

## How to Translate from English to English\*

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### Introduction

In this essay the vocabulary of two texts will be examined within the context of cross-cultural differences. The lexical corpus is limited to a very atypical material - English borrowings used in a novel written by a Czech immigrant writer and their translational equivalents in the novel's translation into English.

The fact that the lexical material selected from both texts is closely related (Ethnic English and Standard English), helps to highlight the cultural differences without having to deal in more depth with the differences brought about by two different linguistic systems.

If we dealt with cross-cultural differences between two distant traditions, for example that of the Orient and of the West, we would have to expect to face different ways of knowing the world encoded in languages, structure of which may differ in varying degrees. The differences between such languages are substantial, reflecting the equally great differences between Oriental and Occidental cultures. If we compare, however, interaction between two cultures which both stem from the European tradition, the expectation of cultural clash is minimal. Therefore, it often comes as a surprise that European immigrants to the United States or Canada have to undergo many changes brought about by existing bicultural dissonance of which they were not previously aware. The immigrants encounter new values, learn to practise different forms of social interaction, and discover diverse codes of behaviour (St. Clair and Koo 1986:55). What these values, forms, and codes are is a question which has not been sufficiently answered yet.

In his analysis of literature on cultural clashes, Hoffer (1986:48) mentions the relative lack of system-specific description of even the major cultures, and stresses its immediate applicability and need for multilingual societies with a complicated network of intercultural subsystems. The presented analysis intends to be a modest contribution, factual as well as methodological, to a description which presents some of the

contrasting features pertaining to two related cultures. The method is based on the observation of translational equivalence.

Even though we assume that the aim of translation is to transfer certain intellectual and esthetic values from one language to another (Popović 1970:79), we may find that translational equivalents point at different attitudes towards certain topics and at the devices used to express those attitudes in the languages involved. The discrepancies between the original and the translation are taken as the reflexion of what the translator and his intended readers accept in the source text and what they reject. The importance of the intended reader or, in more general terms, the receiver has recently been a pivotal object of theoretical attention (Doležel 1980: 81), which is long overdue if compared to the practices of North American popular culture. Here the perspective of the receiver has always determined what one sees, hears or is offered to read. This, due to the cultural diversity of North America, can become a very demanding task since the messages which one group receives with enthusiasm and interest, can be viewed by others belonging to another culture as nothing but social noise. (St. Clair, 1986: 99). The corpus of the English borrowings which is being analyzed was excerpted from the novel *Příběh inženýra lidských duší* (1977), written by a Czech Canadian writer Josef Škvorecký. After having read the text, we can safely assume that the intended reader of the novel must have been a Czech speaker living in an English speaking environment, or at least someone who knows English well, since the language of the novel is anglicized to such an extent that the text is virtually incomprehensible without substantial knowledge of both Czech and English.

The English translation of the novel was done by a Canadian translator Paul Wilson and published under the title *The Engineers of Human Souls* (1985). The synopsis printed on the cover of the translation gives prospective readers a fair idea on the content and is skillfully construed to capture their attention.

"Danny Smiricky is a Czech writer who fled his country in 1968 to find asylum in the sheltered world of Edenvale College in Toronto. His New World is an Eden which he sees with Old World eyes; he is touched and exasperated by its political innocence, wryly amused by the hilarious counter-revolutionary schemes of his fellow emigres, tormented by the Soviet secret agents who dog his footsteps, and he succumbs to the determined flirtations of his prettiest student. At the same time he is undone by memories ... of a homeland as lost to him as his youth ... of Nadia, the factory girl who was his first lover ... of his career as girl-chaser and feckless hero of the Resistance in a small Bohemian village under the pall of the Nazi occupation, and later under Stalin ... a world of heroes, traitors and innocents.

## Methodology

A relationship between languages can generally be regarded as two-directional, though not always symmetrical. Translation, as a process, is always directional: it is always performed in a given direction from a "Source Language" into a "Target Language" (Catford 1965:20). In our particular case, however, we have a situation which is more complex.

As indicated in Graph 1 on the next page, the process can be imagined as a circle beginning with the Model Language-Canadian English (ML) from which the Borrowing Language-Canadian Czech (BL) obtains a substantial amount of English vocabulary. The second part of the circle begins with Canadian Czech, which now serves as a Source Language (SL) for the translation into Canadian English -- the Target Language (TL). The circle is thus completed.

At first sight, one might expect that after having completed a full circle, the ML lexical items would return to Canadian English basically unaffected by their journey. But this is often not the case. Our material shows that TL units can be in one of three kinds of relations to the ML original expressions.

- A. The ML expressions and the TL expressions can be considered the same lexemes since they match in form and in meaning.
- B. The ML expressions and the TL expressions are different lexemes.
- C. The ML expressions are discontinued.

The fate of the relationship of ML and TL expressions depends on two stages. The ML expressions may undergo their first modification during the process of borrowing (Haugen 1950: 210-231 and Rakusan 1985: 178-187). The second modification may happen during the process of translation, when SL borrowings are found unsatisfactory and consequently either modified or eliminated.

### **Analysis of the Material**

Let us now examine our corpus (604 expressions) in the framework which we have just outlined, considering the three types of relationship between ML and TL expressions and the types of translational equivalence between SL and TL.

Table 1 on page 107 shows proportional relations among the above defined groups A, B, and C.

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**Relations between ML and TL Expressions****GROUP A - ML expressions and TL expressions belong to the same lexemes.**

Table 1 shows that group A contains the majority (69%) of all lexical units of the corpus. This high proportion suggests that the usage of English expressions in the Czech ethnic context is in general quite similar to their usage in the context of Canadian English speaking majority.

The relation between SL expression and its TL equivalent is mostly that of HOMOGRAPHY, e.g. ML jingle man, SL kritika ho nazývala jingle man, TL critics didn't call him jingle man for nothing, or TRANSLITERATION, where the borrowings in SL, rendered in Czech orthographic tradition, are converted into letters appropriate for the usual English orthographic shapes in TL. E.g. ML all of a sudden; just like that, SL von olovesadn povídá d'zast lajk det, TL all of a sudden he says ... Just like that.

The remainder of translational equivalents are either several cases of FAITHFUL TRANSLATION, where English-Czech expressions are recalqued back into English, e.g. ML smuggle out, SL nezbyvá nez ji vysmaglovat, TL try and smuggle her out, or a very few examples of TRANSLATION WITH A SHIFT, where the SL material makes use of expressive suffixes which indicate the attitude of the speaker and which cannot be readily translated into TL (Rakusan 1983: 9-25). E.g. ML Pink Lady, SL Blb'enka se posílí pinklejdynou (hypocoristics), TL Dotty fortifies herself with the Pink Lady, etc. Here the suffix -yna adds a tone of familiarity which is absent from TL.

**GROUP B - ML and TL Expressions Differ.**

This group of lexical units (23%) reflects the tension between the Czech and English systems of linguistic and cultural values. The translational equivalence manifested in this group is of the following types:

RESTRICTED TRANSLATION (Phonological) - E.g. ML This is swan calling Lida, SL Dzis is sven, kolin Lida, TL Ziss iss svan kollink layda, where the SL borrowing from ML represents the rendition of an English phrase in Czech pronunciation. The TL equivalent replaces the Czech spelling by a transcription rendering nonspecific foreign pronunciation. This type of "foreign speech", to which North American readers are accustomed from cartoons and television, bears a humorous connotation. From the point of view of translation theory, this type of equivalence can be regarded as merely phonological translation, since lexis and grammar remain unchanged. (Catford 1965: 61).

FAITHFUL TRANSLATION - involves cases of successful rendition of conceptual meaning as well as of expressive (effective) meaning.

Sometimes the SL borrowings have to be modified in the TL text since they have changed the meaning due to their participation in Czech context. E.g. ML drink, SL v zemích drinku, TL in this land of mixed drinks, where the TL equivalent is a hyponym with respect to the original expression, or e.g. ML Kleenex SL vytáhne Kleenex, TL she takes a tissue, where the TL equivalent is a super-ordinate of the original expression.

Let us be aware that English units, after having been incorporated into Czech text, become immediately expressively marked by virtue of their being foreign. It is therefore appropriate that the TL equivalent matches SL expressivity by substituting a slang word for the originally unmarked expression. E.g. ML to spoil the fun, SL Tak sem nechtěla spoilovat fun TL I didn't want to be a party-pooper.

TRANSLATION WITH SEMANTIC SHIFT - involves mostly expressive oligosemy. It can be demonstrated by a case of detropization of the SL equivalent, e.g. ML Dry Look, SL pohladí pana Z. po drajluku, TL rumpling Mr. Z's hair. The SL expression is metonymic - the name for the "hair product" is used instead of hair.

Further examples demonstrate intellectualization of the TL text (Levý 1963: 60). This results in loss of expressivity and in a far more explicit and logical TL text. This effect is achieved in our corpus mainly by nominalization, e.g. ML to design, SL to nemá ta kompaný vydyzajnovaný (Gloss: it has not that company designed-out), TL the company hasn't taken it into account in their design. It can also be achieved by paraphrase, e.g. ML quarter, SL dá t'ri kvotry, (Gloss: gives three quarters), TL come up with seventy-five cents.

TRANSLATION WITH CULTURAL SHIFT - takes place normally when a situational feature relevant for the SL text is completely absent from the culture of which the TL is a part (Catford 1965: 99). The following example shows the opposite case, e.g. SL loutnistce 'sel od úst comicsový balón, (Gloss: to a lutenist went from mouth comics balloon), TL ... and from the lutenist's mouth a balloon.... Here the SL uses a descriptive label for a concept typical of North American culture. The TL equivalent returns to the simple lexical label sufficient for local readers.

For some SL borrowings the translator has tried to modify certain attitudes expressed in the SL text. Obviously, this "cultural cosmetics" is done in order to make the novel more acceptable for Canadian and other North American readers. The TL text shows the following tendencies:

1) Moderation of connotation potentially offensive to Canadian readers

VIOLENCE, e.g. ML Vancouver, SL jeho vancouverská továrna dodávala ventily ... k raketám, TL his California factory manufactured valves ... used on nuclear missiles. In the text, the production of weapons has been conveniently shifted from Canada to its supposedly more militant neighbour - the United States.

DERISION OF ANYTHING CANADIAN, e.g. ML children of the prairies, SL neuctivé o'ci d'etí prérie na mn'e spo'cívaly, (Gloss: disrespectful eyes of children of prairies on me were fixed), TL disrespectful eyes of the young of this young and innocent country looked at me. In this case the SL calque intends to imply the lack of cultivation of the Canadian students whereas the translation refers merely to their innocence.

SEX, e.g. ML hard-core porno, SL Ná's 'séf napsal scéná'r pro hardporno, TL Our boss wrote a scenario for a soft-core porno.

2) Tendency to actualize the text - the attempt to bridge the general cultural differences and the differences in shared experience between Czech immigrants and native Canadians by neutralizing the occasional distinctive Czech or European flavour.

ADJUSTMENT OF SOCIAL FORMALITIES, e.g. ML Miss X, SL Miss Perstová je z 'Ceskoslovenska, TL Veronika is from Czechoslovakia. North American custom allows reference to an adult person by her first name whereas, according to European codes, such address would be interpreted as uncalled for familiarity in the given context.

RELIANCE ON THE SHARED CONTEXT OF READERS - sometimes causes unexpected choice of equivalent. For instance, the translation abbreviates the names of referents which are well known to Canadians whereas the SL text contains full names in order to guarantee their correct interpretation by Czech readers. E.g. ML Canadian National Tower, SL na jehle Canadian National Tower, TL on top of the CN Tower. Similar tendency is attested by the use of different referents in the following simile: ML stilton cheese, SL noha mu smrděla jak stiltonsk'ý seira, TL his leg stinking like gorgonzola. The reason for the change seems rather obscure, but it is possible that for Canadians the mention of the Italian cheese's aroma evokes somewhat stronger reaction than that of the customary used English stilton.

#### GROUP C - The ML Expressions are Discontinued (TL equivalents are missing)

This group (8%) consists of cases in which the translation has not been accomplished. Translation fails - or untranslatability occurs - when it is impossible to build functionally relevant features of the situation into the contextual meaning of the TL text. Broadly speaking, the cases where this happens fall into two categories: Linguistically motivated omissions and Pragmatically motivated omissions.

1. Linguistically motivated omissions are those where the functionally relevant features included some which are in fact formal features of the language of the SL text (Catford 1965: 94). The SL portions of our corpus were omitted due to the expected AMBIGUITY in SL texts that is in many cases impossible to match by TL material.

A more interesting problem stems from the fact of MACARONIC TEXTURE of the SL text. As a result of the frequent use of both languages, the SL text could be considered



an extremely non-standard language variety sample. The code switching and mixing makes the fact of language difference an irrational comical object (Trost 1948: 410). The quantity and the type of the English-inspired neoforms are used to characterize the actors in the novel as to their social background as well as to caricature them. There is very little attempt to match this device in the TL text, which is relatively conventional and close to the English standard variety.

With the presence of foreignisms is also connected the presence of METALANGUAGE in the SL text. The allusions regarding how people speak and evaluation of their English or Czech language performance are very frequent in the SL text. E.g. ML group sex, SL "tak pro č 'ríká's "groupsex", Milenko? "Vel, pon'eva'c h'ír v'ír in Keneda, ne?" (Gloss: "Then, why do you say "Groupsex", Milenka? "Well, because here we are in Canada, not?") Metalanguage is excluded from the TL text by virtue of its texture - the TL is basically monolingual and, consequently, stylistically less marked than the SL original.

## 2. Culturally Motivated Omissions

Some of the pieces of the SL text which have been left untranslated are connected with some of the topics already mentioned as being subjected to moderation in the previous group, such as, EROTIC ALLUSIONS, e.g. SL nápis bude stej'n'e nep'ristoj'n'y jako Blb'en'cina dérink t'y'sértka (Gloss: the sign will be as indecent as Dotty's daring T-shirt).

ANACHRONIC REFERENCE, e.g. SL v'sichni jsou zmarihuán'eni (Gloss: everybody is marihuaned-out), where the expression was left out, together with the whole drug taking scene, which is no longer typical of the students' social life in the 1980's.

Further, there are frequent omissions of expressions that are a part of clauses and paragraphs exhibiting the following tendencies:

CYNICISM, e.g. SL páchl jako vajnos na skidrou (Gloss: He smelled like winos on skidrow)

DERISION TOWARDS WOMEN OR FEMINIST MOVEMENT, SL skoro v'sem jde o akademick'y titul ... M.R.S. (Gloss: Almost all want one academic title ...Mrs.)

DERISION TOWARDS LEFTIST POLITICAL PERSUASION, which abundantly appears throughout the SL text, but it is systematically excluded from TL. E.g. SL Ale jinak typickej komou'sskej gang, (Gloss: Otherwise, typical Communist gang).

## Conclusions

The classification introduced above shows the metamorphosis the English lexical units undergo when passing through two modes, two genres, three linguistic systems, and two cultures, i.e. as elements of mostly spoken everyday Canadian English (ML), as elements of the written Canadian Czech of the novel (SL), as elements of the written English of the novel's translation (TL), and as communicative units used by the Czech ethnic group and by the North American English speaking majority.

The changes which English units undergo in the Czech ethnic environment often result in the need to make adjustments during the process of translation. These adjustments bring about substantial differences in the tuning of both literary texts and can be summed up as follows:

1.     STANDARDIZATION, i.e. de-ethnicization of form

This tendency is mainly noticeable among the units of group A, where the SL units written in Czech spelling which reflects the Czech pronunciation of borrowed words are converted in the TL text back into their English orthographic shapes. Further, the de-ethnicization of the units further concerns the standardization of their morphological shapes as well as their syntactic composition, e.g. re-insertion of articles left out in the Czech, or reconstitution of idioms inaccurately rendered in Czech discourse.

2.     MODERATION OF CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS, i.e. de-ethnicization of content

Although we find several instances of translational equivalence which must be, or could be, explained by the different properties of the Czech and English linguistic systems, more significant are the cases of translational shifts resulting from cross-cultural differences. By this are meant differences in traditional social and even ethical attitudes, revealed through the comparison of both texts in question.

Catering to its Canadian readers, the translation neutralizes criticism or derision directed towards the North American social climate. These allusions, although not very frequent, appear in the SL text as a result of the occasionally hostile attitude of immigrants towards the new environment with which they have problems to cope.

The same fate awaits expressions revealing a cynical attitude towards poverty or human suffering and those which tend to glorify violence. This attitudinal moderation is typical of group B, where the translational equivalence is of a synonymic nature. In group C, containing units which do not pass beyond the borders of the Czech original, the gap between the texts is manifested as untranslationability. Cultural untranslatability is caused by the attitudes mentioned in the previous group with several additions.

Among them are lexical items with derogatory allusions directed towards women and the feminist movement, as well as expressions with sexual content or connotation. As a matter of fact, sometimes entire paragraphs of the SL text have been left untranslated, apparently due to their erotic or male chauvinist content. The implied sensitivity of North American readers to sex-related matters is surprising in view of the openness of the local contemporary literature. It could be that a puritanical attitude towards translation has outlived the one applicable towards the society's own local

production. Such an attitude was criticized already in 1889 by Scandinavian journalist Knut Hamsun in his *American Memoirs*: "... if they translate Zola .. they "sift" it. The translator has spared the four murders in the book, for this is akin to all the shooting in his own literature; but all the swearing, the illegitimate child, and the seductions have been eliminated entirely." (Hamsun 1969:34)

In view of the focus on cross-cultural differences detected in both texts, it is worthwhile to mention some other pieces of the SL text which were omitted even if they did not always contain English borrowings. These were the sentences and paragraphs containing unflattering or humorous allusions directed towards different ethnic groups. Even though the "ethnic slur" came out as one of the most avoided topics in the TL text, there was one group to which the taboo did not consistently apply --the English speaking majority.

### 3. EXPRESSIVE IMPOVERISHMENT, i.e. de-ethnicization of style

Following the differences in the properties of the textures of both, SL and TL texts, we cannot ignore the fact that the focus of the original lies in a maximized "use of the devices of the language in such a way that this use itself attracts attention and is perceived as uncommon" (Havránek 1964: 10). The availability of at least two stylistic levels (standard and colloquial) of two languages in code switching and the use of borrowings and neologisms in code mixing gives the SL text expressivity, which entertains the readers but often diverts their attention from referential aspects of the content. The translation, on the other hand, sets up an interpretative frame within which the messages can be understood on the basis of mainly referential, i.e. "serious", "normal" (Austin 1962: 21-2) uses of language.

The question now is whether this simplicity and restraint is mainly an idiosyncratic feature of the translator's technique or whether we are witnessing the result of a more general tendency which for simplicity's sake might be called "cultural background" or "English literary tradition" (Tancock 1958: 29-51).

There are reasons to acknowledge the latter claim, quoting the old English dictum, "the poet nothing affirmeth". It holds that whatever the propositional (referential) content of an item of verbal art, its meaning is somehow cancelled out or rendered inoperative by the nature of the utterance as verbal art (Ohmann 1971:5 and Bauman 1978:9). The British philosopher of Ordinary language, J. L. Austin also maintains that language in such circumstances is "used not seriously, but in ways parasitic upon its normal use" (1962:21-2).

Even if this problem cannot be solved by an individual study, there is no doubt that the choice of words and literary devices of translational equivalence reveal conflicting as well as shared attitudes in different societies.

The presented study can be seen as an attempt at a typology of translational equivalence which, if developed further, can become a useful methodological device for

evaluating texts and their translations as to their relatedness regarding linguistic as well as cultural parameters.

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