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TRANSLATION GAP

Differences between several translations of the same text always existed and there is no doubt that it is normal. It would not be such a big problem if the translations only slightly differed in stylistics while the meaning of the original was kept remarkably adequate in both versions. Various people cannot operate with exactly the same words, but when they are able to comprehend the text equally right, a reader will only notice the subjective difference, understanding both versions identically.

The problem we want to touch is based on the contention between a good number of opinions of how to actually comprehend the gist, the details and all kinds of shades and contexts, which are put into the original text by the author, combining with the trouble of interpreting it into another language. We will examine English into Russian literary translation, but it also reflects the situation for most of Slavic languages.

To begin with, it is necessary to identify what we mean, when we use the term “movement”. As we are interested in practical side of the case, we want to classify and point at the most considerable types of translation, one most likely encounters: fully adequate, censored-adequate and inadequate. These three groups will represent several somewhat different movements and cover some sorts of ideology they follow.

Ideally, the first group—*fully adequate movement*—would have to translate an original text in a way, that covers all shades of it. This means, a fully adequate translator has not only to correctly comprehend the material and retranslate it into another language, but it has to be done deeply and sophisticatedly, keeping the intonations, attitude, irony, jokes and all the other literal devices offered by the author. More than that, all taboo part has to be translated as taboo without censorship. This way we will have the translation that will represent the original as accurately as possible.

The second group—*censored-adequate movement*—has the same properties as the first one, but requires censoring taboos. Remarkably, back in the USSR and now in the post-USSR countries, it is unlikely to translate, for instance, swearing as swearing. Instead, it has usually been replaced with euphemisms, while everything else is translated adequately.

To clarify, as nobody can be absolutely perfect, adequate movements mentioned above can make uncritical mistakes from time to time, which will not totally affect the quality of the translation. And here where it comes to the third group—*inadequate movement*. By this term, we should consider all kinds of inappropriate translations, which are done poorly, even ignoring the fundamental basics. Those can be both censored and uncensored, but the idea is that translation is critically bad.

After defining what those movements are, we move on to the essence of the matter. As it appears, current tendency is that more and more translators try to follow the fully adequate movement. The problem here is that both professionals and amateurs do not understand one simple fact: proper translation of swearing or blind derogation from solid literariness does not automatically mean that translation is somewhat adequate. No doubt if we have a character such as a swearing teenager, a member of black neighborhood or

Italian mafia, then he has to talk as he talks, up to all kinds of literal incorrectness. But there is no excuse for misinterpreted schemas or collocations, or for deceptive tone of the speech. All those errors are unspeakably common for translators of the so-called “new school”. Let us ask a perfectly legitimate question. Theoretically, what is the difference between “new school” and above-mentioned fully adequate movement? The answer is — none, in theory. However, in practice, most of those “new school”-doers provide low-quality translations, and should be considered as the members of inadequate movement.

To illustrate what we mean, let us focus on one piece of work of the contemporary translator Maksim Nemtsov and his translation of the *Inherent Vice* by Thomas Pynchon. Nemtsov is known for being off-track of the classic “old school” ideology, which was used by such famous translators as Nora Gal or Aleksey Mikhalyov, just to name a few. Nevertheless, let us see the Pynchon’s original (ISBN 978-0143117568) comparing to his translation (ISBN 978-5-699-65953-1).

1.

“She came along the alley and up the back steps the way she always used to. Doc hadn’t seen her for over a year. Nobody had. Back then it was always sandals, bottom half of a flower-print bikini, faded *Country Joe & the Fish* T-shirt. Tonight she was all in flatland gear, hair a lot shorter than he remembered, looking just like she swore she’d never look.”

“Она пришла по переулку и поднялась к чёрному ходу, как, бывало, делала всегда. Док не видел её год с лишним. Никто её не видел. Раньше обычно ходила в сандалиях, трусиках от ситцевого бикини в цветочек, линялой футболке «Сельского Джо и Рыбы». Сегодня же вечером экипировалась, как на плоскости носят, таких коротких волос у неё он не помнил — в общем, некогда она клялась, что ни за что не будет так выглядеть”.

2.

“That you, Shasta?”

“Thinks he’s hallucinating.”

“Just the new package I guess.”

“— Шаста, это ты?”

— Думает, у него галлюцинация.

— Наверно, просто новая упаковка”.

3.

“It had been dark at the beach for hours, he hadn’t been smoking much and it wasn’t headlights—but before she turned away, he could swear he saw light falling on her face, the orange light just after sunset that catches a face turned to the west, watching the ocean for someone to come in on the last wave of the day, in to shore and safety.

(...)

And least askable of all, how passionately did she really feel about old Mickey?”

“ На пляже темно уже не первый час, много Док не курил и мимо никто не проезжал — но не успела Шаста отвернуться, он бы поклялся, на лицо её упал свет, оранжевый, как сразу после заката, такой поймает, когда повернёшься к западу поглядеть на океан — кого принесёт оттуда последней волной дня, прийдёт к безопасному берегу.

(...)

Менее всего спрашивабельным было: много ли страсти питает она к старине Мики?».

Let us comment on them. Main issues first.

In the first example, we have the translation of the proper name. It is not a strict rule, that it isn't done, but there must be an objective reason for that, otherwise it is better to be left "as it is". *Country Joe & the Fish* is the name of the music band. Have you ever heard anybody translating names such as *Deep Purple*, *The Beatles* or maybe *Creedence Clearwater Revival*? Apparently, never, not to mention, that *Country Joe & the Fish* never appears in the whole story to be so important as to have this word-for-word translation, just to confuse a Russian-speaking reader.

In the second case, we have the word "package", meaning "outfit" or "garments". In Russian, the word «упаковка» has nothing to do with «внешний вид» and «одежда»—it is what it is, the package, as a box or a container. This means that the consumer of the translation will get nothing from that, except for unnecessary discombobulation, as deep as this word's length.

The third piece of the text shows us the incapability of the proper restructuring of an English sentence into Russian. Sure, the first one is rather long and a bit messy, but other than that, it has no errors and reads normally. The translation is barely readable at all. In the second sentence Nemtsov altogether dumbly calks the word "askable", which is a rather normal type of beyond-the-borders word formation for English, but in Russian it looks too unusual and incongruous and feels like "it's way too much".

To further perpetuate the debugging, in those examples there are the problems with the rebuilding of the word order. Even the words themselves, which for the most part are just blind copies of the English words, are strictly inappropriate for the Russian language.

From this point on, should we really consider every "new school" translation fully adequate? It declares to be that, but really, it is not, even if it generously drops F-bombs. As well as the "old school" translations sometimes have too much of the "moth-eaten literariness" in them, making dirty villains or pinheaded dopers sound like Oxford graduates.

So far, we can conclude that there is a gap, similar to the generation gap, only between approaches in translation. It is not necessarily stretched in time, but surely exists in our minds. Something lets us think, that, hopefully, the more of the linguistic products of all kinds will be produced, the sooner readers will call for a higher quality. However, it requires involving analysis and reflection, and, at last, be it as it may, the majority will definitely get what it deserves or what it will have been led to.