

Poetic split reference as a translation problem

E. Doubenko

Department of theory and practice of translation from English, Institute of Philology, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Kyiv, Ukraine

Paper received 13.03.17; Accepted for publication 20.03.17.

Abstract. The article focuses on poetic split (or double) reference in Robert Frost's poem "One acquainted with the night" as that quintessentially poetic phenomenon that can be rooted in certain specific features of the source language system which are not always available in the target language. It analyses the chances of conveying these language-bound structures of poetic meaning in the languages that do not give corresponding grammatical forms at the translator's disposal.

Keywords: *split reference, parallax, language-bound split reference.*

1. Introduction. Split or double reference lies at the core of any poetic image as the essence of poeticalness has always been described in terms of the impression of ambivalence which is viewed as the basis of poetic time. According to Gaston Bachelard, the structure of an instant in poetry allows to make our consciousness abandon the usual temporal stream, bringing it into that immovable, comprehensive time which can be termed "vertical". Such frame of mind is created due to the impact of the complex volumetric instant that accumulates "simultaneities" of ambivalent nature [1, p.224-252]. The conveyance of this marginal, "in-between" experience in translation turns into a considerable problem provided the ambivalence stems from a special stylistic treatment of those grammatical forms which are characteristic of the language of the source text (the level of the language mapping of the world). In this case the discrepancies in the elements of language mappings of the world which constitute the manifestations of language parallax lead to the deconstruction of poetic meaning in the target text representing poetic parallax. The Greek word "parallax" ['deviation'] appears to verbalize in a most felicitous fashion the underlying reasons of the interpretative gap emerging between the source and the target poetic texts. For this borrowed from astronomy term traditionally denotes the differences in the vision of the observer depending upon his or her spatial position. Likewise the worldview differences found among the people speaking different languages and belonging to different cultures are conditioned by their linguocultural space, their language and conceptual pictures of the world [3, p. 84-85]. That is why the process of translation that presupposes switching over to the other language code as well as transferring to the constants of the other culture, is rightfully compared to transplanting the seed which is expected to develop into a somewhat new quality on different soil and under different conditions [2, p. 57-58].

2. Language-bound poetic split reference. In works of literature the author's poetic worldview is embodied through giving aesthetic meaning to the elements of different language levels including sounds, grammatical structures and lexical means. The postulate that poetic speech makes use of all the aspects of the language at most, revealing their aesthetic potential for the sake of certain artistic tasks, has become axiomatic nowadays. In the words of H.G. Widdowson, what seems crucial to the character of literature is "that the language of a literary work should be fashioned into patterns over and above those required by the actual language system. Whether the components of these patterns are deviant or non-deviant or both is of secondary importance. ... the effect of this patterning is to create acts of communication which are self-contained units, independent of a social content and expressive of a reality other than that which is sanctioned by convention. In other words, [...] although literature

need not be deviant as text, must of its nature be deviant as discourse" [7, p. 47].

A special attention of scholars has been invariably attached to the grammatical aspect of literary texts that usually seems to be less evident than the lexical one, however, its role in the formation of poetic meaning can hardly be overestimated. Therefore, the notion of "poetic grammar" was initially put forward by Lev Tscherba in his comprehensive philological analysis of poetic texts [see, for instance 6] , and later has been elaborated in a number of major scholarly works on the theory of poetical speech [5; 8]. If in the lexical meaning one can find the expression of the author's individuality or "the author's violence on the language", the grammatical meaning to a greater extent reflects the diktat of the language system, that violence of language upon poetical expression which cannot be ignored or evaded [4, p. 93].

Therefore grammatical forms may turn into a considerable translation problem in case the grammatical structures of the original cannot be adequately recreated in translation because they are absent in the target language system. A weighty argument in favour of potential translatability of literary works containing such specific grammatical constructions is supplied by modern functionalist theory of literary translation whose basic postulate lies in rendering not literary forms proper but rather functions of these forms. However, the task of living up to the requirements set by the functionalist doctrine seems to be quite feasible provided the specific grammatical forms occur not frequently in the original and have only marginal artistic importance within the framework of the literary whole. If such grammatical constructions, on the contrary, constitute that pivotal textual element which is responsible for building up the poetic meaning of the original, their only relative translatability tells upon the faithfulness of poetic translation.

A graphic example of the above described parallax tendencies is presented in French, German, Ukrainian and Russian translations of the following well-known poem by Robert Frost, the stylistic-syntactic core of which is formed by a string of reiterated Present Perfect structures:

ONE ACQUAINTED WITH THE NIGHT

I have been one acquainted with the night.

I have walked out in rain – and back in rain.

I have outwalked the furthest city light.

I have looked down the saddest city lane.

I have passed by the watchman on his beat

And **dropped** my eyes unwilling to explain.

I have stood still and stopped the sound of feet

When far away an interrupted cry

Came over houses from another street.

But not to call me back or say good-by;

And further still at an unearthly height,

One luminary clock against the sky

Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right

I have been one acquainted with the night. (MB, p. 248)

In an archetypical perspective the central image of the poem "Night" embodies the element of the unconscious and the feminine (the archetype of Mother), it also symbolically represents Death. This image-bearing charge of the concept *Night* is observed in both the source language and the target language culture. In the original it contributes to shaping a special kind of psychic experience labeled by the poet as "acquaintance with the night", i.e. being initiated into a certain dimension of borderline existence which is related simultaneously to an earthly life and eternity. The poem is built upon the narration about a gradual estrangement from reality or rather from a fussy world of mortals. At first the person in whose name the text is written leaves the bounds of the city, "outwalking" its lights and lanes, then feels reluctance to utter a word to the watchman, and later comes to realize that he does not belong here anymore because nobody in this city cares for his presence or existence (*When far away an interrupted cry // Came over houses from another street. // But not to call me back or say good-by*). The final part of the poem correlates already with the plane of "an unearthly height" that represents the other world and contains the culmination of the drift away from everyday reality which is indicated by an indirect introduction of the image of the moon: "*One luminary clock against the sky // Proclaimed the time was neither wrong nor right*".

3. Language-bound poetic split reference in translation. Poetic split reference found in the original is encoded in the text by the persistent anaphoric repetition of Present Perfect grammatical forms that permeates the whole poem and, besides, can be observed in its title, the opening and closing lines, i.e. in those stylistically strong positions that make these structures weighty participants of constructing the poetic meaning of the original text. The author's choice in favour of the Present Perfect and not Past Indefinite forms can be explained by the necessity to label the chain of actions that signify the acquaintance-with-the-night experience by the forms capable of double reference, as a sign of that haunting reminiscence of the past which has come to be an essential part of present reality. Actually, all the events portrayed in the poem took place in the past but their significance for the psyche of the narrator lies in the domain of the present making him revolve them in his memory over and over again.

Strictly speaking, the Present Perfect forms as a manifestation of the parallax between the source and target language mappings of the world cannot be completely translated into those languages where Perfect tenses are absent or have different functions. In such case the translated form is bound to reduce the action or state to the past dimension depriving it of the initial double temporal reference. This loss is not essential in translating non-literary texts where grammatical forms are not expected to reveal all their semantic capacities. However, as in a poetic text language forms are always involved in the generation of poetic meaning, the ignorance of the fact that the actions and states of mind delineated in the original are linked to both the past and the present can take on a crucial relevance for the faithfulness of literary translation.

The key syntactical repetition of Perfect forms in the original is partially preserved in French and German translations of the poem:

FAMILIER DE LA NUIT

J'ai été familier de la nuit.

Je suis sorti sous la pluie – et **revenu** sous la pluie.

J'ai marché plus loin que le plus lointain réverbère .

J'ai discerné le plus triste chemin de la ville.
Je suis passé devant le veilleur – à son poste
Et **ai baissé** les yeux, réticent à expliquer.

Je suis resté immobile et **arrêté** le bruit de mes pas
Quand au loin un cri interrompu **est parvenu**
Au-dessus des maisons depuis une autre rue,

Mais pas pour me rappeler ou me dire au revoir,
Et encore plus loin à une hauteur surnaturelle,
Une horloge lumineuse sur fond de ciel

A proclamé que l'heure n'était ni mauvaise ni bonne

J'ai été familier de la nuit. [FR]

(Translated by Tomasz Akszterowicz)

MIT DER NACHT VERTRAUT

Bin einer, der **vertraut ist** mit der Nacht.
Ich ging im Regen aus – im Regen heim.
Ging weiter als die Stadt das Licht gebracht.
Ich sah der Straßen längstes traurig sein.
Ich ging an des Gesetzes Aug' vorbei
Und senkt' den Blick – da ließ es mich allein.

Bin still **gestanden**, dass es stille sei
Wenn über Straßen, über Häuser weh
Im Winde flog ein abgerissener Schrei.
Kein *komm zurück!* für mich und keine *Ade!*,
Und, weiter noch, wie erden fern erdacht
Am Himmel ich das Licht der Turmuhr seh':

Drauf Zeit, die richtig nicht, nicht falsch gemacht.

Bin einer, der **vertraut** ist mit der Nacht. [F]

(Translated by W. A. Aue)

ЗНАЙОМИЙ З НІЧЧЮ

Знайомий з ніччю я уже давно.

Виходив я й вертався під дощем,

Та довго ще світилося вікно,

Задумавшись, не відповів йому,

Як сторож стрівсь, закутаний плащем,

Знов зупинивсь... [...]

Знайомий з ніччю But this formal faithfulness to the source text does not mean faithfulness in poetic meaning as

although both French and German have perfect forms for denoting past actions, the status of these forms differs considerably from that in English. Since in the English language the basic function of the Present Perfect Tense consists in correlating the past and the present because the Present Perfect denotes either activity continuing until now, or activity in a period continuing until now [Close: 248], whereas in French there is even no mentioning of the present in the name of the corresponding grammatical tense which is regarded to be a past tense (*passé composé*). Therefore, the reader of the French translation perceives the perfect structures not in the same manner as they are perceived by the reader of the original.

Analogous forms in German are also deprived of the meaning attached to the Present Perfect constructions in the English language, for German *Perfekt*, together with *Imperfekt* and *Plusquamperfekt*, represents the group of past tenses, the forms of the latter differing not in their meaning but in the sphere of their usage. It is frequently employed for denoting past actions in conversational speech and short messages and has no bearing upon the present.

As perfect forms do not exist in Ukrainian grammar, both Ukrainian translators have made certain attempts to compensate their meaning by offering some functional equivalents of the original grammatical structures. A better strategy seems to be suggested by V. Marach who

encodes the meaning of the Present Perfect Tense into the initial and closing lines of his translation version, because “Знайомий з ніччю я уже давно” in English translation sounds as the key phrase of the original: “I have already known the night / I have already been acquainted with the night for a long time”. That is why despite all other numerous repetitions of perfect forms that denote double temporal reference in the original are, for quite objective reasons, being transferred to the register of the past, the original tension of split reference is at least partially retained in the lines that have the strongest stylistic position:

я уже давно.

(Translated by V.Marach) [M]

O.Tarnavsky’s version appears to be less convincing in this respect, although semantics of the word “пізнав”, obviously, presupposes that the past action has consequences for the present as “to learn, to get to know something” means to be familiar with it in the present :

ЗНАЙОМСТВО З НІЧЧЮ

Тоді на самоті пізнав я ніч.

Я йшов у дощ і повертався в дощ
поза світла міських вулиць і площ
завулкам затривоженим навістріч.

Лиш вартового покотився крок.

Я очі опустив, щоб не пізнав,
і я пристанув і сумірним став [...]

Тоді на самоті я ніч пізнав.

(Translated by O.Tarnavsky) [F, p. 10]

Any way, these palliative measures taken by Ukrainian translators are too restricted and stylistically weak in comparison to the array of split reference perfect forms of the original that make up the most conspicuous stylistic emphasis of the source text.

Finally, in Russian version of the poem there is no intention of the translator to convey the past-present references of the original as “Я тот, кто с ночью был знаком” equals to “I am the one who **was acquainted**

with the night”. Such substitution of the deliberately reiterated grammatical forms which occurs in translation automatically removes the structures of perceptual time they represent and, consequently, deletes a significant part of the poetic content of the original:

ЗНАКОМСТВО С НОЧЬЮ

Я тот, кто с ночью был знаком.

Я вышел в дождь и в дождь вернулся.

С последним городским столбом

В его печали разминулся.

Я часового миновал

В молчанье и не обернулся.

Я шум шагов своих прервал [...]

Я тот, кто с ночью был знаком. [FT]

(Translated by B.Zverev)

4. Conclusion. As it has been hopefully demonstrated, in sometimes the structures that orchestrate the poetic split reference, or, in Bachelard’s terminology, poetic instant, are rooted in those grammatical elements which are specific for the source language system. Therefore, in the target language similar grammatical constructions can either have different functions (as French and German perfect forms *versus* English perfect forms) , or be completely absent in the language of translation (as in case with the Present Perfect forms in Ukrainian and Russian). Accordingly, poetic double reference that rests upon such structures in the original suffers inevitable break down in translation as the target language cannot offer identical patterns that might keep the poetic content of the source text intact. This loss of poetic semantics becomes tangible and irreparable if the grammatical elements under discussion form the key stylistic device of the original poetic text. Thus, parallactic tendencies in language vision of the world typical of different linguocultural spaces foster a perceptible corrosion of the poeticalness of the source text depriving the latter of that inherent ambiguity that, in the final analysis, forms the core of any authentically poetic experience.

REFERENCES

- Bachelard, Gaston. 1970. Instant poétique et instant métaphysique / Gaston Bachelard // Le droit de rêver. – Paris, PUF, 224-252.
 - Bassnett, Susan. Transplanting the Seed: Poetry and Translation / Susan Bassnett, Andre Lefevere // Constructing Cultures: Essays on Literary Translation. – Cleveland – Philadelphia – Toronto – Sydney – Johannesburg: Multilingual Matters, 1998. – P. 57 – 75.
 - Doubenko, Elena. 2015. Comparative poetics: typological and translational aspects – Monography / Olena Yu. Dubenko. – Kyiv: Vydavnychiy dim Dmytra Burago, 2015. – 532 p.
 - Gin Y. I. On the poetics of grammatical categories / Ya. I. Gin // M.V. Lomonosov and Russian culture. – Tartu, 1986. – P. 92 – 94.
 - Gin Y. I. Problems of the poetics of grammatical categories: Selected works / Ya. I. Gin . – Sankt - Petersburg: Akademicheskij proekt, 1996. – 224 p.
 - Tscherba L.V. “The pine” by Lermontov in comparison to its German prototype / L.V. Tscherba // Selected works on the Russian language. – Moscow: Uchpedgiz, 1957. – P. 97-109.
 - Widdowson H.G. Stylistics and the Teaching of Literature / H.G. Widdowson. – London: Longman, 1991. – 124 p.
 - Jakobson R.O. The poetry of grammar and the grammar of poetry / R.O. Jakobson // Semiotics. – M., 1983. – P. 462 - 482.
- РФ = Роберт Фрост. Знайомство з ніччю. Переклад О. Тарнавського // Сучасність. Література, мистецтво, суспільне життя. – Квітень 1963. – 2 (28). – Мюнхен, Karlplatz 8/ III. – С. 10.
- F = Frost, Robert. Acquainted with the night. Translated by W.A. Aue // myweb.dal.ca/waue/Trans/Frost-Night.html
- FR = Frost, Robert. I have been one acquainted with the night. French translation. Electronic resource: <https://schabrieres.wordpress.com/2015/04/18/robert-frost-familier-de-la-nuit-ac>
- FT= Frost, Robert. Translations. Electronic resource: www.netslova/zverev/frost.htm
- M = Marach, Victor. Poetic studio. Electronic resource: maysterni.com/user.php?id=629&=18rub=1238st
- MB =The Mentor Book of Major American Poets /Edited by O.Williams and E.Honig. – Ontario. New American Library, 1962.–535 p.

Поэтическая расщеплённая референтность как проблема перевода

Е. Ю. Дубенко

Аннотация. Статья посвящена описанию расщеплённой референтности в стихотворении Роберта Фроста «Знакомство с ночью» как тому первичному поэтическому явлению, которое порождается определёнными специфическими характеристиками языковой системы. В ней проанализированы возможности передачи в переводе смысловых структур исходного поэтического текста, обусловленных особенностями языковой картины мира, в лоне которой был создан оригинальный поэтический текст.

Ключевые слова: расщеплённая референтность, параллакс, лингвистически обусловленная расщеплённая референтность.