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**HOW TO HELP STUDENTS AVOID MISINTERPRETATION OF
THE ORIGINAL WHEN TRANSLATING FICTION**

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Abstract

In this article a translation of the short story “Sugar” by the New Zealand author Jane Westaway, made by a MSLU third-year-student, is placed under close scrutiny to show the discrepancies between the translation and the original text that have led to a considerable misunderstanding or even a complete loss of some ideas expressed in the original story. Speakers of different languages can use different linguistic means to express emotions; especially in writing. So the Russian language tends to use direct nomination, whereas in English grammatical and structural means can be used to create the desired effect. It is therefore important that the translator analyse the original text in order to identify the specific features of its structure and language (the author’s style) before actually putting the translation down on paper. There are two basic conclusions that result from the analysis. Firstly, the translator did not understand the structure, the ideas and the emotions of the original story as she did not study the specifics either of the genre in general or the story she was going to translate in particular. Secondly, a course of assigned reading can teach students to extract the author’s message from the fiction text, if more emphasis is placed on text analysis.

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Keywords: Misinterpretation, direct nomination, the author’s message, the author’s intention, assigned reading.



1. Introduction

The following article resulted from the 8th translation contest that took place in MSLU in 2018, when students were expected to submit their translations of short stories that have never been translated into Russian before. Under the supervision of the author of this article a third-year-student made a translation of "Sugar", a short story, written by New Zealand author Jane Westaway. This translation has been chosen for the analysis because in our opinion it illustrates best the inability of the translator to feel and visualize the events of the original text, and to express the author's message and the emotional background of the original in the target language. The article contains examples from the first version of the translation that was then edited and corrected for publication that followed in 2019.

2. Problem Statement

Sugar by Jane Westaway is a short story as is stated on the cover of the book by Michael Gifkins. (Gifkins, 1994).

Many existing definitions of a short story make it possible to name the typical features of this type of narrative texts, as it is a short prose fiction that contains a conflict (Mittelman, 2008), focuses on a single major event (Mameeva, 2018), has a limited number of characters (Hansen, 2019), describes real life (Gelfert, 2007), is a form of narration that demonstrates the author's ability to notice the most significant or crucial situations or moments of our life, and aims at creating a certain emotional effect (Merriam-Webster.com dictionary/ Short story, 2020).

If we take a closer look at "Sugar", we can see that it has all the features listed above. The story is centred on the conflict between the two main characters - the daughter and the mother. It describes one single event - the daughter's arrival home after a long while. As we read on, we understand that although the characters keep talking about food, it is not their culinary preferences that interest the author. It is the relationship between them that makes the centre of communication of the story. Their relationship is very complicated, loaded with mutual antagonism and hurt.

Size limitations lead to a creative use of narrative techniques. (Lahn & Meister, 2016) Authors can combine first person narration, which gives the reader an insight into the thoughts and the motives of the characters, with more distant and objective third person narration or even with less frequently used second person narration, when the effect of emotional closeness between the reader and the character should be achieved. (Nünning & Nünning, 2007) In our example story the author combines the impartial third-person-narration with the more intimate second-person narration.

Furthermore the size influences the linguistic means the authors use to put their point across. These must be laconic and expressive at the same time. The effect can be achieved differently in different languages. (Lapchinskaya, 2019; Sokolova, 2009; Vodovatova, 2017) So speakers of English and German can use grammatical or structural instruments to describe their emotions, whereas speakers of Russian prefer lexical tools, using direct nomination.

3. Research Questions

The research was to answer the following questions:

1. Does the translation express the same ideas as the original text?
2. Does the translation express the same emotions as the original text?
3. What translation solutions are inadequate and why?
4. What should ELT specialists focus on during classes of assigned reading for future translators and interpreters?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is

- to establish what kind of information of the original text was misinterpreted by the translator and
- to outline what can be done in the English language teaching practice in order to prevent mistakes of this kind in future.

5. Research Methods

Using the method of qualitative comparative analysis we have tried to establish how the original ideas and emotions expressed in the short story by Jane Westaway were transmitted into target language (Russian).

6. Findings

In this article we quote only the passages of the original text that were misunderstood by the translator. The story begins with a telephone conversation between the daughter and the mother:

Jane Westaway

Sugar

'DOUBLE THREE OH, two seven six,' (1) said *her mother*, and (2) something thumped in Di's chest like wheels biting tarmac.

'Hi. It's me,' (3) she said, (4) although it wasn't. (5)The thump spread like a shell.

'Hello, darling,' said *her mother*. (6) 'Everything all right?'

'Fine,' said Di. She was trying to smile. But having to raise her voice against the surrounding racket and her mother's hardness of hearing made it feel more like gritting her teeth.

'I'll get the first train down and call you from the station.' She saw herself sipping British Rail coffee and looking out of the window. A mature traveller with a sensible destination.

'What do you want to eat when you get here?' said *her mother*. And at once Di knew she was only someone's child, hurtling home through a worn landscape.

(7) Outside the plastic bubble, hundreds of reunited human beings were laughing and crying in each other's arms. A man was inspecting the fingers of a baby and kissing them. (8) Di was relieved and furious *her mother* never met her. Every three years she flew twenty thousand kilometres and always the first question her mother asked was not, is your life what you hoped it might be, or, will you ever forgive me, but, what do want to eat when you get here?

'Anything,' Di said. She had stopped trying to smile.

'Well, you still don't eat meat, I suppose. What about fish? Or I've got a nice chicken and asparagus casserole in the freezer. I could defrost that.'

'Must something always die?'

'You'll have to speak up, darling.'

'I said, I'm not hungry. It's the dead of night for me, biologically speaking.'

(9)'But, Dianna, you must eat' (Gifkins, 1994, p.35).

Джейн Вестэвэй

Сладости

- Триста тридцать, двести семьдесят шесть, - ответила мама, (1) **это был её старый телефонный номер.** (2) **Каждая цифра въедалась в сознание** Дианы, как колёса автомобиля в гравий.

- Привет, это я, - (3) **затараторила** Ди, (4) **хотя у самой Дианы был вопрос, она ли это.** (5)**В трубке были сильные помехи.**

- Привет, - ответила мама. (6) **Как дела?**

- Все хорошо, - ответила Ди. Она попыталась улыбнуться, однако ей пришлось повысить голос, чтобы перекричать этот шум, к тому же её мама была глуховата, так что это улыбка превратилась в оскал.

- Я сяду на первый поезд и позвоню тебе, как приеду. Ди представила, как сидит в вагоне, пьет кофе, который там разносят, и смотрит на пролетающие за окном пейзажи. Самостоятельный, взрослый путешественник с определённой целью.

- Что ты будешь есть, когда приедешь?- спросила мама. И Ди тут же очнулась от своих мыслей и поняла, что она просто ребенок, который спешит домой.

(7) **За пределами этой стены, отделяющей Ди от остального мира, люди просто живут и радуются жизни: смеются, плачут, проводят время вместе.** Какой-то мужчина перебирал пальчики маленькой ручки ребенка и целовал их. (8) **Ди смотрела на это со стороны и в ней нарастала злоба и обида, ведь мама ее никогда не встречала в аэропорту.** Каждые три года Ди пролетала через полмира, и каждый раз первый вопрос мамы был не «Действительно ты живешь такой жизнью, о которой мечтала» или «Простишь ли ты меня когда-то?», а «Что ты будешь есть, когда приедешь?».

- Да все равно, - ответила Ди. Она уже оставила попытки улыбнуться.

-Ты по-прежнему не ешь мясо? А что насчет рыбы? Или у меня же есть курица со спаржей в морозилке. Достать?

- А что, нельзя никого не убивать?

- Что? Говори громче.

- Я сказала – я не голодна. Сейчас для меня, так сказать, середина ночи по биологическим часам.

- (9) Но Диана, тебе нужно поесть (Polyakova, 2019, p. 214)

Cases (1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8) are clear examples of misinterpretation of the factual content of the original. Although it may seem that we have a case of pragmatism in (1), the word *старый* (old) in the translation is misleading, as it suggests that the number has changed. The misinterpretation in case (2)

leads to further mistake in (5), where the unpleasant feeling in the daughter's chest transforms into a fault on the line. Had the translator understood the text correctly, she would not have used the word *затараторила* (jabber) in (3), as jabbering is not possible if there is a thump in your chest that is spreading.

In our opinion these misinterpretations resulted from the inability of the translator to visualize the events described in the text. The same is true about case (7), where the plastic bubble of a telephone bo[transforms into a wall that separates the daughter from the rest of the world. Had the translator paid more attention to the tenses in this paragraph, she would have remembered that progressive tenses are very often used in descriptions as is clearly the case here. Past indefinite tenses in case (8) on the other hand are used to describe the feelings the character experienced many times in her life.

Speaking of tenses we cannot ignore such an important feature of the original short story as the use of past tenses for description of actions happening at the moment of speech, and the use of present tenses for reminiscences, indicating to the reader that those past events are so painful for the daughter that they are still "alive" in her mind at the moment of speech. Besides there is no other visual distinction between the reminiscences and the actions at the moment of speech, so the use of tenses provides a structure for the whole story making it easier to read:

She (10) manoeuvres the lump of meat through a thick sea of gravy towards mashed potato mountain. If she is lucky, the voyage will dislodge any clinging onion. (11) If she is unlucky, she will be overwhelmed by transparent slime. She pushes the meat once more around her plate. (12) Onion is something her mother does to her. One day Dianna will grow up and move far away, somewhere her mother can't do it any more.

(13) 'Dianna,' snaps her mother. 'Don't play with your food. Eat up before it gets cold.' (14) She wields her own cutlery like weapons, dispatching food with efficiency.

(15-16) Dianna braces herself and pushes the brown lump into her mouth (Gifkins, 1994, p.36).

This has been completely ignored by the translator:

Она играючи (10) **вела** корабль - стейк через густое море подливки к горным пикам пюре. Если ей повезет, ненавистный прилипший лук останется за бортом. (11) **Если ей не повезет, она стойко выдержит это испытание.** Корабль вновь отправился в круиз по тарелке. (12) **Мама добавляет лук везде.** Когда Диана вырастет, она переедет куда-то очень далеко, туда, где ей больше не придётся его есть.

(13) -**Диана, - прикрикнула мама,- что ты там ковыряешь. Ешь, пока все не остыло.** Сама она (14) **орудовала** вилкой, как фехтовальщик шпагой, быстро расправляясь со своей порцией.

(15)Глядя на это, (16)Диана поежилась и отправила большой кусок мяса в рот. (Polyakova, 2019, p. 214)

As we can see, the use of tenses in the translation is chaotic and so the meaning that the tenses have in the original is lost in the translation as is lost the structure of the text. This means that the translator did not pay enough attention to the to the structure of the original text.

One more interesting detail is that the reminiscences are always preceded by the mother's remarks referring to food:

She dragged her suitcase over the threshold and saw the Tupperware container dripping disconsolately on the bench. On its lid would be a label indicating the nature of the contents, the number they would serve and the date they were frozen.

'I'll put the kettle on,' said her mother. She had wiped away her few station tears as if scouring a bench. She moved about the kitchen as she had for forty years. Heat the pot. Pour the milk in a jug. Get out the sugar bowl. Who takes sugar, Di nearly said. Instead she peeled back the Tupperware lid.

'What sort of tea are you drinking these days?' asked her mother, poised beside the cupboard.

'Do you have any herbal?'

Her mother tightened her lips and peered into the darkness. 'There's PG Tips, Lapsang Souchong . . . Oh, here you are — Earl Grey.'

'Earl Grey will be fine.' Di was poking the contents of the Tupperware with a spoon. They separated with a depressed creak.

'It was very nice when I made it,' said her mother, pouring boiling water into the pot. (17)'Don't play with it, Dianna.'

'How many times do I have to tell you?'

'But I hate the onion.'

'Nonsense,' says her mother, clinking knife and fork together on a cleaned plate. 'You just think you do. It's quite tasteless really.'

'What's it in here for then?'

But the question is lost under the scraping and rinsing going on at the sink. 'Anyway, it's the feel of it.' And Dianna shudders as her mother turns back to the table.

'Two more pieces of meat, then pudding,' says her mother (Gifkins, 1994, p.36).

First it is the phrase (9) *But Diana, you must eat* and then (17) *Don't play with it*, a typical phrase of the mother that appears twice (13, 17) and in each case triggers in the daughter's head some unpleasant reminiscences, connected with the mother. So for the daughter it is a stimulus phrase and as such should be translated identically in both cases. But unfortunately the translator did not identify it as such and therefore the importance of this phrase in the relationship between the mother and the daughter is lost in the translation:

Она перетасила свой чемодан через порог и увидела запотевший контейнер для еды Таппервер (Tupperware), по которому стекали маленькие капельки на стеллаж. Не хватало только срока годности, количества порций и даты заморозки.

-Пойду чайник поставлю, - сказала мама и промокнула пару упавших слезинок, притворяясь, что вытирает стеллаж под контейнером. Она как обычно металась по кухне. Поставила чайник. Налила молоко в молочник. Достала сахар. «Кому тут, интересно, нужен сахар», - чуть не сказала Ди, но вместо этого она приоткрыла крышку контейнера.

-Какой будешь чай? - спросила мама, стоя в нерешительности у стенового шкафа.

- Есть травяной?

Мама поджала губы и начала вглядываться в глубину шкафа.

-Ну смотри, есть с типсами, Лапсанг Сушонг... О, наконец-то – эрл грей.

-Эрл Грей так эрл грей. Ди исследовала содержимое контейнера ложкой. Не до конца размороженное, оно разламывалось с характерным хрустом.

-Когда я это только приготовила – всё выглядело лучше, - отметила мама, наливая кипяток в чайник. (17) **Хватит возить еду по тарелке, Диана.** (Polyakova, 2019, p. 215)

The peremptory manner of the mother clearly shows in the way she starts the telephone conversation at the very beginning of the story, when she says *Hello, darling. Everything all right?* (6) It is a general question that requires the answer yes or no. It shows that the mother is not interested in how things are. She only gives her daughter a chance to agree or disagree with her own statement. The daughter does not have much chance to express what *she* thinks or feels and she has never had such a chance as the unfolding story tells.

The phrase *Everything all right?* at the beginning of a conversation between two people who have not seen each other for a long time is very unnatural and the translator instinctively changed it into *Как дела?* (How are things?), thus destroying the effect that the author tried to achieve by the reader. When we carefully follow the mother's remarks throughout the story, we can find even more examples. It is the mother's speech that is her portrait, there is not much description of her in the story. The author is clearly on the daughter's side: she describes her feelings, she lets the readers in on her reminiscences, the daughter has a name (Diana or even Di), whereas the mother is always referred to as *her mother*, which strikes the reader as unnatural and creates the effect of alienation between the two characters. In the Russian translation *her mother* transforms into *мама* (Mom) and the effect of alienation disappears.

As well as one of the two cases of second-person-narration, which the author uses, when she wants the character to take the reader into her confidence:

And Di suddenly remembered a day from her last visit. Bournemouth. Sitting on a park bench amidst beds of blinding petunias and watching a mother lift up her teeshirt for her baby. Di and her mother had looked away, as if it reminded them both of something they would rather forget. But her mother had said bitterly, 'I fed you for fifteen months. (18) They made you feel guilty then. I hated it' (Gifkins, 1994, p.39).

The translation here is inadequate, as it expresses annoyance, whereas in the original it sounds more like an excuse:

И тут Ди неожиданно вспомнила день своего последнего приезда. Борнмут. Она вспоминала, как они сидели на скамейке в парке среди цветущих петуний и увидели как женщина кормила ребенка грудью. Ди и её мама отвели взгляд, будто им обоим это напоминало что-то, о чем они обе предпочли бы забыть. Ее мама все же ядовито отметила: «А я кормила тебя до года и трёх месяцев! (18) **Все меня стыдили за это. Как же раздражало.**» (Polyakova, 2019, p. 218)

7. Conclusion

Summing up the findings we can state that the Russian translation of the short story "Sugar" does not show the relationship between the characters as intense as the original. Due to a number of inadequate

translation solutions the sharpness of the central conflict and the emotional tension has been lost. The motivation of the characters and the opinion of the author have become unclear to the reader.

The research has revealed the following problems:

1. The translator does not see the short story as a complete product of the author that contains original ideas and has been written for a particular purpose, but regards it as a number of sentences that should be transmitted into the target language. Before starting her translation she did not analyse the text to identify its type, structure, stylistic devices.
2. The translator does not see the short story as a product of different culture and time. She did pay much attention to the realities described in the text and therefore failed to translate them adequately.
3. The translator sometimes cannot see or imagine the situation "behind" the text. That led to a number of wrong translation solutions.

There are a lot of books and articles about teaching professional translators where authors not only discuss the new professional standards for translators (Sdobnikov, 2019) and describe techniques of teaching translation but also emphasize the importance of text analysis (Petrova, 2018) and even speak about developing a specific way of thinking and seeing things that could help translators switch easily between different fields (Petrova & Sdobnikov, 2019). In our opinion this specific way of thinking and seeing things can be trained from the very beginning, when students take up the course of assigned reading. The aim of such a course for translators and interpreters is to teach students to look at any work of literature as at a product of its author that is complete and original. The task of a translator is firstly to understand what the author wanted to say in his text and why he wanted to say it. Therefore it seems advisable to touch upon the basic features of the type of the text the students are reading, to encourage students to look for examples of the text cohesion, to ask them to find examples in the text that make the authors point clear to the reader. It is very important to ask students what the author thinks about his characters and their actions instead of asking what the students think about them.

Besides when discussing a book with future translators or interpreters we should always stress that it is a product of foreign culture or different time and point out to our students the passages in the text where it can be seen most clearly.

Furthermore it seems advisable to include into the assigned reading courses books that have been made into films, especially if we speak about classical literature. This could help students to visualize what they have read.

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