

ON THE DEGREE OF TRANSLATORS' CREATIVITY

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Translation is a sort of reproductive art, but especially in cases of the greater aesthetic value and pragmatic aspects of the text, particularly when translating literary texts, the creativity of the translator goes into action. However, it must not surpass the intention of the author of the source text.

*Respecting system differences between the source and target languages as well as mastering the technique and methodology of translation is considered a *conditio sine qua non*; more problematic is mastering the **pragmatic** aspect of the translation. That means respecting the different language and life experiences of the source and target addressees, different language situations and usages, different degrees of explicitness and explicativeness, different degrees of cohesion, different habits and means of expressing emotions and attitudes, different associations, images and different degrees of their use, different registers and clichés in parallel situations, different stylistic standards in the same genres, etc. In fact, it is more or less the matter of Nida's well-known "*dynamic equivalence*" (1969) in a broader sense of the term, or of our (i.e. Prague school) *functional equivalence*. Particularly in that field, creativity comes into play.*

Nevertheless, a translator's creativity must have its **limits**. Judging its right degree might lie within the scope of modern translatology, which approaches the translation from the holistic point of view and which can with advantage use the principles of **text linguistics**. These might be of some use just because translation should keep all the text parameters or textuality standards unchanged as far as possible (with adequate adaptation to the conventions of the target language). It should be added that, in general, all the well-known characteristics of textuality have been more or less respected intuitively by translators even before text linguistics gave systemic reasons for them, nevertheless, let us point them out with A. Neubert:

1. Basic is the *intentionality* of the message, which "is meant to sensitize us to the correlation between intentions (author's and translator's) and texts". (Neubert, 72)
2. *Acceptability* of the text in the sense of Grice's maxims (quantity, quality, relation, manner) should be related to the tradition of the respective genres in the particular culture.

3. Very important is *situationality (local and temporal setting)*, adapting the text to the target situation, to the target reader, but within certain limits again.
4. *The scope of information* which the translator communicates to the reader of the target language in the matter of events, states, processes, objects, persons, places and institutions of the source language community should correspond to the function and type of the text.
5. *Coherence*, the logical structure of the text must often be re-built on the basis of understanding the coherence of the source text. Its role may be quite decisive, especially in special purpose literature.
6. In close connection with coherence stands *cohesion*, which reflects coherence on the surface level of the text making it “visible”. The proportion of the coherence reflected in the cohesive devices used in the translation depends on the usage in the respective genre of the text and in the individual style of the author. – It is a difficult task for the translator to convey the right degree of coherence/cohesion to match the author’s intention. Sometimes it is better to keep the logical connection “invisible”.
7. *Intertextuality* based on the previous experience with analogous texts may be of great help to the translator in the choice of other text parameters.

The said text parameters follow Neubert’s presentation, but their order does not quite correspond to their rank of importance they have from the translator’s point of view. Even if Leech’s politeness principle (1983) was later included in their repertoire, the text parameters are rather vague and their characteristics rather broad, so that trying to avoid overlapping is by no means easy.

As is generally known, translation is not only a matter of routine, the translator has to make **decisions**. So far we are treating the introductory, preparatory phase of the process of translation, which leaves much to do in the following stage. Within the latter the translator has to fill systemic communicative factors with concrete language devices respecting the mentioned differences in typology, structure, denotation and connotation, tradition and convention. In other words, considering text parameters is essentially part and parcel of the phase which underlies so-called *strategic decisions*. Only then may the *decision of detail* start (Hervey and Higgins, 1992).

As a matter of fact, the creativity of the translator finds its place in both the phases, but *initial decisions determine later decisions* (Holmes, 1973), the decisions of detail should be controlled by the strategic decisions and not surpass their limits. To get an adequate, good translation presupposes proper strategy (as a choice of the corresponding speech level and of the register) and then in individual cases of the micro-process compliance with that strategic decision. Then there should not appear criticism like “*the translation is too dry, the author of the source text is sure to use more colourful, more juicy speech*”.

The **degree of creativity** is disclosed very clearly when comparing two or more translations of the same source text, where we generally find a generation gap between analyzed translations. We have made an attempt to describe in some detail denotative

as well as connotative components of some modern American novels and short stories and their good Czech translations.

Translation used to be regarded as a sort of stylistic neutralization at one time, but this is no longer the case. In the new translations besides certain modernization and better command of the translation technique we find a number of differences resulting from greater creativity, enrichment of the style. (We do not take into consideration bad translations.) For illustration just one example: In a **detailed analysis** we have found 20 cases of increased denotative information and 18 cases of increased connotative information in 7 sentences of the new translation. The text reads well but elegant creativity should not make the text sound better, more vivid than its original version, even if the translator is stylistically talented, gifted and inventive. After all, he is a reproducing artist and that he should bear in mind. Such translations are semantically more saturated, they also often express explicitly facts which should have been implied only. We are wondering if it is a question of fashion, if it has something in common with the commercial character of the time or whether the skill of a gifted translator hates to submit itself to some discipline. Such a translation is very readable, impressive, but does it meet the demands put on an adequate result?

We see something like a wave of a fashionable trend and a certain progress in the use of translation operations, but also a tendency to use lower language levels, more “democratic” and more colourful common speech, complying to a certain degree with the taste, knowledge, interests and expectations of the public. Nevertheless, the question whether the degree of creativity is not surpassed just with the outstanding translators and whether that fact is not the reason for their high evaluation is left open. Such a colourful translation is usually very successful with the audience/readers and through its mediation the author of the source text is made known in a certain modification which sets a sort of standard for the following translations of the same author.

A number of translation shifts are not out of place, they are inventive, creative, a number of them result from the atmosphere of the text, but still a question is open: is such an intensified translation a denotative as well as connotative invariant of the source text? or how extensive may be the tolerance limits with respect to the pragmatic view of the translation? Some answer seems to lie in text linguistics mentioned before.

However, we are again tackling the old problem: if one language (e.g. Czech) takes quite a different stance on the expressivity/emotionality vs. rationality/intellectuality axis than the other one (e.g. English), is the same degree of expressivity in the translation from English to Czech satisfactory, or is it necessary to increase, intensify it? Are we right when we reproach our contemporary translators their tendency to put more colour into the text, or does it correspond with the mentioned difference? Should not the Czech reader feel another degree of expressivity in the translation from English and another one in the translation from Italian or Spanish? Certainly all the translations should not meet on some mean united course of the usage known in Czech. On the other hand translators should not manipulate the text to conform with the existing readers' taste.

The whole problem is complicated and difficult. Let's quote E.Genzler (1993): "The demands on the translator are enormous; they include competence as literary critic, historical scholar, linguistic technician, and creative artist. It is little wonder that the evaluative horizon presents problems."

The most difficult aspect of translation when translating fiction and dramatic texts is the transfer of subjective factors which are not descriptively appreciable. The scope of the problem is related to the domain of style variety, to the open and variable character of speech, to the complicated situation of various speech levels. Such phenomena only hesitatingly comply with an explicit description, which is based on general rules. But if we want to go as far as an all-embracing contrastive description of a text, it is necessary to proceed gradually even with these facts of language (Jařab 1966, Knittlová 1985, 1986). A method considering **both text parameters and a detailed descriptive approach** might be of some help in judging the adequacy of the source and target texts. It might also help in the theoretical education and practical guidance of translators.

A total, systematically performed analysis based on text linguistics principles and supported by frequency data might lead to objective qualitative indices which would underlie or even substitute for subjective impressions in evaluating the quality of translation and set some limits to the excessive or inadequate creativity of some translators, which often dominates their strategies.

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