translation" or even "transformation" (e.g., "strategies of rendering abbreviations").

In accordance with the communicative-functional approach, I have defined translation strategy as a general program of the translator's activity worked out on the basis of the general approach to translation in a specific communicative situation (CST), determined by the particular parameters of the situation and the translation goal and, in its turn, determining the character of the translator's professional behavior [20, p.1450]. The choice of the strategy to be used is not free. It depends on parameters of the communicative situation, primarily, on extra-lingual factors among which the most significant are the purpose of translation, the needs and expectations of the target text recipients and the specifics of their substantive activity as well as the way in which the TT will be used. Thus, a translation strategy must conform to the communicative situation and is expected to ensure the achievement of the purpose of translation.

Despite the diversity of communicative situations in which translation/interpreting is performed, the number of translation strategies used is limited. I would say, in passing, that I do not accept Venuti's proposal to differentiate between two strategies: domestication and foreignizing [21], an idea first voiced by F. Schleiermacher. I think that translation strategies do not differ in the extent to which a target text conforms to the norms and rules of the target language and culture. They differ in the combination of tactics, i.e. specific actions performed by the translator to achieve the desired goal, in the extent to which the purpose of the TT production corresponds to the purpose of the ST production. In the article cited above I offered a classification of translation strategies that include three types:

1) The strategy of communicative translation. This type of translation strategy may be defined as the program of translation activity aimed to ensure the communicative effect desired and required by the ST author. The strategy of communicative translation is most appropriate in the CST-1 as well as in some varieties of CST-2.

2) *The strategy of tertiary translation.* This translation strategy can be defined as a program of translation activity aimed at satisfying the needs of a third person who plays a role that differs from the role of the initial communication actors and whose goal is not in line with their goals.

3) The strategy of redirection. The strategy of redirection is a general program of translation activities aimed at producing a target text addressed to an audience with different social characteristics (as compared with the ST audience). Needless to say that the same communicative effect is not desired, expected or planned when the strategy of redirection is applied [20, p.1450-1452].

It is clear that application of different translation strategies in different communicative situations results in producing texts that are different in terms of their content and form, even when the same text is translated in different situations.

Translatability: Communicative-Functional Approach

A question arises: how come that the content of the target text may differ significantly from that of the source text? I can answer the question in the following way: much depends upon the amount of information that must be transferred into the TT, i.e. information which is relevant for the TT recipient and/or the commissioner of the translation. One should agree that any text contains various types of information (cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, operational), and very often the text recipient is not interested in receiving all types of information. In the recipient's perception, information can be absolutely relevant, less relevant and not at all relevant. Therefore, the translator's task is to decide what information is needed by the TT recipient to perform his/her substantive activity, i.e. to find out what information is relevant for the TT recipient. The degree of relevance of the information is determined taking into account the specifics of the communicative

situation, the needs and expectations of the TT recipient and, accordingly, the purpose of translation. Not incidentally, the concept of "translation brief" has been developed within the skopos-theory: "it is the translation brief (with its specification of addressed audience, time and place of reception etc.) that determines which items from the ST offer of information has to be transferred in the translation process" [22, p.61]. Usually, translation brief is not explicitly formulated by the translation recipient and/or commissioner. It is the analysis of the communicative situation as a whole which results in the translator's understanding of it.

True, the source text may contain linguistic and speech units which have no equivalents in the TL because of the gap between the languages and cultures. Adherers of the text-oriented approach to translation would say that it is a reason of a low degree of translatability. It is not always the case. The matter is that quite frequently the elements which are so hard "to translate" are of no relevance for the TT users. Suffice it to adduce to following example: In the high-speed train "Lastochka", following the route Nizhny Novgorod - Moscow, you can hear the announcement: «Через несколько минут наш поезд прибудет в *город трудовой доблести и славы* Орехово-Зуево». The word-for-word translation can be as follows: "In a few minutes, our train will arrive in *the city of labor valor and fame* Orekhovo-Zuevo. I doubt that "the city of labor valor and fame" is a happy translation: the mentality of native English speakers lacks the concept of "labor valor and fame". There are some interlingual matches (valour, prowess, heroism), but how do you explain to a manager of an English company or a worker on a conveyor in Detroit why and how to show labor valor/heroism/bravery/hardy at your workplace, and even on a citywide scale? After all, all these concepts are associated primarily with military operations. Another relevant question to ask here is: Is this unit to be translated at all? After all, the purpose of the translation will be to inform English-speaking passengers about the forthcoming arrival of the train at a certain point, not more than that. So, the word-combination that seems to be untranslatable in reality does not pose any problem. It is not surprising that the English version of the announcement lacks this word-combination, which is fully in the conformity with the strategy of communicative translation.

Other examples include the abstract translation of a literary (!) text for the benefit of a publisher who would like to read a summary of the work before deciding whether to order a complete translation for publication. Obviously, in this case, part of the situational information, as well as all the aesthetic and stylistic information, is not transmitted. In this case, is it possible to talk about the principal untranslatability of such a text? Hardly. The text will be translated to the extent that is necessary to achieve the goal of translation. Will the translator deal with metaphors, puns, onomatopoeia, nonce words and euphemisms which are considered to be a challenge in terms of translatability? It's a rhetoric question. Neither will the absence of the same text type in the target language and culture pose any problem. Undoubtedly, it's the case when the specifics of the communication situation dictate the use of the strategy of tertiary translation: the purpose of translation differs from that of creating the original, but fully corresponds to the needs of the recipient of the translation.

In terms of translatability, the use of the strategy of redirection is equally optimistic. We can talk about redirection when, for example, a book originally intended for adults is translated for a children's audience (e.g., "Gulliver's Travels" by J. Swift translated by Tamara Gabbe into Russian). In this case, the composition of the work is transformed to a great extent, its content is simplified, and the style of the text changes considerably. Accordingly, the elements that may not be translated, if we apply the strategy of communicative translation, may not be relevant in the text for children. As a result, the problem of translatability becomes less acute.

Thus, if we are talking about relative translatability, then it should be admitted that it is relative not because something is lost in translation, that the translator sacrifices something, but because it should be considered *in relation* to a certain communicative situation in which translation of a text is done. Ideally, the degree of translatability should be related to the purpose of translation. The translatability of a given text can be complete if the purpose of the translation is achieved. The translatability of the same text may be limited if the purpose of the translation cannot be fully achieved in the given communicative situation. Therefore, translatability as a phenomenon is not a constant, it is relative and depends on the environment in which translation is performed.

Conclusion

We started our discussion about (un)translatability by claiming it is a myth. And it is true. Translatability as it is presented in the linguistic (text-oriented) Translation Studies is indeed a myth. For there is no point in establishing discrepancies between languages and even cultures, which, allegedly, create difficulties for the transfer of certain linguistic phenomena in translation from one language to another. These discrepancies can only be apparent if we compare structures of the two languages at the level of individual units, if we consider

individual linguistic phenomena in isolation from the text in which they are used. When we turn to the translation of the text as such, it turns out that the communicative relevance of the units which have no equivalents in the TL is negligible or even equals to zero.

Thus, what seems to be untranslatable from the point of view of Comparative Linguistics, Cultural Studies or Theory of Intercultural Communication, may not cause problems in the process of translation, i.e. may not affect the degree of translatability of the text. And it is the text that is considered as the unit of translation according to the basic premises of the communicative-functional approach to translation.

One should bear in mind that some degree of untranslatability may be stated only when transfer of a relevant linguistic phenomenon is required to achieve the purpose of translation but cannot be effected. In such cases some relevant information remains untransferred, i.e. lost in translation. Accordingly, untranslatability becomes real, not mythological.

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