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Some peculiarities of translating the 19th century text on the example of Dostoevsky’s “A Writer’s Diary”

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Abstract

The article gives the analysis of difficulties which occur while translating the chapter “Constantinople Must Be Ours” from Dostoevsky's “A Writer's Diary” into English. The text raises issues of geopolitics, which had a great influence on the major powers policies of past and are still vital nowadays. “A Writer's Diary” belongs to philosophical prose highlighting the most relevant issues of the XIXth century Russia. The relevance is that texts of political orientation are the subject of careful analysis now. The issue of political correctness is essential and continuing to gain popularity. It influences the way of translation. It's impossible to neglect Dostoevsky's philosophy that implies some peculiarities of the author's language and style. It needs to be taken into account and appropriate tools should be used while translating. Thus, the purpose of this work is to identify the translation features of the politically directed 19th century text that is also imbued with author's philosophy.

Keywords: Dostoevsky's philosophy, “A Writer’s Diary”, obsolete word, religious, idiom, inverted order of words, neologism.

1. Introduction

While translating texts with language and structure that do not coincide with the norms of the modern language, the translator faces the problem of choosing the appropriate strategy. The first way to go is to strive to preserve the style of the writer and the spirit of the era, which give a special touch to the original text. In this case, translation is more designed for lovers of the writer's creativity, who stand for maximum commitment to the author's unique style and certain philosophy that runs through the whole text. The second way is to modernize the original text with the use of modern words and norms of the language. Such a text is understandable to the wider masses, because the author's intention can be conveyed in modern, accessible language.

2. The process and specifics of translation.

The text was written in the 19th century. Since that time, Russian language has undergone numerous and very serious changes, which should be taken into account during translation. In addition, difficulties are also caused by the style of presentation, the characteristic features of which are due not only to the epoch, but also to the special syllable of Dostoevsky. In this regard, we have

identified 3 groups of problems that cause the main difficulties of translation this passage into English.

First, in the text of the original we can regularly find obsolete words. In this case, the translator has a problem: to preserve the style and find the equivalent of the given word, which would also be considered obsolete in the target language, or use a modern synonym to preserve the clarity of the wording. For example, the expression «по изгнании турок» can be translated as «after the Turks expulsion», without the full preservation of the original style, but with accurate transfer of the meaning. We have chosen the lexeme «expulsion», precisely because it is obsolete and allows preserving the style partially.

In some cases, single words take on a new meaning or another connotative coloring in the modern language. For example: the verb «улетучиваться» has been translated as «disappear», because it is this word that most closely conveys the meaning implied by the author. Thus, it became possible to avoid any kind of distortion of the original meaning, since the verb eventually acquired a slightly different meaning in the Russian language and it is used mainly in the conversational style now.

Particular difficulty for the translation has been caused with the word «кликушество». Dostoevsky did not use this word with its basic meaning (manifestation of hysteria (usually of women), expressed in convulsive attacks, shouts, lamentations, screaming, violent gesticulation) [2], but in a figurative one, which has no analogue in English. As a result, the following decision has been made: to write down a word using transliteration - «klikushestvo», and to give an interpretation in a footnote - a noisy, demagogic expression of discontent with something, disbelief in something [2]. Thus, it was possible not only to convey the exact meaning, but also to preserve the special spirit of the era and the syllable of Dostoevsky.

A distinguishing characteristic of the passage, that also caused some difficulties in the process of translation, was the expression «камень раздора». As known, in Russian language this expression is not fixed and can be considered as Dostoevsky's neologism. However, Dostoevsky's idea is clear: he wanted to combine the meanings of two already existing idioms: «камень преткновения» и «яблоко раздора». As English language already contains the equivalents of these expressions («*stumbling block*» и «*apple of discord*» respectively), the most appropriate decision in this case will be creating a neologism in English language according to the same principle - «*block of discord*». In the footnote to the translation of this expression we gave an explanatory note to exclude the chance of possible readers' misunderstanding.

The terms, which belong to church-religious style, have been referred by us to the separated group of lexemes causing difficulties for translation. In this case a translator faces a choice: whether he should use modern, more suitable for texts of political orientation (which the original text is) terms and expressions, or try to preserve the style and find words which could reflect original meaning to the full extent. For example: the sentence «о, подхватят и закричат многие: «Стало быть, служение-то России славянскому делу, видно, было не столь бескорыстное!» according to the context was translated as «*oh, a great many of people will catch up and cry out: "So, the Russian **devotion** to the matter of Slavdom, apparently, was not so unmercenary!"*». In the given sentence the lexeme «*devotion*» has religious connotation, what undoubtedly helps to transfer the meaning closely to the original at most, as, being a polysemantic word, it contains a big number of meanings (преданность, приверженность, глубокая привязанность, набожность), and due to this more accurate semantic similarity can be reached, than if we used immediate equivalent - «*service*». During the translation of the expression «*мусульманское владение*» we chose the equivalent «*muslim dominion*», because the word «*dominion*» is an obsolete one and that helps to reflect at most the initial author's idea.

The specific feature of the original text is frequent using of inverted order of words what makes the process of translation much more difficult. On the one hand, it is exactly inverted order of words which sets the tone and style for a separate sentence or the whole text and this in its turn

directly has an influence on sense. In that case, a translator faces a choice of preserving that specific manner and choosing appropriate ways to build a sentence. On the other hand, a sentence should be fully grammatically rearranged according to English language rules, and that requires from a translator not only literacy, but also attention. For example: the phrase «*что помешает единению славян и остановит ход правильной жизни их*» according to English grammar rules was translated as «*that will hinder the unity of the Slavs and their course of life*». Thus, for the correct translation it is necessary to review the whole sentence structure and to rearrange it from scratch, considering peculiarities of target language, while word-by-word translation in this very case can lead to mistakes.

3. Conclusion

Thus, the translation of this kind of texts, which A Writer's Diary of F. M. Dostoyevsky is, seems to be not an easy task. A translator should not only take into consideration the sense of statement itself, but also make a choice: to preserve the manner of original text or to focus on information intelligibility and observance of rules of modern language. In the result of the performed research the following conclusion can be drawn: sticking to one strategy is impossible, the best option can be using of comprehensive approach, synthesis of both strategies, forming some third way at the interface of both strategies to get in the result a high-quality translation having preserved the general philosophy of the text and having made a text more clear for the wider masses.

References

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