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ECHOING THE TOPICALISATION TRANSFER

Literary texts present a plethora of challenges for linguistic research due to the depths of readings and interpretations they provide. When texts are translated, each new translation is a challenge that invites fresh analyses and approaches to a newly produced literary piece. This paper presents an analysis of a translation of Ivo Andrić's *The Story of the Vizier's Elephant* into English. It focuses on the analysis of clauses used as discourse segments, including complementation and topic continuity. Even though the main aim is to research morphosyntactic and syntactic means used by the translator, the attention is also paid on psycholinguistic traits that reveal the presence (or absence) of the translator's voice as the Other.

Key words: topicalisation, complementation, transfer, translator's visibility, intersubjectivity.

1. INTRODUCTION

Translation studies rely on approaching their issues multiperspectively. Namely, very rarely would one find researchers who claim that interdisciplinarity and multidisciplinary do not lie at the basis of their work and that it is almost impossible to tackle any problem one-sidedly. Nevertheless, translation studies generally draw an almost invisible, still much felt, line between the translators' and linguists' views and tactics in approaches to some basic issues which occur during the translation process. Such an approach can be used as a security blanket if something goes wrong. Moreover, there is always the other side of the dichotomy – the very one which can appropriately be accused and blamed for the unsuccessful and dubious results obtained. In other words, a general principle may be formulated: be of help, even in defining problems rather than in solving them – they must not be avoided.

2. METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Second language acquisition draws on a number of theories in order to establish a system usable with most general typological issues. In the last decades of the twentieth century, the functional approaches have tried to avert our attention back to what the previous approaches neglected, namely, the "form-only" as opposed to the "inclusion of function" approach. Givón (1979: 208) states that processes such as historical language change, the development of pidgin languages into creoles, the first language acquisition

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and the relationship between informal and formal registers unitedly represent the process of grammaticalization. Dittmar (1992) elaborates the actual definition and claims that grammatical development of the second/foreign language should be regarded as a type of linguistic change which is affected by grammaticalization. Givón (1984: 10) depicts a full circle by linking a pre-syntactic pragmatic mode to a syntactic mode, and, at the same time, to different levels of information processing, emphasising separate pre-syntactic and syntactic modes. At the same time, the same process has occurred in translation studies. The German school regards translation as an act of intercultural communication, and not as a static linguistic phenomenon. Reiss (1976) links language function, text type, genre and translation strategy. Vermeer (2004), accordingly, introduces his *skopos* theory, which views translation as a communicative transaction involving initiator, commissioner and the producers, users and receivers of the source and target texts.

The majority of research directly focuses on translatable and untranslatable points and transfer as the core issues. It is from there that they draw their conclusions and set standards for further research. Enkvist (1978: 180), for instance, emphasises the following:

A translator should be aware not only of cognitive meanings and basic syntactic structures in his text, but also of its information dynamics. Such awareness does not necessarily imply theoretical sophistication in linguistics, or an ability to analyse sentences into themes, rhemes, and focally marked or unmarked elements. Here too a translator must rely on intuition and *Sprachgefühl*. But in situations where theory may be of help, even in defining problems rather than in solving them, it should not be avoided.

When we speak about the Serbian language, researches have mainly been focused on transfer and its influence on translation into Serbian. In her research on the specificities of translation of adverbials, into and from Serbian, Babić (2011, 2013) focuses on the aspects of translation that emerge as a consequence of focusing on similarities rather than on differences in the source- and target language texts. Having Serbian as a mother tongue means focusing on transfer and non-transfer errors in the second language acquisition process, attributing them to certain issues which have been recognized in the second/foreign language acquisition practices (or establishing new ones). There are not many researches that are focused on errors which occur when ostensibly similar linguistic structures are translated from Serbian into English. The aim of this research has been to apply some of the findings from the previously mentioned researches onto the translation from Serbian in order to see whether the results would concur with the previously acquired data.

This paper is neither pro nor contra Hallidayan postulates of SFG (Systemic Functional Grammar) when dealing with topicalisation. Still, the most convenient approach for this research has been found in FSP (Functional Sentence Perspective) where “the communicative goals of an interaction cause the structure of a clause or sentence to function in different kinds of perspective (Baker 2001: 160). When approaching the theme/rheme

dichotomy, Firbas (1987: 46) states that, in embracing the dichotomy, he and his colleagues “consider rhematic information to be always new, but thematic information old and/or new. On the other hand, old information is always thematic, but new information thematic and rhematic”. This approach, at least to me, seems closer to understanding Andrić’s sentences in Serbian. There are too many layers there; there is too much background knowledge present. In every clause he creates, Andrić makes it evident, in a well-planned manner, that he presumes his readers to share his schemata or just leaves it to them to interpret the so-called presumed general knowledge data according to their own devices. In addition to this open discussion, Baker (2001: 163), without taking sides, adds that according to FSP postulates, “[A] clause consists of two types of elements: foundation-laying/context-dependent elements and core-constituting/context/independent elements. The former have a lower degree of CD and are always thematic. The latter, however, may be thematic and rhematic”, where CD stands for communicative dynamism, “a property of communication displayed in the course of the development and consisting in advancing this development” (Firbas 1972: 78). Therefore, the underlying aim of this paper is to shed some personal (and, hopefully, new) light on these research points.

3. DATA DISCUSSION

When studying Serbian language as a mother tongue, students are always reminded that they should follow the examples of “good” writers such as Andrić and Selimović. Still, when Serbian L1 students of English use novels in Serbian language as a corpus for their translation classes, it is usually these authors who present the greatest difficulty for translation due to the complexity and density of texts they created. Moreover, if one looks at the style and personal traits through syntactic and morphosyntactic means used, Andrić seems an obvious choice for researching translational traits in the target texts. His sentences, sometimes even unnaturally long, succumbed to discontinuous dependencies, even on the verge of being overburdened with absolute and embedded clauses, present occasionally an insurmountable challenge for some of the native speakers when they try to follow his train of thoughts. One could not but wonder how successful would a non-native speaker be in transferring these linguistic devices without detriment to the overall literary style and personal imprint which Andrić’s writings possess?

Andrić’s short stories present even bigger challenge for translators because of their intricate personal marks of the writer himself through the voice of the other so visible and audible through his storytellers. *The Story of the Vizier’s Elephant* has imposed itself as the corpus for the study because of its quantitative and qualitative characteristics. The translated text of fifty, densely printed pages promises enough positive and negative usable transfer characteristics. At the same time, the text was translated by a native speaker (Celia Hawkesworth), so the attention has been drawn to the presence of the “other” Other, i.e. the visibility of the translator within the text. Namely, in

some of the previous contrastive researches of the literary text translated from English into Serbian (Babić 2011, 2013), the most notable characteristic marked has been the possibility of a specific type of back translation. Namely, the translators into Serbian retained the English word order and even rhythm of sentences to such an extent that the text itself felt and looked as an artificial creation. If the reader knew English, it was possible to follow the text in Serbian and apply backward translation into English without even casting a glance at the original.

Enkvist (1978: 178) posits that “a sentence is not autonomous, it does not exist for its own sake but as part of a situation and part of a text. And one of the most important functions of information dynamics is precisely to link a sentence to its environment in a manner which allows the information to flow through the text in the desired manner.” How can we apply this to a translation? Is it possible to retain Venuti’s (1995/2008) prescribed “invisibility” and still remain present in the depth of the text? How coherent would a text be and is linearity the only solution to most of the problems? Let us look at some examples.

As expected, the most commonly used way of topicalisation has been the fronting of time and place adjuncts. It is customary in the Serbian language to place the adverbial at the beginning of the sentence, so the translator retained the style of the author.

On his arrival to Bitolj he had summoned the leading men to him and ordered each of them to cut an oak stake of at least four metres in length and to bring it to the Vizier’s Residence with his name carved on it. (V, 4)

From that height, he now looked at his home town from a curiously slanted perspective, as if with new eyes. (V, 27)

It was then, in the first days of May, that the Vizier acquired an elephant. (V, 6)

There are languages (Serbian being one of them) which allow fronting without too much detriment to the theme – rheme relationship. The freedom of choosing word order allows for rhythmical cascades which are not always influenced thematically. The second example illustrates that. By putting the adverbial at the beginning of the sentence, the author of the source text just wants to add certain feeling to the environment the action is taking place in. However, the translation carries some additional meaning as well, possibly not intended by the author of the original text.²

The third example of coordinated fronting of both noun and prepositional phrases functioning as adverbials in English adds some peculiar archaic value

2 The translation of the first sentence somehow undermines the urgency with which the leading men were summoned, which is evident from the source text, for it starts with the conjunction *as soon as*. Moreover, the depiction of a stake will awake with most native Serbian speakers reminiscence on specific historical events, those of which non-native speakers do not necessarily have to possess the knowledge. The second example presents the usage of *aktuelni kvalifikativ* in the construction *kao+NP*. The temporal quality of the event is not felt in the translation itself. The third example in the source language text is presented as a narrative with an embedded clause present, but without topicalisation. Therefore, the force of the translated sentence is much stronger than the original one.

to storytelling. One feels as if some extra information is added in relation to the times of the plot. The translator, even more than the author, adds quality to the actual time of the year in which the elephant was brought to Travnik. Even though the sentence in Serbian has the same word order, the retainment of word order in English definitely adds this other quality to the interpretation of the sentence. The rhythm, enhanced by the usage of a simple noun phrase within the fronted subject, and then a complex noun phrase functioning as the object of the preposition within the second fronted subject, prepares the English-speaking reader for the story from some past times which is to follow and which has to be understood as a tale about something entirely disconnected from the present moment or the reader's ways of thinking and living. Clefting (i.e. the use of a dummy subject) not only enables retaining a storytelling rhythm, but also brings vivacity and jovial feelings into the very depiction of the elephant itself. The entanglement of the story proves the elephant to be as interesting as this first announcement of its existence shown by the usage of a specific kind of topicalisation.

There are examples of fronting of other adverbials as well.

On the Sultan's order, Dželaludin summoned all the prominent Bosnian beys, leaders and town captains to an important discussion in Travnik. (V, 5)

It is noticeable that the translator insists on keeping the original word order, and, therefore, topicalisation, wherever possible. In some cases it is really difficult to explain why certain adverbials are marked as such by using commas and why the same has not been done with others (as exemplified above). It is precisely here that the translator reveals herself. The adverbial fronting, typically used by Serbian speakers, in these cases influences the transfer of the second language structure into the mother tongue.

The choice of the subject topicalisation varied.

It is the people of Travnik, the wisest in Bosnia, who know the greatest number of such stories, but they rarely tell them to strangers, just as it is the rich who are most reluctant to part with their money. (V, 1)

Fronting seems natural in Serbian texts to the extent that it is considered not to be a cohesive device but a common feature of everyday parlance. The above-mentioned sentence carries a great weight in English. Not only is there the fronting present, but also postmodification by an absolute, small clause, and then a further expansion by a coordinated clause again containing another example of fronting. The insistence on the usage of two coordinated noun phrases within the same sentence seems strange in English, even though the Serbian example is in line with Andrić's writing style.

As expected, cases of *wh*-fronting have also been attested.

What impelled the people of Travnik to ask so many questions about each new vizier and his slightest physical and moral characteristics and habits was neither curiosity nor arrogance, but their long experience and pressing need. (V, 2)

As with the previous examples, topicalisation seems the only solution for resolving the conundrum called the Andrić's sentence. Even native speakers sometimes have quite a lot of problems in grasping the incessant flow of information in his sentences. Tight syntactic bonds and meticulous planning of a plethora of information lead the translator into following the current of the sentence. Nevertheless, the translator makes herself apparent and visible only through her insistence on retaining the rhythm of the original sentence.

One of the noticeable aspects in the translation is the effort to retain the Serbian word order, wherever possible. Still, unlike translations into Serbian, the English translator is ever so mindful of the mother tongue syntactical restrictions, so that we are always aware of the fact that the translated text can be read in English without being aware of the source language text influence on the surface level structure. Therefore, it was not surprising to find a vast number of structures introduced by the dummy *it*.

It was an African elephant, just two years old, not yet fully grown, and brimming with life. (V, 7)

Adjectival phrases functioning as subject complements have often been used as fronting elements, whether their function in Serbian is that of a specific kind of adverbial called *aktuelni kvalifikativ* (which is related to both the subject and predicate, and defines the quality whose spatio-temporal array is limited) or the actual true complement.

Wise and experienced as they were, the people of Travnik were often able to extract from these lies a grain of truth which even the liar had not known lay amongst them. (V, 2)

His smooth-shaven face, round and somehow childish, had a barely perceptible red moustache and regular patches of reflected light on his rounded cheekbones, like a porcelain doll. (V, 5)

There are also cases of the fronting of the operator.

Nowhere do curses and complaints, whispered rumours and plots remain simply words for long and least of all in Bosnia. (V, 33)

Surprisingly enough, very few examples of such fronting were attested in the translation. The translator, instead, mainly fronts the adverbials and uses the emphatic *do* as a last-resort operation. Discontinuous dependencies still prevail throughout the text. Andrić's sentence, long but translucent, enables both the reader and translator to add personal interpretation of concatenatedly ordered words.

Postponement is also used in various forms, sometimes as embedded clauses, sometimes as appositive or absolute clauses, but always attached closely to their heads in order not to lose linear syntactic representation.

The older people began to join in the children's jokes, cautiously and unnoticed. (V, 34)

Once more, it is up to the reader to interpret postponement as a translator's pathway into key words that are needed for a full interpretation of the sentence. The psychological implication of such rearrangements of words brings us, in a subtle way, into the cultural realm of Bosnian society where everything is done in a tempo slower than otherwise expected, and with a specific quality of cautiousness, alertness and distrust so typical for the society described.

We end our analysis on an excerpt which is illustrative of the translator's self-awareness that extremely long sentences should, nonetheless, be retained.

This was not a head accustomed to thinking so keenly and cogently, but today, here, even his mind admitted a weak, brief ray of consciousness about the kind of town, the kind of country, the kind of Empire, it was that he, Aljo, and hundreds like him, a few madder, a few cleverer, a few richer, a lot poorer, were living in; the kind of life they lived, a wretched, unworthy life which was insanely loved and dearly paid for, but when one thought about it, it was not worth it, no, it really was not worth it. (V, 27)

Cumbersome with embedding and fronting of various modifiers, the sentence shows the true nature of the approach used for translation throughout the text: the translator cherishes the inextricable connection of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels which encompass the original text. Not wanting to break the thread of storytelling, she deliberately immerses into the web of coordinated phrases, carefully ordered not to disrupt the narrative. Again, even though the sentence consists of ninety-eight words, it can be read effortlessly.

4. CONCLUSION

When approaching the problem of analysing clauses as messages, Baker (2001: 121) states that one either analyses them as thematic or information structures. The Hallidayan School insists on the separate approach to both structures, even though it is evident that there exist some overlapping features of discourse organisation. The Prague School uses both structures as a combination within the same description. Even though the two approaches stand at sometimes utterly opposite standpoints and results of their application may be contradicting, it is up to the translator to choose which one will be used for each of the translation process he/she deals with. The measuring point should be the actual target language. It is solely in the hands of the translator to choose which of the issues or prescribed rules one should put into usage in each particular text translation. Baker herself never explicitly chooses the side, but rather presents both quite aware of the fact that the times of prescribed, closed solutions have long gone. Dealing with translation and its product means being put in front of multiple challenges and facing them on daily basis. Moreover, there is no choice to be made in the first place. Languages like English are subject-prominent, and, therefore, syntactic rules determine word order and interpretation of elements used. Some characteristic features of English can be attached to Serbian, but inflection used in the latter allows for more versatile usage of word order. Linear progression can be interpreted

in much wider sense and sometimes it is up to the reader to determine if topicalisation is present.

Still, translation is not a linear process. Recursiveness is present in text production and changes are constantly made in text understanding. At the end of this process, a text is turned into a target language product. Albir and Alves (2009: 61) define translation “as a complex cognitive process which has an interactive and non-linear nature, encompasses controlled and uncontrolled processes, and requires processes of problem-solving, decision-making and the use of strategies”. The insistence on cognition ultimately leads to individualisation and personalisation of the process. Even though Bell (1991) adopted and built his psycholinguistic model on the framework of systemic-functional linguistics, it is impossible to apply it wholly on all languages. Both analysis and synthesis as integral parts of information processing have to be interpreted according to the needs of the target language. Bell mostly relied on the fact that his model was to be used with the aid of artificial intelligence, but when applied to literary text it somehow lost its wholeness. Building the system on the basis of arranged algorithms seems plausible, but there is something lacking: the self that each translator is inserting into the final product called the translated text. The subjective self of the translator emerges from the product of her work. The relationship of respect for both the culture and language of the source text is overtly visible in the retention of syntactic structures used in translation. However basically English the text may be, it echoes underlined innuendos of the cultural issues depicted by constant usages of topicalisation so typical of Andrić’s prose.

The question of the translator’ (in)visibility is of a subjective nature. Furthermore, the above-mentioned interpretation of the *The Story of the Vizier’s Elephant* is also subjective. And it is intersubjective. For although the author of this paper wanted to be objective, it was only natural that any personal views should become interwoven in the reading. The aim of the paper has been to present one understanding of the translated text; this, by no means, implies exclusiveness, uniqueness or correctness. The purpose is found in constant re-evaluations and confirmations of the existing hypotheses in order to shed some new light on underexplored issues.

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ODJEK TRANSFERA TOPIKALIZACIJE

Rezime

Književni tekstovi predstavljaju mnoštvo izazova pri jezičkim istraživanjima zbog dubina i interpretacija koje omogućavaju pri čitanju. Ako su tekstovi prevedeni, onda se, pri svakom novom prevodu, izazovi produbljuju i otvaraju mjesta novim analizama i pristupima ovom novonastalom književnom uratku. Ovaj rad predstavlja analizu prevoda *Priče o vezirovom slonu* Iva Andrića na engleski jezik. Osnovni fokus je usmjeren na analizu klauza koje su korišćene kao segmenti diskursa, kao i na komplementaciju i kontinuitet topikalizacije. Iako je cilj istraživanja prevashodno bio istražiti morfosintaksička i sintaksička sredstva kojima se prevodilac služio, pažnja je posvećena i psiholingvističkim crtama koje otkrivaju prisustvo (ili odsustvo) glasa prevodioca kao Drugoga.

Ključne riječi: topikalizacija, komplementacija, transfer, vidljivost prevodioca, intersubjektivnost.

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