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On Inconsistencies and Strategies, or How to Translate the Unnatural Naturally

1. Introduction

Every translator, whether a veteran or a novice, strives to make the results of their work look "natural" in the eyes of a potential recipient. The concept of translation naturalness is both ancient and modern. It is ancient because for centuries, translators have intuitively perceived naturalness as the ultimate goal to aspire to though they have avoided the term itself. One of the first proponents of this – implied – naturalness was probably Cicero, who claimed to translate "with the same ideas, forms and, as it were, shape, and with language fitted to our usage" [1949: 365]. According to Lawrence Venuti [1995], the word "natural" begins to explicitly appear in translation definitions and/or descriptions by scholars, literary critics and translators as early as the turn of the 19th century. However only in the second half of the 20th century, naturalness receives

its modern scientific substantiation as part of, first, linguistic [Nida 1969; Newmark 1988] and then cultural [Venuti 1995; Rogers 1998] paradigms of translatology.

Today, the idea of "naturalness" is quite familiar to most translators, since it has become part and parcel of multiple programs for training future translators/interpreters all over the world. Within the linguistic paradigm dominating Translation Studies since its formal inception in the 1960s, the palm undoubtedly belongs to Eugene Nida who offered to define translating as "reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the message of the source language, first in terms of meaning and second in style" [1969: 495]. From Nida's description of translation's relation to linguistics, it becomes obvious that he perceived naturalness in its functional manifestation:

> The actual process of translating can be described as a complex use of language; but the scientific study of translating can and should be regarded as a branch of comparative linguistics, with a dynamic dimension and a focus upon semantics [ibid.].

Another prominent figure in exploring translation naturalness in light of linguistics was Peter Newmark, who treated it as one of the four levels the translator keeps "more or less consciously in mind" [1988: 19] and labeled it as "common language appropriate to the writer or the speaker in a certain situation" [ibid.]. Newmark was perhaps the only researcher that paid tribute to the practical aspect of naturalness proclaiming that it is "both grammatical and lexical, and is a touchstone at every level of a text, from paragraph to word, from title to punctuation" [ibid.: 20]. But even more importantly, he put the concept of naturalness in a literary context where the unnatural often becomes a norm:

> When you are faced with an innovatory expressive text, you have to try to gauge the degree of its deviation from naturalness, from ordinary language and reflect this degree in your translation. Thus in translating *any* type of text you have to sense 'naturalness,' usually for the purpose of reproducing, sometimes for the purpose of deviating from naturalness [ibid.: 25].

Within the cultural paradigm, naturalness is most commonly treated as one of the two major criteria of influential domestication strategy. It is worth reminding at this point that its second criterion is fluency, which

is quite hard to distinguish from naturalness and dictionaries often treat them as synonyms.

In particular, Lawrence Venuti, who formulated the principles of domestication, remains on fairly vague grounds himself giving preference to rather abstract statements according to which

> [t]he translator works to make his or her work 'invisible,' producing the illusory effect of transparency that simultaneously masks its status as an illusion: the translated text seems 'natural,' i.e., not translated [1995: 5].

In its more detailed presentation, naturalness is "indicated in a number of noticeable features, comprising well-formedness, acceptability, idiomacity, authenticity, and contemporaneity" [Saptaningsih, Nuraeni *et al.* 2020]. Needless to say, all of these criteria are factually reduced to "the compliance with the target linguistic and cultural norms" [ibid.].

Within the process-oriented paradigm, the concept of naturalness is even less investigated, and that is where the experimental research methods that have become deeply rooted in Translation Studies for the last 30 years come in handy. The *aim* of this research is to analyze on the basis of think-aloud protocols (TAPs) the translators' decisions intended to make their translations sound more natural. We believe that the implementation of this aim will allow to confirm our *hypothesis* that elimination of inconsistencies is one of the mechanisms of creating naturalness in translation.

2. Methods

2.1. What is TAP? General points

TAP is essentially an exemplary case of interdisciplinary collaboration when the method of "verbal reports on thinking" initially developed in cognitive psychology was adapted for the needs of Translation Studies. This method is based on the technique of "protocol analysis" ascribed to American psychologists Karl Anders Ericsson and Herbert Alexander Simon, who gave its theoretical substantiation in the article "Verbal reports as data" [1980]. The developers' ambition was "to explicate the knowledge necessary to generate successful solutions when we study tasks that cannot be easily performed with simple strategies" [Ericsson, Simon 1987: 28]. Tellingly, they take translation as an example of the task where the number of different acceptable solutions considerably complicates

decision-making, and "words with multiple lexical meanings are likely to be particularly revealing with respect to the translation process" [ibid.].

Due to the concurrent verbalization of mental processes, TAP is referred to as an introspective experiment whose main advantage is that it provides an opportunity to obtain some information about the specifics of all the stages of translation process, e.g., perceiving information, its interpreting, formation of its image (mental representation), selection/creation of the means of reproducing the image formed in the translator's mind, etc. Therefore, there appears a unique chance to carry out a complex analysis of translation as a sequence of cognitive operations.

According to Paul Kussmaul and Sonja Tirkkonen-Condit [1995], potential TAP subjects are divided into three broad categories of – professionals, semi-professionals and non-professionals – with each of its advantages and disadvantages. Non-professionals are subjects who learn a foreign language not as linguists, but for pleasure or for the use in a professional sphere other than translation or language teaching. Professionals are subjects who have completed specialized higher educational programs in foreign languages/literature/translation and have working experience in the field of translation/interpreting of at least three years. Professionals have automatized some of their skills, which may result in less conscious and sparser verbalizations. Finally, semi-professionals are students undergoing specialized programs as mentioned above. They are expected to possess a medium to higher level of a foreign language competence and at least some professional translator's knowledge and skills. Consequently, semi-professionals take their decisions in a more conscious fashion proceeding from their mostly theoretical background. Their professional competence is not fully formed yet and many processes are not automatized, they lack standard ways of overcoming different types of problems:

> As far as attitudinal factors are concerned, the semi-professionals' ambivalent attitude toward paraphrasing and their fear of false friends can be interpreted as a lack of self-confidence [Kussmaul, Tirkkonen-Condit 1995: 187].

2.2. Experiment description

The experiment involved 10 semi-professional subjects – students completing their Master's program "English Language, Literature and Translation, the second Foreign Language" at the School of Foreign Languages of V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University. Because of the COVID

pandemic, the experiment was held online via Zoom videoconferencing service when all the participants were asked to translate an excerpt from Terry Pratchett's novel *A Hat Full of Sky* [2015] and provide simultaneously their commentary on what they were doing. The subjects were given no other instructions that could have had any kind of interfering impact on their decisions or steered the course of their thoughts.

The experiment was held in three stages. At the first stage (pre-translation or interpretation), the subjects read the text. At the second stage (translation proper) they translated the text with concurrent verbalization. Finally, at the third stage (post-translation or editing), they had an opportunity to make amendments to the already produced texts. After completing the task, the translated texts together with the subjects' commentaries were sent to the experiment's supervisor. The subjects were allowed to consult any dictionaries or websites in search of the necessary information except Russian or Ukrainian translations of Terry Pratchett's novels.

The material for the experiment was carefully selected to contain several types of translation difficulties that would require special strategies due to possible emergence of inconsistencies of different types in the target text if translated literally. The strategies applied are presumably intended to make the resulting translation variants sound more natural to the subjects' themselves, who in this case act as the first recipients of their own translations. In other words, following Umberto Eco's somewhat metaphorical hermeneutic concept, the translator here is likened to the Model Reader of the second level, "who wonders what sort of reader that story would like him or her to become and who wants to discover precisely how the model author goes about serving as a guide for the reader" [Eco 1994: 27].

The text offered for the subjects' translation and commenting contained the description of a fairy race the Nac Mac Feegle and presented no difficulty in respect to the possible lack of the translators' background knowledge. Actually, the excerpt functions as Introduction to the novel and provides readers with some background information about this fairy race.

Individual control elements will be described and discussed language-wise, culture-wise, and translation-wise in the next section of the paper. The original TAPs were in Ukrainian; their fragments selected for the analysis in this publication were translated by the authors.

3. Results: The case study

3.1. Control element # 1

The first control element is expression "fighting with the boot and the head" from the following passage:

"He [a Feegle man] may wear a rabbit-skull helmet, and a Feegle often decorates his beard and hair with feathers, beads, and anything else that takes his fancy. He will almost certainly carry a sword, although it is mainly for show, the Feegles' preferred method of fighting being with the boot and the head" [Pratchett 2015: 2].

The source of inconsistency in this case lies in the metonymic transference because in the Ukrainian worldview people do not fight with "boots" but rather with "feet"; another inconsistency lies in violating standard semantic combinability by putting together a body part ("head") and a piece of clothing ("boot").

Somewhat contrary to our prediction, only half of the subjects considered the outlined inconsistencies in their TAPs. They did it with linguistic markers pointing to the unnaturalness of the expression. See, for instance TAP #1: "They prefer fights? Or struggle? With boots or with head? Ok, let it be 'struggle with boots and head.' **God, how strange**".

TAP #6: [They] prefer fighting… *with the boot and the head*… [says in English]. **It's a strange phrase**. It is possible that they… they 'prefer **hand-to-hand fighting** to sword fighting." As we can see, in this case the subject not only identified the inconsistency but offered the way to overcome it in a more natural way by opting for "hand-to-hand fighting", which is common in Ukrainian.

TAP #9: "During fighting, they use *the boot and the head* [says in English]. **It is a very strange word combination**. '[They] use boots or head.' That is possibly the only variant that can be used here. *Boot and the head* [says in English], probably it means that they will **fight with their feet and head**. Well, I think '[they] will apply boots or head' is an optimal variant here." The considerations here are somewhat similar to the previous ones ("It is a very strange word combination") though this subject was unable to resolve their doubts and in the end gave preference to the literal translation ("[they] will apply boots or head").

3.2. Control element # 2

The second control element is a complex stylistic device "like a beehive, but with a lot less honey and a lot more sting" from the following passage:

"Down below, the world of the Feegle is a bit like a beehive, but with a lot less honey and a lot more sting. The reason for this is that females are very rare among the Feegle" [Pratchett 2015: 3]

We characterize this device as complex because it combines a simile ("the world is like a beehive"), an antithesis ("a lot less"/ "a lot more") and a metaphor (while "honey" stands for "pleasure," "sweetness," "truth," "knowledge," sting stands for "pain (also, emotional and mental)," "bitterness," "intoxicality" or even "death"). The inconsistency here is not only of stylistic (direct vs. figurative meaning) but also of grammatical nature as "sting" in English is both countable and uncountable. The latter is more typical for metaphoric use like in the given context, and it should be taken into account while opting for a particular translation variant. We mean that in order to make the Ukrainian variant more natural, literal translation is better be avoided in favor of some variant adapted to the stylistic and/or grammatical norms of the Ukrainian language with the help of transformations and/or functional (indirect, figurative) equivalents. In their TAPs, the subjects expressed their awareness of the outlined inconsistencies as well as demonstrated a number of creative solutions to resolve them.

See, for instance, TAP #1: "The world of the Feegle is like a beehive… there's some metaphor next. *With a lot less honey and a lot more sting* [says in English]. To my mind, their colony or clan looks more like predatory hornets than bees". As we can see, the subject transforms "honey" into "bees" and "sting" into "hornets", which we consider a very successful solution. The use of functional equivalents testifies to the inconsistency that the subject is willing to get rid of.

TAP # 4: "As we can see, their world is apparently like a beehive, but there… I think they liken their world to the beehive in which… well *honey* [says in English] is something good, and *sting* [says in English] is something bad, that is why… this is a metaphor. The Feegle's world is like a beehive, but the beehive in which… there is less honey and more stings. But I can also translate it as a certain metaphor. Maybe, 'there is little good and a lot of evil'. Probably, so. I'll stop here." In this case, the subject also identifies the metaphor and after trying its literal translation (that obviously

does not satisfy them) stops at what they call "a metaphorical translation" with the help of functional equivalents.

TAP #6: "Next, it says that the Feegle's world reminds that of bees… It's an interesting sentence, I think the author wanted to hint at something. . . . maybe that they 'do not as much gather honey as they sting'. And who do they sting? One another? This phrase does not sound proper, but I don't understand more from the context." In this case, in search of naturalness the subject resorts to the transformation of explicitation by turning a noun phrase into a verb one: "honey → to gather honey", "sting → to sting (one another)."

Another interesting example is TAP #7: "Further on, there's an interesting comparison of the underground world where these creatures live to the beehive where bees live because as it was mentioned earlier there aren't many women there and that's why they… I mean those women, they are of great importance. And this very interesting phrase *with a lot less honey and a lot more sting* [reads in English], I would translate it like this: 'Down under the ground, the Feegle's world resembles a beehive a bit because there isn't much honey there but quite a lot of stings.' With stings I mean these warriors… well, men. There are quite a lot of men as compared to women." The subject decided that in this metaphorical expression "honey" stands for women and "sting" – for men, but at the same time remained faithful to the original: the only transformation applied for the sake of naturalness was to change singular source "sting" for plural target "stings."

Finally, TAP #9 reads: "*Down below* [says in English]… I think that this is 'a beehive in which there's much more poison than honey.' The word 'sting' in this sentence I think will not be understandable, and that's why I translate is as 'poison.' I think it will be a very accurate variant." In our opinion, this is a very relevant translation indeed since it successfully transforms the author's original idea into the form that is natural both culturally and grammatically for the target recipient.

3.3. Control element #3

The third control element is a nonce compound "Bigjobs" from "A Feegle Glossary, adjusted for those of a delicate disposition" [Pratchett 2015: 4]. The unit is accompanied with a very laconic definition "Human beings" giving the subjects an opportunity for a wide range of interpretations, but depriving them of the author's possible motivations. Linguistics-wise, "Bigjobs" belongs to the class of ad hoc innovations coined by a speaker/

writer for a particular occasion. That is why they are commonly referred to as "nonce words/formations" or "occasionalisms."

We define nonce formations as

> innovations that by the time of research have not become part of the language lexical system and as a result are characterized by such features as irregularity of use, norm violation, contextual dependency, perceptive novelty/unusualness, pragmatic markedness [Rebrij 2012: 151].

Unlike regular lexemes possessing fixed denotations and senses, ad hoc nonce formations, according to Eve V. Clark and Herbert H. Clark, possess "shifting" denotations and senses, i.e., such that "depend on the time, place, and circumstances in which they are uttered and must be accounted for by a convention about their use." [1979: 809]. This convention

> makes essential use of such notions as kinds of situations, rationality, ready computability, uniqueness, the speaker's and listener's mutual knowledge and certain syntactic constraints [ibid.].

Nonce words fall under the category of translation difficulties due to two factors: (1) they are absent in a potential recipient's mental lexicon as well as in any external sources and thus should be ascribed a coherent meaning on the basis of available resources such as their morphemic structure (if there is one) and/or contextual analysis (context is treated here in the broadest possible way including a recipient's relevant background knowledge); (2) they have no ready equivalents in the target language, which in its turn opens a number of possible strategies for the interpreter. In addition to these universal problems connected with nonce words translation, our control element "Bigjobs" is somewhat inconsistent as a result of using the abstract root morpheme "job" for denominating human beings. We will take the common strategies of translating non-equivalent words [Rebrij, Peškova 2020] and then check their validity on the basis of both TAPs and final versions of target texts after editing. It is also essential to see how these strategies correlate with the concept of naturalness.

The first strategy is to imitate the author's actions by opting for direct equivalents of the nonce word's components and/or the method of word-formation. In our case, the compound consists of two root morphemes (adjective "big" and noun "job") and thus its translation in accordance with this strategy falls under the translation method first described by Jean-Paul Vinay and Jean Darbelnet as "loan translation" or "calque" [1995]. Despite

being one of the most popular strategies for rendering lexical innovations from English into Ukrainian, calque may be potentially damaging to naturalness. In this regard, we share the opinion of our Polish colleague who claims that

> [a]lthough borrowings and calques are relatively straightforward solutions to various problematic situations encountered in the translation process, they should be used with caution. It seems that a lot of translators are biased to think that words and structures borrowed from English sound perfectly right to Polish speakers, which is not necessarily true [Waliński 2015: 59].

On the other hand, following this strategy often requires a strong creative impulse especially when the calque does not "fit" the target language and its norms easily. In our case, we cannot simply put together two Ukrainian equivalents of the source root morphemes and receive an acceptable variant. Subject #4, who unfortunately left no comment in their TAP, offered a very interesting equivalent "важнороби" (literally "those who do important jobs") that is the result of some additional transformational efforts on their side: "big" was substituted with "important" ("важно") and the Ukrainian equivalent for "job" ("робота") was shortened to "роб," which can as well stand for "робітник" ("doer").

The second strategy is that of following not the method of a nonce word coining but rather its form: either graphical (transliteration) or audial (transcription). Obviously, this strategy can be applied in the case of translating from one alphabetic system into another, like in our case from Latin into Cyrillic. In the eyes of language purists, excessive application of this strategy leads to littering the language with hundreds if not thousands of monstrous formations alien to the Ukrainian ear and absolutely undecipherable outside their contexts. From our own observations, translators indeed overindulge in transliteration and transcription especially when they are not able or are not willing to seek for a more creative translation variant. We can also suppose that this strategy is hardly compatible with the concept of naturalness and the fact of resorting to it in a literary discourse only testifies to the translator's lack of experience or creative potential. This strategy turned out the most productive one in our experiment, which can be accounted for by the semi-professional status of its subjects.

See, for instance, TAP #1: "*Bigjobs* [says in English]… I'm not sure here whether I should translate it or leave as it as 'бігджобс' [says in

Ukrainian]. They are human beings, that's for sure. Let it be 'бігджобс' [says in Ukrainian]. Well, since it's in the Glossary, I'll leave it like that. Transliteration again." As one can see, the subject demonstrates not only the knowledge of translation strategies/methods but also the relevance of their use in particular situations, which as we believe is one of the factors connected with naturalness. Another important fact is that in the final version of their translation, the subject changed 'бігджобс' for 'бігджобери' by supplanting the transliterated variant with the English suffix "-er," whose meaning as "a doer of an action" is typical for nominating human beings. As much as, on the one hand, this is a manifestation of the source language interference, on the other hand, it is also a manifestation of an intuitive search for naturalness.

Similar position is observed in TAP #5, whose subject substitutes the English plural ending "-s" with the Ukrainian "-и," which is also typical for Ukrainian nominations of human beings: "And now I'll try to read it, to pronounce it because there's not much else I can do. *Bigjobs* [says in English]…Only if there are many [of them] then without 's', and it will be 'бігджоби' [says in Ukrainian]."

The third strategy stipulated the use of a regular target language word with a similar meaning. This strategy implies more or less coherent interpretation of a source unit. On the upside, it allows to find a natural equivalent, but on the downside, it leads to losing the expressiveness of a nonce unit that attracts a potential recipients' attention due to its novelty and unusualness.

See, for instance TAP #5: "Well, there are quite a lot of the author's neologisms in the next section [of a source text]. The first is *Bigjobs* [says in English]…Well, the dictionary shows that it is some kind of an invective… or… archaic [word]. Well, I'll probably translate it as 'giants.'" As we can see, the subject realized that the control element was the author's coinage and yet turned to dictionaries for a possible translation variant. Such situation is quite common for students with a pretty high level of theoretical knowledge but lacking practical skills and confidence in applying them.

Another glaring example is TAP #6: "*Bigjobs: Human beings* [says in English]… [It] evokes associations with work. With some big work. And those who do this hard work are people, human beings. Maybe, I can translate it as 'mules are human beings,' I mean they consider people as those who carry out some hard work."

Within this strategy, we have two more translation variants that are not commented on in TAPs: "бурмили" and "базіки." The first has two meanings in Ukrainian: (1) a big bear and (2) a bearish person. This variant is probably inferred from the assumption that only strong bear-like creatures can carry out "big jobs." The motivation for the second variant, which literally means "chatterboxes," remains unclear to us.

Finally, the fourth detected strategy is known as "zero translation" and stipulates transferring a source unit to a target context with no changes at all. In relation to English–Ukrainian translation involving switchover from the Latin alphabet to the Cyrillic this strategy is far from natural. The subjects who resorted to it justified their decisions by the fact that the control element (together with a number of other nonce formations) was part of the Glossary. See, for instance, TAP # 2: "Glossary. I wonder what is there to translate and how. Ah, shame on me. It says here that the Glossary is intended for those who have difficulties with interpreting the above text. . . . Well, since it's a Glossary, I'll leave the words as they are. And what else can I do with them?"

TAP #9 provides a similar opinion, the only difference being that the subject believes the "zero translation" strategy will help them preserve the effect that the nonce words in the Glossary belong to some artlang and thus their unnaturalness is in fact natural: "Well, I return to the words that are explained [in the Glossary]. I finally made up my mind not to translate the words themselves but to leave them in English because since it's the Glossary, then it provides their explanations. Maybe, if these words are used in the text further on, they can also be left in English in order to make an impression as if they come from another language, though it is obvious that nearly all of them are manufactured."

4. Conclusions

The modern stage of Translation Studies evolution can be best described as interdisciplinary and polyparadigmatic. Its interdisciplinarity is twofold: (1) translation itself is seen as a complex phenomenon whose various facets are intricately tied to many areas of human knowledge; (2) translation scholars are in constant search of new ideas, theories, conceptions, and methods that can be borrowed and successfully assimilated for their needs.

Polypardigmatic approach seems to be essential for the projects aimed at the complex analysis of different translation-related phenomena or

translation itself. In our case, one such phenomenon is translation naturalness, which is principally linguistic, functional and cultural in nature, but at the same time its motivations, constraints and mechanisms can be exposed and scrutinized with the help of introspective and retrospective experimental methods rooted in cognitive psychology.

The functional aspect of translation naturalness accentuated by Nida and Newmark is understood as preserving the intention and effect implied by the source text or rather by its author. For literary discourse, it often means preserving different types of deviations that mark the author's individual style. Cultural aspect of translation naturalness is inseparable from its fluency as, put together, these two qualities make any translated text virtually indistinguishable from an autochthonous one.

Our efforts, though, focused on the linguistic aspect of translation naturalness in its process-oriented dimension. We designed and conducted an introspective TAP experiment in which 10 semi-professional subjects translated an excerpt from Terry Pratchett's novel *A Hat Full of Sky* and concurrently commented on different problems encountered in the course of their work. Our task was to identify and analyze their decisions related to the concept of translation naturalness. To this end, we formulated the hypothesis that eliminating different types of inconsistencies leads of creating naturalness in translation. We singled out three control elements in the source text whose translation is tricky (de-automatized) due to different types of inconsistencies of structural, semantic or stylistic character. By analyzing the subjects' TAPs and their final edited translations, we came to the conclusion that in those cases when the subjects identified existing inconsistencies they pursued the strategies aimed at eliminating them and thus making their translations look more natural in the eyes of potential recipients.

The prospect of further research includes conducting more experiments, both introspective and retrospective, for the sake of providing a better understanding of the concept of translation naturalness from the process-oriented standpoint.

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ABSTRACT

This article highlights the results of an experimental study dedicated to analysing the concept of translation naturalness in terms of the process-oriented paradigm of Translation Studies. The multidisciplinary nature of modern Translation Studies is revealed through applying methods, concepts, and theories of different areas of knowledge in regard to different translation-related phenomena as well as translation itself. Experimental methods devised by cognitive psychology for exposing the mechanisms of decision-making in complex processes have proven their validity in translatology for the last thirty years. The aim of the study is to investigate the translators' decisions intended to make their output look more natural. Our hypothesis is that such decisions are in particular motivated by aspiration to eliminate different types of inconsistencies that can potentially result in unnaturalness in the target text. To verify this hypothesis, we developed and conducted an introspective experiment based on the think-aloud methodology. The material for the study was taken from Terry Pratchett's novel *A Hat Full of Sky*, within which we singled out three control elements characterised by structural, semantic or stylistic inconsistency. The analysis of the TAPs of ten semi-professional subjects demonstrated that they did not always successfully identify the inconsistencies in the control elements, but when they did, their reaction was to apply strategies aimed at eliminating them and therefore enhancing the target text naturalness.

KEYWORDS: Inconsistency, introspective experiment, naturalness, strategy, think-aloud protocol (TAP)