

**INTRALINGUAL INTERFERENCE,  
BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE  
AND SOURCE TEXT  
INTERPRETATION IN TRANSLATION**

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Adequate translator/interpreter training should be based on the plausible translation/interpreting model whose development requires research into the process of translation. To improve a translator's decision-making potential, the sources of translator's problems emergence have to be found out. Once a source is established, the ways of its neutralizations may be researched, categorized and included into exercises complete with the corresponding remedies to be acquired. Basing on the previous research, it was assumed that both intralanguage interference and lack of the corresponding background knowledge may affect the correct source text interpretation and thus create problems for the translator/interpreter in generating a proper target text. The paper presents the results of the experimental research on the affect of the intralingual interference and background knowledge on the source text interpretation in the actual translation. It was

established that both factors affect the said interpretation and, correspondently on the target text quality and thus require being taken into account in the development of training future translators and interpreters. To reduce the negative effect of the lack of background knowledge it seems reasonable to reorganize the structure and subject-matter of the future translators'/interpreters' training program to take a maximum advantage of the coordination of all the disciplines in the curriculum. The softening of the intralanguage interference negative impact may be possible through the sensible structuring of translation/interpreting exercises which should be based on the scientific data concerning the presence of an ambiguity source and the degree of interference in each specific case. That could enable to incorporate the elements causing intralanguage interference into such exercises, provoking students' errors and neutralizing the sources of the negative effect through the subsequent practice.

**Key words:** background knowledge, intralingual interference, sources of translation problems, source text interpretation, training future translators and interpreters.

**Черноватий Л.М. Внутрішньомовна інтерференція, фонові знання та тлумачення тексту оригіналу під час перекладу.** Наведено результати експериментального дослідження впливу внутрішньомовної інтерференції та фонових знань на тлумачення тексту оригіналу майбутніми перекладачами під час перекладу. Встановлено, що обидва чинники впливають на згадане тлумачення і, відповідно, на якість тексту перекладу, а тому потребують урахування при розробці методики навчання.

**Ключові слова:** внутрішньомовна інтерференція, джерела перекладацьких проблем, навчання майбутніх перекладачів, тлумачення тексту оригіналу, фонові знання.

**Черноватый Л.Н. Внутриязыковая интерференция, фоновые знания и толкование текста оригинала в процессе перевода.** Приводятся результаты экспериментального исследования влияния внутриязыковой интерференции и фоновых знаний на толкование текста оригинала будущими переводчиками в процессе перевода. Установлено, что оба фактора влияют на упомянутое толкование и, соответственно, на качество перевода, а поэтому должны учитываться при разработке методики обучения.

**Ключевые слова:** внутриязыковая интерференция, источники переводческих проблем, обучение будущих переводчиков, толкование текста оригинала, фоновые знания.

Adequate translator/interpreter training should be based on the model of translation/interpreting under typical circumstances. The development of such model requires research into the process of translation as its understanding is a prerequisite for its better management. Unfortunately there is a serious lack of reliable information concerning the factors affecting the translators'/interpreters' decision making in the process of the source text interpretation. It makes this problem a promising one for investigation which in this case is the study of the said factors. Thus the **object** of our research is the translation process while its **subject** being the above mentioned factors.

To improve a translator's decision-making potential we have to find out the reasons of choice situations occurring in translator's performance, i.e. to pinpoint the sources of ambiguity in such situations. Once we know the source, we can start thinking about the ways it may be neutralized. Moreover, we can also group the sources into categories, planning their emergence in exercises in a systematic way, and having built in the corresponding remedies to be acquired.

From among a wide range of sources, in this paper we are going to focus on just two of them – the intralanguage interference [1; 3; 4] and the background knowledge [2; 5]. Basing on the previous research [3], the intralanguage interference may be defined as an activation or intrusion of one language item or principle upon another within the same language. The availability of the background knowledge is seen as a means capable to compensate for underdeveloped second language linguistic proficiency [2: 94]. It seems logical to assume then that both intralanguage interference and lack of the corresponding background knowledge may affect the correct source text interpretation and thus create problems for the translator/interpreter in generating a proper target text.

To check this assumption we conducted a special research within the English Translation Department at V.N. Karazin Kharkiv National University (Ukraine) offering tests to over 150 students (95% of them being females) majoring in Translation/Interpreting at the undergraduate (4<sup>th</sup> year of study) and graduate (5<sup>th</sup> year of study) levels. The subjects were offered English sentences of two types. In the first one they were asked to render into Ukrainian only the words and word combinations in bold type (musical terminology). The second type of tasks (interpreting Biblical and mythological allusions) required the subjects to translate whole

sentences. Though the translation was done in writing, it modeled interpreting as well, as the subjects could not use any additional materials and the time for the task performance was limited. The translations then were analyzed and the results are presented below.

On the basis of the said analysis it was established that the intralingual interference (as a source of ambiguity) is probably even more powerful than the interlingual one. It is easy to explain: the native language field in the students' brain is structured much better than the foreign language one, therefore mixing the words similar in form but different in meaning within the foreign language is much more probable. For example, the form of the English word *quaver* in the word combination *quaver note* (1/8 note) induced the intralingual interference on the part of the word *quarter*, which naturally resulted in its translation as '*chetvertna nota*' (1/4 note). This assumption is corroborated by the fact that the same students translated the word combination *semi-quaver note* (1/16 note) as '*napivchetvertna nota*' (*half-quarter note*).

Different meanings of the English musical terms *major* (*big or related to a key in which the third note is two tones higher than the first note*) and *minor* (*small or related to a key in which the third note is one and a half tones higher than the first note*) unsurprisingly interfered with each other in the interpretation of the terms like *major third*, translated like *mazhorna tertsia* (*third in major key*) instead of '*velyka tertsia*' (*big third*); *minor second*, translated like '*minorna sekunda*' (*second in minor key*) instead of '*mala sekunda*' (*small second*).

Cases of intralingual interference were also registered while translating sentences. In sentence 2 (*Unlike Holy Communion, Communism, as any other revealed religion, is largely made up of prophecies*) the weak differentiation of *Communion* and *commune* caused the usage of the Ukrainian word '*komuna*' (*commune*), interference in the pair *Communion* and *community* resulted in the emergence of '*spilnota*' (*community*), '*suspilstvo*' (*society*), '*hromada*' (*community*); and the utilization of Ukrainian words '*ob'yednannya*' (*union*) and '*vozz'yednannya*' (*reunification*) could be regarded as being the result of mixing up between *communion* and *union*.

In sentence 3 (*Mammon talks, and it's the only conversation some people are interested in*) the element, which was the source of ambiguity (*mammon*), induced intralingual interference along three lines

simultaneously: *mammon* – *Mormon* (*Mormon talks, and it's the only conversation some people are interested in*), *mammon* – *mammal* and *mammon* – *mumble*. Interference in the pair *mammon* – *mammal* explains such sentences as (in back translation) '*Mammal's language is the only language people speak and are interested in*', '*The fact that mammals can talk is of a significant interest only to some of them*', '*Mammal talks and it is the only thing people are interested in*'. The interfering pair *mammon* – *mumble* in combination with the logical extension of the meaning (*mumble* – *speak in a low voice* – *gossip*) produced the following sentences: '*Gossip is the only thing people are interested in*', '*Silly gossip is the only topic some people are interested in*', '*Mammonic gossip is the only conversation some people are interested in*'.

In sentence 5 (*Gentile would believe everything they don't understand*) ambiguity occurred because of the word *gentile* (in this case – *non-believer, having no religious faith*), which in the context could be rather interpreted as a negative than a positive one. The subjects that had taken that path, suggested such variants as *naive, ignorant, dull-witted, foolish, ignoramus, weak person*. On the other hand, some subjects were carried away by the formal interference along the line '*gentile* – *gentle* – *gentleman*', as a result of which they proposed translations like *noble, polite, educated, believer*, even though it clearly contradicted the context.

The problem with sentence 6 (*Never follow any Beatitude including this*) was also connected with the intralingual interference related to the word *Beatitude*, which was expected to be interpreted as *advice* in this context. The word turned to be unknown to all the subjects, so there is little wonder it induced a substantial interference along the line *Beatitude* – *beauty* and the further logical extension of the meaning (*beauty* – *blinded by beauty* – *temptation* – *object of worship*). This resulted in many variants of the following kinds (in back translation): '*Never surrender to beauty*', '*One should never yield to temptation*', '*Do not worship anything blindly*', '*Never follow blindly*', '*Never follow beauty, that is me*'.

Background knowledge is an essential component of the translator's professional competence. Ideally the structure of the translator's background knowledge should be equivalent to that of an average educated native speaker in both of the languages the translator works with. This

concerns the range of such knowledge rather than the depth of it. The importance of background knowledge has been corroborated in this study as well. Its lack is the most powerful source of ambiguity, even when the subjects translated from their native language (Ukrainian), like in sentence 7 (in back translation): *Everybody is entitled to an enforceable right to compensation*. The students did not understand the meaning of ‘*kompensatsiya z pozovnoyu syloyu*’ (enforceable right to compensation) which resulted in predominantly literal translation, like *compensation with force*, *compensation with legible right*, *compensation with positive strength*.

The interpretation of sentence 8, *The shibboleth of a lot of marriages is a lot of shibboleth* (a possible variant in back translation: *The bright colors of a lot of marriages eventually fade under the effect of stock phrases*), was complicated by the unknown word *shibboleth*, as well as by the counterpoint structure of the sentence, where *shibboleth* is positioned both at the beginning and at the end of the sentence. Most subjects tried to guess the meaning of *shibboleth*, suggesting variants like ‘*The morale of a lot of marriages is a lot of morale*’, ‘*The union of a lot of marriages is a lot of unions*’, ‘*The happiness of a lot of marriages is a lot of happiness*’, ‘*The problem of a lot of marriages is a lot of problems*’, ‘*The fuss of a lot of marriages is a lot of fuss*’, ‘*The fault of a lot of marriages is a lot of faults*’.

Failures in the interpretation of sentence 9, *The man who expects a woman to be Lot's wife, has probably been married before* (a possible variant in back translation: *The man who expects a woman to be stubborn, has probably been married before*), are related to the lack of knowledge concerning the Biblical legend of Lot's wife who turned into a pillar of salt because of her stubbornness. Attempts to guess Lot's wife's traits were mostly unsuccessful and quite monotonous: ‘*The man who expects his wife to be loyal, has probably not been married before*’, ‘*The man who thinks all women are disloyal, has probably been married before*’, ‘*The man who expects his wife to be a scold, has probably been married before*’. In some cases the guesses were more or less right and the students came closer to the meaning of the original sentence: ‘*The man who does not expect his wife to be ideal, has probably been married before*’.

The latter variant became possible because the context of sentence 9 allows the right guess to be done while in other cases the context is not

so clear. For example, the meaning of *moirai* (*fate* in Greek mythology) in sentence 10 (*Moirai is the irony that permits us to kill time before time kills us*) is difficult to extract from the context which resulted in a lot of subjects' withdrawals.

Similar things were observed with other sentences which contained mythological allusions and required the corresponding background knowledge. The situation got aggravated when problems with mythological allusions were accompanied by additional sources of ambiguity, such as multiple functions performed by specific mythological characters or/and a complicated language structure of the sentence or its components.

Thus the interpretation of sentence 11 (*Apollo makes up in height for what he lacks in length*) with an expected interpretation (in back translation) '*Happiness does not last long, but how intensive it is!*', turned out to be extremely difficult, because the literal translation looks just like a pile of words which do not make much sense together. It may be explained by the cumulating effect of multi-level difficulties. First, *Apollo* is more readily associated with beauty than with light, harmony and happiness (compare a subject's variant: '*Beauty is truly high, but it does not last long*'). Add up the semantic vagueness of the sentence in general and its components (*make up, lack*), and you would not be surprised by the fact that 50% of the subjects withdrew from undertaking to translate the sentence. The rest attempted literal translation ('*Apollo's height compensates for what he lacks in length*'; '*The thing some lack in strength, they try to compensate with length*') or improvised with varying degree of success.

Things looked similar in sentence 12 (*Eos rises before I do, but I break even by retiring after she does*) with an expected interpretation (in back translation) '*The morning star rises before I get up, but I'll make it up by going to bed later*'. Like in the previous sentence, the unknown element (*Eos*) is coupled with semantically vague (for the subjects) elements (*break even by retiring*), which resulted in over 80% of withdrawals. Others improvised, sometimes approaching the meaning (in back translation): *The sun rises and sets before I do*.

The ambiguity-inducing factor in sentence 13 (*Whether a man gives up Bacchus or Venus, depends on the vintage*) with expected interpretation (in back translation) '*When a man chooses between a woman and wine, he primarily takes into account their age*', was not *Bacchus*

and *Venus*, but the word *vintage*, which turned out to be unknown to many subjects. The variants suggested by students, were within the topic, but not always up to the meaning (in back translation): *'Whether man chooses a drinking bout or love, depends on the wine'*, *'To drink the bitter beverage or the God's nectar, depends on the grapes'*, *'Whether man follows Bacchus or Venus, depends on the situation'*.

Only 40% of the subjects attempted to interpret sentence 14 (*Hera without Eros results in Eros out*) with expected interpretation (in back translation) *'Marriage without love leads to love outside marriage'*, suggesting politically correct sentences which however did not render the full meaning of the original (in back translation): *'One should not enter marriage without love'*, *'Marriage without love does not last long'*, *'The outcome of marriage without love is absence of love'*.

Over 50% tried to interpret sentence 15 (*When Aphrodite dies of starvation, it's usually the man's fault*) with expected interpretation (in back translation) *'When flame of love is dying out, the one to blame is he who failed to put the wood into the fire'*. The main source of ambiguity was the meaning of *Aphrodite* as 'love' instead of 'beauty', which was a typical association of the majority of subjects, but some of them interpreted *Aphrodite* simply as female. The variants suggested by the subjects included (in back translation): *'When woman dies of distress, it's usually the man's fault'*, *'When a maiden dies of hunger, a man is to blame'*, *'If a beauty is sad, who but a man is to blame?'*, *'When beauty dies, it is man who is usually to blame'* (the last sentence has an ecological meaning looking like an accusation of the whole mankind).

This assumption was corroborated by the results of interpreting sentence 15 (*Aphrodite is one long sweet dream, but Hera is an alarm clock*), where we find the following sentences (in back translation): *'Beauty makes you go to sleep while marriage wakes you up'*, *'Beauty is a long sweet relaxation, but marriage is an alarm'*.

Hence the research helped to establish at least two sources of ambiguity in the process of interpreting a source text in a foreign language (English) by Ukrainian students majoring in Translation: intralanguage interference and lack of background knowledge. To reduce the negative effect of the lack of background knowledge it could be worthwhile to reorganize the structure and subject-matter of the future translators'/interpreters' training program to take a maximum advantage of the coordination of all the



disciplines constituting the curriculum. The softening of the negative impact of intralanguage interference may be possible through the sensible structuring of translation/interpreting exercises which should be based on scientific data concerning the presence of an ambiguity source and the degree of interference in each specific case. That could enable to incorporate into such exercises the elements causing intralanguage interference, provoking students' errors and neutralizing the sources of the negative effect through the subsequent exercising. That provides promising prospects for the further research.

### **LITERATURE**

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