Teaching Accurate Translation at Word Level

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Abstract

The article presents the key concepts, strategies and methodology that the author has developed to teach introductory Russian-to-English and English-to-Russian translation at the level of words in a 45-contact-hour course. The focus of such a course is on differentiating between denotative and connotative components of word senses both when translating and assessing the quality of translations. Denotative meaning is viewed as consisting of a sense core and a sense periphery while connotative meaning is divided into seven components indicating emotion, its intensity, the speaker's attitude toward what is being said, style, dialect, the frequency of occurrence of a word sense, and its pragmatics. Brief excerpts from translations of present-day Russian and American prose fiction are used as illustrative examples.

Teaching Accurate Translation at Word Level

In this article, I will set out the basic criteria and methodology for achieving accurate translation at the level of words, illustrating my method with examples from recent translations of popular fiction. Students are often asked to translate something without being given any clear guidelines that could focus their attention and efforts on the main challenges of the assignment. In this article the central question is how to translate contextualized word senses in an accurate or adequate way.

The general aim of my approach to teaching translation is to provide a streamlined, student-friendly introduction to basic translation theory and strategies, expressed in words that can be readily understood and using concepts that can, in fact, be applied to real-life translation problems. In teaching translation, I avoid highly abstract pronouncements on what translation should be like and set out, instead, a series of straightforward explanations and assignments that, I

believe, can actually teach beginning students of translation to translate while at the same time equipping them with a realistic, effective methodology of assessing the quality of translations they come across.

In this article, I will focus on and illustrate with the help of real-life examples the key theses of my book *Translating Culture: Перевод и межкультурная коммуникация. Этап 1: уровень слова* (see Бурак, 2002). I will discuss some easy-to-learn steps in translating the lexical content of various texts accurately and effectively. In my experience, the suggested approach helps students improve their translation techniques and translation quality by making them more sensitive to the word semantics and pragmatics of both the source and target languages.

There are several important aspects of translation discussed in this article that can be unfolded into separate, focused, self-contained narratives within the framework of separate articles. However, my overriding aim is to show the amount of translation theory and practice that can realistically be taught (all at the same time) over the course of one semester (45 contact hours) to a class of novices at an American university, given the fact that a longer course would normally be considered an unjustified luxury. By way of comparison, at MGU (Moscow State University, where I taught translation and interpretation for 23 years), a standard written translation course in Russian (the students' native language) takes the equivalent of 150 American classroom (contact) hours. Thus the severe time constraints in an American university setting force the translation instructor to roll a lot of things into one and cut many a corner.

The basic problem of teaching how to translate words and non-predicative word combinations (phrases) to a class of novices is that of distinguishing denotative and connotative components of meaning. In translation studies this seemingly transparent problem is generally discussed in impressionistic, vague, or overly abstract terms, with the content of the terminology used differing from one author to another. I find it useful to view denotative meaning as consisting of two basic components and to define connotative meaning as comprising seven clearly discernable elements. Thus I single out and describe in unambiguous terms nine aspects of lexical meaning into which a specific word sense has to be analyzed and which have to be

conveyed in the target language. What I have come up with so far and would like to share with other instructors is new, straightforward, very specific, and, most importantly, practicable.

Words do not exist in a vacuum – they combine to form sentences and texts. Teaching how to translate words accurately is impossible without giving the students a basic understanding of the textual transformations involved in reproducing a given text using the means of a different language in the context of a different culture. Based on the texts set as translation assignments, I introduce students to twelve well-tested translation techniques or operations that have to be carried out in order to achieve a faithful or adequate semantic approximation of the original text in the target language. I illustrate with examples from cohesive texts how linguistic norm, semantic faithfulness, and cultural appropriateness usually require the following typical modifications of the text of the translation: (1) omission of lexical items that are present in the original, (2) addition of lexical items that are not present in the original text, (3) changes in word order, (4) replacing parts of speech and grammatical forms with different parts of speech and grammatical forms, (5) compensating for semantic losses in one part of the original text in a different part of the translation, (6) concretizing and (7) generalizing concepts, (8) using antonymic and (9) metonymic translation, (10) paraphrasing to explicate specific parts in the original text, (11) combining sentences, and (12) fragmenting sentences. These are the specific basic translation strategies or techniques that have to be taught in the initial stage of training translators.

My experience has convinced me that there is no magic methodology of teaching translation – the teaching consists in a systematic hands-on approach whereby students have to translate carefully selected texts and assess the quality of translations made by other people, having the nine semantic criteria and the twelve translation manipulations I have outlined very clearly in mind. What I suggest puts the students through a process of rigorous analysis and synthesis of texts and covers the amount of material that can realistically be taught in the course of a 45-contact-hour semester at an American university to students' with limited linguistic backgrounds.

Basic Concepts

The denotative meaning of a word sense is its direct, explicit, literal, or dictionary meaning. I view the denotative meaning of word senses as consisting of two main components: (1) a sense core and (2) a sense periphery (or the specifying/concretizing elements of denotative meaning), and I split the connotative meaning of a word sense into seven component parts – those expressing (1) some kind of emotion, feeling, or mood associated with a particular word sense, (2) the intensity of that emotion, (3) the degree of the speaker's/writer's positive or negative evaluation of or attitude toward what is being expressed by the word sense – evaluative judgment, (4) functional style (register), (5) dialect (regional, temporal as in time, and social as in sociolect), (6) the frequency of occurrence of a word sense, and (7) pragmatics, or conformity with the aim of communication and the expectations and background knowledge of the target audience – the receivers/receptors of translation. Thus I single out 9 basic criteria for achieving adequate (faithful, accurate) translation and also for assessing translation quality at the level of word senses. Needless to say, in real sentences, many of the connotative components are fused together and can only be singled out for purposes of analysis. For example, an emotion and its intensity can be described as the emotive charge of a word sense, which, in its turn, is often closely connected with functional style or register. However, it is extremely helpful for the translator to be able to identify – on a conscious, not intuitive, level – the constituent parts of both denotative and connotative meaning of the original.

General Methodology: Analysis and Synthesis of Translation

The general methodology of teaching accurate translation at the level of word senses can be summarized as follows. The students first make a written translation of a Russian or English passage into English or Russian at home and bring their translations to class for collective editing. The strong and weak points of the students' translated versions of the passage are then discussed in class with particular emphasis on the accuracy of rendering the different denotative and connotative elements of word senses. In the course of this analy-

sis, the students' versions are also compared with the five variants of translation of the same passage provided in my translation textbook *Translating Culture.* As the next homework assignment, the students analyze the accuracy and adequacy of the seven translations (one of their own, five provided in the translation textbook *Translating Culture* – these were made by native speakers of American English and native speakers of Russian who took the same translation course previously, -- and one sample translation at the back of the book) and decide on their own final version of the translation, which they e-mail to me for grading. Time permitting, I spend the final stage of working on the translation of the passage getting pairs of students in the class to do a two-way (reverse) oral translation (consecutive interpreting) of the passage, with either student monitoring the translation accuracy of the other by following the original or the final version of the translation. In the course of working on the translation of a text, I keep track of the students' typical difficulties and recap them at the end of each segment of the course. The assignments I give the students constitute a process of transition from an analysis of lexical meaning to a final synthesis of contextual meaning in the final translated version. In the process, students compose a final version of their translation based on the ready-made – although sometimes not entirely accurate – translation variants. It is for this reason that I describe this stage in teaching translation as the first stage or an introduction to written translation – a kind of "Translation 101."

Illustrations of Criteria of Translation Accuracy in Teaching Basic Translation Techniques

Denotative Meaning

As I mentioned earlier, I view *denotative meaning* (*денотативное значение*) as consisting of *a sense core* (*основа денотативного значения*) and *a sense periphery* (*элементы семантической структуры словозначения, уточняющие денотативное значение*), i.e. the semantic and pragmatic nuances that surround the basic core meaning. Thus *to snicker, to chuckle*, and *to guffaw* have the same sense core *to laugh* but differing sense peripheries, respectively, [to laugh] *quietly, and often unkindly, at*

something that is not supposed to be funny (that is *to snicker - хихикать, ехидно посмеиваться*); [to laugh] *quietly* (that is *to chuckle - тихо смеяться*); and [to laugh] *loudly and boisterously* (that is *to guffaw – ржать, гоготать*). Both elements have to be rendered in translation. The easy option is to translate just the sense core. This deprives the translation of the richness of the original but often happens because of the translator's inexperience, ignorance, and negligence – i.e. unprofessionalism -- or due to the "limited translatability" of a particular stretch of language. Ironically, the general reading public would not notice.

In teaching accurate translation and assessing translation quality it is necessary to set the specific goal of achieving as high a level of approximation to the original sense core and sense periphery of a word sense as realistically possible. Bilingual and monolingual dictionaries in both languages will be necessary. However, students should be cautioned that bilingual dictionaries may be misleading because they themselves are collections of translated word senses, or interlingual synonyms. What they contain is not set in stone.

It would seem that violating, distorting or mismatching the denotative meanings of the original text in the target text should be rare, given the relative transparency of the problem. However, my observation of this part of translation practice indicates otherwise: especially in translations of popular fiction, instances of distorting denotative meaning appear to be as frequent as distortions of connotative meaning.

Andrew Bromfield is a famous British translator of Russian fiction. He always produces high-quality translations. But even in his excellent and widely praised translation into English of the novel *Ночной дозор* by Sergei Lukyanenko (2004) we find some mistranslations of denotative meaning (both its sense core and sense periphery).

Example 1.

"И тогда Костя вдруг ухмыльнулся. Протянул руку, взял один из пузырьков, раскупорил, содрав жестяной колпачок легко и умело. Поднес бутылочку к губам. Опять усмехнулся, сделал глоток" (p. 39). -- "Kostya suddenly laughed. He reached out, took one of the bottles, and opened it, tearing off the tinfoil cap with practiced ease. He raised the bottle to his lips, laughed again, and took a

swallow" (Lukyanenko, 2006, p. 42). In this translation, the denotative meanings of *ухмыльнулся* and *усмехнулся* are not rendered – they are replaced with the denotative meaning of *to laugh*. *Усмехнуться* means *улыбнуться (обычно с иронией, насмешкой, недоверием и т. п.)* (Кузнецов, 1998). *Ухмыльнуться* has a more colloquial ring to it and also means *(разг. усмехнуться, улыбнуться (обычно насмешливо, иронически, самодовольно и т. п.)* (Кузнецов, 1998). Both *ухмыльнуться* and *усмехнуться* are close synonyms – they have the same denotative meaning (*to smile*), and very similar sense peripheries and connotations as indicated in the parentheses above. Bromfield translates both verbs using *to laugh*. *To laugh* means *to make sounds from the throat while breathing out in short bursts or gasps as a way of expressing amusement* (Soukhanov, 2004). *Смеяться* means the same in Russian: *издавать прерывистые горловые звуки, вызываемые короткими выдыхательными движениями, при проявлении веселья, радости, удовольствия и т. п.*(Кузнецов, 1998). While generally belonging to the same semantic field, *ухмыльнуться*, *усмехнуться* and *за/рас/смеяться* have considerably differing denotative meanings. In contrast to smiling in a particular way, laughing involves repeated muscular movements of the throat accompanied by a series of characteristic sounds. Neither *ухмыльнуться* nor *усмехнуться* has this denotative meaning. I would suggest a closer approximation to the original using *a smirk* and *to smirk*: "With a sudden smirk Kostya reached out, took one of the bottles and opened it, tearing off the tinfoil cap with practiced ease. He raised the bottle to his lips, repeated the smirk, and took a swallow." *To smirk* means *to smile in an insolent, smug, or contemptuous way* (Soukhanov, 2004), which is much closer to the Russian *ухмыльнуться* and *усмехнуться* than *to laugh*. Alternatively, given the slight connotational differences between the Russian *ухмыльнуться* and *усмехнуться*, *a grin* (*a broad smile, especially as an indication of pleasure, amusement or the like*) (Soukhanov, 2004) or *to grin* may also work: "Raising the bottle to his lips, he took a swallow with a grin" or "He grinned, brought the bottle to his lips and took a swallow from it." – A. B. This fine-tuning of Bromfield's translation of the two Russian verbs brings the suggested translation closer to the semantics of the original, although, if looked at in an overly pedantic way, it could be criticized, too. The point, however, is that the suggested translation is

an improvement with regard to conveying the denotative meaning of the two "smiling" verbs.

Example 2.

Les faux amis du traducteur (literally, *the false friends of the translator*), that is, cross-cultural lexical cognates, or misleading words of foreign origin, are part of any basic translation manual. Still, surprisingly, they remain a perennial problem. Misinterpreting cross-cultural cognates leads to violations of either or both denotative and connotative meanings. Even experienced translators, inexplicably, fall into the trap, mesmerized, most likely, by the words' "transparent" appearance. In Andrew Bromfield's translation of *Nightwatch*, we read: "Twice I was pestered by crazy young guys who wanted to give me, absolutely free – that is, for only fifty bucks – a Chinese fan, a child's toy, and a dirt-cheap Korean telephone" (Lukyanenko, 2006, p. 47). Sergei Lukyanenko's original sentence is as follows:

> "Дважды ко мне приставали безумные молодые люди, желающие совершенно бесплатно, всего лишь за полсотни баксов, подарить мне китайский фен, детскую игрушку и копеечный корейский телефон" (Лукьяненко, 2004, p. 42).

Фен is a textbook example of a translator's false friend. Almost invariably, it means *a hairdryer* in Russian, whereas *fan* is *веер* – something you usually wave in front of your face to cool yourself down. In example 2, all of the denotative meaning of the word sense *фен* was mistranslated. Of course, one could make a pedantic case for the remote possibility that *a fan* may conceivably be construed as a kind of mechanical or electrical device with rotating blades, et cetera, et cetera. But just try to reverse-translate *fan* into Russian and in the majority of contexts you will most likely come up with *веер*. The frequency-of-use factor and the context come into play here, of which more later.

Are the corrections in examples 1 and 2 important clarifications for conveying the general tenor of the book? In the general scheme of things, they are not. Still, even seemingly insignificant mistranslations compromise the translator's work, make him/her sound unprofessional, and give the high art of translation a bad name.

Indeed, the above slips are comparatively minor transgressions. The depth of a translator's fall is sometimes truly unfathomable. Dan Brown's novel *The Da Vinci Code* has become very popular in Russia thanks to its translator Natalya Rein. A large Russian publishing house has put out a 20,000-copy print run of her translation. However, I cannot help but reinforce the diplomatic and tactful assessment of the quality of the translation expressed by D.I. Yermolovich in 2006 (see Ермолович, 2006) by saying that the number of mistranslations in it is a bit excessive. The following example illustrates a complete annihilation of the original denotative meaning.

Example 3.

The original passage in Dan Brown's novel is as follows: "Tonight's lecture . . . had probably ruffled some conservative feathers in the audience. Most likely, some religious scholar had trailed him home to pick a fight" (2003, pp.7-8). Its translation reads: "Вечерняя лекция . . . консервативной профессуре . . . наверняка пришлась не по вкусу. А может, самые религиозные ученые даже попросят его вон и посадят на первый же рейс до Америки?" (Браун, 2005, p. 14) Back-translated into English, the Russian sentence would read: "Maybe, the most religious scholars will send him packing and put him on the next available flight to America." – A. B. An acceptable Russian translation would read something like this: "Вполне возможно, что какой-нибудь религиозный фанатик-ученый, присутствовавший на лекции, выследил его и теперь явился в гостиницу для выяснения отношений". – А.В.

Despite numerous mistranslations of denotative and connotative aspects of meaning in contemporary fiction, the Russian or English translations usually read all right, and the general public is unaware of their shortcomings as translations, unless somebody proficient in the two languages takes the trouble to compare the translation with its original. Serious mistranslations like the one in example 3 occur for several reasons: the translator's negligence, lack of sufficient linguistic and cultural knowledge, superficial and intuitive use of translation techniques, a tight deadline to which the translator has unwisely agreed – in other words, because of unprofessionalism.

So much for denotative meaning. Let's have a look at the real challenges faced when translating connotations.

Connotative Meaning

Connotative meaning (*коннотативное значение*), also called *expressive meaning*, is what is suggested by or associated with a particular word sense. *To connote* means *to suggest or imply in addition to the denotative meaning*. As already mentioned, for translation purposes, it is useful to look at connotative meaning as consisting of the (1) *emotional/ affective*, (2) *intensive* (having the property of intensifying; giving force or emphasis), (3) *evaluative*, (4) *stylistic*, (5) *dialectal*, (6) *frequency-of-occurrence*, and (7) *pragmatics* components.

(1) The affective component of a word sense has the capacity to evoke or directly express some emotion (эмоциональное состояние, степень эмоциональности, эмоциональность). For example, *Mom* (*мама*) as compared to *mother* (*мать*) is more affective – it expresses greater closeness, love, or tenderness. *To scarf* (*жрать*) as compared with *to eat* (*есть*) is more "emotional" in a different way, usually evoking feelings of disgust or squeamishness.

(2) Connotation may be of varying intensity (экспрессивность, степень экспрессивности). *To abhor* (*терпеть не мочь, не переносить на дух*) as compared with *to hate* (*ненавидеть*) or *to dislike* (in phrases with *не нравится*) expresses a more intense or poignant feeling. *To scarf something down* as compared with *to eat something* implies a process which is more vigorous or intensive.

(3) A word sense often includes an evaluative connotation, or a concealed evaluative judgment (оценка) about something, which may or may not be marked in the respective dictionary entry. *Cronies* as compared to *friends* often has a pejorative shade of meaning, hence *cronyism* (*блат, кумовство.*) *To scarf* as compared to *to eat* may imply censure or disapproval of someone's table manners. Evaluative connotations, like emotions and their intensity, should be reproduced in the target text.

(4) A word sense may carry a distinctive *stylistic coloring* (*стилистическая окраска, стиль*), i.e. belong to a particular style or register – bookish, neutral or colloquial, to name just the classical three. For example, *to slay* (*поразить, сразить*) as compared with *to kill*

(*убить*) is felt to be formal, bookish, or even poetic, while *to scarf*, as compared with *to eat*, which is neutral, belongs in the realm of slang. The style (register) of the translation should be as close as possible to that of the original.

(5) Some word senses are characterized by *dialectal reference* or *dialect* (*диалектальная принадлежность, диалект.*) Three types of dialect have to be kept in mind while translating. *Geographic/regional dialect*: *to tick someone off* means *to make someone angry* (*разозлить, рассердить*) in American English, while in British English it means *to tell someone angrily that you are annoyed with them or disapprove of them* (*отругать, отчитать*). Thus, translated from American English, *He was ticked off* would be *Он был зол/разозлен*, whereas, translated from British English, the same sentence would read *Его отругали/отчитали. Temporal dialect* may be illustrated by words such as *e'er – before*; *thou, thee – you*; *behest – command*, etc. The target text would have to be "aged," using different means, in order to convey the outdated or archaic elements of the original. The following line from the song *Wankster*[1] by the rapper 50 Cent is a sample of AAVE (African American Vernacular English), which is a variety of *sociolect* : "Now shorty think ima sweat her" (translation: "Now this girl thinks I'm going to pursue her"). In many cases, sociolect, being a unique, culture-specific phenomenon, is lost in translation or is compensated for by using slang in the target text. Thus, using Russian slang, the above line might conceivably be translated as "Эта телка думает, что я хочу ее трахать". This is a reasonable approximation to the English original that works better than a straightforward translation of the original sentence in a neutral style. The bottom line is, if it is at all possible, the target text should somehow reflect the dialectal references of the original.

(6) The *frequency of occurrence of a word sense* (*относительная частотность употребления словозначения в определенном функциональном стиле*) as used in the source text should match, at least roughly, that in the target text. *Now* or *today* should be translated into Russian as *сейчас* or *в наше время* and not as *нынче*, which is old-fashioned or ironic or bookish but well liked by American students who read Rus-

[1] I am grateful to C.J. Wahl for bringing this song to my attention.

sian classical literature. English and American electronic language corpora may have to be used in sensitive or very important cases.

(7) And last but not least – *pragmatics* (*прагматический аспект перевода*). A sign reading *Wet paint* on an American bench will read in Russian as *Осторожно, окрашено!* (literally, *Be careful, it is painted.*) The inscription on a car window on the Moscow metro, which, if translated word-for-word, says: "Seats for children, invalids and elderly people" ("Места для детей, инвалидов и лиц пожилого возраста"), would jar on the American English speaker's sensibilities. To make this sentence sound as familiar and unobtrusive in English as it does in Russian, the translator has to subject it to cultural adaptation and produce something like this: "Please offer these seats to the elderly, persons with disabilities, and young children."

As already mentioned earlier, all seven parameters of connotative meaning usually manifest themselves in different permutations but, if approached methodically and with a certain amount of mental concentration, they are not difficult to identify. In dictionaries, some connotative aspects of a word sense may be marked by special notations or abbreviations. Quite often, however, important connotations of a word sense go unmarked and without any comments. In such cases the translator's grasp of the two languages and cultures will determine the accuracy of the translation. It goes without saying that the translator should have an advanced knowledge of two respective languages and cultures. A team of translators representing the two respective cultures is usually more effective at detecting hidden connotations than a single translator who is usually more closely connected with one of the two cultures. Sloppy translators and some journalists with a vague idea of translation theory and techniques often ignore or distort the connotative meaning of the source text, thus robbing the reader of the true expressive impact of the original. Obviously, the ultimate challenge for the translator is to try to preserve in the target text not only the denotative but also as much of the connotative content of the original as possible. Unfortunately, distortions of connotative meaning in translation are as ubiquitous as computer spam. Here are some examples from some recent translations.

Example 4.

This is an example of ignored intensity of feeling or emotion in a set phrase. In the Russian original of *Nightwatch* (Лукьяненко, 2004), we read: "Значит, надо его отвлечь. Создать такую ситуацию, чтобы он был занят по уши. Чтобы его кинули на второстепенное задание, да еще и завязать на этом задании личной ответствен-ностью, симпатией – всем, что под руку подвернется" (p. 146). Andrew Bromfield's English translation of the excerpt goes: "He had to be distracted. A situation had to be created that would keep him busy. He had to be given a secondary assignment, and feel obliged to carry out that assignment for professional and personal reasons – anything that came to hand would do" (Lukyanenko, 2006, p. 168). In this instance, what should have been translated as "A situation had to be created where he would be up to his ears in work," or something along those lines, has been translated using the neutral *keep him busy*, thus lowering levels 5 or 6 of expressive intensity to practically zero.

Examples 5, 6, and 7 deal with evaluative connotations that get lost in translation so often. Untranslated implied evaluative judgments forming part of the original connotative meaning go unnoticed by the reader but they still detract from the overall semantic and emotional impact of the text. Here are three examples illustrating the point. They come from the excellent translation of *Ночной дозор* by Andrew Bromfield (2006).

Example 5.

"Девушку я знал. Алиса Донникова. Ведьмочка из Дневного Дозора" (Лукьяненко, 2004, p. 214). Translation: "I knew the girl. It was Alisa Donnikova, the witch from Day Watch" (p. 251). The word for *witch* is not *ведьмочка* but rather *ведьма*. The previous context and the use of the diminutive suffix *-очк* indicate that the witch is young, inexperienced, not all that much of a threat, and that the narrator (Anton Gorodetsky) has a dismissively disdainful attitude toward her, which comes through in different parts of the original text. Anton's belittling, disparaging evaluation of the new witch on the block is in no way conveyed in the translation. I would

suggest the following improvement: "I knew the girl. It was Alisa Donnikova, the clueless little witch from Day Watch."

Example 6.

"Давай, дружок" (Лукьяненко, 2004, p. 231). Translation: "Bring it on, my young friend" (Lukyanenko, 2006, p. 270). The narrator (Anton Gorodetsky) is challenging a vampire, who is an enemy of his and is sizing Anton up for a fight. The address *my young friend* in the translation sounds somewhat avuncular and rather bookish and old-fashioned, whereas *дружок* in the original is dripping with sarcasm and tension. In other words, Anton's negative attitude toward his adversary is not adequately conveyed. I would suggest something like: "Bring it on, buddy/pal/dude/buster." In any case, a variant of translation should be found so that the speaker does not sound as if he were thinking favorably about someone who is about to attack him.

Example 7.

"Все эти нагловатые молодые маги пользуются стандартным набором заклинаний, наиболее простых и мощных" (Лукьяненко, 2004, pp. 232-233). Translation: "All these young magicians use a standard set of spells, the simplest and most powerful" (Lukyanenko, 2006, p. 273). The problem here is the omission of the word *нагловатые* in the non-predicative collocation *нагловатые молодые маги*, which strips the original phrase of its negative evaluative connotation. The word *нагловатые* here indicates the speaker's negative attitude toward the young generation of magicians, clearly showing that he thinks they are snotty, arrogant, brash, or confident in a bad way. My suggestion is: "All these brash, young magicians use a standard set of spells, the simplest and most powerful."

Example 8.

Distortions of functional style (register) are numerous, and, in most cases, unwarranted and professionally inexcusable. Here is just one example from *The Da Vinci Code*, by Dan Brown (2003): "And if I find which one of you provided that article, I'll have the consulate deport you" (p. 10). Natalya Rein's translation: "И если я только

узнаю, кто приволок (literally, *dragged* or *hauled*) сюда этот журнал, потребую вышвырнуть (literally, *to throw out*) мерзавца (literally, *scoundrel* or *bastard*) вон" (Браун, 2005, p. 16). (Back-translated, *потребую вышвырнуть мерзавца вон* would read something like this: "I will demand that the creep be kicked out of here." Natalya Rein has lowered the stylistic register in her translation from the neutral one in the original to a very colloquial, bordering on slang style in Russian. A translation into Russian which is closer to the original would read something like this: "И если я только узнаю, кто из вас передал/принес эту статью организаторам конференции, я потребую от консульства депортации этого человека." – A.B.

Dialect, in the wide sense of the term, is an important and subtle issue in translation. As has already been said, the dialectal references of the original have to be somehow reproduced in the translation. The obvious aspects of the problem concern regional and temporal varieties of language. Just one more simple example, by way of a reminder. *Dinky* in British English sounds old-fashioned and means *small and charming.* In translating it into Russian, I would be hard put to match its temporal parameter in Russian but would have no difficulty translating its positive evaluation. *A dinky little room* would be *миленькая комнатка*, *симпатичненькая комнатка*, or just *симпатичная комнатка.* In American English, the temporal parameter of "old-fashionedness" of the British word sense does not exist, and the word just means *small and unimportant* in a somewhat derogatory way. So translating *dinky* from American English would yield *комнатуха*, *конура*, or *каморка*, depending on the specific context. Translators should be consistent in their use of regional or national varieties of language. This is often not the case. Thus Andrew Bromfield, for example, in some parts of his *Nightwatch* translation uses terms that are more common in American English (e.g., *apartment* – Br. Eng.: *flat*; *German shepherd* – Br. Eng.: *Alsatian*; *sidewalk* – Br.Eng.: *pavement*; *street car* – Br.Eng.: *tram*; *dial tone* – Br.Eng.: *dialling tone*, etc.) while elsewhere – *flat* for *apartment*, *safety catch* for *safety*, *Sugar!* for *Damn!*, etc. However, these little inconsistencies may well have been introduced by the copy editor. Translating the third variety of dialect – sociolect – usually involves playing around with word senses belonging to different functional styles in order to compensate for the

lack of culture-specific equivalents in the two languages (see the translation of a line from the song *Wankster* on p. 15).

As a rule, the frequency of occurrence of word senses in particular types of discourse – which I regard as a component of connotative meaning closely linked with pragmatics – is determined on the basis of subjective personal experience and the experience of a restricted circle of informants. In many cases this works. A more precise and scientific approach to assessing the frequency-of-occurrence match between source-text and target-text word senses is to use national language corpora. For Russian, these may be *Integrum* (350 million documents dealing with Russia) or *The Russian National Corpus* (140 million words). For English, the better known corpora are *The British National Corpus* (at least 100,000,000 words), *The Oxford English Corpus* (1 billion words: 80% - American and British English and 20% - other varieties of English), the Collins *COBUILD Bank of English* (524 million words), and *The Longman Lancaster Corpus* (incorporating British and American speech). Access to the above databases is not free, though. One has to pay to be allowed to use any of them. Using language corpora for evaluating translation quality (in particular, for establishing the frequency of use of lexical items and their collocability) is an underappreciated and ill-researched field in translation studies.

Example 9.

Pragmatics in translation means making the text of the translation fulfill the aim of communication while conforming to the expectations and background knowledge of the target audience. The goal is to achieve "sameness of perception," whereby the communicative response of the native receiver of the source text would be very similar, if not the same, to that of the receiver of the translation. Unfortunately, we do not have any devices for measuring such responses in people's brains – translators have to rely on previous experience and discussions with informants. Pragmatics often involves expanding or compressing the original text. Thus the Russian *шестерка* (literally, *the six*) has been translated by Andrew Bromfield, quite adequately, by the phrase *a model 6 Zhiguli car* (p. 381), which involved an expansion of the original text. In a different place of the translation, the pragmatics and frequency-of-occurrence criteria have not been

met. In the Russian original we find: "В молодой тигрице, стоящей в боевой стойке на обледенелой крыше, было центнера полтора" (Лукьяненко, 2004, p. 130), which is rendered in the translation as "The young tigress poised in combat stance on the icy roof must have weighed a centner and a half" (Lukyanenko, 2006, p. 150). In this case, the common Russian measure of weight *центнер* should have been pragmatically adapted and translated as *over 300 pounds* (in fact, it is 331 pounds), or *about a hundred and fifty kilos* to convey some local color. To the majority of Americans, *centner* is unknown. So the factor of the frequency of occurrence of *centner* in English has also been disregarded. Whereas in Russia *центнер* is an absolutely common and universal measure of weight equaling 100 kilos, in Britain, for example, it is a specialized term meaning 100 pounds. But, of course, it can be assumed or argued that the translator used the word *centner* for strong local color.

Example 10.

Finally, here is an example of mistranslating a fusion of connotative elements of meaning. However, one should not judge too harshly – connotations do get lost in translation. In Andrew Bromfield's translation of *Nightwatch* (2006), we come across: "Anton, listen carefully ... They've picked up that girl's trail. Perovo station." -- 'Sugar,' was all I said. Working out in the dormitory suburbs was absolute hell" (p. 54). Without even referring to the Russian original, I found the use of *sugar* here distinctly strange. In fact, the original reads: "Антон, внимание ... Поймали след той девушки. Станция 'Перово'," -- 'Блин,' только и сказал я. Работать в спальных районах – мучение" (Лукьяненко, 2004, p. 49). *Блин* (literally, *pancake* in Russian) has long been used as a euphemism for a vulgar Russian expletive beginning with the same two initial consonants. It is a kind of lexical epidemic in Russian speech today – everybody uses it to express annoyance, frustration, disgust, and other similar emotions. On a ten-point scale of intensity of feeling, I would place it somewhere between a five and a seven. The mainstream American reader would hardly readily perceive *Sugar!* as a somewhat mitigated equivalent of *Shit!*, so using *Sugar!* in place of the Russian interjection *Блин!* strikes me as a mistranslation. The many Americans I discussed

the interjection *Sugar!* with felt it to be definitely outdated, rare and belonging to what was termed by one American professor as "gals' slang." Most of my students at the University of Florida (aged 19-23) could not understand it adequately at all and equated it, quite erroneously for the given context, with *sweetie* or *honey*. To me *Sugar!* sounds like British English, where *Oh, sugar!* is a well-known, if outdated, euphemistic interjection expressing annoyance about something stupid that the speaker has just said or done, or when something goes wrong. But is Bromfield's translation in British English? Not quite, given the numerous Americanisms that occur in the translation. To sum up, all seven parameters of connotative meaning that I single out have been mismatched, to a greater or lesser extent, in the translation of the popular Russian interjection *Блин!* The varying degrees of skewing the connotative meaning involve: (1) the nature of emotion (annoyance, frustration – these do not immediately spring to mind when you read the translation); (2) the intensity of emotion (in Russian, it lies above the middle range, and does not gravitate toward zero); (3) the speaker's negative evaluation of the situation, which is noticeably vaguer in the translation than in the Russian original; (4) style or register (*Блин!* is at least a little more slangy in Russian than *Sugar!* is in English); (5) all three dialectal references (*Sugar!* here sounds like outdated effeminate British English – it is as if an annoyed old British lady were talking – no offense to annoyed old British ladies); (6) the frequency of occurrence of the term in everyday speech (in American English – or even British English, for that matter, where the interjection seems to have originated – *Sugar!* is far less frequently used as compared with *Блин!* in contemporary Russian speech); and, finally, (7) pragmatics (back-translated, *Sugar!* would yield something like *Батюшки!* and I find it hard to imagine a young Muscovite man in all seriousness saying something like that). I would suggest the good old, moderately vulgar *Shit!* or the tamer *Damn!* or *Shoot!* which I think are closer approximations to the Russian *Блин!*

Some General Conclusions

Do all of the concerns about translation quality discussed in this article really matter? I believe they do, if you are a proponent of maximum textual equivalence in translation – and I am. Of course,

some translation theories, like skopos theory (see Baker, 2005, pp. 235-238) or translatorial action theory (see Baker, 2005, pp. 3-5) for example, taken to their logical extremes, might lead one to an opposite conclusion, namely, that, in some cases, such "niceties" do not really matter so long as the translation fulfills its functional-communicative purpose and is a good read. Indeed, the majority of Russian and English translations of popular fiction are read without any questions on the part of the readership. The translations do not contain any noticeable errors in the use of Russian or English, read smoothly, and provide a source of entertainment and distraction. On the other hand, a linguist-translator who bothers to compare the original text with its translation(s) immediately finds that the degree of accuracy in conveying some of the original's lexical items leaves something to be desired. Hopefully, the nine criteria of accuracy in translating lexis that I have discussed in this article will be useful and helpful both for teachers and students of translation.

In this article I have focused on what I believe are deficiencies found in various translations, but many translations and sometimes parts of even the worst translations make me say "Wow!" because I realize that I myself could hardly emulate some translation solutions of genius found in them. However, accidental masterpieces are rather the exception than the rule.

It is true that intuition and moments of epiphany do have a place in translation, but to start working as a professional translator one must be aware of some basic principles which, initially, may be confined to the following. Translation is an inexact science and an exact art rolled into one. It is the fifth and highest verbal skill consisting in transferring complex clusters of meaning across cultures. While potential translators of genius are born, they still have to be trained. Given time, most people can be trained to become very good translators in a particular field. In assessing the translation quality of the target text, it is useful to single out the denotative and connotative components of meaning that have to be rendered as closely to the original as possible. To do so one has to familiarize oneself with some basic translation techniques. Teaching translation theory and techniques takes time and presupposes great general erudition, a solid command of the two languages and cultures in question, and a thorough fami-

liarity with translation theory and techniques on the part of the teacher. The students aspiring to become translators should have achieved a high level of language proficiency and cross-cultural awareness. Steering a middle course between grand theories of translation and hard-core, subjective-intuitive pragmatism is the most effective and efficient methodology for training translators.

The importance of using monolingual dictionaries in the course of translating or assessing translation quality, no matter whether you are a native speaker or not, is usually underrated. In order to gauge all the nuances of denotation and connotation, however, the use of monolingual dictionaries is an absolute must. Bilingual dictionaries are a staple in translation practice, but they may often be misleading. How to use dictionaries and other reference sources should be part of any introductory translation course.

No miracles happen in language acquisition, and training oneself to become a translator is a lifelong project. Team translation is a good thing and a translation team should consist of a minimum of two translators whereby one of the two translators is a native speaker of one of the two languages, a linguist, and a trained translator, while the other – a mirror image of the first -- should also be a native speaker of the other language, a linguist, and a trained translator. However, larger, very successful teams are known. For example, Robert Chandler, the famous British translator from Russian into English, sometimes works in teams of three or five, producing highly acclaimed translations (see Platonov 2001; Platonov 2007). Apart from everything else, the translator should have a sense of humility combined with a sense of humor, especially when hearing or reading responses to one's work. Criticism of one's translations should be treated as a stimulus to professional improvement and not as an occasion for vicious polemics.

Despite some criticisms that I have expressed in this article, I would like to finish on a charitable note by quoting a free translation, or "an imitative commentary," "begrimed and beslimed by rhyme," as Nabokov would put it, of an excerpt from Horace's "Ars poetica" (quoted from Steiner, 1998, p. 328):

> Whoever thinks a faultless piece to see,
> Thinks what ne'er was, nor is, nor e'er shall be.

In every work regard the writer's end,
Since none can compass more than they intend;
And, if the means be just, the conduct true,
Applause, in spite of trivial faults is due.
(Alexander Pope)

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