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Translation Strategies, Techniques, and Equivalences in Critical Approach

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Abstract. Various strategies, techniques and equivalence types play an essential role in the process of text translation, translation didactics and academic analysis of translation as a product. However, there is no agreement among the authors of influential theoretical works in Translation Studies about the meaning and scope of these key terms, so that the latter remain to some extent vague. This fact does not facilitate translation teachers' work and often causes chaos in discourse on translation. In this paper, an attempt will be made to defend the necessity of distinguishing between translation strategies and techniques, as well as preserving the concept of equivalence. Moreover, a quality analysis of selected terms will be conducted, inclusive of the arguments for their standarization. The study is directly focused on written translation but its conclusion may apply to interpreting, too.

Key words: Translation Studies, strategy, technique, equivalence, terminology

1. Introduction

Most theorists make a distinction between a translation strategy and translation technique. However, the terminology they use for this purpose is far from uniform. In the most frequently cited works on this subject a strategy is sometimes refered to as a method (Vinay and Darbelnet 1995/1958, Newmark 1988) or global strategy (Lörscher 1991, 71, Jääskeläinen 1993), whilst a technique is mainly labelled a procedure (Newmark 1988, Delisle et al. 1999) or local strategy (Lörscher 1991, 71, Jääskeläinen 1993). Because of the misleading connotation of procedure as a complex, multistage process which does not always apply to translation (especially of a single word or phrase) in this paper the term technique is preferred. The comparison of provided definitions of translation methods and strategies on the one hand, and techniques and procedures on the other hand proves that both terms in each pair concord in content. According to Newmark, "[w]hile translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language" (1988, 81). A similar distinction is made by Delisle el al.

(1999, 191, brackets removed) who observed that "[i]n contrast to translation strategies, which reflect the translator's global approach to a text, translation procedures are generally applied to individual text segments viewed as microcontexts". As far as the notion of equivalence is concerned, it provokes so many controversies in Translation Studies that some scholars have declared it redundant (Snell-Hornby 1995/1988, Hermans 2007). Nevertheless, it continues to appear in research, and translation didactics could hardly do without it. It seems to be of a strategic nature and ensures a commonsense, honest approach to the essence of translation which is meant to preserve the identity of the original message within the bounds of possibility. This is worth noting in the times of progressing segmentation of research into translation and increasing vagueness of its subject.

2. TRANSLATION STRATEGIES

The online version of *Słownik Języka Polskiego* [The Dictionary of the Polish Language], which is likely to be consulted more often than the traditional paper volume, defines the concept of a strategy as "[an] excogitated plan of actions in a field" (translation mine).[1] This clearly implies that this term does not refer to a single action but rather a sequence of rational actions, taken on an analysis of a given situation. Therefore, in the case of translation as a complex task to be fulfilled, which concerns a certain text as a whole and aims to produce another text, a strategy can apply to the whole text only, and not to a single translator's decision about the rendition of a particular lexical unit. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1815) already pointed to the two alternative translation strategies (although without using this term): moving the author towards the reader or the other way around. Later on, this opposition found numerous reformulations, in the shape of altered terminology that conveyed a different aspect of the same introduced message. Jiří Levy proposed in 1963 to discern between illusion and anti-illusion in literary translation. The former applied to translations that successfully imitated the natural use of the target language and could be mistaken for original products. The latter was reserved for the translations that can be easily recognised as such because traces of the original language were left there intentionally, for this purpose (2011/1963, 19-20). Lawrence Venuti (1995) introduced the pair of concepts domestication and foreignization, which correspond to the concept of a target text which is free of translation marks and without and with translation marks respectively (2008/1995, 15). Finally, Juliane House (1997) defined the terms covert and overt translation for the purposes of translation quality evaluation. In her view, covert translation is only recommendable in the case of culturally neutral texts, whilst the overt should be applied to those that are strongly embedded in the source culture (1997, 189-194).

As can be seen, the abovementioned scholars articulate different aspects of translations, doing so from various angles. Schleiermacher expresses in the first place the translator's perspective and choice between the author's and reader's interest. Levy adopts the recipient's viewpoint and focuses on their overall experience based upon their experience with their own language. Venuti takes as the point of reference the abstract

[1] In original "przemyślany plan działań w jakiejś dziedzinie": https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/strategia;2576315. Accessed 21.10.2019.

horizon of the two cultures that are involved in the translation process. House emphasises the relationship between the source text and its culture as the decisive factor for the selection of translation strategy.

Certainly, the oppositions mentioned above do not exhaust the list of all the possible and actually employed translation strategies. The latter does not always have a matching opposing counterpart, and some appear controversial. Let us take what is called literal and free translation: On the one hand, they both might be qualified as internally contradictive since only a quotation with no intervention is truly literal, and a translation as such is never really free but always original-bound. On the other hand, it may be argued that any type of non-literal translation can be perceived as opposed to the latter. As mentioned at the beginning, not all researchers make a distinction between a translation strategy and technique (or procedure). *The Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* (2009/1988), edited by Mona Baker and Gabriela Saldanha does not include the translation technique (or procedure) as an entry, whilst the concept of a translation strategy is thoroughly presented from different angles (Kearns 2009/1998, 282-285). In her seminal book "In other words" (1992), which belongs to the canon of theoretical works on translation nowadays, Mona Baker herself (26-42) labels as strategies what is referred to in other sources as translation techniques or procedures (generalisation, neutralisation, cultural equivalent, borrowing or borrowing with explication, paraphrase or omission).

A researcher can only recognise a translation strategy as such when they have studied and compared the whole source and target texts or at least extensive representative parts of them. What is more, any strategy may be absent from a bad translation. A strategy requires consistency and discipline of action, in translation and any other type of human activity. Like elsewhere, this rule is not always observed by performers, which should not really surprise. It is not difficult to note that the concept of a strategy, including translation strategies, is rather general and does not imply any particular actions to be taken in order to be carried out. These activities boil down to translation techniques which are employed in the linear process of target text production. It is obvious that, regardless of the categories used by theoreticians in their translation process descriptions, in practice the translator is always looking for a suitable target language counterpart of a small, manageable text element: a word, phrase or a short sentence. While doing so, the translator applies, (depending on their experience, background and knowledge), more or less consciously, reliable and multiple described translation techniques that will be discussed below, in a selective approach.

3. TRANSLATION TECHNIQUES

The abovementioned *Słownik Języka Polskiego* defines a procedure as "the specified rules of acting in a matter, usually of administrative or legal character" (translation mine).[2] The multiplicity of rules as well as the administrative or legal domain of their application have led me to definitely prefer using the term technique with reference to translation. Hejwowski (2015, 62) recommends banning the word procedure from

[2] In the original word in"określone reguły postępowania w jakiejś sprawie, zwykle o charakterze urzędowym lub prawnym": https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/procedura;2572498.html. Accessed 21.10.2019.

translation-related terminology in a particularly convincing way. He quotes a definition of procedure that is slightly different from the above one and rightly adds that the scientific terms adopted from general lexicon should not be rendered into a meaning that contradicts their common understanding as ordinary words (Hejwowski 2015). For a technique, the already quoted *Słownik Języka Polskiego* offers two definitions that, in my opinion, capture the essence of the phenomen under consideration best when combined together. A technique is explained there as (1) “a method” (in Polish: metoda) and (2) “a learned and practiced ability of performing certain activities”.[3] Here, the notion of a method seems to better capture the essence of the locally applied technique than the sense of a strategy which refers to the text as a whole. Interestingly, *Mała Encyklopedia Przekładoznawstwa* (A Small Encyclopaedia of Translation Studies) by Dąbska-Prokop et al. (2000), the overall concept of which does not include a separate chapter on a translation technique or procedure, contains the term *procedure* (in Polish: procedura) in the index of terms (358), referring the reader to the chapter titled *Metodologia tłumaczenia* [Methodology of Translation], which is actually titled *Metodologia przekładu* [4] (134-139) and casually mentions the translation *technique* (in Polish: technika) (135). It would not make much sense to compile another list of translation techniques here since an interested reader can easily reach for detailed thematic descriptions elsewhere (e.g. Newmark 1988, Kwieciński 2001, Molina and Hurtado Albir 2002). Instead, we shall focus on selected examples only, which seem controversial for different reasons. They either qualify for translation strategies rather than techniques, or serve the purpose of text manipulation rather than its translation, or account for the methods of lexicon expanding of the target language rather that those of forming texts on the grounds of the prototypes in other languages. They will be discussed in random order since it is not my purpose to suggest a ranking of the most unfit terms among the names of popular translation techniques.

3.1. COMPENSATION

This translation act is meant, in concordance with its semantics, to compensate for the loss of a certain relevant feature in text which could not be rendered in another place (Newmark 1988, 90). This is the reason why this impossibility always comes down to an obstacle of objective nature. The compensation may consist, for example, in the creation of a wordplay without an original counterpart on the corresponding text spot, with the aim to make up for a previous failed attempt to render another wordplay as such. Some scholars comprehend compensation as a translation strategy (e.g. Harvey 1995, Munday 2001), others label it a technique or prodedure (Newmark 1988, Molina and Hurtado Albir 2002). Taking into consideration that the translator needs to know the whole text (or at least its major representative parts) before they can even realize the possible need of compensation, based upon distinctive features of the source text. Moreover, they will need to have completed a part of the translation work already and faced the impossibility

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[3] In the original wording “wyuczona i wyćwiczona umiejętność wykonywania jakichś czynności”.: https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/technika.html. Accessed 21.10.2019.

[4] The words *tłumaczenie* and *przekład* are totally synonymous in Polish (both mean: translation), so that no factual error takes place here.

of preserving particular effects, like the abovementioned wordplays, to finally accept the compensation necessity. However, the strategic decision about the need to compensate does not determine the manner of its implementation.

3.2. BORROWING, CALQUE AND NEOLOGISM

Borrowing, calque and neologism are known as relatively common mechanisms of lexicon extension in all languages, especially when not belonging to the dominant, influential cultures. No translations (translated texts) are needed to identify them in a language. A borrowing or a calque will be easily recognised as such in comparison with the original donor expressions (single units of sense) whilst a neologism will trigger a natural experience-based cognition alarm on the native recipient's mind. As rightly observed by Hejwowski (2015, 70), a borrowing should be qualified as a translation technique solely on the condition that a given word has not functioned in the target language before, in other words, only if it has been "borrowed" for translation purposes for the first time. This requirement can be termed translational novelty. This claim could be applied to calques and coinages, too. Then, only faithful novel translations of compounds could pass for a calque as a translation technique. Undoubtedly, the lexical units like *samozatrudniony* (eng. self-employed) or *autor-widmo* (ghost writer) are calques in Polish. However, since they are lexicalised and in common use already, they do not meet the criterion of translational novelty and thus cannot pass for calques in translation. Similarly, a neologism as a translation technique would encompass only the cases of new word creation by the translator to be applied in the target text, and never the use of new words which have already entered the target language lexicon but are still perceived as coinages. However, in my opinion, Hejwowski's claim should allow for cases of intended use of a borrowing (or maybe calque and coinage, too) whenever the translator has an alternative. Let us examine the case of a word that has been making headlines worldwide recently in the context of Brexit, namely *backstop*, for which journalists have concocted two Polish counterparts: mechanizm awaryjny[5] (emergency mechanism) and mechanizm ochronny[6] (protection mechanism). Nevertheless, in Polish press communicates, the original term backstop occurs more frequently than the corresponding Polish expressions. I maintain that a translator who consistently employs a foreign word, ignoring the propositions of homegrown equivalents should be credited with the use of a borrowing (or calque). This is particularly the case as, consciously or not, they contribute to a possible lexicalization of the borrowing in the target language.

3.3. LITERAL TRANSLATION

The same *Słownik Języka Polskiego* contains three meanings of the adjective *dosłowny* (literal): (1) nieprzenośny (non-metaphorical), (2) przytoczony w sposób

[5] https://www.tvp.info/44008661/impas-ws-brexitu-premier-johnson-ma-pomysl-na-granice-z-irlandia/ Accessed 20.10.2019.
[6] https://nowosci.co.uk/brexit-backstop-co-to-jest-backstop-i-dlaczego-jest-tak-skomplikowany-polityka-aktualnosci/ Accessed 20.10.2019.

dokładny (quoted in the exact way) oraz (3) ścisły, niedopuszczający wyjątków (strict, allowing no exemptions).[7] What is called literal translation does not fall under any of these definitions. Moreover, it may appear internally contradictory if it is taken into consideration that a literal reference to somebody else's text is identical to a quotation. The frequency of optional equivalence, where a source language word mostly corresponds to several target language expressions of different meanings, impairs the legitimacy of this term. The latter can (and should) be defended only in a commonsense-based approach, on the assumption that the context will allow the translator to determine an adequate equivalent, which does not always take place in practice.

Vinay and Darbelnet (1995/1958) define literal translation as a direct translation technique (in their terms: procedure), placing it in the same category as a borrowing and calque, and meaning a translation that is close to the letter of the original. They give as an example the English sentence *The ink is on the table* and its exact French version *L'encre est sur la table* In the exact Polish rendition, this sentence reads *Atrament jest na stole*. One can ask if the Polish wording can pass for literal translation since it does not render the articles typical of both English and French, but absent from Polish. However, what is really worthy of consideration in this context is, in my opinion, the question of whether the above Polish wording, once accepted as literal translation, should be recognised as a translation technique if used in a text, since the translator has actually no other adequate solution. Maybe it would be only justified to reserve this label for the translation solutions that do have alternative options but were intentionally selected by the translator for a reason.

Later concepts (e.g. Newmark 1988) do not perceive literal translation as synonymous with word-for-word rendition and allow in the former the modifications enforced by the target language system. It should not be overlooked that literal translation in its more or less rigorous version can, in some circumstances, occur as a translation strategy imposed on the translator by the commissioner. A need to provide this type of a translation may appear, for instance, in criminal matters, where the letter of the original wording may provide a reason to prosecute the speaker/writer. Such a translation may also require further processing by a word artist who does not know the source language well enough to perform a direct translation.

3.4. OMISSION

In her considerations on omission as (in her terms) a translation strategy, Mona Baker observes at the beginning that this word "may sound rather drastic but in fact it does no harm to omit translating a word or expression in some context" (1992, 49). This diagnosis, if left without a comment, might justify any arbitrary decisions in this respect. However, in my opinion, even when accompanied by a comment, it becomes open to misuse and misinterpretation. Although the scholar strongly emphasises the requirement of justification for every single case of omission, it is difficult to determine when and how this should follow. Presumably, it is the translation scholar who is expected to act as a judge, especially as on many occasions they accept this role voluntarily. Then,

[7] https://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/dosłowny.html. Accessed 20.10.2019.

depending on their own preferences, the referee is likely to find justification for most omissions encountered, mainly in the domains of politics, religion or morals. Recurrent omissions could be used within a strategy that might be labelled as a strategy of mitigation. In the German rendition of Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, several statements were omitted which were related to the Nazi superman ideology and its ambitions. To illustrate, the original reference to "the once invincible German Army" (1970/1965, 157) mentions just "German troops" (1965, 238), and the following fragment was removed completely: "I wondered what gave people the ability to invent such things. Why were the village peasants unable to do it? I wondered what gave people of one color of eyes and hair such great power over other people" (1965, 90). It seems understandable that only twenty years after the end of WWII, the German reader was tired of war rhetoric and, painfully affected by its consequences, did not really desire to be reminded of its origins in foreign literature. Therefore, the translator's decision concerning the above omissions cannot be denied justification in that it can be comprehended. This, however, does not automatically make it right or recommendable for future translation acts.

4. EQUIVALENCES

Long before Translation Studies was recognised as a separate academic discipline (although this is not the case in Poland yet), the notion of equivalence appeared in linguistic considerations of translation. In *Słownik Języka Polskiego*, the entry *ekwiwalencja* (equivalence) is provided with a reference to another entry, namely *równoważność* (literally: equal importance).[8] In the context of translation, this is no instructive explanation since it does not establish any point of reference or measure which could help us to examine its equal importance. The now classical equivalence concepts make a distinction between formal and dynamic equivalence (Nida 1964) postulated for the purpose of Bible translation, acknowledging four types of equivalence on word level (total, optional, approximate and zero) (Kade 1968), its five types on sentence level (equivalence of communicative intention, situation, description method, meanings of structure and total) (Komissarov 1977) as well as five types of equivalence (denotative, connotative, pragmatic, text-normative and formal aesthetic) without a level specification (Koller 1979). It is obvious that Koller's classification goes beyond the sentence level and includes the entire text, since it points to the text generating norms of the target culture as an essential factor in determining the final translation shape. It is obvious that it is rather easy to deliberate over equivalence of individual words or sentences, especially if embedded in the context. It does not take much effort to confirm that the sentences *Na południu Polska graniczy ze Słowacją* and *In the south Poland borders on Slovakia* are in all respects equivalent since we do not find any formal, connotative or semantic differences between them. It is equally easy to find the Polish sentence *Nie mam dość kasy na taką drogą kieckę* [I don't have enough dough for such a fancy tog] and its English counterpart *I don't have enough money for such an expensive dress* equivalent with respect to the meaning but not the form/style. The problem becomes more complicated on a textual level, especially if the text is long. There is no

[8] https://sjp.pwn.pl/sjp/ekwiwalencja;2456745.html. Accessed 21.10.2019.

measure suitable for the examination of the equivalence as "equal importance" of two big sets of words which comply with the norms of textuality. Shall we require that each text constitutive target text sentence be equivalent to its original counterpart? How should a text with few omissions or errors be perceived? Is it to be disqualified as a whole?

Some theorists (Holmes 1973, 68, Snell-Hornby 1995/1988, 15-22) rejected the notion of equivalence from the very beginning as useless, and the twenty first century brought further attempts at its depreciation. Theo Hermans, who is an unquestioned authority in Translation Studies, wrote in 2007 that equivalence "is not a feature that can be extrapolated on the basis of textual comparison but "imposed on them through an external intervention", so that, as a consequence, it is "proclaimed, and not found." (2007, 6). In its essence, this observation boils down to the postulate of accepting as equivalent the translation that is recognised as such in the target language. A slight echo of Newmark's "recognised equivalent" (1988) can be heard here and is recommended for application in translation to avoid confusion, regardless of the translator's preference, even if justified. So, following this instruction and in accordance with the established practice, the originally German legal term *beiderseitige Strafbarkeit* (literally: both-sided punishability) should be always rendered in English as *double criminality*, and in Polish as podwójna karalność (literally: double penalisation), which seems even worse[9] despite the fact that both translations sound absurd since that they imply a double punishment for one crime.

The claim that a translation which circulates as such in the target culture should be generally accepted as equivalent to the original, is not new in Translation Studies. In the 1990s descriptive investigations were practiced and promoted. These aimed to establish the norms governing translation in different cultures and the location of translations in literary polysystems (Toury 1995). Undoubtedly, there is no scarcity of text manipulation in translation, mainly for ideological reasons, but a vast majority of translations are honest renditions, intended to be as close to the original as possible, depending on the relations between the languages and cultures involved as well as the translator's competence. Without the concept of equivalence, applied in the process of translation evaluation under this or another name, openly or tacitly, we would not know anything about manipulations or the cases of non-equivalent translations in circulation.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Without the concept of equivalence, Translation Studies would be impossible because its very subject would get lost. It is the essence of translation to create a text concording with the original in all possible respects. Only such a commonsense-based understanding of translation allows us to recognise other activities and products in translation, such as adaptation, localization or community interpreting which must not be confused with proper translation. Without the concept of equivalence it is equally difficult to imagine translation didactics, where it constitutes the point of departure and reference, and finally

[9] In extradition law, double criminality exists if a given crime is qualified as such and thus punishable in the penal codes of both the suspect's country of residence and the country in which the crime was committed. Usually, double criminality is a major prerequisite for extradition. Only the original German term captures the essence of this term in that it clearly refers to the parties involved, and not to the sanction.

the goal to be pursued. Despite the fact that equivalence can be most easily perceived at the level of word or sentence, it can be followed at the microtextual level too, where a combination of several sentences can be surveyed and memorized with no effort. Only the lack of equivalence on a microlevel entitles the researcher to question the equivalence of whole texts, but maybe it would make more sense to reserve this term for smaller units, remembering that limited applicability is not the same as no applicability.

Translation techniques are not identical to translation strategies. The former can be recognised any time, and the latter only on the analysis of entire texts, which seems logical since a technique is applied to a single sense unit and a strategy to the whole text. In this simple way, as suggested in this paper, translation techniques can be distinguished from translation strategies in research. In addition, it is the strategy chosen that suggests the techniques to be applied in translation, whilst it is the techniques that allow the researcher to reconstruct the translator's strategies. Naturally, this reconstruction can succeed only if the translator acted on any strategies, which always happens in the case of good translations; that is to say, not all of them.

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