SEMANTIC REPRESENTATION
AND THE TRANSLATION OF POETRY

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Acknowledged as the most difficult of all types of translation the translation of poetry has provided a focal point for attempts to create a theory of translation. Until recently the focus has been on the comparison and evaluation of originals and their translations, leaving the actual process of the translation of poetry largely neglected. The reasons for this are clear: it is extremely difficult to describe objectively a process that has been universally accepted as inherently creative. It is also problematic to obtain reliable information from subjects under test conditions.[1] How might the science of linguistics solve the dilemma faced by translation theorists and linguists when attempting to construct a model of translation theory which will encompass "poetic" texts?

It has proved extremely difficult to construct anything resembling a theory of translation as such, although various "theories" have been proposed.[2] Many linguists have ignored the field of translation studies, which has largely been dominated in recent years by literary specialists, while many translation theorists have neglected to take into account recent advances in modern linguistics.[3] Bell suggests that it is now possible to construct an adequate theory of translation,[4] or at least a theoretical approach to the translation process, making use of current advances in cognitive science, artificial intelligence and text linguistics, basing such an approach on a broadly functional theory of language.[5] The question still remains however, whether it is possible that such a model would also be able to deal with the specific problems posed by poetic texts.

Within the framework of Bell's model the translator processes the text according to three areas of operation. Firstly, the text is broken down clause by clause to provide information on its syntactic structure. The text then enters a stage of semantic analysis, where the task of "concept recovery" is undertaken. The next stage consists of a pragmatic analysis in which the communicative function of the text is determined. A "semantic representation" of the text is thus created in the mind of the reader, clause by clause.[6] This representation

passes through a complex reverse process of synthesis in order to produce the translated text. During this stage of the process the translator is obliged to make numerous decisions about how to deal with the purpose, thematic structure, and style of the original. It should be emphasised that the whole process of analysis and synthesis is not of course a linear process, but is an example of top-down/bottom-up processing.

The pragmatic analysis takes into account the tenor of the discourse, or the relationship with the receiver of the text, the mode of discourse, or the medium of the text, and the domain of the discourse, or the role played by the text in a communicative activity.[7] The latter category also determines the function of the text, whether it is referential, emotive, conative, phatic, or poetic. It is this section of the analysis which might be expanded to include an analysis of those features of relevance to the translation of poetry. In such texts the function of the text would be described as "poetic" or also "emotive", or perhaps an "aesthetic function" might be added here.

Bell applies his model to the analysis of a short poem, but fails to take into account the overall semantic representation of the poem, despite the fact that his model makes use of this concept. He concentrates instead on a clause by clause analysis. He opts out of the most serious problems involved in applying his model to the process of the translation of poetry, ending his discussion with the synthesised translation at a stage that he describes as "a translation that a computer programme might have produced". He states that the next stage involves stylistic decisions which "depend on personal taste".[8] A model dealing with the translation of poetry must be able to deal with these decisions and the process leading to them. It is these decisions that determine whether or not the translation becomes a poem in the target language.

De Beaugrande's model, in contrast, focuses on the textual aspects of poems and their translations, building up textual worlds which are modelled as "configurations of concepts".[9] Although his model is at times bafflingly detailed, there is no indication of whether the diagrammatic representation of the poem's textual world - which is compared with diagrammatic representations of the textual worlds of the translations - is meant to coincide with the semantic representation of the poem in the mind of the reader, or whether this textual world is a fixed and objective configuration. Certainly the implication is rather the latter case, which does not however remove the possibility for infinite interpretation present in any literary text - indeed it is claimed that it ensures such infinite interpretation.

A notable gap in his model is left by a failure to include any consideration of the sound texture of the poems analysed - other than in a discussion of the central nature of rhyming concepts - as he concentrates exclusively on syntactic and semantic categories in terms of strategies for textual equivalence. Nor does he enter into any detailed discussion of the "meaning" of individual words nor of the "semantic representation" produced in the mind of the reader or processor of the text.

The most useful concept in de Beaugrande's work is his distinction between a *reader-oriented* translation, in which the translator is aware that his response is only one among many, and a *translator-oriented* translation, where the translator substitutes his own interpretation for the entire meaning potential that the text may have. If one compares several translations of the same poem it is usually obvious that the range of meanings available in the original inevitably changes in the translation. This phenomenon has been described as the appropriation of an original text by the translator. This is particularly evident when the translator is himself a poet, for example Pope's translations of Homer and Bal'mont's translations of Shelley which are so influenced by the translator's own style that Chukovsky refers to the "Bal'montisation" of Shelley culminating in the epigraph 'Shellmont'. [10] In a reader-oriented translation - which is proposed as the more desirable type of translation - a translator will endeavour to preserve the polyvalent quality of the poem as in the original.[11]

In poetry the meaning of a word, because of the density of significance, is largely influenced by the paradigmatic and syntagmatic associations existing in the mind of the reader. This type of analysis of meaning can be dealt with by means of a semantic or lexical field, where words are linked to each other in terms of collocation and association as well as by phonological characteristics. In addition, as the boundary between denotational and connotational meaning is fuzzy rather than fixed, certain concepts formulated in prototype semantics may be applied. Each concept or word may be regarded as having an encyclopaedic entry in the memory which contains all relevant features. Bell suggests three parameters: class, characteristic, and example. A concept therefore belongs to a class of concepts, possesses certain defining properties as well as further qualities, and also supplies examples of itself based on previous experience. Such a storage facility in the long-term memory enables links and cross-links to be established between entries.[12]

One of the characteristics of poetic language is its unexpectedness for the reader.[13] The reader attempts to make sense of the text by looking for equivalences and oppositions from the context as well as the co-text. The world-knowledge of the reader/translator must therefore include the ability to understand and perceive the multiple meanings available in the text as well as the ability to restructure these meanings in a poetic text in the target language - hence the reference to decoding and encoding skills. It is thus important to examine both the process of interpretation by the translator-reader, and the process of "recreation" by the translator-poet.

The associations activated by the elements of the poem, together with all other aspects of meaning will differ from reader to reader, as no one person's knowledge of the world is identical to another's. Each person involved with the text - the original author, the translator-reader, the translator-producer, and the receiver audience in the target language - plays some part in the life of the text and brings a different background to it. Nevertheless, while the possibilities for actualising the meaning of the text may be infinite and change along with readers' horizons, the meaning potential of the text does remain constant, in the sense that the text itself is fixed. It may be this that suggests that an objective analysis and a model for that analysis is feasible.

In order to provide a more comprehensive model (although no definitive solutions are offered here) I would like to propose the application and modification of Fillmore's theory of scenes-and-frames semantics.[14] Fillmore adopts the idea of a frame from cognitive psychology, in which field several different terms have been used for similar concepts. For example, Minsky introduced the term "frames" for stereotyped situations, subsequently extended to linguistic "facts".[15] The term "script" was applied to a conceptual dependency network which would represent the meanings of sentences in conceptual terms. Other terms which have been used include "scenarios" and "schemata": the former are situation-specific while the latter represent more general types of knowledge structure, and may vary considerably with different cultural backgrounds.[16] Thus personal histories and interests may contribute to the creation of higher level schemata which cause messages to be understood in certain ways. This idea can be taken further, so that schemata represent stereotypes of concepts or prototypical instances of concepts.[17]

In Fillmore's terms the frame can be described as a "linguistic coding" which refers to the encoding of any real-life situation and which may be associated with prototypical instances of scenes.[18] The term "scene" refers to any kind of standard scenario, institutional

structure, body image, and "any kind of coherent segment..... of human beliefs, actions, experiences, or imaginings.[19] Scenes and frames constantly activate each other and evoke further associations, so that every linguistic expression in a text is conditioned by another one. This concept may account for the dynamic aspect of reading and assimilating a text, and hence for the construction of a semantic representation of the text in the mind of the reader. It can also explain why the same text may be interpreted in many different ways, exemplifying the polyvalent potential of a text.

It was noted above that in poetry considerable use is made of syntactic and semantic deviation. It is this unexpected use of language that we have said largely distinguishes a poetic text from a prose text. The "unexpectedness" of a word or of the combination of structure and meaning focuses the reader's attention by its very unpredictability. A reader will endeavour to establish links and to "make sense" of such links even when the language used is "unusual" in this way. Indeed an extension of the more general concept of the existence of "mental models" suggests that it is not entirely satisfactory to subscribe to an approach to meaning which depends on the decomposition of word meaning in order to understand the meaning of sentences. A classic example is that we all understand the sentence:

The book fills a much-needed gap.

although the word-meaning makes little sense. Thus we use words in a sentence "as cues to build a familiar mental model".[20] Understanding takes place through the construction of such mental models, which are continually modified and even abandoned as the text continues. The process of interpretation can thus be seen as cyclical. These mental models can be seen to be constructed by means of the activation of frames and scenes in the mind of the reader.

The concept of scenes and frames also allows for the activation of further scenes related to a reader's previous experience of poetic texts. It is in this way that a reader may recognise a text as belonging to a specific text type. Within the field of poetic texts individual genres of poetry may be recognised as "prototypical", that is, a particular poem may activate a "sonnet" scene, or a "lyric" scene. This idea is crucial in translating across boundaries of differing cultural and literary traditions. There may be a "gap" in the structure of individual knowledge bases making up the general background knowledge of the reader. Alternatively, if for example the metric scheme in the target language fulfils a different function from that of the same metric scheme in the source language then an "inappropriate" scene will be activated. The reader will always search for a scene which

provides the closest "fit"." If however there is no scene which fits, then it may be possible to fill the gap with a new concept eventually leading to the establishment of additional links in the network and the construction of further scenes.

If we now take an example of a poem and translations of that poem we can address the question of how the different scenes and frames activated by a potential target text reader compare with those activated by a potential source text reader? What does this imply for the translator of the poem and what do different translations reveal about the analytical process adopted by the translator? It should be emphasised that the concept of scenes and frames used here is not restricted to stereotypical situations. I am adapting the concept in order to deal with the activation of culturally linked scenes as well as with scenes associated with the use of certain words and sounds or the combinations of those words and sounds in a poetic text.

The poem to be discussed is by Osip Mandel'shtam, a leading twentieth century Russian poet, who was himself an accomplished translator of poetry. The poem shows plainly the transition from a predominantly Symbolist and even Romantic phase in Mandel'shtam's poetry, to a more definite Acmeist phase. The Acmeists considered precise language and clarity to be of the utmost importance, and their poetry was always firmly related to an objective reality.[21] It is essential that any theory concerning the translation of poetry should take into account the attitude of the original poet to the material of his trade. Thus before beginning on a translation the translator should familiarise himself with the theoretical and prose works of the poet he is to attempt to translate. This would need to be added to the initial stage of the analysis and would constitute part of the prior knowledge of the translator, alongside his source and target language knowledge, text-type knowledge and domain knowledge.[22]

The poem has as its central theme the endurance of the artistic form, and also illustrates the Acmeist cult of the precise:

Na bledno-goluboy emali,
Kakaya myslima v aprele,
Berezy vetvi podnimali
I nezametno vechereli.

Uzor ottochenny i melkiy,
Zastyla tonen'kaya setka,
Kak na farforovoy tarelke
Risunok, vycherchenny metko,

Kogda ego khudozhnik mily
Vyvodit na steklyannoy tverdi,
B soznanii minutnoy sily,
V zabvenii pechal'noy smerti.[23]

This is one of Mandel'shtam's most haunting and evocative poems, describing the artist's moment of creation. Indeed, Clarence Brown goes so far as to say that Mandel'shtam never exceeded the "sheer verbal beauty" of this lyric.[24] In order to perform an analysis of the original poem, a linear approach will have to be adopted, although all aspects and features of poetry combine to produce the overall semantic representation in the mind of the reader.

Rhyme and the sound of words are of supreme importance in Mandel'shtam's poetry. Indeed, he is one of the very few poets who composed in his head before committing his verse to paper:

> *Mandel'shtam seldom prepared rough drafts of his poems on paper:*
> *he composed them "on the lips", modelling sometimes for weeks on*
> *end phonetic elements and layers of meaning into a coherent*
> *whole.*[25]

In this poem, the metre is regular within each stanza while the rhyme scheme also follows a fixed pattern. In Russian this is the norm for Symbolist and Acmeist poetry, and it thus serves to locate the poetry in a particular tradition and genre. More generally Russian poetry of the twentieth century makes much more use of rhyme and traditional metre than its English counterpart. This is a good example of the association of a quite different *scene* in terms of literary tradition with the *frame* of rhyme and regular metre.

The focus first is on the translator as reader. The poem is read, and a "semantic representation" is created swiftly in the mind of the reader. This representation is not necessarily static however. As the poem is read and reread it will shift and change substantially. The scenes and frames activated on the first reading will in turn activate further scenes and frames and hence further semantic associations during the second and subsequent readings.

The main image is introduced immediately. The idea of "pale-blue enamel" evokes a scene relating to chinaware and crockery. Yet in the very next line the association with April

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