

What Causes Students' Erroneous Translations?

Error analysis has its traditional place in foreign language pedagogy. In the course of reorientation from a behavioristic to a cognitive foreign language learning approach, it has become an important field in foreign language pedagogy. But there are some methodological difficulties concerning differentiating between *langue-related* and *parole-related* error analysis. The question of differences between contrastive linguistics and error analysis arises, which is being discussed by foreign scholars. According to them, the former has a theoretical basis, while the latter refers mainly to "translating in action". In the latter case the error analyst has the opportunity of feedback with informants, i.e. s/he can see his/her students perform "translating in action" [5; 204]. It is not quite clear, however, which theory should be preferred, and that is a controversial point in modern foreign language teaching [7; 198].

The aim of this paper is, therefore, to attempt to find a golden middle between these two tendencies in teaching translation, because the truth is always in the middle. We will not juxtapose contrastive linguistics and error analysis theories, but try to find techniques for eliminating errors which will be theoretically grounded on the one hand, and *poro/e*-practiced on the other.

With regard to L2/L1 (translation from a foreign language into the native tongue, in our case it is translation from English into Russian) performance, foreign scholars put emphasis on the elimination of interference [7; 196]. Another tendency has appeared of late, though, concerning insufficient native language competence [3; 68]. So the -conclusion"which is drawn here is that errors are caused by two significant factors: insufficient L2 text comprehension and deficient LI transfer competence.

For the time being, there is no comparable feedback between L2/L1 error analysis and a corresponding transfer grammar, which would have to be *langue-* and */?aro/e*-oriented, because translation is a specific case of language usage and cannot be accomplished unless rule-governed interlingual communicative competence is achieved. As W. Willis puts it, one cannot by-pass this problem by simply turning around a contrastive grammar (even less so if it should include aspects of foreign language communicative competence, thus giving up the established principle of irreversibility of contrastive grammar and using it both ways for L1/L2 and L2/L1 purposes. This is impossible because TD (translation difficulties) are always transfer-direction-specific, i.e. the TD spectrum of English-Russian is different from that of Russian-English TD. If one changes the position of the source language (SL) and the target language (TL), i.e. if TL takes over the position of SL and vice versa, TD shift accordingly [7; 198].

L2/L1 error analysis needs a large area of multi-factorial research. A methodologically sound basis for eliminating translational errors may be found in our Russian pedagogical and linguistic literature. Back in the 1990's Russian scholars M. P. Brandes and V. I. Provotorov [4] started a theory of "pretranslational" *linguo-stylistic* analysis which was later supported and developed by others [4; 6].

Translation is a sequence of more or less complicated transfer operations which lead from a written source language text (SLT) to an optimally equivalent written target language text (TLT) and require a comprehensive semantic and stylistic analysis of the SLT. Since the analysis procedure constitutes an integrated part of the entire transfer process and, for that matter, of the interlingual transfer competent J of the translator, the observed errors can be assigned to the receptive and the reproductive phase of the transfer process with lexical syntactical and stylistic subcategories.

With a view to the above-mentioned we offer the following scheme of pretranslational *linguo-stylistic* analysis of a text by T. Smith [6; 204]:

Mr. Topper turned from the tree and warmed himself into the automobile. And the observer, had he been endowed with cattish curiosity would have noted by the laborings of Topper's that he had not long been familiar with the driving seat of an automobile. Once in, he relaxed, then, collecting his scattered members, arranged his feet and hands as Mark had patiently instructed him.

Pretranslational (semantic) analysis: This is an extract from the novel *Topper* by Throne Smith, published in 1926. The novel begins when Cosmo Topper, a law-abiding, mild-mannered bank manager decides to buy a second-hand car, only to find it haunted by the ghosts of its previous owners - a reckless, feckless, frivolous couple who met their untimely demise when the car careened into an oak tree. The target reader is an adult person. The words, constructions, and syntax in the language are vivid, expressive, and complex, to render the specific mood of the text.

Words in the text are mostly neutral, yet there are a lot of adjectives creating a particular atmosphere. The communicative aim of the extract is to help imagine the state of the protagonist at the moment described. The text belongs to *belles-lettres* style. All characteristic features should be retained during the translation.

Grammar-syntactical analysis: The syntax is sophisticated: three complex sentences with an adverbial verb, conditional clause, stylistic inversion, and homogeneous predicates. The source structure should be retained in the target text as it is employed to have an impact on the reader. The first sentence contains the subject "Topper" and the homogeneous predicates "turned" and "warmed into". The second predicate "warmed into" is an adverbial verb and expresses two actions simultaneously "got into the car" and "warmed himself". We start the analysis of the second sentence from the end. The subject "he" and the predicate "had not long been familiar" are included in a subordinate clause. Further analysis goes to the complex structure of the sentence. First, it is a conditional sentence of the third, unreal type; second, the predicate in the adverbial subordinate clause of condition is inverted, for stylistic reasons; third, the subject of the main clause is separated from the corresponding predicate. So the main clause of the conditional sentence consists of the subject "observer", and the predicate "would have noted". The adverbial clause of condition is made of the subject "he" and the predicate "had been endowed". Investigating the third sentence of the passage, we come to the conclusion that the main sentence contains the subject "he" and the homogeneous predicates "relaxed" and "arranged". The main clause is complicated by the perfect participle active "collecting".

Semantic-stylistic analysis: The passage is written in the third person. The communicative situation is informal; the text belongs to *belles-lettres* style. The vocabulary contains mainly neutral words. The passage is highly expressive. The passage is told as if someone were watching Mr. Topper's actions from the outside. The author compares the observer with a cat because only cattish curiosity would help catch Mr. Topper's nervousness since he had but only recently begun to drive a car.

Translation as a result of the complex analysis:

Г-н Топпер вышел из-за дерева и, сев в машину, согрелся. И сторонний наблюдатель, обладай он даже малой толикой любопытства, без труда заметил бы по неуверенным движениям Топпера, что тот не так давно водит автомобиль. Оказавшись в машине, он расслабился, затем, заставив непослушные руки и ноги подчиниться, расположил их так, как терпеливо учил его Марк.

Let us look at the erroneous translation of a student:

**Мистер Топпер вышел из-за дерева и бросился в машину. Переполненный любопытством свидетель заметил по поведению Топпера, что он не был достаточно долго знаком с сиденьем автомобиля. Сначала он расслабился, затем, собирая свои расслабленные (разбросанные) части тела, поставил руки и ноги так, как правильно учил его Марк.*

The translation has some errors. They are:

1. The student translated "warmed himself into the automobile" as "бросился в машину". This is a semantic error caused by the wrong choice of word. The Russian word-combination "бросился в машину" does not exactly correspond to "warmed himself into the automobile". The predicate "warmed into" carries two actions simultaneously. The author means that Mr. Topper got into the automobile and stopped feeling cold. So one of the correct variants of translation is "...сел в машину и согрелся".
2. The next error is connected with a misunderstanding of the proper structure of the sentence. The sentence "And the observer, had he been endowed with cattish curiosity would have noted by the laborings of Topper's..." is conditional. It has a complex structure, complicated by inversion, and expresses a probability that is impossible. So one of the equivalent variants might be: "И если бы сторонний наблюдатель обладал хотя бы малой толикой любопытства, то он заметил бы по неуверенным движениям Топпера..."
3. The student did not completely understand what the author meant by "...that he had not long been familiar with the driving seat of an automobile". The literal translation is out of place here, the student was supposed to give a situational translation or use modulation (or logical development). The author meant that Mr. Topper had not driven a car for a long time. So an equivalent translation might be as follows: "...что он долгое время не сидел за рулем автомобиля".
4. The student also made a stylistic error by translating- "...collecting his scattered members..." as "...собирая свои расслабленные части тела..." This extract may be translated as "...заставил непослушные руки и ноги подчиниться..."
5. The student made a lexical error by not finding a proper equivalent to the English adverb "patiently". The

offered translation *"правильно"* distorts the semantics of the sentence, because the correct variant *"терпеливо"* is very far from the translation given.

To some up the character of the errors made by the student we can assume that they are caused by insufficient knowledge of L2, deficient cognitive experience and careless reading of the SLT. In generating the Russian text (TLT) the student failed to find the most suitable semantic equivalents, and violated the style and norm of the native tongue.

Thus the goal of this report, which was to show the necessity of finding reasons for the students' erroneous translations, has been achieved (note should be taken of the fact that our inferences are built on a larger number of examples of which we, being limited by space, have given only one). Every error made by the student, who is only learning how to do things correctly, should be outlined and put by the teacher into a file or a special notebook. This will enrich the teacher's linguistic competence, which will be shared with the students later on. The analysis of students' errors will promote further development of "translation criticism", a branch of the science of translation which has been much discussed of late and has attracted scholars' attention.

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