

Realia in Contemporary Russian-Norwegian and Russian-English Literary Translations: An Attempt to Operationalize Domestication and Foreignization

Abstract

The main goal of my project is to investigate how Norwegian and English translators of modern Russian fiction deal with *realia* — a set of lexical items of the source language that denote unique objects and phenomena characteristic of a certain language community which have no direct lexical counterparts in the target language. This lexis (e.g. *okroshka*, *versta*) often presents a significant challenge in translation, and various solutions have been developed by translators to deal with culture-specific lexical gaps. Translation scholars, in turn, regularly try to classify and examine these solutions in a variety of texts (e.g. Aixela 1996, Leppihalme 1997, Nedergaard-Larsen 1993, Newmark 1981, Pedersen 2011, Vlachov and Florin 1980, 1986/2012). However, very few attempts have been made to analyze this sort of data quantitatively (e.g. van Poucke 2012).

Much of the modern debate on literary translation revolves around binary oppositions viewed as the two poles of a continuum — *literary vs. free translation*, *text-oriented vs. reader-oriented approach*, etc. Recently, the *domestication vs. foreignization* opposition proposed by Venuti (1995, 2008) has been gaining in popularity in translation discourse. These notions are adopted in my study and examined in relation to realia. Domestication and foreignization are conceptualized as overall translation *strategies* employed to deal with a specific translation problem within a single text. These may follow certain patterns throughout a *set* of texts — I refer to the latter as translation *regularities*. Neither translation strategies nor regularities are immediately observable in texts, but manifest themselves in a range of specific linguistic operations, or *shifts*. By classifying and analyzing these shifts combined, I attempt to establish what the translator's strategy was — as opposed to other translators' strategies — and further identify more general translation regularities.

The study is being performed within the Descriptive Paradigm developed by Toury (1980, 1995, 2012) and is intended to be both qualitative and quantitative: an analysis of different types of realia and shifts is followed by statistical calculations. A quantitative model involving a 13-point scale is being tested to measure the degree of domestication/foreignization in selected texts and to perform a comparative analysis. An attempt is made to establish whether the Norwegian and English translations occupy different places on the domestication/foreignization continuum. Data for this research are mainly retrieved from the Russian-Norwegian-English parallel corpus, developed at the

University of Oslo. Six Russian novels and their recent translations into Norwegian and English have been selected for my study. In my talk, I would like to present a fraction of my work in progress: namely, I will focus on one specific category of culture-bound vocabulary — ethnographic realia.

References

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